

# **The Music of David Ahern**

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Illustration E.1. A young David Ahern

## ABSTRACT

David Ahern (1947-1988) was a composer who spent most of his life in Sydney, Australia. He achieved a sudden and extraordinary prominence as a young composer following the success of his first two orchestral works, *After Mallarmé* and *Ned Kelly Music*. In 1968 and 1969 he travelled to Europe where he studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Cornelius Cardew.

On return from Europe Ahern began several performance and improvisatory groups which were modeled on what he had learned in Europe, in particular the recent inception of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra. After three tumultuous years of performances from 1970 to 1972, AZ Music, the only one of these groups remaining, threw off its 'Cardewian' influences and began to professionally perform new music. It folded in 1976 and it appears Ahern wrote no more music. After 12 years of unsuccessful career changes caused by severe alcoholism Ahern died and is little spoken of any longer in Australian contemporary musical circles.

The surviving documentation of Ahern's achievements in his short career are limited to a small number of journal articles by members of his performance groups, a few pages in a book on Australian composers, and the newspaper reviews that were published at the time.

This thesis draws together the existing published information that there is of Ahern's work and through creation of new source material (namely the documentary archiving of his estate onto CD-Rom and the recording of a series of interviews with some of those who worked with the composer) fills gaps left in the information

available. It also seeks to discuss the influence, importance and individuality of Ahern's work and life.

The Prologue describes how I have divided Ahern's creative life from 1965 to 1976 into three distinct periods. Chapter 1 contains a literature review and a detailed explanation of my approach to creating and archiving new primary source material. Chapter 2 describes the first period of Ahern's career, and chapters 3 and 4 the second and third periods respectively. An Epilogue serves to draw together the threads of Ahern's work and life, and discusses its influence and significance not only in Australia but more broadly in an international context – a theme that pervades this entire thesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## PROLOGUE

The story of the life of David Ahern is both a fairytale and a tragedy. I discovered it while beginning research on a broader history of experimental music in Australia, and never proceeded any further, so incredible did I find it that there existed no objective account of this man's life.

The intention of this thesis, then, is to map as objectively and factually as possible the life of an undoubtedly talented man, and also to make some subjective judgments about that talent. The research project, in this form at least, was always intended to be a jumping-off platform for future more detailed work on Ahern's life and music. There is little detailed musical analysis, little theoretical discourse, and little information which might be of biographical (not musical) import only.

What is achieved is the plugging of gaps in the available literature, and the addition of a large body of new source material: so that the movements and development of this complex character from 1967 to 1976, the short nine years in which Ahern was genuinely musically active, are comprehensively summarised.

The new source material which was created for this project was essentially found in two mediums: in Ahern's estate, which was inherited by his close friend Geoffrey Barnard (the greatest documenter of Ahern's life to date), and in interviews conducted by the author, to form an oral history.

To this end this thesis includes two appendices: the first appendix includes copies of the original interviews with Peter Sculthorpe, John Hopkins, Greg Sheimer, Geoff Collins, Geoffrey Barnard, Philip Ryan and Nigel Butterly (Richard Meale was interviewed but did not want to be recorded). It also includes copies of an interview Richard Toop conducted with Ahern himself. Selected transcriptions of these interviews are also included in appendix 1 and this collection will be lodged at the



Australian Music Centre in their archives and in the oral history section at the National Library.

The second appendix is in the form of a CD-Rom. On it are Ahern's private letters, photographs, notes and original compositions, scanned and embedded in PDF (Portable Document Format). The letters especially give us an insight to the private Ahern, and the insecurities that his publicly projected self did not reveal: correspondence from Cornelius Cardew and Leo Schonfield is especially important in this way. The PDF is interactive, and works on an Apple Mac or IBM compatible computer running OS8.6 or Windows 95 or later, respectively. Adobe's Acrobat reader 5 or 6 must be installed to open the PDF and can be downloaded without charge from [www.adobe.com/acrobat](http://www.adobe.com/acrobat).

James Murdoch's book *Australia's Contemporary Composers*<sup>1</sup> was published in 1972, at the height of Ahern's experimental activities, and is the only book with mention of his work. Unfortunately it only reviews with any accuracy the first few years of his career: there is no way Murdoch could have fully understood the breadth of thought Ahern brought back from Europe in 1972 at the time without further exploration. Nearly every journal article on Ahern's music and life has been written by a member of one of his performance groups, and while many of these are detailed and accurate (especially those by Geoffrey Barnard and Ernie Gallagher) they are no doubt also reflections of their personal regard for a man who, as Barnard said, would "walk through walls to get to where he needed to go"<sup>2</sup>. This thesis attempts to draw both facts and opinions on Ahern's personality from the literature, as two separate threads.

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<sup>1</sup> Murdoch, James. (1972). *Australia's contemporary composers*. Sydney: The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In interview: see appendix 1.

The content is not, however, a principally biographical story. While some mention needs to be made of Ahern's relationships with his peers and lovers to understand his state of mind at different times, it does not concern itself with his personal life. To this end, the three chapters on Ahern's life do not deal with his youth before he sprang onto the Australian and international stages, or after 1976, when AZ Music, Ahern's principal performance group, folded and Ahern took heavily to the bottle. They deal instead with the thrust of his musical life during the intense period of activity.

It was Geoffrey Barnard who first identified the two distinct phases of AZ Music in his article "AZ it was":

...AZ actually comprised two distinct phases in its (almost) six year history: the first running from its inception in February 1970 to August 1972, and the second roughly from the beginning of 1973 to the end of 1975.<sup>3</sup>

While AZ bore the same name in 1973, at the beginning of the second phase Ahern had abandoned the very aesthetic which had led to the creation of the group, namely the Cardewian philosophy applied to the Scratch Orchestra of allowing anyone with any musical expertise and experience to perform. Instead AZ Music turned to performing existing, mostly through-composed repertoire with a body of nearly entirely new and paid performers. Ahern himself also took less of a performance role and dealt with choosing repertoire and directing the group.

I have labelled these two periods of Ahern's life the second and third periods, because Ahern had already enjoyed a successful four years in Australia and Europe before he began what later became known as "the course"<sup>4</sup> and AZ Music. In this first period he quickly emerged as a young composer. His music was championed

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<sup>3</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (1989). AZ it was. *NMA*, 7, 17-20.

<sup>4</sup> Ahern's course in experimental music began at the NSW State Conservatorium in February 1970, where it was free. The performers in AZ Music and Teletopa were drawn from these classes, and when time ran out at the Con, Ahern taught the class briefly from his home and then as an approved WEA course. This is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

principally by Richard Meale, who taught the young Ahern, and John Hopkins, who at the time was conducting more than one Australian Symphony Orchestra as well as directing the Sydney Proms and working with Meale and Nigel Butterly at the ABC.

If one looks at the three periods broadly, one can see Ahern's musical life as a move from what he could safely achieve within the Australian institutions in the first, to a radical shift to new thinking from Europe and America which challenged Sydney audiences in the second, and a return to safer ground and performance practice in the third. In many ways this gives a great insight into the growth but eventual defeat of Ahern's spirit, and the reason that this story is both a fairytale and a tragedy.

CHAPTER 1  
LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH  
APPROACH TO PRIMARY SOURCES.

As mentioned in the prologue, the little published information on Ahern's life is represented in one book and a series of articles nearly wholly by those who knew and worked with him. A third category must be added, that of newspaper articles, although Ahern's relationship with the press was not always good (especially during the second period), and one has to question the agenda of the critic when drawing conclusions from these sources.

A similar approach was taken to the source material created for this project, that of the eight interviews conducted to form a broad oral history of Ahern's life.

**The creation of an oral history.**

To create and use an oral history within the same project one must first discuss the nature of creating an oral history as part of a (specifically) musicological project and the pros and cons of oral history as useful source material specifically within musical research. There is very little literature at all available on this field, although the production of a paper during the research has sparked some interest in it.

As mentioned, the available literature (see literature review, below) does enable the mapping of a great deal of Ahern's movements, work and achievements, but questions remained, especially in the context of the significance (locally and internationally) of Ahern's work. What were his contacts with other musicians, in Australia and around the world? What influence did his work have on the Sydney music scene at the time? To what extent were the activities in AZ music, the Sunday Ensemble and Teletopa his own idea, and to what extent were they a synthesis of

others’? From a biographical point of view, how was David considered by his peers and his teachers? How had he risen so meteorically from relative obscurity to working on the world stage?

Broad information was gathered from the History department at the University of Sydney and the Oral History Association of Australia on methods of recording, styles of interviewing, and administration of source material.

The interviews with Geoff Collins, John Hopkins, Greg Sheimer, Geoffrey Barnard, Richard Meale, Philip Ryan and Peter Sculthorpe were by no means a complete collection to cover every aspect of David’s life, but featured enough important figures from all the periods of his life to provide a solid grounding, and more than five hours of recordings from which to draw some conclusions.

John Hopkins, Richard Meale and Nigel Butterly were working together at the ABC when Ahern approached first Butterly then Meale for lessons. Hopkins it was who gave the premieres of Ahern’s early orchestral works, and followed his progress even when he swung away from writing for orchestra in a traditional sense in the second period. Peter Sculthorpe was lecturing in composition at the University of Sydney music department and was already known as Australia’s most successful living composer. Geoffrey Collins, Geoffrey Barnard and Greg Sheimer were all participants in AZ Music, and have since become a leading performer, musicologist and composer respectively. And Philip L. Ryan was an original friend of David’s who had formed with him many of the ideas which were epitomised in the course.

### **Contradiction and reliability.**

There were, however, questions raised by the very nature of this kind of material. What made the interviews reliable source material? What could be gleaned from them as fact, and what as anecdote?

For example, there was a great disparity of opinion on the subject Ahern's skill as a violinist.

Nigel Butterly:

He played violin, that's right. Not very well I think, but he could have done sort of squeaky funny things on the violin.

Geoffrey Barnard:

Yes, he was quite a competent violinist.

John Hopkins:

Oh and he played the violin, didn't he? Yes. And he played it very badly! Yes I remember being at a concert where it was so appalling, his playing, but he did it with such conviction that this was what the violin should sound like.

Peter Sculthorpe:

It was very crazy and committed. Inspiring - I suppose from a conventional point of view maybe it was terrible - but it got you in, and maybe it was a dyslexic playing the violin.

Given that anything recorded represented memory and opinion, the question of how oral history justifies its place in the academic history community is raised. And how this position would work in a musicological context.

### **Reading on oral history.**

Books on oral history agree that it is a relatively new strand of history, although an incidental collecting of spoken memories can be traced back centuries. In his book *Oral Historiography*, David Henige suggests

Those who would accept the outlines of the fall of Troy would probably consider Homer to have been the first known oral historian. Others need go forward only a few centuries until they encounter the Greek historians of the fifth century B.C.<sup>5</sup>

The first distinction one must place on the term oral history is that it is quite different from the recording of oral *tradition*. The latter is defined to mean the

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<sup>5</sup> Henige, David. (1982). *Oral historiography*. London: Longman.

recording of a history or set of sociological traditions that have been passed from generation to generation by word of mouth only. Oral History, on the other hand, is the recording of memories of a person who has a specific insight into the topic that the historian is recording.

A recurring theme in the books reviewed on oral history for this research is that each of the authors is aggressively defensive of their field. In the *Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson remark flatly that “oral history is not a respected practice”<sup>6</sup>. In *By Word Of Mouth: ‘Elite’ Oral History*, Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth quote a criticism of Peter Oliver:

It seems to me that those who prepare and use the oral record have not yet given sufficient weight to the tricks that memory can play, to efforts at rationalization and self-justification that all of us make, even if only subconsciously, or to the terrible telescoping of time which an interview often encourages and which runs counter to the very essence of history.<sup>7</sup>

These fears seemed very pertinent to this project, especially with little other existing material with which to cross reference quotations. They also raised the questions of how one should draw a conclusion from such memories, especially when presented with others’ conflicting memories. Henige approaches this problem in the most succinct manner: he suggests that one should see an oral history project in two clear parts. The first, as interviewer and transcriber, and the second, as historian drawing conclusion. He concludes:

The crucial relationship between collecting evidence and its interpretation is, after all, nowhere more intimate than when the historian uses oral sources. When he is himself responsible for developing a body of data, it is clearly essential that he contemplate every aspect of his work carefully and try to see it in its widest context.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Perks, Robert and Thomson, Alistair. (1998). *The oral history reader*. London: Routledge.

<sup>7</sup> Seldon, Anthony and Pappworth, Joanna. (1983). *By word of mouth – ‘elite’ oral history*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.

<sup>8</sup> Henige, David. *Op cit*.

In Louise Douglas, Alan Roberts and Ruth Thompson's *Oral History: a Handbook*, a similar conclusion is drawn. After stating that oral history's "growth and potential have been matched by considerable controversy over the character of this source – its strengths and weaknesses – and the new kinds of historical information and new ways of communicating history which it can make possible", they go on to draw the same distinction:

The distinguishing factor between oral sources and all other historical sources is the critical role of researchers in the 'creating' of evidence. They not only record the evidence so that it is preserved in a more or less permanent form, but they have the opportunity, in fact the duty, to guide interviewees in their recollections.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding this distinction, the interviews for this project were approached in a completely different way. While it was always intended to make copies of the recordings available to the Australian Music Centre and the Oral History Association of Australia, they were now realised as their own finished product for the sake of this project: any conclusions drawn from them now in this thesis on Ahern's life must be seen as a second, separate, process.

### **Musical oral history in the media.**

The use of Oral History in the media blurs this distinction and as a result has also contributed to its controversy. Its use is in vogue with both television and radio documentaries today, and this is evidenced most clearly in the musicological world in the recent ABC production *Dots On The Landscape*. In order to identify how strict a method was being applied to this public use of oral history, I posed Andrew Ford, the writer and narrator of this series, some questions. Did he consider the interviews alone, without the editing process that turned them into the radio programme, to be historical source material? He responded:

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas, Louise, Roberts, Alan and Thompson, Ruth. (1988). *Oral history: a handbook*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd.



Now the thing about oral history – at least the way I did it in Dots – is that I decided on who would be interviewed, I held the microphone, I asked the questions, I edited the answers, I made the final selection of cuts and decided on the order in which they appeared. You’ll notice that it says the series was “written by Andrew Ford”. And so it was – but with other people’s words. [...] But, by and large, I don’t see oral history – at least in its edited/broadcast/published form – as substantially different from any other form of history. [...] the original tapes? ... some pretty libellous stuff that never went to air (which is why the tapes won’t be made publicly available – at least not in my lifetime!).<sup>10</sup>

This illustrates again the uncertain role and legitimacy of oral history, and the problematic elements to relying on it. Ford is happy to admit his agenda, and has no intention to share the source material, so by the definitions I have set a historian should not think of this as oral history. Yet the ABC describes the series as “an oral history of notated music in Australia”. This contradicts directly with the concept of the recording of the interview and the interpretation of the information gathered therein as a crucial part of creating oral history (and the two stages specifically in that order): Ford has merged the two to fit a pre-designed conclusion.

#### **New information from the interviews.**

The most exciting revelations within the interviews conducted for this project were in respect to the early days of Ahern’s career. The only text on this period is in Murdoch’s book on Australian music<sup>11</sup>, in which he summarises David’s progress as a student of Nigel Butterly then Richard Meale, the great support he was afforded by John Hopkins, and then the decision to leave Australia and study with Stockhausen and Cardew. Correspondence at the time with Stockhausen shows that it had been David’s drive and confidence (rather than compositional ability) that had got him into Darmstadt, that drive and confidence which had gained him the invitation to work as his assistant, and which had put him on stage for most of the concert that later defined the Scratch Orchestra. So was it compositional flair or this same confidence and

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<sup>10</sup> Ford, Andrew. In correspondence: the entire email is included in the first appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op cit.*

ambition that had brought him from obscurity, or had he simply followed the path set out in Murdoch's account of things, because he was a talented composer?

In interview, Nigel Butterly recalled that David did not come to him as full of promise:

David came with very elementary sort of stuff and he obviously didn't have much idea. I don't think he'd had much training in harmony or anything like that. And I'm not sure if I knew quite what to do with what he gave me, and in hindsight I think it was more appropriate that he should have gone to Richard because Richard was more able to steer him in the direction he wanted to go: Probably I would have been thinking more in the lines of a good basis in traditional musical techniques.

David did not, then, really study at all with Nigel Butterly. In fact, Butterly was slightly offended when after a few lessons he took off to study with Meale. It could be this that led him to wonder:

He wrote an orchestral piece, *After Mallarmé*, and I know it was generally said that Richard helped quite a lot with that, and that, well, you know there are always rumours about things, but there was the implication that it was more Richard's than David's.

Peter Sculthorpe had the same suspicions, saying in interview "I wonder in fact if Richard wrote more of *After Mallarmé* than David did". Richard Meale was happy to give an interview, but did not want to be recorded, which was a setback in the creating of a good background. He did, however, confirm that he liked David's compositional style from the outset, and while he conceded that he tutored him closely through the writing of *After Mallarmé*, insisted that it was indeed entirely Ahern's own work. However on *Ned Kelly Music*, which has also been said to have a definite influence of Meale in its sound, Meale said that Ahern and he had a falling out, and that he had nothing to do with its composition whatsoever.

John Hopkins proved to be the real promoter of David's early work, and still spoke about him with great affection:

I think he was like the enfant terrible, the angry young man of music, at the time. Some of my older colleagues couldn't bare it when he used to drift into the music department and head to my office and so forth. They would wonder what was going

to come next! And I just asked them to be patient, because I said, you know, there's something in this young person.

The conclusion, then, is that it was *always* David's confidence and ability to comprehend the new in music and to disseminate it well that impressed so many people, and that saw him rise so quickly as a composer and proponent of new music. One might have thought that Hopkins' professional relationship with Ahern would have ended with his change of direction in the second period, but Hopkins said he had continued to follow Ahern's career closely even during that entirely experimental phase of AZ music from 1970 to 1972:

Of course, he ran, was it AZ music? [That's right, yes] – which had some amazing connections. I mean, what he managed to do in these programmes was quite stunning. I mean, how he did all this was quite amazing. We were just all mind blown by what he was doing.

Peter Sculthorpe, less surprisingly, remembered these years the same way:

I was there all the way for David, because I thought that this was fantastic that a young man like him could get music onto the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald. I mean, this is heady stuff.

### **Methodology concluded.**

The interviews, then, show David seen from different angles during these early years and reveal a young man with some compositional talent, but exceptional personality and drive. They also reveal more of his personality not only through the compliments and criticisms the interviewees place upon him, but in the *way* they speak about him – we can hear so much more from the recorded voice than we might read from a page in a history book. This is reflected again in the Oral History Handbook:

There are many reasons why the original tape is considered a superior source to a transcribed version. The Canadian historian and documentary producer, Imbert Orchard, believes: 'If you transcribe something that somebody has spoken, you're getting a relatively small portion of the meaning, because a great deal of this meaning

is in the inflection of the voice, in the rhythm of the voice, in the pauses, the volume, the emphasis.’<sup>12</sup>

Illustration 1.1 illustrates a shortlist of advantages and disadvantages, unique opportunities and pitfalls that have guided the use this data. It is based on the structure of the pertinent chapter in *By Word of Mouth – ‘Elite’ oral history*<sup>13</sup> and *Oral History – a Handbook*<sup>14</sup>.

The detailed study of *musical* history is different to any other field of historical study. Before one can begin, one must have musical training. One must understand musical languages, tools, structures and the very different musical traditions of different parts of the world. A western musicologist might take it for granted, but they will always have an understanding of over one thousand years of relevant history, and usually an incredibly detailed knowledge of musical history, genre and aesthetics 100 years before (and after where applicable) their chosen field of expertise. On one hand a musicologist must understand many methods of musical analysis, and on the other he should know about the personal life of the composers or performers he researches. He must know what inspired a composer to write, what performance practice was current at the time. And finally, and possibly most importantly, he must know what influences were upon his subject and what influence his subject had upon others.

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas, Louise, Roberts, Alan and Thompson, Ruth. *Op cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Seldon, Anthony and Pappworth, Joanna. (1983). *By word of mouth – ‘elite’ oral history* . London: Methuen & Co Ltd.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas, Louise, Roberts, Alan and Thompson, Ruth. *Op cit.*

Illustration 1.1: Summary of the approach taken to creating a reliable oral history in this project.

### Summary

Bare in mind that any historical document may be subject to the same problems a recording of an interview might have. For instance, a newspaper article or official report may be subject to

- The reliability of the original observations
- Correct recall of those observations
- Background knowledge of the subject
- The reporter's own biases
- Editorial policy
- The preferences of readers

There are limitations of both the interviewee and the interviewer, some of which can't always be overcome. In these cases being aware of them during the interview and afterwards when drawing conclusions can give the work more credibility:

### Limitations of the interviewee

- Unreliability of memory [Many of my interviewees couldn't remember exact years, but as I knew David's movements this was easily overcome]
- Unfairness through vindictiveness
- Excessive discretion [I persuaded Peter to air his opinion that David might have been dyslexic]
- Over simplification
- Distortion of interviewee's role
- Self consciousness
- Influence of hindsight
- Repetition of published evidence [Most have read the Geoffrey Barnard articles]

### Limitations of the interviewer

- Unrepresentative sampling [Small interview pool – but not unrepresentative]
- Biased questioning [Requires critique]
- Deference and bias towards interviewees
- Interviews as a replacement for reading documents
- Encyclopaedic Informant [Geoffrey Barnard]

### Advantages of Oral History [All of these points are highly relevant to this project]

- Events not recorded in documents
- Capture personality of subject
- Personal and organisational relationships
- Add to overall grasp of documents
- Clarification of factual confusions
- Underlying assumptions and motives
- Gaps in documentation
- Discovery of entirely new information

Creating as objective an oral history as possible, therefore, can give more to this kind of understanding of subject in the future than has been possible before. The kind of insight we can get from reading the Cage-Boulez correspondence, or the Prokofiev diaries, or a Wagner treatise is limited in that what is written is contrived for the communication required. In interviewing as many connected musicians as possible, one can begin to understand the sway that one had over another, the tensions between some, and relationships that may well serve to confirm analysis or performance practice in the future. Greg Sheimer mentioned that while little of his own composition, save a few pieces written for AZ Music, had anything directly to do with what David demanded of the classes, that it did open to him a different way of thinking about sound, and a relationship to dance:

So that was I suppose not quite AZ, but it was certainly – I’m just wondering if my thinking would have gone in that direction without AZ ... Probably one of the reasons why I’ve been able to do things in other disciplines – I mean if you can communicate something clearly, whether it’s in musical notation or in code that does something, a system that communicates musical ideas – I think the important thing is the communication and I think I learnt that through AZ.

### **The important role of oral history in musicology**

While in political history one might trace one event to lead to another, in musical history/musicology, this is taken a step further because the events in question are musical events – be they performances, compositions, or changes in aesthetic because of influence. A composer can be influenced by an idea, by another composer, by the composition of another composer, and so on.

Sheimer also felt that many of David’s synthesis of many different ideas came to fruition not in his own music, but through the influence he had on others:

It didn’t benefit him, it benefited other people. I think Roger was one of the main beneficiaries, Geoffrey Collins definitely, and myself.

The interviews can also be used, as explained in illustration 1, to back up written information, fill in blanks, and extend the existing history as we know it. On this

front, there was little contradiction between the events remembered and those I had already documented, with, of course, quite a few amusing anecdotes thrown in for which this thesis deserves a third appendix.

There were a few instances in which interviews gave completely *new* information on Ahern's activities. In 1972 he took Teletopa on tour, a tour which was not reviewed in any of the literature or accounted in any of Ahern's own records. Teletopa split up straight after the tour, and one might have presumed that it did not go well, and that that accounted for the lack of records. But Geoff Collins was able to tell the full story in interview which is quoted in full in chapter 3. Similarly Geoffrey Barnard told an alleged story which might point to the actual reason behind the break up of the group.

#### **The use of oral history in this project: conclusion.**

To conclude, it has been as important in this project to consider the use of these recordings as source material in this project as it has been to gather the information and derive the useful themes that have arisen from it. Gathering an oral history can be a very powerful tool for a project such as this one, and that because of the all-encompassing nature of any work of a musicologist, it can be an important tool to build bridges between what might seem disparate qualities and events in a composer's life.

This is not without danger, however, and therefore this project does follow the advice of existing literature on the topic of oral history which suggests that one needs to make the original recordings available as separate historical documents for third-party analysis and criticism if one expects one's own conclusions to be accepted; just as one would include footnotes to any texts one read before writing a book review or thesis based on available literature.

Even if this approach is at odds with the popular use of oral history, the recordings do share the quality which Andrew Ford reflects is most powerful:

The other thing I hear (see!) when I listen to the programs now, is the composers in the situation in which I interviewed them: Julian Wu and Warren Burt are in the Grainger museum; Barry Conyngham is sitting on a bench at Circular Quay, right outside the opera house; Moya Henderson does the whole interview with her hand in a bowl of water, because just before I arrive at her house she has burned herself... the reason I mention this is that the tapes are only records of what these people thought on particular days, when they were in particular moods... all this affected the outcome.<sup>15</sup>

### **Literature review 1: journal articles by members of Ahern's performance groups.**

The fact that the great majority of articles about the life and work of David Ahern have been written by members of his performance groups makes the objective approach taken to the recordings just as relevant for literature.

Geoffrey Barnard, who inherited Ahern's estate and has provided permission for it to be archived on the CD-Rom included in appendix 2, has also been the most significant contributor of articles on David's life. As mentioned earlier he identified the two phases of AZ Music and has also extended the understanding of the relationship of AZ Music to Cardew's Scratch Orchestra in his article *AZ it was*<sup>16</sup>.

Barnard points out that AZ Music grew out of Ahern's course at the Conservatorium in the same way that the Scratch Orchestra grew from Cardew's class in experimental music at Morley College the previous year.

The influence of Cardew on our activities in the class was paramount, with emphasis on non-elitist, non-hierarchical forms of music-making, essentially for people without the 'benefit' of a formal 'musical' education.<sup>17</sup>

Ironically Barnard refers to himself in a similar vein, although he did attend the Bachelors of Music degree at the University of Sydney for some time, as someone

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<sup>15</sup> Ford, Andrew: in correspondence with the Author.

<sup>16</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. *Op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



without a formal musical education. He is currently completing a Master of Music at the University of Technology, Sydney.

In a second article on Ahern's life, *David Ahern: Starting from Scratch*<sup>18</sup>, written eleven years later, Barnard again points out the strong links between what Ahern had observed in England with the formation of the Scratch Orchestra and the beginning of the course and AZ Music in Sydney some months later. In this article he also adds an interesting qualification:

Unlike the Scratch Orchestra, however, most of the members of AZ Music – with the exception of Ahern and Ernie Gallagher – became more involved with the performance of works (mostly indeterminate) by overseas composers than in the production of their own compositions.<sup>19</sup>

The above mentioned Ernie Gallagher was the other member of AZ Music who also wrote many articles and essays on Ahern's activities, including broader essays on experimental music for a Bachelors degree and a PhD at Macquarie University. By all accounts, and some of these will be found in chapters 2 to 4, Gallagher was an eccentric character. His writing epitomises this in many ways, and is on occasion incisive and informative, and at other times erratic and difficult to follow or agree with. Barnard comments that his PhD thesis is “appalling”<sup>20</sup>.

In *AZ Music*<sup>21</sup>, written for the same NMA journal that Barnard wrote his 1989 article on Ahern, Gallagher also draws on the connection between the Scratch Orchestra and AZ Music, saying “Many of the procedures that Cardew adopted for the Scratch Orchestra in its exploration of sound and of listening procedures, were also adopted by ourselves”. He goes on to compare specific activities of the two groups. Illustration 3.4 summarises and expands on these comparisons.

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<sup>18</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (2000). David Ahern: Starting from Scratch. *Sounds Australian*, 55, 44-46.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In private conversation with the Author.

<sup>21</sup> Gallagher, Ernie. (1989). AZ Music. *NMA*, 7, 9-13.

In their 1989 articles, Gallagher and Barnard both list many of the concert activities of AZ and Teletopa according to their own memory and records, and this was an invaluable starting point for chronologically recording Ahern's career in the second period. Gallagher lists the concerts alphabetically, as was originally intended, from concert A on the 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> February (very few concerts demand two dates for the one performance, but Satie's *Vexations*, a short piano piece with the instruction to perform it 840 time, does) to concert L on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1972 – the last concert before the third period and therefore the last to be listed alphabetically.

In his NMA article, Barnard lists more personally memories of, as he recalls, being “the ‘enfants terribles’ of the Sydney music scene”<sup>22</sup>: memories of concerts rioted or stopped by those who knew better. He also deals in much more detail than Gallagher with selected repertoire performed, including Ahern's only piece written during the second period, *Stereo/Mono*. Both mention the smaller and more specialised electronic improvisation group, Teletopa, although Barnard again offers more detail, discussing the ideas that gave birth to the group, and their approach to improvisation. This is not surprising, however, as Barnard was a member of the group on several occasions.

The other two members of AZ Music who have written in any detail about David Ahern and his groups are Greg Schiemer and Phillip L. Ryan (although Roger Frampton also wrote a small article for *Sounds Australian* in 1992<sup>23</sup>). Schiemer's article in the same NMA journal of 1989 is surprisingly as political in its nature of criticism of the Australian concert-going public and artistic institutions as Barnard or Gallagher's – surprising because in the same article Schiemer names Ahern only as a

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<sup>22</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (1989). *Op. Cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Frampton, Roger. Teletopa etc. *Sounds Australian*, summer 91-92, 22.

starting point rather than the main influence for his compositional career (which Ahern evidently was in Gallagher's, and has been a central figure in Barnard's life too). It is Schiemer who blames the ISCM for an attitude of conservatism in the Australian contemporary music scene:

Guided by the late Professor Peart, the ISCM saw its role as the patron of the second wave of young Australian composers - those who were expected to walk in the footsteps of Meale, Sculthorpe, Butterly, Sitsky, Banks, Humble and Werder. Its agenda was safe, including composers like Messiaen, Ligeti, Pousseur, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Maxwell-Davies, Birtwistle, Bedford, Mellers, and very rarely Stockhausen, Xenakis or even Boulez. With English composers somewhat over-represented, this music was upheld as the standard, presumably for the enlightenment of the new generation here. David Ahern, through AZ music, offered the first real challenge to this sort of cultural filtering by introducing the radical music of the North American avant-garde.<sup>24</sup>

In a similar light, Gallagher attacks the Australia Council:

Many of these ideas too, have been either intentionally or, through ignorance, unwittingly quashed by an overbearing and intransigent musical establishment epitomised by the Music Board of the Australia Council.<sup>25</sup>

Like Barnard and Gallagher, Schiemer draws on the similarities with Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and discusses his own early pieces that were inspired by the thoughts Ahern was disseminating. Again we are made aware of the personal relationship to David, and overtly so with a reference to the strength of Ahern's personality, when Schiemer sums up the influence Ahern had on his work:

I guess most of the group, like me, found it difficult to work with David beyond a certain point, making it difficult to communicate any sense of our indebtedness to him. Understanding improvisation as a form of real-time composing, the use of electronics in music, the concept of music as process rather than music as a product, are all facets of my musical experience which would never have been except for him.<sup>26</sup>

The attacks on the musical establishments which did or did not support Ahern (and his ideas), and the claim that he was the only person to introduce composers like Cage and Feldman to the Australian scene are difficult to back up as anything more than opinion. In discussion, both Anne Boyd and Nigel Butterly said that Cage had

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<sup>24</sup> Schiemer, Greg. (1989). Towards a living tradition. *NMA*, 7, 30-38.

<sup>25</sup> Gallagher, Ernie. (1989). AZ Music. *NMA*, 7, 9-13.

<sup>26</sup> Schiemer, Greg. In interview: see appendix 1.

been performed long before Ahern came onto the scene. In a similar contradiction, in interview with Richard Toop, Ahern claimed both that he was not supported enough by the Australia Council<sup>27</sup> on his return from Europe, but also boasts of a meeting arranged by Patrick White with Dr. Coombes (the then head of the Australia Council) to arrange funding for the Teletopa electronic equipment, and of a recommendation from Stockhausen on his visit to Australia:

Barry Jones, who was then on the Australia Council, turned to Stockhausen and said “Mr Stockhausen, how much shall we give David Ahern?”. And Stockhausen turned around to him and said “Why, anything he wants, of course, Mr Jones”.<sup>28</sup>

The conclusion to draw, then, is perhaps that much of what Ahern did (but not all) in Sydney – especially in the second period – was new and did challenge both the concert going public and the musical institutions and critics, but that he did also attract at least some support and funding. As will be seen in a later part of this literature review, nowhere more was this polarisation of support and criticism felt than in the media.

