

Concert 6 Canberra International Chamber Music Festival

Stopera: *Being Beauteous*

Monday 1 May 6pm

James O. Fairfax Theatre, National Gallery of Australia

Program:

Peter Sculthorpe *The Stars Turn*

Soprano Rebecca Collins, cello Julian Thompson, piano Vivienne Winther.

Peter Sculthorpe *Eliza Fraser Sings*

Soprano Judith Dodsworth, flute Felicity Gallagher, piano Vivienne Winther.

Maurice Ravel *Chansons Madécasses*

Mezzo soprano Maria Danielle-Sette, flute Felicity Gallagher, cello Julian Thompson, piano Vivienne Winther.

Hans Werner Henze *Being Beauteous* (*Australian premiere*)

Soprano Rebecca Collins, harp Laura Tanata, cellos Julian Thompson, Frances Stevens, Lindy Reksten, Alex Voorhoeve.

Program notes:

Language and music are two parallel spheres that are often connected - more than half of all existing music consists of settings of words. This relationship has diverse forms; sometimes music seizes violently upon language, and crushes it in its embrace, or sometimes language wants to seize upon music; they both can degrade but also can elevate one another.

Hans Werner Henze (from a 1959 lecture about the message of music)

***The Stars Turn* (1970)**

Text: Tony Morphett

This song was originally the fourth part of Peter Sculthorpe's *Love 200*, written for rock band and orchestra, and first performed in 1970 by singer Jeannie Lewis with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Hopkins. *Love 200* is about the journey made by Captain Cook in 1770 (at the time of composition the 200 years ago of the title), the original and main purpose of the expedition being to plot the Transit of Venus (Love), but the historic result being the official English discovery of Australia. This effective and beautiful chamber reduction of the work for voice, cello and piano is dedicated to Sculthorpe's family.

Peter Sculthorpe (1929-)

***Eliza Fraser Sings* (1978)**

Text: Barbara Blackman (after Michael Alexander's *Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore*)

- I Prelude***
- II Shipwreck***
- III Capture***
- IV Corroboree***
- V Interlude***
- VI Escape***

Peter Sculthorpe (1929-)

Peter Sculthorpe's brief description of the Eliza Fraser story is simple but compelling—'the story of a woman in two worlds, one inhabited by Aborigines, the other by white colonists'. In this collaboration with poet Barbara Blackman, Peter Sculthorpe has composed a chamber work that gives voice to Eliza Fraser's remembering and reciting of her amazing true story.

The Eliza Fraser story starts in North Queensland, 1836, with a shipwreck; followed by childbirth while stranded at sea in a longboat; the death of her baby; and on making landfall, there comes the killing of her husband, the wrecked ship's captain, and his crew, leaving Eliza, 'the sole survivor', in the hands of a tribe of Aborigines.

Believing that white people are the returned spirits of the dead, the Kabi tribe call a corroboree for the ritual mating of Eliza with another white man, an escaped convict also living with a neighbouring tribe. This corroboree sends Eliza into the refuge of fantasies about the convict returning as her lover and their life in future paradise. She is unexpectedly rescued and returned to the garrison at Moreton Bay.

Eliza wound up a shattered and unstable woman who told her story for sixpence from a booth in Sydney's Hyde Park. *Eliza Fraser Sings* is a representation of Eliza addressing her potential customers from her booth, her mind wandering between the present, her past ordeals, and her fantasies.

***Chansons Madécasses* (1926)**

- Nahandove***
- Aoua! Aoua!***
- Repos***

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Text: Evariste Parny (1753-1814)

Early in 1926, Ravel received a commission from Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a wealthy American patron of the arts, for a song-cycle with the unusual instrumental accompaniment of flute, cello and piano. At the same time, Ravel had found at a second-hand bookstall the complete works of a forgotten poet, Evariste Parny (1753-1814), a native of the Isle of Reunion. Parny's works included poems based on the texts of traditional Madagascan love songs. These two events lead Ravel to write an unusual, exotic and experimental setting of three of Parny's Madagascan songs.

Ravel envisaged the work as a quartet in the true chamber music sense, rather than a traditional vocal work of soloist with accompaniment, describing his vision of the work thus:

Stopera

Artistic Director: Vivienne Winther
Company Manager: Greg Marginson
GPO Box 2481 Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
+ 61 2 6232 4082 stopera@netspeed.com.au

I emphasise that the score demands an independence of the different parts, and in it I see a new dramatic element – the erotic voice, which is introduced by the very subject of Parry's poems. The work is a quartet with the voice in the role of principal instrument. Simplicity is the keynote.

In the first song *Nahandove*, the lover awaits his beloved, describing the moon and the sounds of nature, which Ravel evokes with imaginative skill. When the beloved Nahandove appears, the eroticism of the music and poem intensifies and then subsides.

The second song begins with loud and strident sounds of exclamation – *Aoua! aoua!* Parry's poem then starts with the line: *Méfiez-vous de blancs* – *Beware of the whites!*, and Ravel's setting is an intense expression of the fear, menace and hatred of racism.

In *Repos*, the poetry and music express the sensual joys of resting in the heat of the day and waiting for the evening cool to arrive. It finishes abruptly, with an offhand call for dinner to be served.

***Being Beauteous* (1964)**

Hans Werner Henze (1926-)

Text: Jean-Arthur Rimbaud from *Les Illuminations* (1872/73)

(Australian premiere)

Celebrating his 80th year in 2006, Hans Werner Henze is without doubt one of the most significant opera composers of the second half of the twentieth century. His nineteen opera and music theatre works are regularly performed throughout Europe and America, but regrettably are for the most part unknown and neglected in Australia. His upbringing as a child in Fascist Germany left him with an intense hatred of fascism and he has always made known his strong political, even revolutionary views throughout his career, leaving Germany to live in Italy in 1953.

A keynote of his work has been his deep examination and understanding of the reciprocal relationship of text, music and signs. Henze draws upon the world's great literature for the themes of his operatic and theatre works: stories by writers as diverse as Cervantes (*Das Wundertheater*), Balzac (*The English Cat*), Kafka (*Ein Landarzt*), and contemporary Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima (*Das verratene Meer* based on *The Sailor who fell from Grace with the Sea*) have all been the source of inspiration. One of Henze's notable librettists was the great English poet W. H. Auden (*Elegy for Young Lovers*, *The Bassarids*).

An extensive list of imaginative chamber music works is another feature of Henze's output, which also includes nine symphonies. His first visit to New York in 1963, for the premiere of his Fifth Symphony under Bernstein, was the inspiration for three contrasting vocal works of that period, one of which is the haunting cantata for soprano, harp and four cellos, *Being Beauteous*. Deeply effected by the appalling contrast between Harlem and Fifth Avenue, his reaction was a need to write music of pure and abstract beauty. His setting of the enigmatic Rimbaud poem *Being Beauteous* (a poem also set by Benjamin Britten in the song cycle *Les Illuminations*) has been variously described as ethereal, stringent, and full of elusive beauty. It balances with almost magical defiance complex counterpoint, vocal coloratura, and surreal waltz passages.

Program notes: Vivienne Winther