

WASO CHORUS SINGS: SERENITY

Sunday 30 July, 2.30pm | St Mary's Cathedral

West Australian Symphony Orchestra respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Elders of Country throughout Western Australia, and the Whadjuk Noongar people on whose lands we work and share music.

Ola GJEILO *Prelude*

Alice TEGNÉR *Ave Maria*

Morten LAURIDSEN *Nocturnes: Soneto de La Noche*

Johann Sebastian BACH *Jesu, meine Freude*

Olivia DAVIES *Murmuration* (World Premiere)

Ola GJEILO *Serenity* (O Magnum Mysterium)

Pēteris VASKS *The Fruits of Silence*

Andrew Foote conductor | **Gladys Chua** keyboard/organ | **Noeleen Wright** cello | **WASO Chorus**

This concert has no interval.

Olivia Davies' Murmuration commissioned for WASO by Prue Ashurst.

WASO CHORUS

SOPRANO

Valerie Bannan
Anna Börner
Alinta Carroll
Penelope Colgan
Caitlin Collom
Clara Connor
Rachel Douulton
Ceridwen Dumergue
Sophie Dwyer
Bronwyn Elliott
Ro Gorell
Diane Hawkins
Deborah Jackson-
Porteous

Michelle John
Gillian King
Katherine Langdon
Brooke McKnight
Natasha Meyers
Sue Nightingale
Hingston
Jane Royle
Lucy Sheppard
Sarah Shneier
Kate Sugars
Carol Unkovich
Alicia Walter
Margo Warburton

ALTO

Patsy Brown
Sheila Byfield
Sue Coleson
Jeanette Collins
Kaye Fairbairn
Jenny Fay
Susanna Fleck
Dianne Graves
Louise Hayes
Mathilda Joubert
Lynne Naylor
Fiona Robson
Neb Ryland
Louise Sutton

Moira Westmore
Jacquie Wright

TENOR

David Collings
Nick Fielding
Allan Griffiths
Christopher Ryland
Arthur Tideswell
Malcolm Vernon
Brad Wake

BASS

Justin Audcent
Charlie Bond

Paul Brayshaw
Bertel Bulten
Stephen Hastings
Francis Joseph
Benjamin Lee
Tony Marrion
Peter Ormond
Jim Rhoads
Mark Richardson
Tim Strahan
Robert Turnbull



Olivia DAVIES *Murmuration*

Based on a poem by Thuy On, 'Murmuration', from her book *Decadence*.

A note from the composer

I discovered this poem by luck when browsing the poetry collection in a bookshop in Fremantle. The poem comes from a book titled *Decadence*, by Thuy On. When I first saw the poem, it immediately struck me. Formed entirely from one word —'murmuration'— it's both visual and poetic, in a meta sense. Letters and syllables dispersed asymmetrically down the page gradually form the full word, combining into a single shape—a beautiful visual evocation of a flock of starlings shifting and gliding in the sky.

The music is generated from a simple canon and follows the formation of the word as it appears in the poem. I use *glissandi*, the technique of sliding between pitches, to evoke the image of a murmuration of birds, ascending, turning and descending. At the full statement of 'murmuration', the choir divides further with each singer repeating the word at their own pace. Here, the chorus is felt more texturally, yet still moves as a unified body of sound.

I'd like to thank Thuy On for her beautiful poem and for her permission to write the piece that it inspired.

PROGRAM NOTE

We commence today's program with two pieces from Scandinavia. The first is by the Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo (b.1979), where we hear his boisterous and joyful *Prelude*, set as two plainsong verses upon a drone, and framing a more serene middle section trio requesting the Virgin Mary to grant consolation and peace. We follow with a setting for women's chorus of *Ave Maria* by the Swedish poet and composer, Alice Tegnér (1864–1943), who was well-known for her popular Swedish children's songs (1895) but is otherwise largely forgotten. In contrast, Morten Lauridsen (born in the year that Tegnér died) is the most frequently performed American choral composer. His setting of the poignant *Sonnet of the Night* (in Spanish) from Pablo Neruda's *100 Love Sonnets* is a dying wish that, "When I die, I want your hands upon my eyes ... I want to feel the gentleness that changed my destiny ... and I want you whom I loved ... to keep flowering into full bloom." It's well worth searching for the full poetic translation.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) had an obligation to direct a cantata at every week's service at the dual Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche in Leipzig. He frequently wrote a new cantata but was not restricted to a specific format, so the movements of each cantata were interspersed either throughout the liturgy, or surrounding the sermon, or perhaps as standalone musical pieces for congregational reflection. *Jesu meine Freude* (Jesus, my joy) is the longest of Bach's more than 200 cantatas, and speaks of the believer who seeks to leave this vain world for an eternal life. It is a musically unusual setting because we hear the six verses of the original Lutheran hymn in slightly differing ways,

with each being interspersed by freely composed music accompanying text from Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter 8. In our performance we opt for varying choral forces throughout, rather than using soloists, and vary our augmentation of the *basso continuo* of cello and organ.

The hypnotising patterns caused by starlings flocking together in flight is called 'murmuration'. Olivia Bettina Davies' (b.1988) *Murmuration*, composed for this concert, gradually unfolds the single word 'murmuration' sound by sound. These fragments are then copied by subsequent soprano and alto vocal parts in canon, underpinned by a gentle drone by the tenors and basses, and eventually fly away.

We conclude with two highly contemplative works which both employ sustained harmonies and moments of gentle tension and release. First, we hear the inspiration for this afternoon's concert. Ola Gjeilo's *Serenity: O magnum mysterium* is a nativity setting that captures the great mystery of the newborn Christ child lying in a manger. (The ever-so-slight dissonances as chords collide towards the end of the piece are deliberate.) We conclude with the Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks' (b.1946) *The Fruit of Silence*, a sustained reflection of five stanzas by Mother Teresa that Vasks describes as a "very silent meditation". We hope that we have provided some *Freude* (joy) and serenity.

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For a translation of
Soneto de la Noche,
scan here →



For a translation of
Jesu meine Freude,
scan here →



For Thuy On's poem
Murmuration,
scan here →

