

New era for Pro Arte

Author: **Robin Usher**

Date: 16/08/2008

Page: 23



THE Melbourne Recital Centre is having an impact even before its opening next February. One of the city's oldest groups, Australia **Pro Arte**, is changing its name to the Melbourne **Chamber Orchestra** before moving to the centre next year.

Artistic director William Hennessy says the new name marks the "beginning of a new era for the organisation".

He says the centre's Elisabeth Murdoch Hall is even better than London's Wigmore Hall and "the most dramatic thing to happen to music-making in Melbourne".

The hall is the most important instrument in any concert performance, Hennessy says. This one "will allow the public to listen with far more intimacy and add a sense of danger and excitement to the playing".

The MCO is moving from Federation Square's BMW Edge to perform 14 concerts in the 1000-seat hall next year, more than doubling its potential audience. Australia **Pro Arte** was formed in 1990 but changed its operating philosophy in 2006, moving away from a close liaison with the Melbourne Symphony **Orchestra** to model itself on one of the world's most famous **orchestras**, the Academy of St Martin's in the Field in London.

The academy's founder, Sir Neville Marriner, became patron and will conduct two programs with the **orchestra** in November next year, when he will be 86.

The **orchestra's** conductor in residence, Benjamin Northey, says the new name identifies the **orchestra** with its community in the same way as the MSO. "The **orchestra** is now part of a unique explosion of **chamber** music groups that is happening nowhere else in the world."

The **orchestra's** chairman, Brian Benjamin, says the new name will provide "a definite identity in a new home base".

The **orchestra** will share the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall with ensembles touring for Musica Viva and the Australian Brandenburg **Orchestra**, as well as other groups.

"We know the move to the bigger hall involves more financial risk but we hope to grow strongly," Benjamin says.

The core musicians are also members of such Melbourne **chamber** groups as the TinAlley, Flinders, Melba, Hamer and Taillem quartets. They gain financial security by playing with the bigger organisation for one-third of the year.

The **orchestra** will introduce its new subscription season next March with a concert featuring baritone Peter Coleman-Wright, who will perform a selection of Handel arias. The program will also include music by Grieg and Vivaldi, as well as the premiere of Calvin Bowman's arrangement of Sibelius' Intimate Voices quartet for string **orchestra**.

Benjamin Northey conducts the Australia **Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra** in a program that includes Mozart's clarinet concerto and Haydn's Farewell Symphony at 2.30pm tomorrow and 7pm on Monday at BMW Edge. Book on 9650 3365. More details from mco.org.au.