

Elvis Costello says writing about music is the same as dancing about architecture – it's really a stupid thing to do.

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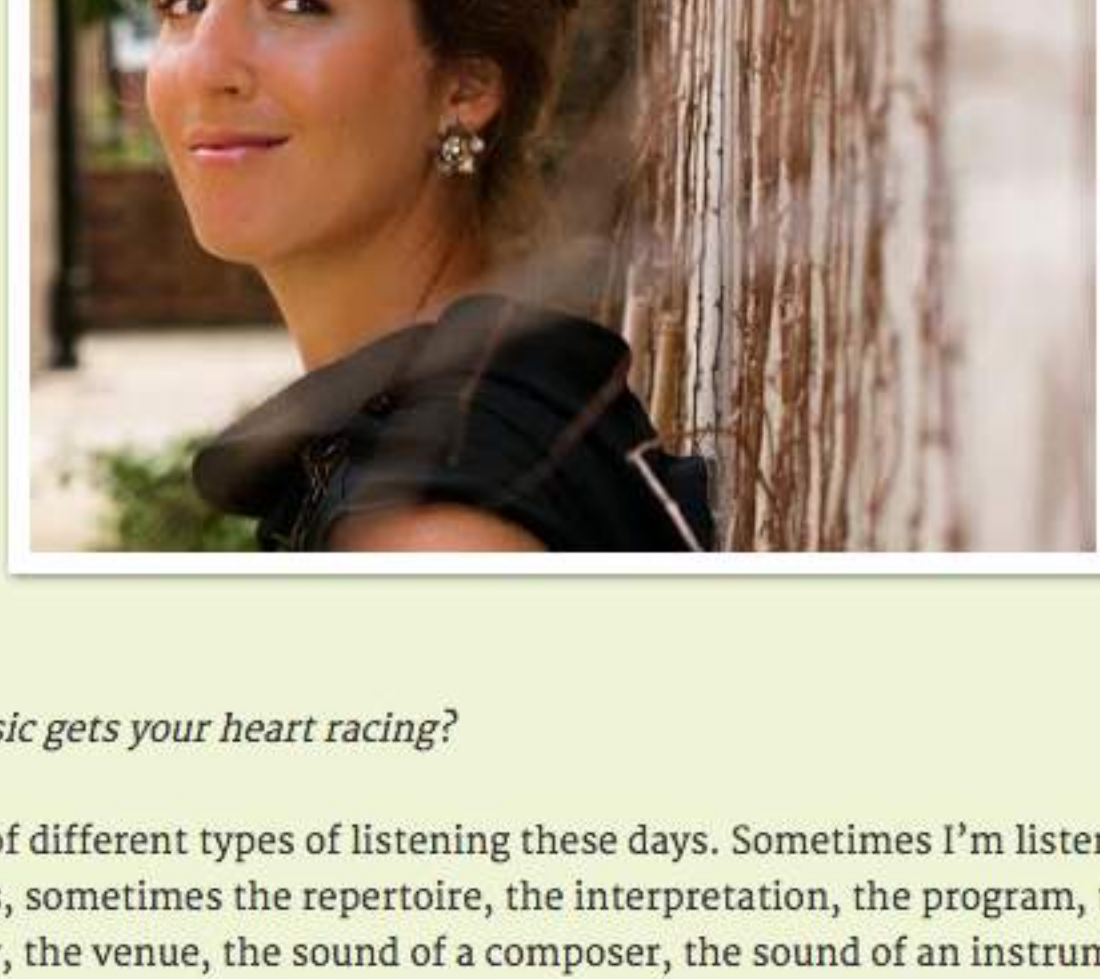
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Tuesday, 6 October 2015

Celebrity Soft Spot Kelly Lovelady

Kelly Lovelady is a Perth girl now based in London where she is founder and artistic director of the Australian orchestra Ruthless Jabiru. She drinks tea with Sir Colin Davis, conducts concerts for Greenpeace and lives in a house boat on a canal. This is someone you need to know about!



What music gets your heart racing?

I do a lot of different types of listening these days. Sometimes I'm listening to the musicians, sometimes the repertoire, the interpretation, the program, the chemistry, the venue, the sound of a composer, the sound of an instrument, the strength of a piece, the impact of a conductor, the list goes on. My ear responds differently to music I know well compared to something I'm hearing for the first time. I do get excited about discovering new composers and their music. At the moment I can't get enough of Counterstream Radio which is the online broadcast of New Music USA. I also love Late Junction (BBC Radio 3) and FIP (Radio France) for eclectic cross-genre programming.

