

The Story of *Classics at Picton Incorporated*

Classics at Picton is an example of a local area treasure that graces so many rural and regional areas and contributes mightily to the cultural life of these communities.

How and when exactly it was formed is a little indefinite and details are confused in the notorious unreliability of oral history. However there is no doubt that the key players were local music teacher, the late Laurel Silm of Cedar Creek Orchard, outstanding Australian pianist, accompanist, chamber musician and sponsor of many talented young musicians Rachel Valler O.A.M., and Picton Probus Club.

The story goes that in the early '90s Laurel and her husband Ron joined Probus. Among the members there was some discussion of the role a choir may serve and Laurel and several friends saw that it materialised – Hazel Morrice was to be the piano accompanist.

Wollondilly lacked a really good piano in any of the public spaces except that in the Estonian Hall Thirlmere: an upright, but it held its tune. So with the help of Marge Kongas of the Estonian Village, concerts began in that venue. The concerts encouraged and supported young student musicians and became well patronised – not the least because of the delicious suppers provided by the talented Probus country cooks. But Laurel had a more ambitious vision: periodic concerts of fine classical music.

Around that time Laurel attended a musical afternoon in Camden where a Sydney Conservatorium of Music contemporary Rachel Valler was performing with the Hazelwood Trio. Rachel Valler was a household name then, and there were few concert performances, and ABC concerts in which Valler did not feature as accompanist, or pianist in chamber ensembles. Laurel asked Rachel whether she could bring similar concert experiences to Wollondilly “on the other side of Razorback”. Rachel agreed.

That ambitious vision needed an excellent piano and that became the priority of Probus: to raise enough funds from the concerts to buy such a piano.

The concerts continued in the Estonian Hall (Classics at Thirlmere) and the pattern of the next 15 years was set. Rachel introduced local audiences to a huge variety of music and to the very best soloists – both instrumentalists and singers.

Probus' fundraising achieved its goal of \$23,000 by 2004 and the Yamaha C2 Grand was selected from Logan's Pianos by Laurel and Rachel and presented to Wollondilly Shire Council and was housed in Picton Shire Hall. Classics at Thirlmere became **Classics at Picton**.

The remarkable thing about Laurel's dedication to Classics is that she worked so hard and largely on her own – at least on the organisational side. Laurel made a handwritten list of all the concert-goers together with their phone numbers. Every one of these contacts was rung before each concert and everyone remembers how you could not say “No” to Laurel! She would do the Hall bookings, order afternoon tea (for many years Laurel prepared beautiful lunches and entertained the artists in their home before the concerts) paid the accounts, collected the money and arranged advertising. The latter was hardly necessary given Laurel's compelling personal phone calls.

By 2008 Laurel felt her advancing age was making it difficult to maintain these rigorous demands she made upon herself and she approached some friends with her plan, and the first **Classics at Picton** Committee was formed soon after. For insurance purposes and efficiency it was decided to become Incorporated in 2015. Since then, following an appeal for new talent on the Committee, there has been a reassuring increase in committee membership and new ideas are being explored to fit the times and changing circumstances.

Classics at Picton Inc. remains a worthy memorial to an inspirational local lady Laurel Silm.

The next 10 years saw a committee of about 7 people, steered initially by John List, organising usually 5 concerts each year. (See 10 years of programs below.) The Wollondilly Shire Hall has a warm acoustic and an intimate atmosphere. Professional concert performers accustomed to larger music halls and a greater distance from the audience seem to appreciate this intimacy with the audience. They enjoy sharing supper and immediate feedback from the audience after the concert. Other venues used are St Marks Church and the Masonic Temple – both in Picton and again the keynote for these concerts is atmosphere and intimacy.

Beginning on a high note with opera star Emilia Farugia, we continued to regularly attract very fine professional musicians, artists, instrumentalists from the Sydney Symphony and Australian Opera, as well as encouraging recent graduates from the Conservatoriums of Australia just at the start of their careers. We hosted internationally renowned London-based pianist Geoffrey Saba, and were lucky enough to present the brilliant saxophonist Amy Dickson at the moment she was launching her dazzling international career. It has been our pleasure to introduce residents of Wollondilly to The St. James' Singers, The Sydney Mandolin Orchestra, Paul Goodchild with Sydney Brass and the Sydney Classical Guitar Society, while popular regular guest returnees are Rachel Scott with her "Bach in the Dark" series, and Andrew Basile & Friends.

Classics at Picton is a non profit organisation with stated objectives to organise classical music concerts and to encourage and support student musicians. It has funded Master classes and tutoring for local music students, provided rehearsal assistance and performance opportunities for aspiring young Wollondilly musicians, and helped establish and support Picton Strings.

Classics at Picton Inc. is now affiliated with the Federation of Music Clubs of Australia, NSW Council Incorporated and it is to be hoped it remains part of Wollondilly social life for many years to come.

CLASSICS AT PICTON.

