

silva:

natural music



Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House
23rd October 2012

Brisbane Powerhouse, Restrung New Chamber Festival
27th October 2012

silva: natural music

Ensemble Offspring

Artistic Directors

Claire Edwardes & Damien Ricketson

Performers

Claire Edwardes: solo percussion

Lamorna Nightingale: flute

Jason Noble: clarinet

Zubin Kanga: piano

Graeme Jennings: violin/viola

Geoffrey Gartner: cello

Program

Tristan Murail: *Garrigue (2008) AP*

flute, viola, cello & percussion

Mary Finsterer: *Circadian Tale 7.1 (2009/12)*

flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin & cello

Iannis Xenakis: *Plektó (1993)*

flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin & cello

- interval -

Rosalind Page: *Being and Time I: Lacrimae rerum (2012) WP*

piano, cello, flutes, wind gong and dice

Melody Eötvös: *Leafcutter (2012) WP*

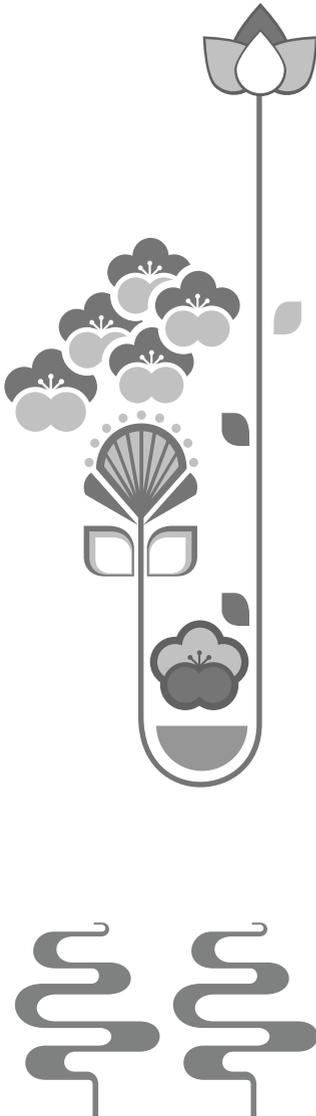
clarinet & vibraphone

Mary Finsterer: *Silva (2012) WP*

solo percussion, flute, clarinet, piano, violin & cello

WP – World premiere

AP – Australian premiere



About the Performance

The natural world has long been the subject of musical inspiration. From the programmatic representation of the force of nature, to the depiction of pastoral landscapes, to the ancient concept of 'Music of the spheres', humanity has pondered the wonders of the natural world and sought to reflect its awe and patterns in sound.

Tonight's program took as its starting point a modern-day assessment of the inspiration from nature for today's composer. In a program dominated by premieres, some works have meandered around and away from the topic of nature. Such meandering is reflective of a living growing process. Collectively, the works display nuanced metaphorical engagement with the wonders of nature ranging from the generative to the poetic.

Often cited as a father figure of the spectral movement, **Tristan Murail** and his music has drawn upon new acoustic understandings of sound itself as a model to generate musical structures. Much of Murail's compositional techniques have been assisted through the use of new computer technologies that have enabled the composer to look into the interior of sound. A recording of Mongolian chant or the sound of the sea becomes a sonic object dismantled into a spectra of microscopic frequencies whose components may be reorchestrated as though sounded

by a figurative synthesiser made of live musicians.

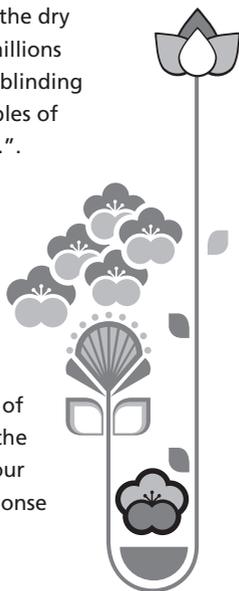
Garrigue is the fourth work in a chamber cycle under the collective title of *Portulan*: a medieval book of sea routes from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Murail describes the cycle as a virtual autobiography where each of the works is motivated by something that has special meaning to him. In the case of *Garrigue*, the quartet takes its name from a type of shrub-like vegetation (including wild thyme, rosemary, juniper) often found in Mediterranean France. The composer writes of a place in French Provence: "I love to hike there - in summer the heat is extreme, but enjoyable because of the dry atmosphere - the silence is full of millions of vibrations, crickets, cicadas - the blinding sun reverberates on the white pebbles of the trail that goes endlessly uphill..."

