



# An Australian e-Conservatorium of Music

**The teaching of music performance** is a niche within higher education. It is expensive under the current university structures, being time-intensive and requiring specialists in up to 50 areas to provide a base curriculum. This is challenging for the largest nations but especially so for Australia, with its small population grouped mainly in a few large cities located well apart from each other.

It is not surprising that the Australian music education sector is beset with financial troubles. ANU has cut back its school drastically, and the ANAM was close to closing recently, both causing community uproar.

At the same time, a global revolution is underway in the delivery of education. Many of the world's leading universities are now offering online degrees or course modules. A vast number of 'massive online open courses', or MOOCs, is emerging from these and other sources.

This paper proposes a solution to many of the problems of Australian music teaching using the technology of the education revolution. It proposes an Australian e-Conservatorium of Music for aspiring musicians at tertiary and pre-tertiary levels, which will also offer community courses for people who live away from the main centres. The e-Conservatorium will provide unparalleled access to performers and scholars of international stature, and it will do so at modest cost. In addition, it will be a pilot to test and demonstrate teaching approaches that can later be applied in larger education sectors, such as law, business or medicine.

**Concept** The e-Conservatorium will deliver high-quality flexible education programs through a blend of online teaching supported by some traditional face-to-face classroom and coaching time. It will need a web portal and central production facility but will depend otherwise on existing facilities and two-way audiovisual links and home facilities being established nationally with the National Broadband Network.

A common technology platform will support programs of three kinds: tertiary and advanced study; pre-tertiary award courses (potentially aligned with AMEB); and basic courses and home lessons, possibly delivered through an alliance with a company such as Telstra. Offering all three levels will help the e-Conservatorium be able to provide adequate income opportunities for teaching staff.

The e-Conservatorium will supplement and not replace or compete with the existing conservatoria. Its intention is to implement a series of agreements or alliances to allow periodic access to facilities and to provide a framework for part-time teaching by conservatorium staff. It will also have partnerships with leading music schools in Asia, Europe and America.

Research and publication, or the musical equivalent, composition, are central to all academic institutions of standing. The e-Conservatorium will set out to gain formal accreditation as soon as it can and to deliver research degrees, including doctorates.

**Economic** The e-Conservatorium can be up and running fairly quickly. Its concepts have been tested already, e.g. through Sydney-Darwin and New York-Sydney online teaching collaborations. Discussions are well advanced with a network of leading institutions and teachers around the world.

We estimate an annual cost of \$3 million. Most operating expenses will be met by subscriptions and student fees, supplemented by corporate support and philanthropy and the sale of recorded materials. The international partnerships will help provide a flow of fee-paying students.

**Timely** Music is a valuable sector of the Australian economy, contributing over \$6.8 billion to the GDP and providing many thousands of jobs. Musical excellence is important to our national identity and contributes to our wider creative industries. However, the music education sector is troubled and under financial strain.

The implementing of the NBN provides an opportunity to strengthen Australian music and its global links through the establishment of the e-Conservatorium. We need to act urgently before the initiative is seized by a neighbouring country.