

About the making of the film

By the producer, Kerry Herman

In 1993 my mother, Ina Herman, read that Vietnam was opening up to the west and at that time she was looking for somewhere different to tour Musica Bella, a small musical ensemble she managed in Perth. My younger sister, who played the recorder, started the ensemble, which specialised in baroque music – an area of music in which the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music was very interested.

My mother approached the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT), which had just started sponsoring cultural groups to Vietnam, to discuss touring the ensemble. DFAT agreed to cover part of the costs of the ensemble's initial visit and its subsequent visit in 1995. Musica Bella was the first cultural group of any sort to visit Vietnam from Western Australia.

Around the same time my mother was approached by Charles Devenish, a Perth businessman with interests in Vietnam, to help raise money for the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music. On a business visit there, he had attended a concert and met a member of the Conservatory who explained the enormous financial and physical difficulties staff and students were working and teaching under. Many instruments were in a state of disrepair, there were few orchestral scores and many of them were outdated scores that came from Russia years before. The lack of resources and materials to assist in running repairs meant many of the instruments were in terrible condition – fine wire was being used to replace broken violin strings, there were huge dents in the timpani and a beautiful grand piano was tucked away on its side under the stairs because no-one could fix it.

Aware my mother was organising a visit to Vietnam for the ensemble to give a performance and series of master classes to Conservatory students, Charles Devenish asked her to see how much help was needed.

Following her visit to Hanoi, my mother agreed to become involved in what became known as the Music Instruments for Vietnam Project. In mid 1993 she made contact with the Department for the Arts in Perth and travelled to Melbourne and Sydney to contact

companies with established business interests in Vietnam which could potentially provide financial support.

Over a period of two years she raised \$50,000 in cash and in-kind support from companies and organisations including Telstra-Vietnam, the School of Music at the University of Western Australia, Musica Bella and PC Doctor Western Australia. In-kind donations included a computer, printer, harpsichord and new orchestral scores that enabled the Conservatory to establish a library. Cash sponsorship covered the purchase of two new violins, a viola, cello and double bass, as well as materials to help repair older string and reed instruments. Singapore Airlines donated cargo space to uplift all the instruments to Hanoi and LEP Transport sponsored the cost of packing and transporting all the instruments to the airport.

During her initial visit to the Conservatory in 1993, my mother met Professor Vu Huong who, over dinner one night, told her about the Conservatory's departure from Hanoi and its life as a campus beneath a village in the countryside during the war. When she returned to Perth she related this story to me, and the germ of the idea for *Vietnam Symphony* was born.