



Omega

Ensemble

Brahms in Love

omegaensemble.com.au



Maria Raspopova. Photo: Keith Saunders

Brahms in Love

Saturday 15 June 2019

2:30pm | Sydney Opera House

This concert is presented as part of
the 2019 Master Series

George Palmer

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Andrew Anderson

Miniatures

Nicole Brady

Sognare: Vignette I-IV [World Premiere]

Johannes Brahms

Trio in A minor, Op. 114

This performance will last approximately 90 minutes
without interval.

Acknowledgment of Country

Omega Ensemble acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we perform. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.



Please ensure your mobile devices are turned to silent and switched off for the full duration of this performance.



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Details correct at time of printing. Omega Ensemble reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.



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2019 Season Calendar



American Masters

Star-spangled masterworks.

Glass Sonata for Violin and Piano

Adams Shaker Loops

Muhly By All Means

Muhly No Uncertain Terms

Muhly World Premiere*

Virtuoso Series

7:30PM

Tuesday 2 July 2019

City Recital Hall

* Supported by Mark Wakely in loving memory of Steven Alward



Mahler One

Symphonic forces take new form.

Mahler Symphony No. 1 "The Titan" (arr. Iain Farrington)

Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor (arr. for Piano and String Quintet)

Kerry Clarinet Quintet [World Premiere]*

Virtuoso Series

7:30PM

Tuesday 10 September 2019

City Recital Hall

* Supported by Kim Williams AM



Romantic Chopin

Passion, drama, and romantic landscapes.

Chopin 24 Preludes, Op. 28

Chopin Ballades No. 1-4

Master Series

2:30PM

Saturday 5 October 2019

Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House



Eternal Requiems

The Australian Voices join Omega Ensemble for a program of choral works and re-works.

Fauré Requiem

Mozart Ave Verum Corpus

Fauré Cantique de Jean Racine

Britten Cantata Misericordium, Op. 69

Mozart/Hamilton Requiem [Re-composed]

Virtuoso Series

7:30PM

Tuesday 5 November 2019

City Recital Hall



Summer Winds II

The Omega Wind Quintet return for a second instalment of favourites in the picturesque Utzon Room.

Holst Wind Quintet in A-Flat Major, Op. 14

Ligeti Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet

Damase 17 Variations for Wind Quintet, Op. 22

Berio Opus Number Zoo

Ichmouratov New Commission [World Premiere]

Master Series

2:30PM

Saturday 7 December 2019

Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House



Paul Stender. Photo: Keith Saunders

Welcome



The unique dialogue between composer and performer has played an important role throughout our musical history. From Benjamin Britten's works for Peter Pears, John Cage's for David Tudor, and the relationship of Brahms and clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, featured in today's performance.

Since 2005, our Ensemble has been privileged to work with over 22 composers in commissioning and premiering over 40 new works. These collaborations have influenced our Ensemble as much as I hope our Ensemble shaped the works themselves. Today I am thrilled to present two of those past commissions along with an exciting new addition from Nicole Brady.

These collaborations are essential for a diverse musical experience, and I hope you will consider supporting our work with Australian composers by making a tax-time donation. Your support will ensure that, in the true spirit of Brahms, we nurture opportunities for new musical ideas for both performers and composers.

David Rowden

Artistic Director and Founder



Music is a language we can all understand. It brings us together. It unites us across barriers of language, geography and time. It's able to help us free our imaginations, elevate our moods and evoke a world of memories like no other art form can. The sweep of a symphony orchestra, the special intimacy of chamber music, and the connection of the musicians to each other reaches out to us, the audience.

The NSW Government's vision is for NSW to be known for bold and exciting arts and culture that engages the community, and reflects our rich diversity.

Omega Ensemble contributes to the vitality of the State, and this 2019 concert season is proof of the power of music in enriching our lives.

Don Harwin MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Resources

Minister for Energy and Utilities

Minister for the Arts

Vice President of the Executive Council

More Miniatures



The music continues on Spotify, iTunes and Google Play.

Explore Andrew Anderson's Miniatures as well as
more live and studio recordings.

Music Notes

GEORGE PALMER (1947 -)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, 'Black, White and a Little Blue'

COMPOSED AND FIRST PERFORMED IN 2010. A GIFT FROM THE COMPOSER.

