

ASTRA 60

2011

2pm, Saturday 24 September
IWAKI AUDITORIUM
Southbank, Melbourne

in association with ABC Classic FM

Andrew Byrne in profile

percussion

piano

voices

Speak Percussion
Michael Kieran Harvey
The Astra Choir and soloists

Today's Astra concert focusses on a single composer, and grew from a proposal from ABC Classic FM for a radio profile of Andrew Byrne's music, to be recorded for national broadcast on 'New Music Up Late', presented by Julian Day. The concert is given with the kind co-operation of the Australian Music Unit of ABC Classic FM, and of the staff of the Iwaki Auditorium. The program also combines Astra's singers and players once again with two outstanding 'performing engines' of contemporary music in Australia – Speak Percussion, Artistic Director Eugene Ughetti, and solo pianist Michael Kieran Harvey.

Astra's 60th-anniversary season in 2011 represents 20 Australian composers across six concerts, with a considerable span of generations and styles. In many cases there is a longstanding relationship, through which the evolving voice of a composer has become part of Astra's history as well, adding to the interest and pleasure of each new work. Andrew Byrne's contributions to our concerts go back over two decades. In particular, *Force* (1997) – text by Leonardo da Vinci – for choir and electric ensemble, and *Shadowshow* (2001) – texts by Joseph Furphy and Miles Franklin – for eight amplified voices and electronics, were vehicles for a kind of vocal theatre in a dense but animated polyrhythmic style that was becoming his own. With *Whispers and Cries* (2008) the choir and solo voices were placed in a more open formal environment with percussion and keyboards. Its second performance in today's concert is joined by new pieces in each of these other musical media – *A Ringing World* for percussion quartet (commissioned by Speak Percussion with assistance from Arts Victoria) and *Unfolding*, written for Michael Kieran Harvey, both works receiving their premieres.

Andrew Byrne is one of a remarkable span of Australian creative musicians to emerge from the former music department at La Trobe University (in existence from 1977 to 1999). Based largely in New York since the early 1990s, he has arrived at an individual language which draws partly on the rhythmic worlds opened up by the American experimental tradition – from Henry Cowell and Conlon Nancarrow to more recent minimalist music – and partly also on popular traditions outside Western art-music, in a period when the boundaries of classical music in general have become less clear-cut in relation to other kinds of musical culture. His music characteristically combines different speeds and pulsations within blocks of sound that are continually repeating. Repetition in music can be heard simply as reiteration, but maybe more profoundly as a fixing of an acoustic object in a musical space – a new kind of space where the listener's ears can play in and around the object or image. It might even be said that the audience is 'in the room' with the music, in an auditory sense that is not the case with more traditional, narrative-based art-music, where the listener is held 'outside the frame'.

In his second CD *White Bone Country*, released by New World Records, New York in 2009, Andrew Byrne created a series of 14 sonic environments, suggestive of different kinds of experience of the Australian desert, using solo piano and percussion in non-conventional combinations. The additional factor of voices alongside these two sonic elements in *Whispers and Cries* places the work in a kind of lineage with Stravinsky's seminal work *The Wedding* (1919-23), in which a ritualized fabric of collective and solo singing with keyboards and percussion opened up new expressions and images of human behaviour, remote from the narrative unfolding of previous cantatas and oratorios.

The three elements of voices, percussion, piano in *Whispers and Cries* are precisely composed in themselves, but are put together as modules in a less pre-defined space, somewhat like a layered mobile, forming distinct environments across the five movements. There is no verbal text for the vocal material throughout. The opening 'Night Music' is described by the composer as "a musical film noir" – flickering percussion with small vocal melodies and cries built around a pervasive evolving piano. The three inner movements create solo 'songs' respectively for soprano, crotales and piano, surrounded by other processions, halos, emanations. The concluding 'Pandemonium' is intended as "the mirror image of the first movement, exploding into the light of day. If 'Night Music' is a musical film noir, 'Pandemonium' suggests a chaotic circus scene straight out of Fellini."

The sonic image of the new piano work *Unfolding* is a soundscape of elemental force, made up of slowly evolving clouds of sound, with the piano's sustain pedal being depressed throughout. The virtuoso blur and waves of sound allow the listener opportunities to make out drones and ringing tones, and at certain points chords that "burst through the surface, before falling back and being swallowed up again by the piano roar." *A Ringing World* takes its title from the continuous web of metal sounds set in motion by

vibrators in the opening section, passing to the second, principal part titled 'Toy Tune', where the four components of toy piano, gongs and other light instruments function as independent entities in a slowly rotating sonic mobile, again a shifting topography in which the listener is left free to explore.

