

FAURÉ REQUIEM



An inspiring evening of choral beauty, reflection, and hope



29th May 2026
7.30pm
St Patrick's Cathedral

WELCOME TO RIVER CITY VOICES

Warami, welcome to River City Voices in 2026!

It's a year of change for us, with Dr Philip Eames taking the baton for this performance, and the transition of our General Manager from our founder, Inara Molinari to Chris McNee. We've also welcomed 2 new choristers and celebrated more milestones as 5 choristers have spent 5 years singing with us! It has been a delight to welcome Philip back to River City Voices, having first been part of our assistant conductor mentorship program in (2019), and having led our Songs of Origin performance in 2025.

It's a testament to River City Voices determination to build opportunities for local conductors to develop their skills that sees Philip take the helm for this concert. There is a lot that has remained the same, with Directors re-committing to our vision and strategic plan, and River City Voices' ability to be agile & respond to opportunities & challenges alike. Our recent performance under Dr Philip Eames for the 1st Oceania International Choral Festival at the Sydney Opera House demonstrated our choristers' skills and professionalism in ever changing circumstances.

Thank you to Riverside Theatres Parramatta for their partnership in selling tickets for this performance for us, as we work together to ensure the future of excellence performance in Parramatta and Western Sydney. In these troubled times, music that moves you whether from sorrow to joy, helps humans to make sense of war and hardship. Not only do we have the poignant Fauré Requiem to share with you in the echoingly beautiful St Patrick's Cathedral, the performance includes deeply spiritual works from Australian composers Alice Chance, (Holy Dreaming, a moving piece set to a prayer from the first Indigenous Anglican pastor), RCV reprising Nicola Smede's Padla, embracing country and Dr Joseph Romeo's setting of the Lord's Prayer, all the way from his home town of Narrandera in regional NSW. What connects these works is the sense of grief, love and experience of the spiritual – whether that is through faith or in connection with the land and seas around us.

Tonight River City Voices pays special tribute to those that help us keep delivering the choral excellence in and of Western Sydney, that this choir sets out to be. Your contributions to our giving programs have enabled us to keep singing and performing at the level of excellence Western Sydney desires, close to home. For a choir that started just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, that has continued to build and deliver to our audiences in performances large and small, it is your support that helps make it happen.

We can't tell you too much about our upcoming projects in 2026 as there are some very exciting but currently under wraps details but we'd love to keep you informed via our eNews! We're also planning our 2027 program together with some exciting new collaborations and partnerships.



Catherine Dolle

Chair, Board of Directors

BOARD

Chair

Catherine Dolle
Director | Founder
Inara Molinari

Directors

Anthony Cannell
Schon G Condon, RFD
Timothy Dashwood
Emma Ringland

MANAGEMENT

General Manager

Chris McNee

Marketing Manager

Lisa Finn-Powell

Choir Coordinator

Olivia Sanders Robinson

ARTISTIC STAFF

Guest Conductor

Dr Philip Eames

Assistant Conductor

Oscar Balle-Bowness

Rehearsal Pianist

Eunbi Oh

ARTISTIC ADVISORY

COMMITTEE

Bina Battacharya

Robert Love AM

Amy Moon

Brett Weymark OAM



River City Voices

River City Voices is the flagship symphonic choir for the City of Parramatta and Western Sydney.

Since 2018 River City Voices has been providing a platform for artists and communities in Western Sydney to develop and present the public performance of large-scale classical and contemporary choral works. We showcase music and art that is innovative, stylistically diverse, culturally relevant and locally responsive for our diverse and unique audiences.

Over the years we have grown to encompass 70 choristers, associated musicians, conductors, administrators, volunteers and more that meet weekly; where we create music and community.

We are Western Sydney's choir.

Soprano Jennifer Baker | Kirstie Barfoot | Emily Boffa | Catriona Champion | Josephine Chan
Teresa Cheung | Maria Costello | Tamara Craig | Lyn Higgs | Wendy Hopley | Deborah Howitt
Iona Mathias | Sandy McAuley | Christine Pendleton | Tracy Samuel | Nicole Senior |
Casey Shibakoski | Karla Stewart-Sykes | Lynn Taye | Ingrid Turner | Sarah Wielgosz

Alto Grace Bondoc | Linda Bryan | Catherine Dolle | Sarah El-Khansa | Sally Glass | Danica Gluvakov
Rufina Ismail | Amanda Karen | Laima Karklins | Lou Merrington | Nancy Nicholls
Jennifer Nixon | Rina Pinto | Shannon Simon | Huong Tran | Hiroko Uchihara | Fiona Yue

Tenor Clive Arasaratnam-Smith | Stuart Elliot | Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Ian Jenson | Brian Julien
Nathan Knight | Josh Lenehan | Isaac Powell | Yana Taylor | Spencer Thew | William Yates

