



RIVER CITY VOICES

western sydney. choral. excellence

BLUE SKY COUNTRY CHRISTMAS



FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER 2023

St Patrick's Cathedral
Parramatta

PROGRAM

WELCOME TO RIVER CITY VOICES



Welcome to Blue Sky Country Christmas! Thank you for joining River City Voices and the composers of Ngarra-burria: First Peoples Composers program for this very special concert. River City Voices acknowledges the support of Walker | Parramatta Square in presenting this program, demonstrating its commitment to the cultural and artistic life of the great City of Parramatta. Such contributions recognise that development of new spaces ideally engages with the history, architecture, arts and culture of the communities that development supports. River City Voices looks forward to continued collaborations and support from within the business communities of Parramatta in championing its centrality to the story of Sydney.

A very special thank you as well to Dr Christopher Sainsbury, founder of Ngarra-burria, for entrusting our Artistic Director, Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith and our choir as Ensemble-in-Residence to participate in the first choral collaboration with this award-winning composers' program. Our choristers have very much enjoyed the artistic process, working alongside the composers to develop what you will hear tonight – from 'Marloo's Blues' which with the addition of choir has evolved into a gospel blues number; to getting our voices around the pronunciation of several Indigenous languages and learning the meaning and resonance of the language choices – whether in language or in English.

Elizabeth Sheppard graced us with the history of the Noongar people and the New Norcia Mission, and how that is expressed in her Christmas carols. Nicole Smede taught us about seeking permission to use the language of the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka people, and some pieces, like 'Namatjira Haven', need no translation. And for a little something extra, we hope you enjoy the eeriness of 'Sleep my Dears' as much as we (perhaps scarily!) do.

River City Voices choristers have been so open to these experiences, engaged and persevering through the challenges of the process and the music. This is our contribution to moving forward together with First Nations Peoples after a challenging year. As always, River City Voices is choir, but different!

Catherine Dolle-Samuel

Chair, Board of Directors

2023 BOARD

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Principal Rehearsal Pianist

Su Choung

Rehearsal Pianist

Callum Tolhurst-Close

Dr Philip Eames

Rehearsal Conductors

Dr Philip Eames

Natalie Gooneratne

2023 CHORISTERS

SOPRANO

Jennifer Baker
Alexandra-Ann Burton
Catriona Champion
Josephine Chan
Louise Corbin
Maria Costello
Tamara Craig
Susan Forss-Clarke
Hadassa Gitau
Lyn Higgs
Wendy Hopley
Deborah Howitt
Iona Mathias
Christine Pendleton
Casey Poon
Tracy Samuel
Naomi von Senff
Nicole Senior
Karla Stewart-Sykes
Lynn Taye
Ingrid Turner
Eleni Waugh
Sarah Wielgosz
Klara de Wit

TENOR

Clive Arasaratnam-Smith
David Archer
Tanja Frzop
Richard Heagren-Gibbs
Nalin Gupta
Ian Jenson
Brian Julien
Joshua Lenehan
Gabriel Newman
Isaac Powell
Mohsen Shamsavarzadeh
Spencer Thew

ALTO

Mel Bester
Grace Bondoc
Clare Brown
Catherine Dolle-Samuel
Sarah El-Khansa
Sally Glass
Danica Gluvakov
Belinda Huang
Rufina Ismail
Jane Jamieson
Laima Karklins
Linda Kemp
Samantha Matwijkeno
Liz Mulcare
Nancy Nicholls
Rina Pinto
Hiroko Uchihara
Rachel Yang
Helen Yiu
Fiona Yue

BASS

Jose Augusto
Steve Barnett
Don Church
Philip Gerber
Cameron Glass
Ivars Karklins
Geoff Kerr
Mark Nguyen
Michael West
Dominic Wong

BLUE SKY COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

Performance 60 minutes - No Interval

Acknowledgement of Country

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Introduction

Dr Christopher Sainsbury

NAIYEE NAYAWA

Words and music, **Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan**
Choral Arrangement, Dr Christopher Sainsbury, 2023
Gomeri language

We come together
With mother to dance.
In this way
We all celebrate as one.

MARY MOORDITJ NGAANGK

Words and Music, **Elizabeth Sheppard**, 2000
Noongar and English lyrics

NOT IN A GOLDEN PALACE

Words and Music, **Elizabeth Sheppard**, 2001
SATB Piano Revised Edition 2022
English and Noongar lyrics

GANDANGARRAGAL Blue Mountains Dreaming

Words and Music, **Elizabeth Sheppard**, 2020
commissioned by River City Voices
SATB Piano Revised Edition 2022
English and Dharug lyrics

MARLOO'S BLUES

Words and music,
Marlene Cummins
Choral arrangement
developed with Sarah
Penicka-Smith, 2023

Bidjawong





BLUE SKY COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

NAMATJIRA HAVEN

Words and music, **Tim Gray**
Choral arrangement developed with Sarah Penicka-Smith, 2023

CHRISTMAS WITH YOU

Lyrics and music, **Deborah Cheetham AO**, 2020
Commissioned by ABC Classic for Classic Choir

SLEEP MY DEARS

Words and Music, **Dr Christopher Sainsbury**, 1992

SUMMER TOGETHER

Words, **Kirli Saunders**
Music, **Elena Kats-Chernin**, 2023
Commissioned by ABC Classic for Classic Choir

BLUE SKY COUNTRY

Words and music, **Elizabeth Sheppard**, 2007
Revised SATB Piano Edition, 2023
English and Noongar lyrics

NGANGK YIRA SUNRISE CAROL

Words and music, **Elizabeth Sheppard**, 2018
Revised SATB Piano Edition, 2020
English and Noongar lyrics

PADLA

Composed/arranged by **Nicole Smede**, 2023
*Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka language, spoken
around Kinipapa (Coopers Creek at Innaminka, SA)*

Long time ago, (Aboriginal) women and men
used to walk/look around
Now white and Aboriginal
share
Country together.



