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Breaking Boundaries

Australian Women in Contemporary Music at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse

Abstract: This article explores the significant contributions of Australian women composers and instrumentalists – such as Jennifer Fowler, Moya Henderson, Sarah Hopkins, Julia Ryder, Cathy Milliken, Vanessa Tomlinson, Liza Lim, Madeline Roycroft, and Jaslyn Robertson – to the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt. It highlights the historical connection between Darmstadt and Australia, emphasizing how these artists have shaped contemporary music. The research is based on interviews with selected composers, specialized literature on Australian contemporary music, Neue Musik, and gender, as well as materials from the archive at the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt.

The participation of Australian composers and performers in the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt provides a critical lens through which to examine the intersection of gender, feminism, and contemporary music. Since the courses' inception in 1946, the representation of female musicians has been uneven, with male composers and performers often receiving most of the recognition and performance opportunities.¹ However, from the 1960s onward, Australian women began to make significant inroads into the musical community of Darmstadt. Their participation not only contributed to the diversification of the course's programming but also helped to challenge existing gender biases within the contemporary music scene.

The early decades of the Darmstadt Summer Courses saw a rapid decline in the presence of women, despite an initial balance among participants. This trend mirrored broader cultural patterns of gender exclusion in the arts, where the contributions of women were frequently overlooked or marginalized. During this period, Australian women were absent from the roster of performers and composers featured at the festival. The lack of female representation reflected the entrenched gender hierarchies that structured both the new music scene and the wider cultural sphere, where men dominated the creation and curation of avant-garde music.

The situation began to change in the 1960s, as Australian female musicians such as Norma Tyer, Ann Kirsten Carr-Boyd, and Jennifer Fowler emerged as important figures at Darmstadt. Their increasing participation coincided with broader shifts in the social and cultural landscape, influenced by the second-wave feminist movement, which advocated for greater gender equality in all areas of life, including the arts. The presence of these pioneering Australian women at Darmstadt not only highlighted their individual achievements but also signalled a growing recognition of female contributions to contemporary music. This

1 See Inge Kovács: *Frauen in Darmstadt*, pp. 94-99; Wilhelm Schlüter: *Vier Jahrzehnte Darmstadt*, pp. 33-50; Antonio Trudu: *La "Scuola" di Darmstadt*.

recognition continued to expand in the ensuing decades, as more Australian women, including Moya Henderson, Sarah Hopkins, Cathy Milliken, and Liza Lim, gained visibility at the festival.²

Examining the contributions of Australian women at Darmstadt provides insight into how gender dynamics have evolved within the realm of the so-called 'Neue Musik' (New Music). The presence of these women at the festival reflected more significant cultural shifts toward gender inclusivity, while their artistic output often engaged with themes of identity, culture, and feminism. Their works brought distinctively Australian perspectives to the international avant-garde, challenging traditional aesthetic boundaries, and introducing new sonic and conceptual approaches.³ For instance, Liza Lim's compositions frequently draw upon themes of cultural hybridity and ecological consciousness, while Sarah Hopkins integrates elements of spirituality and Indigenous Australian culture into her music, expanding the festival's aesthetic discourse.

Recent scholarly work on gender and contemporary music, including contributions by researchers such as Vera Grund, Nina Noeske, Antje Tumat, Kirsten Reese, Christa Brüstle, Rebecca Grotjahn, and Sabine Vogt, has underscored the importance of addressing historical gender imbalances in the documentation and interpretation of New Music.⁴ In the context of Darmstadt, efforts to examine gender relations have been propelled by initiatives like Ashley Fure's 'histor-age' commission and the establishment of the 'Gender Relations in Darmstadt' (GRID) Blog, which critically engages with the festival's archives to reveal patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Fure's work emphasizes the significance of investigating not only what is present in the archives but also what is absent – namely, the stories and perspectives of marginalized groups, including women.⁵

These scholarly initiatives have prompted a re-examination of the festival's history, recognizing the need to account for the contributions of female artists whose work has not been fully acknowledged in previous narratives. The involvement of Australian women at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse – from early trailblazers in the 1960s to more recent figures such as Samantha Wolf, Elizabeth Jigalin, Madeline Roycroft, and Jaslyn Robertson – demonstrates a sustained effort to question and reshape the traditional hierarchies of New Music. This ongoing challenge is visible in several ways: through the inclusion of diverse artistic practices that resist stylistic conformity, through works that engage critically with gender and identity, and through public interventions – such as panels, performances, and publications – that advocate for greater representation. Their presence at Darmstadt reflects a broader shift within contemporary music culture toward equity, inclusivity, and the diversification of creative voices.

2 See Rosalind Appleby: *Women of note*.

3 See Dorottya Fabian, John Napier: *Diversity in Australia's Music*.

4 See Kirsten Reese: *Der hörende Blick ins Archiv*, pp. 43-67; Antje Tumat: *Die Anfänge der Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik aus Gender-Perspektive*; Christa Brüstle: *Das 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, pp. 98-108; Rebecca Grotjahn, Sabine Vogt (ed.): *Musik und Gender*; Nina Noeske, Susanne Rode-Breymann, Melanie Unseld: *Gender Studies*, pp. 239-251.

5 See Ashley Fure: *GRID*.

As this paper will explore, the evolving role of Australian female musicians at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse reveals significant developments in the ongoing dialogue between gender and contemporary music. The participation of these artists over several decades offers a valuable case study of how gender, cultural exchange, and avant-garde music intersect, shaping both the history of the festival and the broader field of 'Neue Musik'. This study draws upon a combination of archival materials housed at the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD), personal correspondence, and relevant literature on gender in contemporary music.

The women discussed in this paper – ranging from pioneering figures of the 1960s to recent voices such as Samantha Wolf, Elizabeth Jigalin, Madeline Roycroft, and Jaslyn Robertson – were selected based on documented participation at the Ferienkurse and the availability of archival or first-hand materials. In e-mail correspondence, a consistent set of questions was posed to each participant to ensure a degree of comparability across individual accounts. These questions focused on their artistic background, experiences at the Ferienkurse, perceptions of the festival's institutional culture, and reflections on gender and representation in the context of New Music.

The following sections will provide: (1) a historical overview of Australian women at the Ferienkurse; (2) individual case studies based on interviews and archival records; (3) an analysis of recurring themes, including inclusion, resistance, and institutional critique; and (4) a concluding reflection on how these artists contribute to rethinking the gendered history of New Music in an international context.

Jennifer Fowler: A Significant Australian Female Composer at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse 1968

In 1967, Perth became home to the Institute of Musicology, and the University of Western Australia launched 'Studies in Music' and the 'Australian Journal of Music Education', both edited by Frank Callaway (1919-2003). Recognizing the talent of Jennifer Fowler (b. 1939), he proposed a scholarship for her, who applied to attend the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1968. He also wrote a letter of reference to the IMD on behalf of the University of Western Australia's Department of Music.⁶

Among the earliest Australian women to engage with the Darmstädter Ferienkurse was composer Jennifer Fowler, who attended the 23rd edition of the courses

6 See Empfehlungsschreiben von Callaway, Frank an [IMD], 21 March 1968. Callaway served as the head and later professor of the newly established music department at the University of Western Australia during a transformative period in its history. Jennifer Fowler joined the department in 1957, marking the first year that the music department welcomed students pursuing an Arts degree. Frank was an influential figure in the broader music education community. He served on the board of the International Society of Music Education and held the presidency of the music council of UNESCO. His contributions to the field were recognized with a knighthood, earning him the title Sir Frank Callaway. This was reported by Jennifer Fowler in an e-mail to the author, 23 January 2024.

in 1968. That year's event, directed by Ernst Thomas, featured a prominent compositional studio led by Karlheinz Stockhausen – one of the most influential and controversial figures in postwar European music. Stockhausen, known for his pioneering work in electronic music, spatialisation, and serialism, was a central figure at Darmstadt throughout the 1950s and 1960s, often shaping the aesthetic direction of the festival.⁷ During the 1968 Ferienkurse, he oversaw the project 'Musik für ein Haus', a large-scale collective composition developed during a preparatory course (Vorkurs) held from 9 to 25 August.⁸ Fowler's presence in this context highlights not only the international reach of Australian composers during this period but also the challenges faced by women navigating a male-dominated avant-garde environment. Her engagement with the festival at a time when Stockhausen's influence was particularly strong offers insight into the gendered dynamics of the institution and the stylistic pressures exerted on emerging composers. Fowler's subsequent compositional trajectory, which often resisted prevailing modernist orthodoxies, can be seen in part as a response to these formative but constraining experiences.