Circadian Tale 7.1 is the first of two works in tonight's program by Australian composer **Mary Finsterer**. The composer writes "Beyond the physical structures that are the face of life in the suburbs, and the everyday rhythms of time spent at work and home, are the dreams we hold for ourselves and our children. *Circadian Tale 7.1* is a response to this existence.

The title of the work brings to mind the timeless and fascinating *Arabian Tales*, a collection of folkloric literature dating back to the 9th century. The similarity in the sound of both titles is an association that is intentional, for the reason that the music the is set in such a way as to resemble a kind of fairytale quality so present in these ancient tales. Having been told thousands of times to generations the world over, the *Arabian Tales* have never lost a certain magic and ability to let us enter into imagined worlds of intrigue and adventure through story-telling.

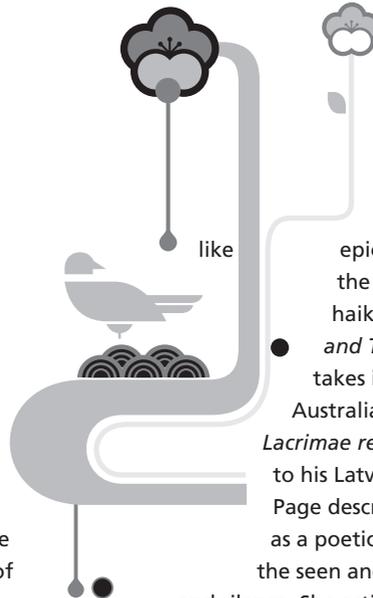
The word 'circadian' is a term chosen for it's cyclic inference, and the recurring rhythms of sleep and waking up that we naturally experience in a day. By contrast, and acting as a counterpoint, is the word 'tale' which infers the idea of a journey – and in this case our personal story as life unfolds before us. This duality of life occurring in cyclic and linear formation may be seen as underpinning all that we experience – in our suburban life."

Iannis Xenakis's *Plektó* is a rare chamber work in a sizeable



oeuvre otherwise characterised by the din of massed forces or the distilled energy of focused soloists. The title, *Plektó* (or *Braids*), alludes to the dense counterpoint between instruments, particularly the flute, clarinet, violin and cello. The instruments overlap and intertwine to create a knotted melodic plait. Much of Xenakis's music is characterised by large sound-masses sometimes likened to capturing complex natural phenomena such as, to use the composer's words, "the collision of hail or rain with hard surfaces, or the song of cicadas in a summer field". Xenakis's melodic writing also draws on mathematical modelling that mirrors physical and biological systems. His compositional technique of arborescence, for example, sees melodic lines branch into tendrils akin to a growing vine. Similarly, his use of cellular automata sets rules that define how cells of material interact with their neighbours. Each generation of growth is like a musical application of a formula used to simulate the evolution of structures such as crystals and bacteria.

The works of **Rosalind Page** take inspiration from divergent sources across the arts and sciences. Drawing interconnections from cosmology to literature, her works unfold



epic narratives distilled into the concise iteration of a haiku. Her new work *Being and Time I: Lacrimae rerum*, takes inspiration from the Australian artist Imants Tillers' *Lacrimae rerum*, (2007), dedicated to his Latvian mother Dzidra. Page describes her composition as a poetic ontologue between the seen and unseen, word, sound and silence. She articulates the narrative arc of *Being and Time I* as a poem, drawing fragments of quotations - in particular Thomas Bernhard's *Under the Iron of the Moon* - found embedded in Tillers' artwork. (see following page).