Phillip L. Ryan is another eccentric character who had the exclusive position in Ahern’s groups of being a contributor of ideas as well as being involved in performance. Ahern himself said of him “He seemed to know about anything that was happening in any point of the universe that was modern”. In his article *Cage on stage*<sup>29</sup>, Ryan outlines the influence John Cage had on music in Australia, and briefly reviews some of the activities of AZ Music in the early seventies. He claims to have first performed Cage in a concert organised with Anne Boyd at the Cell Block Theatre in 1968, and compares the hostility with which it was greeted with the same problems

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<sup>27</sup> See also Kelly, Frances. (1974). David Ahern is fed up with the arts council. *National Times*, 25 February.

<sup>28</sup> Ahern, David. In conversation with Richard Toop: see appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ryan, Philip L. (1994). Cage on stage. *Art Monthly Australia*, 68 (April), 37.

AZ Music had with its audiences during the second period. Again, the issue of the public reaction to these activities is raised.

The journal articles written by the members of Ahern's performance groups, Barnard, Gallagher, Schiemer and Ryan have provided an excellent grounding for the study of this subject. Generally their thoughts on the content and significance of Ahern's teaching is consistent, which gives weight to the information about the course and early concerts. They are, however, by their very nature short articles which leave gaps in the chronology of events, and this has led to the need for extra interviews and the investigation of Ahern's correspondence to create new source material, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

### **Literature review 2: Ahern's articles on his own music and aesthetic.**

A valuable addition to the articles on Ahern's life are his own expositions on what he thought important in new music and what his intentions were with his performance groups. While he wrote very few of these articles, his exuberant confidence is so evident that there is little doubt about what he means and the directions his thoughts were taking him.

Ahern's first published article appeared in *Music Now* in 1969, when he was evidently working out his own connections between what he had learned with Stockhausen and with Cardew. In this article, *Now Music*<sup>30</sup>, he draws a line back from Stockhausen and Cardew to La Monte Young. The logic behind this is that both of the former composers were, in 1969, composing text-based pieces, something which Young had begun to do, as Ahern succinctly points out, as early as 1961. He concludes that Cardew's *Treatise* enhances the freedom of text-composition one step further:

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<sup>30</sup> Ahern, David. (1969). *Now Music*. *Music Now*, 1 (2), 20-24.

In *Treatise* traditional notation is broken up, exploded, transformed and re-worked – then left to the interpreter as to what sounds (or visual theatre events) they might represent. The notation is utterly new; the music likewise. Before *Treatise* notation was a tool the composer used to tell the performer what to do in relation to his conceptualisation. From Cardew comes a notation which becomes the thought itself since the prospective performer says what it means.<sup>31</sup>

In *Notes on Expansion*<sup>32</sup>, written in the same year as the inception of the course and AZ music, Ahern attacks his critics, saying that the role of composer as performer and improviser should not be so shocking to audiences since it was practiced as long ago as the seventeenth century. He explains current thought in composer/performer collaboration as having begun with Cage and continued into both the modern north American scene as well as Europe, suggesting that composers such as Stockhausen tend to restrict the performers' choices to essentially structural ones.

Ahern closes this article with reference to the influence of electronics on modern music (he suggests the microphone is “the Shaman’s devil mask, both have the function of transforming the user into something other than an everyday human being”<sup>33</sup>) and explains the difference between concerts and happenings as music not ‘listened to’ but instead ‘existed in’.

Ahern’s final two journal articles were both written in 1972 to promote the work of Teletopa. The first, *Teletopian Utopia*<sup>34</sup>, was a short article for *The Bulletin* in which Ahern announced the upcoming tour and explained in simple terms the development as he saw it from Cage’s thought, to Cardew’s, and so to his own and the existence of Teletopa. In the second article, eponymously named *Teletopa*<sup>35</sup>, Ahern explores issues arising in the very nature of free improvisation in some detail. He describes the act of composition as the placing of filters on possible sounds, and

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<sup>31</sup> Ahern, David. *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ahern, David. (1970). Notes on expansion. *Other Voices*, vol. 1 no. 2, 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Ahern, David. (1972). Teletopian utopia. *The Bulletin*, May 6, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ahern, David. (1972). Teletopa. *Music Now*, 2 (1), 18-27.

therefore free improvisation being a blank page before any filters have been placed on it.

Once one accepts this definition of the relationship between composition and improvisation, the only question left is how many of these 'filters' in the form of experience and musical training one adds to the music, consciously or subconsciously.

Ahern exerts that finding a balance (or a saturation) of these elements while attempting to create a "total sound situation"<sup>36</sup> is exactly the aim. He concludes:

Welding a total, open sound world now is as much for the province of improvisation as it is of composition. Forging a new musical language, a meta-form, from traditional instruments, everyday objects, environments, complex electronic and associated amplificatory devices on the one hand, and composition, individual or collective (pitched, rhythmical and dynamic), and improvisation on the other hand, is a Teletopian aim.<sup>37</sup>

Illustration 1.2. Teletopa in rehearsal. Left to right: Geoff Collins, David Ahern, Roger Frampton.



<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

**Literature review 3: James Murdoch's book, *Australia's Contemporary Composers*.<sup>38</sup>**

As will be seen in chapters 2 and 3, while Murdoch's chapter on Ahern in his book *Australia's Contemporary Composers*<sup>39</sup> is valuable simply because it is the only such entry on the subject anywhere, the accuracy of the information contained within it is questionable. Murdoch makes some outlandish claims, such as "With *Ned Kelly Music*, Ahern suddenly became the leader of the avant-garde in Australia, a role previously shared by Meale and Sculthorpe": certainly a great weight to place on the shoulders of a 19 year-old boy.

In addition to this, the accuracy of the information provided on principally the first period of Ahern's life needs to come under some scrutiny in light of the new source material created for this project. From reading Murdoch one would conclude that Ahern studied with Butterly consistently for two years, when according to Butterly himself they didn't really study at all<sup>40</sup>. From reading Murdoch one would presume that Ahern and Stockhausen fell out in later years of his career, but correspondence from Stockhausen and interviews show otherwise.<sup>41</sup> The chronology and accuracy of Ahern's movements abroad seem to be exaggerated, possibly because the only place Murdoch could have gained this information was from Ahern himself. And Murdoch also misspells the names of several prominent composers in the chapter, leading the reader to wonder how comfortable he was in this particular area of avant-garde music.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Butterly, Nigel. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>41</sup> Stockhausen, Karlheinz. In correspondence: see appendix 2. Collins, Geoff. In interview: see appendix 1.



Despite the shortcomings of this publication, it is still worth referring to, not only because it is the only such writing on Ahern's life, but because the majority of the other literature on this subject concentrates more on the second and third periods: Murdoch's book was published in 1972 and therefore concentrates mostly on the first period. If nothing else, it is an interesting viewpoint of the exact middle of what proved to be Ahern's short musical career.

#### **Literature review 4: David Ahern and the Press.**

Reviews on Ahern's music in both Sydney's local press and nationally around Australia can be grouped in several ways. Initially, it is interesting to divide them into the periods. During the first period, Ahern was as Nigel Butterly reflects the "white haired boy"<sup>42</sup>, and the great majority of reviews of his early pieces and the progression of his career are very positive and encouraging. In stark contrast, reviews of the second period are generally negative, and reflect the sentiment of the part of the audience who did not enjoy the AZ Music and Teletopa concerts. There are some exceptions, but these do little to balance the sometimes aggressive, damning or simply dismissive tone of many. The final period, in which AZ (which became A-Z) Music performed a more middle-of-the-road contemporary repertoire in a much more professional way, in general attracted better reviews and more acceptance.

The second method of grouping these reviews is by critic or publication. Fred Blanks of the Sydney Morning Herald had little time for Ahern or the music he propagated at any point in his career, save one favourable review in 1973<sup>43</sup> of Nigel Butterly's performance of Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano on behalf of AZ Music.

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<sup>42</sup> Butterly, Nigel. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>43</sup> Blanks, Fred. (1973). Screws and bolts not sacrilege. *Herald*, 26 November.

Roger Covell, on the other hand, also writing for the Sydney Morning Herald, offers a more considered and balanced appraisal of both the *intention* and the result of the AZ performances. Understanding the intention of everything that is new in art is the important first step in criticising it: one can then review whether a performance was successful in regards to its intentions as well or instead of offering one's own opinion of the sound. In experimental music this was especially important, because Cage had lead a revolution to change the dynamic of the composer-performer-audience relationship, and so if listening without understanding that new relationship this it was impossible to grasp the importance of the sound.

Blanks was guilty of this: so many of his reviews rubbish the idea and then rubbish the sound – there is no attempt to accept the intent and therefore try to understand the performance. In interview Sculthorpe commented that he didn't think Blanks ever understood the music Ahern was interested in.

The Australian newspaper, represented through this period by its critics David Gyger, Kenneth Hince and Maria Prerauer, reported the concerts in a factual but conservative manner. Hince and Gyger have little time for the ideas, and focus more on the reaction of the audience and label the events bizarre, but Prerauer is much more even handed and like Covell genuinely understands the intent of the concerts.

The tabloid and lighter press tend to treat AZ Music and Ahern as nothing more than a joke. Headlines like *Mods took a thrashing*<sup>44</sup>, *Concert ends in near riot*<sup>45</sup> and *A killer*<sup>46</sup> being examples of the work of Frank Harris at The Mirror at the time.

Reading the correspondence that Ahern received from Cardew and Schonfield we can summarise that he was negatively affected by these reviews, and probably

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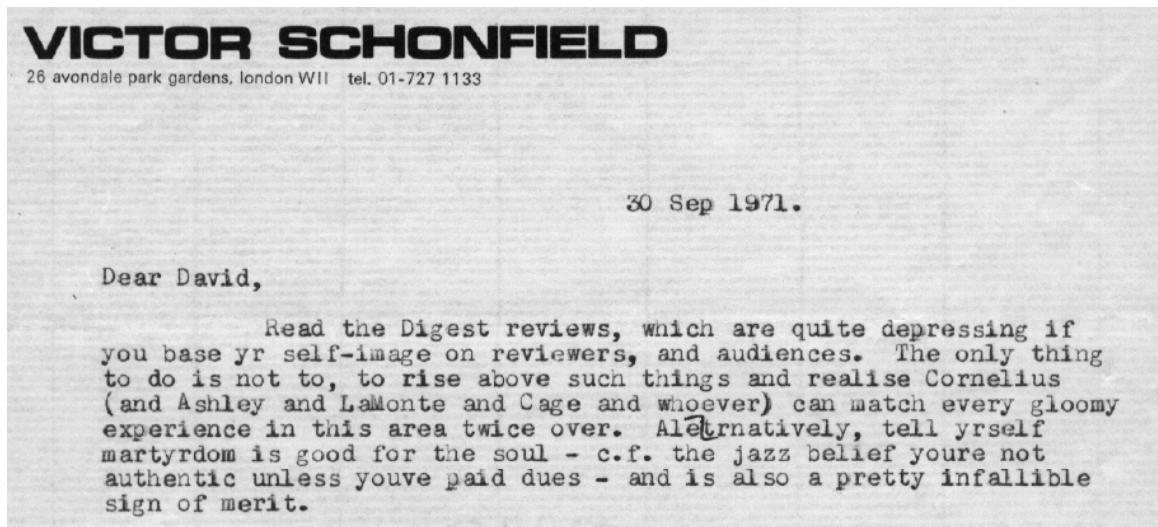
<sup>44</sup> Harris, Frank. (1971). Mods took a thrashing. *Mirror*, 17 February.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, Frank. (1970). Concert ends in near riot. *Mirror*, 17 February.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, Frank. (1971). A killer. *Mirror*, 2 March.

more than he might have admitted at the time. Illustration 2 is a good example of the encouragement they offered him, presumably in response to Ahern's complaints about the Australian media.

Illustration 1.3 – extract from a letter from Victor Schonfield, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1971.



As mentioned in the Epilogue, these insights into the private David Ahern perhaps give us clues as to why the career that began so suddenly and brilliantly ended just as abruptly. The following three chapters study each period of his life in greater detail.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FIRST PERIOD, 1965-1969

Illustration 2.1. David Ahern and John Hopkins after the premiere of *Ned Kelly Music*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1968. This was Ahern's second successful orchestral work. He was 19.



David Ahern was born in 1947. The first period of his life is reviewed in some detail in James Murdoch's book, *Australia's Contemporary Composers*<sup>47</sup>, although as mentioned in the literature review, in the course of researching this project some of the facts in Murdoch's book have come into question. The first is that it explains that in 1963, at the age of only 16, Ahern commenced studies with Nigel Butterly. Essentially this is correct: Ahern approached Butterly for lessons and they had two or three (as far as Butterly can remember) before Ahern moved on to study with Richard Meale, who with Butterly and conductor John Hopkins, represented the new musical force at the time at the ABC.

As mentioned in chapter 1, however, Butterly states now that the material that Ahern brought to him was very basic and immature, and that Butterly felt he did not have the rudimentary understanding of musical theory and harmony that he would need to compose music at a higher level, and so set about teaching him just that. It can be presumed, then, that Ahern was not happy with such a teaching method, and typical to the character revealed over the next twelve years, moved on with unfettered confidence: in this case to approach Richard Meale for lessons instead.

Meale did not feel that Ahern lacked rudimentary musical knowledge and was happy to tutor him on the subjects he wanted to learn about: namely new music. Within a year Ahern had produced his first orchestral work, *After Mallarmé*, a work that Meale even now refers to as "an extraordinary achievement"<sup>48</sup>: so extraordinary, in fact, that Peter Sculthorpe and Nigel Butterly both suggested Meale might have

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<sup>47</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op Cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Meale, Richard. In interview: unfortunately Meale refused to be recorded, and so is not included in appendix 1.

played a large part in writing it. Meale, as mentioned in chapter 1, denies any part other than the tutoring during its composition.

The first public performance of an Ahern composition was of a smaller ensemble piece, *Music for Nine*. Of this work, Curt Prerauer wrote “I do not hesitate to say that I see in Ahern one of the great hopes among Australian composers. He belongs to the class that are never young: they are born with a grown-up seriousness of musical purpose, the class that refrains from aping Bartok, Penderecki, Webern or Stockhausen. Ahern masters only one language, his own. This is what is called originality”<sup>49</sup>. It was an auspicious start for the young composer.

In the list of works that Ahern submitted to the Australian Music Centre, there are five other pieces (at least two of which are orchestral works) also named that were composed in the same year, 1966, which have been lost or withdrawn. Geoffrey Barnard, holder of Ahern’s estate, has suggested that there might be more of his possessions at Ahern’s sister’s home, although at the time of completing this thesis there has not been an opportunity to locate such material, if it exists. The list of works available at the AMC appears in Illustration 2.2. Similarly, there is no existing score for *Arabesque for 48 strings* (1967), *Chameleon* (1968), *The call of the birds woke me* (undated), *Question of time* (1985) or *Rainbow meditations* (1985). The latter two titles are interesting simply for the fact that Ahern seems to have completely stopped composing after the unsuccessful performance of *HiLo* (1975), although Meale said that when they met again in Adelaide in the early nineteen-eighties that Ahern was studying Bartok with the aim to write a violin sonata.

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<sup>49</sup> Prerauer, Curt. (1967). Britten and Blake. *Nation*, October 21, 21

Illustration 2.2 – List of works of David Ahern, courtesy of the Australian Music Centre.

| <b>LIST OF WORKS OF DAVID AHERN</b>                                                                      | SEPT 1990 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| *Asterisk indicates scores and recordings held in the Australian Music Centre                            |           |
| <b>Scores</b>                                                                                            |           |
| <i>After Mallarme.</i> – Universal edition, 1966, orch 9 min.                                            |           |
| <i>Annunciations for orchestra.</i> – 1966                                                               |           |
| <i>Arabesque for 48 strings.</i> – 1967                                                                  |           |
| <i>Atomis.</i> – 1966                                                                                    |           |
| <i>Auriga wind quartet.</i> – 1966                                                                       |           |
| <i>Chameleon.</i> –1968 choral music                                                                     |           |
| <i>Cinemusic</i> : film music. – 1972                                                                    |           |
| <i>Ear</i> for sine wave generators and ears                                                             |           |
| <i>HiLo.</i> – 1975 orch 8 min.                                                                          |           |
| <i>Journal.</i> – 1969                                                                                   |           |
| * <i>Music for nine</i> , for flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, violins, viola, cello. – 1967 15 min.  |           |
| <i>Ned Kelly Music.</i> – 1967 orch 8 min.                                                               |           |
| <i>Nocturnes of love</i> : chamb orch. – 1966                                                            |           |
| <i>Question of time.</i> – 1986 fl, cl, perc, pf, vln, vlc                                               |           |
| <i>Rainbow meditations</i> : string quartet. – 1985                                                      |           |
| <i>Reservoirs</i> for any sound producing objects                                                        |           |
| <i>Stereo / Mono.</i> – 1971 for wind instruments and feedback                                           |           |
| <i>String Quartet.</i> – 1966                                                                            |           |
| <b>RECORDINGS</b>                                                                                        |           |
| <i>After Mallarmé.</i> – Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Hopkins (World Record Club – S4930) |           |
| * <i>The Call of the Birds Woke Me.</i>                                                                  |           |
| * <i>Music for nine</i>                                                                                  |           |
| * <i>Ned Kelly Music</i>                                                                                 |           |
| <i>Geoffrey Barnard also lists the following works which are not found in the AMC list:</i>              |           |
| <i>Network</i> (1968 or 1969)                                                                            |           |
| <i>Tune-In</i> (1968)                                                                                    |           |
| <i>Musikit</i> (1971) – verbal composition, published in <i>Scratch Music</i> <sup>50</sup>              |           |
| <i>Stereo-Mono</i> (1972) – version for 2 wind players utilising feedback.                               |           |

<sup>50</sup> Cardew, Cornelius. (1972). *Scratch music*. London: Latimer New Dimensions Limited.

So impressed was Meale with *After Mallarmé* that he approached John Hopkins with the score and a request that he should look at it. Hopkins was equally impressed with the music of a nineteen-year-old Ahern and both recorded it to be submitted at the 1967 UNESCO International Paris Rostrum and promised a Prom performance of it. He also commissioned another work for the following year (a commission that resulted in *Ned Kelly Music*). Certainly a progression in only three years after being told that he needed to start at the beginning and learn the basics by Butterly. In his favour, however, was current policy at the ABC, which no doubt matched with his confidence and enthusiasm meant that *After Mallarmé* was reviewed by Hopkins in the best possible light. In his own words:

It was at a time when we were trying to promote a lot of younger Australian composers and David had written *After Mallarmé* and we programmed that in the Sydney Proms. I thought this piece had tremendous promise and as a result of that we subsequently asked him to write another piece, and he wrote *Ned Kelly Music*.<sup>51</sup>

The Paris Rostrum afforded Ahern incredible success. After the votes were cast Ahern was astonishingly placed in equal 32<sup>nd</sup> place (of 80, equal with Elliott Carter), three places above his former tutor-of-sorts, Nigel Butterly. The Australian contingent of entries to the competition was evidently organised by Hopkins, because Richard Meale also came a successful 25<sup>th</sup> place. In a newspaper review of the competition, Roger Covell wrote:

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of Australia's participation was that David Ahern has been accepted as an interesting composer by international professionals, although none of his music has been presented in public in his own country. Now about 20, he has studied briefly with both Meale and Butterly and is obviously going to be a composer to watch.<sup>52</sup>

Thus began a period lasting three years in which David Ahern was in many ways a “white haired boy”, as Butterly refers to him, in stark comparison to the second

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<sup>51</sup> Hopkins, John. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>52</sup> Covell, Roger. (1967). Australian composers win votes in Paris. *Herald*, 2 June.



period. Butterly felt that this success was not really deserved at such an early point in Ahern's career:

He was John Hopkins white haired boy and he was given all these opportunities in the prom concerts and all sorts of things which at the time seemed to me, and I'm sure to an awful lot of other people, to be slightly out of proportion to his talent or certainly to his experience.<sup>53</sup>

There were, however, many more people who were impressed and excited about what Ahern was achieving at such an early age. *Ned Kelly Music*, premiered in the same year Ahern had successes in the Paris Rostrum, gave him his first experience with an audience and dealing with the professional performance scene in Australia. And he made the most of it, with a striking piece that asked of the orchestra extended techniques that involved even putting down their instruments, making vocal noises, or throwing paper planes around the orchestra. But Peter Sculthorpe makes an incisive point, which no doubt points to the piece's success:

Ned Kelly Music was actually a very serious statement... a few of the reviews and certainly people in general just took it as an hilarious entertainment and I didn't think that was David's intention at all. I think he was using the figure of Ned Kelly as somebody standing against authority and making an important statement... Some like Fred Blanks, or Lois Simpson, who just played her cello away in the orchestra, while others made paper planes and flew them around. I mean it was a great occasion.<sup>54</sup>

Ned Kelly music marked the end of Ahern's time studying with Meale. In interview Meale recalled Ahern insisting on visiting him despite him being very ill, to show him the score of *Ned Kelly Music*. When he made some suggestions for improvements, Ahern did not like them. There followed a falling out, and Meale had little to do with Ahern again. Whether Meale genuinely disliked the piece (which has been said to show a definite influence of his teaching) or whether he was unreceptive to any new music while he was ill is a matter of contention.

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<sup>53</sup> Butterly, Nigel. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>54</sup> Sculthorpe, Peter. In interview: see appendix 1.

John Hopkins, on the other hand, thought that it was wonderful that this scruffy young Sydney boy was having his way with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

That rather shook the orchestra because they had to say at one point – spoken – ‘Ned Kelly’, and at first they resisted this. Somehow, David, when he presented himself and I introduced him to the orchestra – his actual presentation was scruffy and not very endearing to the orchestra – then when he asked them to say this there was a certain amount of rebellion, especially amongst some of the wind players.

But perform it they did, and like the first orchestral work Hopkins had conducted for Ahern, success was immediate. The Australian newspaper reported “*Ned Kelly Music* brought him ten curtain calls and non-stop clapping for 20 minutes”<sup>55</sup>. Ahern, looking to further his studies now he was without a tutor, successfully applied for a grant from the Australian Music Foundation to study overseas with Karlheinz Stockhausen.

In Murdoch’s book, no doubt informed of the ‘facts’ by David Ahern, he reports that “Early in 1968, Ahern sent tapes and scores of this works to Karlheinz Stockhausen, who immediately replied accepting Ahern as a pupil”. Study of correspondence received from Stockhausen found in Ahern’s estate (see appendix 2) shows that it was not quite that straight forward for the young Australian composer. In the first case, it appears that Stockhausen did not actually receive the tapes. The first letter dated June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968 informs David where he will be teaching for the remainder of that year (Darmstadt and Cologne) and gives him the addresses of relevant people to reply to. The second suggests that Stockhausen did not see or hear any of Ahern’s music, and the third that he was not actually accepted onto the course at all; but since he had the grant, given permission to come and observe.

Illustration 2.3. Letter from Karlheinz Stockhausen to David Ahern dated June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

Transcription:

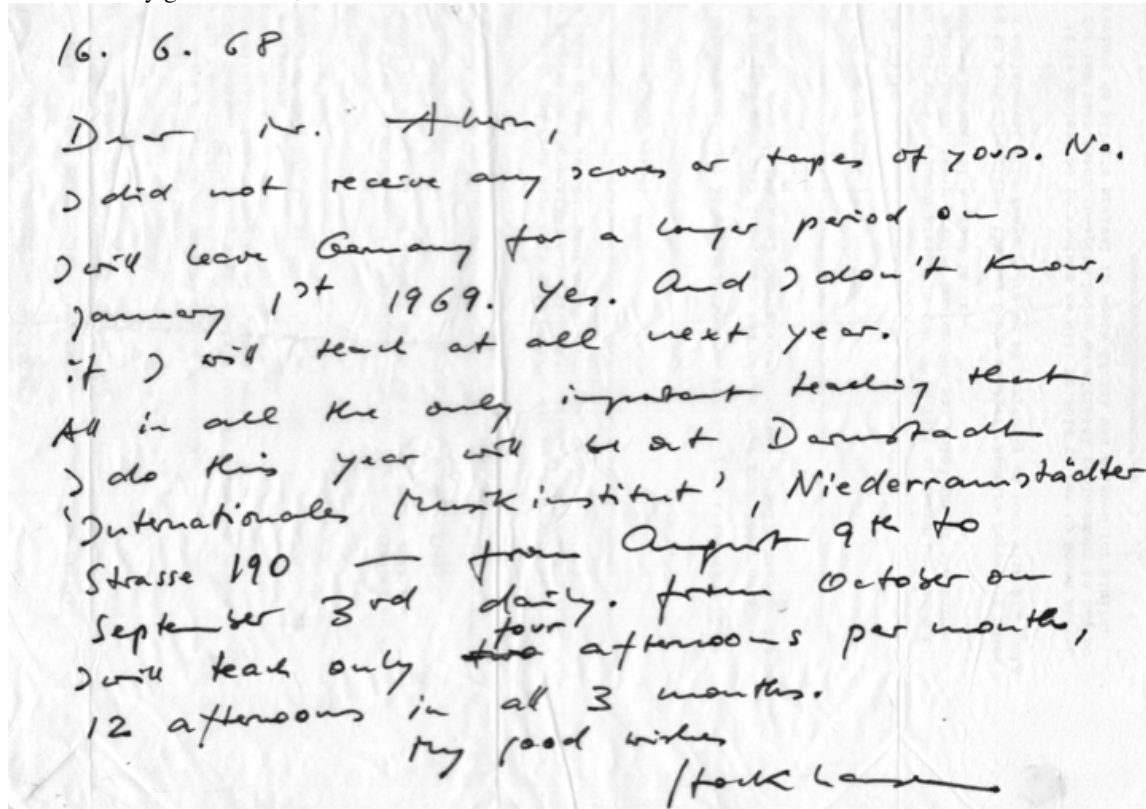
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<sup>55</sup> Hince, Kenneth. (1974). Musical goonery. *Australian*, 14 June.

Dear Mr Ahern,

I did not receive any tapes or scores of yours. No, I will leave Germany for a longer period on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1969. Yes. And I don't know if I will teach at all next year. All in all the only important teaching that I do this year will be at Darmstadt 'Internationales Musikinstitut' Niederramstädter Strasse 190 – from August 9<sup>th</sup> to September 3<sup>rd</sup> daily. From October on I will teach only four afternoons per month, 12 afternoons in all 3 months.

My good wishes, Stockhausen



16. 6. 68

Dear Mr. Ahern,

I did not receive any scores or tapes of yours. No, I will leave Germany for a longer period on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1969. Yes. And I don't know, if I will teach at all next year.

All in all the only important teaching that I do this year will be at Darmstadt 'Internationales Musikinstitut', Niederramstädter Strasse 190 — from August 9<sup>th</sup> to September 3<sup>rd</sup> daily. From October on I will teach only ~~two~~ <sup>four</sup> afternoons per month, 12 afternoons in all 3 months.

My good wishes  
Stockhausen

Illustration 2.4. Letter from Stockhausen to Ahern dated June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

#### Transcription:

Dear David Ahern,

I give you permission to come to my special course in Darmstadt, but as a listener. Because it is a question of practical limitation: we only have rehearsals for 10 composers, and those 10 have already been accepted in March (each composer will write a composition which will be rehearsed and performed at the end).

Please write to Mr Thomas at Darmstadt tell I have accepted you and that he should prepare a room etc. for you.

Yours Stockhausen

29. Juni 1968

Dear David Ahern, I give you permission to come to my special course in Darmstadt, but as a listener. Because it is a question of practical limitation: we have only releases for 10 composers, and those 10 have already been accepted in March (each composer will write a composition that will be released and performed at the end).

Please write to Mr. Thomas Darmstadt that I have accepted you and that he should prepare a room etc. for you.  
Yours Stockhausen

To any other composer, such a blow at a time when things were going well might be off-putting. Another young composer might have decided to spend the grant on another trip, but so determined was Ahern to study with Stockhausen and so confident was he about his abilities, that he joined the course and very soon was not a listener but a participant: we know this because he was involved in the performance of *Musik für ein Haus*, an experimental concert promoted in Darmstadt that year by Stockhausen.

Judging the Ahern's level of acceptance and success in Europe is sometimes difficult, not just because he did not keep a diary, but because as can be seen with the version of events given to Murdoch for his book, Ahern was sometimes given to simplify or exaggerate a story. Similarly the confidence Ahern had in himself seemed infectious to those who spoke to him. For instance, as mentioned in the literature review, Murdoch also writes "With *Ned Kelly Music*, David Ahern suddenly became

the leader of the avant-garde in Australia, a role previously shared by Meale and Sculthorpe”<sup>56</sup>, and one can certainly understand Butterly’s level of pessimism when confronting with such claims.

It is possible, however, to continue to chart Ahern’s success through records of concerts he was involved in, letters and postcards home, and letters from the contacts he had made, such as Stockhausen, on his return to Australia. One of the postcards Ahern sent home, dated December 14<sup>th</sup> 1968, casually mentions that he will become Stockhausen’s assistant in July the next year – certainly an honour for a 21 year old student of the maestro’s. And this is actually confirmed by a reference that Stockhausen wrote for Ahern to help him apply for grants to travel again.

Following the performance of *Musik für ein Haus* Ahern traveled to Cologne to the join Stockhausen at the composition course, where he and Trevor Denham were chosen to jointly compose a work for magnetic tape.

Ahern’s self-belief was borne out by Stockhausen’s confidence in him. 1968 had been quite a year for Stockhausen, too: as Kurtz says in his biography, “particularly the days 6 to 13 May are a focal point... leading to a radical change in his work that was to have more extreme consequences than any of the previous ones.”<sup>57</sup> In emotional turmoil at the decision of his second wife, Mary Bauermeister, to end their relationship Stockhausen, to quote one of his own compositions, lived “completely alone for [seven] days, without food in complete silence, without much movement, sleep[ing] as little as necessary, think[ing] as little as possible.”<sup>58</sup> During this time he wrote his first text-based pieces, *Aus den sieben Tagen* (From the Seven Days).

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<sup>56</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op Cit*, page 4.

<sup>57</sup> Kurtz, Michael. (1992). Stockhausen, a Biography. Toop (Trans.), *Stockhausen, a biography*. London: Faber and Faber.

<sup>58</sup> Stockhausen, Karlheinz. (1968). *Aus den sieben tagen*. Wien: Universal Edition.

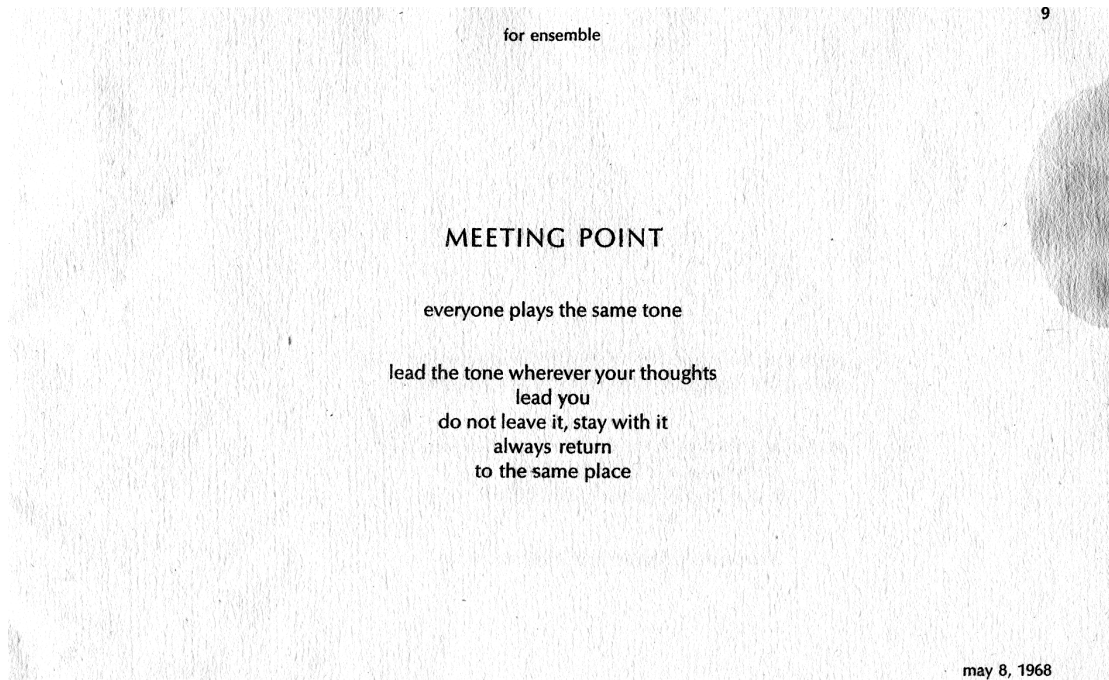
Ahern was greatly inspired by this new approach to composition, which Stockhausen placed in front of the class from the first day. It is interesting to note that, while much of the influence of these pieces would have fed very comfortably into Ahern's soon-to-be-kindled interest in open ended experimentalism, Stockhausen hastily separated himself from that field, saying "What I have in mind is not indeterminacy, but intuitive determinacy"<sup>59</sup>. The concept of the trained and rehearsed improviser, and of carefully prescribed musical situations, was one that remained with Ahern, evident from his piece in Cologne that year, *Tune-In* to his struggles with his improvisation group Teletopa years later.

