



SLAM MESSIAH

SATURDAY 6 DECEMBER 2025

Bryan Brown Theatre
Bankstown

PROGRAM

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Warami, welcome to River City Voices final program for 2025!

Our incredible Artistic Director, Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith first spoke with me about this concept way back between COVID lockdowns, and I vividly remember thinking – oh, really?

Suffice to say her visionary thinking has led to the most moving iteration of Handel’s Messiah I have ever had the privilege of performing in. This is River City Voices' second Slam Messiah – and we hope that this heralds a new Western Sydney tradition of creative innovation, with meaning and resonance in our community.

To our poets Daniel Mehareb, Rania Omar and Charnel Rizk – thank you for what you share of yourselves in these incredible poems through this creative collaboration.

This program is also a fitting conclusion to Sarah's tenure as Artistic Director. Her standard of excellence, and passion for River City Voices' founding vision, has driven our journey from inception in 2019. Without her skill and drive, River City Voices would not have achieved as much in its short lifetime.

On behalf of both the Board and choristers, a heartfelt thank you. We know you will excel in the opportunities you are now taking. The ‘Nu’ exercise and ‘mind your own stuff’ have been mantras that have driven River City Voices to always listen and respond, while developing a positive culture. We will always take this with us.

As one of many small arts organisations previously part funded by Create NSW that were not successful in receiving support for 2026-2027, the future is challenging.

While we continue to pursue multiple other opportunities, 2026 will look a little different with fewer artistic programs. However, we are firmly committed to delivering the excellence and innovation our audiences have come to expect.

We have been heartened by our community who, by supporting our 2026 artistic programs through the current Give Now campaign, AusArt day appeal, and Christmas raffle, demonstrate their commitment to River City Voices' vision, relevance and contribution to western Sydney's cultural fabric.

Our engagement this year with Business Western Sydney and Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, as well as through the ongoing support of MPs, City of Parramatta, Western Sydney University and others, provides endorsement and recognition that equally RCV has a role in providing music that responds to and engages with our diverse communities, and through professionally engaging local artists and arts workers.

I hope that you enjoy and are thrilled by Slam Messiah, and we look forward to seeing you again in 2026 for our first program, Faure’s Requiem performed together with Australian composer Alice Chance’s Holy Dreaming, plus a few other gems!

Catherine Dolle



BOARD

Chair

Catherine Dolle

Director | Founder

Ināra Molinari

Directors

Anthony Cannell

Schon G Condon, RFD

Timothy Dashwood

Emma Ringland

MANAGEMENT

Artistic Director

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

CEO/Development Manager

Inara Molinari

Marketing Manager

Lisa Finn-Powell

Production Manager

Cath Dadd

Choir Coordinator

Olivia Sanders Robinson

ARTISTIC STAFF

Principal Conductor

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Assistant Conductor

Oscar Balle-Bowness

Principal Pianist

Kevin Wang

Conducting Scholar

Adriel Sukumar

ARTISTIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Bina Bhattacharya

Robert Love AM

Amy Moon

Brett Weymark OAM

Welcome to Slam Messiah. Thank you for being here with us.

This show is signature River City Voices: classic choral music performed as excellently as we can offer, with outstanding collaborative artists, new art, and local story-telling.

Choirs are like people — every one has its own personality —and, having stood out the front of many choirs, I can tell you that there is no ensemble quite like River City Voices. This choir is marked out as being home-grown Western Sydney by its courage and openness, its kindness, its work ethic, its willingness to be challenged (and to challenge), its diversity, and its grit.

Across our seven years together, we have made music together with other Western Sydney musicians, neurodivergent musicians, First Nations musicians, school students, emerging artists and local community members, everywhere from cathedrals to decommissioned jails, local parks to shopping centres, in the soaking rain in Sydney's suburban north for a TV commercial, to the iconic Monumental Steps and the glorious Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House, with St Patrick's Cathedral and Riverside Theatres, both in Parramatta, as our main homes.

Whether this is your first time in our audience, you've been with us from the start, or found us somewhere along the way, I am so grateful you're here. This is a difficult moment for me, as it's my last concert with this amazing choir. I'm heading overseas to pursue some professional development opportunities, and while I hope to be back in the audience with you at some point, I would love it if you would continue your support of River City Voices into 2026 and beyond. Every arts organisation needs the support of people who love and value it at the moment.

