

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a dark purple long-sleeved top and small hoop earrings, holds a silver flute vertically. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a gradient of purple and blue. The word 'Omega' is written vertically on the left, and 'Ensemble' is written vertically on the right. At the bottom left, the text 'Summer Winds II' and the website 'omegaensemble.com.au' are visible.

Omega

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Summer Winds II

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# THE ART OF CHAMPAGNE

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# POMMERY

# Summer Winds II

**Saturday 7 December 2019**

2:30pm

Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

This concert is presented as part of  
the 2019 Master Series

**György Ligeti**

Six Bagatelles

**Gustav Holst**

Wind Quintet in A flat, Op.14

**Airat Ichmouratov**

Woodwind Quintet

**Luciano Berio**

Opus Number Zoo

**Jean-Michel Damase**

Seventeen Variations for Wind Quintet, Op.22

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.



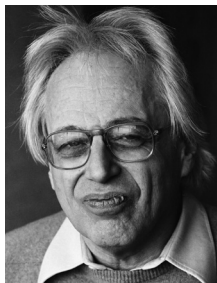
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György Ligeti, 1984. Photo: Marcel Antonisse

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

## Six Bagatelles

COMPOSED IN 1953

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I. Allegro con spirito | IV. Presto ruvido             |
| II. Rubato: Lamentoso  | V. Adagio: Mesto              |
| III. Allegro grazioso  | VI. Molto vivace: Capriccioso |

Ligeti was born in Dicsőszentmárton, a Hungarian speaking enclave in the Romanian district of Transylvania. He had come into contact with Romanian folk music as a young child, and in 1949 was set to work transcribing folksongs from wax cylinder recordings in Bucharest. In the early 1950s, the Hungarian regime's attitude to the arts was, as Ligeti put it, 'insane' and even Béla Bartók, regarded as the great national composer found his works victim to censorship.

Ligeti sensibly held back many of his own works, such as his first *String Quartet*, written before the brief experiment in liberalisation that was so comprehensively crushed by Moscow in 1956 and his flight from Hungary soon after. But between 1951 and 1953 he also composed 11 piano miniatures to which he gave the Baroque-sounding title *Musica ricercata*. He said of these works 'I started to experiment with simple structures of rhythms and sounds, in order to evolve a new music from nothing, so to speak.' Each piece set itself a musical puzzle to solve involving a limited number of pitches.

In 1953, around the time of Berio's *Opus Number Zoo* and Damase's *Seventeen Variations*, Ligeti took six of the more 'acceptable' pieces (numbers 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10) and arranged them as *Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet* (though only the first five were approved by officialdom; the last was deemed too dissonant). In this version, Ligeti begins with a movement that uses only four notes, followed by movements using six, eight, nine, ten and eleven. Each has its own character beginning with the knockabout humour of the first and rather more abstract second.

The third balances a slow brightly scored tune with an obsessive bassoon line, while the fourth rejoices in the irregular rhythms of Hungarian and Romanian folk dances. After the heartfelt but unsentimental tribute to Bartók, the work closes with a finale of bold gestures and pungent harmony.



Gustav Holst

**Gustav Holst (1874-1934)**

## **Wind Quintet in A flat, Op.14**

COMPOSED IN 1903

- |                                      |                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| I. Allegro moderato (un poco rubato) | III. Minuet (in Canon) |
| II. Adagio                           | IV. Air and Variations |

The last years of the 19th century saw Holst's emergence as a mature composer, having studied at the Royal College of Music under the redoubtable Charles Villiers Stanford, and absorbing Stanford's neoclassical Brahmsian aesthetic. Other influences had started to make themselves felt, though. As students, he and Ralph Vaughan Williams formed their abiding friendship, which would see them espousing left wing causes, and pioneering the collection and arranging of folk song. Holst had been intoxicated by the experience of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*; and had developed his lifelong fascination with Indian culture and spirituality, producing the opera *Sita* (based on the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*) and an orchestral portrait of Indra, the Hindu thunder-god.

