

Richard Pollett 10th Anniversary Commemorative Concert

17 October 2021 Customs House, Brisbane 11:00am

Good morning, Mr Steve Minnikin MP, Shadow Minister for Transport and Main Roads; Ms Karina Mall; Mr Timothy Matthews, Australian Youth Orchestra Board representative; and Mr Chris Bonnelly; Professor Debra Terry AO, Vice-Chancellor and President; Professor Ottmar Lip and members of the University Senior Leadership Group; Richard Pollett's parents, Professor Patricia Pollett and Emeritus Professor Philip Pollett; family and friends; industry representatives; Friends of Music and UQ colleagues; distinguished guests; and all of our friends joining us through the live stream around Australia and the world.

My name is **Liam Viney**, and I'm the Head of the School of Music at The University of Queensland, and I'm emcee for today's Richard Pollett 10th Anniversary Commemorative Concert.

Today is about celebrating the legacy of Richard Owain Pollett. It's about commemorating his life through performances of musical works that were important to him or dedicated to him, and it's about understanding how Richard's life continues to create meaning through initiatives such as the Richard Pollett Memorial Award, which will be presented — the 2021 award will be presented — towards the end of proceedings.

I'd like to start, however, by acknowledging the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their ancestors and their descendants who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society. For me, one of those valuable contributions — one that is relevant today — is the Indigenous cultural practice of *Sorry Business*.

Sorry Business seeks to ensure that a community can move past death and commemorate those lost with consideration and celebration.

There are, of course, significant differences between *Sorry Business*, which is an important cultural protocol with specific practices that usually occur in the immediate aftermath of a death, and what we are doing today, ten years after the loss of Richard. But I respectfully suggest that there is also a point of connection that we can reflect on and learn from, which is the role of community in the grieving process.

For me, there's something very beautiful in the phrase itself, *Sorry Business*, which acknowledges that processing sorrow needs to be the business of a whole community, and that it may require multiple approaches and activities.

When Richard was tragically killed in a horrific car-road crash while cycling in 2011, an entire community of people across the globe was struck by grief.

Today, we acknowledge the sorrow that remains and will always be part of our community when thinking about Richard, while at the same time commemorating and celebrating his life and legacy.

We are, of course, in a privileged position to be able to celebrate Richard as we are doing today.

I'm grateful that we have the opportunity to spend some time on the loss of Richard, even though today is a commemoration and not a memorial, because it's important to understand and acknowledge why we are here — why we are here ten years after his loss.

At the heart of this tragedy is extraordinary promise unfulfilled. There are personal and public dimensions to this unfulfilled promise.

On a personal level, Richard would have been 35 years old right now. He might have had children, grandchildren for Patricia and Philip. Patricia also mentioned he might be balding and with grey hairs — I don't know where she got that idea from!

He certainly would have been continuing to inspire people as a human being. The countless letters and testimonials from people around the world that Patricia and Philip received were unfailingly consistent: Richard was humble, he was noble-minded, he was liked and respected by everyone who knew him.

Professionally, 35-year-old Richard would have been enjoying a very significant career as a musician. There was such momentum building behind him. There's no doubt that his talent would have enriched the cultural life of this country and beyond.

It's important to recognise this loss because it goes some way to explaining the powerful legacy that's emerged in his name over the last decade.

Perhaps most tangibly, the connection to landmark cycling safety legislation as a direct result of Richard's death. Queensland was the first state in Australia to trial minimum safe passing distances in 2014. The new rules became law in 2016, and as of April this year, every jurisdiction in Australia now has similar legislation.

This impact on a national discourse around cycling safety is further reflected in over 50 news articles related to Richard over the last decade.

Then there's the outpouring from the musical community around this country and beyond. In the years after his death, there were four new works by major composers written in his memory. There were almost 30 performances dedicated to Richard by major ensembles and performers, and that's not including hundreds of performances by young musicians in the various prizes and awards established in his memory.

Exactly 30 young musicians have been financially supported by winning those four major awards. You can read testimonials from some of them in the program.

The most significant of those awards is the Richard Pollett Memorial Award, administered by the Australian Youth Orchestra. More will be said about the award later, but I will briefly describe its underlying significance for today.

