



A Line Has Two

Ensemble Offspring



innovative new music

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PROGRAMME

1. *In God's Esperanto*

2. *A Line Has Two*

Damien Ricketson—music

Christopher Wallace-Crabbe—poetry

PERFORMERS

Roland Peelman—conductor

Alison Morgan—soprano

James Nightingale—saxillo

Jason Noble—clarinets

Diana Springford—clarinets

John Dewhurst—percussion

Bree van Reyk—percussion

Verity Hampson—lighting design

Bob Scott—sound

Bruno Leti—Artist Book

SUPPORTERS

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Ensemble Offspring

Ensemble Offspring is dedicated to the performance of innovative new music. With over seventy projects to its name, the Sydney-based ensemble is one of Australia's leading voices for innovative forms of classical music. Ensemble Offspring is committed to a living classical-music tradition combining the music of today with iconic works of the 20th and 21st centuries. The ensemble embraces a wide variety of progressive repertoire from wild improvisation to meticulous complexity and has a particular focus on experimental and interdisciplinary presentations. Ensemble Offspring is the voice of new music in Sydney and is fast emerging as one of the most successful contemporary music groups in Australia. The ensemble has developed a reputation for its original programming, quality of performance and successful audience engagement.

Damien Ricketson—Artistic Director

Claire Edwardes—Associate Artistic Director

Joanna Jouin—Administrator

Programme notes

In God's Esperanto

In the 1800s, the Frenchman Jean François Sudre proposed a universal language, Solresol, based entirely on the seven syllables of the diatonic scale: do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-si (ti). In doing so, he created an artificial language that existed not only in written and spoken form, but in pure melodic form communicable without the human voice. Using different combinations of up to four syllables (motifs of up to four notes) he generated a dictionary of over 2600 words organised via a logical grammar. In creating Solresol, Sudre hoped for a global language, a musical precursor to Esperanto, where the peoples of the world could communicate unequivocally through the language of melody.

In God's Esperanto, is an ironic look at the quest for the ultimate universal language: an attribute frequently used to describe the language of music. A new poem, *Spranto Lost*, written especially by Christopher Wallace-Crabbe is used as a narrative thread against a chorus of spoken and melodic statements in *Solresol*. The texts are quotes from the Bible, Wallace-Crabbe, Umberto Eco, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Igor Stravinsky and the World Congress of Esperanto that refer to the quest for universal language: naturally the information contained in the statements is completely arcane.

(Damien Ricketson)

A Line Has Two

When a composer sets a poetic text to music he or she usually weaves a musical accompaniment around pre-existing words. In *A Line Has Two* the composer, Damien Ricketson, and poet, Christopher Wallace-Crabbe, took the more unusual approach of making a work based on an earlier poem of Wallace-Crabbe's, 'The Alignments,' but for which the poet also wrote new text to fit the unfolding of the music.

A Line Has Two explores themes of impermanence and the passing of time. The audience perceives the text in written, spoken and sung forms in such a way that each form presents a subtle variation on the same idea (the written text of the original poem is included with this programme). The sung text incorporates material from clusters of poems written by Wallace-Crabbe in response to Ricketson's project, exploring similar thematic ideas to the original. The spoken portion consists of the original poem in addition to new clusters, and is distinctive for being presented electronically: recitations of the texts were recorded and then subject to varying amounts of electronic processing. Neither the sung nor spoken poetry is intended to be consistently audible, forming instead an acoustic web of words that emerges allusively from the musical texture.

The themes of valediction and renewal pervading the text are represented in *A Line Has Two* by musical quotations from works by Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. Mahler's *The Song of the Earth* (1908), composed in the wake of his daughter's death, is a lengthy meditation on mortality. In its final movement, 'The Farewell,' the contralto soloist repeatedly sings the German word *Ewig* (eternally). Music from 'The Farewell' is included in *A Line Has Two*, but instead of 'Ewig,' the soprano sings portions of 'The Alignments' relating to the idea of impermanence. A layer of distance is imposed by the transformation of Mahler's opulent instrumentation into a strange toy-like ensemble of marimba and recorder.

