

AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble UNSW

Upcoming Events

Collegium Musicum Choir
Rehearsals commence
Wednesday February 19, 5-8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Singers welcome - please see the
website to register:
music.unsw.edu.au/choral/collegium-musicum-choir
or call 02 9385 4874

Australia Ensemble UNSW
Subscription Concert 1
Saturday March 14, at 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Storm and Tempest
KATS-CHERNIN | Velvet Revolution
BEETHOVEN | String Quintet 'Storm'
SCHREKER | Der Wind
BERWALD | Grand Septet in B flat

David Griffiths, clarinet; Dene Olding, violin; Dimity Hall, violin; Irina Morozova, viola; Julian Smiles, cello, Ian Munro, piano

Guest Artists: Carla Blackwood, horn; Tobias Breider, viola; Lyndon Watts, bassoon; and Andrew Meisel, double bass

Collegium Musicum Choir
Sunday April 5, 5pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
DURUFLÉ Quatre motets sur des
themes gregoriens; FAURÉ: Motets
and Cantique de Jean Racine; and
DURUFLÉ Requiem Op.9

music.unsw.edu.au

Velvet Revolution

written by guest artist
Carla Blackwood

The 2020 Concert Season includes two trios for violin, horn and piano. The Australia Ensemble's August concert features Brahms' Horn Trio Op.40, while this year's season opens with Elena Kats-Chernin's Velvet Revolution.

There exist earlier examples of the scoring for horn, violin, and piano, however the seminal work for this instrumentation is Brahms' Horn Trio of 1865. Brahms wrote it to commemorate the death of his mother, and his fondness for the horn as a vehicle for expressing both grief and a nostalgia for his youth is evident throughout. Györgi Ligeti's extraordinary trio for the same instrumentation was composed as a companion piece to the Brahms (1982), and many works followed in the 20th and 21st Centuries. This lineup includes a number of trios by Australian composers, from Don Banks' trio commissioned for the 1962 Edinburgh Festival to later works by Larry Sitsky, Roger Smalley, Gordon Kerry, and Catherine Likhuta.

Elena Kats-Chernin's horn trio was commissioned for the 1999 Musica Viva season, to be performed by Hector McDonald (horn), Ian Munro (piano) and John Harding (violin) alongside the Brahms Horn Trio at the Sydney Opera House. The 1999 Musica Viva series had the overarching title "Surrender to the Velvet Revolution," in commemoration of the lifting of the Iron Curtain a decade prior. Gordon Kerry, then Artistic Director, suggested Kats-Chernin use this theme and call her trio Velvet Revolution.

Kats-Chernin engages with this theme not in direct reference to the Czech revolution, the Velvet Revolution, but rather takes as her subject the Berlin Wall, which fell eight days prior to the start of the peaceful Czech uprising. Kats-Chernin lived in Hannover, Germany, from 1980 until 1994, and was in Karlsruhe at the time of the commission. In 1989, when the wall fell, she was



Top: Guest artist Carla Blackwood
Below: Composer Elena Kats-Chernin,
photo by Bruria Hammer

in Berlin working for a period at the Schaubühne, staying at a house in Kreuzberg directly across the river from East Berlin. She experienced first-hand the impacts of a divided Germany, the destruction of the wall, and the beginning of the process of reunification.

The trio is a tribute to the people who died and to the epic themes of that time, yet it is a personal expression, rather than a programmatic description, of events. It contains tragedy, optimism and drama, and evokes how everything was both falling apart and coming together. Each of the six movements – *Hymn*, *Freeze*, *Fountain*, *Mostly Unison*, *Jump* and *Anarchy* – works as an emotional snapshot of a different facet of that time. While the work is often harsh and almost desperate in its percussive forward propulsion, it also contains moments of tranquility and vulnerability as well as slightly grotesque expressions of joy and celebration. The composer captures something that she sees as particularly European: even in the harshest of times, there are still celebrations, parties, and beauty.

Carla Blackwood will perform Velvet Revolution with Dene Olding and Ian Munro on 14 March 2020.

Festival of Summer Voices

In 2020, UNSW continued its highly successful and on-going partnership with Gondwana Choirs. As a Major Partner, we were pleased to be able to support Gondwana Choirs' Festival of Summer Voices. UNSW opened its Randwick campus early in January, welcoming hundreds of young singers, composers and conductors who partook in the Festival. The two week program included four evening concerts featuring the country's finest young choral singers, Composers School (with each young composer being mentored by our very own Paul Stanhope), and a Conductor's Academy. The intensive program was jam-packed with activities to develop and inspire these gifted and up and coming young artists.



In Good Company

Late January saw the SongCo Lab run by The Song Company held at UNSW. The Lab was a 4-day intensive workshop course attended by 17 early career professional singers. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to work closely with The Song Company's artistic team and guest artist Taryn Fiebig.

The Lab included masterclasses, workshops, industry Q&As, rehearsals and breakout sessions, mentoring and repertoire experience.

Through this invigorating experience, singers developed their ensemble skills, voice and gained insight as emerging artists.

At the conclusion of the Lab, the group of singers presented an intimate recital, performing repertoire from the 15th century through to the present, to a very fortunate group of supporters.

The Music Performance Unit was thrilled to play host to the Song Company's SongCo Lab and looks forward to continuing its relationship with The Song Company into the future.



SongCo Lab at UNSW 2020

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Through the Looking-Glass

With 40 impressive seasons of programs underpinning the ensemble's vibrant history, we sat down with Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope to find what's involved in programming a season of the Australia Ensemble.

