

AUSTA National AGM Report – James de Rozario AUSTA National President

AUSTA National AGM Meeting – 26-11-2020

2020 will certainly be a year that we all remember...or possibly strive hard to forget!

When I look back over the last year, I am struck at something I wrote for my very first Stringendo report:

In order to grow, AUSTA must continue to evolve its offerings. We must support mentoring, forums and knowledge sharing events. We must learn to communicate in new ways. We must celebrate our great Australian performers and teachers. We must build up the value of AUSTA membership so that it is becomes an essential part of being part of the string community. We must look ahead to the future.

When I read that now, it's as if I knew what 2020 was about to bring!

At the beginning of the year there was great excitement as chapters all around the country held their Reading Days and prepared for the events ahead. On a National level, we were busy finalising the visit of Barry Green, while plans were being prepared for the 2021 National Conference.

While this was happening, the Coronavirus was just something that we heard about on the news! As we all know, it became all too real, very quickly!

In mid-March, the Executive met in Adelaide where we discussed a wide range of topics. Sadly, it was during this meeting that we decided to cancel the Barry Green tour. There were so many unknowns about travel, shut-downs, venue availability, whether we would be allowed an audience....the list went on and on.

Of course, at the same meeting we discussed state events and the viability of holding events throughout 2020.

Within a few days of this meeting, Australia was shutting down.

While the world adapted, it was wonderful to see how quickly the Arts sector – and music in particular, adjusted. Instrumental lessons and classroom curriculum moved online; concerts moved online and while we all stayed home, the world seemed to open up!

With the adoption of Zoom licenses, it was wonderful to see the worthwhile activities that AUSTA has provided all around the country – despite the difficulties of a pandemic. Our members have been able to enjoy events from all over the country including remarkable feedback from members in regional Tasmania raving about events AUSTA Queensland. One very positive thing that has come from the pandemic, is that we are now a much more NATIONAL organisation.

I would like to congratulate every State Chapter for their remarkable work in providing online events. As well, the work of our marvellous Administration team has been instrumental in the success of these events. This also includes the successful application for COVID grants and JobKeeper which has helped us financially.

Over the year, the National Executive also decided the following:

- The National Conference will be delayed from 2021 to 2022. This decision was based on uncertain travel arrangements throughout 2021, financial uncertainty for our members as a result of COVID, plus the risk of further lockdowns.
- The decision to move the conference also helps to align the National Presidency with our 3-year cycle. The new cycle of a Presidency is:
 - Year 1 – AUSTA Orchestra Tour. This is organised by a tour operator and gives the National President time to settle into the role and prepare for Years 2 & 3.

- Year 2 – Local or international presenter to tour around Australia.
- Year 3 – National Conference.
- AUSTA was a sponsor of the national Strike a Chord Chamber Music Competition.
- AUSTA signed a partnership deal with the Queensland Youth Orchestra to sponsor the The John Curro Viola Chair for 5 years in memory of our late patron John Curro.

The National Executive also appointed a new Administrator. The process was thorough and time consuming and I would like to thank the selection panel who sat in on many hours of interview: Cara Taggart (National Secretary), Lubino Fernandes (National Treasurer), Gina De Francesco (Accounts) and Karen Kyriakou (Administrator).

I would like to take this opportunity to express great thanks to Karen Kyriakou who is leaving us at the end of this month. Karen has worked tirelessly over the last 2 years to support our members and improve our systems. This included her recommendation to split the admin role into two distinct positions – one of administration, the other of accounts. Splitting these roles has helped us to further refine our systems and introduce greater support at all levels for our members. Gina De Francesco (Accounts) has been able to spend more time on building our financial reserves (which has been particularly important during COVID), while Karen has been able to concentrate on communication, website usability, member support and (all importantly) writing up a handbook of all of our systems. This work will help build longevity into AUSTA and set us up securely for the future.

Karen has also worked hard throughout 2020 to set up Zoom sessions all around the country and has provided support to each AUSTA Chapter. This has been an enormous challenge for the organisation, especially considering all the “unknowns” we have faced throughout the year. Karen’s positivity and good grace has been much appreciated by all as we navigated our way through the challenges.

Karen will be much missed, although she will remain involved with AUSTA through her work with the AUSTA VIC Committee. Thank you, Karen, for all your hard work and achieving so much with AUSTA!

And so I would like to welcome Emily Dittman as our new Administrator. Emily is a highly experienced arts administrator and has a great deal of experience working with Not For Profit organisations. She also knows AUSTA well through her position as our National Advertising Manager and already has great insights into how our organisation is run.

With Emily’s move to the Administrator role, I would also like to welcome Adele Gibson as our new Advertising Manager. Adele has been associated with AUSTA for many years and has attended the AUSTA overseas tours. Adele lives in Alice Springs and it is terrific that we are able to work with our regional members.

I would also like to welcome Samantha Raftery who has taken over the President of AUSTA SA from Fiona Patten. We wish Fiona well and thank her for all of her work for AUSTA over the years.

Although AUSTA might not have held its usual number of in-person events throughout the year, we have certainly continued to work hard in the background to support our members. I am looking forward to resuming in-person events but hope that we will continue to offer a streaming service throughout the country in the future.

A very big thank you to all the National Executive and volunteers who give up so much of their time for AUSTA.

Molto AUSTA!