

Ensemble Offspring

Commitment to First Nations Artists 2023



About

Ensemble Offspring

Ensemble Offspring **unites innovative Australian instrumentalists with a broad collective of collaborators** to champion the music of tomorrow. Together we explore new ideas through living new music that leaps across art form. Driven by discovery, Ensemble Offspring presents intricately crafted experiential performances that transcend genre and place, tapping into the innate curiosity and adventurous spirit of our audiences.

Passionate about ensuring the continued vibrancy of innovative new music-making in Australia, Ensemble Offspring supports emerging and established artists by commissioning many and varied new works each year through our Offspring Creation Fund and generating pathways through our annual Hatched Academy emerging artist development program and our **First Nations Composers Program**.

Ensemble Offspring **employs 5 part-time staff members** within its core staffing (in administration, marketing, production, artistic direction and development). Its **6 core musicians** (violin, cello, flute, clarinet, piano and percussion) are employed on regular contracts with casual musicians contracted according to repertoire. Ensemble Offspring also employs dozens of additional contractors each year in fields such as sound, lighting, video documentation and more.

We do not currently employ any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people as staff members but have a policy of contracting a First Nations Composer in Residence each year to work closely with the group in writing and implementing new works for performance. Furthermore we work closely each year with First Nations artists (composers and musicians) as part of Ngarra-Burria: First Peoples Composers and are committed to growing our First Nations community and networks via these pathways. We prioritise the programming of work by First Nations artists and, where possible, they join the ensemble on stage.

Ensemble Offspring is based in **Sydney NSW** with all staff both working from home and at the offices of Musica Viva Sydney. Ensemble Offspring is funded in an ongoing capacity by Create NSW, touring nationally and internationally according to invitations and additional funding or sponsorship sources. The ensemble regularly tours NSW, Australia and the world.

www.ensembleoffspring.com



Claire Edwardes (Artistic Director, percussion) with **Composing Songlines** First Nations composers (Sydney Opera House, 2021)

Our commitment

to collaborating with First Nations artists

Developing and implementing this plan aligns with our company values, which are: **innovation, excellence, open-mindedness** and **cultural relevance**. We are passionate about supporting and nurturing a living, contemporary Australian music culture that reflects and embraces the true diversity of its artists and practices. We want to play an active role in what [Christopher Sainsbury](#) (composer, guitarist and founder of Ngarra-Burria: First Peoples Composers) terms “a gentle correction” of the disparity in opportunities afforded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in comparison to those afforded to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (see [Ngarra-Burria: New Music and the Search for an Australian sound](#)). We also recognise the damaging legacy of colonisation and see the immense value that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists can offer the broader arts sector and cultural landscape in a genuine two-way conversation.

Since 2017 Ensemble Offspring has been partner in **Ngarra-Burria: First Peoples Composers** led by artistic director, composer [Christopher Sainsbury](#) (Dharug), in partnership with [Moogahlin Performing Arts](#), the [Australian Music Centre](#), The School of Music at the [Australian National University](#) and [Eora College](#) (Sydney TAFE). This program is aimed at supporting and mentoring emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander composers in developing new techniques and skills in instrumental composition and notation, as well as industry knowledge and relationships to build their craft and networks.

Ensemble Offspring has learnt from and worked with the following 12 composers from around Australia as part of Ngarra-Burria: First Peoples Composers – [Brenda Gifford](#) (Yuin), [Troy Russell](#) (Gamillaroi & Biripai), [Elizabeth Sheppard](#) (Noongar Yamatji), [Tim Gray](#) (Gumbaynggiir & Wiradjuri), [Rhyan Clapham](#) (Murrwarri) [James Henry](#) (Yuwaalaraay, Gamilaraay, Yorta Yorta & Yuin), [Eric Avery](#) (Ngiyampaa, Yuin, Bandjalang & Gumbangirri), [Marlene Cummins](#) (Guguyelandji & Woppaburra), [Will Kepa](#) (Torres Strait Islands), [Nardi Simpson](#) (Yuwaalaraay), [Mark 'Munk' Ross](#) (Western Kulin Nation), [Aaron Wyatt](#) (Noongar, Yamatji & Wongi) – workshopping their pieces and showcasing them in annual concerts, which have been documented by ANU and ABC Classic.

