

Part 4: The Fourth Generation

Ten years have passed since the cut-off point of my last book. So now it is possible to speak of the fourth generation of composers. Writing about living composers still emerging in their careers, and still forming their musical personalities, is not only fraught with danger and the strong possibility of error; it is also most probably premature. We certainly need time to look back on an era and be able to ponder on it with some objectivity and distance. For this reason, this section of the book will be the shortest of all, as it is dealing with unknown territory in many ways. I have noticed in my teaching career that the crop of students that surfaced at the end of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first is conservative and unadventurous, at least to someone who has been a modernist all his life. The postmodern (whatever that might mean) has reverted to tonality—not functional tonality, true, more the sound of the triad as an event in itself. On the positive side, the current composer seems more easily to engage with popular music and various multimedia available in the digital age. Australia itself is at present a very conservative society, too. When we elected a Labor government four years ago, I expected some apparent change in the tertiary sector; unfortunately, little seems to have changed: it is business as usual, with the various arts still taking a back seat in the eyes of government. Subsidies and various support systems are still scarce so composers must find it tempting to please at all costs, as a means of survival, perhaps. The real composer will have to show more backbone than usual, I suspect! Our orchestras are now free-floating entities and have to put bums on seats to be able to continue, so there is little incentive there for anything even remotely ‘dangerous’. Long live revisionism!