

## **AUSTA National AGM Report – James de Rozario AUSTA National President**

### **AUSTA National AGM Meeting – 25-11-2021**

It has been frustrating to see the impact that COVID has had on AUSTA and the Performing Arts in general throughout Australia yet again this year. While some states have been able to live relatively normal lives, many of our members have experienced long term lockdowns that affected their ability to work, perform and teach.

With the uptake of vaccines throughout the country, it is hoped that AUSTA will have a much more normal year in 2022.

At the beginning of the year there was great excitement as many chapters around the country were able to hold their Reading Days. For some states, these were the very first live events since early 2020 and their first experience with new COVID safety that were required; while some states transferred online. This approach continued for most of the year, with some states able to run COVID safe events in person, while others could only provide online events.

I would like to thank each state Chapter for the work they put into running both live and online events. The COVID safety measures required each event have COVID marshals, social distancing, mask wearing, QR codes, density limits...and all of these measures only added to the workload of our voluntary committees.

Our online presentations continued to be popular around the country. We have had marvellous feedback from our regional members who have attended these events – it has meant that they have renewed their membership and felt included as an AUSTA Member.

Many thanks to the Chapters and volunteers that ran events throughout the country.

We were pleased to send congratulations to Patron and Founding Member Elizabeth Morgan earlier in the year for her 80th birthday. Over the year I met many times with Elizabeth to discuss the history of AUSTA and the ambition of AUSTA as an organisation.

We were saddened however to learn of the death of AUSTA Patron Sheila Nelson. Sheila visited Australia a number of times and had an enormous impact on string teaching throughout Australia. Her resources and publications were much appreciated at the time and were instrumental in moving string education forward. AUSTA National has plans to celebrate Sheila's life and these will be shared once they are confirmed.

Over the year, the National Executive has been working on the following:

- Arrangements for the 2022 Conference, including:
  - Sponsorship packages
  - Accepting presentation & poster applications
  - Preparing ticketing, programming and publicity for 2022
  - Putting in place electronic infrastructure for future conferences
- AUSTA was a sponsor of the national Strike a Chord Chamber Music Competition for the second year in a row.
- Investigating an agreement with EBM Insurance to provide discounts to members.
- Invested some money for the long-term benefit of AUSTA members.
- Investigated new Patrons for AUSTA.

- Continued work on the final drafts of the AUSTA Book.

Our Administration Team has continued to work tirelessly on ensuring our members are supported. Continued maintenance and improvements to the website & database were made, whilst regular email communication with members continued. I would like to thank Emily Dittman for all of her hard work in this area.

I would like to thank Gina de Francesco for all of her work on our finance side. Her work in applying for COVID grants has been particularly helpful in keeping the AUSTA books healthy. As well, I would like to thank Lubino Fernandes for all of his hard work and research in investing some of AUSTA's money which will provide greater returns and security for our future.

Our Social Media presence has continued to evolve and is now more sophisticated than ever. I would like to thank Catherine Hughes for her work in this area.

The Stringendo Team has put together some marvellous issues throughout 2021 and I would like to thank Susan Pierotti (National Journal Editor), Adele Gibson (National Advertising Manager), Mary Nemet (National Reviews Editor) and Louise Booth (Graphic Designer).

As we come out of COVID, there are a number of challenges ahead for AUSTA:

- Re-establishing live events and reconnecting the string community.
- Balancing our financial commitments.
- Increasing our membership – there has been an impact from COVID and we will need to work hard to attract new members.
- Attracting younger members – we must be careful not to be an aging organisation.
- Continue to offer a mix of live and online events for our metropolitan and regional members.
- Attract younger members on to our committees so that we have building longevity into AUSTA.
- Refresh our events at state level and ensure that we are offering the events that our state members need and support.

I believe that our 2022 Conference will help us work on several our challenges. I would ask ALL members to encourage the young people they know to attend and experience the joy of an AUSTA Conference.

Lastly, I would like to say a very big thank you to all the National Executive and volunteers who give up so much of their time for AUSTA.

Molto AUSTA!