In 2016 staff attended the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program at [Eora College](#), Sydney, to begin an understanding of cultural protocols. The following Aboriginal artists were consulted in the creation of this plan – [Christopher Sainsbury](#), [Elizabeth Sheppard](#), [Rhyan Clapham](#), [Nardi Simpson](#) and [Brenda Gifford](#). In early 2021 Ensemble Offspring members, staff, board and collaborators participated in the [Mirri Mirri](#) online cultural training course. Past and present staff and Board members of Ensemble Offspring were involved in the formulation of this document and continue to be involved in its progression.

*Ensemble
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Rhyan Clapham
(2017/2018 Ngarra-Burria composer)

First Nations **partnerships** & current activities

Ensemble Offspring's participation in **Ngarra-Burria: First Peoples Composers'** inaugural year in 2017 was our first step towards building community partnerships. Outside of the program itself we have collaborated with composer Brenda Gifford on [Music for The Dreaming](#) in 2018 (an ABC and Sydney Opera House joint commission), and three of these composers have gone on to become our [First Nations Composers in Residence](#) (2020 Brenda Gifford, 2021 Nardi Simpson, 2022 Eric Avery, 2023 James Henry). Our recently developed program offers a First Nations Artist a flexible two-way mentoring and workshopping scheme for a year, involving local and regional touring where relevant and the premiere of a new commission in the subsequent season.

In early 2022 we presented the fruits of our 2021 First Nations Composer in Residency by Nardi Simpson with *-barra* as part of Sydney Festival 2022.

Also in 2022, the Christmas Tree at the Queen Victoria Building was brought to life with Ensemble Offspring's recording of Nardi Simpson's *Of Stars and Birds*.

ABC Classic released *To Listen, To Sing* - a celebration of the works written as part of Ngarra-Burria performed by Ensemble Offspring. The work was album of the week in December 2022 and has already proven its popularity with strong sales.

Claire and Chris Sainsbury (with the assistance of Dan Poole) updated all of the works written as part of Ngarra-Burria and, in association with the composers, uploaded them to the Australian Music Centre. This ensures that more ensembles around the country can access this music and the composers can benefit financially from the sale of their work.

In December 2021 we presented a First Nations focused concert at the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House entitled [Composing Songlines](#). The concert featured highlight works from the program with a composer Q&A afterwards. Both were documented by the SOH for digital release in 2022.

In early 2021, also as part of Sydney Festival, Ngarra-Burria participant Marlene Cummins collaborated with Ensemble Offspring percussionist Bree van Reyk on [Musical Microparks](#).

To mark NAIDOC Week 2022 Ensemble Offspring partnered with the new Centre for Creativity at the Sydney Opera House presenting a workshop-style version of *-barra* with Nardi Simpson.

Commissioned by the Canberra Symphony Orchestra in 2019, Rhyan Clapham created a new percussion solo for Claire Edwardes entitled *Drum Dreamer* which has become a core repertoire piece for HSC students.



Christopher Sainsbury
(Artistic Director, Ngarra-Burria)



Commitment

Deliverables

Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations and approach each collaboration from a place of respect and acknowledgment.

Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.

- Be in regular contact with Koori Radio to get more airplay for Ngarra-Burria works.
- Progress Ngarra-Burria works being recorded and released on ABC Classic to realisation phase in 2022/2023.
- After each iteration of Ngarra-Burria ensure that scores and parts are updated and, in association with the composers, uploaded to the Australian Music Centre.

Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.

- Connect with organisations including Common Ground, Indigiearth (Mudgee), First Hand Solutions (La Perouse) and Currie Country (Fingal Bay) to introduce our work with First Nations artists to them and extend our reach in terms of artists we can support and nurture.

Reference the Australia Council's Protocols in First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts

- Always acknowledge the content and intellectual property of First Nations artists in collaborations and seek guidance from First Nations artists on any decision making that is relevant to First Nations peoples (including on keeping this plan up to date).

Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).

Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff .

- Each year we provide our small staff team, our musicians and Board members with details of NRW materials, directing them to RA's website and other relevant event listings and materials.

Board members and staff to participate in at least one external NRW event.

- Board members are encouraged each year to participate in NRW with specific local events committed to by each working group member.

Encourage and support staff, musicians and board to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.

- As above, we are a small organisation - everyone participates in NRW.

Plan to arrange either a NAIDOC Week or NRW concert and panel each year.

Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.

Constantly develop cultural learning opportunities within our organisation.

- Enrol the company in a Mirri Mirri course or similar cultural training annually and/or participate in a cultural course with our First Nations Composer in residence, presented by the artist.

Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.

Stay on top of best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.

- Discuss this regularly with collaborators Moohaglin Performing Arts, Chris Sainsbury, Nardi Simpson and Aaron Wyatt.

Annual review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.

- We are a small music company and as such we review our policies annually through board processes. We will include a regular review of HR policies in relation to anti-discrimination provisions as part of our ongoing review process and plan to diversify our board make up as departing board members are replaced, where possible.

Commitment

Deliverables

Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.

Constantly be developing cultural learning opportunities within our organisation.

- Enrol the company in a Mirri Mirri course or similar cultural training annually and/or participate in a cultural course with our First Nations Composer in residence, presented by the artist.

Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.

- As part of NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week activities we will prioritise understanding of our local First Nations communities and land, especially those on which members and staff of the ensemble live.

Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.

- Covered by our online cultural awareness training/FNCIR session annually. Our Board Chair provides an originally devised acknowledgement of country prior to each Board meeting, and our Artistic Director does the same at all of our self-presented performances.

Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.

Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week & promote external NAIDOC week events.

- As for NRW, each year staff, musicians and Board are involved in NAIDOC Week activities. Relevant links to readings is provided.
- Ensemble Offspring's new website has a specific First Nations focus page as well as an Acknowledgement landing page. It is updated regularly with not only EO's activities, but with suggested viewing and reading material:
<https://ensembleoffspring.com/program/first-nations-program/>

Ensemble Offspring members, staff and board to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event or present one ourselves.

- To be discussed at the first Creative Committee meeting of each year for relevant planning.

Maintain a First Nations Collaboration Plan agenda item as part of Creative Committee Meetings to drive governance of this plan.

Utilise quarterly Creative Committee meetings to govern FNCP plan implementation.

- A First Nations Working Group was formed in 2018. For 3 years it met 4 x per year. It was comprised of our Artistic Director, two Board members, an Ensemble Offspring musician (rotating), and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artist with whom we have a working relationship (most often the First Nations Composer in Residence).
- From 2022 the Ensemble Offspring Creative Committee will oversee the FNCP including members Claire Edwardes, AD; Lamorna Nightingale, EO musician; Jason Noble, EO musician and board member; plus Jenny Bisset, EO board member, as well as our First Nations Composer in Residence that year.

Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.

Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff.

- Staff and Board members all participate in the formulation and implementation of this First Nations plan. Staff are also across all of EO's activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, including updating the specific area of our website which features resources focusing on First Nations artists, films and suggested reading materials.

Identify programming opportunities for First Nations works we have been involved in commissioning and developing. Identify First Nations musicians we can collaborate with.

- Constantly be mindful of how to program existing works by First Nations composers, both in feature concerts and integrating them into more general programming. Likewise seek out the inclusion of First Nations performers in relevant programming.

Identify other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.

- Share reconciliation journey with like-minded music organisations, Musica Viva Australia, Tura New Music and the Australian Art Orchestra to share reconciliation journeys and opportunities. This could be through scheduled zoom check ins with a small consortium of organisations.



Composing Songlines Q&A panel
(Sydney Opera House, 2021)

Contact



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Updated by Claire Edwardes and Ensemble Offspring board members, December 2022

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Ensemble Offspring is assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW.



Eric Avery (2019/2020 Ngarra-Burria composer and 2022 First Nations Composer in Residence) with **Claire Edwardes** (Artistic Director, percussion)