

# Mrs Carey's CONCERT

A film by Bob Connolly and Sophie Raymond

*Smile... Be Brilliant...*

*No Pressure!*

[WWW.MRSCAREYSCONCERT.COM](http://WWW.MRSCAREYSCONCERT.COM)

## THE STORY

At a Sydney girls' school, music director Karen Carey prepares her young students for a concert at the Opera House. Believing in the transformative power of great music, Carey insists upon a classical repertoire, sets a dauntingly high performance standard and requires the participation of every girl in the school. Carey inspires many of her girls, but not everyone shares her passion. And they're not afraid to say so.

Carey's greatest challenge will be firing up the unwilling, and her principal antagonist is 16 year old Iris Shi. Waging open warfare against authority, the charismatic Iris is the focal point of student resistance to Carey's Opera House ambitions. Loftiest of those ambitions is the compulsory learning, by the entire 1200 strong student body, of the grand chorus from Verdi's opera Aida. Off by heart, in Italian.

Iris is the only girl who gets seriously under Karen Carey's skin. Emily Sun is a very different proposition. And a different sort of headache. She is Carey's star musician – a gifted but troubled teenager on the threshold of a brilliant musical career if only ... Karen wants Emily to solo in a Bruch Violin Concerto. But to bring out her best, she needs to keep the girl from going off the rails, and then get inside her head. And that proves no easy task, because young Emily has her own distinctive take on everything.

Mrs Carey's Concert is about music making and coming of age, about talent and courage, rebellion. About those prepared to open their minds and hearts to what the world has to offer ... and those yet to discover the potential within.



Ravel Brahms Verdi Bruch  
Bernstein Stanhope Bach  
Vaughn Williams Barber  
Shostakovich Handel Bloch  
Bruch Schultz Peterson

## DIRECTORS STATEMENT

As filmmakers we share a belief that making music may be the human animal in its finest, and most revealing display. To perform at a high level takes heart, intellect, finely tuned physical skill, commitment, imagination, adaptation, inspiration, courage. On top of that, in our film we were dealing with performers on the cusp of adulthood - full of power and potential, unsure how to utilise it, attempting to engage with musical masterpieces on an emotional level requiring a self knowledge they're only just beginning to discover.

Worthy material for an observational film.

Our approach was simple and one that Bob and late partner Robin Anderson had long been committed to. You choose a potentially interesting situation, stay there long enough to become part of the furniture, and document unfolding events as honestly as you can, without recourse to didacticism or ideology.

### *The back story*

Bob's association with MLC School and its Director of Music Karen Carey goes back more than a decade, as both his daughters had been through the school and been involved in Carey's projects at one time or other. So he was well acquainted with her "crazy, abrasive, rambustuous mix of vision, drive, madness, knowledge and skill," and long marked her down as a potential subject for a film.

In 2007 Karen asked us both to film her 9th Opera House Concert and create a DVD for the parents. The highlight of that concert was undoubtedly Doretta Balkizas' performance of the 2nd movement of the Brahms Violin Concerto. We watched her play, close up in our viewfinders, accompanied by her equally young orchestra of peers. It was instantly compelling, perplexing, moving, even without knowing them as individuals. They were so young, so flighty, continually glancing nervously out at the audience. But when they put their instruments up and began to play, a transformation took place in front of us and magic sounds were produced.

It was this unexpected disjunct, that began to make us think, what's going on here? Are these children especially gifted? Are they privy to a particularly effective training technique? After all, MLC is a comprehensive high school, not a music academy. Perhaps it's simply great music that brings out the best in people. Perhaps it's the inspirational influence of an iconic venue like the Opera House. Or the passion and drive of Karen and her fellow teachers. We suspected the answer was complex and nuanced, and that a closer look at how these concerts are put together might yield rich dividends.

Then we heard Doretta's background story, and our antennae went on full alert. When Karen first proposed the Brahms, Doretta balked, convinced she lacked the technical ability and emotional maturity to do justice to such a great work. For a long time this shy but gifted schoolgirl "would not put herself up in front of the orchestra." Just weeks before the concert, with Doretta stubbornly refusing to expose herself to scrutiny, matters reached crisis point and Carey laid down the law. You will perform! The bullying tactics worked, and in June 2007, on the concert platform of the Sydney Opera House in front of 2000 people, Doretta played her heart out and brought the house down. She had come of age. "But just when they really start to get it," Carey mused to us later, with a certain wistfulness, "they leave school, and we lose them, and we have to start all over again, with the next lot." The bittersweet lament of the teacher who lives for the job.

We were hooked. Then and there, we decided to document, right from the beginning, Music Director Karen Carey's perennial struggle with "the next lot" - the girls who would perform 2 years later at the 2009 concert.

## DIRECTORS STATEMENT CONTINUED...

We filmed at MLC for 18 months, and it was no easy journey. The girls would come with the tide of their weekly scheduled music classes and leave again. The staff would had to make do with a bare 45 minutes of their girls' time. It's very intense, the high school years. We undergo so much change mentally and physically.