Whilst *The Song of the Earth* is used to represent the desire to hold onto life in the face of death, the 'Chorus of the Unborn Children' from Strauss's opera *The Woman Without a Shadow* (1917) stands for emerging life: time yet to be experienced. The clarinet parts featured in the earlier half of *A Line Has Two* are made up of this portion of Strauss's music, transformed so as to be only distantly recognisable, but preparing the way for the exact quotation: an event that occurs immediately after the soprano's dramatic entry into the music, at the centre of the work.

Ricketson's treatment of these clarinet parts engages evocatively with the ability of a single melodic line to stand for the voice and utterances of an individual person. Although Strauss's 'unborn' melody is always presented by two clarinets, the two instruments are perpetually locked together, only ever moving in similar directions, and instructed to take similar approaches to the shaping of the notes they play. Furthermore, the combined sounds of the clarinets, the harmonic intervals between them, are not the warm, blended harmonies typical of Strauss but tend to be either stark open sounds or sustained dissonances. If the clarinets sound like two individuals 'saying' similar things, their paired declamation has a haunting uneasiness to it.

This treatment is just one example of the way in which the music takes up the poem's theme of the individual who finds him or herself in a

world from which it will eventually be necessary to depart. The textual theme of the line, unique but transient, is treated melodically: a representation of human expression. The theme of time, impersonal and permanent, is treated harmonically: a representation of natural order. In live performance the roles of individual instruments against this harmonic background are brought out theatrically by the movement of the players to different parts of the stage, into and out of prominence.

One of the preoccupations of Damien Ricketson's recent music has been the notion of strange or lost musics: as if his audience might be hearing the sounds of an unknown culture, coherent but unfamiliar. This preoccupation has resulted in the use of both well-known and little-known instruments: *A Line Has Two*, for instance, is scored for conventional instruments (clarinets, voice, percussion) as well as others rare or invented (glass tusut, electronic sounds and a saxillo designed by Australian instrument builder Linsey Pollak).

Ricketson's glass tusut is simply 12 wine glasses filled with varying levels of water to create a range of available pitches (the term tusut is a reference to an ancient Arabic instrument made of glass). The wine glasses are not, however, precisely tuned: the composer only specifies their relative highness or lowness. This relinquishing of control over the exact pitches produced is deliberate, and renders each performance of the work different. It also results in microtonal pitches: notes between the keys of the piano and different from most of those heard in Western classical and commercial music. The composer feels that this indeterminacy results in harmonies more intricate than he might, had he tried, have been able to notate.

A similar approach is adopted in the case of the instrument which is, in this performance the afore mentioned saxillo. In the score it is designated as an 'aulos,' a name taken from an ancient Greek wind instrument. Performers of the work are invited to use any wind instrument for the aulos part except those of the Western classical tradition (in a previous performance of the work an Argentine bamboo saxophone was used in this role), once again creating

elements of indeterminacy and exoticism. And as in the case of the tusut, relative highness and lowness are specified but precise sounds vary depending on the instrument chosen.

Although Ricketson's general concern with the strange and exotic has left a mark on the instrumentation of *A Line Has Two*, other decisions about the work's sounds are more directly related to the textual themes outlined above. The piece incorporates an electronic part, already mentioned in relation to the spoken text. This part is heard at the outset of the work, before the acoustic instruments begin, and comes and goes through the rest of the performance. In some respects it is a notional shadow ensemble to the live instruments, an otherworldly double made up of synthesised sounds as well as pre-recorded clarinet and voice. The 'shadowing' occurs as the pre-recorded music is transformed to produce distant but related versions of the original instruments.