Bass Jose Augusto | Steve Barnett | Will Bond | Don Church | Cameron Glass
Sam Huynh | Ivars Karklins | Collin Rozario | Michael West | Peter Wright | Dominic Wong

Soloists Teresa Cheung | Amanda Karen | Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Will Bond



Program

Padla

Holy Dreaming

*The Lord's Prayer**

Ave Verum Corpus, S.44

Geistliches Lied, Op.30

Requiem in D Minor, Op.48

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

** Conducted and prepared by Oscar Balle-Bowness*

Nicole Smede

Alice Chance

*Joseph Romeo**

Franz Liszt

Johannes Brahms

Gabriel Fauré

Johann Sebastian Bach

From the conductor...

This concert traces a spiritual journey in music, moving from jubilant rhythmic vitality toward a sense of peace and rest. In a turbulent world, the program offers sonic sanctuary, with Fauré's Requiem at its centre as an enduring expression of solace. While the music is grounded in Christian tradition, a major influence on Western choral music, it also reflects the broader restorative and unifying power of music.

The first half features contemporary works by Australian composers, showing that the connection between spirituality and music remains alive. Nicole Smede's *Padla* (Country), originally written for the play *Mt Hopeless* and later adapted for River City Voices, is built on layered ostinatos that gather momentum and evoke the rising sun. Its text, in the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka language, simply states that 'Long time ago, [Aboriginal] women and men used to walk and look around; now white and Aboriginal people share Country together.' In *Holy Dreaming*, Alice Chance draws on the influence of Ross Edwards and a text by Reverend Lenore Parker, alternating rich harmonic textures with rhythmic intensity. Led by four soloists from the choir, the work accumulates into an intense sonic tapestry. Reflecting a more traditional choral approach, Joseph Romeo's *The Lord's Prayer* offers a moment of clarity and directness. The familiar text is vividly aligned with the musical setting, resulting in a work of both immediacy and sincerity.

Liszt and Brahms were famously opposed in their musical aesthetics, yet in their sacred music they find common ground. Best known for his virtuosic piano repertoire, Liszt composed a substantial body of sacred choral works that challenge popular perceptions of him as a composer. Despite its slow pace, the sincere *Ave Verum Corpus* reveals his daring harmonic language, with tonal ambiguity that only resolves in the closing bars. Johannes Brahms' *Geistliches Lied, Op. 30* ("Sacred Song"), employs a more intricate musical language. Originally conceived as a compositional exercise, the work is a double canon, in which two pairs of melodic lines are staggered to create rich, interweaving counterpoint. Impressively, this academic construction is balanced by expressive warmth, culminating in a particularly beautiful "Amen."

The program culminates in Fauré's Requiem, a work that reimagines the traditional mass for the dead. It omits much of the dramatic sense of judgment found in earlier settings and instead offers an expression of comfort rather than fear. Tellingly, it remains popular not only as a concert work but also in memorial contexts. This is immediately evident from the Introit et Kyrie, the choir establishes a calm atmosphere, gently subduing the opening organ calls. In the Offertoire, a sparse, almost plainchant-like texture predominates until the baritone solo enters; richer accompaniment then shines a ray of light and prompts the choir's uplifted return. The angelic Sanctus builds on this mood, and its simple call-and-response textures grow increasingly radiant and triumphant. The music turns inward in the famous *Pie Jesu*, featuring a soprano solo that provides a moment of luminous stillness, its simplicity conveying a childlike trust. Particularly striking is the *Agnus Dei*, where Fauré approaches the work's most turbulent point before a return of earlier material creates a sense of cyclical reflection. The work closes with *In Paradisum*, a movement of serene transcendence that recalls the atmosphere of the Sanctus. The music ends not with a bang (or a whimper), but with grace and stillness, a comforting and beautiful farewell.

Thanks are extended to Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith for her guidance in shaping this program, and to Oscar Balle-Bowness for his invaluable support throughout rehearsals.



Dr. Philip Eames
Guest Conductor

Please note that this evening's concert runs for approximately an hour and 15 minutes without an interval.

ARTISTS

Hailing from Brisbane, Dr Philip Eames studied piano with Max Olding AM and Stephen Savage at the Queensland Conservatorium. He then continued his studies on scholarship at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, before completing his doctorate in 2017 at the Sydney Conservatorium focusing on the choral music of Percy Grainger. Philip is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Sydney Conservatorium, working as part of the Spencer-Bennett NeuroMusic Collaborative, and serves as Classical Convenor and lecturer at the Australian Institute of Music.

Philip was appointed Principal Conductor of the Macquarie Singers in 2023. In 2025, he additionally took up the reins as Musical Director of Coro Innominata and has been associated with River City Voices since 2019, where he served as an inaugural assistant conductor under the guidance of Dr. Sarah Penicka-Smith.

