

# Hark The Machine

Ensemble Offspring

Sunday 11 February 2018

Utzon Room

Principal Partner

**SAMSUNG**



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Crunch. Boom. Grind. Like an old machine gradually coming to life, the five works featured in *Hark The Machine* - our first concert of 2018 - will awaken your senses for a new year of music with Ensemble Offspring.

Something really resonated with me when I read David Lang's note about *Cheating, Lying, Stealing* where he refers to the 'dirty seams in music'. It's the same stuff that Annie Gosfield talks about in her piece: 'evoking decaying and deterioration in sound'. There is something quite ironic about this attempt at making music that is at once raw and visceral but also deeply honed (both by the composer and the performer alike), to specifically sound that way. It is a challenge that we run into a lot in our field of new music making – having to use our skills as curious, open minded musicians with years of training and then almost chucking it all out the window for the cause. I think that is what I love so much about what we do – the discipline and preparation required to straddle the worlds of control and mayhem – machine and emotion. It's all in there in these five pieces! I encourage you to listen with open ears.

*Claire Edwardes, Artistic Director*

## Performers

**Ensemble Offspring:** Jacob Abela (piano), Claire Edwardes (percussion), Blair Harris (cello), Lamorna Nightingale (flute), Jason Noble (clarinet), Veronique Serret (violin).

## Program

### ***Cranks and Cactus Needles* (2003)**

Composer: Annie Gosfield (b. 1960)

*Cranks and Cactus Needles* was inspired by the sound of ancient 78 RPM records, and the pops, scratches, skips, and warps that occur as they deteriorate. As to the title, 'Cranks' refers to the crank handles of old record players that had to be wound up before a 78 could be played, and 'Cactus Needles' are the sharp cactus spines that were sometimes used as cheap phonograph needles. The musicians are instructed to play the piece 'distant and ghostly, like a victrola down the hall', and use uneven vibratos, imperfect repeats, and unpitched scrapes to evoke the decaying music of this anachronistic technology.

**Annie Gosfield**, whom the BBC called 'A one woman Hadron collider' lives in New York City and works on the boundaries between notated and improvised music, electronic and acoustic sounds, refined timbres and noise. Her most recent work includes an opera performed by the L.A. Phil in Walt Disney Concert Hall and on the streets of L.A. - a NYC concert of work about immigrants; and a sextet inspired by, and performed under, Diego Rivera's 'Detroit Industry' murals.

### ***Love in Solitude* (2017)**

Composer: Andrea Keller (b. 1973)

Composed for the 2017 Merlyn Myer Composing Women's Commission, *Love in Solitude* is a meditation on the eloquent thoughts presented in *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke. Alongside the live ensemble, the work features a pre-recorded soundscape, with Rilke's text spoken by Miroslav Bukovsky, Czech translation by Alena Tetreault, and sound design by Jem Savage.

Since the release of her first album in 2000, **Andrea Keller** has established herself as an important contributor to Australian jazz and contemporary music. Described as having "one of Australia's most consistently interesting musical minds" (Doug Spencer 2007), she has been the recipient of three ARIA Awards, five Australian Jazz *Bell* Awards, two Art Music Awards, an APRA Professional Development Award, the Merlyn Myer Composing Women's Commission, and fellowships from the MCA/Freedman Foundation and the Australia Council.

## ***Pentography*** (2018 – World Premiere)

Composer: Fiona Hill (b. 1976)

Commissioned by the Noisy Egg Creation Fund – Noisy Women Commission 2017, the work draws its extra musical inspiration from Traditional Chinese Medicine and the five seasons, where each season relates to a particular aspect of the mind, body and spirit.