Jennifer Fowler's attendance at Darmstadt was made possible by her European travels. At that time, she was preparing to enrol in a course on electronic music led by Gottfried Michael Koenig in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where she received a scholarship from the Dutch government. Arriving a few months early to explore Europe for the first time, she was excited to receive the scholarship for her stay in Darmstadt and to participate in the courses offered there.

For Fowler, the experience of meeting other composers was exhilarating. She noted that Western Australia had a small population and was one of the most isolated cities in the world. While she was fortunate to begin her studies at a newly opened music department, the opportunities for composing were limited, making her encounters with other composers all the more significant. Sharing a hotel room with American composer Kathleen St. John, who was enrolled in a postgraduate course at the Juilliard School, Fowler found it enlightening to compare their experiences. Kathleen St. John expressed her dissatisfaction with the competitive atmosphere at Juilliard, prompting Jennifer to reflect on her gratitude for the opportunities she had in Perth, where collaboration was encouraged among musicians.⁹

Fowler also met another Australian composer, David Ahern, who was selected to assist Stockhausen with his setup. Recognizing Ahern's potential, Fowler warned him about the intensity of Stockhausen's influence, although he did not heed her caution.

One of Fowler's lasting memories from Darmstadt involved attending a concert by the Frankfurt Symphony Orchestra, where she noticed that the entire orchestra was comprised of men. This experience highlighted the gender

7 See Stockhausen-Stiftung f. Musik: Karlheinz Stockhausen bei den Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt 1951-1996.

8 See Antonio Trudu: *La "Scuola" di Darmstadt*, pp. 199; see also Dörte Schmidt, Susanne Heiter: *Ereignis und Geschichte: Die Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt 1962-1994*.

9 Details on her experience at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1968 were conveyed on 5 November 2022 by Fowler in an e-mail to the author.

disparities prevalent in European orchestras at that time, a reality she later observed in London as well.¹⁰

Following Darmstadt, Fowler continued her studies at the Gaudeamus annual event in Holland, where she made lifelong friends and established meaningful connections. Eventually, she settled in London, drawn by its vibrant music scene and opportunities to collaborate with talented musicians. Throughout her career as a freelance composer, Fowler remained engaged with the global music community while maintaining ties to Australia.

Jennifer Fowler also noted the geographical isolation of Western Australia, stating that most significant musical events took place in Sydney and Melbourne.¹¹ In this context, she developed a relationship with composer James Penberthy, introduced to her through James Murdoch, head of the Australian Music Centre. While Penberthy was a rigorous critic of contemporary music, he held Fowler's compositions in high regard. Additionally, she corresponded with German composers Felix Werder and George Dreyfus, who lived in Australia as refugees. Werder's touring group performed several of Fowler's pieces, while Dreyfus provided guidance as she prepared for her travels.

Reflecting on her time at Darmstadt, Fowler emphasized the lasting friendships she formed, including one with Brian Ferneyhough, who would later become well-known for his connections to Darmstadt. In 1968, he faced challenges in securing performances and financial stability, which was a sentiment Fowler could empathize with, having navigated similar struggles early in her career.

Moya Henderson and the Didgeridoo at Darmstadt: A Pioneering Journey (1974-1976)

In her application for the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1974, Moya Henderson (b. 1941) provided a detailed account of her academic and professional background to the IMD. Henderson, a distinguished graduate of the University of Queensland, Australia, had completed her Bachelor of Music degree in 1972, graduating with First Class Honours. Following her academic achievements, she secured an apprenticeship as a resident composer with the Australian Opera Company, where she worked from August to December 1973. During her tenure, Henderson's compositions were performed in a dedicated concert held on 1 December 1973, at the prestigious Sydney Opera House. This landmark event was recorded and archived under the label 'HA'. This experience marked a significant milestone in her early compositional career.¹²

10 See Frederique Reibell: The fight for gender equality in orchestras.

11 See *ibid.*

12 See Moya Henderson's registration for the 1974 Darmstädter Ferienkurse. By the time of her application to the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Moya Henderson had already garnered international recognition as a DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) Scholarship recipient, which allowed her to study with two of the most influential figures in avant-garde music: Mauricio Kagel and Karlheinz Stockhausen. These studies positioned her at the cutting edge of contemporary music practices, further cementing her reputation within

In 1974, Moya Henderson became the second female recipient of one of the five prestigious Kranichstein Music Prizes, awarded for her musical theatre work 'Clearing the Air'. This piece featured improvisational performances by Henderson herself on the didgeridoo, Davide Mosconi on the 'Arabic oboe', Christina Kubisch on flute, Rolf Gehlhaar on clarinet, and Fernando Grillo on double bass. The performance was distinctive, with Henderson designing four speaker boxes specifically for the work and guiding the musicians, particularly Grillo, in their improvisations.

It is likely that Moya Henderson was the first to introduce the didgeridoo to the Darmstädter Ferienkurse—a moment of considerable historical and symbolic import within the context of the institution's evolving engagement with non-Western instruments and performance practices. Reflecting on her experience, Henderson recounted that she brought the didgeridoo with her to Darmstadt in 1974, shortly after her arrival. During her time there, she composed a music-theatre work entitled *Clearing the Air*, which featured the distinguished double bassist Fernando Grillo alongside four wind players. Henderson herself performed as one of the instrumentalists, playing the didgeridoo. For her contributions, she was awarded the prestigious Kranichsteiner Musikpreis.¹³

In her 1976 application for a scholarship to the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Moya Henderson outlined her previous studies and professional experience as follows:

- Bachelor of Music, Queensland University (1973)
- Resident Composer, Sydney Opera House (1973)
- Composition Studies, Cologne Musikhochschule (1974-1976)
New Music Theatre Class under Mauricio Kagel
Composition Class under Karlheinz Stockhausen
- Awards: First Kranichsteiner Prize, Darmstadt (1974)
- Concert Performances: Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Darmstadt, Cologne, Braunschweig¹⁴

Shortly before departing for Darmstadt, Moya Henderson had her first introductory session with Mauricio Kagel.¹⁵

He was eager for her to attend the courses but was cautious about assigning her any specific tasks, such as composing a new piece. Instead, he advised her to observe the various sessions. It is unlikely that she brought her music-theatre piece from the 1973 Opera House concert to this initial meeting. That work, 'Marxisms', was written specifically for the Australian cellist Nathan Waks, who was

the global music community. See Moya Henderson: Represented Artist, Australian Music Centre.

