

Dedication of Peter's Memorial Plaque @91 Holdsworth Street, Woollahra
August 8, 2018
11AM

In addition to honouring our indigenous forbears of the Eora nation, I would contend that today we are standing on 'Peter Sculthorpe country'.

Peter lived in Woollahra for 45 years and loved this part of Sydney with a passion. Much of Australia's greatest music was composed within a half-mile radius of where we stand right now.

Indeed, today marks an especially significant, though sad, commemorative moment in Australian cultural history: exactly 4 years ago, Peter Sculthorpe died at Wolper Hospital, just around the corner. Comforting him through his last breaths was his trusted confidante and assistant of 40 years, Adrienne Levenson.

Others of his close friends and family (including his nieces Anne and Libby, Helen and Ross Edwards, Barry Conyngham, and others) spent whatever time we could with him in his final days. Rushing to the hospital that morning to farewell this wonderful man, teacher and mentor, taxiing up Edgecliff Hill, through tears of profound grief, having just learned of Peter's passing, I envisioned him being slowly lifted heavenwards by black winged creatures I took to be angels. He was slowly transforming from the frail bird-like form he had become in his final illness into the full strength and beauty of the charming and brilliant man he had once been. He was smiling broadly. Just as I feel he would be smiling broadly today to be remembered in what for him was the most special place on earth.

He had lived in Woollahra since 1964 – firstly at 147b Queen Street, where he composed his famous (some might say 'infamous') *Sun Musics* and the iconic 6th String Quartet. From 1976 he lived here at 91 Holdsworth Street.

He loved his home deeply: it became an external representation of his inner world. Many of his most important compositions were written here including his famous orchestral works *Port Essington*, *Mangrove*, *Kakadu* and *Earth Cry*; his String Quartets Nos 7- 18 (two more than Beethoven) and his monumental choral orchestral *Requiem*. Also his Memoir *Sun Music* published by the ABC in 1999 was written here. In it he tells us about 91 Holdsworth Street.

I quote:

"By 1976, my collection of books and music had far outgrown my small terrace house in Queen Street, Woollahra. I moved to a modest Georgian cottage not far away, in Holdsworth Street. There was no question of living in any other part of Sydney. The whole area is like a village, with good restaurants, antique shops and art galleries. Also a number of friends like Jane de Couvreur, are within close walking distance.

The house was built in the 1840s. This, of course was the time of the establishment of Victoria Settlement. In the 1890s, a second storey was added, with a roof of rather ugly Marseilles tiles. Shortly after I moved there, I replaced the tiles with corrugated iron. I then added columns at the front, together with a number of Georgian architectural details. Finally, I built a large studio in the back courtyard.

The story of Essington, the quintessential tale of dualism, remained at the back of my mind. In a sense I perpetuated it in my life. At the front of my house, a white picket fence separates the outside world from my own. Behind it, in keeping with the architecture of the house, I later cultivated a somewhat formal English garden. Stubbornly, I make no attempt to adapt to the climate." (p. 209)

He might have described another more or less permanent feature: a bright red MG sports car parked in the front garden of 91 Holdsworth Street, subscribing to a playboy image which, in his younger years, the eligible and decidedly attractive composer took delight in cultivating.

Many of us wished it could have been possible to preserve Peter's house as part of an Historic Trust, but in a typically generous gesture, Peter had willed the bulk of his Estate to the University of Sydney to establish a Chair of Australian Music and the sale of the house was to form a large portion of the funding required. The Chair was to be homed in the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, now the Music Faculty of the University. He was deeply touched and excited when Eduard Glastra-Marcello made a financial contribution in memory of his partner Theodore Marcello to enable the Chair to become a reality. Chair establishments are very expensive.

Speaking on behalf of his Trustees, we were overjoyed when 91 Holdsworth Street was purchased by one of Australia's most famed and loved arts patrons, Peter Weiss, who plans to retain the Studio as a haven for musical activity. It could not have fallen into better hands. Surely, in the future, we may need to reclaim this portion of Sydney as "Peter Sculthorpe *and* Peter Weiss country".

There is so much more one could say of the floods of visitors, numbering the very great and the very small, who flocked to Peter's Studio here at 91 Holdsworth Street – for work, for advice, for comfort – and off-times simply to party. His generosity with his time (and whisky) is legendary. Few were turned away and then only when his musical deadlines were a pressing priority.

Peter lived and loved life to the full. In his last decades a lingering depressive illness sapped much of his characteristic *joie de vie* but it was never completely extinguished. His sense of humour remained to the end. Rallying a few days before his final breaths, he took pleasure in telling visitors to his hospital bed, with a familiar twinkle in his eyes, that his Doctor, commenting on his improvement that morning, had said that "he was like Lazarus".

Nope, Death was never on Peter's agenda. Nor should it have been, for his wonderful music, sounding the very essence of deep Australia, will live on and resonate for so long as humanity inhabits Earth.

The lines of DH Lawrence *Sun in Me*, which meant so much to Peter, perhaps puts it best:

*A sun will rise in me,
I shall slowly resurrect,
Already the whiteness of false dawn is on my inner ocean.*

*A sun in me.
And a sun in heaven.
And beyond that, the immense sun behind the sun
The sun of immense distances that fold themselves together
within the genitals of living space.
And further, the sun within the atom
which is god in the atom.*

How appropriate we should remember Peter Sculthorpe today with this memorial plaque. Especially appreciated when the government did not see fit to honour him with the State Funeral his lasting contribution to our national culture surely merited.

Special thanks to the Woollahra Council for demonstrating that a prophet is **not** without honour in his own country.

Thank you Woollahra Council
Thank you Peter Weiss for contributing to Peter's living legacy
Thank you friends for your attendance today.

And a special thank you to Susan Blake who will now perform the *Introit* from Peter's
Requiem for Cello Alone (1979)

Anne E. Boyd
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