

# *Vietnam symphony*



FILM AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL INTEREST PROGRAM



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In 1965, as the Vietnam War intensified and Hanoi faced the threat of massive US bombing, students and teachers from the National Conservatory of Music were forced to flee the city for the relative safety of a small village in the countryside. With the help of villagers, they built an entire campus underground, creating a maze of hidden tunnels, connecting an auditorium and classrooms. Here, as the war raged around them, they lived, studied and played music for five years. *Vietnam Symphony* tells their extraordinary story.

Stunning black-and-white archival footage captures almost surreal scenes — of pianos wheeled on handcarts along dusty tracks, lessons held in round-the-clock shifts in subterranean caverns, performances for soldiers among heavy armaments, and the unexpected meeting of hard labour and high culture, of the pragmatic and the sublime. This remarkable footage is combined with contemporary interviews with the people involved, who recount personal stories of danger, hunger, fear and loss, counterpointed by moments of humour and beauty. And their music, of course.

Since the war, Vietnam has undergone profound changes. These talented musicians and composers are now among the country's cultural leaders, yet their children tend to take little interest in the past, looking to the west to shape their future.

Beautifully photographed, *Vietnam Symphony* records the coming together of the former conservatory students and villagers for a reunion concert 30 years after the war, to paint a moving portrait of life in Vietnam then and now.

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