

*Future* is one of a group of five works commissioned by Father Arthur Bridge and Ars Musica Australis to celebrate the Centenary of Federation. The project eventually found voice in the 2002 Australian Music Week, organised by MLC School (Sydney) in collaboration with Trinity Grammar. Written by five different composers, each piece deals with one particular aspect of modern Australia as it is presented in the poetry of Sydney-sider Peter Skrzynecki. The premise of *Future* was unique in that it concerned itself not just with our here and now, but also with broader concepts of the human experience. Two of Skrzynecki's poems are employed here: 'Future', from which both the name and the contextual function of this work are derived, and 'Deo Gratias', a prayer of thanksgiving for all that has been and will be granted during a lifetime.

The initial part of the first text consists of expressive gestures which appear to create the conditions for a particular insight, and yet do not reveal its essential nature. The growing need for elucidation is musically realised in a textural build-up over a slow but ever-present bass ostinato. Eventually, the enlightened state found in the second half of the poem- where concepts of significance are proclaimed insignificant- envelops the listener in the form of a massive cadence. This breaks the spell of the ostinato: the colours of the text are then drawn by shifting harmonies and textures. Stasis returns, however, with the last lines. The epiphanal mood drifts silently away, in preparation for the pleading reverence of the second text.

Material that recalls a processional hymn forms the basis for the setting of 'Deo Gratias', amplifying the liturgical and spiritual resonances of the poem. Only in the bridge between the second and third verses is the smooth passage of this ritual first disrupted. Here, there is musical allusion to the wonders of the first text, the quiet ecstasy for which the second has so far been expressing gratitude. But it is with the third verse that the feeling of contemplation is completely shattered. Aggressive, punctuating rhythms and caustic orchestration accompany the disjoining of the text's natural cadence, articulating the hitherto unheralded darkness of its tone. After a moment of chaos, however, there is a climactic return to the light with the reëmergence of the processional hymn. The work ends with the bittersweet triumph of a full and fulfilling life drawing to a close.

Many thanks go to Father Arthur Bridge, Ars Musica Australis, MLC School and Trinity Grammar for allowing me to be part of this celebration of Australia's past, present and of course, future.