What calms you down?

I wish I knew!

What do you sing along to?

Usually whatever score I happen to be studying until I manage to lodge it as an earworm – bit by bit in increments of about 5 seconds at a time..

What inspired you to start Ruthless Jabiru, the all-Australian chamber orchestra?

I'd noticed every orchestra in London and Europe I came into contact with had at least one if not several Australians in the ranks. It struck me as an interesting social experiment to bring them together and there was interest in a chamber orchestra as many of them spent their days within larger sections. I was planning to perform some Australian music but always within the context of an international program – doing my bit to bring Australian composition onto the mainstage here in London but not to the exclusion of building a local audience. I also try to include female composers, Canadian composers and electronic music in my programs where possible. Yes our membership is Australian but beyond that I'd like to think we're on the way to building an identity as a globally-relevant New music ensemble.



Lovelady conducting Ruthless Jabiru



Why the Jabiru?

The Jabiru is a nod to Peter Sculthorpe. I spent my formative years around a lot of wind music but Peter's 11th quartet *Jabiru Dreaming* was something from the string repertoire that came onto my radar pretty early on and made a big impact. For me the Jabiru has a huge personality which probably gave my imagination something to latch onto.

It has been fifteen years since we were undergraduate music students at the University of Western Australia. What has happened since then?

I've reinvented myself in a few different places around the world: Ann Arbor, Winnipeg, Ann Arbor again, Perugia, London, Montreal, Edinburgh, and now London again. Different lifestyles gave rise to different types of musical exploration. Last time I felt the urge to move I bought a boat instead so now I'm in fresh surroundings every few weeks without having to rebuild from scratch. I've been on the waterways for almost 6 years now and think I've finally managed to synthesise all the reinventions into one version of myself.



The view from Lovelady's boat at time of interview



How did you build the skill base to become a freelance conductor?

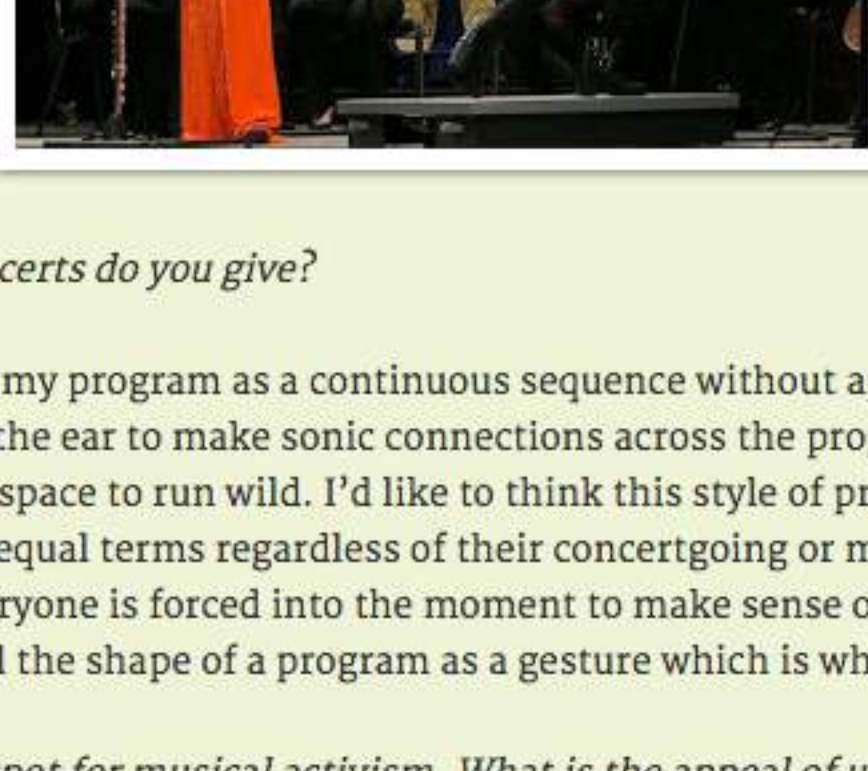
I used to spend a lot of time watching great conductors and orchestras rehearse – it must have been hundreds and hundreds of hours over the years. I think that helped me lock in a sense of the rehearsal room as my home territory. I've seen a myriad of different conducting styles and approaches with varying results. I've also had interesting encounters with many of the greats of our time! One sweet moment was with Sir Colin Davis – I'd been discreetly watching a session from the gallery. There were 100+ LSO players buzzing around but he carried his teacup and saucer all the way upstairs during the break to sit next to me and ask about my own work.