PERFORMERS

CONDUCTOR

Assistant Chorus Master
Principal Rehearsal Pianist
Rehearsal Pianist

DR SARAH PENICKA-SMITH

NATALIE GOONERATNE
SU CHOUNG
DR PHILIP EAMES

PIANIST

CLAPSTICKS

SU CHOUNG

NANCY NICHOLLS

PRODUCTION MANAGER

STAGE MANAGER

PUBLICITY

INARA MOLINARI

MELANIE PENICKA-SMITH

JEN WARD

RIVER CITY VOICES

Soprano

Jennifer Baker | Catriona Champion | Josephine Chan | Susan Forss-Clarke | Louise Corbin
Tamara Craig | Maria Costello | Lyn Higgs | Wendy Hopley | Deborah Howitt | Iona Mathias
Christine Pendleton | Tracy Samuel | Naomi von Senff | Nicole Senior
Karla Stewart-Sykes | Lynn Taye | Ingrid Turner | Eleni Waugh | Sarah Wielgosz

Alto

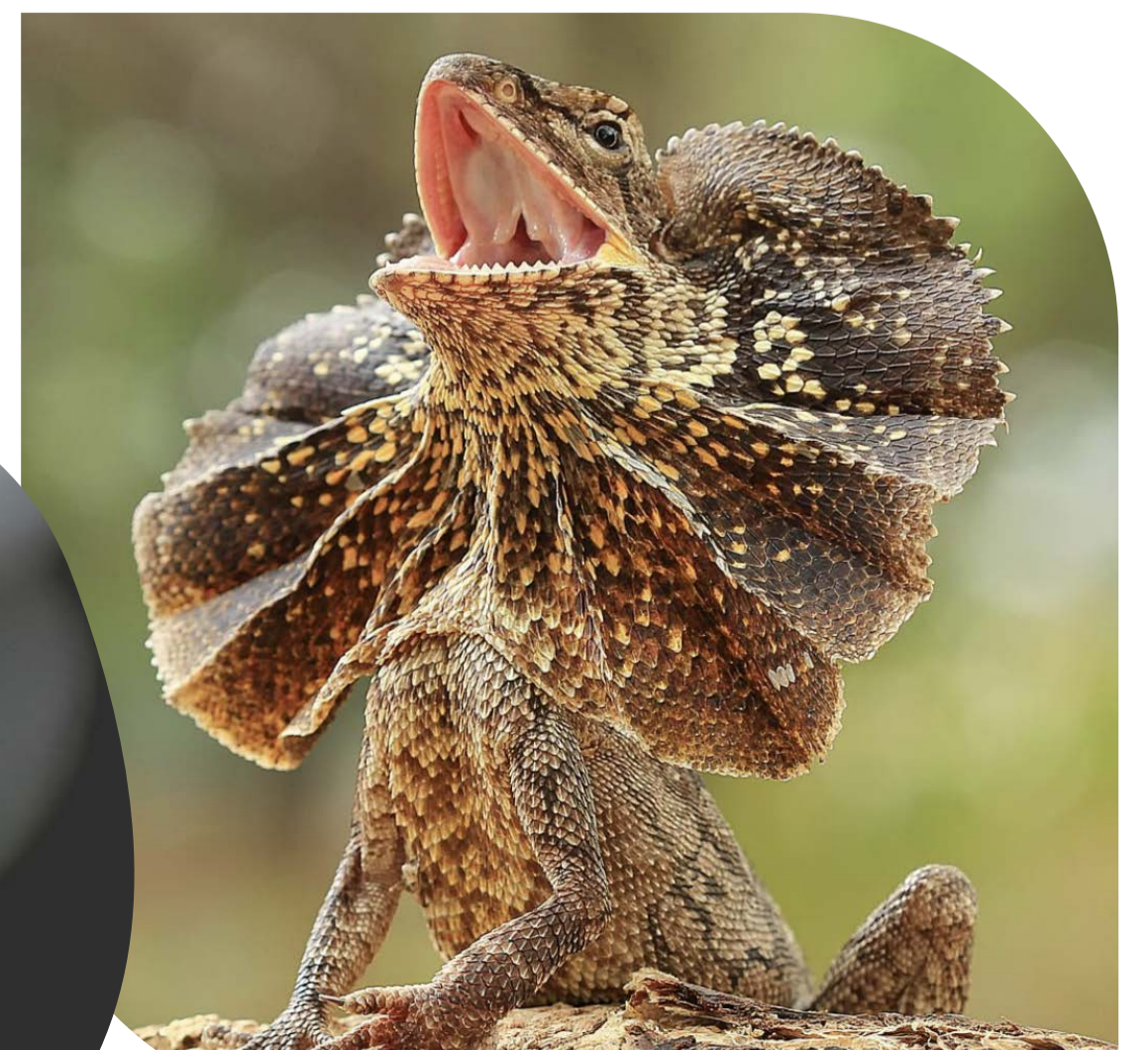
Grace Bondoc | Clare Brown | Catherine Dolle-Samuel | Sarah El-Khansa | Sally Glass
Danica Gluvakov | Belinda Huang | Rufina Ismail | Jane Jamieson | Laima Karklins | Linda Kemp
Samantha Matwijkeno | Liz Mulcare | Nancy Nicholls | Rina Pinto | Rachel Yang | Fiona Yue

Tenor

Clive Arasaratnam-Smith | David Archer | Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Nalin Gupta | Ian Jenson
Gabriel Newman | Isaac Powell | Mohsen Shamsavarzadeh | Spencer Thew

Bass

Jose Augusto | Steve Barnett | Don Church
Cameron Glass | Ivars Karklins
Michael West | Dominic Wong



CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

When I was a young classical musician, my experience of music connected with Australia's First Peoples came in two forms: recordings from the Central Desert, or, in the concert hall, music by non-Indigenous composers using Indigenous language for their titles, setting melodies recorded from Indigenous peoples (needless to say, usually without the relevant cultural permissions).

At concerts these days, you may have noticed quite a few works by Indigenous composers. New commissions, works for orchestra, choir, opera. So where did they all come from?

I think Dr Chris Sainsbury would tell you, they've always been there. He talks about a lack of access and opportunities for many Indigenous composers, and the expectations of non-Indigenous audiences that music by our First Peoples should 'sound Aboriginal' was also a problem.

And this is where the Ngarra-burria: First Peoples Composers program steps in.

Founded in 2016 by Chris, with partners the Australian Music Centre, Moogahlin Performing Arts, APRA AMCOS, the ANU School of Music and the program's first Ensemble in Residence, Ensemble Offspring, Ngarra-burria offers professional development to First Peoples composers.

As Chris writes in his excellent Currency House platform paper from 2019, the program's focus is 'to identify Indigenous composers not yet properly represented, or heard across new art music and jazz, and support them in creating works of new Indigenous music in score format.'

In short - if you don't go to university in Australia, and you don't meet a cohort of fellow musicians who can play your work, and you never learn how to write things down so they can be shared - it's very difficult to be heard publicly. And the barriers to university training are many; not least of which is, university simply doesn't suit everyone.

As a choir that was founded to bring equal opportunity to singers and audience who might otherwise not be able to experience high-level classical choral music in western Sydney, River City Voices stands right beside Ngarra-burria in wanting to create opportunities for voices that haven't been heard enough.

Working on this program has enriched us and enlivened us. And, in this very important year, where there's been much discussion around who has a voice, who doesn't, and who gets to decide, we've chosen to use this concert to make sure that at least the voices of our fellow musicians are shared with all of you.

Program at a Glance

Blue Sky Country Christmas is a program of songs created by Indigenous artists. Many are being heard for the first time tonight; some have been performed by the composers, but not by a choir. The concert opens with a warm and welcoming melody from Kevin 'Gavi' Duncan, a proud Gomeri, Mandandanji and Awaba man. The rich harmonies Chris Sainsbury has given the choir in this arrangement underline the song's message, told in Gomeri language: 'we come together with mother to dance. In this way, we all celebrate as one.'