'Grateful' is not a big enough word to describe how I feel towards everyone connected with River City Voices: all our beautiful singers, our outstanding staff, the artists who collaborate with us, the organisations who have supported us, every audience member who has braved football matches and Sydney weather to attend a concert, all those who have served on our Board, and the woman who founded it all, with nothing more than an idea and a pile of fierce determination - Inara Molinari.

We made this choir to give Western Sydney-siders more chances to sing, to tell local stories, and to uphold local artists. River City Voices has grown beyond that into a community of its own. Thank you for being a part of it, and keep in touch.

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith



Sarah with Assistant Conductor, Alex Siegers
and Principal Pianist, Su Choung, 2019



SLAM MESSIAH

CONDUCTOR

DR SARAH PENICKA-SMITH

Assistant Conductor

OSCAR BALLE-BOWNESS

Rehearsal Pianists

EMMA OH | KEVIN WANG

Guest Rehearsal Conductor

JAMES PAUL

Organist*

SIMON NIEMINSKI

VOCAL SOLOISTS

KERRY NICHOLSON | SOPRANO

WESLEY YU | TENOR

MICHAEL LAMPARD | BASS

POETS

DANIEL MEHAREB

RANIA OMAR

CHARNEL RIZK

THE MUFFAT COLLECTIVE**

MATTHEW GRECO | VIOLIN 1

ELLA BENNETS | VIOLIN 2

RAFAEL FONT | VIOLA

ANTON BABA | CELLO

SIMON WOLNIZER | NATURAL TRUMPET

RIVER CITY VOICES

Soprano

Catriona Champion | Josephine Chan | Teresa Cheung | Maria Costello | Tamara Craig | Lyn Higgs
Deborah Howitt | Mylen Macasado | Iona Mathias | Sandy McAuley | Tracy Samuel | Nicole Senior
Karla Stewart-Sykes | Ingrid Turner | Sarah Wielgosz

Alto

Grace Bondoc | Linda Bryan | Catherine Dolle | Sarah El-Khansa | Sally Glass | Danica Gluvakov
Belinda Huang | Rufina Ismael | Jane Jamieson | Laima Karklins | Linda Kemp | Lou Merrington
Nancy Nicholls | Jennifer Nixon | Rina Pinto | Shannon Simon | Huong Tran | Isabelle Truong
Hiroko Uchihara | Fiona Yue

Tenor

Clive Arasaratnam-Smith | Stuart Elliot | Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Nathan Knight | Ian Jenson
Joshua Lenehan | Gabriel Newman | Peter Nguyen | Spencer Thew

Bass

Jose Augusto | Will Bond | Don Church | Miguel Eduardo Diaz | Sam Huynh | Ivars Karklins
Collin Rozario | Lorence Tan | Michael West | Dominic Wong | Peter Wright

*Continuo organ by Henk Klop, Garderen, Nederland 2004
Supplied & prepared for performance by Carey Beebe

** All members of the Muffat Collective perform on original
or replica Baroque instruments.

Why Slam Messiah?

Since 1742, George Frederick Handel's oratorio has been a crowd favourite, a contemporary Easter tradition in Europe, and a Christmas tradition Down Under. So what do you do when you're a new choir from Western Sydney, wanting to share the choral blockbusters, but also honour local artists and stories?

You look around for an art form that is at home in your part of town, and come up with slam poetry. Today, we've asked three slam poets to create six new works in response to key moments in *Messiah*.

Some of my favourite audience experiences, whether in a gallery or concert hall, have been when new work is placed next to old. You see new things in the familiar, and at the same time are reminded that all art is created by humans, who have things in common across the ages. It's very easy to see Baroque music as museum pieces, but that doesn't have to be the case. Today's slam poets show that the issues Handel and his librettist Charles Jennens highlight are the same issues we struggle with today: oppression and discrimination, selfishness, territorialism, a lack of listening and care. And both the music and the poems in *Slam Messiah* give us a chance for reflection and hope, and provide calls to action for how we can improve our world.