**Spring:** *Wind in heaven, wood on earth.* Shouting sound, impatience, anger, dissatisfaction.

**Summer:** *Heat in heaven, fire on earth.* Growth, lightness, expansion, laughter, joy.

**Earth:** *Harmonises the four seasons.* Time stops, unity, harmony, dreamlike, tranquil.

**Autumn:** *Dryness in heaven, metal on earth.* Grief, gathering together, stillness, contraction.

**Winter:** *Cold in heaven, water on earth.* Receptive, introspective, stillness, spiritual essence.

**Fiona Hill** is fascinated by the dichotomy between natural and industrial environments as well as being influenced by philosophy and socio-political issues. Her musical output covers a broad range of styles from electroacoustic to film scores. She focuses on creating sounds that occupy an experimental, freethinking yet universally beautiful place. Fiona grew up in Melbourne, studied in Adelaide, Montreal and Sydney and now resides in the Blue Mountains.

## ***Medieval Rococo*** (2016)

Composer: Thomas Meadowcroft (b. 1972)

The title, *Medieval Rococo* is an oxymoron for our time -- how is it possible to generate an abundance of wealth, ornamentation and redundancy on the back of an impoverished idea? The terms 'medieval' and 'rococo' are not used to reference periods of European art history, but are used in the populist sense of the words. 'Medieval' denotes music crude and backward, 'rococo' denotes music garish and arty. The piece is dedicated to Ensemble Offspring, for whom the piece was written.

**Thomas Meadowcroft** is a freelance Australian composer, musician and arranger. His music has been described as 'reaching an inexpressible purity' (Le Monde), 'nerve torture' (Süddeutsche Zeitung) and 'dreamy post-rock' (The New York Times). He has worked with a variety of artists, ensembles and institutions including Oliver Pohl and the German Film Orchestra, Dirk Von Lowtzow, Brett Dean and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, ABC Creative Audio Unit, Speak Percussion. He has been based in Berlin for many years.

## ***Cheating, Lying, Stealing*** (1993, rev.1995)

Composer: David Lang (b. 1957)

A couple of years ago, I started thinking about how so often when classical composers write a piece of music, they are trying to tell you something that they are proud of and like about themselves. Here's this big gushing melody, see how emotional I am. Or, here's this abstract hard-to-figure-out piece, see how complicated I am, see my really big brain. I am more noble, more sensitive, I am so happy. The composer really believes he or she is exemplary in this or that area. It's interesting, but it's not very humble. So I thought, What would it be like if composers based pieces on what they thought was wrong with them? Like, here's a piece that shows you how miserable I am. Or, here's a piece that shows you what a liar I am, what a cheater I am. I wanted to make a piece that was about something disreputable. It's a hard line to cross. You have to work against all your training. You are not taught to find the dirty seams in music. You are not taught to be low-down, clumsy, sly and underhanded. In *Cheating, Lying, Stealing*, although phrased in a comic way, I am trying to look at something dark. There is a swagger, but it is not trustworthy. In fact, the instruction in the score for how to play it says: *Ominous funk*.

**David Lang** is one of the most highly esteemed and performed American composers writing today. His works have been performed around the world in most of the great concert halls. In addition to his work as a composer, Lang is Artist in Residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and is a Professor of Composition at the Yale School of Music. Lang is also co-founder and co-artistic director of New York's legendary music collective, Bang on a Can.

## **Ensemble Offspring**

Ensemble Offspring are champions of new music. Presenting concerts of seminal chamber music to free improvisation, alongside the creation of striking interdisciplinary productions, the group embraces open-minded music making in all its forms. Ensemble Offspring is led by acclaimed percussionist, Claire Edwardes, and features some of Australia's most innovative performers. The group has toured to locations such as Hong Kong, London and Warsaw, are regularly featured at MONA FOMA, Sydney and Melbourne Festivals, and have a cult following at their Sizzle series at Petersham Bowling Club. Passionate about nurturing the work of emerging, as well as established composers, Ensemble Offspring has premiered over 200 works in its 22-year history. Committed to giving back to the next generation, Hatched Academy is now in its 4th year and consists of an Associate Artist, Open Mic and Composer Summer School. Featured pianist, Jacob Abela, is an Hatched Academy graduate.

Ensemble Offspring is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts advisory body and the NSW Government through Create NSW.

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