- I. Brightly
- II. Moderato
- III. Lively

Jazz has had a strong influence of Western art music for over a century. This is audible as early as Debussy's 1904 *Rapsodie* for alto saxophone and the 'Golliwog's Cakewalk' from the *Children's Corner* suite. Darius Milhaud's 1923 *La Création du monde* balletically depicts African myths in what has been called the 'first symphonic jazz score'. Soon after, George Gershwin brought jazz and 'classical' traditions into fruitful détente in turn influencing Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*, the jazziest piano concerto apart from Gershwin's own.

Jazz's appeal to French and American composers seeking to avoid the Austro-German tradition is simply explained. Like Debussy's, jazz harmony, with its blue-notes, treats individual chords as objects to be savoured, not steps in a logical progression to a climactic end. Moreover jazz, with its stress on spontaneous improvisation, subverts any sense of text-book form.

Australian music has a significant tradition of works that fuse jazz and contemporary classical idioms, especially in the work of Don Banks and Judy Bailey. It is a tradition to which George Palmer's *Clarinet Sonata* makes an important contribution.

Born in 1947, Palmer has composed since his teenage years, but his professional career in the field dates from the early 2000s, when he, after a career as a barrister (made Queen's Counsel in 1986) also became a Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. Since



Above: Opening clarinet passage
George Palmer's Sonata for Clarinet and
Piano (2010).

then he was composed in a variety of genres, such as choral music including the Papal Mass *Benedictus Qui Venit*, for World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney, music for orchestra, a body of chamber work, including several pieces for Omega Ensemble, and the opera *Cloudstreet*, adapted by Palmer from Tim Winton's classic novel.

Palmer's *Clarinet Sonata* was premiered by David Rowden and Maria Raspopova in Sydney in 2010. The work wears both its jazz and classical learning lightly. Its opening movement seems to turnover several possible opening gambits in a series of improvised-sounding (but precisely notated) gestures: there is a vaulting clarinet tune over spacious piano chords, solo clarinet ruminations, and a flourish that leads to a strongly rhythmic passages. This in turn winds down for a brief *lento* (slow) passage before the faster music finally takes hold. The clarinet melody, characterised by a gesture of three sharply accented notes that release ornate arabesques, contrasts with Rachmaninovian gestures from the piano, where strings of full chords in the right hand sail over turbulent left hand figurations. Elements from the opening, notably the solo rumination, leading to central section marked 'relaxed and easy' where the two instruments call and respond in jazzy motifs. A kind of clarinet cadenza introduces the reprise of the faster material.

The pensive *Moderato* slow movement sets the scene with strongly flavoured added-note chords. The melodies — the piano's triplet upbeat, and the answering clarinet's repeated note and subsequent arabesque — are related to the clarinet's theme of the previous movement. In this way, Palmer deftly gives the impression of spontaneity while keeping the work firmly unified. The pervasive use of major and minor harmony and falling semitones give the piece is gently melancholy.

The triplet up-beat figure also introduces the finale, whose fast 4/4 time is kept lively by syncopations and other off-the-beat accents. This movement is a kind of rondo, repeatedly returning to a dialogue between the instruments that issues in a ragtime figure. There are several contrasting episodes, including an extended passage whose clarinet melody (that triplet figure again) can also be traced back to the opening movement. The ragtime material, transformed, carries the day in a brilliant final summing up.

ANDREW ANDERSON (1971 -)

Miniatures

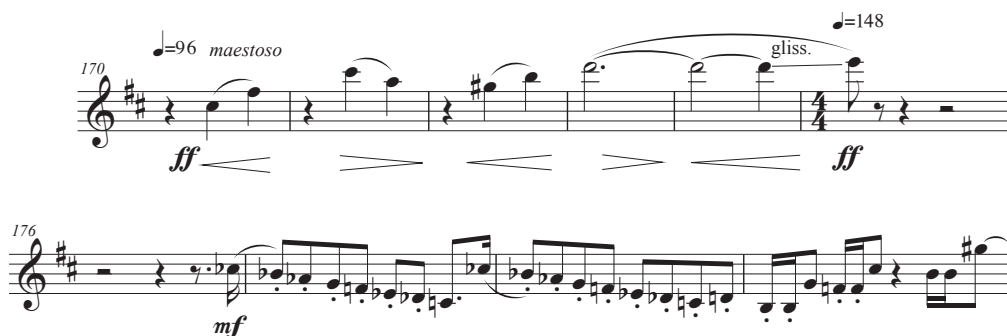
COMPOSED IN 2017. PREMIERED BY OMEGA ENSEMBLE IN 2017.

