

connected to what we do.”

In just three years McIntosh and her cohort of young musicians have lifted the Australian Haydn Ensemble into the upper echelons of classical performance ensembles.

A series of concerts presented in the Sydney Opera House's Utzon Room and at the Australian National University in Canberra garnered wide praise.

A recent concert played in the historic Cell Block Theatre in the National Art School was a revelation, wrote the *Herald's* music critic Harriet Cunningham: “The thrill of discovery combined with a pain-

be leading an orchestra, especially since I'm not a conductor.’

Skye McIntosh

staking attention to historically informed articulation and instrumental techniques are finally translating into a coherent and, frankly, ravishing sound.”

That sound has now been captured on *The Haydn Album*, the ensemble's first CD release, which will be launched as the group makes its City Recital Hall debut.

Joseph Haydn's Cello Concerto in C major, performed by Daniel Yeadon; the Harpsichord Concerto in D major, with Erin Helyard; and Haydn's Symphony No. 6.

“When I listen to Haydn's music now, I think wow, it sounds like pop music,” McIntosh says. “Often, Haydn gets put down for being very simple but there is a lot of funkiness in what he was writing. We want to bring that back to life.”

Founding and running a classical music ensemble is “bloody hard,” McIntosh says. “Sometimes I have moments where I'm so exhausted, I think I can't go on. But

I keep going.

“It's rare for a woman to be leading an orchestra, especially since I'm not a conductor. When I'm tired, the amazing musicians I work with inspire me. Everyone is encouraged to have an input and say, ‘Hey, I'd like to perform this’. It helps to keep me going.”

Up to this point McIntosh has been running the ensemble from an office in her own house. That's been hard enough. She is also expecting her first child in October.

“I've been so busy I haven't had a lot of time to sit down and think about the fact I'm having a baby

Neal Peres Da Costa of chamber versions of Beethoven's piano concertos. It was really full-on because we did two 12-hour days. I was absolutely wrecked.”

Friends are telling McIntosh to put her feet up. “They are enjoying telling me how hard it's going to be after I have the baby,” she says. “I already know that. But I'm up for the challenge of making it all work. Motherhood is just another dimension of what I'm doing. I'm really looking forward to it.”

The Australian Haydn Ensemble is at City Recital Hall on July 16.

‘Nude’ painting that offended politicians now a Sulman finalist

Elie Choueifaty

“Dynamic. Expressive. Iconic.”

These are just a few words judge Judy Watson used to describe the approach of the finalists in the Sulman Prize.

Wendy Sharpe, one of the 25 finalists, aimed to achieve this with her Sulman entry *The Witches*, based on characters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

“I did not want to paint a cliched image,” Sharpe said. “I wanted a new or different or personal take on it, so it took me a very long time.”

After a trip to Mexico, Sharpe was influenced by the country's culture and Day of the Dead mask, which added a “clownish” element to her Goya-esque inspired artwork.

“My witches live in this crazy and magical world ... I want something that attracts your attention and makes you want to look at it longer,” she said. “Black comedy is a great way to describe my artwork.”



Wendy Sharpe's *The Witches* (left) and Reko Rennie's *Warriors Come Out to Play*.

Sharpe originally submitted her artwork for the 25th anniversary of the Bell Shakespeare Theatre Company, where artists were given the task to create art pieces from a Shakespearean play or quote.

While the artworks toured Australia, *The Witches* made headlines in



2015 after it was taken down from Parliament House in Canberra because of its “partial nudity”.

“I just couldn't believe it, it was so funny. It was a ridiculous controversy but I was pleased my artwork was being looked at again.”

Reko Rennie, another Sulman fi-

nalist, took a contemporary spin on his *Warriors Come Out to Play*, combining graffiti art with an Aboriginal warrior.

“My artwork talks about my culture, my connection to the country, and taking the patterning that represents my identity to amplify it rather than conceal it,” Rennie said. “It commands cultural visibility.”

The Indigenous artist experimented with gradients in his artwork, using an automated spray gun and acrylic to make the background.

“The nature of my work is very graphic, using an image that's very symbolic, the notion of a warrior, [with] colours used in graffiti,” Rennie said.

“I grew up in Melbourne, and as a teenager in the 1980s, there was a whole culture of New York. There was beat street, and break dance and I was listening to hip-hop. It's nice to draw on that with my own traditions.”

Lucy Culliton, a finalist this year

in the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes, experimented with space and colour in her Sulman entry, *Pigeons*. Culliton's painting was inspired by her work in animal rescue and helping pigeons at risk.

“I collect them from gutters, or if they had string around their feet, so there are a lot of maimed pigeons,” she said. “I'm also a bit of a hoarder. I collect cactuses and I have a beautiful garden. I paint the things surrounding me.”

The \$40,000 Sulman Prize covers paintings that are often dramatised and borrow from history or poetry, genre painting and murals and is judged by a single artist.

This year, that responsibility fell to Watson. “I tried to give fair attention to all the entries because I know how it would feel for the artist on the other side,” she said.

The Sulman Prize winner will be announced on July 15, along with the Archibald and Wynne prizes.