

Liza Lim, Australia Council Don Banks award

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we gather, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to Uncle Alan Madden and to other elders past, present and emerging. It always feels inspiring to say these words because they speak to the important role of lineages in making culture. I think of the living legacy of knowledge that was passed to me from my earliest mentors in music, my high school music teacher Ros McMillan and her partner, the jazz improviser Brian Brown, as well as my first composition teachers Richard Hames and Riccardo Formosa. They knew Don Banks and I feel that I was also given something from that lineage that merged European serial formalism with an improviser's ear. I played the Banks' Sonata for violin and piano for my final recital at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1986 and I'm beyond thrilled to receive this award named in his honour.

The Australia Council together with the Australian Music Centre, as custodians of culture, have played fundamentally important roles in the development of my work. In 1988, the AMC sent me as the Australian representative to the Hong Kong ISCM World Music Days; the same year the Australia Council's then Music Board commissioned my work 'Garden of Earthly Desire', a 30-minute work performed numerous times by my brilliant long-time collaborators, the ELISION Ensemble. Both things set me up in terms of an international career leading to a publishing contract with Ricordi and a string of international commissions so I'm hugely grateful.

Sadly, it's far too easy to trash the work of organisations such as the AMC and the Australia Council and to undermine the crucial role they play in supporting new talent at pivotal moments. Time and again we see that taking a risk on unknown names, bears fruit years later. To cut arts funding is very simply to sever the legacies of the future.

Of course to build a legacy means to be embedded in community and I thank my family, my parents, friends and numerous colleagues, musicians and of course the audiences without whom no music can be made.

I'm the 5th woman to be awarded the Don Banks out of 32 prize winners since 1984; the 3rd female composer since Ros Bandt and Moya Henderson's wins 25 years ago (amongst 20 composers). The first Asian person & for context, Archie Roach in 2015 was the first Aboriginal musician to be awarded the prize. It's a slow process of inclusion... A year of #Metoo, the recent publication of gender pay gap figures, the rising consciousness of systemic disparities around gender, race and class: we are seeing seismic changes in understanding how so-called 'luck' is distributed and hopefully, we'll also see bold changes in policy that affect how power is reproduced. I'm happy to use the privilege of this prize to make a contribution to shifting some of those barriers in music that women in particular face, both through the art I make and the mentoring I will do in tandem with my work for 'Composing Women' at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. As with all artists, a prize is the opportunity to do more work!

Thank you for this award and honour.

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