Whether you know Handel's *Messiah* or not, pause a moment to consider the astonishing achievement of both Handel (1685-1759) and his librettist, Charles Jennens (1700-1773). You could call Jennens a Handelian fanboy - he had manuscript copies made of every piece Handel wrote - but that would denigrate the spiritual connection he felt to Handel's music. His intense devotion to the composer frequently lifted him from depression, saying, 'Everything that has been united with Handel's music becomes sacred by such a union in my eyes'.

Messiah was Jennens' idea; Handel didn't ask him to write it. The musical world is full of works describing Christ's nativity, the Passion, or single events within Christ's life (such as Beethoven's *Christ on the Mount of Olives*). Yet *Messiah* is unique: yes, it follows Christ from birth to crucifixion and resurrection, but its full reach goes far beyond these events, looking back into the Israelites' history to explore the prophets who preceded the Messiah, and projecting forward to the birth of the Church. How many single musical works span such an epic number of years? (I can't actually think of any others.)

For the eighty biblical verses in his libretto, Jennens used only ten verses from the Gospels, including the angel's appearance to the shepherds. The rest of the libretto he selected across the Old and New Testaments, from Job to Revelations. In all of *Messiah*, the name 'Jesus' appears only once - in the chorus 'But Thanks' (which we are not performing today).

As chorister and retired minister Denis McIntyre once pointed out to me, Jennens' careful text selection from across the entire Bible makes the oratorio a work about the figure of the Messiah, rather than being a biographical account of Jesus. And there is a crucial reason for this.

Messiah is not simply a work to the glory of God, or a retelling of the Christmas and Easter stories. It is a political work. Jennens was a non-Juror, refusing to swear allegiance to William of Orange and his wife, Mary, and like most non-Jurors, he belonged to the High Church. His convictions were more than just politically unwise, with the Low Church holding much of the power under William and Mary; they were also out of fashion.

Jennens was living through the Enlightenment and the rise of Deism, where the natural world itself was taken as adequate proof of divine creation, and revelation, miracles, and the Messiah were rejected. Jennens was campaigning to keep his orthodox Church of England alive. The pillar of this Church was belief in a Messiah, and the figure of the Messiah was defined largely by the prophecies contained in the Old Testament. For Jennens, *Messiah* was a call to arms, a vibrant and colourful illustration of Biblical prophecy, and a reminder to his backsliding compatriots that they were straying from the path of truth laid in the Old Testament, and brought to fruit in the New.

Jennens offered this precious text to the finest composer he knew: George Frederick Handel.

Born in Germany, Handel moved to England in 1712 after a stint in Italy. He made a name for himself as one of the great operatic composers of his day, as well as an impresario who staged lavish productions of his own music. Yet, like Jennens' passion for the High Church, Handel's love of opera became dangerously unfashionable in England. And so, in the 1730s, Handel reinvented himself, transferring all his brilliant operatic writing to an art form which still allowed for solo arias, roaring choruses and, most importantly, drama, just without the costumes - oratorio. Many commentators have noted that Handel's oratorios are just as operatic as his operas, and in some ways *Messiah*, with its dramatic storytelling, gripping recitatives, and decorative arias, is no different.

Jennens and Handel had a well-established relationship by the time Jennens wrote *Messiah*. He expected Handel to 'lay out his whole Genius & Skill' on it: '[Handel] said he would be a year about it, & make it the best of all his Compositions'. Handel, however, received an invitation to visit Ireland, and so he dashed off *Messiah* in a mere three weeks (while also squeezing in six weeks on *Samson* before he left). 'I shall put no more Sacred Works into his hands, to be thus abus'd', Jennens lamented. (Not true: Handel managed to woo him into working on *Belshazzar* a couple of years later.)

In spite of Jennens' qualms, Handel's setting of *Messiah* remains one of the great works of the choral repertoire. I sometimes wonder whether it could have been improved even if Handel did take eight months to write it - although we know Handel revised it several times, largely due to the performers he had at his command.

Our performance today focuses on the most dramatic moments of the story, largely keeping intact movements which are built from consecutive Biblical verses. We hope to tell you a story; a story which, despite its focus on one man's life and death, spans centuries and peoples.

© Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith



Charles Jennens
(1701-1773)

PROGRAM

Sinfonia *The Muffat Collective*

The people that walked in darkness *Michael Lampard*

Isaiah 9:2

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

For unto us a child is born *River City Voices*

Isaiah 9:6

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Inhale/exhale *Charnel Rizk*

Pifa (Pastorale - Shepherd's Music) *The Muffat Collective*

There were shepherds *Kerry Nicholson*

Luke 2:8

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night

And lo! the angel of the Lord

Luke 2:9

And lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them

Luke 2:10-11

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And suddenly there was with the angel

Luke 2:13

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God *River City Voices*

Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men

dodgy.com. *Rania Omar*

Behold the Lamb of God *River City Voices*

John 1:29

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

Surely He hath borne our griefs

Isaiah 53:4-5

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

And with His stripes

Isaiah 53:5

And with His stripes we are healed.

All we, like sheep

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

All they that see Him *Wesley Yu*

Psalms 22:7

All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

He trusted in God *River City Voices*

Psalms 22:8

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.

Eulogy for the Living *Daniel Mehareb*

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart *Wesley Yu*

Psalm 69:20

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness; He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him.

Behold and see

Lamentations 1:12

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

He was cut off

Isaiah 53:8

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken.

But thou didst not leave

Psalm 16:10

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell, nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

Perhaps? *Charnel Rizk*

Lift up your heads *River City Voices*

Psalm 24:7-10

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

Why do the nations *Michael Lampard*

Psalm 2:1-2

Why do the nations so furiously rage together? and why do the people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed.

Let us break their bonds *River City Voices*

Psalm 2:3

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.

He that dwelleth in heaven *Wesley Yu*

Psalm 2:4

He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.

Thou shalt break them

Psalm 2:9

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Hallelujah *River City Voices*

Revelation 9:16; 11:15; 19:16

Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

I will *Rania Omar*

Since by Man *River City Voices*

I Corinthians 15:21

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The trumpet shall sound *Michael Lampard*

Corinthians 15:52-53

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

If God be for us *Kerry Nicholson*

Romans 8:31, 33, 34

If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?

It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

Markings of Hope *Daniel Mehareb*

Worthy is the Lamb *River City Voices*

Revelation 5:12-14

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.

Amen

ARTISTS

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 the Artistic Director & Principal Conductor of River City Voices, and the Associate Conductor of Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

In 2025, Sarah travelled to Europe and the USA on a Churchill Fellowship to research socially-engaged orchestral and operatic models, including visits to Santa Fe Opera, the Barenboim Said Fundação (Seville), the Barenboim Stiftung (Berlin), the West-eastern Divan Orchestra, the Refugee Orchestra Project (Boston), and the Lerici Music Festival.

Sarah made her international debut at The Dallas Opera in 2018 through the Hart Institute for Women Conductors. She has conducted a number of operas with Sydney companies, as well as many Sydney orchestras. She also works extensively with choirs, including previous positions with Macquarie Singers, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs.

Sarah was one of The Cad Factory's inaugural CASE Incubator residents, for contemporary artists with a socially engaged practice, later joining projects in the regional communities of Pinnaroo, SA, and Narrandera, NSW.

As Penicka-Smith Arts & Event Management, Sarah and her wife Melanie Penicka-Smith run socially-engaged music projects including Pacific Pride Choir, a touring choir visiting regions where LGBTQIA+ rights are less accepted, and the Lifehouse Volunteer Orchestra, performing at the Chris O'Brien Lifehouse.

They co-created and produced 'OCDiva', Dr Eve Klein's one-woman opera for mezzo-soprano and OCD advocate Yasmin Arkinstall.

Human Waves, Riverside Theatres, 6 September, 2025
Photo: Grant Leslie





Daniel Mehareb



Charnel Rizk



Rania Omar

Daniel is a performer, playwright and poet of Egyptian heritage from South West Sydney. He uses poetry and comedy to tell stories of his community for his community.

He has previously been a finalist in the 2024 Bankstown Poetry Grand Slam as well as having performed his one-man show *Big Nose Big Dreams* as part of the 2024 Sydney Fringe Festival.

Daniel has also performed and featured as a poet in poetry slams around Sydney including Bread and Butter, Westside and Bankstown Poetry Slam.

Drawing from his Coptic faith he aspires to use storytelling as a tool to weave decolonial political and cultural awareness in his art.

Charnel Rizk is a Lebanese-Australian multidisciplinary artist, co-owner of Parramatta Actors Centre, and founder of the production platform ALLTHERIZK. Her practice spans across music, acting, writing, and theatre.

