

Emeritus Professor Peter Joshua Sculthorpe AO MBE



The degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) was conferred upon Peter Joshua Sculthorpe at the Arts ceremony held at 4.00pm on 3 June 2005.



Emeritus Professor Peter Sculthorpe (right) and Jimmy Little, also Hon DMus, *photo, courtesy University of Sydney Publications.*

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present the distinguished composer Emeritus Professor Peter Joshua Sculthorpe AO, OBE for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa).

Peter Sculthorpe was born in Launceston Tasmania in 1929. He graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1950 with a Bachelor of Music in piano. His extraordinary gifts for musical composition were first recognised internationally when, at the age of 26, his Piano Sonatina, based upon an Aboriginal legend, became the first work of a resident Australian to be chosen for performance at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Baden-Baden. In 1958, Peter Sculthorpe went to Oxford University where he studied composition with Edmund Rubbra and Egon Wellesz. Rather than adopting an English or European musical style, the experience of studying in England further raised his awareness of his uniqueness as an Australian. He returned to Australia in 1960. In 1961, following the death of his father, he wrote *Irkanda IV* for solo violin, string orchestra and percussion. The international acclaim of this work, in his own words, 'gave him the courage to continue'.

In 1963 Peter Sculthorpe was appointed Lecturer in Composition in the Department of Music at the University of Sydney from which position, across the next forty years, he has mentored the next generation of Australian composers including Anne Boyd, Ross Edwards, Barry Conyngham, Elliott Gyger and Matthew Hindson. He was made a Reader in the late 60s and appointed to a Personal Chair in Musical Composition in 1991, retiring in 1999.

Peter Sculthorpe has received many civic awards and honours for his contribution to Australian culture. He was made an Officer of the British Empire in 1977, and in the same year awarded a Silver Jubilee medal. He has received the degree of Honorary Doctor of Letters from both the University of Tasmania (1980) and the University of Sussex (1989) and that of Honorary Doctor of Music from the University of Melbourne (1989). His contribution to Australian society was further acknowledged in 1988 when, by popular vote, he was elected one of Australia's 100 Living National treasures. He became an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1990.

In the following year he was elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. When in 1999 he was made one of Australia's 45 Icons – 'a visionary, an opinion maker, one who is making statements about something the nation needs to think about at this time', Peter Sculthorpe wrote to his publisher, 'I was happy enough to become one of our 100 Living National Treasures, but this is much more impressive, it means that music has at last found a place in our consciousness.' In 2002, he was made a life member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, joining AD Hope, Sidney Nolan and Christina Stead as the only Australians to be so distinguished.

Peter Sculthorpe's creative output has been both voluminous and extraordinary. He has developed a unique musical language, drawing particularly upon landscape, Australian aboriginal culture and Australia's position within Asia, as well as its European heritage and local history since white settlement. He has contributed a large number of works to the international symphonic repertoire, notably the Sun Music series, Port Essington, Kakadu, Mangrove and Earth Cry. His opera, Rites of Passage, commissioned for the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1973, was intended to be a truly Australian theatre work, not a drama in the "European post-Renaissance sense" but "world theatre". Its texts are in the ritual languages of two cultures, Latin from European culture and Aranda (an Australian Aboriginal language). His 15 string quartets, like those of Shostakovich, stand as a remarkable contribution to this medium and are performed worldwide by the celebrated Kronos and Brodsky String Quartets. Whilst the subject matter of Sculthorpe's music is local and specific, its international acceptance recognises its universal and global qualities.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) the distinguished Australian composer, scholar, teacher and cultural visionary, Emeritus Professor Peter Joshua Sculthorpe, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.