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Australia



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PROGRAM

Donald HOLLIER (b 1934)

A Little Sea Music (2021) 15 min
[In five sections]

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Trio in D major, Op. 70 No. 1 'Ghost' (1809) 30 min
I Allegro vivace e con brio
II Largo assai ed espressivo
III Presto

Edvard GRIEG (1843-1907)

Lento doloroso
from Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, Op. 13 (1867) 9 min

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)

Piano Trio in A minor (1914) 28 min
I Modéré
II Pantoum: Assez vif
III Passacaille: Très large
IV Final: Animé

With special thanks to the Producers' Circle and the Amadeus Society of its support of the 2022 Concert Season, and to our Concert Champions Pam Cudlipp (NSW) and anonymous (ACT).

CANBERRA	HOBART	SYDNEY	NEWCASTLE
THU 24 FEB, 7PM	MON 28 FEB, 7:30PM	MON 7 MAR, 7PM SAT 12 MAR, 2PM	THU 10 MAR, 7:30PM
Llewellyn Hall, ANU School of Music	Hobart Town Hall	City Recital Hall	Newcastle City Hall

Meet the Artists
after the concert.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Bernadette Harvey *piano*

Bernadette Harvey is Senior Lecturer in Piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. An acclaimed international performer and teacher, she was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2000 by then Prime Minister, John Howard, for her contribution to Australian music. Dr Harvey has won many accolades since her first medal in a Sydney Eisteddfod at the age of two and a half, including the ABC Young Performer of the Year in 1987.

As guest artist for the past 11 years at the Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival, Arizona, she has worked with such artists as Ani Kavafian, Joseph Lin, Antonio Lysy, Paul Coletti, Alan Vogel and David Schiff. She presented the world premiere there of a piano quintet by Pierre Jalbert and performed with the Tokyo Quartet in Carl Vine's Piano Quintet, *Fantasia* (premiered in 2013 with the Shanghai Quartet in Tucson and again in Australia for the Melbourne

Festival in October 2013). She and the Shanghai Quartet presented the Australian premiere of the Bright Sheng Piano Quintet, *Dance Capriccio*. More recently she has released a CD, *Alchemy*, with the acclaimed Jupiter Quartet, recorded in 2019 for the Canadian label *Marquis*, which was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Bernadette Harvey performs regularly with Musica Viva Australia and with the ABC. She has had several new piano works written for her, including *Rubia* by Melbourne composer Tim Dargaville which she premiered in Melbourne with the Academy of Melbourne Orchestra, and by Ross Edwards, and Donald Hollier. She recently gave the Australian premiere of *Night*, the first piano concerto by her American colleague Kevin Puts, performed with the Llewellyn Sinfonia, conducted by her sister Rowan Harvey-Martin in Canberra.



Harry Bennetts *violin*

Sydney-born violinist Harry Bennetts began lessons in the Suzuki method at the age of four; and spent his final years of study with Dr Robin Wilson at the Australian National Academy of Music, and then with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley at the Karajan Academy in Berlin. He has appeared as soloist with the Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmanian and Canberra Symphony Orchestras and has performed in recital at Ukaria (SA), Melbourne Recital Centre, and Sydney Opera House Utzon Room, as well as a number of regional centres. His love of chamber music has taken him across the world performing in the Berlin Philharmonie Kammermusiksaal, Cologne Philharmonie, London Southbank Centre, Prussia Cove and back home at the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville as well as regular performances in Sydney and Melbourne. Harry appears courtesy of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, where he is Associate Concertmaster.



Miles Mullin-Chivers *cello*

Miles Mullin-Chivers began playing the cello when he was four years old. At age 19, Miles completed his Bachelor of Music Performance with First-Class Honours at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, having studied under Julian Smiles.

He has also been taught by Fred Sherry, Tamás Varga, Timothy Walden, Hannu Kiiski, Howard Penny, Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, Philippe Muller and Kasia Hans, with whom he continues to study. Miles performed as a soloist at the Canberra International Music Festival in 2018 and 2019 and won the 2019 Gisborne International Music Competition. He has performed as a guest musician with the Sydney Symphony and Opera Australia orchestras.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Donald Hollier writes:

Late in 2019, and shortly after the appointment of Paul Kildea as Artistic Director of Musica Viva Australia, I was approached with the suggestion to write a trio.

I was somewhat hesitant at first. Although I had written a great deal of chamber music during my early years, I found the medium generally rather limiting. This was particularly apparent after I began to receive invitations and commissions to write large-scale works for orchestras and operas. Although I have continued to write songs and other smaller works for voices, instrumental chamber music was more or less abandoned. Consequently, I had written nothing for small instrumental groups for at least 40 years.

After much thought, I decided it might do me some good to concentrate my musical ideas into this very concise form.