Illustration 2.5. The influence of Stockhausen's *Aus den sieben Tagen* on Ahern's *Tune-In* needs no detailed analysis.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tune-In</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">David Ahern</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cologne – November 1968</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Listen to the tone-giver.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tune your instrument to perfection.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hold what you have for as long as you wish.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Versions:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(i) for any number of instruments + 1 tone giver</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(ii) for any number of instruments + any number of tone givers</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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<sup>59</sup> Kurtz, Michael. *Op. Cit.*



Stockhausen had two other great influences on Ahern during this first meeting. The first was in the use of graphic scores and electronics, neither of which he had used before, exemplified in both of his larger works from that period, *Network*, which was performed in Cologne that December, and *Journal*, completed the next year for an ABC commission and recorded in Sydney. The second seed sewn by Stockhausen was the example that being involved in one's own performance group was invaluable, whether as performer, conductor, composer or administrator. Ahern saw this in the music of all of the composers whose music interested him, and within the next few years was to become all of the above.

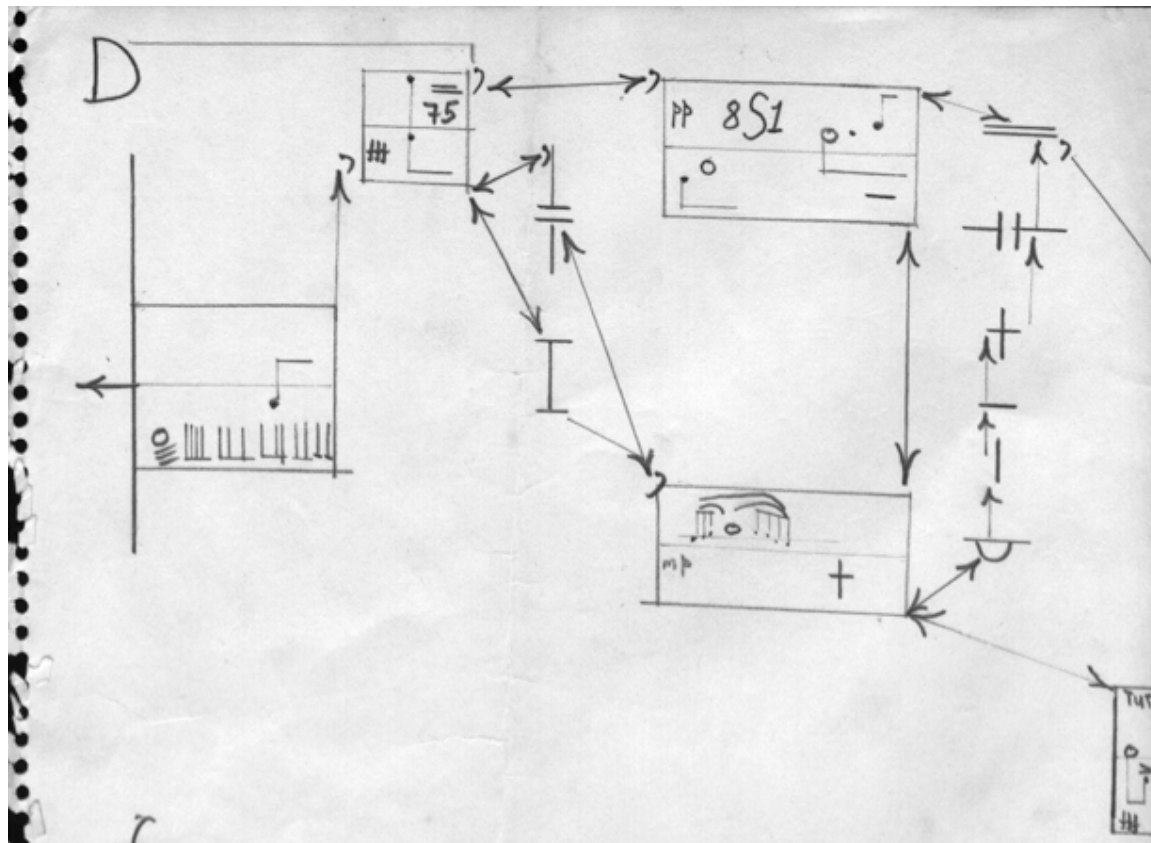
*Network* was premiered at the Cologne Conservatorium on the 12th December 1968 along with the tape piece Stockhausen had directed Ahern to write with Denham, which was called *Take II*. The concert itself represented the culmination of many weeks study with Stockhausen at Cologne, as can be seen on the programme<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 2.

It was at this time that David formed a friendship with Rolf Gehlhaar, who was currently Stockhausen's assistant. A friendship that would last for years to come.

Illustration 2.6. A excerpt from the original score of *Network*.



All this happened within months of leaving Australia. There is, then, little doubt that Ahern's entry into the international music world had been successful.

Following the Cologne concerts Ahern travelled to England, where he met Cornelius Cardew who was within the next year to become a bigger influence than Stockhausen. Interestingly Cardew had also worked as Stockhausen's assistant ten years earlier, bringing the orchestration of *Carré* to life for the maestro. Although we know that in his own words Ahern "worked with Cardew" at the Royal Academy of Music and the Hornsely College over this period there is no evidence of collaboration



or influence at this point; but it is likely that Cardew would have offered advice on creating the mostly graphic score of *Journal*.

We know from correspondence to his family late in 1969 that Ahern's plan was to remain in Europe with Stockhausen and not to return to Australia until 1970, when Stockhausen intended to tour Australia (a tour which did indeed eventuate, unlike many that Ahern planned in the third period). Unfortunately Ahern's finances ran out, and he was forced to return to Sydney. In Sydney he completed *Journal*, an ABC commission, and was made music critic at the Daily Telegraph.

As mentioned, *Journal* again made use of the graphic scoring techniques he had learned in Europe. The work was a commission as an Italia prize entry, and was loosely based on the journals of Captain Cook which Ahern had studied while in London only months earlier. It featured use of electronics in addition to electric bass and didgeridoo in combination with violin and voice, and a recorded version was made. As Murdoch observes, "The score consists of one page a la Stockhausen. To listeners unacquainted with the music of Cardew and Stockhausen, the work doubtless would seem obsessively long. But it is precisely in this area of dwelling upon a sound that fascinated Ahern."<sup>61</sup>

Still intent to get back to Europe as soon as possible, Ahern spent much time in early 1969 applying for grants to fund another trip. At the same time, he was lucky to gain the position of music critic with the Sydney Daily Telegraph, a position he held on and off for years to come. A letter from Stockhausen dated March 28<sup>th</sup> asked Ahern not to return to become his assistant until June, although Stockhausen was kind enough to write a reference the following month, so Ahern could continue applying for funding with international support (see illustration 2.7)

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<sup>61</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op. Cit.* page 5

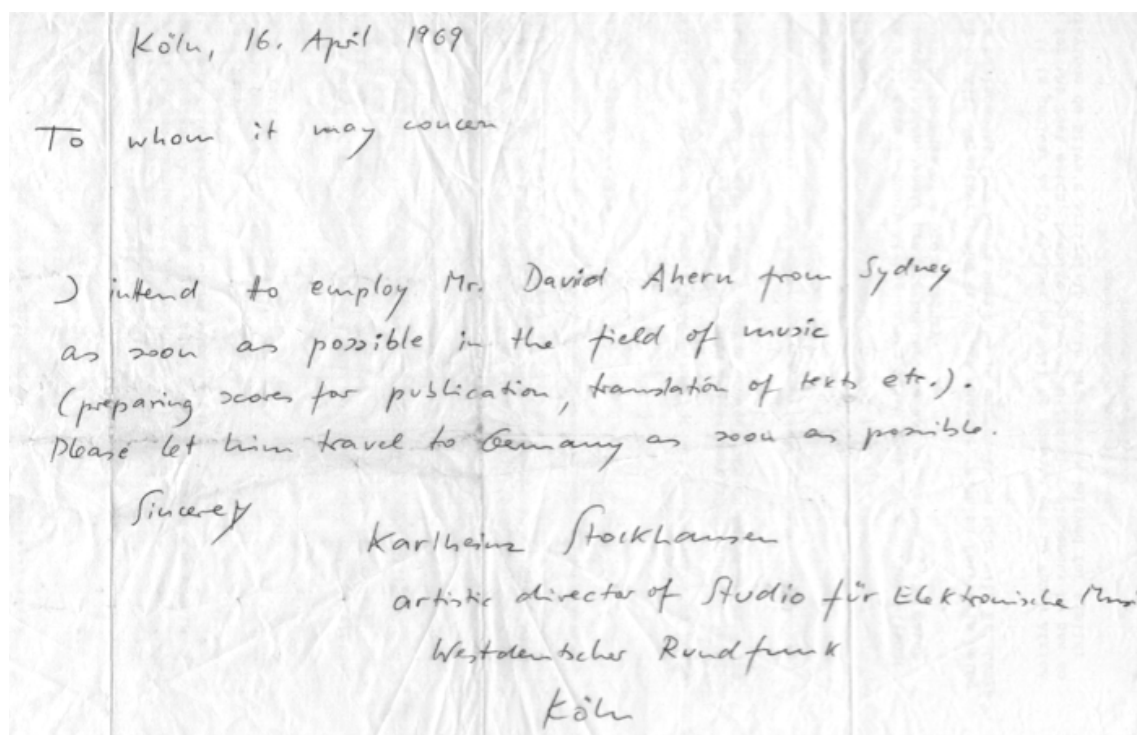
Illustration 2.7. Reference for David Ahern from Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Transcription:

To Whom It May Concern:

I intend to employ Mr David Ahern from Sydney as soon as possible in the field of music (preparing scores for publication, translation of texts, etc.). Please let him travel to Germany as soon as possible.

Sincerely Karlheinz Stockhausen



Köln, 16. April 1969

To whom it may concern

I intend to employ Mr. David Ahern from Sydney as soon as possible in the field of music (preparing scores for publication, translation of texts etc.). Please let him travel to Germany as soon as possible.

Sincerely  
Karlheinz Stockhausen  
artistic director of Studio für Elektronische Musik  
Westdeutscher Rundfunk  
Köln

The extent of the closeness of Ahern's relationship with Stockhausen from 1969 has become clouded over time. It seems that Murdoch might have exaggerated, or at least been a little over-prosaic when he wrote:

With *Journal* completed and a tape of it as well as his commission fee in his pocket, Ahern returned to Germany in 1969 to find a cooler Stockhausen. The fledgling had sprouted wings... Feeling dissatisfied with his progress, Ahern again went to London to seek out Cornelius Cardew.<sup>62</sup>

Exaggerated because evidence in the form of letters from Stockhausen, completed projects in Paris, where Ahern performed as part of Group Stockhausen, and in Cologne, where he worked with Mary Bauermeister, suggest that it merely grew into a more functional working relationship, from one of student-teacher. In interview

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<sup>62</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op. Cit.* page 5.

Geoff Collins also confirmed that on the 1972 Teletopa tour they were still “close friends”.<sup>63</sup> Murdoch’s assertion could possibly be backed up by Rolf Gehlhaar, however, who wrote to Ahern on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1971 and in reference to Stockhausen said “I, for one, have not yet forgotten how he shit upon your head when you were here”. Gehlhaar, when asked to contribute to this project, said that there was nothing that he could really remember, and so was not pressed for a meaning to this comment: at the least, we can be sure that even if the Ahern-Stockhausen relationship did falter, that Stockhausen remained loyal and friendly at least externally.

Another misconception from this period is that Ahern actually abandoned Stockhausen’s teaching to study with Cardew, but in fact he had traveled first to London, where he was part of the infamous May 1969 Roundhouse concert (more of which below). The Darmstadt course did not begin until later in 1969. Stockhausen again worked with *Aus den sieben Tagen*, but only performing most of the text compositions and answering questions on them rather than discussing the theory: As Richard Toop confirmed in an email recently: “There wasn’t really a ‘course’ as such in 1969 (I can testify to this since I was there).”<sup>64</sup>

It was Cardew not Stockhausen, then, who most directly inspired the actions that lead to the next three years’ activities for Ahern back in Australia. Ahern arrived in London in perfect time for the beginnings of the Scratch Orchestra, and thanks to his established relationship with Cornelius Cardew was able to be involved. In fact, Ahern performed in the Music Now ensemble in the May concert at the Roundhouse that is widely acknowledged<sup>65</sup> to have been the catalyst for the formation of the

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<sup>63</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>64</sup> Toop, Richard. In correspondence with the Author.

<sup>65</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (2000). David Ahern: Starting from Scratch. *Sounds Australian*, 55, 44-46: Eley, Rod. (1974). A History of the Scratch Orchestra. Cardew (Ed.) *Stockhausen serves imperialism*. London: Latimer New Dimensions.

Scratch Orchestra, not only in the first performance of Cardew's *Great Learning* paragraph 2 but also in the La Monte Young *String Trio* and the Terry Jennings *String Quartet*. Now 32 years later, Howard Skempton, a co-founder of the Scratch Orchestra, remembered David's contribution to this concert when his name was mentioned in recent correspondence.

Such, then, was Ahern's performance introduction to experimental music. Cardew's experimentalism was a practical one. While 'Cagean' in the wish to allow "sounds be themselves" and to disassociate the composer from the act of composition, Cardew developed very specific interpretations of these ideas specifically about performance, and the Scratch Orchestra was to be a performance group. The relationship between the composer, performer and audience was not to be blurred, it was to be obliterated, and the first instance of this was the openness of the Scratch Orchestra to any person, whether or not they had a formal music training.

For Ahern there was never any question of joining a specific camp, however. For all the importance that is today made of the differences between the Experimental and Serial composers, and as "Cardewian" as his activities became, Ahern was only interested in what was new. The Scratch Orchestra, with its unique approaches to performance, and the application of the experimental aesthetic that any sound, intended or not, is musical, simply opened up new avenues to the Australian. Here was not a way of changing how one composed or how one played: he learnt to change the way he *listened*. In many ways we can relate this, as much as Stockhausen might protest, to the "Seven Days", and indeed that work was included in the list of compositions in the draft constitution of the Scratch Orchestra.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cardew, Cornelius. (1969). A Scratch Orchestra: draft constitution. *The Musical Times*, June.

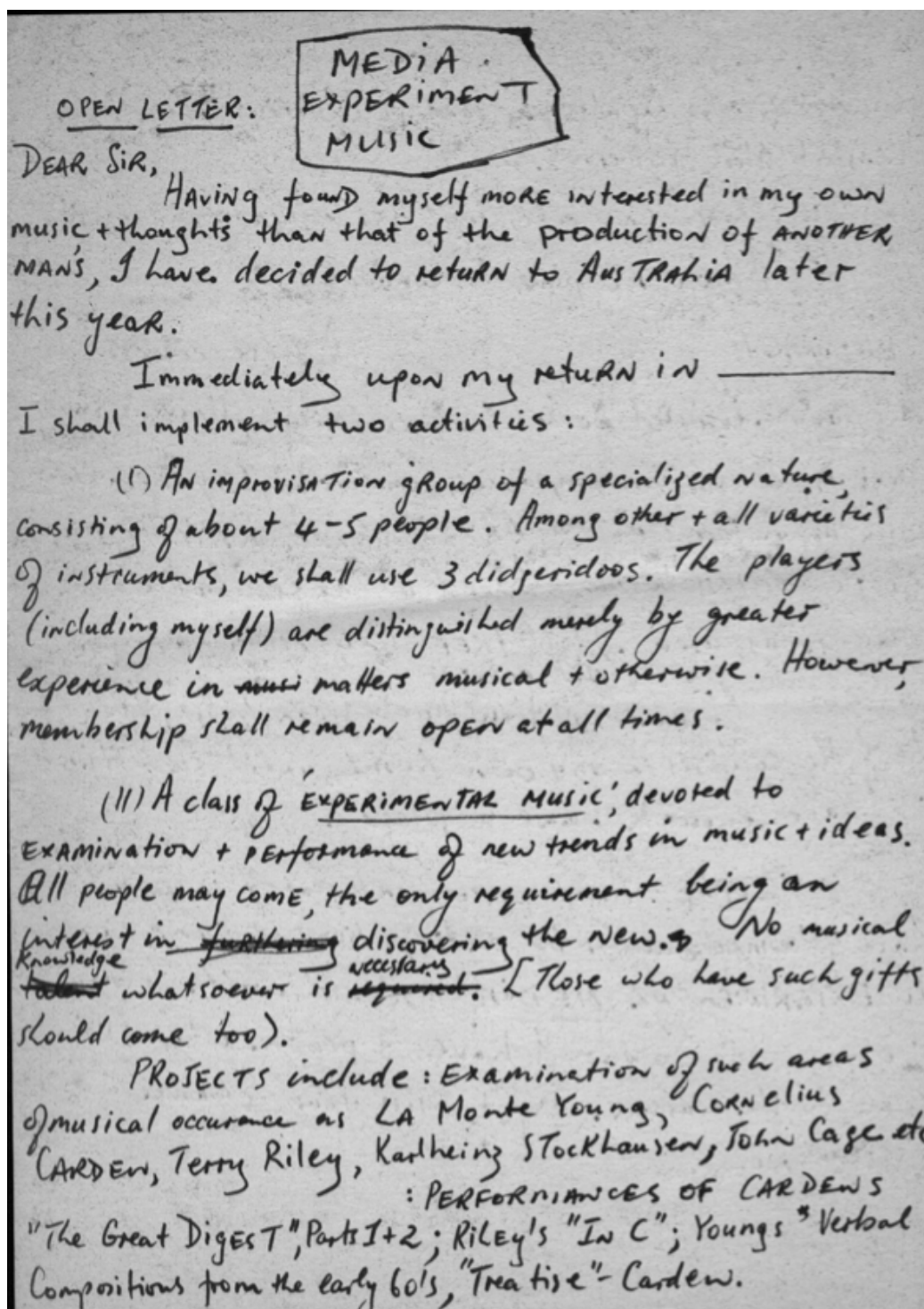
Repertoire of the Scratch Orchestra was mostly made up of established experimental or minimalist works, however, (although even to this day the boundaries between the two are somewhat blurred), and included works by Young, Riley, Wolff and Cage as well as those by Cardew and of course any other members of the Scratch Orchestra. As such it was these composers to whom David looked as he developed his own synthesis of the ideas.

Given these revelations, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that later in 1969, after involvement in several Scratch concerts, the Darmstadt and Paris Stockhausen performances and an alleged invitation from La Monte Young himself to work with him in New York in the “Theatre of Eternal Music”, Ahern’s attention focused not on these endless possibilities overseas, but to the idea of returning home to explore them in his own environment.

Ahern’s decision to do this again illustrates the man’s single-mindedness and confidence. He realised that by being joined to any one group, be it the Scratch Orchestra, Group Stockhausen, the Theatre of Eternal Music or any of the then proliferating New York scenes, he would not be genuinely developing his own aesthetic and the musical ideas he wanted to explore.

We are lucky enough to have Ahern’s own notes from this time, as he developed the ideas of what he wanted to do. The first thing he planned was a course in experimental music, comparable to the one Cardew had been taking at Morely college and out of which the Scratch Orchestra had grown. He wrote directly to the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, and outlined his credentials and plans for the course, as shown in illustration 2.8.

Illustration 2.8. Ahern's 'open letter', which must have been sent (in some revision) to the NSW State Conservatorium, since he was granted a space to run the course there in early 1970. A transcription is below.



Dear Sir,

Having found myself more interested in my own music and thoughts than that of the production of another man's, I have decided to return to Australia later this year.

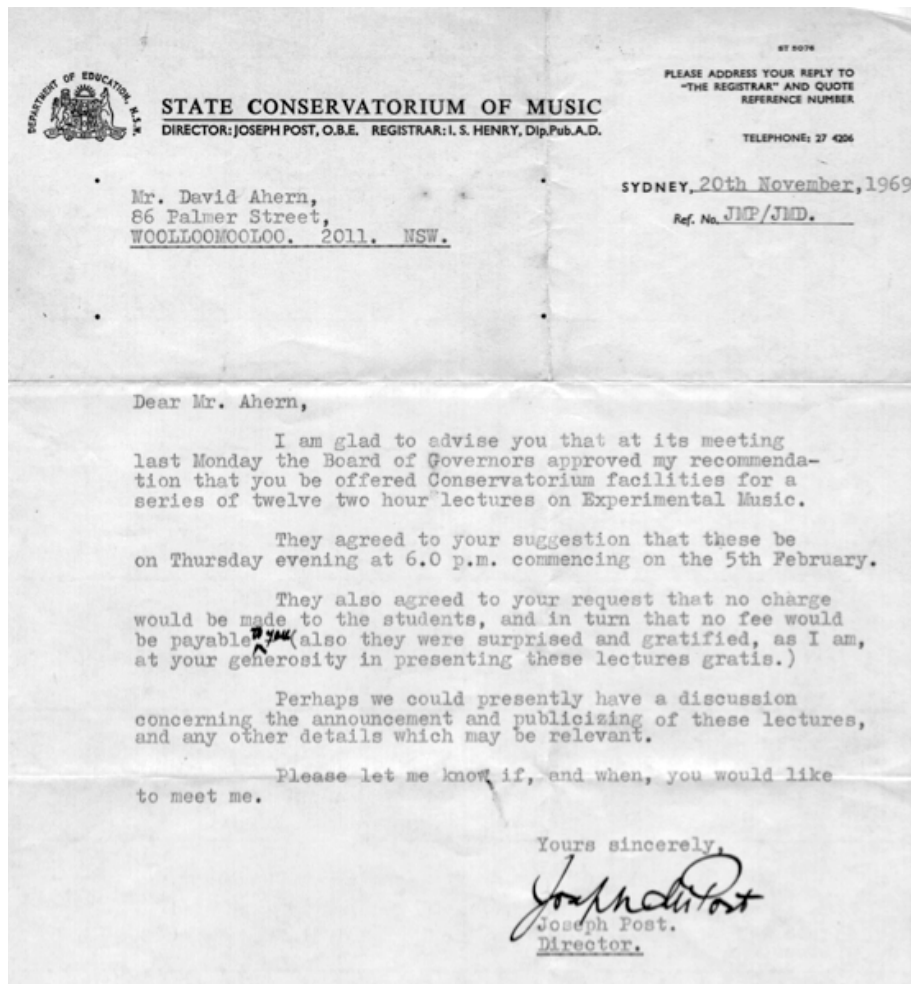
Immediately upon my return in \_\_\_\_ I shall implement two activities:

(1) An improvisation group of a specialized nature, consisting of about 4-5 people. Among other and all varieties of instruments, we shall use three didgeridoos. The players (including myself) are distinguished merely by greater experience in matters musical and otherwise. However, membership shall remain open at all times.

(2) A class of 'EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC', devoted to the examination and performance of new trends in music and ideas. All people may come, the only requirement being an interest in discovering the new. No musical knowledge whatsoever is necessary.

Projects include: examination of such areas of musical occurrence as La Monte Young, Cornelius Cardew, Terry Riley, Karlheinz Stockhausen. John Cage etc.

Illustration 2.9. Letter from the Director of the NSW State Conservatorium (today the Sydney Conservatorium) confirming that Ahern would be given permission to run his free course in experimental music there.



By November Ahern had approval for an open-entry 12-week course at the Conservatorium (Illustration 2.9) and returned to Australia. Further notes from this time plan the formulation of a performance group, ACME (Australian Contemporary

Music Ensemble) and a new conception work, or 'happening': EAR. However after two years of traveling Ahern's finances were used up, so he took a job and sent letters outlining who he was and what he wanted to do, to attract funding. The following is excerpts of drafts for these characteristically confident letters, dated late in 1969:

I came back to Australia because my place is here. I came back to improve our cultural environment - to create an atmosphere in which to work. I am being hampered by a lack of money - which essentially means time.

I am told one has to be in work to receive money, but surely, considering just who I am and what I have done you can help me. I have formed an action group, ACME...

Next year I shall be giving a course... at the Conservatorium... the people who attend this course shall form the nucleus of my 'cultural area' and will join forces with ACME to present concerts.

**I shall move mountains in a short time** - but I need time; please help me. I can honestly say this would be for the good of Australian creativity.

EAR is different. It concerns investigations for the production of a composition unlike that occurring elsewhere - and I would know, for I know personally those who create the new in sound throughout the world and hence what they are doing now.

Years later, after even the third period, when everything had gone badly for Ahern, he felt that the support for an Australian artist returning from studies overseas was woefully lacking. He felt this on two levels: firstly because the Australian establishment was more conservative than the European one to which he had become accustomed in a very short time: and secondly because there was a definite feeling that after two trips to Europe he had had enough generous funding for a while. In a conversation recorded with Richard Toop in the nineteen-eighties, David articulated this to a sympathetic ear:

Ahern: 'I had been given this scholarship to go and study with [Stockhausen] from the Australian Music Foundation, and I got back here and I said 'what's to do then?', and "What's all this backup that everyone's mumbling about?", you know? So now I'm out of work, or working for the post office, you know? So where are we? Where are we yeah? See they should never do that. I don't think they do it these days but... they should never send you overseas and then get you back here unless they're prepared to go right through. Unless they have their own follow-up plan. But they all mumble, and say "well you know we will do things", then you get back here - say 1969 or '70 - they still didn't know what to do with you when they got you back here.'

Toop: 'That's exactly the same now. That hasn't changed at all.'

Ahern: 'Well it should, you know?'

Toop: 'No, I think that's a real problem when people study overseas for a couple of years and then come back and the first thing they have to do is sign up on the dole, and the second thing they do is apply for more grants... in fact there's even the inclination to think "well they've had their grant, what do they want any more for?'



Ahern: *Exactly!* This, in itself, has happened to me. I had a go at Peter about this because I know it was him who in fact stopped that one. This was where I wanted to study conducting with Gielen, who had accepted me, which is – I gave him my history and I told him what kinds of pieces I'd conducted, and that, and once again Maria is a very good friend of Gielen's and I thought "he's the man I'd like to study with". You know, I'll do less of the composing part, and let's conduct Australian music business, and all that sort of thing. Which Barry Conyngham thought was a good idea, which Peter thought was a good idea and all this sort of thing. But it seems to be a different situation in the bloody board room, because the decision came back that – exactly – I've had my piece of the cake.<sup>67</sup>

The letter of acceptance from the conservatory in Basle, dated June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1974, is contained in appendix 2. The young Ahern in 1969, however, was not to be beaten immediately by the uphill struggle of finding funding for his ideas. And this was a time of idea formulation for Ahern. Notes and letters reveal many plans, some of which did not eventuate (including the EAR project), but the most important concreted themselves as the start of the course at the Conservatorium, which Ahern called the Laboratory of the Creative Ear.

And so we arrive at the end of the first period, and the start of the second: Ahern having in three short years made the progression from being a schoolboy with a belief he could compose new music of a kind no-one had heard before, to a participant in the avant-garde scene in Europe, held in high regard by many. As mentioned in chapter 1, his exploration of his own aesthetic at this pivotal point was explored in his article in *Music Now*<sup>68</sup>, in which he had proclaimed that those who concerned themselves with the new in music were looking to La Monte Young. Referring to Young's clear progress from traditional to graphic notation, and then to instruction by word, he pointed out that he had foreshadowed this same progression in the then (1969) current music of Stockhausen and Cardew. This he saw as natural in the attainment of the experimental aim: "Music becomes something 'listened to'

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<sup>67</sup> Toop, Richard and Ahern, David. In conversation: see appendix 1.

<sup>68</sup> Ahern, David. (1969). *Now Music*. *Music Now*, 1 (2), 20-24.

rather than 'heard before'. Composer and performer alike have refound the sheer joy of exploring sound for its own sake, seeking for sounds not heard before or, if heard before, then imperfectly, incompletely or inexactly"<sup>69</sup>.

Perhaps it was because Ahern was quite so precocious that he became an easy target for the more conservative musical institutions and the press alike during his second period. After all, when he wrote this article, he was still only 22 years old.

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<sup>69</sup> Ahern, David. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

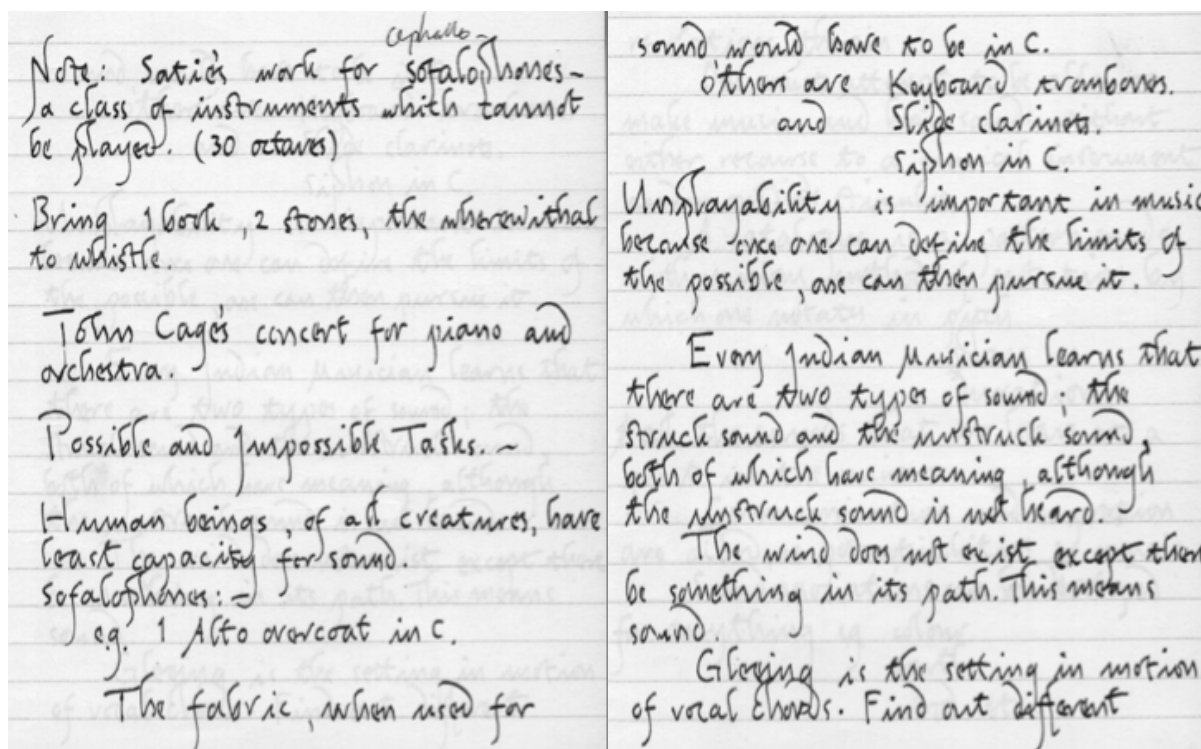
THE SECOND PERIOD, 1970-1972

Illustration 3.1. Teletopa on tour, in Japan, late 1972. Left to right: Peter Evans, Geoff Collins, David Ahern, Roger Frampton.



The first Laboratory of the Creative Ear was held on Thursday 5th February 1970. Classes were taught mainly informally, but Ahern was always clearly at the helm. Geoffrey Collins, at the time only in year 10 at the Con High School remembers them as such: “I wouldn’t call it teaching in any traditional kind of sense. He would tend to extemporise; or in a way the classes were a performance of David. They were like a performance event, because he would have some particular idea that had come into his head and he would... talk about it to a certain extent, but there would be large performance elements of it”.<sup>70</sup> Geoffrey Barnard remembers that it was only the first class that was more traditional: “The first class of course had that formal structure. Rows and rows of seats and David out the front talking for the best part of two hours”.<sup>71</sup>

Illustration 3.2. The first two pages of notes taken by Ernie Gallagher in the very first lesson of Ahern’s course at the Conservatorium.



<sup>70</sup> Collins, Geoff. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>71</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In interview: see appendix 1.