Composed in 1903, the *Wind Quintet* is, in this context, something of an anomaly. It is a work with no extra-musical allusions, and sits comfortably within a traditional classical form and genre. Holst seems not to have attached any great importance to the *Quintet*; he is said to have asked the editors of Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music to omit it (and its companion piece, the *Quintet for Piano and Winds*).

Holst's indifference to the piece might explain the score's disappearance soon after its composition. Only in 1978 was the manuscript rediscovered, and five years later published in an edition by Holst's daughter Imogen, and her fellow composer Colin Matthews. Imogen Holst and Matthews removed fairly substantive sections of the first and second movements in the interests of balance and added numerous markings. That version was premiered by the Nash Ensemble of London in 1983. However, later at the

Cheltenham Festival in 2006, the Nash Ensemble premiered a version of Holst's original, restored with the excised sections. This is the score we hear today.

The first of its four movements is not without the odd Brahmsian touch – the clarinet's opening pastoral tune is soon doubled in thirds, there is gentle rhythmic ambiguity between duplet and triplet motifs, and after a delicate solo, the movement ends with a hushed high chord. Horn and oboe set a forest scene in the Adagio, answered by blended flute and clarinet lines and mildly comic bassoon writing. A contrasting, slightly faster section, offers a more rhythmically defined dance-like theme woven into supple counterpoint.

The mix of dance and counterpoint is also evident in the Minuet, whose outer sections are ingeniously written in canon, with the theme chasing itself. This is offset by a simpler central trio section. The final movement begins with what might be the most 'English' theme in the piece. This is the basis of a short set of variations, in which Holst, with the lightest of touches alludes to a variety of older musics both learned and popular.



Airat Ichmouratov. Photo: Mirielle Gaza

**Airat Ichmouratov (1973- )**

## **Woodwind Quintet**

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From the composer:

I was born and grew up in Soviet Russia. In 1998, for several reasons, I had to leave my country and look for new home. I was fortunate to find it in Montreal, but as many immigrants, I had to adapt to this new country, a new culture, and new languages. Upon arriving in Canada, I survived the first several years by playing for spare change in the subway stations of Montreal and on the streets of the market in Ottawa. It was a rough schooling, but I had a chance to learn how to improvise, play klezmer as well as many other styles of music, which has influenced my musical language today. I also remain influenced by my youth in Soviet Russia and by the music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Mussorgsky, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. My own musical style has evolved out of this rich heritage.

I was very happy to get a request to compose a new work for Omega Ensemble. The *Woodwind Quintet* could be described as post-Romantic in sonata form. There are still many Russian influences, and it is autobiographical in many ways, with sense of nostalgia and humour.

One of the opening motifs, a leap of a seventh, derived from the last movement of Shostakovich's *Fourth Symphony*, plays a particularly powerful role and is present in multiple places in this *Quintet*. It's my personal signature, my 'fate' motif, which can be found in my other works, such as the *String Octet 'Letter from an unknown woman'*, the *Fourth String Quartet*, *3 Romances for Viola*, *First Symphony* and *Second Cello Concerto*.



Luciano Berio

Luciano Berio (1925–2003)

## Opus Number Zoo

COMPOSED IN 1951

- |               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| I. Barn Dance | III. The Grey Mouse |
| II. The Fawn  | IV. Tom Cats        |

The composers with whom Berio is most often bracketed – Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono – were noted for their intransigent view that music needed to start again from a clean slate. High culture was complicit in two World Wars, and needed to be rebuilt from the ground up. Berio, however, tended to admit elements and influences from earlier music from the start of his career. As early as 1964 he was – provocatively – producing works like his *Folk Songs* and made a habit of composing works that often included pastiche of other composer's music, notably in the *Sinfonia* of 1968, which appropriates, among other things, large chunks of Mahler. In his later years Berio lovingly completed unfinished works like Schubert's *Tenth Symphony* (as *Renderings*) and Puccini's final opera *Turandot*.