The second piece is the only one already heard within the walls of this beautiful cathedral. It is the first work you'll hear tonight by Elizabeth Sheppard, a musician of Noongar heritage, with Yamatji and Gandangarra connections.

Now living on Burrumatta Dharug-speaking country, Elizabeth was a Cantor at this very cathedral for many years; *Mary Moorditj Ngaangk* (*Mary Gentle Mother*) was premiered here in 2007. This Advent carol is a declamation of faith and an affirmation of the treaty between the Catholic Church and the Noongar, who are singing an invocation to Christ to sit with the community at their campfires.



Photo:
Belinda Dipalo

The following carol, *Not in a Golden Palace*, would sound right at home in any traditional carol program, with its four-part harmony, memorable melody, and multi-layered text, telling the Nativity story and reminding us of our moral obligations to each other and to the world we live in. Elizabeth carries this reminder into *Gandangarragal*, which River City Voices commissioned in 2020. The song is both a lament for the losses of the 2019 bushfires in the Blue Mountains, and a musical calling-forth of the new life there which it is now our responsibility to sustain.

Aunty Marlene Cummins' soulful *Marloo's Blues* taps into the shared experiences of Black America and Black Australia. A Guguyelandji and Woppaburra woman, Aunty Marlene was raised in a politically active family and has a powerful connection with the blues as a vehicle for both deep personal expression and social justice. As producer Richard Field puts it, "The life Marlene has lived is closer to the life that produced those original blues singers like Muddy Waters, than any contemporary American blues artist."

Tim Gray's *Namatjira Haven* is also deeply personal, a contemporary folk song with a jazz groove. Tim is a Gumbaynggirr/Wiradjuri man, and this song - the first he ever wrote - sings his story of rehabilitation and recovery from addiction. It's a frank and vulnerable confession, as he looks ahead to the long 'twenty-four hour road' to start his recovery.

After this, Yorta Yorta woman Deborah Cheetham-Fraillon's *Christmas With You* reminds us all of the many people who will spend Christmas separated from someone they love. Deborah wrote this song for the 2020 ABC Classic Choir, after the first year of Covid lockdowns, but the message of loss and longing at this time remains a truth for many of us at this time of year.

Despite a hard year, however, Christmas is also a time for anticipation and excitement, which is where Chris Sainsbury's *Sleep My Dears* and Kirli Saunders and Elena Kats-Chernin's *Summer Together* come in. Although not a Christmas song (more 'Halloween', says Chris), the 'menacing lullaby' of *Sleep My Dears* reminds us of the many tactics parents will employ to keep their kids in bed after dark, from threats to promises. Chris, a Dharug man, has decorated his score with lots of fun instructions for the performers, including 'with a sting' and 'more sinister', but also wants to reassure us all 'I never sang this to my children!' Presuming everyone survives the night, celebration abounds in *Summer Together*, this year's cheerful ABC Classic Choir song, with lyrics by Gunai woman Kirli Saunders and music by Elena Kats-Chernin.

As a choir conductor, one of the most frequent complaints I hear at Christmas is from choristers who are sick of singing about snow. Elizabeth Sheppard's *Blue Sky Country* is an antidote to this, describing a Christmas we'll all recognise, with wide skies, magpies and kookaburras. In both this carol and the next, *Ngangk Yira Sunrise Carol*, Elizabeth blends Noongar and English lyrics. 'Ngank yira' means the rising sun, and this carol celebrates the birth of a new day in tandem with the birth of the Christ child.

The rising sun continues in our final song, Nicole Smede's *Padla*. Nicole, of Warrimay Birrbay, English and Irish descent, wrote *Padla* when experiencing sunrise in the Big Sky Country of outback Australia for the first time. The words, in the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka language, state simply that 'long time ago, [Aboriginal] women and men used to walk/look around. Now white and Aboriginal share Country together'.

These words are a perfect summary of the generosity and openness with which First Nations composers have come to this project. All composers were free to share with us whichever music and message they chose, and this beautiful *Blue Sky Country Christmas* program was the result. May your holiday season be marked by generosity and sharing, and may you carry it forward into 2024, across all communities and peoples.

© Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

River City Voices

gratefully acknowledges and thanks
Blue Sky Country Christmas' Major Program Sponsor

—
**PARRAMATTA
SQUARE**
—



Marlene Cummins

A Guguyelandji and Woppaburra woman, **Marlene Cummins** is Australia's foremost Indigenous blues performer. She is a singer, songwriter, musician, painter, broadcaster, actor, dancer and activist who was born in the South West Queensland town of Cunnamulla, and expresses herself through her music and art.

Marlene is a proud Guguyelandji and Woppaburra woman, who was raised amidst the Aboriginal Protection Act of the 1950s, a childhood that was instilled with a very political 'grassroots' upbringing.

At age 17, Marlene joined the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra and, not long after, met the leader of the Black Panther Party and became a founding member the Australian Black Panther Party. The Black Panthers in Australia was short-lived, but the presence ignited the political consciousness of many activists. The party also inspired the implementation of much needed basic services that were non-existent at the time, such as Aboriginal medical and legal services, which were largely run by women. Campaigning for land rights, medical, educational and legal services and general activism for equality and an Indigenous voice are the threads interwoven into Marlene's life and art.

Marlene knows the blues in this country from an Aboriginal woman's perspective, and her story is one of vulnerability, strength and survival. She refined her skills as a blues saxophonist and songwriter at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, USA, in the mid-90s.

In her spare time, Marlene enjoys busking and is an iconic fixture entertaining in Redfern, Broadway and Central tunnel.

Marlene is also an accomplished painter, whose works have been nominated for many awards including being shortlisted for the NSW parliament art prize.

In addition to her music, art and activism, Marlene has been regular broadcaster on Koori Radio for 33 years, with her renowned blues show, *Marloo's Blues*, picking up a "Deadly Award" in 2009 and a Broadcaster of the Year award.

Marlene's first release was an EP titled *Whichway Up*, released in 2008. Her first full-length album, *Koori Woman Blues*, is a mixture of original and traditional blues songs.