Charnel has released six singles, including OWN MY ONLY and N.I.C.E, blending English and Arabic to create genre-defying soundscapes that reflect her heritage and experiences.

Her theatre work spans a wide range of productions, including her original work *Will She*, a one-woman show, presented at the 2025 Sydney Fringe Festival. Her writing has been featured on SBS and has received international recognition.

Passionate about storytelling and creative collaboration, Charnel uses her multidisciplinary practice to engage audiences, explore identity and place, and connect communities through authentic and impactful artistic expression.

She also works in the community as a speech therapist, helping others develop expression and communication skills.

Rania Omar is an Australian Lebanese Muslim emerging writer and artist from Western Sydney. Her writing often reflects on her lived experiences of mental illness, disability, domestic violence as well as culture and social commentary.

Rania has performed her poetry at many events, most recently featured at the National Theatre of Parramatta, Heartland Festival's Bars from the Heart event and the Sydney Fringe Festival. She has published her poetry in many online journals, including *SeaGlass Literary*, *Wild Greens*, and *FLARE Magazine*.

Rania was recently featured in an article in the Sydney Morning Herald about her poetry and love for Western Sydney as part of the *Ritual* anthology promotion. (Sweatshop)



ARTISTS



Kerry Nicholson



Wesley Yu



Michael Lampard

As an opera and concert singer Soprano Kerry Nicholson has performed the title role in *Rusalka*, Opera and Song Collective, (2024) ; *Gerhilde* in *Ride of the Valkyries* with the Willoughby Symphony (2023), as soprano soloist with the Symphony Orchestras of Strathfield, Willoughby, Manly-Warringah and Sydney Conservatorium performing in Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, *Mass in C*, Bach's *Magnificat*, *St John Passion*, Handel's *Messiah*, *Dixit Dominus*, Mozart *Requiem*, Schubert's *Mass in G*, Saint-Saën's *Christmas Oratorio*.

Other operatic roles include Santuzza, Violetta, Lucia di Lammermoor, Konstanza, Pamina, Königin der Nacht, Donna Anna, Rosalinda, Gertrude in *Hansel and Gretel*, Dido, and Celia *La Fedelta Premiata*. Kerry has also performed in summer festivals in Italy and Austria, in the Opera Australia Chorus, and Rockdale Opera.

Kerry was a winner of the Australian National Operatic Aria, several times a finalist for the Opera Foundation Australia Awards and a Young Artist with Pacific Opera.

Kerry teaches at Menai High School and has taught voice at the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music and privately.

Tenor Wesley Yu is currently completing his Master of Music Studies (Opera Performance) degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM). His many awards include: Sherman Lowe Study Prize and Merenda Travel Prize (2025 finals of the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition) ; Jane Ede Award (ASC semifinals 2025) and the Margaret Henderson Travelers Scholarship in 2023, 2024 and 2025 which supported him to participate in opera programs and festivals in Manchester, Chicago and Italy. His operatic roles include: Rinuccio *Gianni Schicchi*, Knusperhexe *Hänsel und Gretel*, the title role *Orphée aux enfers*, Brighella *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Tempo *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* and Septimius, *Theodora*, Nova in Oliver John Cameron's *M.T.H.R.*, and Scout in Hao Zhen's *The Lullaby*, an SCM and NIDA co-production directed by Lindy Hume. As a concert soloist, Wesley's credits include to name a few: Handel's *Messiah* (Sydney Town Hall (2023-2025)); *Carmina Burana* (Orff), *Symphony No. 9* (Beethoven), *Missa in angustiis* (Haydn), *Petite messe solennelle* (Rossini), *Krönungsmesse* (Mozart), *Magnificat* (Vivaldi), and *Aesop's Fables Suite* (Alice Chance). In 2025, Wesley sang the role of Didi, in the world premiere of *The Parts We Give* (Christine Pan), a Blush Opera production.

Michael Lampard holds a Master of Music from the University of Tasmania and is now based in Sydney, Australia. A principal artist with Opera Australia, he made his company debut in *La Bohème* at the Sydney Opera House in 2019 and has since toured nationally in *Carmen* (2021), *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (2022/23), and *La Bohème* (2024/25). His performances have taken him across Australia, as well as to Asia, the USA, the UK, and Europe. Michael is also recognised as a concert artist, noted for his work in German Lieder, English Art Song, and contemporary Australian song. Operatic highlights include major roles in works by Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Puccini, and Bizet with companies such as Victorian Opera, Melbourne Opera, Lyster Opera, CitiOpera, and Australian International Touring Opera. In 2019 he was nominated for a Green Room Award for his performance as Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* with Melbourne Opera.

