

Father Arthur Bridge

The honorary degree of Doctor of Music was conferred upon Father Arthur Bridge by the Pro-Chancellor John McCarthy QC at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music graduation ceremony held in the Great Hall at 2.00pm on 18 April 2008.



Father Bridge, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Pro Chancellor, I have the honour to present Arthur Ernest Bridge for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*).

Fr. Bridge has made a sustained and outstanding contribution to Australian music, particularly in supporting artistic practice and audience development in the western Sydney region, with a special focus on supporting young artists in their early career development.

In 1991, Fr. Bridge formed the Academy of St. Cecilia, which in 1996 developed into *Ars Musica Australis*, a charitable foundation supporting the creative arts. Through *Ars Musica Australia*, Fr. Bridge has managed to achieve a level of attainment unparalleled by any other private arts organization in Australia.

Perhaps the most profound accomplishment is in the field of music composition. To date, Fr. Bridge has commissioned over 170 new pieces of music from over 70 composers. These range from some of Australia's most established and distinguished composers (including Peter Sculthorpe, Anne Boyd, Ross Edwards, Roger Smalley, Elena Kats-Chernin, Matthew Hindson and Stuart Greenbaum) through to many emerging younger composers, covering orchestral, operatic, choral and chamber music genres. Major works have been commissioned from international figures such as Sir John Taverner and Eijno Raatuvaara. New works have been commissioned for a wide range of Australia's premier ensembles as well as youth-orientated organizations and performers.

The effect of this commissioning work undertaken by Fr. Bridge has been enormous. Through *Ars Musica Australis*, he has assumed the role of a modern Medici, based in twenty and twenty-first century Blacktown rather than fifteenth-century Florence. Australian composition would be in a parlous state were it not for the contribution of Fr. Bridge.

Young generations of Australian performing musicians and dancers have similarly been the beneficiaries of Fr. Bridge's endeavours. Over two hundred scholarships have been awarded by *Ars Musica Australis* to young men and women for national and international study. Recipients of these awards have gone on to international careers in the arts: from fellows of the Royal Academy of Music in London to soloists with the St. Petersburg Opera to members of the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Fr. Bridge has contributed in a very significant manner to musical and artistic education and cultural development in the western Sydney region. He has, to date, presented or promoted over five hundred concerts involving many of Sydney's finest music ensembles as well as facilitating concerts by local performers from the Western Sydney region.

Fr. Bridge has served on numerous boards with distinction, including the Music Board of the Australia Council and the Australia International Cultural Council. He is patron to seven arts organizations around Australia. He has been previously recognized for his outstanding contribution to music, including being made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2004 for services to music and the arts, and receiving the Premier's Award in 2006 for his contribution to music and the arts in the Western Sydney region. In 2003 Ars Musica Australis was the co-winner of the APRA/Australian Music Centre award for the Most Distinguished Contribution to Australian Music in Education.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of all the abovementioned work over the past fifteen years is that the vast majority of funding has been raised via individual fundraising efforts by Fr. Bridge: including corporate sponsorship and fundraising events such as artwork auctions. Unlike other organizations, Ars Musica Australis does not receive any substantial government funding for its activities. This makes Fr. Bridge's achievements all the more noteworthy – not only has he facilitated an extremely wide range of activities, he has also raised the vast bulk of the money himself.

It is difficult to overstate the historical significance of Fr. Bridge to Australian music and musicians. There is no other individual in this country who has backed up such a unique vision with the level of commitment needed to ensure that it actually all happens to highest possible standard, whilst ensuring access to the finest contemporary music for Australians of all backgrounds.

Pro Chancellor, I present Arthur Ernest Bridge for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music, honoris causa, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.