13 See Moya Henderson in correspondence with the author, 27 June 2022.

14 See Moya Henderson's registration for the 1976 Summer Courses.

15 See Mauricio Raúl Kagel (1929-2008) was an Argentine-German composer, conductor, librettist, and director, whose diverse output includes instrumental music, music theatre, radio plays, and films. A key figure in postwar experimental music, Kagel made significant contributions to the aesthetic and conceptual expansion of *Neue Musik* in the second half of the 20th century. From 1960 onwards, he was regularly active as a lecturer at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse. In 1968, he collaborated with visual artist Wolf Vostell and others to found *Labor e. V.*, an initiative for the investigation of acoustic and visual events, which led to performances such as '5-Tage-Rennen' in Cologne. In 1969, Kagel succeeded Karlheinz Stockhausen as director of the Cologne Courses for New Music, and in 1974 was appointed Professor of Music Theatre at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln. See Björn Heile: Mauricio Kagel bei den Internationalen Ferienkursen für Neue Musik in Darmstadt.

young, energetic, and bore a striking resemblance to the Marx Brothers. Inspired by this, she composed a piece for him and his cello that incorporated playful references to Groucho, Harpo, and Chico in a humorous and exaggerated manner.¹⁶

Upon arriving in Darmstadt in 1974 and 1976, Henderson became acquainted with a lively group of Italians. Among them, Davide Mosconi spoke fluent English, which provided her with a sense of comfort. The standout performer of this group was Fernando Grillo, who, despite not speaking English, captivated audiences with his delicate harmonic work on a small double bass. He and his instrument seemed inseparable. Without actively seeking a new project, Henderson soon conceived a striking new work, 'Clearing the Air'. The piece took shape quickly, leading her to spend much of her time constructing four large loudspeaker boxes. Alongside Davide, Rolf Gehlhaar, and Christina Kubisch, she remained motionless inside the boxes, appearing as passive elements of the performance space. However, they were, in fact, waiting for the right moment to act. The hidden performers gradually executed their plan as Grillo became ever more absorbed in his harmonic playing. While still producing various horn-like sounds in response to Grillo's high notes, they methodically cut through the fabric of the loudspeaker boxes. Then, in a sudden and dramatic climax, they emerged from their hiding places and overwhelmed the unsuspecting double bassist from behind. In the final blackout, they symbolically brought him down.

Moya Henderson's 'Stubble (Dramatic Music)' (1976) is a striking vocal work exploring texture, breath, and the limits of phonetic expression. It was composed for and premiered by soprano Beth Griffith on 16 March 1976 at the Aula of the Musikhochschule in Cologne, Germany. This performance marked Henderson's engagement with the European avant-garde while foregrounding a uniquely Australian sonic sensibility.¹⁷ Kagel seemed to believe that the time had come for her to create a new music-theatre piece. The production was aided by the Musikhochschule's caretaker, Mr. Vondran, who provided an essential stage prop: a Schminktisch (makeup table). Henderson contributed a 'soft' prop, while Vondran supplied a 'hard' one – a specially adapted table with a front panel that could be manipulated by foot pedals operated by the soprano Beth Griffith. This mechanism allowed the table's 'mouth' to open and close, revealing a set of teeth and giving the impression that the table itself was speaking. The voice of the table was performed by the French-Canadian composer Michel Gonneville, whose deep, French-accented speech delivered fragments of recipes embedded in the piece's text.

For 'Stubble', Henderson also devised an unusual performance element involving a modified undergarment. Inspired by the concept of 'prepared' pianos, she adapted a bra – formerly her own – for theatrical use. Given the peculiar nature of the piece, she sought Kagel's approval before its final presentation at the Musikhochschule. With his encouragement, the work proceeded.¹⁸

16 On 8 January 2025 Moya Henderson sent the author an extensive e-mail providing feedback on her experience in Darmstadt in 1974 and 1976.

17 Moya Henderson: Stubble (dramatic music).

18 E-mail from Moya Henderson to the author, 8 January 2025.

Beth Griffith embraced the eccentricity of the piece with confidence. Her slender physique allowed her to execute the work's striking visual effect: pulling endless strands of black cotton thread from her costume's pseudo-breasts, stretching them to arm's length, and then cutting them free. Simultaneously, she operated the foot pedal that animated the talking table. The audience's focus was drawn to the surreal elements of the performance, particularly the moment when she unzipped her elegant dress to engage in the symbolic act of removing 'stubble.' The 'prepared' bra functioned as a silent instrument within the piece. Henderson carefully constructed the illusion that the garment was an extension of the performer's own body. The effect was achieved by winding long strands of black cotton thread onto tiny bobbins, which were discreetly positioned at the back of the bra. These threads were channelled through small plastic tubes towards the front, emerging at the strategically placed artificial nipples. This meticulous preparation created the unsettling visual of perpetual hair growth that Griffith, in character, sought to remove.

Even decades later, Henderson continued to reflect on her fascination with and horror at what she had created in 'Stubble'. The intensity of the work remained vivid in her memory.

On 21 July 1976, 'Stubble' for soprano and bass voice was performed at the Ferienkurse, highlighting the theatrical dimension of Henderson's compositional approach. The work was dedicated to "all those women emancipated during the Year of Women, 1975", underscoring her engagement with social issues and her evolving creative vision.¹⁹

During her time in Cologne, with Kagel and Stockhausen as mentors, Henderson focused heavily on musical theatre, a genre that would define her early career. However, after returning to Sydney in 1976, she shifted away from theatre compositions, as Australian audiences were more interested in chamber music and orchestral works during the late 1970s and 1980s. Despite her desire to continue working in musical theatre and opera, Henderson's bold and unconventional ideas were often seen as too avant-garde.

While Kagel significantly influenced Henderson's development, she clarified that she did not wish to replicate his European aesthetic, noting the differences between European and Australian cultures. Her return to Australia was driven by a desire to create work deeply connected to her cultural roots:

It was important for me to come back to Australia because I was particularly interested in theatre work and because this is my culture, which I've known since I was a child. I think if you know a culture well, you can have confidence in yourself and what you have to say about it. That was what made me return, even though there were many things I would have liked to have stayed in Germany for. But I've been exploring the differences and beauty of the country ever since, and trying to realize that what I have to say as a European-Australian is different from what Europeans have to say in America itself.²⁰

Inspired by John Cage's ethos of creative freedom, Henderson's artistic approach has always emphasized experimentation and the rejection of stylistic labels. She

19 Kirsten Reese: *Der hörende Blick ins Archiv*, p. 53; see Moya Henderson: *Stubble*.

20 Catherine Milliken: *Herausfinden, wer man ist*, p. 35.

believes in preserving artistic freedom and resisting external pressures, particularly from academia, to conform to predetermined styles or expectations. “I refuse to have a style”,²¹ she asserted, arguing that a composer’s individuality should come through in their work, unencumbered by imposed frameworks. Sound sources and craftsmanship have always been central to Henderson’s creative process. She insists that composers must convey their emotional experience while maintaining a coherent flow in their musical ideas. This technical mastery, honed under the guidance of Kagel, is evident in her meticulously crafted scores, which reflect her deep attention to detail and commitment to artistic expression.²²

Sarah Hopkins: A Cellist and Composer at the 1980 Darmstädter Ferienkurse

Sarah Hopkins, born in 1958, is an Australian composer and cellist known for her engagement with holistic music and a distinct creative style shaped by her deep connection to the Australian landscape and her exploration of unconventional sounds, such as the didgeridoo. Her classical music training and innovative approach to cello playing have made her a prominent figure in contemporary music, and since the 1980s, she has represented Australia at numerous international festivals.