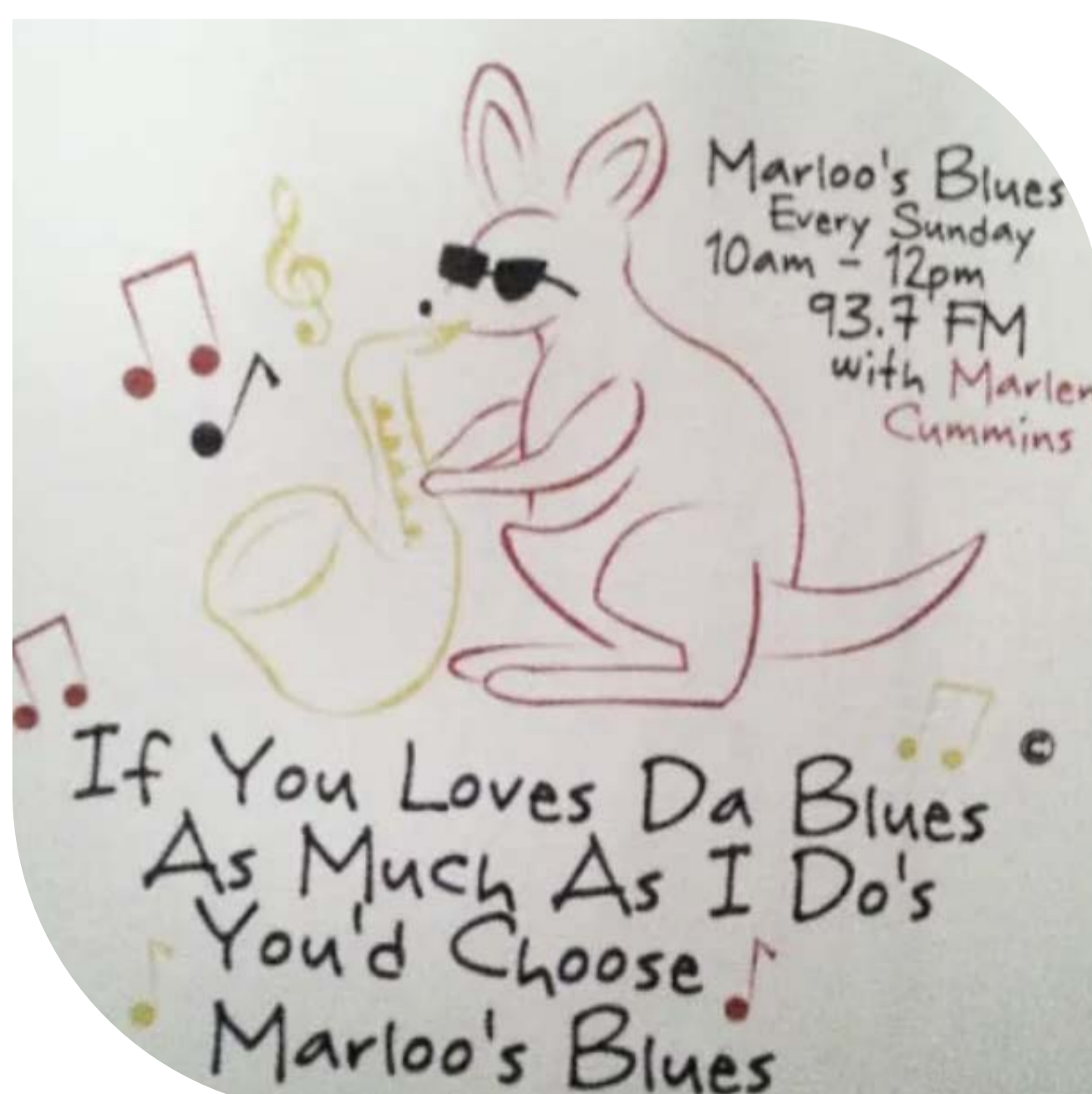
In 2019, Marlene joined the Ngarra-Burria First Peoples Composers program and created a number of works for Ensemble Offspring. Her piece *Starting Over* from the Ensemble Offspring CD receives regular airplay on ABC Classic.



About Marloo's Blues

This song has evolved from a "catch phrase" to a fully fledged notated choral work!

Originally a promotional line for Aunty Marlene's radio show "Marloo's Blues" that has aired every Sunday on Koori Radio for the last 33 years, it next blossomed at the Yabun Festival, held annually on 26 January at Victoria Park, Camperdown. MC and comedian, Sean Choolburra, introduced the next act- Marlene Cummins Blues Experience - saying "Ooh why does she want to sing the blues? Make me feel sad!" and Marlene thought to herself: "Sean, you don't know the blues like I do! Makes me feel glad!" For Marlene, singing the blues is historically a way of coming together to fight oppression - it's an uplifting anti-depressant! The melody and these exchanges kept playing in Marlene's mind, with an instrument only performance debut when Aunty Marlene participated in the Ngarra-burria program. And for this concert, working alongside Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, the lyrics and music have been notated for choir for the first time.



NGARRA-BURRIA: FIRST PEOPLES COMPOSERS

Kevin "Gavi" Duncan



Born in Moree, Kevin (Gavi) Duncan is a Gomilaroi, Mandandanji, Awaba man whose artwork stems from his connection to country and ancestors.

Duncan started painting at the age of 13 inspired by listening to stories passed down from his grandfather and grandmother, his parents, aunts, uncles, and many Aboriginal elders throughout his life. Gavi believes that "To be one with Mother Earth, is to be one in Spirit, Mind and Body, which is to be whole in life itself."

Duncan originally trained as a carpenter and joiner before joining the Aboriginal & Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) in 1980 and was a member for seven years. During that time, Duncan's artistic career saw him design posters (Survival Day), magazine covers (NSW Law Bulletin), an Australia Post booklet, murals (eg. Australian Museum Archway; New York City Pathfinder Mural Project), and set and stage designs (ABC TV, AIDT, David Bowie's clip "Let's Dance"). He staged an exhibition at the Boomalli Aboriginal Gallery and designed many logos (eg. NSW Police, NSW Courts Administration, Newcastle University Umuliko Logo). Gavi then joined the Tranby Aboriginal College where he participated in the Big Red Diary project.

In the '90's and into the 2000's, Duncan worked as a performer/actor at Old Sydney Town, whilst also branching into a career as an Aboriginal Education Officer (Catholic Schools), Aboriginal Heritage Officer (DLALC, NSW State Forests) and Youth Officer (Youth Connections). Duncan has also specialised in fabric design (Pierre Chevalier, France-Fabric; Arts Australia Design) and emu egg artistry examples of which are on display at the Cook Islands Gallery, Powerhouse Museum, Australian Museum Sydney, NSW Art Gallery and Hogarth Galleries. Other artworks have been displayed at the John Webber Gallery New York, Coee Galleries in Sydney, and Gosford City Gallery.

About Naiyee Nayawa

This song, words and melody, came to Duncan one night in a dream, a gift he believes came directly from his ancestors.

Duncan draws inspiration for all of his art and creativity from his people. Performance of songs is not only a way to preserve language, but counteracts the historic impact and effects of colonisation, through revival of and increased connection to his people's ongoing cultural practice.

Awakening from the dream, Gavi immediately got up and recorded what he had heard on his phone, eventually performing it live with clapsticks for the first time at the [5 Lands Walk](#), a physical, spiritual and cultural journey along 10km of spectacular coastline linking five villages on Darkinjung Country, (NSW Central Coast) held annually in June. Naiyee Nayawa has now become the event's "anthem", and Gavi is excited to hear its first arrangement for and performance by a choir.