We wanted the audience to share their intense experience, to read between the lines, with no narration or explanatory interviews getting in the way. This reluctance to dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" is uncharacteristic of documentary but commonplace in fictional drama. As Billy Marshal Stoneking puts it: "The cheapest part of the budget is the audiences' imagination... so use it".

Despite the temptations of painting on a wider socio/political canvas, we chose to focus on the music, on the Music Department and its 2009 Opera House Concert program. For in truth, this was Karen Carey's focus. She sees all the girls as musicians or potential musicians. Ethnicity or family life only became of interest to her if it was getting the way of their emotional or musical development.

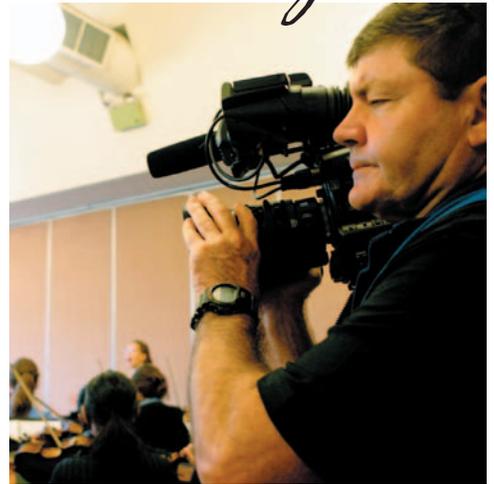
Our greatest challenge in the edit was to chart the musical progression and the emotional development of the girls as they wrestled with the demanding repertoire and the ever looming deadline of the Opera House Concert. It was a multi-layered process, transformations often subtle. As subtle as the difference in speed of vibrato on a single note. Every day of editing brought a new challenge, as we gradually brought our 263 hours of rushes down to 95 minutes.



# DIRECTOR/PRODUCER *Bob Connolly*

Connolly began his career at the ABC, directing some 30 documentaries in the 1970s and winning several national awards.

He left the ABC to work independently with Robin Anderson, releasing *First Contact* (1983), *Joe Leahy's Neighbours* (1989) and *Black Harvest* (1992). Shot in the PNG Highlands over ten years, these 3 films won 30 national and international awards, including an Oscar nomination for *First Contact*. All three won the Grand Prix at France's Festival Cinema du Reel, and AFI awards for Best Documentary. In 1996 Connolly and Anderson released *Rats in the Ranks*. Their last film together (Robin Anderson died in 2002) was *Facing the Music* (2001) which



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enjoyed a lengthy national theatrical release. It too won the AFI Award for Best Documentary, and was voted most popular film at the Sydney and Brisbane Film Festivals. All five of Connolly and Anderson's films won the Australian Film Critics Circle Award for Best Documentary. In March 2002, Bob Connolly's wife and professional colleague Robin Anderson died aged 51.

With co-director Sophie Raymond, Connolly has just completed *Mrs Careys Concert*

# *Sophie Raymond*

DIRECTOR



MRS CAREY'S CONCERT is Sophie Raymond's debut feature length documentary, and builds on her successful career as an animator and singer/songwriter with academic foundations in Anthropology & Theatre. Sophie teamed up with Bob Connolly after a chance meeting at IDFA in 2003. She was at the festival representing (as co director) the highly successful, short animated docco IT'S LIKE THAT. The film went on to garner several awards and enjoy an Australian theatrical release and over 60 festival screenings worldwide.

Previously, Sophie was Assistant Animator on Adam Elliot's Oscar winning short HARVIE KRUMPET and she went on to work on Elliot's recent feature animation MARY AND MAX.

As a singer/songwriter Sophie released & toured three albums of her own work Nationally and internationally, and presented a regular segment on ABC National radio, thus bringing a wealth of hands-on experience to her role as sound recordist, editor and co director of Mrs Carey's Concert.

Her next work in development- an animated documentary series "The Nature of Things" with co-producer Jane Liscombe.

PRODUCER *Helen Panckhurst*



Helen Panckhurst is a principal of production company Matchbox Pictures. She recently co-produced the Logie & AFI Award winning children's television series MY PLACE. She was series producer on the landmark documentary series FIRST AUSTRALIANS with indigenous filmmakers Rachel Perkins and Darren Dale, and produced the one-hour documentary THE MATILDA CANDIDATE with Curtis Levy.

Helen's other producing credits include Alex Holmes' ALI & THE BALL, winner of the 2008 Dendy Award for Best Short Fiction and selected for Berlinale 2009. RAN: REMOTE AREA NURSE, the Chapman Pictures six-part SBS drama miniseries that Helen co-produced, won Best Miniseries, Best Television Screenplay and Best Lead Actress in Television at the 2006 AFI Awards and Most Outstanding Actress at the 2007 Logie Awards.