Before attending the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1980, she had an impressive academic and professional background, as documented in the IMD archive. She studied at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in Melbourne, earning a Diploma of Arts in music (solo cello performance) in 1977 and another in experimental composition and contemporary cello music in 1979. Her collaborations with trombonist and composer James Fulkerson, who was a visiting composer-in-residence at the VCA, were instrumental in shaping her career. Together, they formed a contemporary duo and toured extensively, performing and recording in Belgium, the Netherlands, England, and Norway.²³

Hopkins was awarded an international fellowship by the Music Board of the Australia Council in 1979, which allowed her to pursue advanced studies of performance and composition in Europe. Fulkerson, who encouraged her to apply to Darmstadt, also introduced her to the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition, both of which became key experiences in her European journey.²⁴

Regarding her participation at Darmstadt, Hopkins reflected on the intellectually rigorous and heavily academic atmosphere of the festival, which was dominated by the modernist school of German new music. When she performed her composition ‘Seasons II’ (1978) for cello and tape delay, she found that it stood in stark contrast to the prevailing aesthetics at Darmstadt. The piece, characterized by its organic structure, harmonic overlays, and evolving textural sounds, elicited a deeply emotional response from the audience, earning her a standing ovation. However, the course’s instructors, steeped in modernist traditions, dismissed her

21 Ibid.

22 See *ibid.*, pp. 35 ff.

23 See Sarah Hopkins: Registration for Darmstädter Ferienkurse.

24 Sarah Hopkins in an e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 November 2023.

music as “women’s music”,²⁵ a classification that allowed them to maintain their allegiance to academic modernism.

Hopkins also recounted more informal and collaborative experiences at Darmstadt, such as her impromptu improvisational sessions between 21 July and 4 August 1980 with Italian saxophonist Mario Sanco. Despite language barriers, the two musicians connected through their instruments, forming an improvising duo that later expanded into a quartet with Steffan Wunderlich (composer and pianist from Munich) and Louise Ingebos (composer and pianist from Belgium). This ensemble performed several times at Darmstadt and later reconvened in Munich and London for additional performances. Hopkins and Sanco also recorded an album of their cello and saxophone improvisations, solidifying the creative bonds formed during the Ferienkurse.²⁶



Sarah Hopkins in Werner Taube’s course at the 1980 summer courses.
© IMD Archiv (IMD-B3001924), Photographer: Manfred Melzer.

Hopkins’ experience at Darmstadt, marked by both creative success and the challenge of navigating the modernist-dominated environment, highlights her distinctive artistic voice. While her work did not align with the prevailing trends of the course, her holistic and organic approach to composition and performance left a lasting impact, both on those who heard her work and on her creative trajectory. Upon returning to Australia in 1981, she continued to explore and expand

25 Ibid.

26 See *ibid.*

her unique musical language while remaining a key figure in the promotion of Australian contemporary music on the international stage.

Julia Ryder: The cellist and her performances at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse (1986-1992)

Julia Ryder is one of Australia's most distinguished cellists, renowned for her chamber music and Beethoven interpretations. Between 1986 and 1992, she was highly active at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, where her performances influenced generations of composers and garnered acclaim, including the prestigious Kranichsteiner Musikpreis in 1986. Her participation in these courses showcased her versatility, performing a wide range of works by composers such as Brian Ferneyhough, Rodney Sharman, Kaija Saariaho, and others, each time leaving a strong artistic imprint.

In 21 May 1986, while residing in Sydney, Ryder applied to the Ferienkurse and distinguished herself with performances of contemporary compositions, including James Erber's 'Make or Break' for seven instrumentalists and Suzanne Giraud's 'L'offrande à Vénus'. The recognition she received that year affirmed her exceptional talent and granted her a scholarship. Her repertoire at this event demonstrated her ability to navigate complex and diverse modern works, a trait that would define her subsequent appearances at Darmstadt.

By 1988, Ryder had further solidified her reputation, delivering compelling interpretations of pieces such as Rodney Sharman's 'Dark Glasses' and Sergio Lanza's 'Ricerca di mutamento'. Her selection of works highlighted her commitment to expanding the contemporary cello repertoire while engaging with innovative compositional techniques. In 1990, Ryder continued to push boundaries, performing challenging pieces such as Brian Ferneyhough's 'La chute d'Icare' for clarinet and ensemble and Kaija Saariaho's 'Lichtbogen', which incorporated live electronics. These performances not only showcased her technical prowess but also her capacity for artistic expression in avant-garde music.

Her final documented appearance at the Ferienkurse occurred on 27 July 1992, by which time she was based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. She performed a variety of compositions, including Steve Ingham's 'Deuce' and Clarence Barlow's 'Im Januar am Nil', reaffirming her position as a versatile interpreter of contemporary music.²⁷

Throughout her career, Julia Ryder's participation in the Ferienkurse profoundly impacted the New Music scene, fostering collaborations with leading composers like Messiaen, Xenakis, and Finnissy. Her high-energy performances inspired numerous works written for her and led to extensive tours and recordings, both as a soloist and with ensembles across Australia, Europe, and Asia.

27 Audio recordings of the 13 works performed by Julia Ryder at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse are preserved in the IMD archive. These recordings are accessible by appointment only. For more information, visit [Julia Ryder's audios](#).

Now based in the mountains near Melbourne, Ryder continues to contribute to the arts through teaching, performing, and nurturing her passion for gardening. Her legacy at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse remains a testament to her dedication to contemporary music and her influence on the international stage.

Vanessa Tomlinson: A Percussionist at the Ferienkurse 1994

Composer and percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson is known for her transdisciplinary sound explorations and has emerged as a significant representative of Australian music in the twenty-first century. Her extensive engagement with experimental music has led her to perform works by numerous composers at festivals across various countries, including her participation in the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1994.²⁸

Tomlinson was introduced to the IMD by composer Brian Ferneyhough and her percussion professor, Steven Schick.²⁹ In 1993-1994, she attended the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) as a guest student, where she was joined by fellow students such as Elizabeth McNutt, Andrew May, Mark Osborne, and Erik Ulman. Encouraged by her peers, she decided to attend the Darmstadt courses in 1994. Coincidentally, she travelled to Darmstadt the same year that clarinetist, singer, and conductor Carl Rosman (b. 1971) also participated. Both were members of the Libra Ensemble, based in Melbourne.³⁰

During her time at the Ferienkurse, Tomlinson performed David Harris's '643 Pieces for a Percussionist'. She returned to Darmstadt in 1995 to perform a large-scale outdoor work for 15 musicians, also composed by Harris, although this performance was not affiliated with the IMD. Tomlinson's percussion training included studying under Bernhard Wolfe at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg from 1994 to 1995. Subsequently, she returned full-time to UCSD from 1995 to 1998 and moved to Melbourne in 1999. Notably, she was also associated with Ensemble Modern in Frankfurt and performed at the Adelaide Festival, likely in 1996.

Vanessa Tomlinson's decision to attend the Darmstädter Ferienkurse was shaped by a sense that participation in the festival was a requisite step for any leading instrumentalist engaged with contemporary music. However, she later reflected that, even at the time, her aesthetic orientation diverged significantly from the dominant paradigms associated with Darmstadt. Her musical influences were rooted in the experimental traditions of Morton Feldman – particularly his extended work 'For Philip Guston', which she was studying at the time – and John Cage. She recalled a particularly striking moment during a Darmstadt

28 Vanessa Tomlinson's Official [Website](#).

29 Steven Schick (b. 1954) is a distinguished American contemporary percussionist and an influential figure in the field of music education. Schick's scholarly contributions to the field include his acclaimed publication, 'The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams', along with numerous recordings of contemporary percussion music. For further information, please refer to his [faculty profile](#).