- I. Overture & Miniature I: Ugly Ducklings
- II. Miniature II: A Butterfly at Sunset
- III. Miniature III: Toy Trains
- IV. Miniature IV: Vigil (Through the Small Hours)
- V. Miniature V: In the Form of a Grand Fugue
- VI. Fermeture & Miniature VI: Musette & Précis

Andrew Anderson was born in Melbourne, where he is currently based. His works have been performed by ensembles such as The Australian Piano Quartet, The Consort of Melbourne, Syzygy Ensemble, and the Streeton Trio and recorded by the Czech Philharmonic and the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestras. He has written several liturgical works for parish choirs in the USA and the UK. He also has an interest in encouraging community engagement in music performance.

Anderson describes his *Miniatures* as ‘a celebration of the small: from small creatures (“Ugly Ducklings”) and things (“Toy Trains”), to brief time spans (“A Butterfly at Sunset”) and shortened forms (“Précis” and – ironically – “In the Form of a Grand Fugue”)’.

The first of its six short movements, *Ugly Ducklings*, is, in Anderson’s words an ‘up-tempo spoof of a famous work by Saint-Saëns (a man known for his down-tempo satire)’. The quotation, when it arrives, is self-explanatory, but Anderson more broadly captures a Saint-Saëns-esque sense of humour in the pompous Maestoso opening with its heavy chords and simple rhythm, as well as the rhetorical flourish before the main fast section of the piece. This makes much of contrasts between liquid scale-based passages and sections of much more terse, staccato rhythms, interrupted briefly by, well... wait and see.



Above: Opening clarinet passage of *Miniature VI: Musette & Précis* by Andrew Anderson.

A Butterfly at Sunset (Mvt. II) is no less Francophone, though without the irony of the opening. There is, Anderson explains:

... pathos to be found, but the music is euphonious, with often surprising progressions of simple common and added-note chords; these are coloured by tremolos in the piano's right hand, which are taken up, at times, by the clarinet. Over this serene harmony the clarinet spins out a long song-like melody that gathers to a brief but convincing climax before fading gradually. As Anderson puts it 'the colours of a butterfly no more resplendent than when lit by the fiery glow of the setting sun, but we are also aware that this moment heralds the end of the day and – according to popular myth – the butterfly too.

Toy Trains (Mvt. III) is dominated by a delicate texture of repeated sextuplet and semiquaver patterns in the piano – shades both of Saint-Saëns's *Aquarium* and the clockwork of some Ravel. Once again the clarinet sings a long and beautiful tune, swapping it with the piano's sextuplets from time to time.

The fourth movement, *Vigil*, begins with an arching nostalgic melody from the clarinet, its phrases pointed by isolated quiet tolling from the piano. Simple chordal accompaniment grows, becoming more intense and chromatic as the movement rises in pitch and volume to its climax: Anderson explains that 'anguished pre-dawn hours are [...] banished by the arrival of a new day and renewed hope.'

In the form of Grand Fugue (Mvt. V) is one of Anderson's shortened forms and after it has made a powerful argument we return to the Maestoso material of the opening for the final movement. This too

introduces a movement based on several contrasting ideas: a brusque pattern of repeated martial figures in the piano that support scalic, staccato figures from the clarinet. The movement continues with more lyrical material, often sung by the clarinet over undulating piano figures, and a syncopated passage for piano accompanied by on-the-beat grace notes from the clarinet. The latter is precisely the sort of gesture that Saint-Saëns might enlist in a 'grand zoological fantasy'. Anderson makes this plain when he says that 'overall, with its structural similarities and musical allusions to *The Carnival of the Animals*, *Miniatures* might be seen as a small tribute to Saint-Saens' masterpiece: a *Carnival of the Small*, as it were.'

NICOLE BRADY

Sognare: Vignette I-IV

WORLD PREMIERE

- I. Vignette 1
- II. Vignette 2
- III. Vignette 3
- IV. Vignette 4

In the printed catalogue for a 1912 exhibition of Italian Futurist Painters in London, the artists wrote that in their works:

... spots, lines, zones of colour...do not correspond to any reality, but in accordance with a law of our interior mathematics, musically prepare and enhance the emotion of the spectator. We thus create a sort of emotive ambience, seeking by intuition the sympathies and the links which exist between the exterior (concrete) scene and the interior (abstract) emotion. Those lines, those spots, those zones of colour, apparently illogical and meaningless, are the mysterious keys to our pictures.

In this new work Nicole Brady has taken inspiration from this idea of 'emotional ambience' in 'an attempt to convey the idea of combining all at once, memories, the present and future events'. Writing specifically for Omega Ensemble, Brady uses 'beautiful sonority combined with virtuosity, and pointillistic orchestration' as the basic idea of the piece.