We are lucky enough to have Ernie Gallagher's notes from this first lesson (see illustration 3.2), and they show the subject matter: *Stockhausen's Aus den Seiben Tagen*, La Monte Young, Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, audition (modes of listening), Satie, Cage, some eastern thought and the forms of composition and improvisation that Ahern wanted the class to follow. These are listed in those notes as:

**Glees:** Gleeing is the setting in motion of the vocal chords. Find out different relations therein.

**Catalogues:** A Catalogue is a pattern made with various methods of notation.

**Singalongs:** Find and sing along with a classic and find the opposite sound.

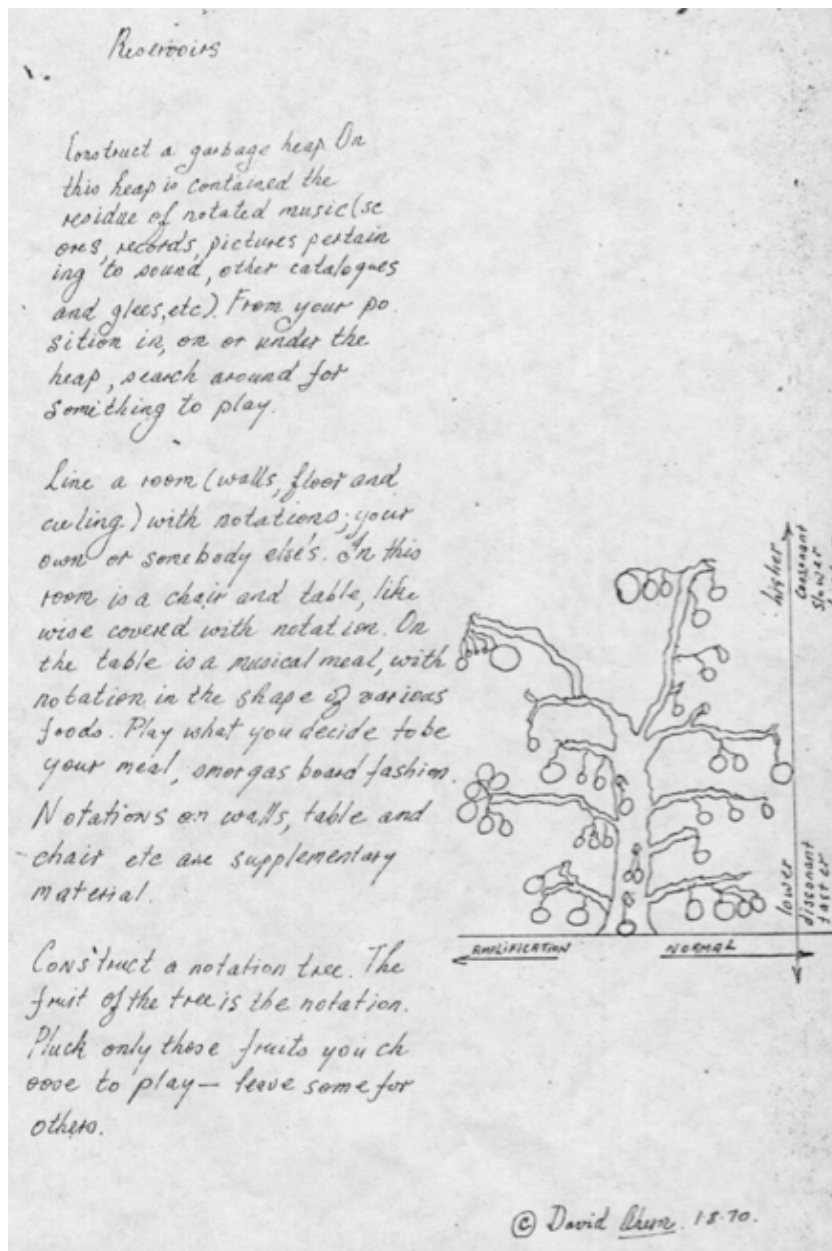
Glees written by the group and Ahern's text composition *Reservoirs* (Illustration 2.3) are collected in appendix 2 and are from this early period as examples. By the very nature of the activities a performance group had to be formed, and this was not called ACME, but AZ Music. At first this name was intended to be pronounced "as", as Barnard says, to reflect the philosophy from Cardew that "whatever we do, we do *as* music".<sup>72</sup> Ernie Gallagher also explains in his article *AZ Music* that it meant all-encompassing music, from A to Z, and that the concerts were also given a letter in alphabetical order to reflect the name.<sup>73</sup> In the third period, after the group had fundamentally changed away from the Cardewian influence, a hyphen was added between the A and the Z, which also changed the pronunciation of the name to A-Z (separately) Music.

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<sup>72</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Gallagher, Ernie. (1989). *AZ Music*. *NMA*, 7, 9-13.

Illustration 3.3. David Ahern's *Reservoirs*.



AZ Music's inception was precursored (in much the same way the Scratch Orchestra's was by the concert Ahern had taken part in less than a year earlier) by a 24-hour concert on February 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> at the Watters Gallery in which Satie's *Vexations* was performed along with works by Young and Wolff. Naturally such a "happening", as it would have been called in the New York scene at the time, attracted a lot of publicity – not necessarily good – for both AZ Music and Ahern individually. Even overseas, the first Australian performance of Satie's short piano

piece to be performed 840 times was noted. In his article on the performances of *Vexations*, Gavin Bryars records the Australian premiere as such:

21-2 February 1970. Watters Gallery, Dalminghurst, Sydney. *Organiser*: David Ahern. *Pianists*: Peter Evans, Linda Wilson (substitute). *Duration*: 22 hours. Evans played continuously for 15 hours until he reached repetition 595, when he suddenly stopped; he was in a daze and left immediately. He writes: 'I would not play this piece again. I felt each repetition slowly wearing my mind away. I had to stop. If I hadn't stopped I'd be a very different person today... People who play it do so at their own great peril.'<sup>74</sup>

The performance caused a stir in the existing Australian music scene, too, and Peter Sculthorpe remembered it clearly.

The *Vexations* concert was... I think the first performance in Australia... all this made David a very attractive person and important because he was getting music out there right in the face of the general public.<sup>75</sup>

These first lessons of the Laboratory, which became known simply as 'the course', and the activities of AZ Music associated with them were of course very Cardewian. Illustration 3.4 shows the most obvious similarities between the Scratch Orchestra, as laid out in the *Draft Constitution* and AZ Music, as taught in the course and in practice in rehearsal. As such the two entities, the course and the performance group, did become one although Ahern maintained an appearance of separate existence so that, when the twelve weeks granted by the Conservatorium had run out, and Ahern was "teaching" from his home in Woolloomooloo, he could - successfully - apply for WEA funding to keep both alive financially.

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<sup>74</sup> Bryars, Gavin. (1983). 'Vexations' and its Performers. *Contact*, 26, 12-20.

<sup>75</sup> Sculthorpe, Peter. In interview: see appendix 1.

Illustration 3.4. Similarities of the Scratch Orchestra and AZ Music.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>SCRATCH ORCHESTRA – JUNE 1969</p> <p>Cornelius Cardew<br/>Howard Skempton<br/>Michael Parsons<br/>Arose from Morely College course and draft Constitution</p> <p><b>Scratch Music</b><br/><i>Notes performable continuously for indefinite periods</i></p> <p><b>Popular Classics</b><br/><i>Players join in as best they can</i></p> <p><b>Improvisation Rites</b><br/><i>A community of feeling - also free improvisation</i></p> <p><b>Resarch Project Catalogues</b><br/><i>Travels in many dimensions A catalogue is an ordered representation of what you hear and what you see</i></p> <p><b>Compositions</b><br/><i>La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage, Christian Wolff, Christopher Hobbs, etc</i></p> <p>“A Scratch Orchestra is a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources and assembling for action”<br/>- Cornelius Cardew</p> | <p>AZ MUSIC - FEBRUARY 1970</p> <p>David Ahern<br/>Philip L Ryan<br/>Peter Evans<br/>Arose from the Laboratory of the Creative Ear</p> <p><b>Glees</b><br/><i>Glees are patterns and preparations for song.</i></p> <p><b>Singalongs</b><br/><i>Find and sing along with a classic</i></p> <p><b>Improvisation Rites</b></p> <p><b>Compositions</b><br/><i>Similar repertoire</i></p> <p>“Many of the procedures that Cardew adopted for the Scratch Orchestra in its exploration of sound and of listening experiences were also adopted by ourselves. His Draft Constitution provided a strong basis for our own private performances and improvisations”<br/>- Ernie Gallagher</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The content of the AZ Music concerts over the next eighteen months is well documented, especially in the articles by Gallagher and Barnard<sup>76</sup> mentioned in chapter 1, and a summary of the dates, repertoire and any special themes is condensed into illustration 3.5. It is plain that there was an exceptionally strong lean toward the experimental composers, with great importance given to paragraphs of Cardew’s *Great Learning*, the large-scale work that gave the Scratch Orchestra so much of its

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<sup>76</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (1989). AZ it was. *NMA*, 7, 17-20. Gallagher, Ernie. (1989). AZ Music. *NMA*, 7, 9-13.



impetus for performance in 1970. *The Great Learning* was music written for the aesthetic and the group as much the group existed for the aesthetic and the music. The other frequent inclusions were Young and Cage, and La Monte Young remained through 1970 and 1971 an important source of inspiration to Ahern, notable especially as one composer we cannot confirm he had actually met (despite the claim that he had been invited to join the Theatre of Eternal Music).

Illustration 3.5. List of AZ Music concerts by date with reference to important Teletopa performances.

| Activity       | Date            | Works performed                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A              | Feb 21-2, 1970  | Satie <i>Vexations</i><br>Wolff <i>Stones</i> (from <i>Prose Collection</i> )<br>Young <i>Composition 1960 No.7</i><br>Young <i>Composition 1960 No.9</i>      |
| B              | Jul 3 & 5, 1970 | Cage <i>Concert for Piano &amp; Orchestra</i><br>Cage <i>Imaginary Landscape</i><br>Riley <i>In C</i><br>Young <i>Death Chant</i><br>Ashley <i>The Wolfman</i> |
| C              | Sep 20, 1970    | Feldman <i>Projection IV</i><br>Cardew <i>The Great Learning paragraphs 1 &amp; 7</i>                                                                          |
| D              | Dec 19, 1970    | Compositions by members of the course utilizing a score of<br>Cage <i>Variations IV</i><br>Cardew <i>The Great Learning paragraph 6</i>                        |
| Town Hall Prom | Feb 16, 1971    | Cardew <i>The Great Learning paragraph 2</i>                                                                                                                   |
| Teletopa       | Mar, 1971       | Teletopa: Ahern, Evans, Frampton, State Conservatorium of music                                                                                                |
| E              | Jun 28, 1971    | Reich <i>Piano Phase</i>                                                                                                                                       |
| F              | Oct 8, 1971     | Piano works concert featuring Wolff, Reich, Feldman, Cage                                                                                                      |
| G              | Oct 8, 1971     | Milo Concert – Featuring Frampton, Skempton, May, Hobbs, Gallagher                                                                                             |
| H              | Oct 18, 1971    | Cardew <i>Treatise</i><br>Cardew <i>Schooltime special</i><br>Lucier <i>I am sitting in a room</i>                                                             |
| Teletopa       | Oct, 1971       | Teletopa: Ahern, Barnard, Frampton: Music Now and Then                                                                                                         |
| I              | Dec 14, 1971    | Ahern <i>Stereo-Mono</i><br>Riley <i>In C</i>                                                                                                                  |
| Teletopa       | Feb 1972        | Teletopa tour to Hobart: Ahern, Barnard, Frampton<br>In addition to improvisation performed:<br>Ahern <i>Stereo-Mono</i><br>Riley <i>In C</i>                  |
| J              | Feb 25, 1972    | Cardew, <i>The Great Learning paragraphs 1 &amp; 4</i>                                                                                                         |
| Teletopa       | Apr, 1972       | Teletopa “Sound Venture” series (3 nights)                                                                                                                     |
| K              | Jun 4, 1972     | Kage concert – featured 14 Cage works                                                                                                                          |
| L              | Jul 20, 1972    | Five Australian Composers                                                                                                                                      |
| Teletopa       |                 | Teletopa World Tour: Ahern, Collins, Evans, Frampton                                                                                                           |

The reaction from Sydney's concert going public (even the younger and more open-minded ones) and the professional critics to the new music - and new way of listening to music - that Ahern presented was hostile, to say the least. Today AZ Music and David Ahern are often only remembered for riots at concerts, walk-outs, and damning reviews. As mentioned in chapter 1, Schiemer put this down to the conservatism in the ISCM and a body of "safe" and respected works that were acceptable to perform.<sup>77</sup> Murdoch makes a similar point in his book:

Ahern in some ways has usurped in Australia the functions of the I.S.C.M., which increasingly has become a conservative body. He claims, perhaps justifiably, that the 'classics' of contemporary music are no longer Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, but Cage, Wolff and Feldman, whose works of course he performs with his own group A-Z Music.<sup>78</sup>

In interview I asked Geoffrey Barnard if before AZ Music anyone had been talking about John Cage or La Monte Young. He answered:

No, no. It was very conservative. The ISCM thought itself to be the champion of new music. It was such a conservative body... no-one even knew about people like that, I mean no-one even talked about Cage, or Feldman, all those people.<sup>79</sup>

Geoff Collins remembers a specific event at the Conservatorium:

Roger Frampton and I started doing duos together. We did a famous concert at the conservatorium... we played a traditional duo recital except that the repertoire was a little unusual: Steve Reich's *Piano Phase* and... John Cage *Cartridge Music* which of course is a graphic score and pretty much anything goes. We decided we would amplify both the pianos quite substantially so that small sounds were quite large, and this was a bit difficult for Francis Cameron because he felt that the sounds that he was experiencing constituted damage to the pianos... it's probably one of the few concerts that made it onto the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald... and David jumped up onto the stage and said 'if you touch that microphone I'll sue you'<sup>80</sup>

And in his NMA article<sup>81</sup>, Barnard remembers the famous Proms performance that AZ Music gave at the Town Hall on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1971, when the audience rioted.

At the Sydney Proms in February, an augmented AZ ensemble took part in a realization of Paragraph 2 or Cardew's The Great Learning, simultaneously with the first public improvisation of the group Teletopa. While the four members of

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<sup>77</sup> Sheimer, Greg. (1989). Towards a living tradition. *NMA*, 7, 30-38.

<sup>78</sup> Murdoch, James. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>80</sup> Collins, Geoff. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>81</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (1989). AZ it was. *NMA*, 7, 17-20.

Teletopa were up on the stage of the Sydney Town Hall, the five groups required by the Cardew composition (each comprising a drummer and a number of singers) were placed at various points in the body of the hall. As critic Roger Covell remarked in his review of the night's events, it was the first time in the local history of the series that the audience did actually promenade... A good number were overtly aggressive, snatching drumsticks out of their hands or tipping water on them from the balconies upstairs. The Town Hall guards joined in the occasion, and one such charismatic individual... threatened to break me in two if I didn't pack up my gear and clear out.<sup>82</sup>

The extent of this rioting was reported, as Gallagher points out<sup>83</sup>, with great variation in the press, evidence of the varying approach taken by Sydney's music critics at the time, as discussed in chapter 1. Sandra Hall suggested "some two thirds of the audience walked out, others stayed to slow-clap and boo, a few tried to take the musicians' scores and instruments from them"<sup>84</sup>, while Roger Covell recounted "a not too depressed minority stayed to wander up and down the hall, jig, talk and gather around the little groups of performers, some of them singing, some of them banging out rather square and uninventive rhythms on drums and one or two producing highly amplified noises by scratching a saxophone or dragging a horsehair bow across the edge of a cymbal"<sup>85</sup>. Frank Harris' report for the Daily Mirror took the story even further, saying "Hundreds walked out in the first 15 minutes and then the mob took over in a howling opposition which turned the concert into a near-riot"<sup>86</sup>.

While Ahern as ever continued on confidently, giving interviews and publicising more concerts, it is evident from correspondence with Cardew and others at the time that he did take a lot of the reaction personally. The letter from Victor Schonfield, administrator at Music Now, referred to in chapter 1 (see illustration 1.3) reflects exactly this. He offers the advice "(it is) quite depressing if you base your self-image on reviewers, and audiences. The only thing is not to, to rise above such

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Gallagher, Ernie. (1989). AZ Music. *NMA*, 7, 9-13.

<sup>84</sup> Hall, Sandra. (1971). Who threw water over the drummer? *Bulletin*, 27 February.

<sup>85</sup> Covell, Roger. (1971). They promenaded right out the door. *Herald*, 17 February.

<sup>86</sup> Harris, Frank. (1971). Mods took a thrashing. *Mirror*, 17 February.

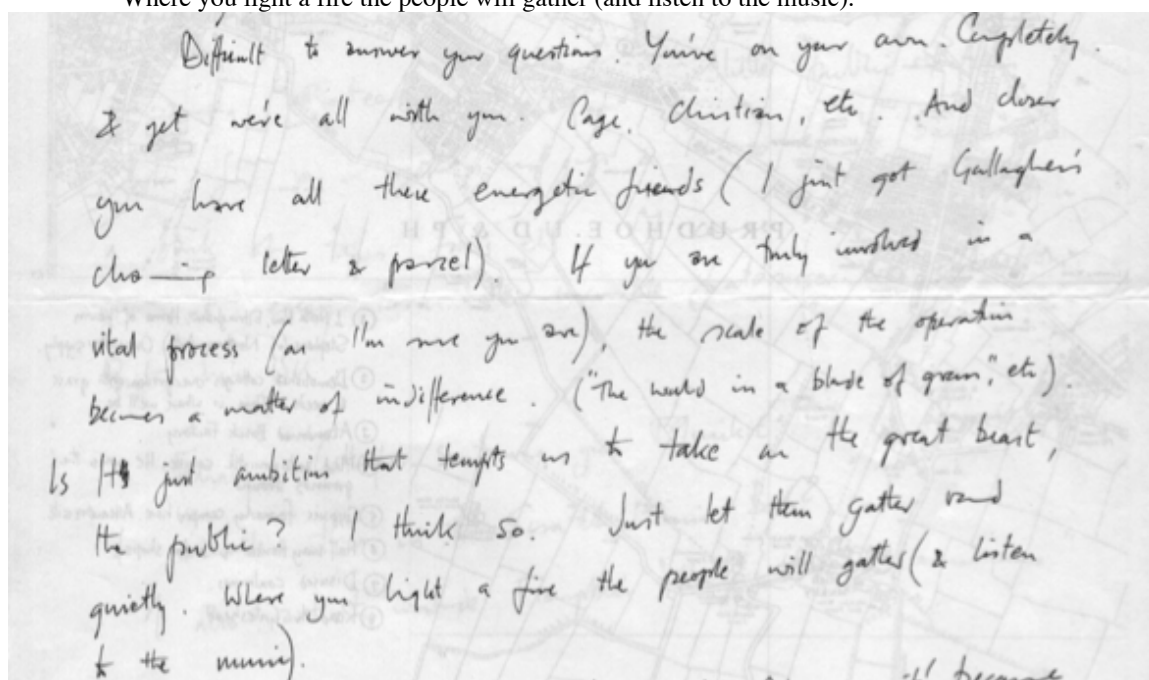
things and realise Cornelius (and Ashley and LaMonte and Cage and whoever) can match every gloomy experience in this area twice over”.

Cardew offered a friendly and slightly more light-hearted piece of advice in reply to a letter of Ahern’s which had obviously suggested he might give up.

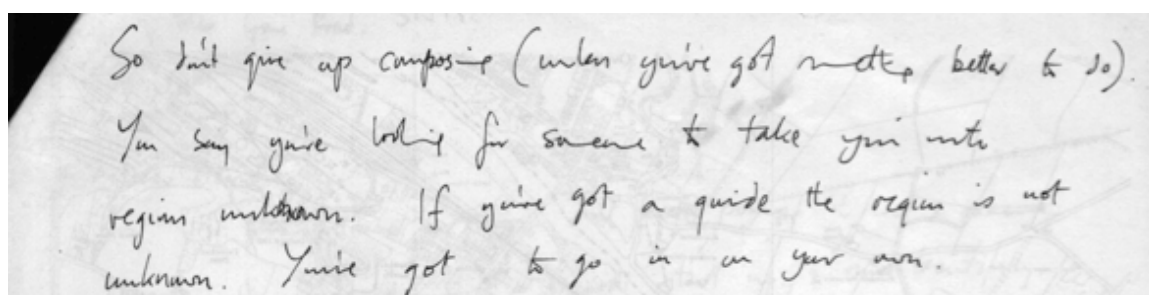
Illustration 3.6. Two excerpts from a letter from Cornelius Cardew to David Ahern dated July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1971.

Transcription:

Difficult to answer your questions. You’re on your own. Completely. And yet we’re all with you. Cage, Christian, etc. And closer you have all these energetic friends (I just got Gallagher’s charming letter and parcel). If you are truly involved in a vital process (as I’m sure you are), the scale of the operation becomes a matter of indifference. (“The world in a blade of grass”, etc.) Is it just ambition that tempts us to take on the great beast, the public? I think so. Just let them gather round quietly. Where you light a fire the people will gather (and listen to the music).



So don’t give up composing (unless you’ve got something better to do). You say you’re looking for someone to take you into regions unknown. If you’re got a guide the region is not unknown. You’ve got to go on your own.



At the time it appears that Ahern had less support and sympathy in Sydney, than he did internationally. Presumably this is because those in whose footsteps he was following had had some of the same experiences. On this front, it also gives us a clear indication of the significance of the work Ahern was doing in Australia on an international basis.

Despite the set backs, Ahern formed a special improvisatory group within AZ Music, which he called Teletopa. This new group was intended to supplement the AZ Concerts, and also to create its own installation performances and be self funded. The initial performers were Ahern, Frampton, and Evans, and Ahern produced a pamphlet to advertise the groups activities (see appendix 2.)

Over the following year this group was to include Philip L. Ryan, Geoffrey Barnard and Geoff Collins, and to explore the boundaries of free improvisation more thoroughly than AZ could, especially with the performance focus provided by Roger Frampton and Geoff Collins, both of whom went on to enjoy professional performance careers. Recordings of Teletopa do exist but are at the moment in safe storage until they can be transferred into digital format. Analysis of these recordings, when they become available, will provide us with bare facts about the performance nature of the group as well as enabling us to compare it more accurately with other similar groups at the time.

Collins remembers that the performances were not structured, but that the group did rehearse together regularly, and through that a style was developed, but not discussed. Any discussion remained purely on the theory of what they were trying to achieve. Again, this can be related back to what Ahern had learned from Stockhausen

at the first Darmstadt and Cologne courses. Ahern wrote two articles on the aesthetic of Teletopa<sup>87</sup>, and these were reviewed in chapter 1.

Despite the heavy influence of Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, Ahern remained interested in Stockhausen and planned a performance of *Sails* from *Aus den sieben Tagen*, writing in his programme notes “they attempt to do away with inherited concepts of rational music making (note-to-note composition), transcending this in order to create supra-rational music making based on *intuition* and not *repetition*... they represent Stockhausen’s attempt to go beyond so-called ‘aleatoric’ or indeterminate music of the early sixties. He moves into a spiritual (even religious) realm, which institutes controlled improvisation which develops the intuitive listening capacity of the performer.”

And so Ahern, having two years earlier shown that Young lead Cardew and Stockhausen in the development of text composition, now acknowledged the maestro, as he sought to achieve what Stockhausen had identified, with AZ Music and Teletopa. For Ahern, these groups, which were his synthesis of what he called the ‘new’ thinking in music, were the next step toward the “supra-rational music making” Stockhausen had aimed for.

“Welding a total, open sound world now is as much the province of improvisation as it is of composition. Forging a new musical language, a meta-form, from traditional instruments, everyday objects, environments, complex electronics and associated amplificatory devices on one hand, and composition, individual or collective... and improvisation on the other hand, is a Teletopian aim. The whole situation is ‘up in the air’, hovering to come to rest in a new synthesis - an environmental metasound.”<sup>88</sup>

At this time (from late 1971) the Scratch Orchestra itself was beginning to lose direction, and this was (in Cardew’s opinion) partly to do with Cardew having

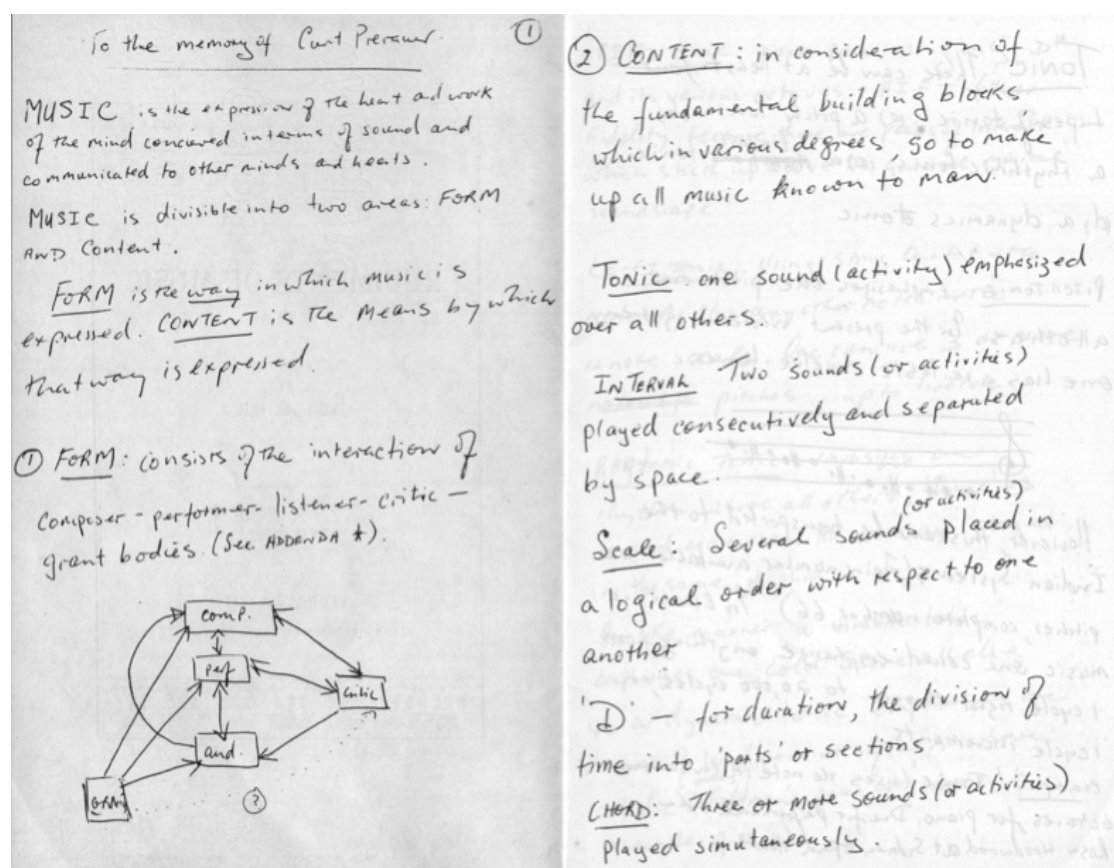
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<sup>87</sup> Ahern, David. (1972). Teletopian utopia. *The Bulletin*, May 6, 49. Ahern, David. (1972). Teletopa. *Music Now*, 2 (1), 18-27.

<sup>88</sup> Ahern, David. (1972). Teletopa. *Music Now*, 2 (1), 18-27.

finished the *Great Learning*, and there being nothing new of his to perform<sup>89</sup>. To Ahern, AZ and Teletopa were in many ways his living and breathing composition, but he did also continue work on *Stereo-Mono*, a graphic score which Roger Frampton performed utilising feedback, and several texts which were mixtures of compositions and statements of aesthetic, such as *Rudiments of Music*.

Illustration 3.7. A page from Ahern's *Rudiments of Music*.



In 1972 Ahern decided to have Teletopa judged at an international standard the only way he could - by taking it on tour. Cardew had been promising to visit Australia with David's help, but there had not been enough interest from the Australian musical establishments. Stockhausen had visited in 1970 but had not liked the country. So Ahern wrote to those he knew would help him arrange a tour, getting

<sup>89</sup> Cardew, Cornelius. Correspondence: see appendix 2.

immediate support from Stockhausen, and confirming a wide-eyed Geoff Collins as the fourth member just before departing.

The Teletopa tour is not at all well documented, due principally to the fact that tensions arose toward its end brought about the end of the working friendship between Ahern and both Frampton and Evans. Despite this the tour was a success. Collins recalls:

We started off by going to the Philippines cultural centre in Manilla... then we spent a fair bit of time in England at a large new music festival at the Roundhouse Chalk Farm where we performed and got to hear lots of other improvisation groups... There was a concert on a train up to Edinburgh... and we went and spent time with Stockhausen and did radio broadcasts in Germany. We went to New York and spent time with Steve Reich and Cage and to Italy and Japan where we did a concert in a nightclub in Tokyo. He (David) was incredibly well connected and ... within the space of a month I had met all the biggest names. They were very generous to David and us.<sup>90</sup>

Ironically it was the issue of controlling the improvisation that brought the downfall of Teletopa, and especially disagreement between Frampton and Ahern to how much David should control the group's performance. Geoffrey Barnard recalls this story:

And then of course there's the time when David and Roger [Frampton] were in the pub with Cardew, in London I presume, and that was a year down the track from Cardew's conversion to Maoism. Sort of a fairly hard-line approach to music-making. And Cardew had been waffling on about the oppressed people in the world and David kind of spat the dummy and started carrying on about "Who's oppressed?" and "I'm not oppressed" and "Are you oppressed Roger?" and of course Roger said "yes David, I'm oppressed" and he said "well who are you oppressed by then?". He said "well I'm oppressed by you David, that's who".<sup>91</sup>

On Ahern's return to Australia AZ Music took an enormous turn away from its Scratch roots, and became the antithesis of what it had originally been. It is Barnard's opinion that the breakup of Teletopa had been a signpost for these changes: Ahern was beginning to worry a lot more about the presentation and performance of

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<sup>90</sup> Collins, Geoff. In interview: see appendix 1.

<sup>91</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In interview: see appendix 1.



the group, where before he might have worried about the *ideas* behind the performance first. One could argue that this change of heart was related to seeing the more ordered and organized Steve Reich at work in New York (and certainly Ahern was constantly in touch with Reich on his return, and endeavoured to perform a lot of his music and even arrange a tour for his ensemble). On the other hand, one could equally argue that the evidence of how much Ahern had been troubled by the bad reviews and audience reactions to the second period concerts is enough to suggest that the change of direction was merely to avoid more of the same in the future.

In the second period Ahern made a swift change from Butterly's description of his being the "white haired boy" to Hopkins description of his being the "enfant terrible". Ahern's outlook was consistent, however: before he left Australia the first time he already felt that it was he who was at the forefront of the new in Australian music, and *After Mallarmé* and *Ned Kelly Music* were expressions of what he had learned to that point. After Stockhausen and Cardew, Ahern still saw himself as the main proponent of what was new in music in Australia: and Australia was perhaps not ready for him at this time.

What was achieved in this period, however, was the setting up of groups and realisation of ideas just like those circulating in Europe and America, and without Ahern Australia would have not had the direct contact with these experiences that it did<sup>92</sup>. In this respect it does not matter how successful, or not, individual concerts were; how many reviews were bad; it does not matter that Teletopa folded. What does matter is that for three years these elements were ever-present in Sydney, and this is

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<sup>92</sup> This is not to say that Australia would not have had exposure to experimental aesthetics or contemporary performance groups, but to say these things could not have related as directly as Ahern's did to what he had just experienced in Europe.

why Ahern was so valued by his colleagues overseas, and why he inspired these happenings against the current of concert-going in Sydney at the time.

In his recorded conversation with Richard Toop, Ahern reminisced:

Even when Stockhausen came over, he said “Gee, you’ve got some excellent people here David. They’re really prepared to work for you, you know?”. And I said “Yeah, I know”. It was just one of those things, the right thing at the right time. Whether I was charismatic or not I don’t know, but jeez I had enough bloody training with Stockhausen to work out how to be charismatic, but I think it was not that: I think that what we did have, while I was the focal point in that sense, we really had a sense of cooperation of people working together. Because we all put in our ideas, and we all had our responsibilities. Because there was that sense of togetherness and pitching in and working together. Bernard Rhanz said the same thing: “I find it hard to believe, out here... I’m sure they’d walk over hot coals for you, David”.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ahern, David. In conversation with Richard Toop: see appendix 1.