Leafcutter, a world premiere by the young Australian composer **Melody Eötvös**, finds her inspiration in the complex social structures of ants. She writes: "Winged female and male Leafcutter Ants leave their respective nests en masse and engage in a nuptial flight known as the revoada. Once on the ground, the female loses her wings and searches for a suitable underground lair in which to found her colony. One of the most interesting things I find about this species of ant is that if their newborn Queens are not able to take this flight, they are still incorporated into the colony and adapt to some sort of function within the group... rather than being eaten or

driven out. So, this composition is my salute to these resilient little princesses and the metaphor of survival, versatility, and resilience they have. Next to humans, Leafcutter Ants form the largest and most complex animal societies on Earth.”

“ **The forest has always figured high in our collective consciousness. Through the stories we first heard as children, the forest plays on our imagination as a place of wonder, escape, danger and adventure. In many folk tales the forest is even seen as forbidden - a place full of mystery and shadows.** ” Mary Finsterer

Silva was commissioned for this evening’s performance and the metaphor of survival, versatility, performance in celebration of **Mary Finsterer’s** 50th birthday. Scored for the full sextet and featuring Ensemble Offspring’s Co-Artistic Director Claire Edwardes on solo percussion, *Silva* takes its name from the Latin for forest. Finsterer uses the idea of the forest as a metaphor: a creative reference-point that acts as both a germinating seed as well as a guiding character during the act of composition.

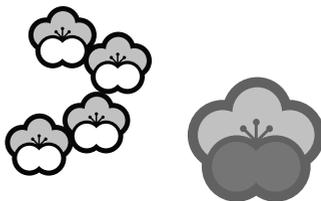
The composer describes the first portion of the work as seeking the feeling of largeness through space: “as if to experience the forest through layers of branches and leaves, these represented by the whimsical, faster

moving soft gestures of the woodwinds and string harmonics.” In contrast, the latter section evokes a stark and more earthy image of the wood and soil highlighted by toms and gongs in the percussion.

The work takes a traditional form - a simple ABA structure - and reflects the work that Finsterer has been developing since her orchestral work *In Praise of Darkness* in 2009, where the idea of memory is played

out through recurring references, thematic fragments inspired by Tallis’s *Spem in alium* and Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*, a fitting quote for the recent passing of a dear friend.

Notes by Damien Ricketson



Being and Time I: Lacrimae Rerum¹

Rosalind Page

1. *How is the hammer of the Earth cut asunder and broken?*

*this house of belonging
the nature of things
purified by tears
these hearts touched
by transience*

2. *Wave after wave, land beyond goodbye*

*I will go on paths
I will not speak
But love will fill my heart*

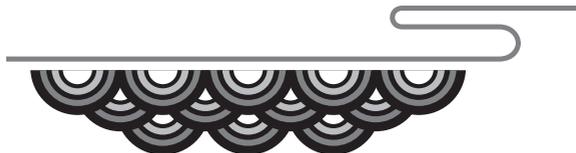
3. *Tomorrow will be exchanged for this sky*

*No prayer will console me
No tree will understand*

*into the mountains my grief must fly
and the blackbird guard me
in this fresh grave²*

¹ *Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentum mortalia tangunt*, Virgil *Aeneid I*, 462
Tears of things that touch the heart for how our life passes

² *Under the Iron of the Moon*, Thomas Bernhard. Translated by James Riedel.
Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2006.



About the artists



Ensemble Offspring

An organisation dedicated to the performance of innovative new music. Driven by open-mindedness and performance excellence, Ensemble Offspring's activities promote diverse and emerging music practices that expose audiences to new ways of experiencing sound. The group embraces a broad and progressive repertoire from seminal chamber music of the past 50 years, to free improvisation and the creation of striking interdisciplinary productions.

Led by Artistic Directors Claire Edwardes (percussion) and Damien Ricketson (composer), the ensemble comprises a team of virtuoso performers with broad ranging talents: some performing concertos with renowned symphony orchestras and others touring the world with indie pop bands.