A Decade of Classical Music Concerts 2008 to 2018

- 2018 March - **Bach in the Dark** – 7pm St Marks Picton
Rachel Scott Cello, Anthony Schulz piano accordion.
- May - **Travels with a Harp** 4pm Masonic Temple Picton
Verna Lee, harp.
- July - **The Mirabella Trio.** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Piano, violin and clarinet.
- Sept - **Swing Band + Piano** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
- Nov - **Andrew Basile & Friends** – (1.30pm Picton Shire Hall)
- 2017 March - **The Mirabella Trio** – (1.30pm Picton Shire Hall)
Piano, violin and clarinet
- May - **Music for the Ages** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Presentation Concert. Sarah Prestwidge soprano, and various artists.
- Aug - **Bach in the Dark** – 7pm St Marks Picton.
St James Chamber Choir with Rachel Scott, cello.
- Sept - **Portrait of the Artists** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Soprano Karen Fitzgibbon, artist Helen Paulucci.
- Oct - **Bach in the Dark** – 7pm Masonic Temple Picton.
Rachel Scott, cello; Duo Agostino, guitars
- Nov - **Andrew Basile & Friends.** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Across the Channel – English and French Chamber Music
Piano, Emily Long, violin, Leah Lynn, cello
- 2016 March- **Bach in the Dark.** 7pm St Marks Picton
Rachel Scott, cello; Sally Walker, flute.
- Mar - **Australian Art Quartet** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Art of Nature. String Quartet
- May - **The Sirius Wind Quintet** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Melissa Coleman, Alex Fontaine, Alison Evans, Julia Zeltzer, Ian Sykes
- Aug - **Sydney Classical Guitar Society** 1.30pm Picton
25th Anniversary Concert.
- Nov - **Andrew Basile & Friends** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Piano, Keara Donahoe, mezzo sop; Tobias Breider, viola
- 2015 Mar - **Tonic String Quartet** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Slow Cooked Sunday Hayley Bullock, Dan Russell, Leo Kram and James Beck
- May- **Passion & Romance** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Valler, piano, Mylinda Joyce, soprano; R. Beasley, baritone
- Aug - **Bach in the Dark** - 7pm St Marks Picton
Rachel Scott, cello; St James Singers and chamber organ.
- Sept - **Mirabella Trio** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Kayoko Nishiwaki, piano, Sayaka Eguchi, violin and Hanae McLean, clarinet.
- Nov - **Andrew Basile & Friends** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
An Afternoon of Song with Jane Ede, soprano.

- 2014 Mar - **Into Oblivion.** – 1.30pm Shire Hall Picton
Ambre Hammond, piano; Marcello Maio, accordion
- May – **An Autumn Concert-** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Jane and Andrew Duncan, flutes, Andrew Basile, piano.
- Aug - **The Lure of the East** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Geoffrey Saba, piano
- Oct - **Andrew Basile & Friends** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
With Laurence Dobell, clarinet; Tobias Breider, viola
- Nov - **Music for 16 Strings** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Scott cello, Raff and Janet Agostino, guitar
- 2013 April - **Bach in the Dark** - St Marks Picton.
Rachel Scott and David Periera, cello
- May - **Amabile Trio** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Flute, violin and piano
- July - **Picton Strings** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Fundraiser Concert for our youth orchestra.
- Aug - **Metro Wind Quintet** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
- Sept - **20th Anniversay Concert** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Valler with soprano, trumpet and bassoon.
- Oct - **Andrew Basile & Friends** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Piano Quartet with Andy Hines, Tobias Breider & Huy-Nguyen Bui
- 2012 March- **Music for Two Cellos** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
David Periera and Rachel Scott
- April – **Young Classics**
Showcasing young local musicians
- May - **Flute and Harp Recital** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Janet Webb, flute; Louise Johnson, harp.
- Aug - **Travels Around the World** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Nicole Thompson, soprano; Rachel Scott, cello.
- Sept - **A Spring Celebration** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall.
Rachel Valler,piano; Shu-Cheen Yu, sop; Daniel Mendelow,trumpet
- 2011 March- **The Three Rs** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Valler, piano, Rachel Scott, cello; Rachel Tolmie,oboe
- May - **The Vallerstein Trio** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Valler, piano; T.Dethlefs, violin; Francesco Lo Surdo; horn
- June - **Young Classics** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Fundraiser for young musicians in Wollondilly
- Aug - **Sydney Brass** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Paul Goodchild director.
- Nov - **Piano Trio** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Andrew Basile, piano; Sophie Cole, violin; Leah Lynn, cello.
- 2010 April - **Rachel Valler Presents** - 1.30 Picton Shire Hall

- Robert Cran, bassoon; Rachel Tolmie, oboe and cor anglais
- May – **Two Singers** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Rachel Valler, piano; Adam Player and Jonathan Alley, baritones
- Sept- **The Sydney Mandolin Orchestra** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Featuring Serendipity.
- Nov - **French Connection** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Andrew Basile piano, Leah Lynn, cello, Sophie Cole, violin
- 2009 Mar - **Rachel Valler Presents** 1.30 Picton Shire Hall
Clarinet and piano
- April – **Rachel Valler & Co.** – 19th Picton Shire Hall
Shu Cheen Yu sop, Elizabeth Lim, clarinet (?), Rachel Valler, piano
- June - **Young Classics** - 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Various groups of local musicians.
- Sept – **Spring Concert.** – 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Amy Dickson, saxophone; David Howie, piano; Jane Duncan, flute.
- Nov – **Chamber Concert** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall
Robert Johnson, horn; Frank Cellata, clarinet; Rachel Valler, piano
- 2008 Nov – **The Vallerstein Quintet.** 1.30pm Picton Shire Hall.
2 violins, viola, cello and piano.
- 2007 - Rachel Valler recital with soprano Amelia Farugia