– JMcC

PROGRAM

Andrew Byrne

WHISPERS AND CRIES (2008)

solo voices, choir, percussion ensemble and keyboards

1. Night music
2. Song for Voice
3. Song for Crotales
4. Song for Piano
5. Pandemonium

UNFOLDING (2011)

solo piano

first performance

A RINGING WORLD (2011)

percussion quartet

first performance

Speak Percussion

Eugene Ughetti (Artistic Director), **Peter Neville**,
Matthew Horsley, **Arwen Johnston**

Kim Bastin *piano, organ, regal, celeste* **Peter Dumsday** *piano, organ*

Michael Kieran Harvey *solo piano*

Solo voices

Catrina Seiffert *soprano*

Justine Anderson, **Irene McGinnigle**, **Sarah Whitteron** *soprano*

Louisa Billeter *mezzo soprano* **Laila Engle** *alto*

Ben Owen, **Kym Dillon** *tenor*

Robert Franzke *baritone*, **Steven Hodgson** *bass*

The Astra Choir

soprano

Justine Anderson, **Catrina Seiffert**, **Irene McGinnigle**, **Sarah Whitteron**

Louisa Billeter, **Maree Macmillan**, **Emma Gardner**, **Kim Tan**

alto

Gloria Gamboz, **Anna Gifford**, **Joy Lee**, **Katie Richardson**,

Jane Cousens, Laila Engle, Joan Pollock
tenor
Kym Dillon, Greg Deakin, Ben Owen, Simon Johnson
bass
Alex Connelly, Robert Franzke, James Harland, Bradley Posselt, Chris Rechner
Steven Hodgson, Andrew Rostas, Chris Smith, John Terrell

conducted by John McCaughey

COMPACT DISCS

available at this concert

New World Records, USA:

ANDREW BYRNE, *WHITE BONE COUNTRY* and other pieces (2007)
White Bone Country – Tracks – Fata Morgana: Mirages on the Horizon
Stephen Gosling (piano) and David Shively (percussion)

New World Records, USA:

JOHANNA BEYER: *STICKY MELODIES*
Choral and Chamber Music 1932–43 (double-CD)
Astra Choir, soloists and ensemble
Merlyn Quaife (soprano), Craig Hill (clarinet)
Miwako Abe, Aaron Barnden, Erkki Veltheim, Rosanne Hunt (string quartet)
Nicholas Synot (double bass), Kim Bastin (piano), Peter Dumsday (piano)
The Astra Choir conducted by John McCaughey

Astra CD 1: Michael Kieran Harvey, piano: ***Threnody***.
Australian piano compositions by James Anderson, Andrew Byrne,
Stuart Campbell, Michael Kieran Harvey, Keith Humble, John McCaughey and Carl Vine.

Astra CD 2: Keith Humble, piano: ***Bagatelles***. Liszt, Bartok and Humble,
recorded at Humble's last public recital, at La Trobe University in 1993.

Astra CD 3: Lawrence Whiffin, ***murchitt a daydream***, with book by William Henderson.
Merlyn Quaife (soprano), Tyrone Landau (tenor), William Henderson (reciter),
instrumental ensemble and the Astra Choir, conducted by John McCaughey.

Astra CD 4: Kim Bastin and Joan Pollock, pianos: ***White and Black***.
Schoenberg, *Second Chamber Symphony* and other works for two pianos
by Schumann, Ravel and Debussy.

Astra CD 5: Astra Concert Archive: **"Achilles falls..."** Astra Choir, soloists & ensemble
Stefan Wolpe with Webern, Beethoven, Brahms.
Choral works with song, melodrama, instrumental solo and chamber music
Soloists including Miwako Abe (violin), Tristram Williams (trumpet),
and instrumental ensembles, conducted by John McCaughey.

Astra CD 6: Astra Concert Archive: **"first and last things..."** Astra Choir, soloists & ensemble
Bach, Lechner, Busoni, Kagel, Hindemith, Martin Friedel, Wolfgang Hufschmidt, Paul Celan.
from Bach via chant, speech-chorus & poetry to Busoni *Fantasia contrappuntistica*.
Kim Bastin & Joan Pollock (piano duo); Margaret Ricketts and William Henderson (speakers),
conducted by John McCaughey.

Astra CD 7: **Helen Gifford: *Choral Scenes. The Western Front, World War I*** (1999)
Poems by René Arcos, August Stramm, Wilfred Owen, Rudyard Kipling,
Frederic Manning, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilhelm Klemm, Charles Vildrac,
Edmund Blunden, Laurence Binyon, Guillaume Apollinaire, Vance Palmer.
The Astra Choir with speakers and instruments, conducted by John McCaughey

Producer, ABC Classic FM: Haig Burnell
Recording Engineers: Nic Mierisch, Carey Dell

Concert Production Manager: Margaret Lloyd
Venue Manager: Phil Brennan
Astra Manager: Gabrielle Baker

Front of House: Bella Miller

Thanks to:

Stephen Adams, Julian Day, ABC Classic FM;
Pat Kenny, Venue Coordinator, ABC Southbank Centre; Eleventh Hour Theatre.

Astra concerts receive support in 2011 from numerous private donors;
Arts Victoria, a division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet;
The William Angliss Trust; Diana Gibson; The Potter Foundation; The Salzer Foundation.

© ASTRA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

Chair: Graeme Leak Manager: Gabrielle Baker Musical Director: John McCaughey
PO Box 365, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051, Australia ABN 41 255 197 577
Tel: +61 (3) 9326 5424 email: info@astramusic.org.au web: www.astramusic.org.au