In 2011 Ensemble Offspring was nominated in nine categories at the 2011 Art Music Awards. Recent highlights include the 2010 Sydney Festival, ensemble-in-residence at the 2010 ISCM World New Music Days and an international tour to China (2011). Performing in venues ranging from the Sydney Opera House to local Sydney bowling clubs, Ensemble Offspring has developed a reputation for its uniquely adventurous and engaging programs.

www.ensembleoffspring.com

Claire Edwardes is a leading interpreter of contemporary classical music and Co-Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring. Recent career highlights include concertos with the Vector Wellington Orchestra (New Zealand) & The Queensland Symphony Orchestra as well as solo festival appearances at Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music (UK), Port Fairy Spring Music Festival (Victoria) and Mona Foma (Hobart). In 2012 & 2007 she was awarded the AMC/APRA Art Music Award for Excellence in Australian Music, in 2005 she was the recipient of the MCA Freedman Fellowship and in 1999 she was named Australian Young Performer of the Year.

www.claireedwardes.com

Melody Eötvös is an Australian composer currently residing in Bloomington Indiana, USA, and is undertaking the final year of her DMA at the Jacobs School of Music where she also serves as an Associate Instructor in Composition and Music Coordinator for the Composition Department. She has studied with a variety of composers across the globe, including Dr. Gerardo Dirié (Queensland Conservatorium of Music BMus), Simon Bainbridge (Royal Academy of Music 2006-07, MMus), Dr. David Dzubay (Jacobs School of Music), and has been the recipient of various awards including the 3MBS National Composers Award & an APRA PDA. She has had her music performed by ensembles/orchestras such as the London Sinfonietta, BBC Singers, Tasmanian

Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian String Quartet.

www.melodyeotvos.com.au

Mary Finsterer is recognised as one of Australia's most original orchestral composers. Her work has won many awards around the world, including the prestigious Paul Lowin Orchestral Prize in 2009 for her work inspired by Jorge Luis Borges, *In Praise of Darkness*. In 2006, Mary received a Churchill Fellowship to compose alongside Marco Beltrami for the blockbuster movie *Die Hard 4*. During this time she continued to work on short films including productions at the Australian Film Television and Radio School. *South Solitary*, written and directed by Shirley Barrett, is Mary's first feature film, the music of which has been released on the CD label, ABC Classics | Universal. She has recently completed an opera entitled *Biographia*, commissioned by the Song Company.

www.maryfinsterer.com

Geoffrey Gartner is an exponent of the upside-down cello and a passionate advocate of the Fluxus ethos. Conductor, cellist and performance artist, he has brought countless new works to life and collaborated with many composers in Australia and abroad. Geoffrey holds a Doctorate in Contemporary Music Performance from the University of California, San Diego. He is a faculty member in the Department of Academic

Studies at the Australian Institute of Music, where he brings his unique performer's perspective to the lecture theatre.

Graeme Jennings Australian violinist, violist and conductor, Graeme Jennings is a former member of the legendary Arditti String Quartet (1994-2005). He has toured widely throughout the world, made more than 70 CDs, given over 300 premieres and received numerous accolades including the prestigious Siemens Prize (1999) and two Gramophone awards. Active as a soloist, chamber musician and ensemble leader, his repertoire ranges from Bach to Boulez and beyond. He has worked with and been complimented on his interpretations by many of the leading composers of our time. In 2009 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in violin at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University.