One day, Richard was out busking in Lugano, where he was studying at the time. He finished busking and went home. Sometime soon after, he received a mysterious email in which an organisation he'd never heard of was claiming to have selected him to win a \$2,000 award.

Like any savvy digital native, Richard hit the delete button, but they persisted. By the third email, he thought he'd better look into this.

As it turned out, while he'd been busking, a scout for the US-based Williamson Foundation had heard him play, gone home, somehow found his contact details and nominated him for an award to support him in attending summer music courses.

The Richard Pollett Memorial Award being awarded today is inspired by this out-of-the-blue model. The winner does not know that they are being considered until they receive notification that they've won.

But the symbolism goes deeper. While playing the violin phenomenally well is the first criterion, the equally important second criterion is that the winner must be a person of integrity and character. Who they are as a person matters, just like who Richard was as a person matters to this day.

So Richard lost his future, but his impact and legacy lives on through the spirit of this award. In particular, his example continues to teach people about goodness and beauty, about strength and discipline, about values and principles that confirm the best in humanity.

There is no better way to reflect and celebrate Richard's personal and artistic legacy than through sharing music together. So today is also a concert. We wouldn't be honouring Richard, who lived for music, without performing music.

So it now gives me great pleasure to introduce Pulse Chamber Orchestra, who'll perform three works — two by Mozart and the third by Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin.

Elena's work is called *For Richard*, and she wrote it in the days following Richard's passing. At the core of the piece is a melody derived from the letters in the name Richard.

Please welcome Pulse Chamber Orchestra.

When Richard died, he was on a short visit to Australia. At the time, he was actually based in Tel Aviv, where he was studying with one of the most celebrated violinists in the world.

He was only to be back in Australia for a couple of weeks to perform a concerto by Elena Kats-Chernin with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra in QPAC. He'd been communicating closely with Elena in the lead-up, and she was enjoying the burgeoning relationship with Richard, having already collaborated with Patricia many times over the years.

Another composer who is close to the Pollett family is Andrew Ford, who you may know as a composer. You may also know him as the host of *The Music Show* every week on Radio National.

He composed *Cradle Song*, the next work in Richard's memory, and it was premiered by Michelle Walsh, who is performing today in the Beethoven which is after this, and Stephen Emmerson in 2012.

Cradle Song is a work that speaks for itself in terms of its vulnerable simplicity, and in that simplicity it evokes for me the last conversation that Richard had with his father, Philip, just hours before his death on the 27th of September 2011.

Typically for Richard, that conversation happened to be quite deep, and it concerned the poetry of William Blake. Richard had just read *Auguries of Innocence* and was discussing it with his father at length.

That very morning, he'd been especially taken by the famous opening:

"To see a world in a grain of sand

And a heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour."

The next work on the program is the slow movement, the Cavatina, from Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 130.

This piece is well known as one of Beethoven's most moving late works, and it was a very significant part of the musical selection at Richard's funeral.

This is a good opportunity to hear from Richard himself. His friends sent Patricia and Philip a lot of emails and communications from him after he died, and this is one of their favourite sections from just an email that he wrote to a friend, a general conversation.

And he said to his friend:

"You need to hear his late quartets. All his music is great, but the late quartets really are in a different universe, as far as I'm concerned. They're so effing ahead of their time.

He was a full-blooded romantic artist. He wrote them on his deathbed, completely poverty-stricken and bed-bound, and he's finding these strange, blissful places through his chamber music.

"The slow movement of Opus 132 completely blew my mind to bits when I first heard it. Also Opus 130, especially the Cavatina, the slow movement. It has this bit where the music briefly goes off on this sort of blissful tangent that I still regard as the most transcendent, cryptic and mystical in all of classical music."

Please welcome Adam Chalabi, Michele Walsh, Patricia and Patrick Murphy to the stage for Beethoven's Cavatina.

As a child, Richard was rather quiet and thoughtful. As a teenager, he showed little interest in television, partying or going out drinking with friends. He seemed unusually mature at an early age when it came to music, food, literature, film and nature.

The eulogy at his funeral put it like this:

"Richard's interests were incandescent in their intensity and profound in their thoroughness. It was as if he was selecting aspects of life that took his interest and, rather than nibble at the surface, he sucked the very marrow from their bones. Once satisfied, he packed it into his life experience and moved on to the next subject that stimulated his interests.

