

The music of Mx Margaret  
Dylan Jones, androgyne  
composer

## INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is Margaret Dylan Jones. I was born in WA. My parents gave me Dylan as a middle name in honour of the famous Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas.

I'm going to talk a little about being a transgender composer and how that has informed some of my music. I'll play a piano solo and accompany two wonderful sopranos in a song.

In 1979 I began a composition degree at UWA and studied with Roger Smalley for about five years spread over many more years than that, and then I did a DipEd.

Even though I continue to thank my lucky stars that I had the opportunity to learn from Roger I'm not aware that my music bears any obvious similarity to his. There is presumably a background influence. You can read more about my studies with Roger in an article on my blog.

My gender identity is non-binary transgender, also called

'enby,' the sound of 'N dot B dot.' An alternative term I've used for about twenty years is 'androgyne,' which means a combination of male and female.

I was assumed male at birth; I prefer to say it that way rather than 'assigned male at birth.'

I use 'she' or 'they' as my pronouns and my title is Mx, spelt 'em - ex.' It's a non-binary transgender title I've been using consistently since 2002. I seem to be the earliest adopter of it anywhere on the planet who is still using it. In recent years Mx has really taken off and become widely accepted by dictionaries, businesses and governments in several countries. In 2015 I wrote a major article about Mx, available on my website.

I'm very glad to see 'diversity' in the name of this conference. Surely, evolution, and the survival of any species, depend on diversity.

## ABOUT MY MUSIC

Right from the start my music has been concerned with the issues of gender identity, and preserving mental health. Early on I also became concerned

about environmental protection, especially the conservation of old-growth forests and I wrote a song cycle for choir on that subject.

My earliest published work is 'Androgyne Prophecy,' a four-minute piano solo composed when I was just turning 16, still at school, and not looking forward to the prospect of having to live as some sort of transgender person. You can imagine in 1977 that was a very daunting prospect. I would have loved to play it for you as it's never been heard or seen here, but time does not permit. [hold score up]

My Sonatina from 1981 echoes the sense of isolation and inner conflict often experienced by young LGBTIQ people. The style is at times freely atonal and neo-tonal. The coda has a prophetic sense of partial resolution in the evocation of a Balinese gamelan percussion ensemble, an example of which you can see over there. [Point to instruments on display behind glass.]

Two years ago I completed Rainbows Over Hovea, a joyous celebration of the increasing acceptance of LGBTIQ people. It begins with chords which

seem to me to be rainbow-coloured, especially purple and violet. Overall the harmonic language is mostly straightforward which helps, I think, to make the continuous variation more accessible. Hovea is the name of a purple-blue flower and is the locality where the Parkerville Amphitheatre is located, in which I grew up, literally. This piano solo was used in a wedding a few hundred metres from Hovea Falls in JFNP, where I spent many hours in my youth. I'll play it for you now; it's about three minutes.

[Play Rainbows Over Hovea, 3 minutes]

=====

VOCAL MUSIC

I've long been disappointed that most of the best vocal and choral music is strongly heterosexist and exclusively binary in gender. I'm sure I'm not the only person who would prefer to sing lyrics that mean something to me. I want to sing great music with words that relate to my experience as a non-binary transgender androgyne and member of the LGBTIQ community.

Just to back track a little, in 2001 I founded a choir called

The GGO Quire: Girls, Guys & Others. I was one of the others. The group included eight members who were intersex, non-binary, or assigned-male or assigned-female transgender, among a membership primarily of cisgender people (including gay or lesbian people). You may know the term 'mixed choir,' which refers to a choir with men and women. Well, this was a VERY mixed choir!

Our aim was to raise the wider community's awareness and acceptance of transgender and intersex people. The group only lasted one year but gave eight performances. Some members were composers with music degrees but we didn't get as far as writing on-topic music for ourselves.

Over the last year I've been trying to remedy that situation by writing new lyrics for traditional tunes which are built around LGBTIQ stories or themes.

These are solo, duet and choral re-workings of Amazing Grace, Greensleeves and Londonderry Air, which I've re-named 'Beside the Foyle.' Each has multiple lyrics to choose from depending on the occasion or the point of view of the singers.

These are very special arrangements. The first two are so musically sophisticated and innovative they verge on being new compositions. These lovely and well-known melodies were crying out for refurbishment to give them a new lease on life with new and old audiences.

Each song has at least two sets of lyrics to choose from. Within some lyrics there are further choices of a different word here and there.

The lyrics have an archaic style mimicking the traditional lyrics and even retaining some words and phrases so that singers and audiences will experience some of the traditional flavour of these famous songs. However, the songs now tell modern stories and romances. It's about time we had our own voice!

## LYRICS USING THE SINGULAR THEY

These inclusive lyrics feature the singular they and can be sung by LGTBIQ people and/or our friends, families and supporters.

In everyday life all people use the singular they without

realising it, though they don't often see it in print. Nevertheless, it has been used in writing for many hundreds of years by a long list of respected authors including Jane Austen and William Shakespeare.

Contrary to popular belief, the singular *they*, though it may be exceptional has never been considered ungrammatical except by a few diehard linguists in the nineteenth century who fought unsuccessfully to outlaw it.

To back track again, 1989 I founded my first adult community choir, the Perth Discovery Choir, which I conducted for five years. Until last year I hadn't heard anything about them for decades but to my great surprise the group has survived and next month they'll hold their 30th anniversary concert in Nedlands, with me conducting my arrangement of Beside the Foyle, based on Londonderry Air or Danny Boy, with my new lyrics which are printed in your handout.

## TRANSGENDER SINGERS

Transgender people have to decide what to do about their speaking and singing voices when they transition. This is

true whether they are changing their gender presentation or also altering their physiology.

In 1992 I sang in the Fremantle Eisteddfod as some sort of low tenor, and won four first places so I couldn't have been too bad. However, soon after this I gave up singing because I knew my best voice would inevitably sound very masculine and that was doing my head in.

However, in recent years a number of transgender singers around the world have resumed or continued their professional singing careers, which I find personally very encouraging, so today I will sing a few bars.

In the handout sheet I have listed some transgender singers I have found online over the last few years. They seem to have made various choices with some singing in their self-identified gender, some in a gender-neutral way, and some, like myself, completely unchanged after transition.

To conclude this lecture-performance I will perform a World Premiere, my arrangement of Amazing Grace, A Song for All (Harvey Milk Gave Us Hope). Hannah Lee Tungate and Lucinda Nicholls,

who are UWA Conservatorium  
of Music voice students, will  
sing it as a duet.

SING: Amazing Grace, A Song  
for All (Harvey Milk Gave Us  
Hope) [6 minutes]

=====