

*Playground* (2002)

Barry Conyngham

“The title references the starting point of the work, a real playground near Harvard Square on the gate of which is a plaque: ‘In memory of a little boy who loved to play’ also indicating the short life of the dedicatee.

The piece evolved into a reflection on playgrounds—about many things involving playgrounds: children playing, lots of games, running all over the place, childish freedom, energy, exploration, etc. However, while playgrounds are wonderfully joyous places when full, they are particularly sad and lonely when they are empty. Thus they are timeless—to the adult, full of memories and nostalgia, to the child, full of potential and possibility. Each day playgrounds witness drama and emotion which is at once both trivial and profound.”

—Barry Conyngham

The world premiere of *Playground* was on September 19, 2004 at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Barry Conyngham (born 1944, Sydney, Australia) had an initial involvement with jazz. He then studied composition with Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney where he completed the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees. In 1970, he visited Japan on a Churchill Fellowship and studied with Toru Takemitsu. Two years later he went to the United States on a Harkness Fellowship and gained a Certificate of Post-Doctoral Studies from the University of California, San Diego. During the 1970s he was also a Fellow at Princeton University, Composer-in-Residence at the University of Aix-Marseilles in France, and Visiting Scholar at the University of Minnesota. In 1982, he received a Doctorate in Music from the University of Melbourne.

While pursuing an academic career, Conyngham established himself as one of Australia's leading composers with a strong national and international reputation. He has over eighty published works and approximately forty recordings featuring his compositions. His output reveals a broad spectrum from orchestral, ensemble and solo pieces to music theatre and film music. The images of his music are diverse and include a fascination with notions of place, both specific and general. He has also used his emotional reaction to dreams and natural phenomena in structuring his music.

The locations of premiere performances of his works indicate the international acceptance of his music: *Bennelong* (1988), a large music-theatre work for the Australian Chamber Orchestra, received its first six performances in Holland while *Streams* (1989), for harp, flute, and viola was premiered in Tokyo. *Monuments* (1989) for piano and orchestra was premiered by the Albany (New York) Symphony, and the first performance of *Waterways* (1990) for viola and orchestra was given by the Dutch Radio Philharmonic. In 1991, *Cloudlines*, for harp and orchestra was premiered in North and South America; *Dawning* (1996) was first heard in the United States.

Conyngham has received numerous awards, prizes and grants for composition. He won the Albert H. Maggs Composition Award on two occasions, and he received fellowships from the Ian Potter Music Commission; the Churchill and Harkness Foundations; the Australian Council, and the Fulbright Program. He was invited to give the annual Peggy Glanville-Hicks address for the Sydney Spring Festival. His CDs *Ice Carving* and *Southern Cross* received the Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA) award for the Best Classical Recording. In recognition of his contribution to his country, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.

As an academician, Conyngham was a Reader of Music at the University of Melbourne, Head of the School of Creative Arts at Wollongong University, and inaugural Vice-Chancellor of Southern Cross University. He became the first musician to occupy the position of Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University.

After retiring from academic life to concentrate on composition and music performance in 2010, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne. He is an Emeritus Professor of both the University of Wollongong and Southern Cross University.