ARTISTS

Oscar grew up in Cairns where he began his music education playing the Double Bass and studying Classical Voice. This passion for music led him to study a Bachelor of Music (Performance) at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music where he was the recipient of the Patricia Lucas Memorial Scholarship. He also holds a Master of Teaching (Music) from the University of New South Wales and currently teaches at Cranbrook School.

Oscar recently performed the role of Dido in a recast concert production of Purcell's Dido and Aeneas at the Llewlyn Hall in Canberra. Some of his other performed operatic roles include Normanno in Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor, Goro in Puccini's Madama Butterfly, Monostatos and The First Armed Man in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, and Mr. Upfold (The Mayor) in Britten's Albert Herring. His performed concert repertoire includes Stainer's Crucifixion, Handel's L'allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato, and Saint-Saëns' Oratorio de Noël. He has also performed as a soloist with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

Oscar has worked as the Musical Director for productions of Grease and Meet Me in St. Louis. In 2022, he was the recipient of the Susan Doyle Scholarship to support his vocal studies as a Pacific Opera Young Artist.

Oscar Balle-Bowness
Assistant Conductor



The Muffat Collective

The Muffat Collective is an Australian-based early music ensemble specializing in 17th and 18th-century Baroque music, performing on historical instruments. Formed by musicians who met in Europe, the group includes harpsichordist Anthony Abouhamad, viola da gamba player Anton Baba, and Baroque violinists Matthew Greco and Rafael Font. The ensemble is named after Baroque composer Georg Muffat and aims to recreate the sounds of the Baroque era through intimate concerts and audience engagement.



CREW

Production Manager

Stage Manager

Choir Coordinator

Publicity | VIPs

Artist liaison | Program

Videographer

Audio Engineer

Photographer

AUSLAN Interpreters (Mat.)

CATH DADD

MELANIE PENICKA-SMITH

OLIVIA SANDERS ROBINSON

LISA FINN-POWELL

INARA MOLINARI

MARTIN FOX

ROSS A'HERN, Sound on Safari

GRANT LESLIE

YASMIN DANDACHI | REBECCA KENT

DONORS

THANK YOU

We are so very grateful to our donors who have heeded our fundraising call-to-arms to date on **Give Now** ,during Creative Australia's inaugural **AusArt Day** campaign, and through our **Christmas Raffle** (drawn 12 December)
All donors who contributed
\$100 + earned a special shout-out "reward" in this program !

Ansa Fourie

David Hoffmann

Julie Burton

Helen Yiu

Ingrid Turner

Danielle Grant

Seth Molinari

Emma Ringland

Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

Eunbi and Dylan Watkins

Anon
X 7



Will Bond

Sharon Salter

Fiona Toose

Sam Huynh

Ian McCrae

Diana Weston

Dominic Wong

Catherine Dolle

Jason & Sue Coates

AND..... **MARK YOUR
DIARY** for our first
program in 2026



FAURÉ
REQUIEM

Friday 29 May, 2026
St Patrick's Cathedral
Parramatta

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 neurodivergent 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) and for its program at The Concourse. River City Voices was also 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.

2023 projects 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; Morten Lauridsen's Lux Aeterna and Nocturnes described by one audience member as "A truly transcendent night"; its first ever fundraising gala event at PHIVE with the vivacious Monica Trapaga as MC and entertainer; featured choir in Sydney Philharmonia Choir's premiere performance at the Sydney Opera House of Elena Kats-Chernin's and Tamara-Anna Cislowska's "Human Waves", also broadcast on ABC Classic; appearing as the only choir entertaining thousands of people touring the Opera House for its closing 50th birthday celebratory "Open HouseWeekend". The year ended with a truly unique and authentic Australian Christmas Concert with a program featuring composers from the the Ngarra-burria First Peoples Composers program.