30 In an interview, Vanessa Tomlinson discusses her life and career. See Percussion Perspectives ep. 18: Vanessa Tomlinson (Percussionist, Artistic Director, Researcher) on [YouTube](#).

concert, where she sat beside Christian Wolff and was surprised to hear his 'Exercises' performed within such a context, underscoring the disconnect between her artistic values and the festival's programming tendencies.³¹

Tomlinson's artistic sensibilities had been shaped not only by American experimentalism but also by her involvement in a radical music scene in Adelaide that emphasized duration, extremes, and indeterminacy. Her subsequent studies with George Lewis had further deepened her engagement with free improvisation, an area she felt was discouraged or marginalised within the Darmstadt environment. She also cited the influence of Vinko Globokar's music theatre, often curating performances that referenced his aesthetic approach – for instance, by incorporating readings of Kurt Schwitters's 'Ursonate'. While these experimental practices were not foregrounded at Darmstadt during her time there, Tomlinson ultimately presented a duo concert with Elizabeth Jigalin that foregrounded their shared musical interests and drew notable attention. Despite her aesthetic distance from some of the dominant figures at the festival, Tomlinson expressed deep respect for Brian Ferneyhough's work and found his presence in the Darmstadt milieu intellectually stimulating.³²

Tomlinson forged many friendships during her time as a percussionist, notably with Eduardo Leandro, Tatiana Koleva, and Kuniko Kato, with whom she remains in close contact. She also appreciated the guidance of Steve Schick and James Wood, both of whom played significant roles in her development as a percussionist.

Having always questioned the composer/performer dichotomy, Tomlinson found her experience at Darmstadt challenging. She desired to engage in discussions, perform, and socialize with all participants and composers, resisting the urge to conform to predefined roles. Describing herself as someone who was never simply "on duty" as an instrumentalist, she was described as obstinate, full of ideas, and eager to delve into the material.³³

Recalling the atmosphere at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Vanessa Tomlinson reflected on the intensity of audience reactions, noting that she had witnessed people booing and walking out during performances – experiences that were unfamiliar to her at the time. Such responses, she observed, revealed the depth of audience engagement and their willingness to publicly reject artistic offerings. She recalled a performance by Bang on a Can, possibly in either 1994 or 1996, which provoked a notably vocal response from the audience. This incident highlighted what she perceived as a pervasive anti-minimalist sentiment at the festival. Tomlinson interpreted these reactions as symptomatic of an underlying hierarchy of musical value, one that appeared to privilege male composers, despite the presence of female faculty members such as Chaya Czernowin.³⁴

While she acknowledged the challenges of participating in such an ideologically charged environment, Tomlinson expressed a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to engage with the festival. Though she did not feel compelled to

31 Sarah Tomlinson expressed this in an e-mail to the author, 15 November 2023.

32 See *ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 See *ibid.*

return in subsequent years, she maintained contact with those musicians she found to be intellectually generous and open to diverse perspectives. In retrospect, she viewed the Ferienkurse as one among many international platforms for the exchange of innovative ideas. At the time, however, she regarded it as a vital and galvanizing force within the landscape of contemporary music – an experience that she found formative and of enduring value.³⁵

Crossing Boundaries:

Liza Lim's Impact and Presence at the Ferienkurse from 1998

Liza Lim, an Australian composer of Chinese descent, participated in the prestigious Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1998, contributing to a panel discussion on the globalization of new music and European independence. Born in 1966 in Perth to Chinese parents, Lim has built an illustrious career marked by her deep engagement with multidisciplinary art forms and her exploration of non-Western musical traditions. Her works span musical theatre, concert compositions, installation, and video projects, all of which reflect her interest in Asian ritual culture, Indigenous Australian aesthetics, and diverse global performance practices.³⁶

Lim's educational journey laid a strong foundation for her compositional development. She earned a Bachelor of Arts from the Victorian College of the Arts (1986), a Master of Music from the University of Melbourne (1996), and a PhD from the University of Queensland. She also pursued advanced studies in composition with Ton de Leeuw in Amsterdam and Richard David Hames in Melbourne. Hames had a profound influence on Lim, particularly through his access to the Faculty of Arts library, which exposed her to a wealth of scores and recordings. Her compositional voice began to crystallize in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as she explored the physicality of sound production and performers' interactions with their instruments. Her work shared affinities with Helmut Lachenmann's focus on sound as a physical reality, yet Lim approached this from a different perspective, integrating cultural and artistic dimensions.³⁷

Throughout the 1990s, Lim's compositions bridged cultural boundaries, integrating non-Western instruments such as the Turkish lute and the koto with classical ensembles. Her collaboration with the Australian contemporary music group 'ELISION' during this period was particularly fruitful, fostering a unique performance style that became central to her creative output. Lim's work also

35 See *ibid.*

36 Rosalind Appleby: *Women of Note*.

37 Richard Toop argues that Liza Lim's work is imbued with ritualistic concepts, though she interprets "ritual" in diverse ways. He notes that Brian Ferneyhough's music initially inspired Lim, and that her early compositions were influenced by British composers. In 1986, Lim completed her master's dissertation at the University of Melbourne, which focused on her analysis of Ferneyhough's early String Quartet Sonatas. She also references his composition *Funérailles* in her dissertation, examining the ritualistic themes present behind a figurative curtain. During the early stages of her career, Lim expressed considerable fascination with the compositions of *Funérailles* (See Richard Toop: *Klangwelten für verlorene Wörter*; Richard Toop, Liza Lim: Grove Music Online).

drew inspiration from a variety of intellectual sources, including John Cage's 'Silence', Riccardo Formosa's approach to craftsmanship, and the labyrinthine structures of Italo Calvino's writings, which influenced her approach to composition as a non-linear, improvisatory process. She also found inspiration in Roland Barthes' 'Mythologies' and Marcel Duchamp's ideas about the multiplicity of meaning, which aligned with her tendency to eschew predetermined structures in favour of more organic, intuitive development.³⁸



Wolfgang Lessing, Thomas Löffler, and Liza Lim performing with Ensemble Phorminx at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 1998. © IMD Archive (IMD-B3010040). Photo by Siegfried Meckle.

At the Ferienkurse 1998, Lim was a featured lecturer, and her compositions were performed by prominent ensembles such as Ensemble Phorminx, the Kairos Quartet, and soloists like Kurt Widmer and Mircea Ardeleanu. The works presented included 'Hell' (for string quartet), 'Change-O' (for baritone and percussion), and 'Inguz'.

In the panel discussion, Lim joined composers Julio Estrada, Toshio Hosokawa, Manfred Stahnke, and Chaya Czernowin in reflecting on the question, "Where are the peripheries?" As each composer navigated their centre of focus, Lim highlighted the cultural periphery she occupied by centring her work on Indigenous

38 See Tim Rutherford-Johnson: *The Music of Liza Lim*; *Liza Lim: Rifts in Time*; Walsh, Craig, Shaun Gladwell, TV Moore, Daniel Crooks, Daryl Buckley, Lisa Lim, Michael Riley: *Wave Front – Australian Contemporary Art Scene*.

Australian culture, thus positioning Darmstadt itself as a peripheral context with her artistic priorities.³⁹

The 1990s saw a flourishing of diverse musical voices within Australian New Music music, with composers like Liza Lim and Adam Yee contributing to a growing cross-cultural dialogue. This period also marked the rise of international composer residencies and the global recognition of Australian music, in part through festivals such as Sydney Spring, which showcased both Australian and international compositions. Outstanding chamber ensembles such as the Sydney Alpha Ensemble, Perihelion Ensemble, and ELISION championed these new works, rehearsing and performing pieces by young composers like Lim, helping to establish Australia's place on the world stage of contemporary music.⁴⁰

Lim's continued involvement with the Ferienkurse into the twenty-first century underscores her ongoing influence and dedication to expanding the boundaries of musical and cultural expression.

The oboist and composer Cathy Milliken: Between Brisbane, Berlin and Darmstadt

The Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, known for its significant role in shaping the contemporary music landscape, has long been a meeting ground for composers, instrumentalists, and theorists worldwide. Among its many international participants is Australian oboist, composer, and educator Cathy Milliken, whose career has seen her traverse the boundaries between traditional performance and experimental music-making.

Cathy Milliken's musical journey began in her hometown of Brisbane, where she initially took up the oboe. Her growing interest in contemporary music, coupled with a curiosity for composition, set the stage for a career that would soon extend beyond Australia. Milliken recalls Brisbane's contemporary music scene in the 1970s and early 1980s as vibrant yet isolated, with few avenues for young musicians interested in avant-garde music. It was a community nonetheless characterized by passionate teachers and mentors who fostered her burgeoning interest in contemporary techniques.

