

Graeme Leak, Artist Biography 2020

Graeme Leak works as a performer, composer, music director, collaborator and instrument maker with both professional artists and community performers in Australia and the UK.

Graeme was in the class of '78 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music High School, studying piano with Albert Landa and percussion with Allard Maling, Jack Purdon and Richard Miller. He began working professionally as a percussionist and drummer at age 14 and at 16 undertook his first tour to Melbourne to play triangle with the Melbourne Trust Orchestra, staying in the Hotel Windsor and dining at the Pancake Parlour. He was 17 at the time of his first engagement with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra to play at the Opera House, however he was to remain backstage as the concert ran over time and the Percy Grainger work was scratched. For his final year A.S.C.M recital he won both the Frank Hutchens Award for Excellence and the Premier Instrumentalist prize.

Graeme undertook advanced percussion studies in New York in 1985, taking lessons with William Moersch [marimba], Ian Finkel [xylophone], Elden 'Buster' Bailey [snare drum], Jonathon Haas [timpani] and Eddie Rodriguez [Afro-Cuban].

Graeme maintained a parallel, fractional career in education. He was Lecturer in Percussion first at the Qld Conservatorium 1981-82, then the Canberra School of Music 1984 and finally founder of the first Percussion Department at the Sydney Conservatorium 1986 - 90. He was Lecturer in Performance at La Trobe university in Melbourne 1991-99 including a year as Head of Department in 1999.

Graeme's performing career highlights include 10 years of international touring as a co-creator of *The Spaghetti Western Orchestra*, with productions at the Montreal Jazz Festival and the Royal Albert Hall; premiering over 100 newly commissioned solo and ensemble works with contemporary music groups *Flederman* and *Synergy* in the 90s; extensive touring of solo recitals and original shows such as *From Africa to the Kitchen Sink*, *LISTEN!* and *The Lab* (with Linsey Pollak); and glockenspiel soloist in *From the Canyons to the Stars* at the Sydney Opera House in 1988 in the presence of Olivier Messiaen.

As a composer, Graeme has written over 50 works for instruments and voices, including commissions for the 2006 Commonwealth Games and the 2013 Canberra Centenary. His recent works include *Spirit Rising (2018)* for string-can orchestra with multiple community groups as guest performers, and *The Exquisite Now (2019)* for groups of any number for Museums Victoria.

Graeme is also in demand as a director and music leader. He devises productions that involve a mix of composing, instrument making, collaborating and workshopping with groups of all ages, skill levels and from all walks of life. Events include *Raising the Roof (2012)* with 300 diverse participants for Arts Centre Melbourne and an ongoing collaboration since 2017 with the small town of Girgarre, Victoria creating a tin-can orchestra known as *Junkestra* for Regional Arts Victoria.

Graeme is well known as the creator of the outback Queensland town of Winton's interactive installation, *The Musical Fence (2003)*. The playable wire fence with overhead acoustic resonators and accompanying junk percussion park has become a popular tourist attraction.

Graeme has devised and produced one off special events in Australia for Melbourne Recital Centre, the Melbourne Festival, Ten Days on the Island Tasmania, the Queensland Music Festival and in the UK for the Watford Colosseum, Cornerstone Arts Centre and East Neuk Festival.

Graeme's latest show *SAVED*, built around 70s home organs, received a Made in Scotland grant and will be showcased at the Edinburgh Festival 2021.