The challenge and joy of programming an AE season is to bring something fresh without straying too far from the tradition of concert-making which has made the ensemble so successful over many years. I'm really standing on the shoulders of the late Professor Roger Covell who set up a very successful 'template' for these concerts and I also rely on the enormous wealth of knowledge from the musicians who bring many suggestions of works they would like to perform. Everyone has their own sensibility when it comes to repertoire so my job is a careful balancing act! My role is, therefore, to bring coherence to the various suggestions and find satisfying combinations of pieces which give sufficient contrast and a good shape to the concert experience. This requires quite a lot of back and forth with the players. We're also very fortunate to be able to invite the cream of chamber musicians from across the country to augment our key players, and this adds considerably to the possibilities of programming.

For the 2020 season, the ensemble wanted to tap into the richness of Beethoven's chamber music for his semiquincentennial (250th anniversary of the composers' birth). Orchestras of course have the symphonies and concertos to choose from, but in the case of Beethoven's chamber music, there is an enormous amount of high quality music that we don't hear very often, such as the String Quintet in C 'Storm' in our first program or the quirky 'Kakadu' Variations in the last of the season. We will be performing a chamber work by Beethoven in every concert by way of taking in this sampling of this masterful composer's work. These are not always the featured work in the program, so there is plenty of scope to include masterpieces from other composers such as Schumann, Brahms and Shostakovich.

There are two other threads of programming that the ensemble has been interested in: the first is uncovering hidden gems and lesser known composers from historical periods. New threads of musicology are particularly focusing on composing women right now, and I look forward to more music coming to light, such as Louise Farrenc's Flute Trio, composed in 1857. The second of these threads is music of the contemporary world. Australia Ensemble's audiences have embraced the new and unexpected worlds of contemporary Australian (and international) composition and this has been an important theme across the AE's history with the commissioning of new works in each season. There has been a recent focus on younger generation composing women in our commissioning program, and it is a delight to have a new work by Holly Harrison in the last program. I am a big fan of Holly's work which has already had considerable international exposure.

There are so many highlights for me and every concert has a strong individual flavour. Of the Beethoven, the E minor Razumovsky Quartet Op. 59 no.2 is a real highlight. This is Beethoven in the midst of his revolutionary period, making great and bold strides in every medium he tackles. The Op. 70 No. 2 Piano Trio is a similar case. It is less famous than the first trio in this opus – "The Ghost" – but I think it is as good if not better. From the European canon, the Brahms Horn Trio makes a welcome return as well as the Schumann Piano Quartet. If you like your music with a bit more bite, the Shostakovich Piano Quintet in our last program is always a knockout and is a piece the ensemble loves performing. Of the more contemporary fare, Elena Kats-Chernin's dramatic "Velvet Revolution" (also for Horn Trio) is highly-charged and gives an inkling of this composer's earlier style. And I'm also very much looking forward to hearing tenor Robert Macfarlane sing with the ensemble. His light, flexible tenor voice and engaging performing style is not to be missed!



Paul Stanhope Photo: Keith Saunders

Community Voice

Sonia Maddock, Choral Director

While the Australia Ensemble celebrated its 40th season last year, UNSW's Collegium Musicum Choir undertook its 45th year of programs, certainly a less celebrated milestone than round-numbered occasions. Academic and performer Patricia Brown took the helm of the fledging choral program in 1975 with the formation of the Dowland Singers, which grew into the Collegium Musicum Choir and the smaller Burgundian Consort. After twenty-eight years, the baton was handed to me – I always felt a sense of responsibility that I had been entrusted with something that Patricia felt was most valuable, and I have carried this treasure with me for the past 17 years.



Patricia Brown and the Dowland Singers, 1979

The Collegium Musicum Choir is essentially a community choir, incorporating singers from across the university and stretching out into the broader community. I see its purpose as bringing people together to have a quality musical experience they otherwise might not have, and musical opportunities that all singers should have from time to time. The music is chosen with care so that the works provide challenge and variety for those who've been part of it for many years, and that more transient members have a memorable and rewarding experience. Baroque oratorios and Classical masses therefore sit in annual programs with works of Britten, Lauridsen, Jenkins and Vasks. It is not about the easy sell, but about bringing value to the singers and their supporters who come along to performances. I'm also determined to ensure that there are works new to me in each year, and works that I've not worked on for some time so I come to it with fresh eyes and ears, and approach it with the current cohort of singers in mind.



Collegium Musicum Choir and orchestra 2019
with Choral Director Sonia Maddock

Over the years, the most often performed work by the Collegium Musicum Choir is Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, other favourites including the Requiems of Mozart and Fauré, masses of Haydn, and of course oratorios of Handel. Mozart is the best represented in past repertoire, with plenty of offerings of Bach, Monteverdi, Kodaly and Vaughan Williams. Working with professional musicians in the orchestra and combining with both accomplished and emerging soloists provides variety and freshness, and a gamut of diverse experiences for the choral singers.

This year, then, we embark on our 46th year, beginning with works of French composers Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Duruflé in a program with both choirs. Later in the year, Handel's colourful ode *Alexander's Feast* is on offer, ending the year with a program of Benjamin Britten, including his challenging but vibrant score *Saint Nicolas*. These choral gems will undeniably bring great joy and riches to the choristers and to the life of the campus.

The Collegium Musicum Choir's next performance will be held on Sunday April 5, 2020 at 5pm in Sir John Clancy Auditorium. For more information: www.music.unsw.edu.au or phone 9385 4874.

Keen to join a choir this year? We want to hear from you!

The Collegium Musicum Choir is currently recruiting for Term 1. If you would like to sing in a mass choir, then this could be your chance. The CMC, a 100-piece choir performs three times each year in Sir John Clancy Auditorium and rehearses weekly during term on Wednesdays 5-8pm.

If this is of interest to you, why not give us a call to have a chat about joining up!

Ph: 9385 4874 or email cmc@unsw.edu.au.