

1986: A YEAR OF RECKONING FOR THE AMC

Janet Donald

This is the third year that the AMC has operated under its goal of working for Australian composers. It has begun with a lot of frustrations for the AMC Board of Directors and the Centre's manager, Frank Maietta, and staff.

We are frustrated because we have so many good ideas about ways of helping composers and no money to put them into action.

As readers of the News may or may not know, the AMC is a non-profit organisation. It really exists because the Music Board of the Australia Council believes that it is good for our cultural development that the works of Australian composers have a way of being disseminated, and is willing to put its money where its mouth is — namely, into paying for the basic running costs of the AMC.

If the AMC did not exist, most composers would find it very hard if not impossible to reach the performing groups, educators, students and other musicians who are interested in their work. The AMC is providing these services.

Our basic tool of trade is our information base. We collect as much information as we can about Australian composers and their works. The most important part of the information base is our collection of scores and tapes.

Using the scores and tapes, we catalogue the information that people want, like the type of work, its instrumentation, its duration, how many movements it has, who commissioned it, and where it was first performed.

When people write or call wanting any type of information about Australian composition, we use the information base to answer their queries as well as we can.

When a performing group decides that they want to perform a work, we copy the score for them and/or hire out the parts (if they exist) on the composer's behalf.

At the moment we just don't have enough money to make the information base run as well as our users would like it to. We need more staff to catalogue the scores, more staff to answer all the queries that come in, more staff to copy the scores quickly, more staff and money to make tapes of works, and more money for decent audio equipment.

As well as this, we can see all the other things that we could do to help composers to be better known and recognised.

We want to work intensively for the greater inclusion of Australian music in the repertoire of performing groups, in community music activities and in music education.

We want to have lively and innovative workshopping of music, including performances which attract interest outside the relatively small composition community.

We want to help composers to make contact with people who want to commission works, and to help them make sure that their interests are protected in any commissioning arrangements.

These activities (and there are many more than this on the ideas drawing

board) all sound fine. But we have no money to do them.

We asked the Music Board for \$418,000 for 1986 so that we could run the information base and do some of the other activities talked about above. The Music Board offered us only \$240,000 not on an analysis of our submission, but simply by increasing our 1985 grant by 7%.

We were angry about this, as the \$240,000 would not even cover the level of service we had offered users of the information base in 1985, let alone fund any other activity.

After an appeal to the Music Board, we have \$250,000 for 1986, which is just enough to continue with the information base at a level of service which will not cause users to feel angry and frustrated with the AMC — there is nothing worse than an information agency which does not deliver the goods it offers.

We now have to work out how we can do other things for composers which we think are as important as the scores and tapes and information that we provide today.

Basically it is a question of money to pay for staff, tapes, equipment, fares, telephone calls and all the other things that are the components of any good idea actually seeing the light of day and coming into existence.

If you know of any source of money from government or private organisations, please tell us what it is and whom we should contact.

If you care about the development of composers, we need you.