Brisbane's isolation from Europe's experimental music scene prompted Milliken to seek opportunities abroad. Influenced by the work of Australian and European musicians, she decided to move to Germany, a pivotal step that provided exposure to a wider network of artists and composers. Her early years in Germany involved intensive studies with established oboists and encounters with avant-garde composers.

39 Cf. the audio recordings available at the IMD archive: Roundtable Discussion: The Abdication of Europe? The Globalization of New Music (1). For further details, refer to Roundtable Discussion: The Abdication of Europe? The Globalization of New Music (2).

40 Richard Toop: *Ein Puzzle von Individualitäten*, pp. 37; Catherine Milliken: *Auf assoziativen Wegen*, pp. 39 f.; Brenton Broadstock: *Sound ideas*; Dugal McKinnon: *Australien / Neuseeland / Ozeanien*, pp. 192 ff.

Cathy Milliken's first documented appearance at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse occurred in 1984, marking a significant step in her career. She performed a piece for oboe by Bruno Maderna with the Ensemble Modern, a group she would collaborate with throughout her career. This particular performance took place on 16 March 1984, as part of a special concert commemorating the 10th anniversary of Maderna's death. Under the direction of Swiss conductor Matthias Bamert, Milliken and the ensemble presented a program that was both a tribute and an exploration of Maderna's music.⁴¹

Reflecting on the concert, Milliken emphasizes the intensity and depth of the rehearsals, which included collaboration with fellow musicians who shared a commitment to precision and expression. The environment of the Ferienkurse, characterized by a mix of established figures and emerging talents, provided Milliken with valuable insights into ensemble performance and the interpretative demands of contemporary music.

Two years later, in 1986, Milliken returned to the Ferienkurse, where her artistic focus expanded. Notably, she collaborated with oboist Christopher Redgate in a performance of 'Sotto Presse' by Wolfgang Motz, a piece for two oboes and quadrasonic tape. This performance was part of a guest concert by the London-based Gruppe 'Exposé', marking their debut in Germany with support from the British Council. The collaboration exemplified the Ferienkurse's commitment to fostering international exchange and cross-cultural partnerships in experimental music.⁴² Milliken's participation extended to the Ensemble Modern's performances during the same course, including works by composers like Dario Maggi ('Olimpia') and Richard Barrett ('Anatomy'), conducted by Bernhard Kontarsky. These concerts, often a result of workshops with composers, allowed performers to directly engage with the creative processes of contemporary composition, offering a unique educational experience.

The 1986 course left a lasting impression on Milliken. She observed a distinct openness to experimentation in Darmstadt, with discussions ranging from aesthetics to politics within the context of music. The interaction with composers, performers, and theorists provided her with insights that influenced her subsequent work as both an oboist and a composer.

After an extended break from Darmstadt, Milliken returned in 2004, a visit marked by significant achievements. Her piece 'En Secret', for countertenor, oboe d'amore, and guitar, was performed alongside collaborators Christopher Brandt and countertenor Daniel Gloger. Additionally, her work 'Jet', for clarinet and tape, was featured, performed by clarinetist Carol Robinson, and produced by Hessischer Rundfunk. Milliken also took part in Hermann Kretzschmar's 'schlichte Gedichte', contributing as an instrumentalist. A major highlight of the 2004 Ferienkurse was Milliken receiving the prestigious Kranichsteiner Musikpreis,

41 For details on Catherine Milliken's participation as an oboist at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1984, refer to the search results for 'Catherine+Milliken+1984' in the IMD archive.

42 For information regarding Catherine Milliken's participation as an oboist at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 1986, see the search results for 'Catherine+Milliken+1986' in the IMD archive.

a recognition of her contributions to the field of contemporary music.⁴³ This accolade marked a turning point in her career, affirming her role as a significant voice in contemporary music. The award, along with her collaborations at the Ferienkurse, contributed to the growth of her reputation in Germany and internationally.

Milliken's latest documented appearance at the Ferienkurse took place in 2018, where she presented a lecture titled 'Are democratic processes in musical practice realistic? Successes and pitfalls from the field'. This talk delved into the challenges and possibilities of collaborative and participatory approaches in music-making, a topic that has informed much of her recent work. The lecture addressed questions about authority, authorship, and the dynamics of ensemble performance, drawing from her extensive experience in various collaborative projects. Regarding Milliken's reflections on her four-decade association with the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, she has observed shifts in the aesthetic focus and organizational approaches under different leaderships, from the 1980s era of Friedrich Hommel to the present-day directorship of Solf Schaefer and Thomas Schäfer.

Cathy Milliken's career demonstrates a bridge between Australian and European contemporary music practices. Her involvement with the Darmstädter Ferienkurse is not only a testament to her achievements but also part of a broader narrative of Australian musicians engaging with Germany's avant-garde music scene. Despite the geographical distance from Australia, Milliken has remained connected to the country's contemporary music scene, advocating for Australian composers in Germany and participating in initiatives promoting contemporary music from her homeland. Her experience exemplifies the rich cultural exchange facilitated by institutions like the IMD.

Cathy Milliken's multifaceted experiences at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse reflect a continuous engagement with contemporary music's evolving practices and philosophies. From her performances and collaborations in the 1980s to her recognition with the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis in 2004 and her thought-provoking lecture in 2018, Milliken's career has been significantly shaped by her association with Darmstadt.⁴⁴ Her journey serves as an example of how Australian artists can contribute to, and be shaped by international contemporary music traditions.⁴⁵

43 For details on Catherine Milliken's participation as a composer and performer at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 2004, see the search results for 'Catherine+Milliken+2004' in the IMD archive.

44 For information on Catherine Milliken's role as a lecturer at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 2018, refer to the audio recording IMD archive: Past practices, present traumas, possible futures.

45 In an interview conducted via Zoom on 7 October 2024, Cathy Milliken clarified her invitation to the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 2018, where she served as an oboe instructor for composition students. This opportunity arose as part of an initiative led by the festival director, Thomas Schäfer, who encouraged her to propose new projects. During that year in Darmstadt, she delivered two lectures within a program characterized by collaborative compositions, which aligned with Christian Dierstein's percussion project. Milliken highlighted that from 1982 to 1994, the festival's director, Friedrich Hommel, adopted a bold and experimental approach to leading the Ferienkurse. Subsequently, Solf Schäfer's tenure from 1995 to 2008 saw the introduction of composer groups who facilitated discussions on themes including contemporary music, interculturality, and dialogues with other arts. Under Thomas Schäfer's leadership, beginning in 2010, the Ferienkurse further evolved into a more collaborative space. Milliken also participated in performances of

The ongoing dialogue between Australian and German contemporary music, as represented by Milliken and others, suggests a dynamic and evolving relationship that continues to inspire new generations of musicians.

Exploring Multidimensional Composition: Jaslyn Robertson's Experiences at the Ferienkurse (2021 & 2023) and her Evolving Musical Practice

Jaslyn Robertson, a composer based in Melbourne, is known for her multidisciplinary approach to music, incorporating electronic processing, experimental notation, and alternate tuning systems. Her career is characterized by a dedication to pushing musical boundaries, driven by a curiosity for new sounds and textures.

Born in Brisbane, Robertson began her formal music education at Monash University, where she studied composition with David Chisholm, Mary Finsterer, and Myles Mumford.⁴⁶ Her early work demonstrated a keen interest in contemporary music and electronic soundscapes, elements that would continue to influence her practice. She has composed for ensembles and soloists of international acclaim, such as the Swiss ensemble Vortex, Tristram Williams of ELISION, and the Landesjugendensemble Neue Musik Berlin, with performances taking place in prestigious venues like the Deutsche Oper in Berlin.

