

Resolution of Council

19 November 2018

Item 3.2

Vale Richard James Gill AO

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I inform Council of the death of the eminent Australian musician, conductor and music educator, Richard James Gill AO, on Sunday 28 October 2018.

Richard Gill was best known for his strong commitment to music education, mentoring young musicians and to promoting the joy of music throughout the community. He was also a conductor and the artistic director of several organisations, some of which he helped found.

Richard's passion for music education began during a stint of practice teaching at Eastwood Primary School, after completing teacher training at Alexander Mackie Teachers College. He had been accepted into the College at the age of 16. In 1963, he started as a music teacher at Marsden High School, West Ryde, where he inspired many of his students to write their own music.

His musical tastes were not limited to classical music. He played piano in a rock band and sang in a vocal group.

In 1969, he was the founding conductor of the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra, the first of many orchestras, musical ensembles and opera companies he would lead. He was founding music director of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, chorus master of the Australian Opera, artistic director of OzOpera, the Sydney Sinfonia, inaugural artistic director of Victorian Opera (2005-2012) and he breathed new life into the Canberra Symphony. He established the Conservatorium Singers and, in 2014, he became director of the Sydney Chamber Choir. When he died he was co-founder and artistic director of the Australian

Romantic and Classical Orchestra, which he established in 2013, along with Rachael Beesley and Nicole van Bruggen.

His commitment to supporting Australian composers led to him conducting world premieres of Jonathan Mill's *The Ghost Wife* and *Eternity Man*, Andrew Ford's *Rembrandt's Wife* and Moya Henderson's *Lindy* and Alan John's *The Eighth Wonder* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He also championed commissioning and programming numerous instrumental and choral pieces from a wide range of Australian professional and student composers.

In the late 1960s, Richard travelled to London to learn how to teach infant children. He later studied at the Orff Institute in Salzburg, where he met Carl Orff and played piano in a performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana* conducted by the composer.

After returning to Australia, he taught at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music and became musical director for the Sydney Youth Orchestra. In keeping with his belief in the importance of introducing music to children as early as possible, he established the Babies' Proms.

Richard sought to introduce the joy of music to as many people as possible.

He was a panellist on the ABC's *Spicks and Specks* and *Operatunity* television series. As a guest on Q&A he had the panel and entire audience singing, observing "even polties can sing!"

In February 2017, Richard conducted the first Sydney Flash Mob Choir, an initiative of the City Recital Hall, which brought together people wanting the chance to sing.

His commitment to music education continued. The National Music Teacher Mentoring Program, which began in 2015, with Richard as founder and director, helped give general school teachers the skills and confidence to teach music in their classrooms.

His most recent initiative is a new national music academy with the involvement of Muswellbrook Mayor Martin Rush. This new school will ensure children have access to the unique social, emotional and intellectual benefits of music from kindergarten through to year 12. It will commence in 2020.

Richard has received more honours than almost anyone involved in Australian music.

He received an Order of Australia Medal in 1994, a Centenary Medal in 2001, the Bernard Heinze Award for services to music in Australia, the Australian Music Centre's award for 'Most Distinguished Contribution to the Presentation of Australian Composition by an Individual', and the Don Banks Music Award 2006 by the Australia Council for the Arts. He was awarded an Achievement Award in July 2018 "in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the Arts in Australia as both a conductor and as a music educator" and two weeks later he was awarded the Arts Leadership Award at the 2018 Creative Partnerships Awards, held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

He received honorary doctorates from the Edith Cowan University and the Australian Catholic University. A personal chair in music education was recently created in his name at the Sydney Conservatorium High School, endowed by the international law firm King & Wood Mallesons. In 2016, he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia.

The day before he died, more than 70 musicians, including a police band, gathered outside Richard's Stanmore home, to play his favourite theme, from his favourite movie, "The Dam Busters March". It was a fitting farewell.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons present in the Chamber stand for one minute's silence to mark the life of Richard James Gill AO and his outstanding contribution to Australian music and music education; and
- (B) a letter, under the Lord Mayor's signature, be conveyed to Mr Gill's wife, Maureen, expressing Council's sincere condolences to her and her family.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor) –

That the minute by the Lord Mayor be endorsed and adopted.

Carried unanimously.

Note – all Councillors, staff, press and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Richard James Gill AO.