Something I would definitely include in my conductor education is having a Proms pass for a few years. Seeing the top international orchestras in their signature rep every night for three months straight is a baptism by fire. I've also had several teachers over the years whose philosophies have put down roots in my mind. Having said all that, I've now developed my own unique way of doing things that is completely individual to me and the way I understand music. I think early career conductors just need to get their hands as dirty as possible until they figure out what makes them original.



I know there are loads of Aussies performing in Europe and the UK. Who do you have in Ruthless Jabiru, any West Aussies? And what is the appeal of working with Australians?

I have had some West Aussies in Ruthless Jabiru – most recently Marina Gillam, Coral Lancaster, Bree Enemark, Sam Wickramasinghe, others on the sidelines until schedules fall into place. I'm looking forward to playing some music by Liza Lim in this next program and by Cat Hope in the program after that. The Australian element adds a social dimension to the project alongside the music. It sets us up for solidarity which in my opinion is a good starting point.



What sort of concerts do you give?

I like to perform my program as a continuous sequence without applause. I think this encourages the ear to make sonic connections across the program and gives the imagination space to run wild. I'd like to think this style of presentation puts the audience on equal terms regardless of their concertgoing or musical background. Everyone is forced into the moment to make sense of what they hear but they also feel the shape of a program as a gesture which is whole in itself.

You have a soft spot for musical activism. What is the appeal of using music to champion a cause?

I realise not everyone has the luxury of choosing their own programs or choosing how they present but for me the commercial fad for cheap themes with tenuous links by title is one of the most effective ways to keep audiences stale. So many ensembles have a full-time marketing department dedicated to bringing public awareness to a concert event. I like the idea of using this machine as a force for good to bring visibility to an idea or issue that deserves our consideration. One of my recent programs paid tribute to the damaged landscape of Maralinga, another to poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal. I really think we need to treat our audiences with much more sophistication – we really need to be specific with the level of intelligence and imagination we expect from them. I try to invite a dialogue well beyond the music in the leadup to a concert – exploring situations and histories I'm also learning about as we go along. I get artist-Activists to tell these stories, spark some ideas, lend us their passions, uncover the hidden details that unbalance the world as we know it through the mass media. When it comes down to it though the marketing is all just a precursor – people come out to concerts for all different reasons and ticketholders may or may not be invested in the particular story a program carries for me. There's no propaganda, no speeches, we just turn down the house lights and let the music go to work.

Your next concert features Peter Sculthorpe's final, unfinished work, commissioned by Ruthless Jabiru in 2012. It seems a perfect match, pairing Ruthless Jabiru with a composer who was so passionate about Australian culture. How tragic he was unable to complete the work before his death last year. What is required to bring this piece to the stage?

My decision to perform the sketches for *Postcards from Jabiru* is obviously as symbolic as it is musical but I'm confident I can make it work. My challenge is to deliver a meaningful program for a London audience probably unfamiliar with Peter's music. The broadness of the brushstrokes at this early stage of composition allows for some creative license which I think is a good fit for us. What is required now is the last bit of finance to bring it into production.

What do you hope audiences will experience?

I hope I've come up with a program which acknowledges one of our great Australian elders but does so through a collection of music which is truly international. Of course you're absolutely right in saying Peter was passionate about both Australia and its arts culture but I think he also deserves a hearing beyond the scope of being Australian. By setting him against Kaija Saariaho, Liza Lim, John Luther Adams and a new work for us by Eugene Birman I hope people will hear some of the things typically associated with European and American music in Peter's work – and equally vice versa. I guess I'm trying to invite a hearing of Peter's music first and foremost as sound before source.

At what age did you start learning music?