Tim Gray



Tim Gray is a Gumbaynggirr/Wiradjuri man who studied at Eora College in 2010-11, 2013 and 2016. As a child he was trained in classical piano, and he has always loved film music highlighting his inspirations as John Williams, Ennio Morricone, John Carpenter, and Hans Zimmer, to name a few. Tim is an accomplished singer/songwriter who has released 2 albums with reggae fusion group Green Hand Band, in which he plays the keyboard and sings. He sings in a group called Voices Carry lead by Sydney choral director Tania Bowra. He came out of the emerging artists program at Gadigal/Koori Radio and is the presenter of Koori Radio show Social Change. He is a board member of Tribal Warrior Corporation and was a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel for City of Sydney. Tim also works for Barangaroo as an Aboriginal Cultural guide and as an Engagement Officer for GambleAware.

Tim connected with the Ngarra-burria First Peoples Composers program eight years ago and has material on two Ensemble Offspring CDs which find regular airplay on ABC Classic. His commissions include from Canberra Grammar School, and Ensemble Offspring with Orchestra Victoria Chamber Players.

About Namatjira Haven

Tim was two months into a stint at Namatjira Haven ('Nama') - a drug and alcohol healing centre in Alstonville for Aboriginal men - when he wrote his first ever song without any instrument, sitting alone in his bedroom. Every Thursday musicians would come to Nama to perform and share their stories, and Tim was inspired to give it a go! (in fact a CD had already been made featuring Nama songs as well as the Centre subsequently building a new recording studio). He brought his song to class and workshopped it, including using his early training on keyboard to add accompaniment.

Back in Sydney, Tim joined the singing group Block Harmony which was based at the Redfern Community Centre. He and his singing mates made a point of regularly attending Nama Open Days and performing, including his own song "Namatjira Haven", to inspire and encourage a new group of musicians and songwriters. It's been a thrill for Tim to see his solo vocal grow into a fully notated choral song!

Elizabeth Sheppard

Elizabeth Sheppard's music combines ancient Noongar Aboriginal musical traditions with contemporary themes, using expressive, culturally infused motifs and textures. Through this fusion of old and new, she strengthens ties to country and kin, and educates community groups. Her extended family, dispersed across Australia, keep music, story and gardening traditions alive, that connect them to the ancient songlines that crisscross Australia. Together with colleagues in education, churches, Aboriginal and Western law, and grassroots activism, Elizabeth also explores contemporary and historical Australian cultural, governance and religious scenarios in her music. Her *Kooranginy Suite* on invasion, mourning and the hope of peace through truth telling, was premiered by Ensemble Offspring in November 2017, recorded at the Australian National University, replayed at Biame's Nhunghu Festival at Brewarrina in 2017, featured on ABC Classic FM during NAIDOC Week 2018, and is broadcast on ABC's New Waves podcast. In November 2018 Ensemble Offspring and Dharawal soprano Sonya Holowell performed her pieces *Kaya Mary Blue Pool*, *Warangka Makialo*, *Wonthaggi* and *Burradowi* at the ABC's Eugene Goossens Hall in Sydney. In 2019 The Song Company performed Sheppard's "Untitled" choral music at the Sydney Opera House in Nineteen to the Dozen, the Royal Australian Navy Band performed her wind quintet *Karlinkiri Hearth*, commissioned by Sydney Living Museums, to commemorate the archaeological unearthing and preservation of a Dharug Ceremonial Smoking Hearth at Parramatta, and fortepianist Dr. Scott Davie performed and recorded her commissioned fortepiano piece, *Kalgoorli Silky Pear*.



In 2020-2021 she sang her songs *Kaya Mary Blue Pool*, *Ngaala Maaman*, *Ngalak Noonook Balga*, *Mary Moorditj Ngaangk* and *Wonthaggi* at Sydney Conservatorium's Classical Song concerts, and also composed 17 pieces (43 min) of mainstage choral music for The Song Company's toured *Songs from the Heart* production. The Australia Arts Council awarded Sheppard's *Songs from the Heart* music (curated with six choral pieces from Dharawal composer Sonya Holowell and Anmatjere Arrernte singer songwriter Rhubee Neale and praised as "a sacred oratorio for our time" by music critic Pepe Newton) a \$25,000 grant for a second Australian tour in 2023. Sheppard's latest project is *Karollini Christmas*, an album and published Songbook of ten new SATB and Piano Australian carols. Her forthcoming projects are her *Minninup Pool String Quartet*, *Macquarie's Feast* (a mainstage production), her *Reveille Mass* for ANZAC Day, and her Noongar Song Cycle, *Bina Benang*.

About Elizabeth's Songs

Mary Moorditj Ngaangk is a bilingual Australian carol with English and Noongar language lyrics. The Noongar language (the composer's maternal heritage language) is from South West Western Australia. The parallel metrical lyrics join the traditional English and Noongar theologies of the Nativity, in voiced song.

Not in a Golden Palace presents the foundational social justice theme of the Christmas season in simple strophic chants, and links it to Australian First Peoples' cultures. Each verse begins with a "not" phrase that rejects worldly values, and progresses to the Nativity story, that expresses the Incarnation of Christ.

Gandangarragal begins with flowing water, ferny gullies and nesting magpies, and acknowledges the *Bidjawong* Water Dragon lizard, who reigns from his rocky throne by the water, and the tiny glow worms that silently illumine deep, dark caverns. As the sun sets, pinging semiquavers set against flowing melodies give voice to glow worm illuminations, butterflies flutter and settle in the dusk, and the song of the bellbird falls silent. This music invokes and honours the miraculous divine life that springs up after a disaster.

Ngaangk Yira Sunrise Carol begins with an English bell ringing "change" that is interrupted by a Noongar language chant. These two source motifs then combine in a celebration of the Christmas message of hope and goodwill that sends God's love out to the world. As Christmas goodwill is extended, the power and glory of divine salvation is celebrated.

Blue Sky Country focuses on typically Australian summer images, scenes, sounds and moods of the Southern Hemisphere Christmas season. Repetition, and parallel lyrics in Noongar, emphasize these features as constructive Australian ways of living on Country, that are offered to the world.



NGARRA-BURRIA: FIRST PEOPLES COMPOSERS

Nicole Smede



Photo Credit: Bonnie Porter

Nicole Smede is a multi-disciplinary artist of Warrimay Birrbay, English and Irish descent, living and creating on Gummēya Darrawal & Wodi Wodi Country. Proud of her lineage, she works with language reconnecting to ancestry and culture in song, sound and poetry.

A trained vocalist and graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Nicole has performed at Parliament House, City Recital Hall, Mona Foma Festival, and galleries and venues across Australia as a soloist and in ensembles such as The Song Company and Hinterlandt, and her voice has been heard globally on award-winning film scores.

