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What's in a trio?

By [Piers Lane](#) on Jul 10, 2012 (9 hours ago) filed under [Classical Music](#) | [Comments](#)

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Musical chairs and unexpected connections at the Australian Festival of Chamber Music.

I had the happiest time on Saturday evening, playing Gershwin's *Concerto and Rhapsody in Blue* with the Canberra Symphony to a sold-out Llewellyn Hall. The orchestra seems to exist on the smell of an oily rag, but boasts some of Australia's top players (the flautists Vernon Hill and Virginia Taylor, who have often performed at the AFCM, spring immediately to mind) and plays with passion and soul. That is no doubt partly inspired by their chief conductor, one of my favourite concerto partners – our own Nicholas Milton.



I first met Nick at the AFCM, long before I was directing it. In fact, I think it was on my first visit to the festival as a player. I'd been impressed by a local taxi driver who'd asked in a laconic but comradely way, "Yer here for the Reef mate?"

I replied, a little embarrassed by the slightly English roundness in my vowels, "I'm here for the Chamber Music Festival, actually".

He commented, with a sort of gruff bemusement, "Aw, that chamber music! Yer can't 'ave a posh wedding in Townsville these days without a string quartet!" I realised then that the AFCM had a long reach...

Piers Lane

Australian-born, London-based pianist Piers Lane reflects on the ins and outs of directing the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville.

Nick was in Townsville as the violinist of the Macquarie Trio. I last saw him about a year ago, when I attended a thrilling concert he conducted for the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany. I was playing in that festival too, in a chamber music segment curated by the Aussie cellist Liwei Qin.

That was where I met another piano trio – the Storioni Trio from Holland – and realised we hadn't had a professional trio play at the AFCM since the Macquarie lot many years ago. It was time! I immensely enjoyed playing chamber music with the violinist and cellist of the trio – the two brothers, Wouter and Marc Vossen – and Schubert piano duets with their pianist Bart van der Roer were an unalloyed delight.

I asked if the Storionis might like to come to Townsville; they were so enthusiastic that they reorganised their annual visit to the Kuhmo Festival in Finland (the progenitor, incidentally, of the AFCM) so that they could arrive in Townsville for the first rehearsal day – Wednesday July 25. It was a joy for me to be able to programme repertoire they've played for years together and to suggest they might learn the piano trio by this year's composer-in-residence, the well-loved Nigel Westlake. They were duly cautious at taking on a new contemporary piece, but as soon as they'd heard it and seen the score, they were keen to take up the challenge.

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Well, the best laid plans and all that! Last week, I received a touching email from Bart explaining that Wouter, the leader, has severely damaged his shoulder and has been forbidden to play for six to nine weeks, which precludes a visit to Townsville at the end of this month! Bart and Marc were wondering what to do and if I still wanted them to come. The Storioni Trio had never been in this position before. I reassured them that I did indeed want them to come – and to choose a violinist they'd feel happy playing with.

They asked various friends, but all were booked for the multiple European festivals that take place at this time of year. Apparently they then turned to our mutual friend Liwei Qin. He suggested Natsuko Yoshimoto (pictured), leader of the Grainger Quartet and the Adelaide Symphony. Liwei, Marc and Natsuko all studied together in Manchester. It was an inspired suggestion.

Life is strange! I had asked Natsuko to the festival two years ago, but her commitments with the ASO meant it wasn't possible. I am delighted that this year, through fate, she is able to come along after all. Arvo Volmer, the chief conductor in Adelaide, has agreed to release her at short notice from a scheduled symphony concert, because he recognises the importance of the AFCM and the importance of his players representing the orchestra in different ways. I have to say I loved playing Beethoven's *Emperor* with him a few years ago at the Adelaide Town Hall. He has a lyrical sense of line and a natural empathy. It seems that empathy extends beyond music-making, a mercy for which I am hugely appreciative.

Bizarre that two of my favourite conductors – and the fabulous Liwei Qin - have unwittingly been responsible for the trios to be played at this year's AFCM! But the classical music world's like that.

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I agree with you: Me permito escribir en español transcribiendo un fragmento de un mail que me mandara Claudio von Foerster: ".....decidí practicar el juego de elegir, que no es otra cosa que el...

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Having a limited number for a list like this will always create challenges, and the title is inaccurate: these are all pianists who made recordings that are commercially available. Many of the...

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Sorry that the Australian pianist, Bruce Hungerford (1922-1977), is not on the list. He did not have as big a career as he deserved, but was a fantastic Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin pianist, and...

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'Ten pianists that have influenced my musical life' might have been preferable. Van Cliburn, Barenboim, Leif Ove Andsnes, are a few that I would include.

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I find these kinds of lists very frustrating. Such judgements are inevitably subjective. Great pianists is fine, greatest pianists is annoying and greatest of all time is just plain silly...

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