He is frequently engaged as a conductor of operatic productions, with credits including Menotti's *The Medium*, Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins/Mahagonny Songspiel* and Salieri's *Prima la musica, e poi le parole*. He is also an active composer, being announced the winner of the 2020 Willgoss Choral Composition Prize, the Tagore and ASKM Composition Competitions. Performers and commissioners of his music throughout Australia include the Australian Voices, Queensland Ballet, the Black Square and Flinders Quartets, and the Australian National Piano Award.

Dr Philip Eames
Conductor



Oscar Balle-Bowness
Assistant Conductor



Oscar grew up in Cairns before studying a Bachelor of Music (Performance) at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where he was the recipient of the Patricia Lucas Memorial Scholarship. He holds a Master of Teaching (Music) from the University of New South Wales and teaches Music and Voice at Cranbrook School.

A sought-after private voice teacher specialising in Classical Voice and Musical Theatre, Oscar draws professional and beginner students. In December 2025, he conducted River City Voices on the Monumental Steps of the Sydney Opera House as part of the On The Steps concert series.

As a singer, Oscar's operatic roles include the titular role of Dido in a recast production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* on the Llewellyn Hall Concert Stage in 2025 — a performance that garnered favourable reviews — alongside Goro in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Monostatos in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, and Mr. Upfold in Britten's *Albert Herring*. His concert work includes tenor soloist engagements with The Willoughby Symphony and works by Handel, Saint-Saëns, and Stainer. He has served as Musical Director for productions of *Grease* at the Seymour Centre and *Meet Me In St. Louis* at the New Theatre, and in 2022 was the recipient of the Susan Doyle Scholarship as a Pacific Opera Young Artist.

Originally from Tokyo, Japan, Ayako completed her Masters at the Royal Academy of Music in London, UK and also holds a PhD from the Kunitachi College of Music in Japan. In Australia, Ayako is an alumna of Pacific Opera, Coast Opera Australia and Lisa Gasteen National Opera Program. She has appeared as a soloist with acclaimed Australian orchestras such as Canberra Symphony Orchestra and Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

Outside Australia, she made her German debut as a concert soloist with the Göttinger Symphonie Orchestra in 2020. In 2022, Ayako made her appearance as Königin der Nacht in *Die Zauberflöte* with WSO and Pacific Opera for their pocket opera series, reviewed as “an accomplished and terrifying performance” (Limelight magazine, 2022). Ayako has also ventured into contemporary music, working with Blush Opera on numerous occasions, and premiered as Victoria in a new opera, *Chop Chef*, receiving great reviews.

In addition to operatic repertoire, she also performs sacred music, as well as in various concert settings, regularly in Australia and Japan. Competition highlights include the second prize in the Lockwood New Zealand Aria and the first prize in the French & German Art Song section in the Sydney Eisteddfod. Outside performance, Ayako has been enjoying hosting SBS Japan's radio program VIVA! Opera since 2021.

Ayako Ohtake
Soprano



ARTISTS

Benjamin Caukwell, Baritone, achieved a Bachelor of Music degree with Honours from the University of Canterbury in 2008, and a Master of Music degree in Performance Voice from the University of Otago in 2011.

He sang with the New Zealand Opera Chorus before moving to Sydney where he is a member of the Opera Australia Chorus. With Opera Australia he has performed in numerous concerts and operas including the yearly showpiece *Handa Opera on the Harbour*. Benjamin has appeared as soloist with many musical organisations, including the Christchurch City Choir, the Dunedin City Choir, Pinchgut Opera and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra.

With the music society Artes Christe, he featured in their 2017 recording of Handel's *Messiah* and in that year took a lead role in their production of *Camelot*. He attended the Lisa Gasteen Opera Programme in 2019, performing in Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and featured in Blush Opera's premiere of the new opera *Chop Chef* in 2021. He performed the New Zealand and Australian national anthems in A Remembrance Day Concert at the town hall, broadcast on channel seven, and recently sung at the Newcastle Music Festival in Opera Cocktails.

Benjamin Caukwell
Baritone



Simon Niemiński
Organist



In concert and broadcasts, Simon Niemiński's work has taken him from BBC Radio's *The Organist Entertains* to Choral Evensong, and *Pipedreams* in the USA, and beyond. He has performed some of the most challenging items of organ repertoire, for example Max Reger's *Symphonic Fantasia & Fugue 'The Inferno'* and Giles Swayne's monumental *Stations of the Cross*, of which *Gramophone* magazine wrote "Swayne's visionary writing is imbued with a level of powerful dramatic imagery that requires a highly resourceful organ and a particularly inspiring player to bring it off to its full effect. It gets both here ... For his part, Simon Niemiński champions this vast score with a compelling intensity that captures the visionary scope of Swayne's writing magnificently."