Australian-born Brady has enjoyed a successful career as composer and music producer for film and video games in Los Angeles for many years now, and has honed a fine sense of sound and moment-to-

The Futurists hymned the speed and noise of modernity, with 'vibration and motion endlessly multiplying each object'; Brady's third Vignette is marked *industriale*, with fast, unison figures in 7/8 time. There is a gradual diversion into competing ostinatos, with the piano's left hand given considerable freedom. Driving semiquavers are taken up by clarinet and cello, and there is a reprise of the 7/8 now in hammered chords.

The final Vignette revisits the mood of the opening, before settling into a *dolce* section where ostinatos of quintuplet rhythm support a series of simple alto-register chords from the piano. As the composer puts it, the 'vignettes evolve through chromaticism and industrial rhythms... dream state tempos... broken by melodic nostalgia, or one might say, a love theme.'



Johannes Brahms

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Trio in A minor for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Op.114

COMPOSED IN 1891

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Andantino grazioso
- IV. Allegro

Academic, author and musician Edward Said once wrote that late style:

... has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile.

In 1891, the 58 year-old Brahms began to feel that he had completed his life's work; he would write no more orchestral music, and had brought his chamber music to a pinnacle in the String Quintet, Op.111. Brahms accepted important honours from the Austrian Emperor and his native city of Hamburg, and began to put his personal affairs in order to consider the content and shape of his musical legacy.

In 1885, Brahms had travelled to the German city of Meiningen, where the reigning Duke was an enthusiast for the arts and supported a theatre with an orchestra directed by the likes of Hans von Bülow,



Above: Manuscript of the opening passages of the Brahms Trio in A Minor.

Richard Strauss and, later, Max Reger. Brahms was honoured with performances of his own music, notably the wildly successful premiere of his fourth symphony, as well as concerts featuring works, then much less well-known than now, by composers such as Bach and Mozart. In 1891 he returned to Meiningen, and on this occasion was struck by the excellent sound and technique of Richard Mühlfeld, the orchestra's principal clarinetist, who had played for Brahms at the request of conductor Fritz Steinbach.

Brahms returned to Austria to spend the summer at the village of Ischl and from there wrote to his young friend and assistant, the librarian Eusebius Mandyczewski, enclosing the score of the Clarinet Trio, Op.114. 'Mandy' responded in glowing terms – it is he that made the often-quoted remark about how, in the trio, it seems the clarinet and cello are 'in love'. Brahms in turn wrote back, saying that the trio was 'the twin to a far greater folly', which he was currently 'feeding up', a reference, of course, to the Clarinet Quintet. The Trio was premiered, with Brahms at the piano, in Berlin in December 1891, and in addition to these two chamber works, the two late Sonatas for clarinet (or viola)

were composed for Fräulein Klarinette, or Nachtigall (nightingale), as Brahms dubbed Mühlfeld.

The *Trio* seems, for Brahms, deceptively insubstantial. It retains the classical four-movement design, but each movement is relatively concise (the opening *allegro* runs to no more than eight minutes, and Brahms foregoes the repetition of the opening exposition). The lucid textures avoid the sometimes strenuous elaboration of certain earlier pieces, and the blend of the clarinet's timbres with the darker tones of the cello create a rich, amber sound.

The first movement has the kind of sonata design with which Brahms experiments in such pieces as the Fourth Symphony, where structural 'signposts' are disguised, and 'archaic' formal devices, like the second subject's use of canon in inversion, point paradoxically towards later composers like Schoenberg. The slow movement makes use a motif (falling third followed by two downward steps) which also occurs in the quintet and is traceable back to Mozart. There follows a limpid, nostalgic dance movement and a Hungarian accented finale.

Brahms scholar Karl Geiringer argued that 'this noble work is not wholly free from a certain weariness; the themes are not quite as inspired, nor is their elaboration quite so captivating as usual.' It may be, however, that here Brahms, like late Beethoven, is simply 'stripped of hubris and pomposity' and unashamedly clear-eyed.

Notes by Gordon Kerry

Artists



David Rowden Clarinet

Orchestras Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, The Queensland Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. **Ensembles** Omega Ensemble, Australia Ensemble, Sydney Soloists. **Premieres** George Palmer: Clarinet Concerto, Ian Munro: Clarinet Quintet. **Selected Recordings** Omega Ensemble: Mozart—Munro—Palmer (ABC Classic), Omega Ensemble: Mozart Symphony No. 40 (ABC Classic); Play School 50th Anniversary Special (ABC3). **Awards/Study** BMus (London), LRAM; Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM).

