

Noonan or groups such as the Australian Chamber Orchestra – the latter also accepts commissions to perform private concerts.

The ACO's outgoing general manager Tim Calnin says the fee for a performance ranges from \$20,000 to \$50,000, depending on who and how many musicians perform and the length of their concert. "The majority of private performances we do for a fee are from our immediate circle of supporters who want to support the orchestra by paying us a fee to do a private performance for a special event they have planned," he says.

In contrast, The Australian Ballet's private performance for bachelor Sam Wood and his date Snezana Markoski on television series *The Bachelor Australia* was purely for publicity with no money exchanged, according to a spokeswoman.

Privately commissioned portraits and sculptures are also typical gifts for the artistically minded. Renowned for his portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Mary, Ralph Heimans accepts corporate and private commissions which, he says, are mainly of family members for their home.

"My work is described as narrative portraiture in that each painting tells a story by placing the sitter in a context which is meaningful to them," he says.

Heimans says he uses artistic licence to reimagine certain elements to strengthen the composition and enhance the narrative: "In my portrait of Princess Mary, for example, I changed the Venetian landscapes in the garden room of Fredensborg Palace to depictions of Constitution Dock in Hobart, the city where she was born."

Heimans' portrait of the Queen, commissioned to mark the Diamond Jubilee, was set in Westminster Abbey at the site of her coronation 60 years earlier.

Heimans says large-scale portraits are priced from \$300,000: "Smaller format



oil portraits are also possible, with prices depending on such factors as size, compositional complexity and number of figures. Drawings start at \$16,000."

A two-time winner of the Archibald Prize People's Choice Award, Evert Ploeg has painted the likes of actor Richard Roxburgh, Kamahl and Australia's first astronaut, Dr Paul Scully-Power. Ploeg places a painted portrait between written language and a photograph in what it reveals about a subject.

"The corporate portrait is more about celebrating an individual's contribution to the company or association; they are usually more descriptive of their roles," he says.

"Private portraits examine on perhaps a more personal level and there is, of course, a great demand for children's portraits."

Ploeg says most people are familiar with his work, but each portrait is a collaborative effort: "The patron may have ideas. I have ideas and together we tailor the work so that it's unique."

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The cost of a portrait depends on its size, complexity and the type of material, but he says a pencil or charcoal sketch may cost \$1000, while an oil portrait carries a \$40,000 price tag. "But then you can have a fairly large pencil drawing that has taken months to complete and the price would reflect that," he adds.

Ploeg's favoured style is *alla prima* – a portrait painted from life and completed in one sitting that lasts between four and six hours. It costs between \$3000 and \$5000.

"Here the subject gets to experience a one-on-one with an artist and see how his or her own portrait develops," he says.

"The final work is spontaneous, unlaboured over and has a raw honesty about it."

Fellow portrait artist and two-time Archibald Packing Room Prize winner Paul Newton's portraits are priced from \$50,000. "A three-quarter-length portrait includes the sitter's hands; an important inclusion, as hands can be such an expressive part of a portrait."

He says he is often fascinated by the reactions of subjects to a finished portrait.

Maggie Tabberer wept after he revealed his work. "I thought 'Good grief, what have I done?' But she quickly reassured me that she really liked the painting," he says. "It's just that you revealed things about me which I thought I'd hidden," she told me."

On another occasion, a corporate executive asked Newton to "tweak" the corner of his mouth. "I was happy to oblige, and mixed up some paint while they looked on," he says.

"I approached the portrait, raised my brush to make the adjustment, but an instant before the brush had actually made contact with the canvas they both called out in unison 'stop!'"

"That's got it," one of them said. "Don't do any more." They were happy."

He adds: "I think as a portrait painter one has to be a diplomat, sometimes a confidant and, above all, a person who enjoys working with people." x