In her artistic practice, she has created meditations, songs, soundscapes and music for podcasts and plays and her poetry can be found in visual and sound pieces, exhibitions, journals, publications and anthologies. In 2022 Nicole was a recipient of the inaugural Space to Create residency through Australia Council, Yil Lull Studio and ANU and in 2023 is a participant in Ngarra-Burria First Peoples Composers program working with Ensemble Offspring and a mentee through both the APRA AMCOS Women in Music program and South Coast Writers Centre Emerging Writers program. <https://nicolesmede.com>

About Padla

Padla was written in 2022, after a trip to Corner Country (where NSW, SA and Qld meet). This trip was to experience Country (the land) so I could respectfully and accurately represent it in compositions for a play about colonial explorers Burke and Wills.

During this trip, I lived as close to the land as possible: sleeping under the stars that stretched to the tips of the horizon; breathing in the mineral scent of red soil; marvelling at the patterned rocks of the Sturt Desert and the brightly coloured flowers and bushes scattered in dry creek beds; rising with the sun each day, heralded by hundreds of birds, and witnessing every spectacular sunset, as the colours warped the sky above the 360-degree flat landscape around me. This world was magic and foreign to me, having lived all my life between mountain and sea on the East Coast. It wasn't the barren landscape spoken about by colonial explorers, it was vibrant and whispered many ancient stories. I did my best to listen and record what I heard.

Padla is a celebration of Country and this landscape, its generosity and beauty, and of the gratitude for each day, acknowledging the interconnectedness of life. I thank the Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka people, and Les Harris Jnr for their guidance and for the permission to use language in this piece.

COMPOSERS

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO



Professor Deborah Cheetham Fraillon, Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer and educator has been a leader and pioneer in the Australian arts landscape for more than 25 years. In the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours List, Cheetham Fraillon was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), for "distinguished service to the performing arts as an opera singer, composer and artistic director, to the development of Indigenous artists, and to innovation in performance".

In 2009, Cheetham Fraillon established Short Black Opera as a national not-for-profit opera company devoted to the development of Indigenous singers. The following year she produced the premiere of her first opera Pecan Summer. This landmark work was Australia's first Indigenous opera and has been a vehicle for the development of a new generation of Indigenous opera singers.

In March 2015 she was inducted onto the Honour Roll of Women in Victoria and in April 2018 received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of South Australia for her pioneering work and achievements in the music.

Cheetham Fraillon's Eumeralla, a war requiem for peace, premiered to sold out audiences on-country at the Port Fairy Spring Festival in October 2018 and at Hamer Hall in Melbourne with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra on June 15, 2019.

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon's list of commissions for major Australian ensembles including works for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Australia String Quartet, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Rubiks Collective, The Sydney Philharmonia, Plexus Collective, the Goldner Quartet and Flinders Quartet. [Bio courtesy of University of Sydney]

Christmas With You was commissioned by ABC Classic to bring the community together in song at the end of an extraordinary year. Says Cheetham Fraillon: "In trying to make sense of a year of loss and separation, felt around the world I needed to respond and this carol was my chance. It came as a single thread of consciousness, my thoughts moving too fast for my pencil on the page and fingers at the piano. The longing I am sure we have all felt at some time this year. Wishing to be with those we love, when the choice was not ours to make. I do not apologise for the nostalgic style of this carol. There is longing, yes, but there is also hope. For me, hope is ultimately the message and meaning of Christmas." [ABC Classic Post: 3 November 2020]

Elena Kats-Chernin

As one of Australia's foremost contemporary composers, **Elena Kats-Chernin's** vibrant and distinctive music across all genres has reached millions worldwide, featuring at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, 2003 Rugby World Cup and 2018 Commonwealth Games. Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, she has received numerous prizes including Helpmann, Limelight, Sounds Australian and Sydney Theatre Awards, the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award and the 2022 Australian Women in Music Award (AWMA) for 'Artistic Excellence'.

Kats-Chernin has written for ballet, opera and theatre, and is performed by all major orchestras in Australia, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Brandenburg Orchestra and Australian World Orchestra; London Philharmonic Orchestra, Komische Oper Berlin, Deutsche Kammerorchester Berlin, City of London Sinfonia, BBC Orchestra, and in festivals across the USA, Europe, and throughout Australia. She has collaborated with well-known artists such as Shobana Jeyasingh, Didy Veldman, Mahan Esfahani, Avi Avital, Richard Tognetti, Michael Collins, Axel Ranisch, Igor Bauersima, Tamara-Anna Cislowska, Simone Young, Marin Alsop, David Porcelijn, and many more.



Photo Credit: Vicki Lauren

Kats-Chernin's opera, *WHITELEY*, for Opera Australia (libretto by Justin Fleming) on the life of iconic Australian artist, Brett Whiteley, was nominated in the 2020 International Opera Awards for 'Best new opera'; Eliza Aria from ballet *Wild Swans* (choreographer Meryl Tankard) was made famous by British bank Lloyds TSB; Russian Rag in award-winning claymation film *Mary and Max*. Kats-Chernin also composed the music for the first ever Australian episodic opera for television, *The Divorce*, (libretto by Joanna Murray-Smith) watched by over a million viewers on ABC TV. Recent world premieres include new works commissioned for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and more, including new music for film, string ensembles, and a fourth piano concerto.

2023 has held notable world premieres: first violin concerto, 'Fantasie im Wintergarten', commissioned for violinist Emily Sun by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra; music for E.A. Dupont's silent film *Variété* from 1925; 'KAIROS' presented by FORM Dance Project for Sydney Festival; her children's opera Nils Holgersson's *Wondrous Adventures* at Komische Oper Berlin; 'Human Waves', commissioned by Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, with libretto by Tamara-Anna Cislowska; and as Composer-in-residence at Magdeburg and Bremerhaven during the 2023/24 season, premieres of a new production of Kats-Chernin's operatic version of *The Wind in the Willows*.

{Bio courtesy of Cinque Artist Management.}

Summer Together, commissioned by ABC Classic, was written in collaboration with Gunai woman and poet **Kirli Saunders**. The song captures the quintessential Australian summer: sharing a feed, being outdoors, spending time with loved ones. Kats-Chernin says, "Kirli brought me this one page of words, which were just perfect to set. She talks about people coming together, having a picnic and having beautiful feed. They could be in the mountains, in the desert, camping by the forests or by the sea. And then she names different places in the First Nations languages. They have this innate inner rhythm which leapt at me."