CHAPTER 4

THE THIRD PERIOD, 1973-1976

Illustration 4.1. David Ahern in his kitchen, after 1976



In the third period, traditionally programmed concerts, new and professional performers and increasingly traditional performance spaces (the Sydney Opera House) replaced the improvised, amateur and anarchic exploration of sound in the second period. AZ Music became (pronounced) A-Z Music and was almost the antithesis of the former. As Barnard says:

The idealism which endeavoured to bring about a set of contexts whereby “concepts such as the specialized performer and concert-giving itself start to fall apart” (Ahern), gave way to a new phase that re-affirmed the conventional concert situation.<sup>94</sup>

As has been discussed, *exactly* why one cannot be sure, but most likely Ahern had grown tired of the bad reviews and his transformation from the young brilliant composer of the first period to the *enfant terrible* in the eyes of most of the musical institution in Sydney in the second. He took a more often role of conductor and administrator and ceased improvising. In this period he also composed his last pieces. From 1973 to 1976 he arranged at least 16 concerts with AZ Music, but apart from himself, Geoff Collins was the only surviving original member.

The new A-Z was on the whole much more approachable than the old AZ, and the press cuttings from this period reflect this. Repertoire would have had much to do with this, because the choice of pieces, while still mostly experimental or minimalist, were more through-composed pieces with definite time, little improvisation, and did not involve amateur performance. The appearance of Reich in the first two concerts of 1973 (see illustration 4.2) set the tone, and of course this was as a direct result of the contact Ahern had made with the American minimalist on the Teletopa world tour.

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<sup>94</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. (1989). AZ it was. *NMA*, 7, 17-20.

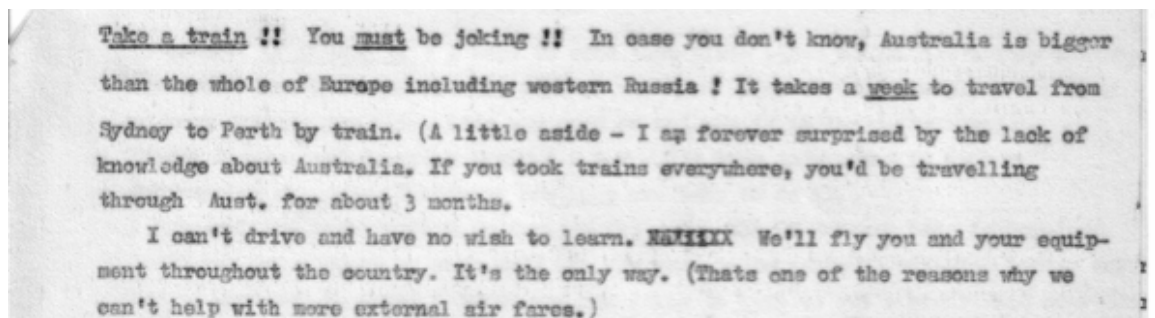
Illustration 4.2. A-Z Music concerts (or concerts performed in association with A-Z Music) 1973 – 1975.

| Date         | Venue                                                 | Repertoire                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 Apr, 1973 | Cell Block Theatre                                    | Steve Reich, <i>Four Organs</i><br>Morton Feldman, <i>Piano and Voices II</i><br>Steve Reich, <i>Four Organs</i>                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 27 Apr, 1973 | Cell Block Theatre                                    | John Cage <i>Cheap Imitation</i> (Geoff Collins, pno)<br>Steve Reich <i>Clapping Music</i><br>Morton Feldman <i>The Viola in My Life 3</i><br>Morton Feldman <i>The Viola in My Life 1</i><br>Morton Feldman <i>The Viola in My Life 2</i><br>Terry Riley <i>Music with Balls</i> (film) |
| 16 May, 1973 | Joseph Post Auditorium                                | The complete solo piano works of Karlheinz Stockhausen<br>(performed by members of the Nancy Salas Studio)                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 24 Aug, 1973 | Cell Block Theatre                                    | David Ahern <i>The Rudiments of Music</i> (Harry Grunstein, pno)                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 25 Aug, 1973 | Cell Block Theatre                                    | John Cage <i>First Construction (In Metal)</i><br>Ian Bonighton <i>Derivations III</i><br>Karlheinz Stockhausen <i>Zyklus</i><br>John Seal <i>Melbourne Media</i><br>Ron Nagorka <i>Six Numbers Converging on an Animal</i><br>Robert Irving <i>Sums</i><br>Carlos Chavez <i>Tocatta</i> |
| 12 Oct, 1973 | New Music Centre, Melba Hall (Melbourne University)   | The complete solo piano works of Karlheinz Stockhausen<br>(performed by members of the Nancy Salas Studio)                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 21 Nov, 1973 | Musica Viva Australia, Music Room, Sydney Opera House | Steve Reich <i>Piano Phase</i> (William Scarlett and Colin Forbes)<br>Karlheinz Stockhausen <i>Klavierstück X</i> (Harry Grunstein)<br>David Ahern <i>Cinemusic</i> (film – premiere screening)<br>Mauricio Kagel <i>Ludwig Van</i>                                                      |
| 24 Nov, 1973 | Cell Block Theater                                    | David Ahern, <i>Cinemusic</i> (film)<br>John Cage <i>Sonatas and Interludes</i> (Nigel Butterly, prepared piano)                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 21 Feb, 1974 | Pre-prom Concert, Town Hall                           | Anton Webern, <i>Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Saxophone and Piano</i> , Opus 22 (1930) (Erroll Russell, vln; Des Beazley, cl; Roger Frampton, ten sax; Harry Grunstein, pno.<br>John Cage <i>Concert for Piano and Orchestra</i> (Harry Grunstein, piano)                               |
| 1 Mar, 1974  | Reception Hall, Sydney Opera House                    | “Jazz at the Opera House” (Roger Frampton, al sax and pno; Jack Thorncroft, bass; Phil Treloar, drums; Howie Smith, ten and sop sax; Peter Evans, sop sax and perc; Chris Qua, bass)                                                                                                     |
| 10 Aug 1974  | Rug Concert                                           | Luciano Berio <i>Sequenza</i> for Flute (Geoff Collins)<br>Maurice Ohana <i>Choreographic Etudes</i> (The Sydney Percussion)<br>Luciano Berio <i>Sequenza</i> for Trombone (Cameron Allan)<br>Richard Meale <i>Interiors/Exteriors</i> (cond. Ahern)                                     |
| 6 Oct 1974   | Musica Viva Canberra Spring Festival, Playhouse       | Richard Meale <i>Incredible Floridas</i><br>John Cage <i>Concert for Piano and Orchestra</i> (Harry Grunstein, pno)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 19 Oct 1974  | Rug Concert                                           | Jacqui Carroll <i>Gnu Piece #29a</i><br>Steve Reich <i>Clapping Music</i> (Dance Interpretation)<br>John Cage <i>Concert for Piano and Orchestra</i> (Dance Interpretation)                                                                                                              |

|               |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16 Nov 1974   | Rug Concert                        | David Ahern <i>Gesture</i><br>Howard Skempton <i>First Prelude*</i><br>Howard Skempton <i>September Song*</i><br>Cameron Allan <i>a duets</i><br>Robert Allworth <i>Piano Pieces</i><br>Allan Holley <i>it's been heard before</i><br>Robert Irving <i>Popornot</i><br>Terry Jennings <i>Winter Sun (1965)*</i><br>Richard Reason <i>Piano Piece*</i><br>Howard Skempton <i>Waltz for Piano*</i><br>(* Harry Grunstein, pno) |
| 23 Aug, 1975  | Congregational Church, Pitt Street | Cornelius Cardew <i>The Great Learning</i> , Paragraphs 3 & 4                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 19 Sept, 1975 | Recording Hall, Sydney Opera House | Robert Allworth <i>Septet</i> (cond. Ahern)<br>Alen Holley <i>Trio</i><br>Cameron Allan <i>Harp and other Pedals</i> (Anthony Maydwell, harp)<br>Alan Holley <i>Elendril</i> (cond. Ahern)<br>Robert Irving <i>Popornot</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Correspondence from the time shows that Ahern had first made contact with Reich in 1972 and had already flagged the possibility of Reich and his musicians making a tour to Australia in 1975. Allegedly when Reich heard Frampton and Collins perform *Piano Phase*, he said it was the best performance he'd ever heard. Whether or not this is true, Reich certainly took Ahern's invitation seriously and appointed him as his representative in Australia for the course of the tour. He felt he needed a local guide who not only understood where the audiences and venues might be, but also would know about hiring equipment, and so on. Early on in correspondence Reich suggested they might tour Australia by train. Ahern replied:

Illustration 4.3. Excerpt from a letter from David Ahern to Steve Reich, 1972.



While the regularity of AZ Music concerts during the third period remained constant, it seems that Ahern was frequently being over-ambitious in his

arrangements for concerts in, and tours to Australia. The Reich correspondence continues well into 1973 before it ends, without the tour having got off the ground. Similarly letters from Gordon Mumma at the Cunningham Dance Company and Toru Takemitsu in Japan show that Ahern was trying to arrange many tours simultaneously. As mentioned in chapter 3, Cardew himself had also been relying on Ahern to help arrange a tour for AMM, and correspondence with Stockhausen at the time shows that Ahern was in the last stages of planning performances of both *Mixtur* and *Hymnen*, neither of which actually happened.

Ahern had visited Takemitsu in Tokyo, although the dates are uncertain: possibly as part of the Teletopa tour in 1972. Their relationship, according to Barnard, was close (“David used to take him down the West End Hotel, the roughest pub in Balmain”) and while Ahern did not manage to arrange a tour for Takemitsu, it seems that he was taken at his word when he promised to show him around Australia and introduce him to important Australian musicians. Takemitsu simply turned up in Sydney and phoned Ahern:

He just decided to be here by himself... “Herro, are you A-hern? Composer David A-hern?”. “Yeah. And I’m very bloody pissed.”. “Herro, this is Toru.”. I said, “oh god, Toru, this is something else. Where are you Toru?”, ie, “are you in Japan?”. Well, that’s what I thought. He said “No. Synney.” I said “OK Toru”, then we just organised everybody. Very quickly. But we couldn’t find where Peter was.<sup>95</sup>

As mentioned in chapter 3, it was in the third period that Ahern decided he would like to learn more about conducting, and with a recommendation from Maria Prerauer, applied to study conducting with Michael Gielen. Funding was not made available for that course, and Ahern was left embarrassingly unable to take up the offered position at the Basle Conservatoire. Characteristically, this did not put him off the idea of extending his conducting career, and he applied for several conducting

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<sup>95</sup> Ahern, David. In conversation with Richard Toop: see appendix 1.

positions (both vocal and orchestral) with the ABC in Adelaide. John Hopkins remembered that the orchestral audition, for which he was on the panel, went disastrously for Ahern.

It was with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. The set piece was Beethoven's second symphony, but he could also choose a piece of his own, and he chose *After Mallarmé* to do. But it was astonishing that he really didn't know how to rehearse it... you have quarter of an hour, twenty minutes for the audition, he's got stuck on the first few bars and he couldn't get off those, and he couldn't really conduct that in a way that the orchestra could understand it. But then there was the Beethoven second symphony, which starts with a demi-semi-quaver on the opening slow section before a pause. And I watched very intensely, as we all did on the panel, as to what he would do. And he shuffled around on the podium for quite a while, and looked rather eagerly at the players, and then he raised his arms right up, slowly up, because its adagio, and he went up and up, and he got to this point, then he shouted to them "PLAY!"<sup>96</sup>

The failed ideas and ambitions that Ahern had in this period give us clues to his thoughts in this period. The first, and positive thing, is that while in many ways AZ Music in the second period had been a living, evolving composition for Ahern, after reinventing it in the third period he still wanted to be as creative as possible himself. This he threw into the arranging (albeit mostly unsuccessfully) of tours, the attempts at beginning a career in professional musical direction, and his last few compositions. He also, as will be discussed, gave a lot of time and exposure to a new group of Australian composers.

Sadly these failed activities also point to the darker side of this final period of Ahern's musical life. The failed auditions, withdrawn funding, and tours with some of the world's biggest names failing to eventuate must have crushed Ahern as much as the negativity from audience and critics on his initial return to Australia. Here was a change in the direction of many things he had done in the second period, and still barriers prevented him from being acknowledged as truly successful. Whether or not

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<sup>96</sup> Hopkins, John. In interview: see appendix 1.



we can attribute some of the problems he had arranging the tours to his increasing problems with alcohol is not clear, but from 1976 this was definitely evident.

Not everything in the third period was negative, however, and as mentioned Ahern had not lost any of his vitality and did gain more respect within the critical community in the third period. The music critic who had been most critical of the early AZ, Fred Blanks, wrote of the AZ Music concert in which Nigel Butterly performed John Cage's prepared piano piece, *Sonatas and Interludes*, "the audience had been taken into the confidence of a novel and hypnotically fascinating musical revelation. The music, played from the keyboard, is woven by gentle, orient-flavoured sounds."<sup>97</sup>

Similarly successful was the 1974 proms pre-concert, of which David Gyger wrote "David Ahern's AZ Music made a good job of Webern's *Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Saxophone and Piano* and Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*"<sup>98</sup> and Roger Covell conceded "I have been as critical as anyone in the past of some AZ performances, but this Prom contribution was a salutary, valuable and well-presented event."<sup>99</sup>

Butterly, who had been skeptical of the young Ahern's talent, and critical of the attention he had received in the first period, in contrast remember the AZ concert in which he had performed the Cage warmly. "The first Australian performance of the Cage, which David Ahern organised... I've done it about 20 times since then, so that's the one thing that I feel very happy about with David Ahern".<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Blanks, Fred. (1973). Screws and bolts not sacrilege. *Herald*, 26 November.

<sup>98</sup> Gyger, David. (1974). The proms of 1974: saved by a requiem. *Australian*, 25 February.

<sup>99</sup> Covell, Roger. (1974). Salutary deviation. *Herald*, 22 February.

<sup>100</sup> Butterly, Nigel. In interview: see appendix 1.

Another highly positive element of the third period was Ahern's deliberate involvement and promotion of a number of young Australian composers. These included Ian Bonighton, John Seal, Ron Nagorka, Robert Irving (who became Ahern's closest friend for some time), Robert Allworth, Cameron Allan and Allan Holley. The change in AZ demanded more through-composed music, which these composers were writing, and it also demanded new and talented performers in addition to Geoff Collins. The principal one of these was Harry Grunstein, who unlike Collins did not go on to make a living as a professional performer, but can be seen in illustration 4.2 to have performed on the piano in many of AZ Music's concerts in the third period.

The one exception to these new type of AZ Music concerts took place on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1975, when Ahern arranged a performance of Cardew's *Great Learning*, paragraphs 3 and 4. This concert was held in memory of dancer Philippa Cullen who had recently passed away after becoming ill while touring. It was a shock to many who had worked with Philippa during the second period, according to Geoffrey Barnard.

Ahern's own composition during this final period did not create much of a stir – the feedback was absent rather than negative or positive in the most part. The majority of these were performed by or under the auspices AZ Music – *The Rudiments of Music* by the Australian Percussion Ensemble, Austral String Quartet, members of the Philharmonia Choir and Harry Grunstein (piano) in 1973 and *Gesture* by the AZ ensemble with Greg Matheson (vocalist) in 1974. *Cinemusic*, a film made with Phillip Noyce in 1973 was also premiered as part of an AZ concert in 1973, and played before the Cage *Sonatas and Interludes* mentioned above (although Blanks does not report on it at all).

The last performance of one of his new works that Ahern heard was on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1975. *HiLo* was performed by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at a prom concert at the Sydney Town Hall, a momentous occasion considering it was the first time Hopkins had conducted Ahern's work since 1969, and considering how far the young man had come since. Sadly Hopkins remembers only problems with *HiLo*.

He wrote a piece called *HiLo*. It had a rather unfortunate performance. The circumstances were that the ABC had loosened my connection with the proms because they said they wanted me to conduct prom concerts in every state, but they wanted to introduce guest conductors... so the audience was totally confused as to what these concerts were about when we started a concert with *HiLo*. But the other problems with that concert were there was to be the Ravel G major piano concerto with Albert Lander as the pianist, and he suddenly withdrew and I've forgotten what we played in its place. And there was a Mahler 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony which is a pretty challenging piece and it had not been played in Australia so I think the audience was totally confused as to what we were doing. So that was very unfortunate because I only remember [*HiLo*] getting a very mixed reception which was quite different to what the audience had given to *Ned Kelly [Music]* and *After Mallarmé*.<sup>101</sup>

The third period was a change for Ahern to safer ground, if the word 'safer' can be applied to the running of contemporary music concerts. For AZ Music it was indeed a successful period, with wider acceptance and some very successful concerts, but for Ahern despite pouring just as much energy into this period as he had the previous two, personal success and satisfaction eluded him. His own compositions did not create a stir, his attempts at changing his career to professional conductor were unsuccessful, and he was on the path to alcoholism. Perhaps it was that same confidence and drive that saw him rise from obscurity so quickly that also made him disappear just as quickly: simply because he could never fulfill his own incredibly ambitious goals, even though he was sure he had the talent.

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<sup>101</sup> Hopkins, John. In interview: see appendix 1.



## EPILOGUE

In 1976 AZ Music played its last concert. Ahern was a broken man, and took refuge with the bottle. During the last 12 years of his life he was, as Barnard puts it, “a shadow of his former self”<sup>102</sup>, and in 1988 he died aged only 40. There are several theories as to why David spent these last years in such a state. Peter Sculthorpe feels that, unlike the young composers of his own generation, Ahern had no equal peers, no following composers of equal brilliance to back him up and support his position:

Another theory that I’ve had about David is that he wanted to get up to the next rung of the ladder. He was this *enfant terrible* and he wanted to move up, move on, but there was nobody coming up to take over his position. I think that was because he was idolised by those around him and younger people. You know, Geoffrey, Ernie, Robert, and so on. And so therefore he was left – not that he was aging – he was left becoming an aging *enfant terrible*.

Barnard relates the change to the ending of a six year relationship with Ahern’s childhood sweetheart who was many years younger than him. It could be that Ahern just never felt that he could be completely accepted and successful, having tried three distinct approaches to music in three distinct periods of his life.

Illustration E.1. West End Hotel, Balmain c.1982: Ernie Gallagher, Geoffrey Barnard, David Ahern.



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<sup>102</sup> Barnard, Geoffrey. In interview: see appendix 1.

Whatever the reason it is doubtless that the last twelve drunken years of Ahern's life undid much of his great work in the memories of his contemporaries: even in the minds of friends and colleagues who had supported and performed with him. This has contributed to a great lack of musicological analysis of much of what he did, and without the input of dedicated ex-members of AZ Music, such as Geoffrey Barnard or Ernie Gallagher, there would be no articles to recount the order of Ahern's achievements in such a short space of time. No articles to document the many theories and aesthetics he was able to synthesise into his own activities and happenings.

The question, then, remains - how significant were these activities in an international context? The answer is very significant. Were Michael Nyman to rewrite his "bible" on Experimental Music<sup>103</sup>, the sixth chapter should most definitely refer to AZ Music and Teletopa in its discussion of similar experimental performance and improvisation groups such as Fluxus, AMM, The Scratch Orchestra, Taj Mahal Travellers, Musica Elettronica Viva. Ahern's groups shared the notion of the unskilled performers of Fluxus or the Scratch Orchestra. They propagated the same anarchistic subversion as AMM and the Scratch. They encompassed the use of electronics as Fluxus, AMM and MEV did, and like Taj Mahal and much of Cardew's thinking on improvisation, regularly rehearsed the act but did not apply structure or constraints. One could even argue that they were also David's own Group Stockhausen (or Group Ahern).

On the two month world tour, Teletopa probably did more playing to more interested audiences than they did in the entire year before in Australia. While Ahern had struggled to overcome Australian reviews that described his music as, for

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<sup>103</sup> Nyman, Michael. (1999). *Experimental music: Cage and beyond* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

example, a “scrambled compendium of noises, some born of musical instruments (not always by conventional birth) and others produced by all manner of means involving childish visual fun”<sup>104</sup> it is undeniable that he was incredibly well respected overseas. Letters from Cardew, Stockhausen, Gehlhaar, Takemitsu and Reich as well as the words of Geoff Collins confirm this.

Correspondence from the time of the tour reveals letters from European radio stations, including one from Stephen Plaistow at the BBC who wrote “I’d already heard about your Teletopa group from Bill Colleran of Universal Edition here in London, and some time ago Peter Maxwell Davies told me something about yourself as a composer.” At the Roundhouse Az played alongside these groups - AMM, Taj Mahal, The Scratch Orchestra, and many others - and Geoff Collins genuinely believes they acquitted themselves well and equally.

The achievements have not been entirely without public recognition. In 1992, four years after David’s death and twenty years after the end of Teletopa, Roger Frampton wrote that David “was responsible for shaking Australian concert music out of smug complacency and for introducing me and others to a whole new world of radical concepts in art and music.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Richard Toop had ten years earlier recognised that the activities were “too thorny for the Australian musical establishment to handle”<sup>106</sup>. It is almost impossible to believe that Ahern achieved all this, and was held in such high esteem by composers all around the world within five years of leaving Australia for the first time as a twenty-one year old composer. And that within another three years it was to be ended.

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<sup>104</sup> Blanks, Fred. (1970). Aural air pollution. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July.

<sup>105</sup> Frampton, Roger. Teletopa etc. *Sounds Australian*, summer 91-92, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Toop, Richard. (1982). The Concert Hall Avant Garde: Where is it? *Art Network*, 6.

AZ Music and Teletopa were Ahern's own fusion (synthesis) of ideas from both Europe and America. They were and as active in the Australian music scene as were those other groups, but without the institutional support that figures like Stockhausen and Cardew had been afforded. Without the diversity and size of population that the "way out" American composers like La Monte Young could rely upon. In this light it is hoped that this thesis on Ahern's life will become a step towards further detailed analysis, and create a more general acknowledgement that everything achieved in this remarkably short time was significant not only in Australia, but also on the scale of international new music in the early nineteen-seventies.

From Ahern's recorded conversation with Richard Toop.

DA: Don [Banks] wrote me a letter once, this goes back to probably '71 or '72, and he said "where's the boy who wrote *After Mallarmé*?"

RT: Meaning where are the notes David? Where is the 40 line manuscript?

DA: Yeah, where are all these good things that you could continue having grants till the day you die. And keep on churning out all this "modrern" music. But acceptable "modrern". And I simply wrote back and said "well I'm not the boy who wrote *After Mallarmé*."



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## APPENDIX 1

### COPIES OF ORIGINAL RECORDINGS OF INTERVIEWS

#### SELECTED TRANSCRIPTIONS

Contained on the following CDs are interviews between the Author and subject:

| <b>CD</b> | <b>Interviews contained</b>              |
|-----------|------------------------------------------|
| A         | Geoffrey Barnard part 1                  |
| B         | Geoffrey Barnard part 2<br>Geoff Collins |
| C         | John Hopkins<br>Peter Sculthorpe         |
| D         | Greg Schiemer part 1                     |
| E         | Greg Schiemer part 2<br>Nigel Butterly   |
| F         | Phillip L. Ryan                          |
| G         | Toop-Ahern part 1                        |
| H         | Toop-Ahern part 2                        |

Transcriptions of the interviews most frequently quoted are also included in the following pages, before the CDs. These include:

Peter Sculthorpe

John Hopkins

Geoffrey Barnard

Nigel Butterly

A complete collection of transcriptions is to be made before the collection is submitted to the oral history collection at the National Library.

## TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH PETER SCULTHORPE

Peter Sculthorpe: (Shall we start) I can't remember when we first met, David. I remember Richard Meale used to talk about him, 'cause I used to see Richard a fair deal and ah so it's blurred between Richard talking about him and my first meeting [him]. But it would have been very early on, when would that have been about 1967.

James Humberstone: '67 or 8.

PS: About '67 or 8, yes that's right. I was in the States in 1966 and 67 so it probably would have been '68. David and I hit it off from the start because we both enjoyed socialising, having a drink and so on and so on. David always seemed to be a little bit afraid of Richard in some way. While they had a good relationship I think Richard in those days was very much the mentor, the teacher to whom David looked up to, whereas I was just a good guy. And we didn't even talk about music very much. We talked a lot about sex (chuckle) all those kinds of things. David was also drawn to me I think because I knew, I'd known Cornelius Cardew well and John Cage. I didn't ever really know Stockhausen, but I think the fact that I knew them - Cage and Cardew made me special perhaps for David and yet we didn't talk about their music much. We didn't talk about music much at all. We might have talked about Cage and Cardew and their idiosyncracies, but not so much what they stood for. My relationship with David was quite constant. I think in later years before he died we didn't meet so much although he used to phone me sometimes, when he was in quite a state late at night and we'd have a long talk. I'm just trying to get ... deal with that chronologically, but I think that just about does it. I mean I was there all the way for David because I thought this was just fantastic that a young man like him could get music onto the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I mean you know this is ... this is heady stuff. And, you know, the *Vexations* concert was just ... I suppose it would have been the first time it was performed in Australia ... I wonder ... the full piece.

JH: Yes I don't ... but I'm just trying to remember it.

PS: Oh no, no this was before Richard had arrived in Sydney [yes it would have been]. And I mean all this made David a very attractive person and important because he was getting music out there, right in the face of the general public. I've often wondered if David, not often, in fact it's just recently occurred to me that David might have had some mild form of dyslexia, in that he had a terrible sense of direction, or no sense of direction at all. There's no way that he could have driven a car. His handwriting was, musical handwriting, was appalling. I wonder in fact if Richard wrote more of *After Mallarmé* than David did because if he had some mild form of dyslexia I don't think he could've written that score. That's just a thought. What else was I saying about ... this dyslexia?

JH: Direction, organisation.

PS: I mean, I suppose even in his violin playing, I mean you said that someone had said it was good and someone had said it was terrible. Well, it was sort of both. It was very crazy and committed, inspiring, I suppose from a conventional point of view, maybe it was terrible but ... it got you in. And maybe it was a dyslexic playing

of violin (chuckle). My ... another theory about, that I've had about David is that he wanted to get up the next rung of the ladder, you know he was this enfant terrible. And he wanted to move up, move on, but there was nobody coming up to take over his position. Perhaps that was because he was so idolised by those around him, and younger people, you know Geoffrey, Ernie, Robert and so on. And so therefore he was left, not that he was aging, but he was left becoming an aging enfant terrible. If he had moved up into the next position, I don't quite know what he would have done, but he would certainly have found a way. I think ... well it's just my opinion ... because he did - no. Because ... even though he and Richard had a falling out he still, seems to me, that he still looked up to Richard. David and I were more like, just like buddies, in a way, and, but he sort of looked up to me and I think he would like to have been a cross between the two of us. But he couldn't have done the kinds of things we were doing because I don't think he would have been able to write it ... come up with a through-written score, full of detail and really neatly written up. But then maybe he would have found some other thing to do, because we're talking not so much I suppose, or I'm talking not so much about what Richard and I did but the position that David wanted to occupy and he did want to, yes, position because he was full of drive and ambition, which is as a composer should be. You can't just sit back and wait for things to happen. I don't know if people have talked about his time on the *Daily Telegraph*, is that ...?

JH: Not much.

PS: No, right because I mean he was an amazing critic. Absolutely fearless ... and there was really something in the way that he said what he thought that could've been hurtful but somehow it never was. I think it was because he was just so honest in a direct and almost simple way. You know I remember when a piece of mine called *Music of Rain* which I later called *Rain* which is not a good piece actually but ... I thought it was a bit too long but David went on about how it was Balinese inspired, how it wasn't nearly long enough. And looking back what he said was actually so right. That I should've you know written just one of those pieces that goes on, on a few chords forever really. And I think the reason I withdrew it is because it did get bogged down in perhaps too much fussy detail really. One of his most famous reviews which you should get hold of was about the 'Coo-eee competition'. Ever come across that? Well it was a week when you know we had every possible so-called famous performer out from Europe playing, you know Beethoven violin concertos or conducting German symphonies, on and on. A week when a lot of imported stuff was going on and David wrote that the only interesting event this week was the 'Coo-eee competition' in Queensland (chuckle). And he wrote in the only, you know, event that had any significance for Australian music and music in Australia and then he proceeded to write details of, or explain how the 'Coo-eee competition', you know, it was a matter of who could project the 'Coo-eee' the farthest and he explained all that ... And I mean it was so funny, and it was so ... it said it all really. Because it was of course the only significant event in music in Australia that week ... Oh the Opera company was doing a first performance of something or other, you know a new production of Verdi or Puccini (chuckle). So David had, he had everything in the right perspective. We need him now. I wonder where he'd be now, what he'd be doing.

JH: Do you think he put too many people offside to carry on being successful?

PS: Well, there was something so engaging about him. I wouldn't know, but I find it very hard to imagine that he put ... he would've put many people offside, really. But do you know?

JH: Well, I'm just thinking, you know, that before he went away that, you know, he got accolades and wonderful young talented composer and when he came back he still got as much attention but for completely different reasons because he was doing these weird wacky concerts and causing riots at the Proms and things like that. It's a bit difficult because over half of the reviews are written by Fred Blanks, who really didn't like David at all.

PS: I don't think he disliked David, did he? I think he just didn't understand - didn't understand what he was doing. Wouldn't understand it?

JH: Really.

PS: No.

JH: But the impression I get and this is it's very one way because I've got letters from Cornelius today that are around 1971-1972 and Cornelius is saying "Look, yes we all know it's hard you've just got to ..." and Leo Schonfield as well from Music Now in London. Both saying "Look, you know everyone goes through this and it's a hard time and you've just got to keep doing it and people will eventually respond." And I just wondered whether maybe because Australia was much smaller than England and America where these things had happened before that David did actually struggle. You know he probably wouldn't have shown it on the outside but these were responses to his letters saying "I'm thinking about giving up". In fact Cornelius Cardew says a lovely thing in one of the letters which is "Don't give up composing unless you've found something better to do or more useful to do".

PS: Ah yes right. That's nice. But because David was ... Oh, I know, I know the key to that it would be *Ned Kelly Music*, which was actually a very serious statement. I don't know if you have much on that, I've forgotten the reviews. But a few of the reviews and certainly people in general took it as just an hilarious entertainment, and I don't think that was David's intention at all. I think he was using the figure of Ned Kelly as somebody standing for, standing against authority and making an important statement about that. And maybe, I mean he didn't ever talk about it, at least not to me. Maybe he felt misunderstood and perhaps that's what it was about. Because he couldn't have complained about lack of interest and lack of success, but he certainly had grounds to complain of being misunderstood. And that, that's pretty awful for a composer. I mean if you write a work in all seriousness and it's treated as a joke - a nice joke by a lot of people - oh, and by some like Fred Blanks is just - or Lois Simpson who just played her cello (chuckle) in a way, in the orchestra, while others made paper planes and flew them around. I mean it was a great occasion. What does John Hopkins have to say about Ned Kelly Music?

JH: He just remembers it very fondly. In fact he said that after *After Mallarmé* and *Ned Kelly (Music)* were great successes the *HiLo* a later piece was the one that was a bit of a disaster but he had programming problems that year.



PS: Yeah, right, yes ... I don't think *Journal*, maybe it needs to be re-recorded. I don't think that was so successful either, but that could be in the actual performance because ... it should be re-recorded actually, I mean heavens that's ridiculous, we only have that one old LP of it really. When one thinks of, you know now that performance or education and more sympathetic.

JH: Yes, although Geoffrey Barnard was saying that there was a ... it was part of some festival (and my memory's not very good) but they did perform one of David's, I think it was just one of his text notations ... as part of the festival and that the performance really wasn't very sympathetic at all, people doing...

PS: This was recent?

JH: Mmm, well I think in the '90s ... Music for Nine got another airing in the '90s didn't it?

PS: Yes that's right.

JH: I've got this plan to do an edition of *Ned Kelly Music*.

PS: Oh fantastic.

JH: When I get some spare time.

PS: I mean for somebody who wrote so little, he had amazing success.

JH: Yeah, didn't really write anything after '73.

PS: Really.

JH: I mean there are records of pieces here and there but no actual pieces.

PS: But you mentioned Geoffrey's performance of a text piece and lack of sympathy, I mean I imagine in Australia a lot of those scratch music pieces still wouldn't get much sympathy. I mean I find it quite bizarre but I'm sure it's true. I mean we do have a long way to go.

JH: It's quite well documented in a couple of articles that Peter Sculthorpe sent students along to David's early sessions at the Conservatorium.

PS: Oh right, yeah, definitely, yes. I used to get him to come to the department to do workshops. Oh yes students used to get so excited. Because he was an exciting person.

JH: He wouldn't have been much older than a lot of them either.

PS: No. And they'd all go away and write text pieces or you know really, really fired. [So what else? Is there another area I could - that you could think of - that I could talk about?]

JH: Well we've covered his violin playing, that's the most important thing (chuckle).

PS: Yeah right.

JH: I think it's the actual dates and everything fit into place quite well now. I can sort of track down what David was doing for most of that important period from '68 to '76.