No doubt, in his brief life he extracted more from such excursions than most of us acquire in our extended lifetimes."

This intense mode of existence might explain Richard's love of the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. It's not the typical choice for a 25-year-old.

Again, from an email to a friend — and actually, it went back even way before he was 25. He described Bruckner as:

"A really wacky composer who I took a huge liking to as a young lad. I often think of Bruckner as my first love in music — as in wild, romantic, passionate love."

The next group of works, starting with some Bruckner — some sacred music of Bruckner, so not so wacky or wild in this case — will be performed by the UQ Chamber Singers and the Amity String Quartet.

Dr Graham Morton will be conducting in his role as Choral Performance Fellow at UQ. But it's worth noting that there's another connection of importance here: Graham taught at St Peter's Lutheran College while Richard was in Years 11 and 12 there.

Richard often commented on the inspiration that Graham provided him, adding to the depth of his feeling for music.

Please welcome the UQ Chamber Singers and the Amity String Quartet.

We're now moving into the presentation of the Richard Pollett Memorial Award, part of the program.

So it gives me great pleasure at this point to introduce Mr Timothy Matthews, who is the Director of Artistic Planning at the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, but today he's here representing the Board of the Australian Youth Orchestra, and he's going to speak about the Richard Memorial Award.

Thanks, Tim.

Timothy Matthews

Thank you very much, Liam.

I too acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we are gathered today, and pay my respects to their ancestors and descendants who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country, including through music-making.

Mr Stephen Minnikin and Ms Karina Mole; Professor Debra Terry; Professor Ottmar Lip and members of the University's Senior Leadership Group; dear Patricia and Philip, and your and Richard's family and friends.

It is an honour to be speaking today representing the Australian Youth Orchestra's Board and leadership.

AYO is Australia's premier youth music organisation, with a breadth of programs providing young musicians with outstanding musical experiences, both nationally and internationally.

Richard fully involved himself in a number of AYO programs over many years, starting with Young Symphonists, the National Music Camp, the Australian Youth Orchestra, and as part of the chamber music program, Young Australian Concert Artists.

This involvement was important to him, as has been Patricia's connection to AYO, and the organisation is honoured that Patricia, Philip and others established the Richard Pollett Memorial Award in association with it to honour his memory.

The annual award provides support and encouragement to young violinists who display outstanding personal and musical attributes, and provides funds to cover costs associated with music studies, including lessons, attending courses, orchestral program fees, instrument costs or overseas studies.

As Liam said, the recipient is chosen by a small panel, with recommendations sought from specialist musicians from around Australia, and there is no application process.

As he also mentioned, how the award is made was inspired by an experience Richard had. I don't believe any of the recipients haven't believed Colin Cornish, AYO CEO, when he has called them. However, I know from speaking with many of them, and as you can read in today's program, that receiving the award is a life-changing experience.

They, and everyone at AYO, are so grateful to Patricia and Philip and all the many generous supporters from around the world, individuals and organisations, who have and continue to support this very important award.

Richard's qualities serve as an inspiration for it, and I would like to read part of the letter that the scouts for the award receive:

"This award aims to support and encourage young violinists, helping them to explore their potential and deepen their love for music. The award is in recognition of a person's qualities and achievements, and not necessarily advanced technical ability.

"We hope that Richard's spirit will serve as an inspiration, possibly changing their view of what is possible. The award encourages young people who have a broad vision in life, more than just studying the violin.

"The virtues that align with the aims of the award include musicianship, sensitivity, imagination, enthusiasm, dedication, humility and, above all, passion.

"The desire to communicate and discover beauty through music was at the heart of Richard's ethos.

"Music was at the centre of his life, but at the same time he explored many interests, including literature, film, art, contract bridge, food and cricket, and he loved the outdoors.

"He had a kindness of spirit and a gentle disposition that had a positive effect on those around him.

"We hope there will always be common threads that link his special qualities with those of award recipients."

I only had the opportunity to hear Richard play live a couple of times, and similar opportunities to talk with him. Yet these words sum up my experience and knowledge of him.