The glass tusut, too, reflects the implication of otherworldliness: of souls unborn or departing. The glasses are most often played with violin bows, creating an unearthly quality of sound. Ricketson follows Strauss's lead in the use of an 'angelic' glass instrument: in *The Woman Without a Shadow*, the 'Chorus of the Unborn Children' is preceded by the last known use in Western Classical music of the once-common Glass Harmonica.

The final section of *A Line Has Two* introduces a choir of recorders tuned microtonally, playing music based on the 'unborn' chorus. Their rhythms differ until they gradually come closer and closer together, in a kind of warped unison, speaking almost as one voice. As the chorus fades, the singer takes up the part of the Mahler quotation that had been repeated obsessively in 'The Farewell,' and which Mahler used to create the sense of an ending indefinitely postponed. *A Line Has Two* similarly avoids resolution, ending with slow lingering fragments of the Mahler, inverted and disappearing into nothingness.

(Notes by Rachel Campbell)

Artists

Damien Ricketson is a composer and the Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring. Much of Damien's music has been performed, and received critical acclaim through Ensemble Offspring as well as performances by many internationally renowned ensembles. Recent composition commissions have included the prestigious Warsaw Autumn Festival, the Transit Festival (Belgium), the Grainger Quartet and ABC Classic FM.

Christopher Wallace-Crabbe has a distinguished career as poet, essayist, literary critic and educator. With a novel (*Splinters*) and over 16 published volumes of poetry, Chris has earned an international reputation as one of Australia's most important poets. Chris has received numerous literary awards and is an elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Chris is an Emeritus Professor at The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne.

Roland Peelman is best known as the Artistic Director of The Song Company. He is also Ensemble Offspring's resident conductor and keyboard player. Through Roland's direction, The Song Company has developed into an international touring ensemble of the highest standard. Roland received the NSW State Award in the 2005 Classical Music Awards in recognition of his sustained contribution to Australian music.

Alison Morgan is the co-Artistic Director of Halcyon, Halcyon is the only Australian ensemble dedicated to the performance of new and recent music for voice and instruments. Alison has developed a reputation as one of Australia's leading interpreters of contemporary vocal music. In addition to Halcyon and Ensemble Offspring, she has also appeared as a soloist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, The Australian Ballet, Pinchgut Opera, The Song Company and Cantillation.

James Nightingale is one of Sydney's most active saxophonists in the field of classical music. James is the president of the New Music Network and Australia's leading saxophone quartet Continuum Sax. James performs regularly with Ensemble Offspring, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and teaches at the Sydney Conservatorium.

Jason Noble is a freelance clarinetist specialising in contemporary repertoire. He has performed at prestigious festivals such as the Warsaw Autumn, Aldeburgh (UK), Sydney Spring Festival, and Sydney Film Festival. As both a soloist and chamber musician Jason has appeared with Ensemble Offspring, Sonic Art Ensemble, Halcyon Ensemble, Synergy, and Sydney Childrens Choir.

Diana Springford has played clarinet with Ensemble Offspring, Halcyon, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Chambermaids Wind Quintet, Symphony Australia and the Sydney Wind Ensemble and has recorded for SBSTV, 2MBSFM and the ABC. She has taught clarinet and saxophone for many years and lectures in philosophy at the University of Wollongong where she is completing a PhD thesis on the relationship between music and politics.

John Dewhurst is a Sydney percussionist and educator. He plays regularly in the InterPlay Percussion Duo and he is the director of Wind Trace New Music Ensemble. He has performed with The Song Company, Ensemble Offspring, and Aark Ensemble. John is an ongoing collaborator in the works of composers Mary-Anne Kyriakou (new theatre and mixed media) and Amanda Cole (microtonal and electronic music).

Bree van Reyk is a successful cross-over percussionist maintaining a career in both classical and popular music. As well as performing percussion (and occasional accordion) with Ensemble Offspring, Bree performs with Australia's leading percussion group Synergy and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra. Bree also plays drum-kit for singer-songwriters Holly Throsby and Darren Hanlon and appears with many popular music acts.