PS: I just find it extraordinary that it's just so few years. When did he die?

JH: '88 ... So twelve years on the bottle. Basically ... And phone calls to you in the early hours of the morning ... I think he did make a bit of a nuisance of himself.

PS: Yes, we used to, I used to groan (chuckle). But still if you felt that you were helping ...

JH: I've wondered whether that's been a reason why he hasn't really been documented very much. There are only about four or five articles on ...

PS: Really?

JH: That's why I decided to do these interviews, because I just sort of thought well it would be nice if there was a wealth of material. The other thing I'm doing is going to Geoffrey Barnard's house, because he inherited David's [stuff].

PS: I was going to say, hasn't Geoffrey written a lot.

JH: He's written two articles. And he's currently doing a thesis on ... positive sociological ... he's documented lots of things about but he's also got David's estate so I'm scanning those things like letters from Stockhausen and all [that kind of pieces] so that they're archived ...

PS: I mean it's a brilliant subject.

JH: It is.

PS: It's fantastic.

JH: It's a great story. It's a very sad story. No that's good I think ...

PS: I'm, I've got to write a requiem for the Adelaide Festival and I was thinking of dedicating it ... Who was it who said "Those whom the Gods love die young"?

JH: I'm trying to remember.

PS: But anyway I must track that down and then I'm going to write the requiem and dedicate it to them because throughout my life I've known so many people who've died far too early in age and I was making a list recently and of course David is amongst those who died, so he'll be in the requiem somehow. I mean the first was

when I was ten and my next door neighbour who was ten got tetanus and died so it sort of goes a long way back through my life.

## TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HOPKINS

John Hopkins: Well, are you going to ask me questions or ...

James: The best thing is if I talk as little as possible and you just remember what you can remember. I'll probably just prompt.

JH: Yes and you can extract what you don't want.

James: Exactly.

JH: So, well, do you want to start off just to get the ball ...

James: Sure, to me? Well usually it's easiest to start off chronologically so if you can remember, did you say it was either Nigel Butterly or Richard Meale?

JH. It was either Nigel Butterly or Richard Meale who suggested that I should meet David Ahern. I can't be sure which at the moment. But it was at a time when we were trying to promote a lot of younger Australian composers. And David had written *After Mallarmé* and we programmed that in the Sydney [Proms] and I thought this piece was ... had tremendous promise and as a result of that we subsequently asked him to write another piece and he wrote *Ned Kelly Music*. I think that came next. And that rather shook the orchestra because the orchestra had to say at one point - this is spoken - "Ned Kelly" and they at first resisted this. Somehow David when he presented himself, when I introduced him to the orchestra, his actual presentation was scruffy and (chuckle) not very endearing to the orchestra. And then when they were asked to say this there was a certain amount of rebellion especially among some of the wind players. Anyhow it performed it and it was in the Prom season. These Proms in Sydney which I conducted for some thirteen years were a wonderful opportunity to do things by younger composers. And of course Nigel and Richard and Peter Sculthorpe, Don Banks, all of these composers were represented. But to get down to some of the younger ones, like Barry Conyngham was one of those and David of course was. Then, next came, after I actually left the ABC, he wrote a piece called *HiLo*. And that was ... it had a rather unfortunate performance. The circumstances were that I'd actually loosened my connection, or the ABC had loosened my connection I should say with the Proms because they said they wanted me to conduct Prom concerts in every state but they wanted to introduce guest conductors. And I think it was someone, it might have been Willie [Bothskovski], had done three Johann Strauss programs - it was either that or Morton Gould, I think it was Willie [Bothskovski] - so the audience was totally confused as to what these Proms were about and when we started a concert with *HiLo* ... But the other problems with that concert were that there was to be the piano concerto with Albert Landow as the pianist and he suddenly withdrew and I've forgotten what we played in its place. And there was the Mahler seventh symphony which is a pretty challenging piece and it had not been played in Australia. So I think the audience was totally confused as to what we were doing after these Strauss concerts. But that was unfortunate because I only remember this piece getting really a very mixed reception which was quite different to what the audience had given to *Ned Kelly* and *After Mallarmé*. Though that's been my connection with the works of David of course he ran - was it AZ Music?

James: That's right.

JH: Yes which had some amazing connections. I mean what he managed to do in these programs was quite stunning. I mean how he did all this was quite amazing because we just were mind blown by what he was doing. But I think he was like the enfant terrible, the angry young man of music at the time and some of my colleagues - older colleagues - couldn't bear it when he used to drift into the music department and head to my office and so forth and then wonder what was going to come next (chuckle). And look I just asked them all to be patient because I said "You know, there's something in this young person". Then one day he came to see me and he said "Can we have lunch together?". And I thought he was taking me out to lunch to say thank you for what I'd done ... the impression that I get when he said can I join him for lunch. We walked out of the William Street offices, that's where they were, and we walked up William Street toward Kings Cross, and we walked around Kings Cross and we walked right along Darlinghurst Road and right down to the - to Woolloomooloo. And I thought I wonder where David's thinking of going cause I don't know any cafes or restaurants down here and I was very concerned that I didn't want him to be spending much money I just ... And we were chatting all the time and he was chatting very earnestly and walking with me. Then we started walking up again, up towards Forbes Street, or whatever street it is towards William Street and the ABC. I said "David, where are you intending going?" "Oh" he said, "I don't know, I thought you knew". (Chuckle) This was the most amazing thing we'd spent an hour doing this - him talking to me in the most urgent way about things but it's never going to any particular point because it's crossed my mind - Does he have some place in mind now, I hope it's not somewhere expensive that's going to cost the earth because I wouldn't want that.

James: And this was in the AZ days was it? After he came back from ...

JH: I can't really think of the year this is the terrible thing but it was all around this period when we were doing these performances and that's one experience which I can say it's not a ... It gave me another side of David because he was so well focused on so many things and so out of focus on others and this was one of the out of focus moments. I think we had a sandwich somewhere in the end. I'd really spent all the time I could walking the streets with him. So this was a most unforgettable experience in its way but it says something about David's personality I think. When he focused in on things he had the most amazing dedication to them ... What he did with AZ Music was, though I don't know all the details, I only saw the finished product but what he achieved at that time when there was, there wasn't all the support systems that there are today. It was quite amazing. And I think we all ... like Nigel and Richard they were very supportive of him and they encouraged me of course when I was ... because he was a young composer with extraordinary talent. The amazing thing was that David wanted to do everything. He wanted to conduct and I was - had a very strange experience of seeing him do a conducting audition in Adelaide - with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. The set piece was Beethoven's Second Symphony, but he also could choose a piece of his own. And he chose *After Mallarmé* to do. But it was astonishing that he really didn't know how to rehearse it. He had no sense of strategy for approaching a piece like that especially in the situation where you've got yourself a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes for the

audition. He got stuck on the first few bars and he couldn't get off those and he couldn't really conduct that in a way that the orchestra could understand it. But then there's the Beethoven Second Symphony which starts with a demi-semiquaver on the opening slow section, demi-semiquaver before a pause. And I watched very intently as we all did on the panel as to what he would do and he shuffled around on the podium for quite a while and looked rather eagerly at the players and then he raised his arms and he took his arms right up, slowly up because it's adagio and he went up and up and he got to this point and then he shouted "Play". (Chuckle). He just shouted "PLAY" ... We were all watching (our group) were watching very intently as this, his arms were going up which bore no resemblance to any tempo at all and he got to this point of no return and he couldn't go any higher and he just called out "PLAY". And the orchestra just collapsed. So he didn't pass the audition needless to say. He was a most extraordinary man in this way but as a stirrer, I think that was his number one quality. He stirred up a lot of very worthwhile things. The second is of course I think he, he had a gift we never saw fully realised, whether it could have been realised I really don't know. I have to be quite honest about that or whether he was just latching onto a whole lot of things which are floating around in the mind, in his mind at that time and having got ... or wherever it is, different ideas in connection with Stockhausen and so on. He had a lot to say about these things in conversation but in sense of the actual individual, the individual message that the composer must have and the commitment to put that down on paper in a very logical way and a practical way. Well I don't know whether David ever mastered that. I mean, I think it would have required enormous discipline but I sometimes had a bit of a question mark in my mind as to whether it could be carried through without discipline. He obviously must have had to run AZ Music and to get the connections. Or was he just sailing very close to the wind all the time.

James: I think his confidence got him a long way.

JH: Well he was enormously confident. This is the extraordinary thing. He had unbounded confidence, whereas most Australian composers particularly at that time, people like Peter Sculthorpe didn't have that confidence to ... you know, they had been rebuffed so many times. Richard Meale didn't have that same confidence. I mean when Richard, when I asked him if he'd write a piece for the Proms and this was the piece which is Clouds, Now and Then. He just was thrilled at first and then I kept asking how it was coming along and so on and he said he couldn't get to it, he was just, needed to resign from the ABC. You see, because he had a very challenging position in the federal music department. He had a program planner in charge of the fine music area with Nigel Butterly but he didn't have really quite the same security that Nigel had. Nigel was rock-like in this, but Richard - who I'm sure you've met.

James: Yeah.

JH: He had this sort of nervous feeling all the time so Richard said no he must resign. So I talked to him for a long while and I said "Richard, I don't want you to resign, will you like to take a period of leave, leave without pay, to complete the piece". So he agreed to do that. And this, what he told me was a few weeks later was he just found that now when he had the time the urge to compose escaped him - it left him - and he asked if he could come back again. The stimulus of being in the federal music department and us all being together there as a team, because it was a, quite a unique

team we'd put together and I benefited greatly from Nigel, Richard, Ian Farr, those in particular there. And their, all their contacts that they had, I mean people talk about me and John Hopkins and the Proms but I stress it was Nigel and Richard and Ian Farr who were enormously helpful. A lot of the ideas were theirs that came out, I was the sort of front figure. But they all of them used to keep a pad ... in a drawer in their desk on which they wrote down all the work we should consider for the next Prom season. Many people thought I was choosing the programs to press, sometimes gave me heaps for, for you know there being so totally in charge of it. But David played such a very important role and they would come up with, we'd show these lists, I'd, we'd probably have about two hundred works on which we chose the Prom programs for [the] next year. Of course I used to say "Well I'd like to do this, I'd like to do that" and the reason[s] why but the presence of a whole lot of things was due to the influence of ... people. So that's about all I can say about David I'm afraid because - what, I mean you did something a little bit more about [him] and that might prompt me.

James: Well, I mean that's great because I mean I was aware that David had had a couple of lessons with Nigel and then with Richard and like you say he's come through this fold, it's really interesting now that I've spoken to all three of you to see sort of what a close unit that was and the way that it worked. And the thing that pleases me most about what you said is not only recognising this young man's talent but after he had been to Darmstadt and done that with Stockhausen and met Cornelius Cardew in London. And I mean talking of David's confidence, as far as I can tell he more or less just talked himself into Darmstadt which Stockhausen never interviewed him or actually even said he could join the course.

JH: Really.

James: There's a letter from Stockhausen where he says "I'm already full, but seeing as you're so keen and you've got the money to come you can come and listen but the course is full". And David, then there's another letter about two months later where David says "Oh, Stockhausen's asked me to be his assistant".

JH: Yes, yes, that's right. I remember that.

James: So this incredible confidence that obviously stood him in good stead wherever he went.

JH: But was that true that he had asked him to become his assistant?

James: Well it's written in several places, so I don't know. And in Stockhausen - there are references from Stockhausen where he says "I intend to employ David Ahern, to help with preparation of scores and things". So certainly Stockhausen was on his side but the nice thing is that I think a lot of people you know Richard and Nigel don't really see what David did when he came back in the AZ Music and the things that went after is really anything to do with them or, but whereas you sort of seem to think that it was really exciting and interesting and even if he was enfant terrible.

JH: Yes, well I think it had a, at that time, it had a way out role to play. I mean it was very difficult to relate it to know what we could do. You can imagine as federal director of music it was a huge challenge.

James: And he wasn't writing notated music very much at that point.

JH: No, no.

James: Most of it was text.

JH: No, and he played the violin didn't he (chuckle)?

James: That's right.

JH: And he played it very badly (chuckle - laugh). Yes I remember being at a concert where it was so appalling, his playing, but he did it with such conviction and the feeling that this was absolutely right, this was what the violin should sound like, you know. So you had to admire this but I must say that I came away with a very big question mark in my mind as to really where he was going. Now of course I'd left the ABC when he died. What were the circumstances of his death.

James: Well, he'd been ill for several days beforehand. And he was found by the front door of his home with, I think, a big, sort of, bash on the side of his head like he'd struck his head against the wall. So we're not quite sure whether he had a seizure or a fit or ... But I mean the thing is that he was drinking so heavily he could have just been in a bit of a rush to get back down to the bottle shop after being ill for a few days. I mean there are various theories ... But he'd been there for a while when they found him. It wasn't very nice.

JH: So, what did he actually die of - a seizure?

James: It was the smash to the side of the head against the wall, but they don't know exactly what caused him to do that ... And that was 1988 ... So he'd, you know, AZ Music ran until, well they did one last concert in 1976.

JH: How did he actually live, earn a living?

James: After that he was given a position at the College of the Arts, which is now part of Sydney University, lecturing in sound design. So it sort of fitted in with what he was doing. But '76 also seemed to mark the start of the really serious drinking. There's no recorded music written after about '73, '74. Although, and this is very interesting, one of his friends and other performers in the, in AZ Music and also Teletopa Geoffrey Barnard said that when he looks at that period of David's life he thinks of the group as his performance I mean that was the whole, and his composition, that was the whole aesthetic behind that experimental community-based music [wasn't it]. Which is a nice, a nice idea, I think.

JH: Yeah.



James: But then you see Richard said that he saw David in Adelaide in the early '80s and David was apparently writing a violin sonata and he made a submission to the AMC at some point in the mid '80s saying that he'd written another two pieces but there's no record of them anywhere. I think that when AZ Music finished - you know he taught at there were various other things that he did here and there but there was no real creative output for the last twelve years. Which is terribly sad.

JH: Yes, yes. Now you've, have you heard *HiLo*? I wonder if there's an ABC tape of that.

James: I should check. There's a recording of *After Mallarmé, Ned Kelly Music...*

JH: Is there no ... music, the recording of that from the Sydney Proms, from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra?

James: I think so. It's in the AMC.

JH: Yep.

James: And, there's another one ... Oh *Journal* ...

JH: Oh yes.

James: Which is the piece that he had performed after he first came back from Europe. Did you have anything to do with that?

JH: No. What is *Journal's*... ?

James: *Journal's*, well it was a piece for radio to be performed over... It's got sort of didgeridoos and percussion and all sorts of ...

JH: Well was that going to be an Italia Prize entrant?

James: I don't know.

JH: I mean like Nigel ... was, you know it's won the radiophonic part of the Italia Prize.

James: I'm not sure but that's recorded on the same series as *After Mallarmé*, same series of records.

JH: Yeah. Well that's about it I'm afraid.

James: That's it. No, no, no, that's absolutely fantastic. That was really, really good.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH GEOFFREY BARNARD

Geoffrey Barnard: I can't remember. I've got nothing. I've got nothing from that period of my life anyway. And if I had I'd throw it out.

GB & JH: Chuckle, chuckle.

JH: I think it's working.

GB: I hope so.

JH: Say something really loudly.

GB: Ahem.

JH: Yeah that really freaks it out.

GB: Clothing collection. You can help by filling this bag with children's and adults clothing, blankets and sheets. Our official collector will call from 9:00am.

JH: Give us a bit of Ernie Gallagher.

GB: On the...

JH: Oh, it's hard to pick that up.

GB: And you know how I'm a bit accident prone (chuckle).

JH: Now a bit of John Cage.

GB: "Oh, I've always loved it." (Chuckle.) "It's very colourful." (Chuckle.) Those two, what I just said then, were ... my friend Gerard picked up on this as well cause ... when I went away in 1978, Gerard, Gerard and I went away together (that's my mate in Nowra) and he came across to New York as well. So he was with me, you know, like he stayed in Cage's place for five and a half weeks with me you know.

JH: Cool.

GB: And the first two weeks we were in New York, when we were staying in the Earl - The Earl Hotel, The Hotel Earl - now the Washington Square Hotel there was a two week season of Cunningham on at the - there's a theatre up in the mid west fifties, Mid Town Theatre, West Fifty-Third Street. And the way that evenings were structured were that there were three dances each evening and there was an intermission between each piece so that after the first one was over you would just go up and walk in, there was no-one on the door or anything. So, and John said "Oh I can get you tickets" and I said "Oh no, don't worry about it we just go into everything we just miss the first one and walk in ...". He seemed to like that (chuckle). But there was one piece and it had music by John Gibson I think and it was, the colours were really vibrant, really strong. I mean that was the strong aspect of it. And we were sitting in the hall and John had, he wasn't in the musicians pit, and hem we were

sitting with him and Gerard leant over to him at one point and said, oh you know, just made some comment about the colours, how strong they were and when the lights went up John said, turned to us and said "It's very colourful". (Chuckle) And of course Gerard picked that up 'cause he really picks up on things like that and he'll say it over and over again. He used to do that, he used to mimic all sorts of people we came across in New York. He kept talking to me about the bloke, the first diner we ever went into, our first day in New York, and the song he was singing. "Mate I don't know what you're talking about", but he could remember the guy's accent and the way he sang and he would pick up on all these different accents and really little, sort of, turns of phrase and what ... So, yeah "It's very colourful", he used to say that and he probably still would ... Or if you met him, if you said "It's very colourful" he'd know what you're talking about. And then I remember and the other thing was "I've always loved it". 'Cause I remember saying to Cage something about my main, the main focal point for me was the music and that dance was kind of alien to me. And I, you know, it was new to me 'cause I didn't have any kind of, had not any real contact with modern dance. And he said "I've always loved it" (chuckle). So that's one I remember.

JH: I think I've heard you say that before.

GB: I do. I say it just like Gerard says it. I know this is all very trite but ...

JH: No that's a good, that's a good sound test there.

GB: [Right that's enough sound test.] I've got to remember to get ... If and when we go out to see Phillip, I'm going to have to take some things out. 'Cause I don't know if I told you, when I first visited him that time back in January of 1992 he said to me that if I was coming I should bring a mug (chuckle). I mean talk about a Spartan existence.

JH: You're joking.

GB: He had sort of one cup or mug.

JH: You're joking.

GB: Well no-one else comes there, you know. So I had to bring my own mug which I gave him. I said "You can have it".

JH: This is why he's quite original.

GB: He's got nothing, I mean he's just ... He had this tiny little (oh shit what is it), he used to boil water in an electric hotplate. I gave him an electric jug. It was just nonsense. This tiny little, sort of electric hotplate from memory that he boiled water in. Had one fuckin' mug. So I saw some down the road in the second-hand shop and I thought I might get him a few - maybe about four or something, three or four. And then I thought if we go out I'll have to take coffee and I'll have to take lunch and I'll have to do all that because he won't have anything much.

JH: Well we can share that responsibility.

GB: But he's you know, like, he's just, I don't know, it's - I don't know it's such a strange ...

JH: He's your age?

GB: He's two years older than me. Strange person. Really strange. But he always was. Fuck what a bunch. Greg Mattheson, Phillip L. Ryan and Ernie bloody Gallagher. (Chuckle.)

JH: You can say exactly the same when you look at the English experimentalists and probably many of the Americans.

GB: Possibly.

JH: Especially in the La Monte Young camp. There's some real mad guys there.

GB: Yeah, yeah. I told you about Angus McCluse didn't I. He was the guy who played hand drums in the Theatre of Eternal Music, in the early group with Tony Conrad and John Cale. He was one of the founders of the Velvet Underground.

JH: Oh OK.

GB: And he left the group 'cause he was so affronted with the notion of being paid to play music.

JH: ...

GB: Yeah but a lot of those people ... it was the scene around Young, it was a real drug culture as well so it was that kind of New York underground, you know, like you'd appreciate that with the music and the sort of embracing of, you know, Indian philosophy and whatnot. All that yeah, very different from Cage's, very kind of urban.

JH: Was there a crossover there with the, 'cause his wife did the lighting

GB: Yeah, Marian Zazeela.

JH: Was there a crossover with that and the sort of ... Cage relationship.

GB: Not really, they just ...

JH: ...

GB: They just knew, I mean, they knew each other of course and Young was doing this new stuff and Cage was quite intrigued by it and of course Young did the music for the piece Winterbranch which is one of the most excruciating pieces of music you'll ever hear. But I mean they all knew each other and there was sort of ... I suppose the person that John and Merce were pally with was George Brecht. I don't know how pally he was with Young but, but he was one of the original Fluxus people,

at least American Fluxus people and one of the I suppose Brecht, there was only a handful of them, there's a few artists who, and they wrote music of course or, you know, events or did events scores that you could say their music or their work typifies Fluxus. A lot of other people involved with fluxus you can't see it, I mean, it really challenges the notion of what Fluxus is, and you know like if it's later on it just became like a, I see it as a boys' club. Oh yeah, that's the Elliott Schwartz - Schwartz is it?

JH: That's the ... [showing Barnard something from a book]

GB: Oh yeah.

JH: I thought that was great.

GB: I've seen extremely elaborate ones of these. There was a fluxus show ...

JH: I especially love the way Cage goes right across all three.

GB: Did you see the Fluxus show last year at all?

JH: No.

GB: There was a [series]. It wasn't great but there was some nice things in it. I mean it's just good to see things, you know when they come out but I thought overall it was, it was dishonest, it purported to be something and it was something else. It was supposed to be Fluxus but it was from Frankfurt. So they've got like Cage's score to *Water Music* - well he did that in 1952. Fluxus didn't happen 'til '61-'62. And there were other things that were far more recent and it's like that, you get a lot of, you get a lot of stuff that's not really Fluxus but it's related to it.

JH: The interest that I had in looking at, at this [book] was to see whether they identified, when he, clearly identifies things, common things about group performance and being [writers]/composers that you could relate to Scratch and Group Stockhausen and ...

GB: Yeah, well you've got that whole history haven't you. I suppose with those Americans it became what really came through was not a group like Scratch Orchestra but it was like the identity of the so-called composer/performer and by extension like say with Riley so you got solo work. And then by extension the composer with his own group. So you got that with Young and you got it with Reich as well and of course later on Glass. So that, they, yeah, it's mean it's just composer/performer's really only applicable to, I guess, a soloist anyway. So if you're writing ensemble pieces you've got your own people to work with. And you seem to have that with those people.

JH: Whereas you don't, Cardew didn't seem to be writing for specific people though he was writing for a group.

GB: No and of course with those earlier pieces the pre-Scratch pieces like *Optet 61* and - what is it? - Solo? - is it Solo and Accompaniment? or whatever it's called and

then *Treatise* I mean I'm not sure who he was writing those for. I know with *Treatise* that there was a kind of, that there's been a history of certain people being involved in performances.

JH: I guess there's so much interpretation involved.

GB: Yeah. Keith Rowe told me last year that the way that Cardew actually got into AMM was that it was, he sort of came across Keith and some others - I can't remember the original circumstances so I've got it on tape - but he, coming out of that ... I think he actually (oh shit) I think he actually ... originally enlisted, when I say them it was Keith and some other people. Oh look, I'm not, I just can't quite remember but it went from there, whatever, however he came into contact with them initially then they started to work on *Treatise* as it was developing and sort of Cardew was invited to join AMM. Yeah. I guess the thing about the Scratch Orchestra was, was that, like because it was a group and what, that list I've got upstairs on, you remember those letters you photocopied.

JH: Yeah.

GB: There's about seventy names on that page in that tiny little ... I think that's Cardew's handwriting. That's 1971, that's a lot of people.

JH: And if you read Scratch Music you really do get an impression of a community having a lot of fun. I mean that's, to me that was, I got that feeling far more than I got any feeling of great aesthetic being pushed forwards or anything like that.

GB: Yeah it's highly eclectic and it seems to be like one of the, one of the factors in the Scratch Orchestra that kind of, you know, was a catalyst for its downfall, when, you know, Cardew and a lot of the others decided to go off on that Maoist tangent.

JH: I was thinking about that the other day and I thought, really to have a group that's doing that's doing the kind of extreme musical stuff that the Scratch Orchestra did would have been hard to keep together. And to have a group that was politically doing some extreme stuff like he wanted to do as well would also be very hard to keep together so there was really no way that the two could ever have really continued, you know equally.

GB: No.

JH: I mean the musical thing was already extreme enough.

GB: Yeah. It's, you know like some of the things I've read about, you know why, I mean there was, there were crises obviously in the Scratch. But you know then subsequent kind of, sort of polemisation against the Scratch Orchestra and you know Cardew saying things like you know that they would just become this kind of isolated little commune you know that, that ... self-contained and it didn't go anywhere didn't go out beyond its own kind of, you know, immediate confines and all that.

JH: And David must have found something too difficult about running AZ in '72 when it changed the format.

GB: It became different, I mean it became a more formal organisation I guess. But you still had a kind of a, an administrative body that functioned as a, well an entrepreneurial body.

JH: Yeah, that's common to both.

GB: Yeah. But, you know, it was getting more serious shall we say because you know like in the early days we played at, well I can sort of run through a crude chronology like Watters Gallery, Central Street Gallery, the Congregational Church in Pitt Street, then in Inhibodres Gallery in Woolloomooloo which is no longer with us, Cell Block Theatre, the Old St James Playhouse, Watters Gallery again, the Congregational Church a few times actually, you know and later on David's putting on concerts at the Opera House in the old recording hall which is now that new space - The Studio. You know having not exactly glossy programs printed.

JH: But the kind of repertoire and concert wasn't inclusive was it, I mean as music was in its first phase was very much like the Scratch Orchestra in that anybody was welcome and if you, I mean, just looking at the first stuff of Laboratory of the Creative Ear it was supposed to be open to anybody, musical or not.

GB: Yeah.

JH: David wrote that himself.

GB: Yeah. It changed. David, David changed and I think that's '72 was a turning point. And I think that's, you know, led to the demise of Teletopa when they went on that overseas tour. That David started to be concerned with, kind of, presentation, with you know making sure the, you know that there weren't any kind of, and this is within free improvisation I'm speaking about, that it would work, that it wouldn't fall flat on its face. And he wanted to ensure that even before, you know, the group had started improvising and I think Roger and Peter and certainly I would have found this too that to me it's the antithesis of the type of improvisation they're involved in. I mean you can't prescribe improvisation.

JH: Well the second phase of AZ in general seems to be the antithesis of the first in that it's not all inclusive and it's not opened and pieces are much more prescribed and ...

GB: They are, yeah.

JH: ... and in the program order.

GB: And there was a lot more of hiring of professional musicians, outsiders and that.

JH: And you don't have things going on like part of *The Great Learning* at the same time as Teletopa improvising and people throwing stuff at them from the audience.

GB: Yeah and also there was that, I suppose the most extreme instance of that notion of simultaneity was the concert that AZ did in the end of (oh when was it) the end of

1970, in December where the, and this was a sort of a culmination of the work that the people in the first of the WEA classes had been doing, so when it became formalised, you know, you got this influx of new people and yeah so this concert was largely, or the first half of it anyway, when I say half I mean you know prior to the intermission, was worked by these people. They overlapped. There was a timetable drawn up and the spaces within the gallery itself were kind of, where this composition or that composition would take place was determined according to Cage's score or variations for and dropping the, the little plastic transparencies on a ground plan of the - Do you know the score to that?

JH: No.

GB: Oh the actual, you were required to get a ground plan of the performance space and the score comes in, it's a plastic transparency of, there are nine dots and three small circles and you cut them out and you drop, you drop one of the circles on the page, on the ground plan and then you drop seven of the dots on the ground plan and you take the centre of the circle and you rule lines out from the centre of the circle through each of the dots and then beyond and the score simply says that your performance is to take place at, along any point along any of those lines. And that what you, what you perform is not determined at all. So I mean it can be used, you know to, the way it was to put on a concert of other peoples works. And that's what actually transpired. And the pieces were mostly verbal compositions, from memory. Not terribly brilliant but you know.

JH: Things that people on the course had written.

GB: Yeah, in that WEA class for the most part, yeah. Or, and there was other stuff too. I mean they, people like, there was a piece by Peter Evans and there was a very strange one by Ernie that, that they probably were doing 'cause I don't know that they were going to that class all the time. But the others like only went to that class because they'd enrolled in the WEA. So you had that type of thing which you never, you didn't get in that second phase of AZ at all, you know they were much more formal. Yeah formal concerts.

JH: OK, going back to probably right to the start when you first met David which we spoke about the first time we met, you said he was a fairly scary character, would you like to elaborate on that.

GB: Well he had a reputation. I'd - my interest in what I would deem to be contemporary music happened very quickly. It was out of nowhere I started to get this inclination and it was when I was in my second year of graphic design at East Sydney Tech. Now because the Cell Block Theatre's in the grounds of East Sydney Tech and that was the main venue for the, for ICM, for ICM concerts. So not infrequently that year you would get rehearsals going on during the day and so you know if I was at the college and it was lunch time you know you could go in and they might be rehearsing a piece by Nigel Butterly or Peter Sculthorpe. I remember once going in there and they were rehearsing a piece by David Bedford called *Music for Moonlight* and I looked at the score, it was sitting there on a chair, and it, from memory it was, it was a graphic, or it was a symbolic notation and I'd never seen anything like it. And I found it very confronting. And also the, you know even music



by Sculthorpe and Butterly I found to be very new sounding so I don't know if that was just a, sort of a, the catalyst for this sort of something bubbling inside me but I took it from there. And then, you know, through the following year I was listening to Stravinsky and Bartok and Honegger and people like that, Milhaud, not the Germans. And I knew of Cage and Stockhausen and I think I'd heard stuff by them as well, I can't quite remember but you know there was a sort of a burgeoning interest there. And I knew of Ahern and I knew that he was younger, he was only a few years older than me, so he's certainly younger than that generation of Meale, Butterly, Sculthorpe and that he was this new kid on the block who was, you know pretty dynamic without really having heard what he did I knew him by reputation. And he was overseas at the time. I remember seeing an article about him in, it might have been *The Bulletin* or something and yeah, and then that copy of Music Now came out. Do you remember what that - you know, the Now Musicale - was that from '69? Can you remember?

JH: Yes. Yes I think it is.

GB: Yeah, and I read that and it was on the music of Cardew and La Monte Young and you know I, it just totally kind of baffled me. But I sort of in my mind equated Ahern with the very new in music, the very extreme probably like post-Cagean currents of music.

JH: So nobody was really talking about La Monte Young or [Cage] at that point.

GB: No, no. Not at all. It was very conservative. You know, I mean the ISCM I think thought itself to be the kind of the champion of new music and it was such a conservative body. I mean I didn't realise it at the time but looking back you can see just how conservative it really was. No, no. No-one, no-one even knew about people like that let alone, I mean no-one even talked about Cage or Feldman or those people. But in my mind I, you know, I kind of established that David was, he was right up there, he had his finger on the pulse and the stuff he was involved in was extreme and it was the very newest, sort of activity, you know, in music going on in the world. But as I say without having heard anything about, anything by, without really knowing anything about his music just he had this reputation. People were talking about it and it was - I don't know how to express it but it was sort of like - this guy's dynamite.

JH: So how did you come to meet him the first time? Was that for the Laboratory?

GB: Yeah there was, bare in mind that I did my HSC, I ... I dropped out of high school and I'd studied graphic design for two years and I was getting very restless, I mean I wasn't, you know, I had no real desire to work in an advertising agency. I wasn't really that good as a designer. I don't think I would have been. I had a certain ability but it wasn't brilliant. And I just decided, like, that I wanted to be a composer. This happened in 1968. You know, as I say, it really came from nowhere. So, and I thought well there's only one place to study and that's Sydney University 'cause Peter Sculthorpe's there. So I decided that I, if I wanted to do that then I'd have to do my HSC. So I did. I did it at tech in one year and so I finished the end of '69 and I can't remember the kind of the, what order all this happens, but I would have applied probably then to do a B.Mus and I got accepted of course and so that was the

holidays, so November through to February, the term not starting 'til the end of February, beginning of March and at some point there in, it must have been in January that year here's this little ad in the paper "Ahern conducts free classes in experimental music". And I couldn't believe it. You know, like he was offering these classes and they were free. And the first, he called in the ad ... was called ... he referred to the class as the Laboratory of the Creative Ear and it was set down for the 5<sup>th</sup> of February. And, yeah, I went along. And I remember there was a lot of people there that first night. There must have been maybe fifty or more people in the class. It was just jam-packed and it was February, it was pretty warm from memory, pretty muggy. And the second week - there was even a nun in the group! In the second week there were about fifteen people. (Chuckle.) ... But the people from that first night, myself, Roger Frampton, Geoffrey Collins, Ernie Gallagher, Deidre Evans, Linda Wilson. Who else, Peter Kennedy who was at the time doing, working with film, and then went on to do kind of mixed media work, Ian Millis who was involved in concept art at the time, oh there were other people, there was even a chap who had, who'd been a couple of years ahead of me at Sydney High, Dick Perrem. Yeah. (Are you going to answer that or ...).