I have spent time with a number of the award recipients, and they absolutely display these qualities — the humanity, dedication and passion, as will future recipients.

They, like all of us, honour Richard's memory through making music to bring positive effect.

Thank you.

Thank you, Tim, and thank you to you and the Australian Youth Orchestra for being able to be here today. We're just delighted that we're able to award this award on this occasion, at the 10th anniversary.

And it now gives me great pleasure to introduce Professor Deborah Terry, Vice-Chancellor and President of The University of Queensland, who will say a few words.

There's a kind of delightful symmetry to her presence here. She'll explain, and then she'll announce and introduce the 2021 winner of the Richard Pollett Memorial Award.

Please welcome Professor Terry.

Professor Deborah Terry AO

Thank you very much, Liam.

Can I also begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we are meeting here today. We honour their Elders as we walk together on the path to reconciliation.

I'd also like to acknowledge Mr Stephen Minnikin MP. Thank you for being with us here today.

Stephen, Mr Tim Matthews, thank you for your wonderful comments.

Richard's parents, Professor Patricia and Emeritus Professor Philip Pollett; family, friends, UQ colleagues, one and all.

And can I thank you, Liam, for your really thoughtful comments and perfect introduction to today's event.

And also can I thank all of our musicians this morning. What wonderful and moving performances we've heard.

I feel absolutely privileged to be speaking at today's very special event.

Like many at UQ, I clearly remember the day we tragically lost Richard and the profound sense of shock and loss that was so deeply felt throughout our community.

Then, as Acting Vice-Chancellor in 2012, I had the great honour of announcing and presenting the inaugural Richard Pollett Memorial Award in the very room that we are in here today.

I'm honoured to be playing that role again, almost a decade later.

Richard was an inspirational young person in so many ways — one of those rare individuals gifted with an extraordinary talent for music and raised by a family who supported and nurtured that wonderful talent.

I'm proud that he was a member of the UQ community as a Master of Philosophy student in the School of Music.

Richard's brilliance as a performer was complemented by his warm, unassuming and sensitive nature. As we've heard, his strength of character has become part of his legacy.

I've enjoyed learning more about Richard today, as well as the many ways in which his memory has inspired and sustained so much that is good over the last ten years.

I acknowledge Richard's wonderful parents, Patricia and Philip, who are both professors here at UQ, and whose work does so much to honour their son and grow his legacy by supporting the next generation of musicians in this country.

I acknowledge the work of our colleagues at the Australian Youth Orchestra and the many people around Australia and internationally who have supported and enabled the Richard Pollett Memorial Award.

And now I'm delighted to announce that the 2021 Richard Pollett Memorial Award recipient is Mr Robert Smith.

Robert is a violinist currently pursuing a Bachelor of Music at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music at Griffith University.

He has played with the Australian Youth Orchestra and was concertmaster at the AYO's National Music Camp.

It is my great pleasure to invite him now to perform for us.

Please join me in welcoming Mr Robert Smith.

Robert Smith

Good afternoon.

I'd like to thank the Pollett family for the support of emerging violinists. For this award, being a recipient of this award is a great honour and privilege, and as such is greatly humbling.

I would also like to thank my teacher, Michele Walsh. It is through her instruction and mentoring that I have developed into the musician I am today.

In addition, the opportunities offered by the Australian Youth Orchestra have impacted positively upon my growth as a musician over the past few years.

I have been exploring postgraduate options and am considering the possibility of a Master of Performance in Europe. This award will contribute to this, or similar, in my future studies. Richard's legacy has a clear and ongoing impact on the arts community, and I am very grateful for the opportunities that this award will provide.
Thank you.

Alex and I will be performing the Garden Scene from *König* [*Much Ado About Nothing*].
[Music]

Thank you, Robert, and thank you to your pianist, Alex Raineri, as well.
Thank you to Mr Matthews, Professor Terry, and all the performers today.
Thank you to Sophie Rutledge from Central Advancement for her support in putting this event on.
Thank you to Paul Young for technical support and his team of student event assistants.
And thank you to everyone, including our distinguished guests, for joining us today and being part of Richard Pollett's evolving legacy.
Please join us for some tea and coffee over here and on the balcony, and for further conversation about Richard, about music and about life.
Thank you very much.
Good day.