Paul Stender Cello

Ensembles Australia Ensemble, Song Company, Burgundian Consort (guest soloist), Sculthorpe String Quartet **Orchestras** Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, ACO Collective (guest principal) **Selected Recordings** Omega Ensemble: Munro—Mozart—Palmer (ABC classics). **Awards/Study** Canberra School of Music, Universität für Musik Wien

Maria Raspopova Piano

Ensembles Omega Ensemble, Regional tour with Paul Meyer, Recital in AGNSW, Government House performance with Emma Matthews **Premieres** Mark Grandison: Riffraction; Andrew Ford:

Contradance; Mark Issacs: Chamber Symphony

Recordings Prokofiev: Visions fugitives (Omega Classics) Awards/Study Khabarovsk College of Arts Scholarship, Masonic Youth Welfare Fund scholarship, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, BArts (UNSW) **Masterclasses** Beijing Central Conservatory, JilLin College of Arts, Dalian University

George Palmer Composer

George Palmer's many works include music for large orchestra, various chamber ensembles, choir a cappella and with orchestra, song cycles and concertos for a variety of instruments. His work has been performed by leading orchestras, soloists and chamber groups throughout Australia and New Zealand, and in the USA and Europe.

Palmer's opera, *Cloudstreet*, adapted from Tim Winton's iconic novel, for which Palmer wrote both libretto and music, was premiered in May 2016 by State Opera South Australia. It was hailed by The Australian as 'a resounding triumph' and played to capacity houses and standing ovations.

Amongst his many commissioned works are a concerto for two clarinets and chamber orchestra, *It Takes Two*, recorded for ABC Classics by Dimitri Ashkenazy and David Rowden with the Omega Ensemble. The Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, *Black, White and a Little Blue*, was Palmer's engagement present to the Artistic Directors of the Omega Ensemble, Maria Raspopova and David Rowden,



In 2010 Palmer was made a Member of the Order of Australia 'for services to the law as a judge and to music as a composer and in leadership roles.'

Nicole Brady Composer

Composer & Music Producer Nicole Brady's work spans video games, feature film & television, & art music. Nicole is most well known for her work as soundtrack producer + arranger in AAA Video Games, having worked on major franchises such as Final Fantasy (Square Enix), Tekken (Bandai Namco), & Valkyria Chronicles (Sega).

Recent major performances of her work have included performing her organ work 'Ra' at Walt Disney Hall during LA Philharmonic's 2019 Fluxus Festival (a collaboration with dance choreographer Nina McNeely for the GirlschoolLA Yoko Ono 'breathwatchlistentouch' concert), commission by the Savassi Jazz Festival & the Sao Paolo Symphony (Piano Concerto arrangement of the four movement solo rhodes work 'Spaces' by Kenny Werner), Omega Ensemble's commission of theatre work 'Postlude' for actor, amplified string quartet, & bass clarinet to commemorate Bernard Herrmann's anniversary in 2016, and the National Gallery of Art & National Symphony US (Score to silent film 'Le Pied du Mouton' for the opening of the 2012 Joan Miro exhibition).

Recordings of her arrangements have been published on Columbia Pictures Records, Sony, Basiscape Records, Supersweep, 5pb & Geneon.

Nicole is a Masters in Music graduate of New York University & the Elmer Bernstein Award, and a Bachelor of Music Performance graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music & the Winifred Elizabeth Nerious award for the top graduating recital.

Andrew Anderson Composer

Andrew Anderson was born in 1971 in Melbourne, Australia, where he studied composition with Rodney Ford, violin with Barbara O'Reilly, and piano with Arvon McFadden. He is based in Melbourne.

Anderson's works have been performed by ensembles such as The Australia Piano Quartet, The Consort of Melbourne, Omega Ensemble, Syzygy Ensemble, and the Streeton Trio. He has been the recipient of two Masterworks prizes (ERMmedia, USA) for composition, resulting in recordings by the Czech Philharmonic and the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. His scores are published by the Australian Music Centre, where he is an Associate Artist.

Anderson has written several choral works for the Christian liturgy, this writing being informed by engagements with parish choirs in the USA and the UK, as well as tuition in singing with Nigel Wickens (Cambridge, UK). He also has an interest in encouraging community engagement in music performance, being the founder of the University of Melbourne Artists Register.



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David Rowden. Photo: David Vagg



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