

AUSTRALIA FAIR?

11:30AM

SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER 2022

REARDON THEATRE



Partridge String Quartet

Jos Jonker *Violin*

Mana Ohashi *Violin*

Eunise Cheng *Viola*

Daniel Smith *Cello*

HARRISON *Balderdash*

MARKS *Australia Fair? Volume I (World Premiere)*

Holly Harrison is a young Australian composer from the Blue Mountains, Sydney. Holly's music is driven by the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, embracing stylistic juxtapositions, the visceral energy of rock, and whimsical humour. An awarding winning composer, Holly's music has been performed in Australia, Asia, Europe and the USA by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orkest de Ereprijs, Alarm Will Sound, The Riot Ensemble, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, Minot Symphony Orchestra, Hwaum Chamber Orchestra, National Taiwan Normal University Orchestra, Jason Noble, and Antonietta Loffredo. Holly recently completed a Doctorate of Creative Arts in Composition under the supervision of Bruce Crossman and John Encarnacao at the University of Western Sydney. She graduated from the Bachelor of Music program with the University Medal for outstanding academic achievement and was the recipient of an Australia Postgraduate Award.

Balderdash was commissioned for the 2018 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, through the support of the Silo Collective. The composer writes:

"Balderdash begins and ends with amplifier feedback: a sound that quickly makes us bring our fingers to our ears! The piece imagines an alternate world in which music is heard between the feedback - a sort of sub/hyper-sonic sound world which takes place in mere seconds. With this in mind, the string quartet explores musical ideas inspired by electric guitar, including distortion, white noise, whammy bars, power-chords, dive-bombs, wah-wah, phaser effects, slap bass, and of course, speaker feedback. Balderdash makes high use of punk rock rhythms, dissonance, and percussive-based jams, which morph in and out of bluegrass, grunge, prog-rock, metal, and... disco. Given the piece was commissioned for a competition, I felt it might be fun to experiment with a battle-of-the-bands theme within the string quartet itself. Throughout Balderdash, players go rogue (especially the cello!), engage in one-upmanship, jam, duel, challenge, compete, interrupt, surrender, work together in teams, and cooperate as one. The piece is intended to be theatrical and encourages the quartet to perform with abandon."

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Bryony Marks is one of Australia's busiest screen composers. Her scores for *2040* and *Lambs of God* won AACTAS in 2019 and were nominated for APRA AGSC Screen Music Awards, while the score for *Frayed* was also nominated for an AACTA in the same year. Bryony's score for *Barracuda* was awarded 'Best Music for a Mini-Series or Telemovie' at the 2017 APRA AGSC Screen Music Awards. She won 'Best Original Score' for *Berlin Syndrome* (2017) and *Noise* (2007) at the FCCA Awards. This year she has scored *Savage River* for the ABC, *Class of 07* for Amazon and *The Messenger* for the ABC. Bryony also enjoys writing in other disciplines. Her chamber opera *Crossing Live*, premiered by Chamber Made Opera in 2007, won a Green Room Award for Best New Australian Work (opera).

In 2013, the MSO premiered her adaptation for orchestra and narrator of *The Happiness Box*, from the seminal Australian Children's Book of the same name by Changi POWs David Griffin and Leslie Greener. The adaptation has subsequently been performed by MSO twice, NZSO, QSO and SSO. *Lockdown Birdsong*, a duet for violin and piano, was written for Erica Kennedy, and performed by Erica and Kristian Chong at the Melbourne Digital Concert Hall in March 2021. Bryony collaborated with choreographer Alice Topp and Designer Jon Buswell on *Patina*, a dance work which was performed in January 2022 at the Playhouse's inaugural season of Topp and Buswell's new dance collective Project Animo. The trio recently collaborated again on *Annealing*, a new commission for the Australian Ballet, which formed part of the Triple Bill, premiering at the Victorian Arts Centre last month. A season at the Sydney Opera House is scheduled for November.

Australia Fair? Volume I

The composer writes:

"In March 2020, like everyone in my field and huge numbers in other fields, my work was postponed indefinitely. A hectic year-long schedule of writing music for film and tv was replaced by home schooling, a precious walk with kids and dogs, and a grim watch of the nightly news. But I also found myself with time to write, whatever I wanted, just for the joy of it, something I'd been too busy to contemplate for years.

Before the pandemic, Monica Curro had been in touch about adapting some of my music from the miniseries *Cloudstreet* for string quartet, to play in the Women in Music Festival, of which she was Artistic Director. Once locked down, I got back to her and asked whether she would be interested in a new, longer work for quartet. *Australia Fair? Volume I* is the result. While the Women in Music Festival, and then last year's Port Fairy Spring Music Festival suffered covid cancellations, thanks to Monica and Stefan Cassomenos the work now finds its premier in the hands of the hugely talented Partridge String Quartet.

As a screen composer, I revel in setting music to image. On the better projects, score can contribute a substantial and sometimes subversive counter narrative. But you are still, always - willingly, gloriously - in service of the film. For this project, I thought it would be fun to invert that hierarchy, writing a piece in which the quartet is at the fore, with the images functioning as underscore.

For over 100 years, screen culture has reflected current mores, ideals and fantasies. Interested in fluctuating notions of Australian identity across the decades, and how that identity is moulded and reflected in our screen culture, I approached the National Film and Sound Archives, and trawled, online, through their archival footage.

This first Volume of *Australia Fair?* is an assemblage of previously unrelated footage from the first half of the twentieth century. On display is the monoculture that was deemed acceptable and aspirational in Australia during that time: exclusively white, strictly gendered, defined in relation to the beach and World Wars fought on foreign soil. Home videos of Post War 1950s leisure pursuits join footage of bombing trials. A 1920s advertisement for Berlei Corsets gives way to a 1960s promotional video depicting a day in the life of a suburban housewife, contrasting with the masculine tomfoolery of 1950s beach wrestling. A fascinating glimpse behind the scenes at the stirrings of what is now ubiquitous celebrity screen culture is seen in a rare silent screen test from the 1920s. In it Isabel McDonagh, under the stage name 'Marie Lorraine', acts out various scenes, in competition with two other young actresses. Isabel, with her sisters Paulette and Phyllis, were a pioneering force in Australian silent films, and the first Australian women to own and run a film production company. Across all this footage, the music does not obediently re-enforce what unfolds, but instead expresses a separate, autonomous point of view.

I've called this work 'Volume 1' because an examination of screen depictions of Australian identity only becomes meaningful with the accumulation of layers and layers of different footage, promulgating many differing historical narratives which challenge and extend those halcyon ones presented in Volume I. I hope to collaborate with other composers and ensembles, addressing the gaping holes inherent in the dominant narrative, documenting formative waves of immigration and most importantly recognising the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the rightful owners of unceded land, and the layers of injustice and trauma stemming from invasion, dispossession and colonisation that, whether we acknowledge them or not, are at the core of our collective Australian identity. Is *Australia Fair?* Who are we, who were we and who do we want to be?"

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Presented with the generous assistance of the National Film & Sound Archive.