In Australia, Robertson's compositions have been featured in festivals including the Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music and MONA FOMA. She is also actively engaged in writing about the local music scene, contributing reviews and articles to publications such as RealTime Arts and CutCommon. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD at Monash University, focusing on the theme of queering concepts of censorship, a project that underscores her interest in music's potential to engage with complex social issues.

Darmstädter Ferienkurse 2021: Navigating New Landscapes in a Virtual Format

Robertson's first experience with the Darmstädter Ferienkurse came in 2021, amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally scheduled to attend in 2020, she participated virtually due to ongoing travel restrictions. Although the online format lacked the spontaneity and social interaction

works by other Australian composers, including Liza Lim, and emphasized the collaboration between the Ensemble Modern and the Australian-based Ensemble Elision. In 1996, the Ensemble Modern performed a composition by Brian Ferneyhough at the Adelaide Festival of Arts, further solidifying its connections to Australia. Milliken maintained strong ties with her homeland, particularly with the Queensland Conservatorium of Music in Brisbane, which she described as "a fantastic place." She noted that her Australian roots and heritage enriched her compositional work in Germany.

46 As of now, publicly available sources do not provide information regarding Jaslyn Robertson's date of birth. Details about her birthdate have not been disclosed in the accessible literature.

characteristic of in-person events, Robertson found value in the experience, particularly through workshops and lessons with notable figures such as Jennifer Walshe, Cathy Milliken, David Helbich, Sebastian Berweck, and Du Yun.

A highlight of the 2021 course was Robertson's involvement in the Minimoog Project, led by Sebastian Berweck. Here, she explored the nuances of composing for the Minimoog, a synthesizer not traditionally used in notated compositions. This experience deepened her understanding of notation as a communicative tool, prompting her to create scores that are visually expressive and unique, akin to a 'gift' for the performer. For the Minimoog piece, she handwrote the score using colored pencils as a tribute to early electronic music pioneers like Eliane Radigue, adding a personal touch to her experimental practice.

Darmstädter Ferienkurse 2023:

Expanding Horizons through Site-Specific and Collaborative Work

In 2023, Robertson returned to Darmstadt, this time participating in person, which provided a much more immersive experience. The highlight was the intensive workshop 'Local Music', led by Sarah Saviet and Arne Gieshoff. This site-specific project took place at the New Artists' Colony in Matildenhöhe, an artistically significant space surrounded by gardens. Working closely with a group of composer-performers, Robertson explored the sonic possibilities of the site, which inspired the creation of 'Rosenhöhe', a piece for trombone and violin. This composition engaged with the architectural features of the gallery space, incorporating elements of control and motion-tracking to blend live performance with field recordings.

The 2023 course also afforded Robertson opportunities for one-on-one lessons with esteemed composers such as Du Yun, Brigitta Muntendorf, and Matthew Schlomowitz, as well as classes with Helmut Lachenmann and Clara Iannotta. These encounters deepened her understanding of musical form and dramaturgy, crucial for her ongoing work on a chamber opera – a significant undertaking that will be her largest work to date.

Robertson's experiences at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse were not confined to a learning environment; they represented an opportunity to situate her practice within a global context. Her exchange to the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg in 2023 further expanded her compositional approach, allowing her to study multimedia composition under Alexander Schubert and engage with innovative technologies such as virtual reality and Ambisonic sound. This exposure to cutting-edge techniques enriched her artistic vocabulary, influencing her work on projects like the RMIT commission for a 24.2 multichannel 3D speaker system in Melbourne.

Back in Australia, Robertson continued to contribute to the local contemporary music scene by collaborating with prominent ensembles such as Speak Percussion, exploring new methods of sound spatialization and composition. Her dual presence in both international and local spheres underscores a commitment to

integrating diverse influences, demonstrating how global experiences can invigorate a local practice.

Robertson's artistic research is inextricably linked to social and political themes. In her PhD project on queering the concept of censorship, she uses composition as a means to question and subvert structures of power. This thematic focus is evident in her development of a chamber opera that explores creative expression within restricted social environments. The work reflects her broader interest in multisensory performance, often involving unconventional tunings, modular synthesis, and experimental forms of notation that challenge normative listening experiences.

Her music has been described as "theatrical and demanding" (Limelight) and evocative of "anxiety, a kind of otherness, and yet a joy" (The Sound Barrier),⁴⁷ indicating a complex aesthetic that draws listeners into critical engagement. By collaborating with artists, writers, and improvisers, Robertson's compositions transcend traditional concert settings, extending into multimedia art forms that invite audiences to contemplate broader societal issues.

Jaslyn Robertson's participation in the Darmstädter Ferienkurse in 2021 and 2023 has played a pivotal role in shaping her compositional practice. Through workshops, site-specific projects, and collaborative performances, she has expanded her artistic scope and refined her approach to music-making. By bridging international influences with local initiatives, Robertson's career exemplifies the dynamic interplay between global experiences and regional identity in contemporary composition. As she continues to challenge conventional boundaries through her artistic research and creative endeavours, her work will likely resonate as a significant contribution to the evolving landscape of new music.

From Melbourne to Montréal:

Madeline Roycroft's Musical Pathways and the Influence of Darmstadt

Madeline Roycroft's journey from Melbourne to Darmstadt and beyond encapsulates a vibrant career shaped by a commitment to musicology and a passion for writing about contemporary music. Her experiences reflect the intersection of music performance, academic pursuit, and cultural exchange, navigating diverse settings and grappling with issues such as gender, nationality, and ecoanxiety.

Roycroft's first encounter with the Darmstädter Ferienkurse began in 2016, when she learned about its Words on Music course, which was dedicated to exploring the complexities of music criticism. She had a background as an oboist and an emerging musicologist, driven by an early desire to write about music for newspapers and magazines. At that time, she viewed Darmstadt primarily as a historic festival, with a reputation as a site of radical modernist music. The

47 Ibid.

subsequent research and ongoing reflections on the course gradually solidified her interest, inspiring her to consider participation in the future.⁴⁸

An important precursor to her Darmstadt experience was the Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music (BIFEM) between 2 and 4 September 2016, which held music criticism workshops organized by David Chisholm in Australia. Although BIFEM is no longer running, Roycroft recalls hearing it referred to as “a small Australian answer to the Darmstadt program”. This comparison further fuelled her curiosity, framing Darmstadt as a site for engaging with new music in a manner resonant with her evolving interests as a scholar and critic.

Roycroft’s eventual participation in the Words on Music course at the first post-pandemic edition of the Ferienkurse in 2022 marked the realization of a long-standing ambition. Yet, her two-week stay was not without its challenges. While the course provided an immersive and stimulating environment, the uneven gender distribution – three women, one gender-diverse participant, and eight men – shaped her experience. She found the discussions occasionally dominated by louder voices, reflecting broader patterns of gendered communication dynamics within the field of music criticism. Despite these frustrations, she found meaningful opportunities to contribute, such as in a podcast discussion with composer Chaya Czernowin, where her questioning brought forward the topic of women’s choice regarding motherhood – a conversation she felt would not have arisen without her perspective.