When I think of chamber music, it is to recall the great period of its composition in the Classical period of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. These masters produced works of incredible structure and precision. They can never be imitated.

Chamber music in the following centuries represented the broadening of the medium with Romantic, Impressionistic and Expressionistic colours. The upshot of all this thought determined me to attempt to reduce the scale of my work and accept the offer.

As I was in the concluding stages of two operas, I put the commission aside for a number of months. I completed operas 15 and 16 during the holiday period of 2020-2021. The year 2020 was the first year of COVID-19 lockdowns which for a composer meant long days alone with little to do but compose, particularly as I am now in my 86th year with few social activities.

I began work on the trio in January 2021. Paul Kildea is a world authority on the music of Benjamin Britten, and I thought it might be a nice gesture to write a theme and variations on a theme of Britten as a tribute to his academic standing.

But which theme? Britten has written so much famous music with many possible themes. I had already in my youth written a theme and variations on the famous dodecaphonic theme in *Cantata Academica* written for the 500th Anniversary of Basel University. This is a brilliant work with an abundance of harmonic and contrapuntal devices.

I considered this theme again but rejected the idea. Eventually I decided on the beautiful opening of Act 1, Scene 1 of Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*. It flowed not only as a theme but as a beautiful 'Aubade' in its own right.

After transcribing this theme, I realised that the theme I had chosen was really unsuitable for 'normal' variation form. The melody, while marvellously serene, is without any rhythmic or harmonic variation. What should I do? Begin again?

The idea sprang upon me that I should use the theme to bounce onto other poems about the sea. I was fortunate to have one of Australia's finest pianists, Bernadette Harvey, as the keyboard lead. In early discussions, she had expressed a wish for some 'water music'. I certainly could not use the title 'Water Music' after Handel had written such famous music under that name. I therefore decided to call the work *Small Sea Songs*. They turned into a work like Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words' except that mine should really be 'Songs with Words', but the actual words of each poem not used. The words, however, were the impetus for each song.

There were of course now multiple choices available for sea poems. I decided on four of my favourites:

1. Break, break, break
On thy cold grey stones, O sea
(Alfred, Lord Tennyson)
2. Dead seamen, from *Beach Burial*
(Kenneth Slessor)
3. Many waters cannot quench love.
Neither can floods drown it.
(*Song of Songs* Ch. 8 Verse 7)
4. I must go down to the sea again,
To the vagrant gypsy life
(from *Sea Fever* – John Masfield)

Somehow from that decision, the trio flourished boldly and within two or three weeks, the work was completed with a fair copy made.

NB: *The composer has created an additional movement for this tour, a Lento tranquillo which appears between the third and fourth movements.*

© DONALD HOLLIER 2021

Though composed in the same year as the mighty 'Emperor' piano concerto, 1809, **Beethoven's** D major Piano Trio is quite unlike it in character, the first two movements of the Trio displaying unrest and anxiety. The first movement – *Allegro vivace e con brio* – opens with a theme played in octaves by the three instruments and is quickly followed by a lyrical theme on the cello. This is the material from which the movement is mainly constructed. The development is lengthy, and contrasts are achieved by extreme changes of texture. A driving passage in unison or octaves gives way to contrapuntal imitations: a brief lyric interlude is interrupted by a vehement outburst of sound.

The uneasy atmosphere manifest throughout the first movement continues to be felt in the splendid slow movement, which begins with the violin and cello in octaves. An eerie figure, repeated without cessation throughout the movement is, according to musicologist Gustav Nottebohm, to be found in Beethoven's sketches for the opening scene of *Macbeth*, a project which came to nothing. The weird effect is heightened in the Trio by the introduction of light tremolo chords in the piano. It is the desolation of this music which suggested the nickname of 'Geister' (Ghost) for the work. Several despairing climaxes are developed and die away in long descending scales. Like the opening movement, the slow movement is constructed from a minimum of material, but its overall effect is awe-inspiring.

The finale, *Presto*, is in sonata form, and does not attain the heights of inspiration reached by the preceding movements. It is neither so concentrated nor so intense. Despite this however, throughout it there is the same compulsion to make much of little, the development principle taking possession of the entire movement. It is this characteristic which makes the D major Trio one of Beethoven's most passionate utterances in the sphere of his chamber music.

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Grieg's Second Violin Sonata, written at age 23 when he was on his honeymoon, was one of the first identifiably 'Norwegian' works of his career.

Pointedly, it was dedicated to Norwegian composer and violinist Johan Svendsen. Far from the 'sunny' disposition of its predecessor, it was described by composer Gerhard Schjelderup as 'the gift to the world of a man who has also shivered in the cold mists of night'. Grieg himself said it was explicitly a Norwegian piece, and that 'a Norway without tragedy is not a complete Norway.'

