

KAWAI SATURDAY GALA: NIGHT SKY

7:30PM

SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 2023

REARDON THEATRE



Brenda GIFFORD (born 1968)

Dhawara Miriwa

PLEXUS

Monica Curro *Violin*

Philip Arkinstall *Clarinet*

Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

About the composer: Brenda Gifford is one of Australia's leading First Peoples composers, an accomplished saxophonist and pianist, and an archivist at the Indigenous Collection Branch of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia. A proud Yuin woman originally from Wreck Bay on the South Coast of New South Wales, Brenda has played and recorded with many artists and ensembles, most notably Mixed Relations with Bart Willoughby, the jazz pianist and composer Kevin Hunt, and singer-songwriter Kev Carmody on his album *Eulogy (for a Black Person)*. Brenda also taught music at Eora College in Redfern, has toured extensively around Australia and internationally to Native American communities and the Pacific Islands, and has conducted over a hundred interviews and oral histories with Indigenous musicians. In 2018 and subsequently in 2020–21, Brenda was part of the Composing Women program at the Sydney Conservatorium with Professor Liza Lim. In 2020 she was Ensemble Offspring's inaugural First Nations Composer in Residence, and in 2022 she was the recipient of a Prelude residency, administered by the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composers House Trust. In recent years Brenda has been commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Sydney Dance Company, the Sydney Living Museums, the Canberra International Music Festival, the Four Winds Festival and One Day in January. This year she was announced as the recipient of the Merlyn Myer Music Commission.

About the music: Receiving its world premiere at this evening's performance, *Dhawara Miriwa (Night Sky)* for clarinet, violin and piano was composed in 2021 on a commission from PLEXUS. According to the composer herself, "This piece uncovers the reverence for the natural beauty of the Night Sky and all it possesses. The Night Sky is strange and mysterious. It reveals itself to us as we observe his rawness and splendour."

Francis POULENC (1899 – 1963)

Sextet, FP 100

1. *Allegro vivace. Très Vite et emporté*

2. *Divertissement. Andantino*

3. *Finale. Prestissimo*

Eliza Shephard *Flute*

Emmanuel Cassimatis *Oboe*

Philip Arkinstall *Clarinet*

Matthew Kneale *Bassoon*

Rachel Shaw *Horn*

Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Notoriously described in 1950 by the critic Claude Rostand as "half-monk, half-hooligan", Poulenc was arguably the most well-known member of *Les Six*, a group of progressive composers who declared war on German Romanticism and the Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel. Written in 1931/2 and revised in 1939, the Sextet for winds and piano is Poulenc's most popular piece of chamber music. It brims with the composer's trademark mixture of irreverent humour and sentimentality, and tantalising Neoclassical hints of Stravinsky and Prokofiev. The work launches into being with a brazenly impetuous first movement, spiced up with jazzy harmonies and propelled along by pounding rhythms. A pensively melancholic bassoon solo leads into a slower, more lyrical and increasingly ardent middle section, before the return of the opening Allegro. The Andantino (marked *Divertissement* – divertimento or diversion) unfolds with a radiantly beautiful melody in the oboe, passed between the other instruments, and but for a brief parodic interlude, the movement exudes luxurious warmth. Poulenc caps the Sextet with a *prestissimo* rondo-finale, in many ways the highpoint of the whole piece. Strutting along with a brash, burlesque character at first, the movement finishes unexpectedly with a slow, luminous, quasi-hymnal exaltation. © Douglas Rutherford, 2023

Gustav MAHLER (1860 – 1911)

Symphony No. 1 (arr. Simon)

I. Langsam. Schleppend. Wie ein Naturlaut – Immer sehr gemächlich

II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell – Recht gemächlich

III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen – Sehr einfach und schlicht wie eine Volksweise – Wieder etwas bewegter, wie im Anfang

IV. Stürmisch bewegt – Energisch

Port Fairy Spring Music Festival Chamber Orchestra

Fabian Russell *Conductor*

Zoë Black *Violin I*

Sarah Curro *Violin II*

Caroline Henbest *Viola*

Michelle Wood *Cello*

Douglas Rutherford *Bass*

Eliza Shephard *Flute*

Emmanuel Cassimatis *Oboe*

Philip Arkinstall *Clarinet*

Matthew Larsen *Clarinet*

Matthew Kneale *Bassoon*

Peter Luff *Horn*

Rachel Shaw *Horn*

Tristram Williams *Trumpet*

Greg Sully *Percussion*

Alex Raineri *Piano*

Stefan Cassomenos *Harmonium*

Considered now to be one of the giants of symphonic music, at the time of starting on his First Symphony in late 1887, Mahler was an assistant conductor at the Neues Stadttheater in Leipzig, with just a few songs to his name. Ironically, his first significant success as a composer was achieved here by completing the music of another composer – Weber’s unfinished opera *Die drei Pintos*.

Riding a wave of creative momentum, Mahler set to work on his first symphony. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, “It became so overpowering ... it flowed out of me like a mountain river . . . for six weeks I had nothing but my desk in front of me!” However, despite his enthusiasm, the symphony met with mixed reactions or worse – “Nobody dared to talk to me about the performance and my work; I went around the city like a plague victim...” Mahler locked the manuscript in a drawer for three years and revised the work repeatedly over the next decade.

Like Beethoven, Mahler held a deep reverence for nature, reflected in most of his music and also demonstrated by his love of hiking, swimming and cycling in the countryside and mountains, and the three composing huts he built in the Austrian wilderness. According to his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner, Mahler once exclaimed:

“...those who in the face of nature are not overwhelmed with awe at her infinite mystery, her divinity (we can only sense it, not comprehend or penetrate it) – these people have not yet discovered her. ... In every work of art, which should be a reflection of nature, there must be a trace of this infinity.”

True to his word, some of this trace of the infinite is found at the beginning of the First Symphony. Marked *wie ein Naturlaut* (“like a sound of nature”) the strings intone a vast pedal, *pianissimo*, from the lowest A in the double bass to the highest harmonic A in the violin, evoking some ancient, mist-shrouded forest, punctuated by birdcalls and distant fanfares in the winds and brass. The main body of the first movement makes prominent use of one of Mahler’s songs, “I went this morning over the field”, and despite the reappearance of earlier ominous stirrings, it ends, according to Mahler, with the hero breaking into laughter and running away.

Originally entitled “Under Full Sail”, the second movement opens and closes with a rambunctious Austrian folk dance, flanking a nostalgic trio section redolent of young love. The third movement brings with it a dramatic change of mood, as a solo double bass spins out a solemn, minor-key version of *Frère Jacques* – Mahler was apparently inspired by an image well-known to Austrian children of the hunter’s funeral procession, where the deceased hunter is borne to his grave by the animals of the forest. The disquiet left in the wake of this unreal march is shattered by the opening of the finale, which erupts with an outburst of vehement, frenzied agitation. Mahler described this movement as “From the Inferno to Paradise” – on the way we return to the sound-world of the first movement, before finally reaching a glittering, triumphal climax with the orchestra hammering out over 30 bars of pure D major.

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