JH: No.

GB: So yeah that's when I first met David, but I mean I didn't really meet him then, I mean these, you know like, I was pretty young and the first class of course had that formal structure, you know, rows and rows of seats and David out the front talking for the best part of two hours. He talked about all sorts of things. He was talking about Satie, weighing sounds and I'm sure he talked about - I remember him early on whether it was the first week or not he talked about the Stockhausen compendium of verbal compositions *Aus den sieben tagen*. He would have talked about Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, about La Monte Young. He talked a lot about audition, listening, modes of listening, you know, aural perception.

JH: Did he relate those together the Stockhausen verbal pieces and some of the Cardew or rather the Scratch Orchestra's activities? 'Cause much of that was very verbal based.

GB: He was probably talking broadly about verbal composition. What, I mean, bare in mind that you know I didn't have much of a grounding even in music, I mean, at that point. The history of western music was just what I'd got from high school so, you know, I wasn't overly informed ... It wasn't as though I was any great shakes as a pianist. I wasn't. And all this was incredibly new and just it was hard like trying to even understand it. I mean a lot of it challenged your, sort of preconceptions of what music was. And what was coming about very quickly in my own mind was here is a music which challenged the, kind of, and this has stayed with me for over thirty years, the kind of, the notion of object formation in western music, in sort of so-called art music or whatever you want to call it. And David was talking about a music that went right against that grain into process, into environment, installation, whatever. Even out of the world of music altogether. And it was, I had a lot of trouble, I mean I didn't accept a lot of this at first. It took some time. It took some months. Because it just jarred with anything I thought of as music, I think, from memory. I don't know if I'm making myself clear or not.

JH: No I think it's quite clear. I mean David was really explaining several different aesthetics at once anyway, but obviously the general one would have been some sort of Cagean feeling of letting sounds be themselves or something like that, would that be ...?

GB: He didn't talk as much about Cage, of course there was a lot of acknowledgement of Cage but really he was, the two composers he was big on at the time were Cardew and Young. Perhaps because he'd more recently discovered them and he'd known about Cage for, you know, a bit longer and that. And he, kind of, I mean while he, while he had obviously been very impressed by Stockhausen I think he'd kind of moved on from that point. Going across to London and falling in with the, with Cardew and the scene around Cardew. You know, it was a step beyond, I think, whatever Stockhausen had had to offer. But he still had a lot of respect for Stockhausen's music and a lot of interest in it. David as a, David was talking about a lot of things though and what was coming through very early on was the issues of, sort of, what I just said that, you know like, really what is a composition and challenging this notion of the, like the through composed, you know, temporal object. Then, you know, in accordance with all that issues about even the identity of a piece, the notion of a piece in itself, the identity and then different types of notations and so that's where he would have been where he was talking about say verbal notation, he was talking about graphic notation even conceptual notation. All these ideas were flying around. I can't remember at what point but there was a, he'd very quickly he was, he was into things like improvisation rites and we would just bring stuff along and improvise, like stuff I mean, you know, objects or implements for making sounds with.

JH: And that was within the first class, or is that the Sunday Ensemble?

GB: No, no the Sunday Ensemble was much later. No this was in that first, and as I say that class at the Con went for twelve weeks and this would have been in the first, you know, like the third, the third or fourth week, we were doing that. I remember he, I remember his showing us the whistle part to the first paragraph of Cardew's *The Great Learning* or it was still then called *The Great Digest*? And I think we had a go at it, I think he ran off copies of the whistle solo, the graphic notation of that. I think. What else, what else? Then he very quickly introduced, and he had us, he had certain people, not me, because as I said I was still having a lot of trouble digesting a lot of this and even coming to terms with it but people started to bring in their own verbal compositions and he had this framework and it was obviously very influenced, I didn't realise it at the time but I'm aware of it now, it was very influenced by what Cardew had done with the Scratch Orchestra. Like Cardew had that category Scratch Music well David had, he had a catalogue, and it was, oh I can see the parallels between the catalogue and, yeah, some of the Scratch Music or related kind of activities. And he also had people write in Glees which, Glees were for the most part verbal compositions pertaining to the voice. And so people were writing those. Not me though, I didn't write anything. (Chuckle.) And then he was having them printed. Ernie Gallagher knew some old biddy up the north [side] up at Mt Colah who had some, she must have had some Roneoing equipment and Ernie would come in with these great piles of these compositions, for want of a better word, on this coloured paper that Mrs Cree.

JH: Oh, yes.

GB: Mrs Cree, yes, had had printed for him. Do you want me to just keep speaking freely or do you want to throw some more things at me?

JH: As long as you've got things to say, just keep talking.

GB: Just, I was just going to say, just to sort of flow on from the class when it was obliged to move and I'm not sure of the circumstances around why we moved from the Con except that, you know in the files upstairs there's that letter from Joseph [Post] granting David permission to run the class for twelve weeks and twelve weeks only and it was after that twelve weeks that he couldn't continue. Now someone told me, I don't know if it was Peter or Phillip, that at the time that the reason that we had to move from the Con was that the other, some of the other teachers, presumably teachers of, you know like, instruments there got wind that David was running this class and it was free and they couldn't deal with it. They were too threatened by that and so they put pressure on Post, you know, not to give David a, you know grant him an extension or another term [or something]. I don't know if that's true or not.

JH: Didn't you say at the same time though Sculthorpe was actually sending people down to David's Ear Cleaning classes? It says that in ...

GB: Yeah, I think that was later, see, cause, well where could we go? There was only one place we could go and that, we went to David's terrace in Woolloomooloo in Palmer Street which is not there anymore because of that expressway. And then the class became very informal because it was just like every Thursday night we would go, we were sort of going to this curious party. I mean there was a structure to it and it was still run like a class but it was in, you know, it was in someone's house. And so you didn't have the kind of the structured space for a start. It was a small terrace and there was like downstairs there was just like from memory there were the two rooms and then the sort of kitchen out the back. But by the time we went there - when would that have been? February, March, April - that would have been May probably. End of April, early May. We were already working towards the, the two concerts of American music that were as put on in July that year. And AZ Music was founded, I can't remember, I mean it would have been David and Phillip and Peter probably. But I remember David registered AZ Music as a business name. He had it there on the little slip of paper was, you know taped to the wall there in his terrace. So when we moved to the terrace we were actually for the most part, the evenings, was spent rehearsing. We were rehearsing, like this is what pieces the class as a group was going to play and that was like Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No 4* for twelve radios and twenty-four players. So there were twenty-four of us. And Terry Riley's *In C* for those who could play conventional instruments and there was maybe I think a dozen of us played that. And so yeah, we used to, we used to play those and then later on it became more informal so at eight o'clock, you know, like I'd been doing at the Con just go home and you'd start to get to know people and the, sort of those barriers would be broken down. And yeah we took it from there.

JH: And your impression of David during this period?

GB: He was, yeah he was full on. I mean he was passionate and he had a vision he was the sort of person that if he wanted to do something and he had to sort of trample over ten people to do it he would trample over those ten people. If he had to walk through a wall he would have done it, he was like that. He had incredible energy and incredible confidence. I mean there was a certain arrogance there, but he had a kind of, such a unique intellect, if you like and you know obviously wealths and wealths and wealths of talent. I still feel to this day that, you know, David's probably the most extraordinary musical person to have been born into this country. Not only as a composer, but he obviously had an incredible ability as a composer. He was just so willing to embrace things, not 'cause they were new but the new things that were really interesting and pertinent, he was, you know, he would embrace them unabashedly. He was not at all conservative in that regard. And always had that exploratory sort of mind. And he was obviously ... The curious thing, as I've told you, I don't know a lot about David as a teenager and the status that he'd acquired within the contemporary music establishment, but it seems to me the case that he had been nurtured by certain prominent people in the establishment. The fact that Joseph Post gave him those classes and, you know, yeah he could have them for free. He was close to people like Kenneth Tribe and I've got things from Sir Bernard Heinze that he wrote to David like, as though David was his son and such affection in the letters and they're not expansive letters. And I guess they thought well here's this young chap and he's got wealths and wealths of talent and look he's studying with Nigel and he's studying with Richard. And so he did that but then of course he went beyond that. It was I think Sir Bernard Heinze that, I'm not saying that Heinze was responsible for him getting the scholarship to go and study with Stockhausen, but it's the letter informing David of all that is signed by him. I can't remember which body it was that gave him that scholarship. But that had never happened before either. I mean it happens now, sure, people go overseas not to study with Stockhausen but to study with Mauricio Kagel or who's the Dutch chap? Louis Andriessen. People like that. It's not uncommon, but in those days it was very uncommon.

JH: But people from other countries, like England, I mean Kagel himself has studied with Stockhausen and then been Stockhausen's assistant as well hadn't he?

GB: Yeah, it's interesting. Did he study with Stockhausen? He was certainly the assistant.

JH: Well he was at Stockhausen's first Darmstadt I think.

GB: Yeah, yeah he was around.

JH: I'll strike this off the tape if it's wrong.

GB: (Chuckle.) He was around, yeah. It's interesting.

JH: So was David's intense ambition ... The impression that I get from Scratch Music and AZ Music and the thing which seems similar, the idea of it being all-encompassing, the first, the course that David did anybody was welcome whether or not they had any musical talent, they basically just had to be interested. And the same could be said of the Scratch Orchestra. But if he was very ambitious did you get the feeling that he was doing this for him or he was doing it for other people?

GB: He was doing it for music I think. For art. The thing you have to remember, and David did change a bit over this, you know from what he was like in say February of 1970 to what he was like in say February of 1972. There were changes and then, you know in August/September that year when they were overseas, ended in disaster. David, when he started up this class was actually working in some menial job at the GPO during the day, sort of carting mailbags around. Now I did that job in 1987 and it was the most poorly paid job I've ever had. It really did not pay very well being a postal officer. And that, what I was doing in '87, I'm assuming that's what David was doing at the end of 1969 beginning of 1970. You know, and he had the terrace at Woolloomooloo. I mean I was living with my parents, a lot of us were, we were young, you know, but he was renting a terrace and that. He did not ask for payment from people. You know, the stipulation was that the classes were to be free. And when he was obliged to move from the Con, rather than, if what I said before was true, that the teachers sort of jacked up, rather than say "Well alright maybe I'll charge ..." he moved on and went to his own house and held the classes there so that the classes could continue to be free.

JH: Which is quite outstanding when you consider, as both you and Phillip Ryan have pointed out, that he, he was introducing music to, to Australia that nobody else had introduced and repertoire that nobody else had introduced.

GB: That's right. Obviously there was a time when he felt the pinch because ... we were rehearsing for the American music concerts and then we did those. AZ Music had become formalised at that stage, it had registered as a business name etc etc. We'd put on our first AZ concert, it was the second concert by AZ but the first one was that twenty-four hour one which was kind of like done by AZ Music before AZ Music actually had existed so it was retrospectively an AZ concert. After the American music concerts then here he is still working with this Cardewian type Scratch type body of, you know, trained/untrained people, musicians. So we were going to do two paragraphs of *The Great Learning* so then we continued on at the terrace. - the Woolloomooloo terrace - working towards that which was another ten, ten or so weeks away. It was after that concert, and that was in September of 1970, at the Congregational Church in Pitt Street, David said to us, I think it was a Sunday night that concert was on, "Next week, next Thursday we all meet at the Boilermaker's Hall in Castlereagh Street". And I remember fronting up that Thursday (the Boilermaker's Hall was just an old union space down in Castlereagh Street, it's not there any more) and here's this new batch of people all sitting there, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and David comes in and gets out this roll and calls these names out and, you know, ticks each name off as its, you know as they say "Yes, here".

JH: And this is the WEA course?

GB: And then I found out this class was now actually being run as a formal WEA class. There was this new ... It was going to go for a term and these people had enrolled, had paid money to WEA to attend and of course we all continued to come along, regardless. I still wasn't that close to David at that point so it wasn't like I was fraternising with him all the time so I wouldn't have been privy to the sort of whys and wherefores of, you know of this. But I guess David just reached a point where he thought well I really should make some money out of this. But rather than turn to us

and say you're going to have to pay from now on he started something off anew. For us it was just a continuation of the class as it always had been, but for these other people, you know, they paid, you know they did it.

JH: So these people joined in on the concerts? The AZ concerts?

GB: Yeah, as I say the, that December one, cause that was the next one after the Cardew concerts, that was the, it was kind of like their, their graduation in a sense. The concert was largely verbal compositions by these people, by these new people. Though as I say there was a piece by Peter, there was a piece by Ernie, a piece by Ian Millis, but then there were other pieces by other people. Now, I just want to say two things that I sort of broke off from. The Ear Cleaning sessions I believe that Peter Sculthorpe declared those or suggested that his students attend those. From memory two people came to the course when it was being held at the, at David's terrace. And this was after July and they were Greg Schiemer and who would have then been in his second year of B. Mus and Kim Williams who's now, sort of, Murdoch's head boy at Fox Studios and Kim had been (he was first year B. Mus with me and Ernie) Kim had been, or was a private student of Peter's, a composition student. That's probably when it was announced, it wasn't announced straight away, like before the classes started up but the classes had been underway for some time. I'm just assuming that because you know, Greg and Kim came along together one night. Kim had a lot of trouble I think initially. I think he found a lot of the ideas very confronting, 'cause I mean he was a private student of Peter Sculthorpe's. Cornelius Cardew at that time was hardly writing the sort of music that Peter Sculthorpe was. But Greg really, Greg stayed, Greg stayed right through for the next, you know like for the next two years and was very active in AZ especially sort of through 1972.

The other thing I was saying a moment ago but broke off from was that just in the way that I felt that the establishment nurtured David, I don't think they were prepared for what he ultimately, sort of, got into. The terrain that he got into and you know obviously he'd reached a point where it got too hot for them, that they couldn't deal with it at all.

JH: This is a point that I wanted to raise when we were talking about his character and the fact that he was doing a lot of this for free and putting a lot of time into a lot of people who weren't necessarily professional musicians themselves. It must have been very hard for him to get bad feedback from both the institutions and audiences and of course the newspaper critics.

GB: Yeah he got nothing but hostility from the critics especially Fred Blanks and Romola Constantino. They're just total imbeciles these people. They hated the music. They made no attempt to understand it. Some of the, if you read some of the things the critics have said, it's just absolutely garbage. Like one of the critics wrote about Terry Riley's piece *In C* that endless variations on *Three Blind Mice* were played. Well anyone with an ear for music would know that that's not true 'cause ... *Three Blind Mice* is an extended type of melody, I mean it's sort of, there's a sort of fragmentation there but ...

JH: It's really more an uneducated misunderstanding or complete non-understanding ...

GB: Yeah.

JH: Presumably of the music and that fits in with what you were saying earlier that Australian music scene in '68 and '69 before AZ came along was very conservative.

GB: Yeah, I think it thought it wasn't, because they were playing the latest piece by ... or something but you know. There's that residue, a point that Greg Schiemer brings out in the article he wrote for an issue of *NMA* No 7, that the ICSM and contemporary music generally was, sort of, saturated with the residue of, you know, English neo-romanticism. I mean Professor Donald Pert was president of the ICSM and he'd been a student of Ralph Vaughn Williams, I mean they're the sentiments. I hardly see Delius as kind of a champion of new music in 1970. And I don't know what it's like now. And it's interesting that the person, one of the composers that you know that David, sort of embraced and actually challenged this was an Englishman, Cornelius Cardew.

JH: I also find it very interesting that ... I would love to know who said you need to go and study with Stockhausen, because really reading about Stockhausen in the sixties, the impression that I get is that he probably of, you know whether you liked Stockhausen or not and the music he was writing, he probably was the most all-encompassing of the big composers who David could have studied with and no-one said "Go and study with Boulez".

GB: No.

JH: And I sort of get the feeling 'cause there's obviously, you know Stockhausen had tried some aleatory processes, he had communicated off and on, and on various levels of friendliness with Cage and had a good ongoing relationship with people like Boulez and I wonder whether Stockhausen himself might have suggested then that David went on to visit Cornelius.

GB: Possibly, it's hard to know. I certainly don't know. I really, I don't know.

JH: He was obviously also open to what David did when he came back here, however much it was influenced by Scratch Orchestra because he still invited David back and ...

GB: Yeah, well David was ... David ... I know David was sort of angling for some job as an assistant to Stockhausen. I just ... no it's ... no it's not ... I'm not sure. I'd have to go through all those letters. You'd probably have a better idea at this point in time ...

JH: Well it sounds like ...

GB: ... than I would have from those things you scanned last week.

JH: ... sounds more like, from what Rolf said that it was a bit of a strained relationship or it was a one way relationship in the early seventies.



GB: Well you know like you have to understand that there would have been problems I think with Stockhausen's personality like the way he saw himself, you know like virtually demanded that people call him Maestro. David told me that you know Rolf Gehlhaar and Johannes just reached a point where they couldn't stomach Stockhausen anymore, this kind of despot, sort of cosmic despot, and that's why they left the group. And I think there's one letter that Rolf wrote to David, he said something, made some reference to, you know, "I remember how Stockhausen shat on you" (chuckle).

JH: I think the exact phrase is "Shit on your head".

GB & JH: (Chuckle).

GB: So, I don't know. I don't know, I mean David's not around now. I didn't have these letters when he was alive. I only got them 'cause he's dead so ... And I never really talked to David much about Stockhausen, I guess 'cause I was never very interested in Stockhausen. Yeah, I mean there's so many things I could ask him now, that I've kind of come across in the letters. You know, David in one of the letters, or in something it might have been a draft for a letter, I can't remember, saying that La Monte Young had approached him to join the Theatre of Eternal Music.

JH: Oh that's right.

GB: You know, well, I don't know, did he? Or didn't he? And when? You know like, I don't know. (Chuckle.)

JH: Well what would have been very interesting, it would have been interesting to see what David brought back to AZ had he done that.

GB: But that might have been, oh I don't know. I'm not sure, I better not say anything more. The other thing is that David claims to have played with AMM and Musica Electronica Viva in 1969. I mentioned this to Keith Rowe last year and Keith barely knew the name, David Ahern. You'd think if David had played in the group then Keith would remember him "Oh yeah, the young chap from Australia who played with us". Keith thought maybe he played in the, a piece by Eddie Provost, I think it's called *Silver Spiral* and that was on that, a piece on that concert at the Roundhouse and David played violin in the La Monte Young *Trio for Strings* with Cardew. And Keith thinks maybe he played in the piece by Eddie Provost. But, I don't know, David says "Oh no, played with AMM". And Greg Schiemer claims that David told Greg what the initials AMM stand for, but that's a secret. That is a secret.

JH: And he didn't tell you what the version was?

GB: No Greg, if you speak to Greg Schiemer he'll tell you what David said. I don't know what it is. Greg, he claims that, you know, David said "Oh the AMM stands for [you know, blah, blah, blah]" whatever it was. (Chuckle.) But Keith told me that there is a meaning but they can also fit other meanings to those initials. Like the cellist Rohan Disarum who's in the Adidi Quartet, plays with AMM sometimes. And Keith said when Rohan plays with the group he says, this is Disarum says "Oh yeah, I know what these initials stand for, they stand for 'Ain't Much Money'".

GB & JH: (Chuckle.)

GB: 'Cause he's a professional cellist and AMM doesn't seem to, you know, get as, the members don't, aren't as well paid as he is when he's playing with the Adidi quartet.

JH: Probably depends on whether that particular week they're Leninist or Marxist or Marxist-Leninist or Maoist.

GB: (Chuckle.) I don't know Keith claimed he knew nothing of it. He knew nothing of David playing with AMM. But no David said in one of those drafts "I've played with AMM and Musica Electronica Viva". You know, he could have been, David could have been exaggerating shall we say, I mean I don't know who these letters were supposed to go to. You know, it would have looked good. I mean he had been involved obviously with the coming into being of the Scratch Orchestra.

JH: And he was getting plenty of letters from Cardew on AMM notehead so it would have, there would probably have been friends in England who would have nodded happily had they been asked for a reference ...

GB: Yeah sure, yeah.

JH: Going back to early AZ, do you want to say something in the formation of Teletopa?

GB: I don't know about the formation of Teletopa, see because that was in 1970 and bear in mind that like AZ Music was still like, there was the core, the core members of AZ, who just came along to the classes. And then there was the inner sanctum and that was like David, Peter Evans, and Phillip L. Ryan and Linda Wilson. Now Linda was living with David, 'cause when the posters were drawn up, those little posters for the Laboratory of the Creative Ear, Peter (as I say it was a small terrace but it was two bedrooms upstairs) and Peter had the other room. And at some point early in that year, 1970, he moved out and Linda Wilson, she was doing a Diploma of Music Education, so that was the structure, that was you did your three days at the Conservatorium, your three music days and you did two, the other two days of the week at Alexander Mackie College which is now the campus for the College of Fine Arts down near the Barracks there. And, like she came from Cheltenham, near Beecroft and she moved into the terrace. And 'cause it was, you know, wouldn't have taken Ahern long to put the hard word on her. But I didn't realise all this, I must have been a bit slow on the uptake. So you had that little inner sanctum and of course then Roger Frampton established a friendship with David very quickly on the strength of his musicianship. Whereas you know people like Ernie, and myself and Geoff Collins, well Geoffrey was only fifteen, we just came along to the class, the class and then the terrace. We might have hung around a bit, maybe not Geoffrey, he was a bit young. I certainly used to hang around after the eight o'clock time at the terrace but you know, there was still a certain formality there. But as I say the others had this kind of like a - a high degree of social interaction. Peter had been, had known David at high school and they played in the school orchestra together and Phillip knew David initially, like established a friendship with him back in I think about 1968. I

don't know if Phillip was working at the ABC and there was some, I think Phillip met David through Richard Meale. I'm not really sure, you'll have to ask him that. So there was a lot of fraternisation with these people, and also at the end of that year what I used to do was, like when exam time came around I would just kind of go away for three or four weeks and lock myself away until all the exams were over. And so there was a period of some weeks where I, you know, I wasn't, I wasn't going to the classes ... Actually given that it had that term structure there must have been a point then when like the WEA term was over and then there would have been a kind of recess because from memory, if that class started in sort of late, the end of September, beginning of October, October, November, would have gone through 'til just before Christmas probably. Probably a recess over the Christmas holidays, then the new term started up in about March. Anyway in the interim, this is like in, I think around October Teletopa was formed. I just was told "Oh David's got a, you know, David's formed an improvisation group" and of course Peter and Roger were the other two members. And of course at that stage too the gallery had opened up in Woolloomooloo, not very far from where Dave was living, called Inhibodres and it was kind of the, the stable for post-object art in Sydney. And it was, kind of, it was run co-operatively whatever that means but I know that Teletopa were members. And there was a minimal fee paid each week. If you wanted to find out more about Inhibodres you could track down Mike Parr or Tim Johnson and ask them. I don't know, I don't know if you want to do that. The point being is that this gallery had started, there was a space, and every Monday night Teletopa used to go to Inhibodres and they would play. There'd be no-one there of course, but they would just play - improvise. And this continued, this continued on all through 1971 into '72.

JH: And were you a part of it?

GB: Not then, no, not then. I just was told probably Linda or someone said "Oh, you know, David's got an improvisation group being formed". All I know, it was formed in the spring of 1970, as I say I think because of my exams I wasn't around much and ...

JH: He put out fairly glossy leaflets to advertise it ...

GB: Yeah, yeah. I remember very, not so very long after Teletopa was formed they had a, a little booklet published. There was a photographer (what was his name - Robert Walker? I can't remember) he, I remember he came along, well I remember, I wasn't there, but he came along to Inhibodres one night and took a lot of photos of the group and individually, you know ... He might have actually been involved in the printing of that as well, again I'm not sure, 'cause I wasn't around. But that's, yeah, that's when it formed.

JH: So at which point did you get involved?

GB: About August, September of 1971. The group was this. There was the three core members plus initially Linda Wilson though she was never granted, sort of, official status. She was like a guest member. David had this kind of, you know, mode of hierarchical thinking, that, that the three core members were David, Roger and Peter. Then there was Linda for a time and then of course she disappeared from the scene because of David's involvement with Deidre, which I won't go into right

now. Then Phillip Ryan was with the group, certainly in April, May of 1971 but he mustn't have been ... Teletopa played, the first time Teletopa performed was at that riot, you know, at the Proms ... when the group played simultaneously with the, you know, performance of the Cardew, *The Great Learning*.

JH: It must have been very exciting.

GB: (Chuckle.)

JH: I mean as a performer and a ... you must have realised by then that what you, that what you were doing was very radical.

GB: Yeah I, I was getting very interested in improvisation very quickly. In spite of the fact I was a complete and utter hack. But because of the crude technology we had, I mean, you know, you can put a contact microphone on anything and you can turn it up to about 90 decibels so you can use anything you like. It's just an instrument, instant electronic instrument. Just the simplest contact microphones appealed to me. With, I was going to say, with that first performance at the Proms, that Linda played in that but then when Teletopa played in March the following year it was just the three of them. And then they played again in May and Phillip was in the group. Now, Peter was a computer programmer and the company he worked for wanted him to go to Calgary in Canada, in Alberta, for a year, which he did. So I was called up to replace Peter in the group. And so there was a period of a few weeks before Peter left where the four of us were playing at Inhibodres and then I displaced Peter in the group ... There were three of us and then in, I think about April - March, April of '72, Geoffrey Collins joined the group. And when they went overseas in August of '72 David, Roger and Geoffrey went away and then Peter came across 'cause his year was up, he came across to England from, from Canada and then there were the four of them. And that's where the group, sort of, died. But, yeah, just getting back to what you said a moment ago I, by that, by 19-, by the end of 1971 I didn't care about anything any more apart from, I mean I cared about a lot of things but, musically I was just interested in group improvisation. That's all I really cared about. I wasn't interested in composition. I wasn't interested in performing pieces. I was just interested in the group and I probably would have stayed on if the fallings out that occurred hadn't occurred when they occurred.

JH: There were a lot of them in '72. You've got to tell the story about Cardew in the pub.

GB: Yeah well when, when they came back

## **CD TWO**

GB: They'd come back from overseas. I met him in the city one day and he was just adamant that he would never go near David again. And he virtually didn't, I know that he did see David on occasions, but really he virtually didn't go near David again. I don't remember Phillip, er Phillip, Peter sorry ever going near, visiting David at the house in Rozelle. Though wait a minute there was - in early '73 I think Peter was still

around. David and Deidre were living in a terrace in Darlinghurst up near East Sydney Tech at that stage. He lived there for a year before he bought the place at Rozelle. Anyway, Peter didn't say much but I, to this day don't really know what, you know what upset Peter so much but, it's probably more than the fact that David when they were overseas was trying to kind of prescribe the way the improvisation should flow. I know that Peter and Roger objected to that strongly and I know I would have as well if I'd been there. It may have been more, I really don't know. Peter's the sort of person that once he's dark on someone that's it, he's just dark on them for the rest of his life. He admitted this to me only recently and he felt it was something in him that he should try to change, but seems that he's like that. Anyway Roger told me, that, well he sort of confirmed that or maybe Roger was the one who told me that David was trying to prescribe the flow of the improvisation. In fact there is a review in a copy of, I think it's *Music and Musicians* by Gavin Briars on a Teletopa performance where, well I've recounted it in that AZ article I wrote anyway, it's there, but I couldn't quote it off the top of my head.

JH: There's a comment as well in one of the letters that I was looking at the other day about the style of performance when they were in England and saying that it was quite, it felt quite constricted ...

GB: I might have been - was it from Victor Schonfield?

JH: Yes, that's it.

GB: And he, 'cause he comments on Briars and I think the Briars' review upset David or something. But Briars uses words like sort of you know hierarchical and implies in the review that David was, I don't know, trying to control ... I can't remember the actual ...

JH: It really is very interesting though how there's so many parallels between that and then what happens to AZ about six months after.

GB: Yeah, it went off on a new tack, I mean David, you know in 1969 David came back to Australia with sort of Cornelius Cardew and La Monte Young under his belt and at the end of '72 he came back to Australia with Steve Reich under his belt. And that was the new focus. So it was, I mean not a conservative music but a far more structured music and a music that wasn't improvisatory at all and required highly disciplined instrumentalists.

JH: So the Scratch aesthetic just wasn't there anymore?

GB: No. Well what David told me before he went away, and they went away in August '72, was that, because it was hard to know, you know like AZ came out of the class, you know the original class and was, you know continued to be fed by membership of people in the two WEA classes. When the second of those WEA classes folded, like the term grinded to a halt, which was March, April, May, say middle of 1971 then there were [a] few survivors from that class continued as the Sunday Ensemble. They were called the Sunday Ensemble because once that second WEA term finished David didn't start up a third one, but the people who were interested, that is members of that WEA class, Robert Irving was one and there were

some other people and then other people who were still regularly attending like Ernie and Greg Schiemer and of course Deidre 'cause she was living with David. They kicked on at the gallery on Sunday evenings, hence the name the Sunday Ensemble. And they continued there for maybe a year. Yeah, really up to the point of the Teletopa departure so AZ music was kind of like essentially for that final year, for mid '71 - mid '72 a concert organising body and the Sunday Ensemble was a, a performance group, like a mini Scratch Orchestra almost. None of the people in the Sunday Ensemble were kind of you know fluent instrumentalists. And then you had Teletopa. And then I guess, I guess, it was changing anyway. I don't want to say too much because I want to get on to this other stuff. So, but anyway, David told me just before they went away that on their return Teletopa, he wanted to expand Teletopa so that it became a flexible performing body. There was going to be the sort of hard core, which functioned as an improvisation group but then it could expand to include other people and it would be, you know they might play music by whoever and Teletopa would be just the, would be a flexible performing ensemble. But of course that never saw the light of day 'cause of whatever happened overseas. And I was interested in that idea. And then of course there's the time when David and Roger were in the pub with Cardew in London I presume and you know that was a year, yeah a year down the track following on from Cardew's conversion to Maoism, sort of fairly hard line approach to music making. He was, Cardew that is, was obviously, had been sort of waffling on about, you know the oppressed people of the world and David kind of spat the dummy and started carrying on about "Who's oppressed?" you know talking about people being oppressed "Who's oppressed?" and "I'm not oppressed" and "Are you oppressed Roger?" This was in front of Cardew and of course Roger said "Yes David, I'm oppressed". He said "Well who are you oppressed by the?" and he said "Well I'm oppressed by you David, that's who". That was the kind of tenor of their friendship/relationship, whatever at that point. So yeah, on the return to Australia the old group just, you know, it virtually kind of died.

JH: So the new AZ then, you're talking about professional performers and also an influx of new people to the group and they presumably had quite good, quite good audiences and such to be able to afford that. So did that mean that they actually got some better reviews?

GB: Yeah, I guess so. My association with David over those years was largely social, I mean there were concerts that AZ put on that I didn't go to and I didn't sort of look at the reviews anyway but I imagine that yeah there would have been a more polished sound in that sort of conventional sense - polished.

JH: Do you think, I mean David obviously, he'd been very much the golden boy when he was younger and very much nurtured by the Australian musical institution and then straight to being the enfant terrible in 1971 and [7]2, do you think that he was trying to buy himself back into favour or ... did he work that way.

GB: I'm not sure, I think David was a very complex man. He had a lot of emotional problems all along the way that became clearer after '76 when he really started drinking heavily. But he had lots of ideals I think. That's why I said before that I felt that he was probably the greatest (I don't know how I expressed myself but) I didn't say composer I said sort of musical - Can you remember what expression I used? There was sort of the most talented or whatever of sort of person musically that's been

born into this country. And you know he was quite a competent violinist. And he wrote. I mean he was a critic, he wrote theoretical articles, he taught, and then of course he got into conducting as well. So yeah, I'm not really sure, but he obviously had, you know obviously had a lot of ideals and he was pursuing those right up to the sort of time when you know the bottle got the better of him.

JH: And mixing with people from all ends of the establishment.

GB: Well, David bought the house in Rozelle in 1974 and I remember through '74 and '75 especially he, cause David was very social, he was very gregarious person, he was very generous in spirit, he was a very generous person. And he not infrequently had Sunday afternoon barbecues and people like Peter Sculthorpe would be invited. But I remember going to one and ... was there who was the conductor of the SSO at the time, so you know, yeah they were the people he was sort of ...

JH: Then there's people like Geoffrey Barnard and Ernie Gallagher ...

GB: (Chuckle.) Oh yeah I was always ...

