

Part 3: The Third Generation

The 1970s marked what might be regarded, in retrospect, as a golden period in Australian music. The battles that the previous generation had fought were over and done with, and the new generation could embark on their careers with a fresh sense of optimism about the viability of earning a living as a composer. Generally, government support for the arts was at its highest, and various organisations directly supported composers, such as the Australia Council and the Australian Music Centre. Commissioning from the major educational and concert-giving organisations was also peaking, so there was money for the commissioning as well as the performance of new scores. Publication became a reality probably for the first time in our history—that is, publication of serious art music, not just commercially viable educational material, kitsch (nationalistic and other varieties), or fairy floss. Suddenly composers were employable as composers, reversing previous trends where composers were employable only if they taught something else. New compositions were recognised in academia as products of serious personal research. As for music by composers who were concert pianists—this was a breed that was rapidly dying out, so the importance of the piano in chamber and vocal music began a slow decline as well. Cultural historians will be writing about the changes to our society, and about the new political awareness that came from involvement in conflicts in the Pacific and Asian regions. Some composers were passionate about this kind of engagement and it influenced their music; others, as usual, simply jumped on that particular bandwagon and used it to be continually fashionable and trendy. The sad cause of the Aboriginal people was yet another cow to be milked, one way or another. The ‘golden age’ did not last long, historically speaking, and the realities of being an artist in Australia returned all too soon, with all of its attendant evils and cynical exploitations.