For Grieg's Danish composition teacher Niels Gade, it was 'too Norwegian', and he demanded that his student's next sonata should be less so. 'On the contrary, Professor,' Grieg answered, 'the next one will be even more so.' Soon they would part ways; in Grieg's case, toward international stardom.

This sonata was premiered by Gudbrand Bøhn (who'd also played Grieg's First Sonata), with the composer at the piano, in the autumn of 1867. This concert will feature the first of the sonata's three movements. In it, the spirit of peasant folk dances is never far away. The piano part sometimes resembling a guitarist strumming a rhythm.

ADAPTED FROM A NOTE
© MARTIN BUZACOTT 2018

In August 1914 **Maurice Ravel** wrote to his friend Maurice Delage: 'If only you knew how I am suffering. From morning to night, I am obsessed with one idea that tortures me... If I leave my poor old mother, it will surely kill her... But so as not to think of this I am working, yes, with the sureness and lucidity of a madman. At the same time, I get terrible fits of depression and suddenly find myself sobbing over the sharps and flats!'

This glimpse of distress in a composer noted for a calculated and methodical approach to his work (and a tendency to cool irony when discussing his life) is at first surprising. But the outbreak of World War I deeply upset him. Elsewhere he writes: 'This perpetual nightmare is too atrocious. I feel I shall go mad...' The war threatened the culture which he loved, and he was terribly concerned for the safety of his friends such as the young Stravinsky. Ravel was also determined to serve his country, despite the fact that he was now 39 years old, short and underweight. In September he was caring for the wounded in a voluntary capacity; by the following March he was a military truck driver. With his truck *Adelaide* he faced a number of potentially fatal dangers.

Ravel's small output is a result of his perfectionism; he had begun his Trio in the summer of 1913 and, characteristically, completed only one movement – the first – by March 1914. Other works distracted him from the piece, which he clearly found challenging to write, but the outbreak of the war and his determination to enlist (despite the effect this might have on his much-loved mother) drove him to complete it in, for him, record time. And yet we must agree with scholar Rollo Myers, that 'considering the conditions under which the work was composed, one can only marvel at its perfection and apparently unruffled equilibrium – with the possible exception of the last movement which shows some signs of nervous tension, although it is exultant and not at all tragic.'

The opening movement is an expansive sonata design based on the attractive simple theme announced by the piano at the start. Ravel described it as 'Basque in colour'; its rhythm, like much folk music, contains subtle irregularities (here, each bar is initially divided into groups of 3+2+3 quavers) while the harmony is essentially simple and modal. The title of the second movement, *Pantoum*, refers to a style of Malay poetry (*pantun*) introduced into

French letters by Victor Hugo and much used by Charles Baudelaire. Its form demands that the second and fourth line of one stanza become the first and third of the next stanza. This doesn't 'translate' into musical form, of course, though we might hear echoes in Ravel's contrast of rhythmic groups of three and two, and in the way he alternates thematic material between strings and piano.

The exotic brilliance of the *Pantomim* is in complete contrast to the celebrated passacaglia (*Passacaille*) which follows. It is tempting to hear it as a kind of hymn to peace, the poised theme passing from instrument to instrument as Ravel gradually elaborates the texture and then, after the movement's climax, gradually reduces it to its original state. The *Final* is, as Myers says, exultant. Ravel uses typically Basque rhythmic devices, such as the alternation of five and seven beats to a bar, and

the writing for all instruments is hugely virtuosic. One might suggest that for Ravel there was a kind of salvation from the imminent horrors of war in the virtues of Classical, lucent structures and textures.

© GORDON KERRY 2018

CHAMBER OF MUSICAL CURIOSITIES

Journey into the Chamber of Musical Curiosities

Hosted by Artistic Director Paul Kildea, the Chamber of Musical Curiosities is a podcast exploring the world of music in and around Musica Viva Australia. During the episodes, guests reflect upon creativity, their careers, and their passion for chamber music.

► Episode 10: Kim Williams

In this episode, Kim discusses the various careers he's had throughout his remarkable life. They explore the importance of Australian musicians, composers and learning the history of Australian music culture and musical traditions. Paul and Kim also have a heartfelt reflection on their mutual friend Richard Gill and his advocacy for music education in Australia.

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 musicaviva.com.au/podcast



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In loving memory of Jennifer Bates; Julian Burnside AO QC & Kate Durham; The Barry Jones Birthday Commission; Michael & Frédérique Katz, in honour of Cecily Katz; Graham Lovelock & Steve Singer; DR & KM Magarey; Vicki Olsson; Tribe family in honour of Doug Tribe's 75th Birthday

Musica Viva Australia also thanks the Silo Collective, the Ken Tribe Fund for Australian Composition, and the Hildegard Project for their support in bringing new Australian works to life.

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