Berio composed *Opus Number Zoo* in 1951 and revised it in 1970, giving the new version of the work the dedication:

Revised for the Dorian Quintet and dedicated to Aaron Copland for his 70th birthday (and, as an afterthought, also for his 51th birthday)

It is a work of great simplicity and directness, but in a sense this too is pastiche. Not only is it part of a tradition of zoological fantasy, like Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, it sounds a lot like the neoclassical works of Igor Stravinsky, especially, with its spoken text, *The Soldier's Tale*. *Opus Number Zoo* is described as a 'children's play for quintet', and in this final version the instrumentalists are delegated, while not playing, to speak the lines of Rhoda Levine's text. In the grand tradition of children's stories, though, *Opus Number Zoo* is by no means good

clean fun. Its tiny fables of the farm, forest, house and street meditate on the violence inherent in life.

The first movement is a kind of foxtrot, aptly, as here a fox invites a chicken to dance with him. The music soon loses its geniality as it becomes clear that the fox's motives are far from pure, but the poor chicken, so proud to have been asked, is oblivious, despite the repetitions of the text, when 'the light goes out...that's all folks.'

The bleak second movement with its simple, questing melodies, accompanies a Fawn who simply cannot understand why humans are so hell-bent on destruction with 'the cry of bombs'. 'What madness', it asks, 'what can be the reason?'

As a kind of scherzo, the old Grey Mouse, to a scurrying and fussy music, tells two younger mice how she no longer cares to dance and warns them of the depredations of time. Finally Omar and Bartholomew, two urban tom cats, indulge in a fierce fight driven by envy and pride, before retreating, both the worse for wear.



Jean-Michel Damase

**Jean-Michel Damase (1928–2013)**

## **Seventeen Variations for Wind Quintet, Op.22**

COMPOSED IN 1951

Jean-Michel Damase was born into the French musical aristocracy. His mother, Micheline Kahn, was a harpist whose long and illustrious career included the premieres of Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* and several major works by Gabriel Fauré and André Caplet. Damase's precocious talent saw him studying piano from the age of five, and with Alfred Cortot from the age of 12. He also started composing as a child, and at nine received three poems from the great French author Colette, which he set to music. His subsequent career was something of a royal progress, with him winning the Conservatoire's First Prize for piano and, in 1944, the coveted *Prix de Rome*. Later in his professional life, Damase was music director of the opera in Bordeaux, and composed numerous stage works, often in collaboration with tragedian Jean Anouilh. He also composed a number of ballets and orchestral works, and a considerable body of chamber music. Perhaps not surprisingly, a number of the chamber works include harp, often with unexpected partnerings, such as accordion in the *Menuet boiteux*, or the striking *Aspects* for the unusual combination of horn and harp.

Damase's musical language is conservative and neo-classical, never



straying far from diatonic harmony and with the kinds of rhythmic tricks we might hear in Stravinsky, Messiaen or Jehan Alain. Like many French composers of the past century, Damase had a keen sense of woodwind sonority and his *Seventeen Variations*, composed in 1951, are the work of a master technician. The theme has something of the folk-song as treated by Percy Grainger to it, that is to say almost quotidian and clumsy, but with unexpected twists that provide the basis for further development. Each of the variations is short and strongly profiled, and played without discernible breaks; the work as a whole is a mixture of mild parodies and character pieces and more abstract movements. One, for instance is a piece of modernist counterpoint based almost entirely on a two-note motif, but soon enough there is a bassoon solo worthy of Dukas's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. There are moments of richly chromatic homophony, passages of energetic bustling or insouciant swagger. The work moves towards a variation that is expansive in a way redolent of Copland, but which is swept aside by more emphatic busy-ness. This in turn simply dissolves, as the theme is restated, one eyebrow arched and decorated with obbligato solos from the upper instruments.

All notes by Gordon Kerry unless otherwise stated.

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**Celia Craig**  
Oboe



**David Rowden**  
Clarinet /  
Artistic Director



**Mark Gaydon**  
Bassoon



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