His recordings have helped to revive the music of unjustly neglected composers; for example Eugène Reuchsel's *Promenades en Provence* recorded in St Louis, Missouri was commended by *The American Record Guide* as "...a splendid release... There is a lot of poetry here" and *Organists' Review*: "Simon Niemiński's playing is utterly convincing and at one stroke establishes him as a recording artist of the first rank." Simon's performances have included recitals at York Minster and Durham Cathedral, Notre Dame in Paris, the Royal Canadian College of Organists annual convention, the International Organ Festival in Japan, and Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane town halls. He has also performed with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Northern Sinfonia, the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and accompanied the BBC Singers.

Simon studied at the Royal College of Music, at Cambridge University and as Organ Scholar of York Minster. He is currently Assistant Director of Music at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney.

Simon's latest solo album (his thirteenth) was recently released: *Hill Uncorked: An Organist's Journey in the Barossa*.

Eunbi (Emma) is a Korean classical pianist based in Sydney, Australia. She began studying piano at the age of five and earned her Bachelor degree of Music in Piano Performance from Dongduk Women's University in Seoul, South Korea in 2012.

She has performed extensively as an accompanist with choirs, vocalists, and instrumentalists. Notable appearances include W.A.Mozart's opera *Le nozze di Figaro* with Dongduk Women's University College of Arts, the 4th Piano Ensemble Night at Dongduk Recital Hall, and a Piano Duo Recital at Gwanglim Art Centre.

Since moving to Sydney, she has collaborated with River City Voices, the Sydney Intersociety Choral Festival, Inspire Choir, and currently accompanies the Men's Shed Chorale in Lidcombe. Passionate about sharing classical music and her experience, Eunbi has tutored students since 2011. She currently teaches piano at Penrith Conservatorium and continues to perform across the Greater Sydney area.

Eunbi Oh
Rehearsal Pianist



Support River City Voices

For our 2026 season River City Voices is entirely reliant on ticket sales and philanthropic support.

Without the support of donors from the River City Voices community we simply could not do the vital work we do, providing large scale choral excellence in Western Sydney, so thank you to everyone who has given to support this season and in the past.

The best way that you can help to ensure the long term success of River City Voices is by joining our Giving Program. This program connects donors, music lovers and members of our community.

The tiers of our Giving Program allow for varying levels of commitment and pledges over a minimum three year period (or annual open-ended commitments).

River: \$1,000 and over per annum for 3 years
Stream: \$500 and over per annum for 3 years
Brook: \$100 and over per annum for 3 years

Your membership to our giving program means we have the financial security to:

- Secure and maintain our program and continue to provide choral excellence in Western Sydney
- Responsibly offer and maintain staff contracts and ensure wages can be paid
- Continue the vital work that make River City Voices an incubator of arts in Western Sydney
- Create the opportunity to showcase the musical and artistic excellence of our choir and our region

The Benefits of being a member of the Giving Program

- Tax deductible donation
- Name/s on website, Programs and electronic communication as a **RCV Giving Program** donor
- Invitations to selected performances and events throughout the 2026 season*

*River and Stream donors only

All donations over \$2 are fully tax-deductible.

Your Donation

To learn more go to:

www.rivercityvoices.org.au/support-us

To arrange a bank transfer or for more details contact
Chris McNee at: manager@rivercityvoices.org.au

Direct Transfer

Account Name: River City Voices

BSB: 0611 - 100

Account Number: 100287187

Donate now via the QR code below:



Thank you to the current supporters of our 2026 season

Anonymous (18) | Diana Bayley | William Bond | Linda Bryan | Julie Burton | Teresa Cheung | Jason & Sue Coates
Catherine Dolle | Ansa Fourie | Prue Gibbs | Danielle Grant | David Hoffman | Sam Huynh | Ian McRae
Seth Molinari | Gleyth Moll | Patrick O'Halloran | Sandra Penicka | Mel & Sarah Penicka-Smith | Emma Ringland
Joe Romeo | Sharon Salter | Mary Solomon | Rosemary Summers | Isabella Tye (Easy Piano) | Yana Taylor
Fiona Toose | Ingrid Turner | Eunbi & Dylan Watkins | Diana Weston | Dominic Wong | Helen Yiu





We'd love your feedback!

To complete our short concert survey please scan the QR code.



Get in touch!

To learn more about River City Voices, how you can volunteer, or audition contact our General Manager, Chris: manager@rivercityvoices.org.au

www.rivercityvoices.org.au
www.facebook.com/rivercityvoices
Insta: @rivercityvoices

Stay up to date!

To sign up for our E-News please scan the QR code below.