[ABC Classic Post: Ria Andriani, 7 Sep 2023]

Dr Christopher Sainsbury

Christopher Sainsbury composes in various genres, and his recent works include an opera *The Visitors* commissioned by Richard Mills for the Victorian Opera Company's 2023 season (with libretto by Jane Harrison), a string orchestra work *String Talk* commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for July 2024, *A Lithium Fascination* commissioned by the UBC Future Minerals Working Group and Axiom Brass Chicago as part of *The Heavy Metal Suite* (a collaboration with composers Yao Chen, Augusta Read Thomas and others), and *Ocean Song* - an album of ambient surf music with the Random Earth Band which features legendary Australian guitarist Guy Strazz and Chris on guitars. Some early commissions include works for the Australian Chamber Orchestra (1987), for Australian flute elder Gordon Yemm (1987), as well as for the Central Coast Philharmonia (1988) - a group from his previous home. Like most Dharug people Chris is of mixed heritage yet proudly Indigenous to Sydney. Composing music that responds to his home region is meaningful to him.



Chris is Associate Professor in Composition at the Australian National University (ANU) Canberra. He won the APRA National Luminary Award in 2020 for effecting change within the classical and new music industry through the Ngarra-burria First Peoples Composers program, and a Classical:NEXT Innovation Award was awarded to the program in 2022 for innovation in practice. He was also winner of the (Boston) New England Philharmonic Orchestra's Open Call for Scores in 2010-11. Since the mid-1980s he has made a sustained contribution to Australian music through composing, performing and teaching. In more recent years he has strongly advocated for the commissioning and programming of First Nations composers, and also advocated for more programming of all Australian composers.

Sleep My Dears

Sleep My Dears is not a Christmas Carol, but more a Halloween-style piece. It is a lullaby of a kind, and it follows a similar vein of being a menacing lullaby as does the Benjamin Britten/Thomas Randolph song *A Charm*. So there is a bit of a tradition there, threats to keep the children in bed at night. The inner parts for the choir are quite chromatic, and although the harmonic language of the piano part is tonal it is also quite dissonant at times. This is an older piece from 1992.

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Artwork: Nina Gotsis

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith Artistic Director & Principal Conductor, River City Voices

A passionate advocate for music as a force for change, Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith is a unique and innovative voice in Australian music, who thrives working across genres & disciplines. A conductor from Western Sydney with a socially-engaged arts practice, she is dedicated to giving a platform to artists whose voices are missing from the mainstage.

Currently Sarah is the Artistic Director & Principal Conductor of River City Voices, a symphonic choir for Western Sydney combining access to major choral classics with telling local stories. Pioneering programs from 2022 include 'What The World Needs', an album of choral arrangements of work by the neurodiverse musicians of Club Weld, and 'Slam Messiah', where Handel's masterwork meets performance poets. Sarah is also the first Associate Conductor of Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, where her work has included collaborating on the Young Composer Award, and contemporary music programs with physical theatre company Legs On The Wall.

In 2022, Sarah was also one of The Cad Factory's four inaugural CASE Incubator artist residents, for contemporary artists with a socially engaged practice. This led to two further 2023 projects in the regional communities of Pinnaroo, SA, and Narrandera, NSW; the second project was in collaboration with the Parkside Cottage Museum.

Sarah is an alumna of the 2018 Hart Institute for Women Conductors at The Dallas Opera, with whom she made her international debut.

Her opera credits include Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* (the first opera staged by a queer choir, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, 2009) & *Dido & Aeneas* (Macquarie Singers, 2017), Korie & Wallace's *Harvey Milk* (Left Bauer/SGLC 2015), Phillip Glass's *Akhnaten* (Ondine Productions, 2013), Campra's *Tancredi* (2010), Cummins' *Anacreontea* (2011) and *Timor* (2015), Krasa's *Brundibar* (2014), Leon's *Monsoon* (2015) and Menotti's *The Medium* (2015), all with Opera Prometheus.

Under the banner of Penicka-Smith Arts & Event Management, Sarah and her wife Melanie Penicka-Smith run Pacific Pride Choir, a touring choir founded to travel to regions where LGBTQIA+ rights may be legalised, but not accepted. They have toured to Poland, Vietnam and Cambodia. The Penicka-Smiths are both founding members of the Global Alliance of Queer Choirs, and together began the Lifehouse Volunteer Orchestra, bringing music to patients and their families at the Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, a Sydney oncology hospital. They are currently touring 'OCDiva', a one-woman opera with mezzo-soprano Yasmin Arkinstall and composer Eve Klein, about Yasmin's experiences living with OCD.

Sarah has conducted many Sydney orchestras, including Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra and Sydney Youth Orchestra. From 2005-2017, she was the longest-serving Music Director of the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, and for eleven years she was Director of Music and Head of Creative Arts at St Andrew's College, and Principal Conductor with the Macquarie Singers & Macquarie Chamber Orchestra. Sarah chorusmasters for a range of ensembles and festivals, including Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, and conducted all four years of ABC Sydney's 'Sing Out Sydney' event.

As part of the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program (2012-2015), Sarah worked with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra under the guidance of Maestri Asher Fisch, Johannes Fritsch, Marko Letonja and Christopher Seaman. Her most recent studies are with Maestro Carlo Montanaro.

Sarah is also in demand as an adjudicator and panelist, including serving on the Musica Viva Artistic Review Committee and as a juror for the Vocal/Choral section of the APRA/AMCOS Art Music Awards. In addition to her musical credits, she holds a PhD from the University of Sydney.

Su Choung is a Sydney based pianist and répétiteur. Most recently, Su has worked as a répétiteur for Opera Australia on their production of *Aida* (Verdi) as well as *il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Rossini) for the National Tour. Last year, Su joined the team at Victorian Opera for their premiere productions of *The Butterfly Lovers* (Richard Mills), and *A Christmas Carol* (Graeme Koehne).

Between 2020-22, Su was a young artist with Melba Opera Trust where she was supported by the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship and the Mel and Nina Waters Award. In 2022, she was awarded the Megan Evans OAM Encouragement Award through the Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyngue Foundation.

Su was Pacific Opera Young Artists program's répétiteur in 2019, as well as Music Director for The Other Theatre's productions of *Love Burns* (Graeme Koehne & Louis Nowra) and *Dido and Aeneas*. She is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with a Bachelor of Music Performance and a Graduate Diploma in Accompaniment.

