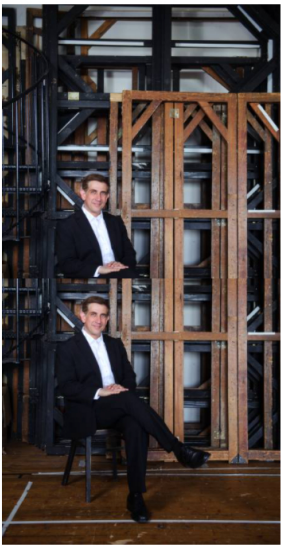
Conductor Nicholas Milton reflects on his time at the helm of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra

Nicholas Milton

Music, Theatre & Arts

I would like to take this opportunity, from the bottom of my heart, to thank all of you who have supported our magnificent Canberra Symphony Orchestra during the wonderful years in which I have had the privilege and honour to work with this brilliant orchestra.



Nicholas Milton portraits, taken at Saarbrucken opera house, where he spends his time when not in Canberra. Picture: Sally Walker

I have felt truly happy and energised to have shared with our engaged and have had the privilege and honour to work with this brilliant orchestra.

I have felt truly happy and energised to have shared with our engaged and intelligent audiences so many extraordinary moments: evenings of musical magic that we onstage and you in the audience will never forget, in performances that have opened hearts, enriched souls and undeniably brought us closer together as a community.

I am incredibly proud of what the organisation has accomplished together as a musical family during my time with the CSO. The orchestra I first conducted as a guest conductor in 1999 has grown enormously during the last 20 years, and the organisation itself has matured and evolved, dramatically, during this time.

ADVERTISING

I inherited an orchestra that already possessed a remarkable performance and aesthetic culture, one that had already benefited from the dedication of my distinguished predecessors, most notably, the legend himself - Ernest Llewellyn, Leonard Dommett and, most recently, the inimitable Richard Gill.

The most extraordinary Australian musicians have performed as members of the CSO over the years, and it's to them I would like to express my deepest and sincerest thanks. They put their trust in me, and inspired me with their artistry, enthusiasm, courage, elegance, grace, and musical integrity.

It has been a joyful and wonderful chapter of my life for which, I know with certainty, I will always remain profoundly grateful.

It's impossible for me to mention all of the highlights of my tenure, but two events do stand out:

Shortly after I commenced as chief conductor with the orchestra, Llewellyn Hall was damaged by a severe storm system. For the reopening, we chose to perform Carl Orff's gigantic oratorio, *Carmina Burana*, with a massive community choir and children's choir.

We sold out the renovated Llewellyn Hall within a few days, subsequently welcomed another 1000 to the dress rehearsal, and people are still talking to me about that performance and how they've never forgotten its enthralling impact.

After I was invited by the Prime Minister to join the Australia-Germany Advisory Group in 2016, one of our cultural initiatives was a gala concert event with the CSO and six outstanding singers from my opera house in Germany at that time, the State Opera House of Saarbrcken.

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That event was another unforgettable musical experience that not only brought joy to Australian audiences but also forged important connections between countries and musicians that have endured to this day.

I have long believed that the professional orchestra serving the nation's capital has an obligation and a responsibility to celebrate Australia's most outstanding emerging and established musicians.

I am proud that the CSO has, especially over these last 15 years, provided so many opportunities to the best musical talent emerging from our land.

Our responsibility extends to the creation of new music, and Australian music now holds an even more integral place at the heart of the CSO's musical quest. Curated during my tenure by my dear friend Matthew Hindson, our Australian Series remains one of the most remarkable and successful initiatives in the national orchestral landscape.

Our commissioning program has opened up dramatic sonic dimensions and continues to unleash the potential of a new generation of composers and performers.

During my tenure, we have performed riveting works by every generation of Australian composers. In their diverse languages, the composers we have honoured, discovered and encouraged with commissions constitute a joyful celebration of the fervent freedom of our national character in all of its ardent variety.

The CSO's education and community engagement has also undergone the most dramatic and revolutionary change, and that interaction with children of all ages and backgrounds has been enriching and inspiring.

Finally, I'd like to warmly thank our enlightened Board of Directors led by Sir Angus Houston for their ongoing engagement and support of our shared dreams for the community.

I am pleased to be leaving the orchestra in the leadership of Jessica Cottis, an extraordinary musician, conductor and communicator.

The CSO can look forward to a bright and exciting future in which the organisation will develop even further as an orchestral innovator, telling compelling Australian stories and taking on thought-provoking subject matter through music.

All of us in the CSO family look forward to seeing you at concerts in 2021 and beyond, and sharing with you magnificent, reflective, magical moments of exquisite beauty.

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