

The Vietnam Requiem Performance

Latham's 'Vietnam Requiem' a moving triumph

By **Review** <https://citynews.com.au/>

June 5, 2021



Soloists, from left, Susannah Lawergren, Rachel Mink and Phan Van Hung. Photo: Peter Hislop.

Music / "Vietnam Requiem", conducted by Christopher Latham. At Llewellyn Hall, ANU, until June 6. Reviewed by CLINTON WHITE.

CHRISTOPHER Latham's "Vietnam Requiem" was a triumph and quite possibly the most moving concert performance this writer has ever attended.

Latham compiled the work from compositions from a range of composers, rather than it being written as a single work by one composer. This might seem strange, but Latham has proven this formula to work successfully; he took a similar approach for his "The Diggers' Requiem" of 2018, which attracted worldwide acclaim.



'60s singing star Little Pattie on stage. Photo: Peter Hislop.

Latham gathered and conducted huge forces, including some stars of the Vietnam era, for this three-hour epic, divided into two contrasting but complementary "Acts", and embellished it with a comprehensive and beautifully presented program booklet.

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With a three-piece contemporary band comprising Bill Risby (piano and keyboards), Ben Hauptmann (guitar) and Warren Trout (drums) with a chamber orchestra mainly of strings, the first act comprised 12 songs inextricably linked to the period of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war.

And to perform those songs was a who's who of the '60s and '70s, including Normie Rowe, Little Pattie, and NZ-born singer Mark Williams, along with John Schumann, of Redgum fame, jazz singer Nina Ferro, and Vietnamese singer Phan V?n H?ng.

Songs such as "He Ain't Heavy, He's my Brother", "I Was Only 19", "Smiley" and "What a Wonderful World" no doubt brought back memories for many.

Phan V?n H?ng's story is especially interesting. He and his family escaped Hanoi in 1954, when he was four years old.



By 1982 he was married and came to Australia as a refugee. He became well-known in both Vietnam and Australia for his songs about the harrowing stories of people's suffering in Vietnam.

His two songs, sung in Vietnamese, "The Little Girl and the Pebbles" and "Return to Galang", the English lyrics of which are in the program booklet, were beautiful and poignant. In the case of "Return to Galang", the poignancy was made especially so by a gorgeous accompaniment on cello by CSO principal Patrick Suthers.

The second act comprises an overture and 12 movements, each accompanied on two large overhead screens by thoughtfully presented historical facts and figures as well as images. They were not meant to be presented chronologically, but more to tell the story behind each movement.

The work's movements were written by the cream of Australian composers – Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards, Graeme Koehne, Andrew Schultz, Elena Kats-Chernin, and Latham himself.

Even works by overseas composers were included.

*Photo above;
Phan Van Hung. Photo Peter Hislop.*

There was a stellar cast of soloists, too – Phan V?n H?ng, dressed in a magnificent gold traditional costume and playing a 2000-year-old Vietnamese ?ong S?n bronze drum, didgeridoo

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virtuoso William Barton, trumpeter Paul Goodchild, guitarists Minh Le Hoang and Slava Grigoryan, sopranos Susannah Lawergren and Rachel Mink, soundscape technician Bob Scott, and harpist Alice Giles.



Christopher Latham conducting the "Vietnam Requiem". Photo: Peter Hislop.

They were supported by the Canberra Symphony Orchestra and guest instrumentalists, led by concertmaster Kirsten Williams, as well as members of military bands and several choirs.



Singer John Schumann performs "I Was Only 19" at Llewellyn Hall.

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In all, more than 200 artists performed the work. So many musicians were on stage that Latham's conductor's podium was on its own platform in front of the stage.

Space does not allow discussion of all 13 movements, but a couple particularly are worth mentioning.

The Overture, "The Cold War", a Latham arrangement of "The Time of War", by US composer Caleb Burhans, began with single strokes on the ?ông S?n drum, slowly building in volume and intensity, with William Barton joining in on didgeridoo and Slava Grigoryan on guitar. The ancient and the modern coming together in this way created an ethereal, almost mysterious, beginning.

Movement 8, "The Entertainers", was a Bill Risby arrangement of two songs into a medley, Carole King's "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" and "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay", by Otis Redding and Steve Cropper.

Nina Ferro sang the medley in honour of Cathy Wayne who was shot and killed by a US marine at the end of her performance at a US Marine NCO's club on a base near Da Nang (the shooter possibly intended the shot for the CO, but missed). She was the first Australian woman to be killed in Vietnam. She ... was only 19.

Movement 11, "The Boat People", by Graeme Koehne, brought home the plight, not only of Vietnamese refugees in the '70s and '80s, but perhaps also suggested a sub-text relevant to today's refugees.

Movement 12, Latham's "The Road to Peace", concluded with a deeply emotional "Last Post" played variously on harp and guitar with the didgeridoo quietly and respectfully providing a foundation, with gentle punctuation from the ?ông S?n drum.



The full "Vietnam Requiem" ensemble on stage at Llewellyn Hall. Photo: Peter Hislop.

At the conclusion, there was a long silence, seemingly for at least 45 seconds, with no-one in the audience daring even to breathe, and Latham still facing the orchestra.

