

Award to encourage the trusted role

By BERNADETTE CRUISE

IN SYDNEY, an award has been instituted in honour of the revered accompanist, Geoffrey Parsons; in Canberra, the Margaret Smiles Prize encourages the art of accompaniment — with a competition to be held this week.

The Margaret Smiles Fund was jointly raised by the Smiles family and the Llewellyn Choir as a memorial to a much-loved and dedicated musician who died in 1994 from leukemia. Family, friends and colleagues have been quick to voice their support.

Alan Jenkins, former lecturer in piano at the School of Music, remembers: "I knew Margaret as a rewarding, mature-age student who was prepared to give a huge amount of time to perfecting her studies. Her attention to detail was remarkable. She acted as accompanist to [her son] Julian when he was preparing for his diploma at the CSM; listening to them playing a Brahms cello sonata with extraordinary musicality was a delight."

The Llewellyn Choir — then the Canberra School of Music Community Choir — was founded 20 years ago by Professor Bill Hawkey, who was also the first music director. In '93 Richard McIntyre assumed this role and two years later a change of name — the Llewellyn Choir — was adopted.

Seventeen years ago Struan Thomson decided to add her *alto* voice to that of the other choristers: "Margaret was our first repetiteur and we became friends quickly," says Thomson. "As I had little musical experience, I appreciated her offer to take sectional rehearsals at her home; she gave hours and hours of her time. During preparation sessions, she was reserved and quiet, always ready to anticipate the conductor's wishes."

Words such as "dedication" and "devotion" come to the fore when examining the role of accompanist; and its core is the acceptance of support, even in subjugation to another person or body of musicians. For the accompanist relates to the soloist: the soloist relates to the au-



Margaret Smiles.

dience. It is little wonder that a musician who has given as much time and effort to training and performance as the soloist should decide that associate artists is a fairer term to describe the balance of musical responsibility. Yet it doesn't capture the element of trust, so valued when a shaky singer relies on his accompanist to cover up his errors.

David Smiles of the CSIRO and his son, Julian (familiar to music-lovers as the cellist of the Goldner Quartet), detailed Margaret's life as only a husband and a son could.

Born just before World War II in Sydney, Margaret suffered because of the nationality of her father, Heinrich Koch, a German who had not been naturalised. She was only four when her world was turned upside down. Heinrich was interned for six years in Tatura and Margaret had to live with her grandmother while her mother managed the family business.

The severity of her grandmother, combined with an inevitable prejudice against children with German names, made for a harsh childhood, but when she became a student at the Presbyterian Ladies College, Croyden, she began to show her mettle. Dux of the school for two years running,

she also shone musically and was coached by Faunce-Allman, the Sydney University organist.

While at university she studied science, graduating with first class honours, and receiving the award of a PhD studentship to pursue a research career in embryology. "Margaret and I met at university while studying physics and chemistry," says David. "Although she continued to play the piano for relaxation at this time, she effectively dropped music while doing science."

Marriage came in 1961 and with it the responsibility of caring for her three young children — John, Robyn and Julian. "She was a wonderful mother," says Julian. In 1972 the family moved to Canberra. Margaret revived her musical skills, arranging lessons so she could assist her children in their musical education.

"Our original perception was that they would enter professions — and Julian could have been a fine mathematician," considers David. "We didn't see music as the be-all and end-all of their existence but they took to music like ducks to water."

"Robyn chose the French horn which she studied with Hector McDonald at the School of Music. Margaret started by accompanying Robyn and ended up accompanying Hector." Her skill in this role soon involved her in the wider music scene, working with the Lieder Society and the School of Music Community Choir, as well as with individual musicians such as baritone, Geoffrey Brennan.

Julian realises that his mother "took great pleasure in seeing her children grow up with the same sensitivity and desire to do well".

David adds, "Margaret believed strongly that accompanists make a substantial contribution and should be encouraged more. When Ric McIntyre and I discussed the Margaret Smiles Prize, we knew it had to be for an accompanist."

The Accompaniment Competition for the Margaret Smiles Prize will be held on Sunday at 3pm in RR3, Canberra School of Music.



melbourne festival

By RICHARD WINDEYER

ON WEDNESDAY, Thursday and Friday nights last week I was introduced to two ensembles in the Bach 2000 festival.

The Australian Bach Ensemble was only recently formed and brings together some of the finest baroque musicians in Australia and some of the finest singers. Over these two concerts the ensemble performed eight cantatas.

The highlights were *BWV 106 Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (Actus Tragicus)* and *BWV 140 Wachet auf, fuft uns die Stimme*. Both of these were performed with feeling and sensitivity. The viola da gamba played by Daniel Yeardon in *Actus Tragicus* assisted in the beautiful, sorrowful opening to this funeral cantata.

BWV 140 was the pinnacle of the ensemble's performances. The instrumentalists played brilliantly in all cantatas. However, it was the singers who really hit their stride in this cantata. The chorale singing was excellently balanced with the text of the cantata and some of the solo and recitative work was stunning.

Alarm k

By JANE FREEBURY

ACTOR Chris Haywood sounded the alarm for the Australian film industry on the weekend at a symposium held in Canberra.

With overall film production levels "static" compared to overseas, and with the average Australian film budget of \$3.5 million per film the same as more than 10 years ago, "we're nowhere", he said.

Tracking the Silk Road