Zubin Kanga has recently performed at the Aldeburgh (UK), Borealis (Norway) and London 2012 Festivals as well as appearing as soloist with the London Sinfonietta. In the past two years, he has been awarded the Michael Kieran Harvey Scholarship, the Limelight Award for Best Newcomer and the NSW State Award for Performance of the Year at the AMC/APRA Art Music Awards. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, London, he has collaborated with many of the world's leading composers including Michael Finnissy, George Benjamin and Beat Furrer.

www.zubinkanga.com

Tristan Murail is a French composer often associated with spectral music. Murail received degrees in classical Arabic and economics before turning to composition where he studied with Olivier Messiaen. After winning the Prix de Rome in 1971 he founded the Itinéraire Ensemble, a group regarded for its groundbreaking explorations of the relationship between instrumental performance and electronics. Murail's use of technology to research acoustic phenomena and computer assisted composition continued in a long association with IRCAM in Paris. More recently Murail was Professor of Composition at Columbia University in New York and currently holds a Professorship at Universität Mozarteum of Salzburg (Austria).

www.tristanmurail.com

Lamorna Nightingale Joining Ensemble Offspring in 2007, Lamorna has been featured in numerous marathon length Feldman performances, regional Australian tours and Sizzles. She regularly performs with the Sydney Symphony, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra as well as the Australian Chamber Orchestra. As a soloist she recently released a recording of new Australian music for flute, *Eat Chocolate* and *Cry* and in her role as a flute mentor, she has published a range of flute teaching materials.

Jason Noble is a freelance clarinetist specialising in contemporary classical

repertoire. He has performed at many prestigious festivals such as the Warsaw Autumn, Aldeburgh Festival, Musica Viva Festival and Sydney Festival. Jason has been an integral member of Ensemble Offspring for many years whilst also performing with Halcyon, Sydney Children's Choir, the indigenous women's group from the Tiwi Islands, Ngarukuruwala and singer Holly Throsby. He teaches in the Musicology faculty at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and maintains a strong interest in teaching his craft to the next generation.

Rosalind Page has created works for theatre, dance, chamber ensembles, orchestra and electronica, with performances in Europe, USA and Japan. Rosalind's artistic practice includes her M.A. (Theatre and Film Studies). In 2004, *Fracture: a noh play for cello and orchestra*, an interpretation of Shakespeare's King Lear and Kurosawa's RAN, received a Highly Commended Award in the Paul Lowin Orchestral Prize. In 2006 her setting of Lorca's *Sonetos del Amor Oscuro* won the Paul Lowin Song Cycle Prize. Rosalind has been an invited composer by ISCM at VICC, Sweden, CAMAC, France, Herhusid, Iceland and The Banff Centre, Alberta, Canada.

Iannis Xenakis was a French composer of Greek heritage renowned for pioneering sound-mass composition. Xenakis fought in the Greek Resistance during WWII before leaving for France in 1947. After working briefly as an assistant to architect Le Corbusier, he turned his attention to

composition in *Metastaseis* (1953-54) a monolithic work that placed him firmly as a leader of the post war avant garde. His music sought to replace traditional musical forms with radical new concepts of sound composition that drew on complex understanding of mathematical formulae rendered into sound. His visionary concepts, exhilarating energy and rigorous intellectual enquiry have had a profound impact on subsequent generations of composers. "Xenakis has developed a music of truly majestic otherness. It is an alien shard, glimmering in the heart of the West." [Ben Watson, *The Wire*]

Coming soon

The Composers

John Cage Centenary Celebration

Sydney Opera House, The Studio

4.30pm: Musicircus

7.00pm: Permission Granted
(with Bang on a Can All Stars)

On Loop

1. Sydney Carriageworks (Bay 20)

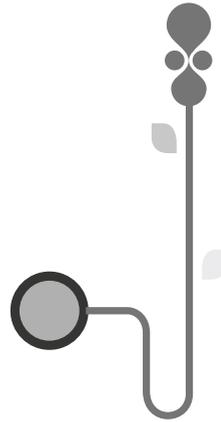
Sat 1st December 8pm

2. Melbourne Recital Centre (Salon)

Thur 6th December 8pm

Acknowledgements

The Brisbane performance of *Silva* has been made possible with the support of Restrung New Chamber Festival and Brisbane Powerhouse.



Ensemble Offspring is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, Its Arts funding and advisory body and by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.



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Ensemble Offspring

Artistic Directors

Claire Edwardes & Damien Ricketson



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