I started taking piano lessons when I was 4 or 5 but safe to say that time was more about tools and sociomusicology 101 than being musical – the beginnings of an ear, developing a memory, learning how it feels to perform in front of other people, to practice, how it feels to be ready for a performance. Opinions about tempo, expression, rubato etc probably started appearing when I was around 11 or 12. Looking back I guess my ideas became bolder, started gathering some momentum – by this time I was also holding a flute. My first forays into real musical risktaking were a few years after that, probably around 14 or 15. It was a subtle shift which went unnoticed at the time but this is when I would say I really got started on the music.

When did you become involved in activism?

I've been around a lot of artist-Activists and I'm really inspired by their energy. My friends Jessie Boylan and Alex Kelly are both doing exceptional work with arts and social change in Australia and internationally. I also had the privilege of recently connecting here in London with two heroes: **Peter Sellars** and **John Pilger**. They're passionate about what they believe in 24 hours a day, it doesn't switch off. I think we need to be that persistent if we want to get the whole truth about social justice and sustainability issues because there are a lot of people making money off the fact that the public only has half the story. A few months ago I was invited to guest conduct a pretty high profile gig for Greenpeace to promote their Save the Arctic campaign. We played to hundreds of paparazzi and protesters under a rail bridge in howling winds and horizontal rain, the perfect setting to champion the elements. I realised it was exactly the sort of listening environment I'm trying to culture in my own audiences – some raw information to set the scene beforehand but once we're in situ it's about triggering the imagination through the ear.

Will we ever be able to entice you back to Australia?

I would love to get some projects and/or collaborations happening in Australia. I've been abroad for nearly 15 years now and it would be great to reconnect with the artists back home on the ground. I'm also really interested in devising some programs for Australian audiences. I think the way I use Australian music in my programs at the moment is very much from a bird's eye view. It would be great to explore how my ideas about tone, pace, narrative etc in programming, which are probably the things which define me as a musician at the moment here in London, would need to adapt to a home crowd.



Do you have a soft spot for anything else in life or is it all about the music?

For me internalising a score is a decoding process. I've noticed my best work happens when I'm in motion – however much stress I think I'm under, eventually the cogs of my mind and imagination will start to turn when I'm on the move and that's when things start getting creative and the solutions begin to appear. Although tempting to lock eyes with a score for 15 hours straight, I have to keep reminding myself that running, cycling, walking, cruising are also a big part of my score study process. I live and study in a tiny space – good for focusing on details but without the time away there is no perspective, no epiphany.

Thank you Kelly Lovelady for your thought-provoking interview. For more details on Kelly and her orchestra go to the Ruthless Jabiru website. For details on how to lend a hand financing the premiere of Peter Sculthorpe's last work check out the Australian Cultural Fund.

And here's another feature on Kelly Lovelady that ran in Limelight magazine recently:

<http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/news/sculthorpes-last-postcards-get-hearing-london>

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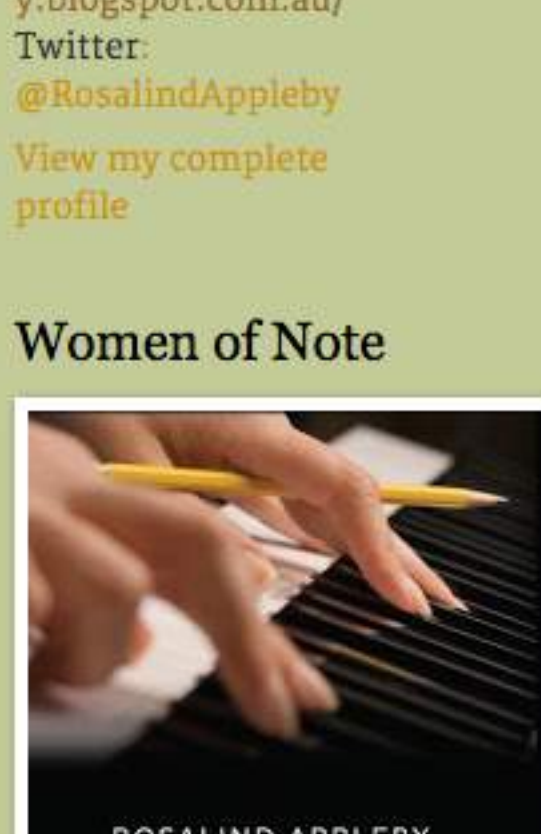
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