## CREW LIST

Directors BOB CONNOLLY SOPHIE RAYMOND Producers BOB CONNOLLY HELEN PANCKHURST  
Camera BOB CONNOLLY Sound SOPHIE RAYMOND Editing SOPHIE RAYMOND RAY THOMAS<sup>ASE</sup>  
Additional Editing NICK MEYERS<sup>ASE</sup> Concert Recording BOB SCOTT Sound Post DORON KIPEN  
Produced with the assistance of SCREEN AUSTRALIA, SCREEN NSW THE ADELAIDE FILM FESTIVAL  
THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION,

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Running Time: 95 minutes  
Aspect Ratio: 16:9  
Sound: 5.1 Dolby Surround & 2.0 LtRt  
Master: HDCAM  
Codecs: HDV, DVC Pro, Standard Definition, 16 mm  
Shooting Ratio: 175:1  
Rating: TBA  
Language: English  
Filmed on Location in Sydney, Australia

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## CHARACTERS

*Karen Carey*

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC, MLC SCHOOL, SYDNEY



Karen Carey has worked in music education for 30 years. She was appointed Director of Music at MLC School in 1989, where she set about developing a comprehensive music program for all students. Composition and performance has been a major focus, and currently there are no less than four professional composers on staff. Under Karen's direction MLC has presented 10 biennial Opera House Concerts, all featuring commissioned works, with a national award for excellence presented by the federal Education minister.

She's led her students on numerous international music tours acclaimed for their high standard of performance and for the presentation of contemporary Australian Art music. Her outstanding contribution to music education was recognised in 2007

VIOLINIST *Emily Sun*



Emily began playing the violin at a very young age, introduced to the instrument by her father Daniel, a composer, violinist and conductor, who tragically died when she was 5. She won her AMusA for piano at 13, her LMusA for violin at 14. She went through MLC School on a music scholarship, and on graduating won a full scholarship to the Sydney Conservatorium Open Academy.

Emily has won numerous state and national music competitions, including the Australian National Youth Concerto Competition and the Richard Goldner National Concerto Competition. After her debut with the East-West Philharmonic Orchestra in 1999 aged 10, she's been a guest soloist with the Shanghai Philharmonic, the Queensland Youth Orchestra, the Balmain Sinfonia and the Ku-Ring-Gai Philharmonic.

Emily is currently studying at the Sydney Conservatorium but will go to London later this year to take up a full scholarship at the Royal College of Music.

*Louise Keller*

HEAD OF STRINGS, MLC SCHOOL, SYDNEY



Louise studied violin and piano at the Sydney Conservatorium, and after graduating, taught at several schools before her appointment as Director of Strings at MLC in 2002. She's also a freelance accompanist, playing for numerous eisteddfods, recitals and concerts. Louise has conducted various orchestras in Sydney, including the Sydney Youth Orchestra, Kuringai Philharmonic and other community ensembles. She's currently President of the Kuringai Philharmonic.

## CHARACTERS CONT...

VIOLIN TUTOR *Lynn Byun*



After a Korean childhood steeped in music, Lynn moved to Australia at 14, and after graduating from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, has performed at music festivals and concerts in Korea, Australia, South America and the United States as both soloist and ensemble player. She's the founding member of 'Live Music Sydney' a string orchestra directed by Goetz Richter; and the 'Ensemble Consonant', an up and coming chamber group. Her performances have been broadcast on 2MBS-FM.

As well as performing, Lynn loves teaching, and is currently working a conductor of the String Sinfonia at Sydney Conservatorium High School and a string teacher at MLC.

RESIDENT COMPOSER *Damian Barbeler*



Damian Barbeler's award-winning compositions have been heard around the world, sung and played by leading Australian and international soloists and ensembles. But a distinctive part of Damian's expertise is his ability to inspire younger musicians to excel in professional settings.

His wide-ranging career has taken him to places he never imagined it could, from famous concert halls to biscuit factories, board rooms and far-flung parts of regional Australia.

Acting out the precept that an artist should also teach, Damian joyously inhabits the exquisite, rarified atmosphere of art music, the invigorating world of beginners, students and music-loving amateurs.

*Kimballi Harding*  
HEAD OF MUSIC CURRICULLUM, MLC SCHOOL, SYDNEY



Kimballi Harding is Karen Carey's deputy and an accomplished performer in her own right. Beginning her musical journey at 3, studying both violin and piano, Kim won a scholarship to MLC. Thriving under Karen Carey and staff, she topped the State in HSC Music in Year 11, winning a Premier's Prize for outstanding performance.

After graduating in Music from Sydney University, Kim studied piano in Paris under Madame Clidat, performing at a number of international competitions. After studying Musicology at the Sorbonne, she returned to Sydney to teach at MLC. Kim's passionate about teaching, whether it be musicology or choral performance, working with students from kindergarten to senior level.