

# Arts & Culture

## Gigs bring music to players' ears

By **ROBIN USHER**

IT MAY not sound like much of accomplishment, but Melbourne's chamber orchestra, Australia Pro Arte, is close to achieving its aim of full-time work for three months of the year.

But this is all the company wants. "This provides secure work for many of the city's quality young chamber players who can then devote the rest of the time to forging their careers with their own groups," says the company's chairman, Brian Benjamin.

Without the security of Pro Arte engagements, the separate groups — which include the TinAlley, Flinders, Melba, Hamer and Taillem quartets — would have to spend far more of their time touring to earn money.

The aim is to have the orchestra made up mainly of young players who also play in their own groups, which Benjamin says brings "tremendous vitality" to the playing.

The orchestra's operating philosophy changed this year after it moved away from a close liaison with the Melbourne Symphony to model itself on one of the world's most famous orchestras, the Academy of St Martin's in the Field.

The academy's founder more than 50 years ago, Sir Neville Marriner, became Pro Arte's patron, and his former colleague, William Hennessy, took over as artistic director.

"Sir Neville is a very generous and much-loved man," Hennessy says. "He was a mentor to me ... I think the model he established can be hugely influential here."

Sir Neville, 83, has promised to conduct Pro Arte in 2009 to increase its profile. But the orchestra is already developing a national profile after an ABC decision to have it perform at the



William Hennessy: artistic director.

concert highlighting the selection of Australia's favourite concertos in a poll of Classic FM listeners.

It is the first time that such a concert has moved to Melbourne from Sydney.

The new arrangement brings many benefits. Hennessy points to the example of Kristian Winter, violinist with the TinAlley Quartet, who is a regular player with Pro Arte and who has toured with the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Hennessy, who helped start the ACO and the Australian String Quartet on his return to Australia from London, is also artist in residence at the Australian National Academy of Music.

He says the abilities of Pro Arte's individual players will be evident in this weekend's concert of Bach's Brandenburg concertos. The orchestra will perform 23 concerts next year, 12 in Melbourne and 11 in regional centres.

The Pro Arte Orchestra will perform the final four Brandenburg concertos at the BMW Edge at 2.30pm tomorrow and 7pm Monday.

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▶ [www.proarte.com.au](http://www.proarte.com.au)