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I wanted the silence to continue. But, from the back of the capacity house came soft, gentle applause. As it built in volume on its way to the front, so did the audience rise to a standing ovation for a truly magnificent performance, put together by Christopher Latham and a vast team of helpers. It thoroughly deserves to be kept “on top of the desk and dog-eared” for performances in the future.

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Photos: Peter Hislop
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Additional Personal Reviews:

AWM Musical Event - Vietnam Requiem 5th & 6^h June 2021

Musical Director Chris Latham

Musical artist in residence. Australian War Memorial

Location: Llewellyn Hall - ANU School of Music. 100 William Herbert Place,
Canberra, ACT, 2601 Australia ([map](#))

Refer: <http://theflowersofwar.org/calendar/2021/6/6/vietnam-requiem>
Canberra ACT

Reviews

I found the entire performance absolutely magnificent & would certainly see it again if given the opportunity. Anyone who didn't attend missed a very special event & I can only hope it will eventually be performed throughout the Country & possibly New Zealand as well.

*Kind regards
Don Hannaford
B Coy 3 RAR 1971
Sunday, 13 June 2021 4:44 PM*

The standing ovation said it all.

Musically, the performance was a masterpiece which seamlessly blended the familiar with the traditional from different cultures; but it was much more than just that.

It was a tribute to those who served on behalf of their country, particularly Australia and South Vietnam.

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It was an acknowledgement of the effect that the War had on Australian society.

It was testimony of the consequences, not only for military personnel and others who served in different roles, but also the populations of Vietnam and surrounding countries.

It was recognition of both the struggles faced by Vietnamese refugees and the manner in which they have repaid Australia's welcome through successful integration into our society.

It was a cast to a future world, one in which ideologies no longer serve to divide nations, but instead bring them together.

LTCOL Bruce Cameron MC (Ret'd), former member of C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment

My wife and I were blown away by how moving and powerful the concert turned out to be. Looking at the program I thought Act 1. would be more relevant to me however, I think Act 2. provided entertainment like nothing I have previously experienced, and the memory of these performances will remain with me.

Great to see the Indigenous and the ANZAC connections were not overlooked.

*John Ginnivan
3rd Battalion RAR Vietnam 1971*

Raymond and I absolutely loved the concert, it was so awesome, we will never forget the experience, thank you to everyone that made it possible, unbelievable, we loved it all.

*Raymond and Lucy Barrie
3rd Battalion RAR Vietnam 1971*

The thought of sitting through a 3 hour Requiem was a bit daunting and I had planned how to quietly slip away at the half way mark ... however you had me at the get-go! I could have easily sat there absorbing many more hours of this excellent and emotional performance. Shed lots of tears while recalling memories of growing up listening to those songs and waiting for my big brother to come home.

This show needs to be toured and I hope that can be achieved.

Thank you for your contribution to a very, very important and never-ending healing process for some of Australia's best ...our Vietnam vets.

*Kind regards,
Annette Janic 15th June 2021
Relative Veteran crew member of Centurion Tank 5 Bravo Vietnam 1971*

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I met Chris Latham some time ago whilst undergoing an interview process for the Vietnam Requiem. I found the project interesting, but because I am not musically inclined I did not, at first, fully comprehend the process nor the result. Chris played a portion of the proposed music to me and the interpretation behind the portion, and I immediately understood that this would be a powerful performance and a gift to the Vietnam Veteran, the Vietnamese community generally and the general public. I felt there was little I could do to assist Chris but anything he requested I would support wholeheartedly. Chris Latham timed the performances to occur on the same weekend of the 50th Anniversary of Operation Overlord, Battle of Long Khanh and the 3rd Battalion RAR Vietnam 1971 Reunion and the associated Australian Task Force units who may attend Canberra for the June Commemoration.

So what does a 2000-year-old Vietnamese ?ông S?n bronze drum sound like?

The 3 hours of orchestral music and song was simply not enough. Fully engrossed in the performance, time appeared to vanish as the experience took you along a masterful presentation story line of Vietnam from beginning to the present. The experience literally took my breath away and exceeded anything I had anticipated. My family were thoroughly impressed with the story line and the music. The performance provided my daughter and son in law with an overview of what the Vietnam experience was all about. A greater emotional understand was achieved that will only make us closer. Chris told me that the performance was a healing process and I know that happened in ways known and unknown.

The Vietnam Requiem is a magnificent presentation gift to the Vietnam Veteran by Chris Latham and everyone who contributed to the performance. I can only hope that there is momentum sufficient to provide an opportunity for the performance to be experienced by as many people as possible. The Vietnam Requiem has wide appeal, not just for veterans.

The majority of my friends in the audience simply used the word “magnificent” to describe what they had just experienced. I agree.

Thank you, Chris Latham, and everyone who performed the Vietnam Requiem on the 6th June 2021.

*Tony Cox
3rd Battalion RAR Vietnam 1971
Organiser / Coordinator 3rd Battalion Vietnam 1971 50th Anniversary reunion & Commemoration*

*The above editorial review and comments are for your information.
If you get the opportunity to experience the Vietnam Requiem, don't miss it*