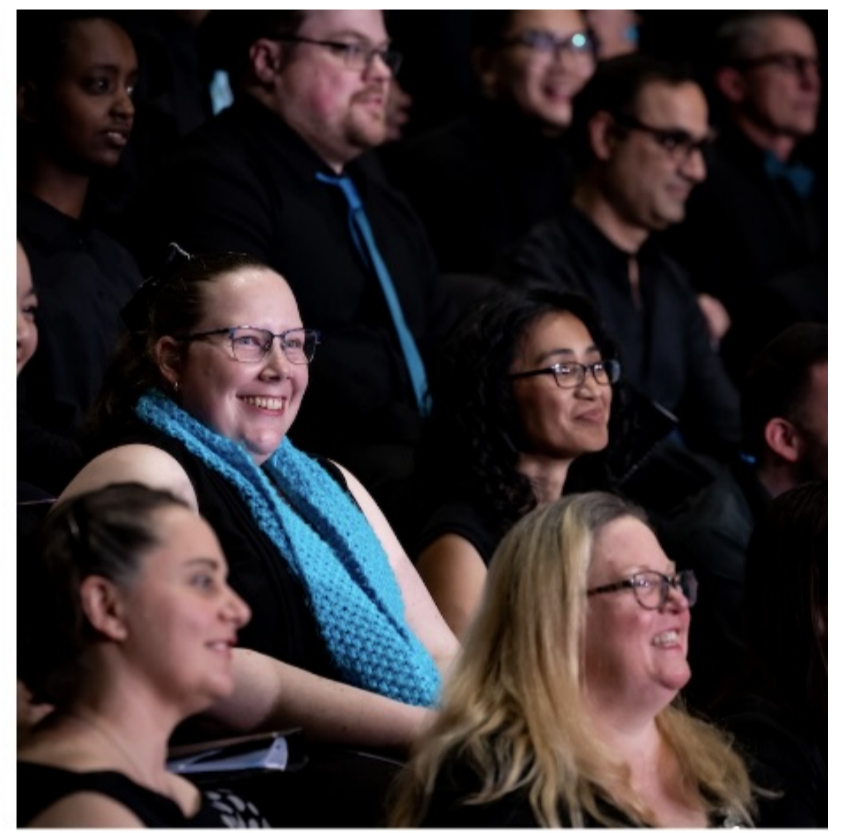
Su looks forward to returning to Victorian Opera for a dynamic production of Puccini's *il Tabarro* to be performed at the Sydney Festival 2024.



Su Choung Piano



GALLERY



TOP THREE: RCV's "magnificent" performance of Lux Aeterna & Nocturnes, St Patricks Cathedral, May 2023.

LEFT: Monica Trapaga wows the crowd at RCV's first ever fundraising party at PHIVE, Parramatta Square

ABOVE: Winners are grinners! and RCV chorister Susan Forss-Clark shares her experiences with RCV.

Photos: Grant Leslie



LEFT: Taking a bow post the premiere of "Human Waves" at the Sydney Opera House on September 9 . RCV choristers filled the front 3 rows and featured in movements of this new work by Elena Kats-Chernin and Tamara-Anna Cislowska. **RIGHT:** Altos backstage!



ABOVE LEFT and BELOW RIGHT: RCV tenor, teacher and cellist, Gabriel Newman led RCV's first music reading workshop for Absolute Beginners in Oct. **ABOVE RIGHT:** RCV performed for c.10,000 people as they toured the Opera House over its 50th birthday Open House Weekend in October (Photo: Daniel Bouda); **BELOW :** RCV singers entertained shoppers at Westfield Parramatta for its annual Santa Parade.



RIVER CITY VOICES

River City Voices is Parramatta's flagship, auditioned symphony choir. It was formed in 2018 to meet the community's desire for large-scale and innovative cultural events that expand horizons closer to home.

Led by its exceptional Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, the company's vision is to become a permanent and relevant organisation, renowned for its vocal excellence, surprising collaborative artistic programs, and events that reflect and engage its diverse community, their talents, and stories.

In its brief history, River City Voices has engaged over 2,000 artists, arts workers and community members through its public performances, development programs and workshops. Performances have included curated programs, festivals, corporate and government gigs, and collaborative community events.

In its inaugural year, River City Voices sang in the Parramatta premiere performance of *Carmina Burana*; at the Sydney Cherry Blossom Festival alongside TaikOZ; as a featured choir for ABC Radio's Sing Out Sydney at the City Recital Hall; and with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs for its performances of Handel's *Messiah* at the Sydney Opera House, and then in its own sold-out performance at St Patrick's Cathedral, again with members of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs accompanied by the Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, River City Voices collaborated with the neurodiverse musicians of ACE's Club Weld to record 'What the World Needs', bespoke choral arrangements of songs by the Club Weld musicians, which featured on the ABC's Art Works.

In 2022, River City Voices premiered two works by Indigenous composers Elizabeth Sheppard and Troy Russell, performed with Willoughby Symphony (Riverside Theatres), featured on the Sydney Opera House steps for its opening 50th birthday celebrations event, and presented 'Slam Messiah', combining Handel's *Messiah* with newly conceived slam poetry, (Riverside Theatres) After appearances at the Blackheath Choir Festival, members of the choir featured as the "Crocs choir" in a quirky advertisement for Catch.com.au's national campaign released in September '22 which is still running!

2023 projects have included Julian Day's public participation work 'Super Critical Mass' at Parramatta Gaol, a workshop/performance event supported by a City of Parramatta Council Community Grant and Powerhouse Parramatta; a concert performance of Morten Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna* and *Nocturnes* described as "A truly transcendent night". River City Voices then hosted its first ever fundraising gala event at PHIVE with the vivacious Monica Trapaga as MC and entertainer, followed shortly after appearing as a featured choir in Sydney Philharmonia Choir's premiere performance on the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall stage of Elena Kats-Chernin's and Tamara-Anna Cislowska's work "Human Waves" also broadcast on ABC Classic. Choristers were then thrilled to be the only choir invited to entertain thousands of people as they toured the Opera House for its closing 50th birthday celebratory event "Open House Weekend". Singers also managed to entertain shoppers for Westfield Parramatta's annual Santa Parade!

In presenting this final concert for 2023 as Ensemble-In-Residence for the Ngarra-burria First Peoples Composers program, River City Voices continues to demonstrate the choir's ability to break barriers, embrace diversity, and build a sustainable future for choral excellence in Parramatta.

Special thanks to the following individuals and organisations:

DR CHRIS SAINSBURY and all of the wonderful Ngarra-burria composers: MARLENE CUMMINS, GAVI DUNCAN, TIM GRAY, ELIZABETH SHEPPARD and NICOLE SMEDE.

MILI LEE and team at St Patricks Cathedral, Parramatta, RCV's rehearsal home

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PARKROYAL PARRAMATTA, thanks to Nadia Dambrosi

GOSPEL PIANOS

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GRANT LESLIE, Photography

ABC CLASSIC - Classic Choir Hour

SIMONE WHETTON, What's On, ABC Local Radio

Our RCV BOARD MEMBERS, led by chair and chorister CATHERINE DOLLE-SAMUEL, who so generously donate their time and expertise. And finally our wonderful RIVER CITY VOICES CHORISTERS (and significant others) - we can't do any of this without you. THANK YOU !

RIVER CITY VOICES
is supported by the NSW Government
through Create NSW



2023 marked River City Voices 5th year and with your SUPPORT we can celebrate our 10th birthday!

Our 2023 crowdfunding campaign ends on 30 December. Reaching our \$10K target will help us achieve another 5 years of delivering outstanding community musical events!

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HAPPY
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RCV!

2023