Regarding this experience, Roycroft stated:

On gender, I was very aware of my gender throughout the two weeks in the words on music course because we were not evenly split (there were three women, one gender diverse person and eight men). Much of our time in the course was devoted to discussion, and of course everyone in the group was intelligent, passionate and had strong opinions, so from my perspective it was often a case of ‘whoever talks the loudest will be heard the most’. I found these discussions frustrating because I’m a softly spoken person and I was interrupted a few times when I did manage to speak for a bit, so I was never able to contribute my thoughts in a way that I was content with. But thankfully this was not the case for the small groups we formed to create the daily podcast. On one of the episodes we actually did an interview with Chaya Czernowin, and I received really nice feedback about the conversation we had with her about women’s choice to enter into motherhood or not. As my fellow podcasters were men I don’t think the conversation would have gotten to this place without my line of questioning, so I was proud of that. And kudos to the boys for sitting back and listening in that moment.⁴⁹

In addition to gender dynamics, the discourse on nationality proved to be a significant theme in Roycroft’s experience at Darmstadt. Her feelings of being “out of place” stemmed from discussions that often centred on the absence of participants from the “global south”. She found this term problematic, viewing it as Eurocentric, as it implies a dichotomy between economically “developed” and “underdeveloped” regions while ostensibly neutralizing the geopolitical and economic undertones. For Roycroft, this discourse was particularly challenging as

48 Madeline Roycroft provided feedback about her experiences at Darmstadt on 13 and 14 October 2024, in response to questions posed by the author. These thoughts (also through the following quotes) were shared in a private conversation on Facebook.

49 Ibid.

an Australian, given that Australia occupies the southern hemisphere geographically but does not fit the “global south” categorization due to its economic status.

Moreover, ecoanxiety surfaced as a prevalent topic in the discussions, with some participants suggesting that events like Darmstadt should limit long-distance travel to reduce the carbon footprint. As an Australian, Roycroft found these remarks particularly exclusionary, as her participation necessarily involved air travel. While some colleagues acknowledged the geographical realities faced by participants from outside Europe, the discussions often underscored a subtle but persistent Eurocentric bias in the assumptions about who the festival was for.

A high point of Roycroft’s time at Darmstadt was her meeting with Matthew Shlomowitz, an Australian composer based in the UK. This encounter offered a comforting connection to home amidst the international and sometimes intense environment of the course. Shlomowitz’s familiarity and shared humour resonated with Roycroft, providing a sense of belonging that contrasted with the cultural and intellectual tensions of the program. The significance of this meeting also reflects the broader value of cultural exchanges at events like Darmstadt, where connections between artists, scholars, and performers often transcend national boundaries, fostering a shared sense of purpose in the world of contemporary music.

Following her time at Darmstadt, Roycroft’s career took another turn, with a move to Montréal for a full-time research fellowship.⁵⁰ The opportunity to work on French music presented a promising continuation of her research career, addressing a major challenge faced by musicologists in Australia: the limited funding for academic positions. While she enjoyed life in Melbourne and was deeply connected to its music scene, the need for stable, full-time research support necessitated the transition. In Montréal, she has faced the dual task of adapting to a new cultural environment while managing familiar feelings of imposter syndrome, a sentiment often exacerbated by Australia’s ‘tall poppy syndrome’ – the cultural inclination to critique those who achieve notable success.

The move has also brought new experiences, such as learning to navigate a ‘real’ winter and integrating into the local academic community. Roycroft finds that her background as an Australian-speaking French often surprises her colleagues, creating opportunities for cultural exchange that extend beyond her work in musicology.⁵¹

Madeline Roycroft’s career embodies the spirit of global academic and musical exchange, with her trajectory spanning three distinct cultural landscapes: Australia, Germany, and Canada. Her experiences highlight the personal and professional challenges of navigating different musical and academic communities, while also reflecting broader issues of gender, nationality, and the role of the non-European participant in the global discourse on contemporary music. Her reflections on the Ferienkurse illustrate the complexities of engaging in a space traditionally dominated by European perspectives, and her journey continues to unfold as she seeks to further her scholarly contributions in Montréal.

50 See *ibid.*

51 See *ibid.*

Roycroft's story offers a compelling perspective on the diverse pathways that shape contemporary musicology, challenging traditional narratives and advocating for more inclusive approaches in international music festivals. Her experiences underscore the ongoing relevance of critical reflections on gender and nationality in shaping the future of music scholarship and festival participation.

Conclusion

This article aims at extending the discussion by recognizing the evolving role of Australian women in *Neue Musik* through the lens of their participation in the Darmstädter Ferienkurse. While initial decades after the founding of the courses in 1946 saw minimal representation of female composers, the eventual involvement of Australians like Norma Tyer, Ann Carr-Boyd, Moya Henderson, Cathy Milliken, Sarah Hopkins, Julia Ryder, Vanessa Tomlinson, Liza Lim, Samantha Wolf, Elizabeth Jigalin, Madeline Roycroft, and Jaslyn Robertson illustrates a gradual broadening of opportunities for women within contemporary music.

The study identifies key moments in which Australian women took part in challenging the traditional male-dominated landscape at Darmstadt, with their performances and compositions gaining recognition and contributing to the diversification of the repertoire. The article highlights how later participants, including Samantha Wolf and Julia Ryder, built upon these foundations, integrating distinct perspectives and expanding the influence of Australian contemporary music in an international context.

Drawing from interviews, archival research at the IMD, and an examination of the literature on gender and music, this article emphasizes that while gender disparities have historically shaped the participation of women in contemporary music, the incremental progress seen at Darmstadt reflects broader changes within the field. The ongoing development of the Darmstadt-Australia connection provides a platform for rethinking the narratives of contemporary music and redefining what it means to contribute to the global stage of *Neue Musik*.

In advocating for increased visibility of these contributions, the article also calls for further investigation into overlooked works and experiences, encouraging future research to continue unravelling the histories of women in contemporary music. The stories of these pioneering Australian artists inspire a deeper understanding of how musical culture can evolve towards greater inclusivity and diversity, pushing the boundaries of what is considered normative within avant-garde music practices.

The stories of the Australian women who participated in the Darmstädter Ferienkurse reveal both striking commonalities and illuminating differences, shedding light on the broader narrative of women in contemporary music and Australia's evolving relationship with this crucial hub of avant-garde music.

A clear throughline across their experiences is a shared sense of boundary-breaking – whether musical, geographical, or cultural. Many of these artists arrived in Darmstadt as outsiders to the central European avant-garde

scene, yet they engaged critically and creatively with its dominant currents. For example, Jennifer Fowler and Moya Henderson, who attended in earlier decades, often found themselves navigating a patriarchal musical culture while asserting their compositional identities. Their pioneering roles helped open doors for future generations.

In contrast, younger composers like Liza Lim or performers like Vanessa Tomlinson and Jaslyn Robertson entered the Ferienkurse in a later, more pluralistic era. Yet, they still grappled with the enduring expectations of “Neue Musik” aesthetics while bringing in new perspectives – drawing on postcolonial theory, intercultural practice, and feminist thought.

Sarah Hopkins’s and Julia Ryder’s experiences stand out for their embodied and performance-based approaches, offering an alternative to the cerebral, structurally-driven music that dominated Darmstadt in earlier years. Hopkins’s holistic and spiritual orientation, for example, posed a deliberate contrast to the Modernist emphasis on abstraction and complexity.

Cathy Milliken, who transitioned from performer to composer and cultural leader, embodies a model of artistic evolution deeply connected to her time in Germany. Her work reflects both deep integration with European traditions and an ongoing commitment to collaborative and cross-disciplinary practice.

As for the order of presentation in this article, it follows a roughly chronological and generational structure – beginning with early trailblazers like Fowler and Henderson, and moving toward more recent participants. This structure not only traces the historical development of Australian women’s presence at Darmstadt but also subtly maps the shifting aesthetic and institutional landscapes of the Ferienkurse over the decades.

By highlighting these women’s voices, this article reveals how Australian artists have not only contributed to but also redefined the contours of contemporary music at Darmstadt. The diversity of their pathways – some driven by compositional innovation, others by performance, collaboration, or pedagogy – challenges any singular narrative about gender, nationality, or style. What unites them, ultimately, is a commitment to experimentation, to making space for new sounds, and to reshaping the institutions in which those sounds are heard.

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