JH: [Turning up just to tone it down]

GB: ... I was always invited. We always remained friends.

JH: Are there any - we've got a couple of minutes of tape left - are there any special moments that we need to remember?

GB: Special moments?

JH: That ought to go on the record?

GB: there might be two minutes of thinking here.

JH & GB: (Chuckle.)

GB: I, I'll always remember as I said a moment ago, I'll always remember David's generosity. And his kind of, his friendship and that ... They're the things I remember. (Sigh.) I can't say any more. It's too much [ ].

JH: No.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH NIGEL BUTTERLY

Nigel Butterly: This is the only thing apart from that book which I've forgotten about. Anyway this was the program of the Australian first performance of the Cage which David Ahern organised. As you see it's got a piece of his on the same program.

James Humberstone: Yes.

NB: And there's a review of us by Fred Blanks.

JH: Fred loved David's work, didn't he?

NB: (Chuckle.) You being ... yeah.

JH: (Chuckle.)

NB: You didn't hear my piece last year did you - *The Spell of Creation*?

JH: No.

NB: No well. That got a very good review from Peter MacCallum and it, more importantly, it had a terrific response from the audience. And a lot of people were moved by it and so forth. Fred Blanks said "Nigel..." no, "paint the world, paint the universe grey, that is Nigel Butterly's attitude" or something. It's so pathetic. I wish.

JH: It's like an ongoing battle.

NB: If you talk to people after a concert and people just say what's in their head, just ordinary people, you get much more value and often very perceptive comments, much more than you ever get from a critic who has to write things that are printed. I'm doing a lot of work on Liszt at the moment and he used to have a dreadful time with critics. It was interesting that Hanslick, who was so awful, actually admired Liszt tremendously as a pianist. And he and Liszt got on quite well when they met socially and yet he'd say all these dreadful things about Liszt. And Heine who had been a friend of Liszt in Paris when they were all new after the revolution and everything, all this new revolution and everything was going on and Heine and Liszt were friendly and Liszt ... Heine as perfect, but Heine said dreadful things about Liszt. Really bitter, and so many people turned against him. And the amazing thing about him was that he went on performing their music, conducting it, performing it, setting their poetry, even though they were so dreadful. Clara Schumann was awful, and yet he performed premieres of Schumann's music and they didn't even acknowledge it. Oh she just complained about something or other but didn't thank him for putting it on or anything. And he sent the Sonata in B minor which he dedicated to Schumann. And she couldn't stand it and thought it was a dreadful monstrous thing and wouldn't play it or anything. Schumann was in, just about in the asylum by then.

JH: Was that people with their own ... their own agendas?

NB: Who the Schumanns?



JH: Well no, no, no. I mean if people are being friends with, but criticising at the same time.

NB: Yes, yes. Oh yes. Well by this time the Schumanns weren't all that friendly but it was just that Liszt had such an idealistic view of music as a God-given gift, that if something was great and if he believed in something, he would perform it, no matter how dreadful the perpetrator of the music was. And of course the ultimate of that is Wagner who's unbelievably awful.

JH: Back to Fred Blanks.

NB: Yes, there are some copies here, you can have one of those if you want it.

JH: I've been looking up a lot of reviews actually.

NB: Yes. So is your Masters in composition or in ...?

JH: Yes.

NB: ... arts.

JH: This thesis is a small part of it.

NB: Yes.

JH: A very small part of it but it's turned into a huge project.

NB: But you could make it musicology if you wanted to.

JH: I could. I could, you know, several people in the department have already asked if I want to turn it into a PhD.

NB: Yes.

JH: We'll see. At the moment, to be quite honest I want to do this round of interviews, and I've, sort of, got a fairly good, sort of, historical account of everything that David did. And I've also been in touch with Geoffrey Barnard who inherited his estate and so I have copies of letters from people like Stockhausen and Cornelius Cardew and Rolf Gehlhaar, Kagel, you know so there's lots of interesting, sort of, stuff that's come out of that, that I've been scanning.

NB: So you've spoken to Moya, have you, Moya Henderson? Because mentioning Kagel, of course, she was a student of his and I know that ... I don't know how well she knew David Ahern but I remember I said something slightly disparaging about him one day and she, sort of, rose to his defence. So she would be worth talking to. But she lives at Avalon. But of course at the moment she's completely obsessed by all the problems with her opera. Apparently, but I haven't spoken to her for quite a while. Anyway she might like a diversion from her opera and talk about what she remembered of David.

JH: OK. That would be good. Do you know when she knew him?

NB: Oh in the latter part of his life.

JH: That's good. 'Cause that's where I'm short of people. Because he basically was mainly making a nuisance of himself. There aren't very many people who, you know, sort of, will say yes I've got things to tell about after about 1976.

NB: Have you spoken to Maria Prerauer?

JH: No.

NB: I presume she's still around.

JH: I've read a few reviews that she wrote.

NB: Well I remember (do you want to start recording)?

JH: It's going.

NB: It's going. Good. I remember there was an ABC late night program, like what today's Late Night Live with Phillip Adams and they ... it was a live program. And there was discussion about music, of course music hardly ever gets into these general programs but on this occasion it did and William Mann. Do you know of William Mann?

JH: I don't quite know ...

NB: The critic. Yes. He was out in Australia and he and David Ahern and I and Maria Prerauer were in this discussion. Presumably it was about modern music or something, I can't remember what we talked about. But I remember that William Mann was very pompous. And he called, on air, he called Maria, My Dear and she said "I am not your dear". (Chuckle.) It was wonderful. And anyway we'd all started the program, of course David hadn't arrived, and suddenly David came in clutching a can of beer and yeah it was rather useless and yeah. So that may have been the last time I saw him. I really only knew him at the beginning, then of course when he organised for me to play the Cage. That was great because he knew that I'd done some of it, because Richard Meale, You know Richard Meale and I both worked in the ABC with John Hopkins in the sixties and early seventies, well no Richard had left by the early seventies. But in the Sixties. And David Ahern became John Hopkins' white-haired boy. And anyway it was, yeah it was in '73 that David organised that, so I think he knew that I had played some of them 'cause Richard had a photocopy of the first five and I had done the first five at some contemporary music concert. And so David said "Would you like to do the whole lot?" And so I don't know whether he had the music or I got the music or what, but anyway I've done it about twenty times since then. So that's one thing that I feel very happy about in, with David Ahern, that he initiated this performance which got a good reception. It was in the Cell Block Theatre where he did a lot of things, didn't he?

JH: Yes.

NB: Yes. And, have you been there?

JH: No.

NB: No. You should go and have a look. Yes. 'Cause there's Alan Walker biographer of Liszt talks about how important it is for a biographer to actually go to the places where these things happened. And you know the way he describes the monastery outside Rome where Liszt lived. He's actually been in the room where Liszt was and seen the view that Liszt saw when he was writing *St Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds*. It makes such a difference, he's very strong on that, because so many biographies of Liszt have just repeated what ... the misinformation that previous people have said. It's very interesting indeed. Anyway, the performance in the Cell Block Theatre is an ideal setting for it and I remember Patrick White was there, he was very enthusiastic about it. And then after that I've done it on lots of occasions, including with people, the audience sitting on the floor and incense and probably pot and all that sort of thing. And I've done that sort of all over Australia. And I hope to go to do it for the Cage Centenary in 2012. 'Cause I'll be seventy-seven and they'll think "Well who's this funny old thing they're dragging out?" And I think even though other people will play it better, at least I can say I did the first performance.

JH: Well I was going to say, I don't know after twenty times, is there anyone who can play it better?

NB: Well I don't know of anyone else who plays it except that there was one girl who did it for the HSC. And she came to me about preparing the piano. Of course for the HSC she could only play two pieces or something but she came to me about how to prepare the piano and all that sort of thing. And she was terribly enthusiastic about it. But imagine going to all the trouble, two hours to prepare the piano for a couple of minutes.

JH: ... It's the same with their compositions they have to keep a diary over several months to produce a three minute piece of music.

NB: Oh, the HSC compositions, yes that's right.

JH: ...

NB: But I, this business of analysing your own music I don't understand that.

JH: ...

NB: It's for other people to do.

JH: ... caught up with about twenty years ago, hasn't it?

NB: Oh.

JH: If you see what I mean. I think when I went through university that was of course very important. In fact more important than the music itself.

NB: Oh, but do you think it's not considered so important now?

JH: ... I think over here it's not considered important now no. I think it's institutions in Europe that still consider ...

NB: Still? Well depends what your music, what sort of music it is I suppose. I mean I wouldn't want to analyse my music. Other people can get PhDs doing that.

JH: ...very wisely said "It's more important what the audience thinks, than the critic". But I think a lot of composers wouldn't necessarily realise that. Most of them would be much more worried about what the critic would think. I can remember my piece at Exeter which is where I went to university that got the biggest round of applause, a standing ovation and three curtain calls, got me the lowest mark.

NB: (Chuckle.) That'd be right.

JH: ... too popular.

NB: Yes.

JH: ...

NB: So I hope you went on along those lines.

JH: Absolutely.

NB: Yes. Right. Anyway do you want me to start from where I first knew David.

JH: Yes that would be great.

NB: I'll make a cup of tea in a while - if you drink tea.

I think he was still at school when he first came to me, I think he was at school, if not I don't know what he was doing but I don't know why he came to me. I can't remember who would have suggested that he come to me but I was working in the ABC of course. And that was probably where he first came to see me and I had never taught composition and I didn't know how to teach composition. I still don't but I just chat to people and or they chat to me which is more important. I remember my piano teacher had moved to new rooms in Clarence Street behind the Town Hall because where he had taught before had been pulled down and I asked him if I (I wasn't studying with him anymore but I was friendly with him) and I asked if I could borrow his studio, 'cause I didn't want ... I couldn't sort of give a lesson to someone at the ABC. And so I remember one particular occasion, I don't think it happened more than two or three times but David came with very elementary sort of stuff, and he obviously didn't have much idea, I don't think he'd much training in harmony or anything like that. And I'm not sure if I knew quite what to do with what he gave me. And I, in hindsight I think it was more appropriate that he should have gone to

Richard because Richard was more able to steer him in the direction that he wanted to go. Probably I would have been thinking more on the lines of a good basis in traditional musical techniques whereas, I don't know, I think Richard would have been concerned with that too probably. But certainly I don't know whether we had three or four lessons and not many more than that I think and then suddenly he disappeared to Richard. And I was slightly put out at the time I think, but I feel it was much better that he should go to Richard. And then he wrote an orchestral piece the *After Mallarmé*, and I know it was generally said that Richard helped quite a lot with that and that there were always rumours about things but there was the implication that it was more Richard's than David's. But, and there was another piece he wrote - *Music For Nine* - yeah. And I was going to play piano in that and I think I was playing something else in the same concert. 'Cause in those days there were only a few people who were interested in playing new music. Whereas today, sort of, everyone does it. And people with terrific techniques, like Michael Harvey, now do that sort of thing, but in those days there were only a few people interested. And I think Ian Farr played it in the end and I think he's in the recording. Yes. Ian is another person you could write to, rather than speaking to him, 'cause he's in Adelaide. Have you spoken to him? No. The more you go on the more people you could get.

JH: ...

NB: But Ian Farr was working in the ABC at that time too and he was writing quite Wabern-ish sort of music himself. Very intellectual sort of approach to music which is completely different from the way he went after that. But I know he played that piece 'cause I think I looked at it and I didn't particularly, wasn't particularly interested in it and I was doing something else on the same program and so in the end I didn't play in it. That was after *After Mallarmé* wasn't it?

JH: Yes.

NB: Yes.

JH: And then *Ned Kelly Music*.

NB: But anyway I remember one event when, well not an event, but one occasion, when at this studio in town David and I were having a lesson, and oh the reason I remember it is that I had to go to the Great Hall of Sydney University for a recording or something to do with a recording of *The Shepherd's Calendar* by Peter Maxwell Davis, which had been commissioned by [not] Sydney University but Professor Peart. I know I was late or something or other, I was late because I'd been giving David a lesson or something and I don't think I got into great trouble or anything but I remember being late and I remember sort of being slightly confused but that's not of any significance. But I do remember, I think, talking to David about that music or something. But anyway, it's, I've only got vague memories of this because there was nothing much to have any memory of. I also remember an occasion where he came up, so I must have chatted to him a fair bit, I suppose. But he came up to Beecroft where I lived, with my family, and he came up to dinner. I remember my mother thought he was a bit strange, which he was. And we must have been chatting quite a lot because we went down to get the train and we missed the train and it was the last

train so he had to come back and stay over night. It's funny the little things that you remember, but I remember that he didn't have ... he had ... I think my sister was away, I don't know why, and he slept in my sister's room but he didn't use sheets, he only slept between the blankets and I remember my mother thinking that was very strange and he seemed rather dirty. And he certainly looked dirty.

...

I never, I was never close to him because he was in a different sort of world but he was only just finding that different world so when he came to me it seemed right that we should talk about harmony and that sort of stuff but then soon he went in a completely different, well not completely, but in a different direction. And another thing that I remember, a very slight thing, is that when, I didn't see him much of course, it was only just when he came to the ABC and I happened to see him and we made polite conversation, that was all. Of course by this time he was John Hopkins' white-haired boy and he was given all these opportunities and Prom concerts and all sorts of things. Which at the time seemed to me, and I'm sure to a lot of other people, seemed to be slightly out of proportion to his talent or certainly to his experience. And he went on to do so-called avant-garde things and interesting things - there was something called Lettuce Music I think cutting up a lettuce on stage or something. That was in the Proms, a pre-Proms, which I can't say, called Lettuce Music. You know about the Proms?

JH: Yeah.

NB: Yeah. Which were very important at the time. And I remember seeing him in the ABC just before he went overseas he got the opportunity to go overseas and work with Stockhausen and I said something which now seems extremely silly, but it wasn't ... I knew he was going overseas to study so I said something about packing orchestration books or something or packing books in your luggage or something. And he said, "Oh no I won't, I wouldn't be doing anything like that". And I remember thinking, well you need this sort of thing, but obviously he was doing something different, he didn't need orchestration books, he wasn't writing orchestral music.

JH: Well no.

NB: No.

JH: Or he didn't.

NB: No.

JH: [I wonder] if he already knew that.

NB: So when he wrote *After Mallarmé* it's probably, probably a lot of it was Richard. Has Richard spoken about that?

JH: I haven't spoken to Richard yet.

NB: No.

JH: I took ... I have a score of *Ned Kelly Music* not *After Mallarmé*. I took that, it's the original handwritten copy. I took that to show to Anne Boyd and she said that you could hear Richard in the score. So, and that was a year later. That's just before he went to Stockhausen.

NB: Yes. Well I think *After Mallarmé* particularly as far as orchestration was concerned I don't think David would have had much idea.

JH: No well if he brought you fairly rudimentary ...

NB: Oh extremely rudimentary. Yes. Oh yes, he wouldn't have got into university with it.

JH: ...

NB: Oh no. he wouldn't have got into university at all I should think.

JH: So what was the talent that John Hopkins recognised - do you think ...?

NB: Oh this ...

JH: He must have seen something genuine.

NB: Yes. Yes, he must've. Yes. I suppose he had innovatory ideas to do things which now seem very sixties and dated but were new at that time, and were all involved in that sort of thing. I remember one event in the Cell Block Theatre when Ian Farr played -what's it called Seven Hundred and Something For Henry Flint, by who's it by, Earl Brown or someone?

JH: Yeah.

NB: Yeah, isn't one called ...

JH: ...

NB: Christian Wolff. Yeah. Is it the same chord lots and lots of times?

JH: Yeah, something like that.

NB: Yes. And so the audience could move around if they wanted to. And so people went and lay underneath the piano. And I went and lay underneath piano. And then people were pushing the piano around and so Ian had to move his piano stool along to keep up with the piano. And we were lying underneath the piano and I remember someone saying "You're lying next to Nigel Butterly". (Chuckle.)

JH: This was 1970?

NB: Sixties this would have been I should think. Oh it might have been about '70 - yeah, yeah.

JH: After David came back and had met Cardew.

NB: I suppose, yes, yes. I also remember Stockhausen's performance at the Cell Block Theatre and David was running around, and other people were running around, you know, serving the master. It was incredible. All ... were all terribly nervous with tape recorders and things and doing the master's bidding. I heard, this is not related to David Ahern, but there's a student at - have you heard of Michael Fowler - pianist? He and a percussion player, they called themselves Something Else and they played the Sydney Spring Festival last year. They played a percussion/piano concert including *Contacte*. You didn't go to that event?

JH: No.

NB: No, I didn't go but I, they did the same concert in Newcastle and I believe it was terrific. But Michael Fowler was a student of Colin Spiers in Newcastle and then he went to America and he told Colin Spiers, last year when he was back, that he and his percussionist had done *Contacte* in a Stockhausen competition or something for performances of Stockhausen music. And the master was there so he deigned to meet the performers afterwards. I think, I don't know if they came first or second, or something or other. And so Stockhausen was giving his autograph and he said "What's your name?" and he said "Michael Fowler" and he said "Spell it". And he started to spell out Michael and he said "No, I know that, he's my patron saint, I was talking to him this morning". (Chuckle.)

JH: ...

NB: Well anyway I'm sure Richard too can tell you lots and lots of stories about Stockhausen.

JH: Yeah, I mean I haven't really got ... I asked Richard about the two Darmstadts that David went to, which is basically when Stockhausen was just concerned with *Ais Den Sieben Tagen* text in compositions.

NB: Oh yes.

JH: Which feeds directly into what David would have then learnt from Cornelius.

NB: Yes of course.

JH: So that follows.

NB: Yes.

JH: It makes total sense.

NB: Yes, yes.

JH: I mean I think David would have seen the Scratch Orchestra as a direct line from where Stockhausen was ...



NB: Yes, yes.

JH: I mean he made a connection himself back to La Monte Young as well.

NB: Connection to ...?

JH: La Monte Young, the American.

NB: Oh right.

JH: An experimentalist, who'd been writing text compositions for longer than either of those two people.

NB: Oh yes. Yes, that's right. Yes. So what did Richard say about that?

JH: ... He said that especially in 1969 there wasn't even really a course, I mean they performed parts of *Aus Den Sieben Tagen* and Stockhausen advised them to discuss it afterwards and that was it. There was no formal lecturing ...

NB: No.

JH: ... in Darmstadt that year. I mean apart from the fact that Stockhausen asked David to become his assistant I don't think that there was really any reason for David to be there that year. I think that's why he went to England ...

NB: Yes well I was under the impression that he was going to study, but I'm not sure. Did he know that he was going to Stockhausen when he went away?

JH: It's very interesting. I think he got the funding first and then he wrote to Stockhausen and I only know this because I've got Stockhausen's letters back. Stockhausen evidently said "You can come, but there's no room for you on the course, you'll just have to come and listen". Because they can only have ten students and there's not room for any other students 'cause they ought to have their works performed. So of course David dropped out from being the, I mean I don't know David, never met David, but evidently being this super, ultra confident you could almost say arrogant person that he was walked his way into the, pushed his way into the course and then followed Stockhausen to Cologne and did the course there as well and there Stockhausen asked him to write a tape piece with Trevor Denham. Which he did. And I think that that was it that by the end of that, it would have been summer in Europe Stockhausen had asked him if he'd like to be assistant when Rolf Gehlhaar finished. But that never eventuated because Rolf Gehlhaar stuck around for another year or two by which time David had ...

NB: ... come back to Australia.

JH: Yes. Done the Scratch thing and then come back to Australia.

NB: Yes, I see.

JH: But I know if you read I think in James Murdoch's book he sort of intonates that Stockhausen and Ahern perhaps fell out at that point when Stockhausen went to ... when David went to Cornelius Cardew. But I, my reading of it is that that's not the case [as] there are still, Stockhausen still sent references over for David after that. And when they went back in 1972, David arranged a tour with his group Teletopa, I know he stayed with Stockhausen ... and introduced the whole group to ... I mean I think David had his finger in, well he was very well liked, and his finger in lots of different pies, 'cause there was the American scene as well and then there was the AZ thing as well that he got Teletopa into.

NB: Yes, yes.

JH: And this is my impression, that he was an arch organiser ...

NB: Yes.

JH: ... if not composer, I mean I don't know ... what you feel on that.

NB: Yes. Yes well certainly he organised lots of performances. I didn't, actually I don't think I ever heard AZ Music or Teletopa, I never actually went to them because at the time I was working in the ABC and also trying to write music and I didn't, you know, I had to go to lots of things, recording them or whatever, no I wasn't recording at that stage, I was planning. But it was hard enough to fit in time to write music without going to all sorts of things that I wasn't really, particularly interested in and although I was interested in Cage and although I was very interested in graphic notation and other things which were newish at the time that wasn't the direction that I was really going myself or particularly interested in. And I think I was also put off by David himself and by, yeah I probably in retrospect, I probably thought "Oh that's all a bit amateurish and a bit silly". Perhaps. And perhaps it was to an extent. And there were people, there were hangers on and in the same way that Stockhausen had his hangers on David Ahern had his too. And there was one person who had no musical training at all - Phillip someone. And I remember him throwing a broom into the piano and there was great complaint about that. Yes and Phillip sort of saw himself as a composer, but I think he disappeared fairly quickly. Ian would remember more of those people but what he actually remembered of David himself I don't know but Ian of course recorded the *Music for Nine* and he might ... He would have perhaps, I don't know whether he was close to David but he might remember things of interest If you wanted to get in touch with him I could give you his address. That's about it really, but as you say he was good at organising because that Cage thing it was his initiative. He just thought it would be good to have a performance of such an important and he knew that I'd played it and so he organised it. And ... good audience. And the other things that he organised, obviously he had quite a following so he must have been good at it, but I don't [think], he didn't do much in the way of written music then did he? It was more improvisatory kind of stuff?

JH: ... That's right the Ahern list changes after '73. And he seems to start, the concerts, the AZ concerts are much to do with professional performers and programmed music, written music rather than the improvised stuff.

NB: After '73, they are?

JH: There's a marked change during the '73, from '73, yeah.

NB: But did he write music then?

JH: No.

NB: I see ... It was other people's written music ... So after '73 he wasn't writing much then or composing much.

JH: Hardly at all.

NB: I see.

JH: Talking, talking to, you know, some of the people who were involved they would say that the group for David was his composing.

NB: I see.

JH: Which is certainly true as far whether it was improvisatory music you could understand.

NB: Yes, but what did he play in the group?

JH: Well by the end of he just wasn't playing at all.

NB: No.

JH: Either conducting or just administrating or ...

NB: Yes, but he couldn't play the piano ...

JH: He played violin didn't he?

NB: He played violin, that's right. Not very well I think. But he could have done, sort of, squeaky, funny things on the violin.

JH: Very enthusiastic by all accounts.

NB: ... He didn't have very much solid musical training and that's why I was saying before, that I doubt whether he would have got into university these days.

JH: Do you think, I suppose 'cause I find it especially interesting, you know, your, sort of take on that really quick rise from rudimentary pieces to doing, you know, stuff that most people would be really proud of .

NB: Yes.

JH: Do you think that when he came back he did bring anything that wasn't already in Australia ...?

NB: When he came back from Stockhausen?

JH: Yeah, when he came back from Europe?

NB: Oh I think he probably did, yes. Well what he brought back was the impetus for Teletopa and AZ Music ... I suppose there was nothing else like that ... Not in the sense of an actual group ... I mean, various people had been doing all sorts of new music, like the, as I said the, who is it? Christian Wolff and Richard and I had done Earl Brown and various things. I remember we did, you know the single-age piece, *Four Systems for David Tudor on a Birthday*, by ... that's Earl Brown isn't it? All this sort of stuff we were very keen on it and very keen to do it, but it was still new and I remember that Richard and I at the ... Theatre - did you hear, have you heard of that place?, I think it may have even been pulled down. There was a very wealthy man called ... I forget his first name, owned this place in which he built a sort of Baroque theatre. And new music concerts used to be incongruously performed in this place over at Mosman or Cremorne or somewhere. And I remember Richard and I came on and did *Four Systems* and I played at the keyboards and Richard played drumsticks and played the prepared piano and we did it very seriously, following the music and all that sort of thing. And then bowed. And then we both went out and collapsed in laughter backstage (chuckle). It's important to be able to see the funny side of things. I don't know whether David had much sense of humour, I don't think he would see the funny side of things. I don't know. Perhaps he did. Well he may have had a dry sort of sense of humour. Something else I was going to say that ... Oh yes, this is long before David, but Richard Meale conducted the first Australian performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* and I played piano in that and Peter Richardson played flute and Marilyn Richardson was the, did the ... and even then, we were all only in our early twenties, but it was something that was very exciting to do but it was still very strange. And it was music that, I didn't, I knew about it but I don't think I knew it, but Richard, sort of knew it reasonably well and I was terribly keen to be involved in it. But even to the others, as well as to me, it was still something pretty strange. That was in 1958.

JH: Right.

NB: So, it's quite a long time ago. But that was really quite an important event and I think it was in that same concert that Richard Meale's flute Sonata was done. But anyway that's long before David Ahern. When did he die - 197...?

JH: '88.

NB: '88.

JH: After twelve years of, you know, mainly drinking.

NB: Yes. Yes, great pity isn't. Don't know how it ever all happened. He ... perhaps he wanted to do things that he wasn't able, within himself or didn't have the ability to do or perhaps, I don't know. Have you any idea why ...?

JH: Well I don't ... I've sort of summarised, but different people have different ideas, who I've asked about it. You know, people who knew him personally said there were girlfriends and then this and then that. There was ...

NB: He was married at one stage, wasn't he?

JH: At one stage shortly after it all went wrong.

NB: Oh. That was to the daughter of Linda and Colin ... thingo, the two flute players in the Sydney Symphony.

JH: ...

NB: Yes.

JH: ... and other people have said look you know it might have been that there just wasn't anyone else in Australia, you know, whereas in other areas and generations of Australian music there've always been two or three composers moving in the same direction and, sort of, backing each other up to a certain degree. And you might feel the same about, you know, your career but whereas David didn't really have anyone else creatively doing the same thing ... pushing him to the same goals.

NB: Yes.

JH: So, other people have said, well the drinking started in his lessons with Richard ... It didn't start in ...

NB: No, that'd be right. Yes that'd be right and it was probably much more the drinking too. I mean it may not have been but it could well have been. Yeah.

JH: ... The interviews with people like Geoff Collins is, you just get a bit of an idea of what was going on in the background. It was all fairly open. Lessons would finish and they would all hop into bed together, it sounds ... But I don't know ... Anyway, I mean ...

NB: All very sixties (chuckle).

JH: Yeah all very sixties, that's right.

NB: Now, when was this, the lessons with Richard?

JH: When ...?

NB: Yeah. That'd what be seventies, was it?

JH: No that was, it was, well I mean that was late sixties, wasn't it?

NB: Late sixties, yes. Yes. Yeah. 'Cause that, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, what I'm talking about, was that '65 or something like that?

JH: ...

NB: But, so, 'cause he was with me a little while before Richard. As I say I only had two or three lessons with him. Did Richard have the hots for him? (Chuckle.)

JH: Oh, I don't know.

NB: Well, you said they all hopped into bed together.

JH: Oh, well no, that was more in the days when David came back.

NB: Oh.

JH: That I think it was all, sort of fairly open ... But I don't know.

NB: No. Anyway. It all went into a different sort of area that I wasn't involved in or interested in, yeah.

JH: Oh, that's good. That's good. It's especially interesting to, you know, talk to someone before, I obviously, I know, I understand the background behind the Cardew stuff and I could ... you know my research into Howard Skempton's music can take me back to, now, Howard and David on the same stage in the same place in 1969.

NB: Oh yes.

JH: Roundhouse. So I completely understand, well I understood what David tried to do when he came back and you know I can see which parts of it I think are very, very important and useful and good and the other things which you know he derived from other places ... And that, that's become increasingly easy for me to have my own take on [it]. But, it's a bit of a mystery where, you know where David came from ...

NB: From not very much as far as musical training was concerned. Yes, I'd forgotten that he played the violin. I think I might, I think I seem to remember hearing him play the violin, but, you know, he had no ... I don't think he had a very extensive knowledge of musical repertoire.

JH: It would be interesting maybe just to even talk to someone in his family and say well what gave him the idea to become a composer.

NB: Yes, have you spoken to the family at all, are they around?

JH: ...

NB: 'Cause he lived somewhere, they lived somewhere near Dee Why or Avalon somewhere, didn't they?

JH: I'm not sure.

NB: I think so.

JH: Geoffrey Barnard, I think has a contact with some of the family, like his sister or something who still has some of the estate which Geoffrey hasn't picked up. So that might be a ... I don't know if his parents are still alive.

NB: Or his ex-wife, various other people like that.

JH: I mean, by that point '76 onwards there's not really a lot to document. David wrote his last piece of music in 1973.

NB: Oh really.

JH: And there are, in his list which *he* logged at the AMC sometime in the eighties he lists two or three pieces in 1984 or something, but there's no sight of them, you know.

NB: They may not have existed, except in his head.

JH: Exactly.

NB: Or perhaps ...

JH: Or maybe he made some notes but never orchestrated [them]. I mean I don't know, they might have been text [compositions], they could have been anything.

NB: Yes.

JH: It's impossible to say, so ... But anyway, no that's very useful 'cause it does fill in, you know ...

NB: Good.

JH: ... it fills in that background. I'm going to speak to John Hopkins.

NB: Oh you haven't spoken to him yet?

JH: I've made contact. I'm going down to, I'm actually teaching in Melbourne at the end of this month.

NB: Oh he's based in Melbourne is he?

JH: Yeah.

NB: Where is he living now? ... Last I knew he was in the Blue Mountains and before that he had a penthouse at the Quay.

JH: Oh really.

NB: Yeah.

JH: Someone did say to me he's, you know, he's [living] in the Blue Mountains and then I didn't know how to make contact but then I had a friend who's been doing some

stuff with Sarah ... so through that I got a phone number and well he's in South Melbourne ... so I'm going to go ...

NB: 'Cause he'd be latish seventies by now wouldn't he. I haven't heard of him doing anything lately. Does he still go round and conduct or anything?

JH: I don't know.

NB: No, no.

JH: I mean I think he, I think he, he says he doesn't really remember very much about David at all. So ...

NB: Hopkins doesn't?

JH: Well, I mean, I think he's probably sort of saying you know, he's probably sort of intonated that it won't be a very long interview. But that's fine, you know, that's ...

NB: But you could ask him what he saw, what you were talking about before, what he saw in David, what potential he saw in David.

JH: That's, I mean to me, that's the most interesting.

NB: That's the most important thing yeah. Because he obviously, as I, I described him as his white-haired boy and he obviously gave him a terrific lot of help and exposure and promotion.

JH: Well it was Hopkins in fact he did the studio recording of *After Mallarmé* which got David into the international competition thing in Paris, wasn't it?

NB: The Rostrum

JH: The Rostrum, yeah, where he, what was it? Equal thirty-seventh with Elliott Carter or something.

NB: Did he? (Chuckle.)

JH: That's a claim to fame when you're about nineteen years old isn't it?

NB: Yes, well my claim to fame is that I beat Berio in the Italia Prize.

JH: Oh did you?

NB: Yes.

JH: Fantastic.

NB: He came second.

NB & JH: (Chuckle.)



JH: Excellent.

NB: ... so, yes ...

JH: And like I say I've written a letter to Richard to ask him whether he'd do an interview as well ...

NB: Yes, but ...

JH: ... that'll cover the Ernie years.

NB: If Richard is coming down to Sydney for a, or is he in Sydney at the moment?

JH: He's staying with someone in Sydney.

NB: With Julie Simons.

JH: Yeah.









## APPENDIX 2

### CD-ROM OF ARCHIVES FROM THE ESTATE OF DAVID AHERN

The Estate is archived as an interactive PDF file. To open the file you need to have the current version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer. If you do not have the Reader already installed you can download it at no charge from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

This CD-Rom will run on any PC or Mac which can run Adobe Acrobat Reader. To run the program, simply double-click the file "Ahern CD-Rom.pdf" on this CD-Rom. If you are going to be using the CD-Rom at any length you should drag the file onto your desktop before running it, as it will run faster from your hard drive than from the CD.

#### **Using this CD-Rom**

Any words coloured red in this CD-Rom are links to new pages. To begin, select a subsection by clicking on it. To return from a subsection to this first page, click on the photo of David Ahern at the top right. From a subsection choose any archived document by clicking on it. When the document opens, clicking anywhere on the page will take you to the next page if there is another page within the same document, or back to the subsection you came from if there is not. To print, type Command-P on a Mac or Ctrl-P on a PC. To leave full-screen mode, press Escape. To quit, type Command-Q on a Mac or Alt-F4 on a PC.

The CD-Rom is bound to the next page.

