

Business/Music etc

On sour notes and striking the right chords

MICHAEL BAUME

Thanks, but no, thanks. Don't even bother thinking about complaints that the big end of town should have done more in the election campaign to promote the benefits of Malcolm Turnbull's corporate tax cuts in response to Bill Shorten's hypocritical opposition. Clearly, the main weakness in the cuts was the delay of up to ten years before they were to be fully implemented, not Shorten's self-evidently phoney objection that this was 'not the right time' for them. But with so much of the corporate sector (with the banking finance and insurance sectors being singled out by the Governance Institute of Australia) being 'on the nose', Malcolm Turnbull was already suffering from being too close to the big end of town - and 'seriously out of touch' with John Howard's aspirational Australians. Any closer link between the Vaucluse 'toff' and Collins Street could have cost even more seats! Anyway, a corporate public campaign singing the (accurate) benefits of tax cuts would have merely been trying to fatten the pig on market day.

The problem goes much deeper. Nothing meaningful is being done to inform Australians, particularly the young in educational institutions, about the real impact of free-market capitalism on our way of life; the correlation between corporate success and household wealth. As West-farmers' Richard Goyder lamented last week 'How do we get the message out that growing businesses and making profits, employing people, paying taxes is a good thing to do?' Corporate Australia (and Liberal governments) had better find out pretty quick; the forces of the anti-capitalist left are winning the propaganda war.

Let's take a break from political and economic sour notes as Malcolm Turnbull reaps the reward of his off-key election campaign and the discordant pantomime that passes for a US presidential election add to the quavering uncertainty of reserve banks and the IMF about the future. It's time to strike a more positive chord - the multi-million dollar Grand Piano business. Australia imports annually about a thousand, retailing for more than \$30 million. A few are made in Australia, like the revolutionary Stuart in Newcas-

tle, but the old local favourite Beale is now made in China. As with the huge trade in electronic keyboards, most come from Asia with almost 80 per cent from Japan and China. But Germany provides the top end in quality, with only four per cent of the volume but 20 per cent of the value. It's hard to find a concert hall in Australia where a Steinway & Sons is not on offer.

But after July's spectacular Sydney International Piano Competition, Steinway's recently appointed (and Lindsay Fox-backed) Australian agents can no longer take this dominance for granted. The competition proved to be a serious contest between the four leading concert grand piano brands. During the preliminary solo recital and semi-final chamber music rounds at Sydney's Conservatorium of music, contestants were required to perform on each of the four pianos provided, mirroring what professionals face. These were the big three of Steinway, Yamaha and Shirgeru-Kawai along with an Italian first-time interloper in any top competition, Fazioli. Only the six contestants who made it to the finals got to choose a preferred piano. And for most, it was definitely not Steinway, many of whom expressed disappointment at the instrument provided. Five of the six chose Fazioli for their Mozart finals concerto, with one selecting Kawai. It was only in the 19th-20th century finals that Steinway got a guernsey from three, including the \$50,000 first prize winner, Russia's outstanding Andrey Gugnin who switched from the Fazioli of his 'Jeunehomme' Mozart No. 9 to Steinway for an electrifying Prokofiev No. 3. The large audience, many from interstate, were astounded by the strikingly different sound of the same Prokofiev coming from Gugnin against the flowing, fluid (but not entirely accurate) musicality of Kazakhstan's Oxana Shevchenko on Fazioli.

The pianist winners look forward to their career-enhancing concert and recital engagements with conductors like Valery Gergiev at the Marinsky and at the London Philharmonic and Sydney Symphony Orchestras. But what is in store for the concert grand piano business now that Fazioli has turned it on its head?

CULTURE BUFF

Donald McDonald



Margarita Sampson,
The Grove. Photo: M. Schofield

Sculptures at Barangaroo

The most significant enhancement to Sydney Harbour since the restoration of Walsh Bay, the Barangaroo development is coming into its own. For the next three weeks until 21 August, the foreshore park will be host to a sculpture exhibition. *Sculpture at Barangaroo* is being presented by the Barangaroo Delivery Authority in partnership with David Handley and *Sculpture by the Sea*. Barangaroo will be showing 14 works, eight of which are new for this exhibition. Major artists are represented including Ron Robertson-Swann and Ken Unsworth together with emerging artists and, appropriately, several aboriginal artists.

Robertson-Swann's work, *Weighty Matters* is three large unrelated metal works he has created over 40 years, one of which, *Tony's Tower II*, honours his mentor Sir Anthony Caro. Ken Unsworth's *Harlequin Shuttle*, on loan from its original commissioner, Scenic World Katoomba, is eight metres tall and covered in coloured plexiglass. Margarita Sampson, a popular favourite from *Sculpture by the Sea*, is represented by *The Grove* on the Sea Wall Lawn. The Milky Way Sisters, three Sydney artists, have contributed, *Barangaroo Dreaming* representing a huge crinoline of eight layers, one for each of eight generations.

Artists will be giving practical demonstrations of their creative processes and a series of free talks will be given by them during weekends, see www.barangaroo.sydney for the schedule. This is a great promotion of sculpture.