In 2024, River City Voices performed Mozart's Requiem with Western Sydney Philharmonic to a sold-out crowd, and then teamed up with students from Macarthur Girls High School to perform classical favourites and more with a contemporary twist as it explored cancel culture in "Cancel Choir" - "Bold, thought-provoking but still light-hearted." We ended the year with our truly unique children's Proms concert All Aboard with Beethoven at PHIVE, Parramatta Square.

The 2025 season opened with the resoundingly successful Australian premiere performance of Brazilian composer Amaral Vieira's Stabat Mater, continuing with Human Waves, a wonderful collaboration with composer/pianist Elena Kats-Chernin and librettist/pianist Tamara-Anna Cislowska. This program included new commissions based on choristers' migration stories and heartfelt songs from choristers' lived and ancestral homelands. Our bravely envisaged “Slam Messiah” is yet another program that exemplifies River City Voices' mission to break barriers, embrace diversity, and to place choral music at the heart of Western Sydney's innovative arts practice.

2025 CHORISTERS

SOPRANO	ALTO	TENOR	BASS
Jennifer Baker	Grace Bondoc	Clive Arasaratnam-Smith	Jose Augusto
Kirstie Barfoot	Linda Bryan	Stuart Elliot	Steve Barnett
Catriona Champion	Emma Bulloch	Tanja Frzop	Will Bond
Josephine Chan	Katrina Cooper	Richard Heagren-Gibbs	Don Church
Teresa Cheung	Catherine Dolle	Ian Jenson*	Miguel Eduardo Diaz
Maria Costello	Sarah El-Khansa	Brian Julien	Cameron Glass
Tamara Craig	Sally Glass	Nathan Knight	Sam Huynh
Susan Forss-Clarke*	Danica Gluvakov	Josh Lenehan	Ivars Karklins
Lyn Higgs	Kate Hawkins	Gabriel Newman	Collin Rozario
Deborah Howitt	Belinda Huang	Isaac Powell	Lorence Tan
Mysten Macasado	Rufina Ismail	Yana Taylor	Michael West
Iona Mathias	Jane Jamieson	Spencer Thew	Dominic Wong
Sandy McAuley	Amanda Karen		Peter Wright
Christine Pendleton	Laima Karklins		
Tracy Samuel	Linda Kemp		
Nicole Senior	Lou Merrington		
Casey Shibakoski	Liz Mulcare		
Karla Stewart-Sykes	Nancy Nicholls		
Lynn Taye	Jennifer Nixon		
Ingrid Turner	Rina Pinto		
Naomi Von Senff	Shannon Simon		
Eleni Waugh	Macy Torrington		
Sarah Wielgosz	Huong Tran		
	Isabelle Truong		
	Hiroko Uchihara		
	Helen Yiu		
	Fiona Yue		

* Chorister Representatives

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



RIVER CITY VOICES' 2025 Season
is supported by the NSW Government
through a Create NSW Annual Organisation Grant



BINA BHATTACHARYA & PYT Fairfield for
recommending our wonderful poets

Special thanks to the following individuals and organisations:

The venue, technical and Front-of-House Team at BRYAN BROWN THEATRE for welcoming us to their wonderful stage
STAGE LEFT for providing the fantastic interpreters for our d/Deaf patrons at the Matinee performance
DONNA & PATRICIA at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta, RCV's rehearsal home
MATTHEW GRECO for support in organising orchestral rehearsals
SAM ALLCHURCH & Christ Church St Lawrence (orchestral rehearsal venue support)

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

And a special shout out to each and every person and organisation who has rallied as a program sponsor and donor since 2018.



Members of the RCV team (Directors, Tim Dashwood, Emma Ringland, Schon Condon, Inara Molinari, Catherine Dolle (Chair), and AD and Principal Conductor Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, meet special guests from left, Donna Davis, NSW State Member for Parramatta, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Mr. Carlos Pacha and Mrs. Mirella Miranda Fernandes, and Consul-General of Brazil, Mr Jorge Geraldo Kadri and Mrs Elza Kadri.
~ Australian premiere performance of Amara Vieira's ***Stabat Mater***, 23 May 2025



Sarah's last rehearsal at Cloister Hall, 27 November, 2025



Human Waves, (Songs of Origin)
6 September, 2025, Riverside Theatres, Parramatta
Photo: Grant Leslie

W W W . R I V E R C I T Y V O I C E S . O R G . A U

ABN 79 627 858 315