

Sirius Chamber Ensemble



Virago
Saturday 21 October

A concert in celebration of female composers

Louise Farrenc

Trio for clarinet, cello and piano in Eb Major, Op. 44

1. *Andante – Allegro moderato*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Minuetto. Allegro*
4. *Finale. Allegro*

Margery Smith

The Long Now for flute, violin and cello

Germaine Tailleferre / arr. Christine Draeger

Pastorale for flute (or violin) and piano arranged for flute, clarinet and bassoon

Cécile Chaminade

Concertino for flute and piano, Op 107

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Valerie Coleman

Portraits of Langston for flute, clarinet and piano

1. *Prelude: Helen Keller*
2. *Danse Africaine*
3. *Le Grand Duc Mambo*
4. *Silver Rain*
5. *Parisian Cabaret*
6. *Harlem's Summer Night*

Keyna Wilkins

Virago for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano

1. *Greta Thunberg*
2. *Grace Tame*
3. *Jacinda Arden*
4. *Angela Merkel*

Louise Farrenc (1804-1875)

Trio for clarinet, cello and piano in Eb Major, Op. 44 (1854-56)

Born in Paris in 1804, Louise Farrenc was an extremely talented pianist, composer, and teacher, and was also a true trailblazer. She was the only woman to be appointed as a professor at the Paris Conservatory when she won the position in 1842, and was in fact the only female tenured professor at the Conservatory throughout the entire 19th century. Farrenc fought hard for equality and equal pay while she held this position, as she was initially paid far less than her male colleagues and was only allowed to teach female students. After a decade of repeatedly requesting equal pay, it was the success of the 1850 premiere of Farrenc's stunning Nonet for winds and strings which convinced the Conservatory's director to finally agree to her request.

Farrenc composed three symphonies which are increasingly being programmed by major orchestras, but it was her music for solo piano and small ensembles which was most recognised during her lifetime. The Trio in E flat for clarinet, piano and cello, published in 1861, was dedicated to the clarinetist Adolphe Leroy, who was also a teacher at the Paris Conservatory. The work is in four movements, and all demonstrate Farrenc's unique compositional voice, exploring overlapping rhythms, a range of textures, interweaving thematic material, and exquisite melodies.

Margery Smith

The Long Now for flute, violin and cello (2019)

An Australian composer, Margery Smith is known for writing in various styles for a variety of instruments, but especially for woodwind solo and ensembles. She teaches clarinet, saxophone and composition at her home studio in Geelong, Victoria. She is also a Composer in Residence at the International Grammar School, Ultimo, Sydney.

The Long Now was written whilst Margery was participating in the program Composing in the Wilderness, jointly run by Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, the National Park Service and Alaska Geographic. The Long Now was first performed on 22 July 2019 at the Denali National Park Visitors Centre, Alaska. The nine composers who took part in this program wrote music inspired by some aspect of their experience in Denali National Park. For Margery, her inspiration for writing this work drew from watching the riverbed, viewing the braided rivers from a high pass as patterns below, listening to the rushing, gurgling water and smelling the fresh scent in the air. From her transformative experience listening to these rivers, her work portrays the deep connection to nature and its stories past and present.

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983) / arr. Christine Draeger

Pastorale for flute (or violin) and piano (1942)

Germaine Tailleferre showed much musical talent from a very young age, however, was nearly deprived of her creative pursuits by a disapproving father, and two discouraging husbands. She prevailed despite significant hardship, displacement and financial insecurity to become a successful and prolific composer. She was a member of the collective 'Les Six' along with contemporaries Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc, Georges Auric, and Darius Milhaud, who all lived and worked in Montparnasse in the 1920s.

With its simple, lyrical melody, the *Pastorale* displays Tailleferre's desire to bring comfort and simple joy through a soothing melody. Tailleferre often modelled her works on baroque dance forms, and this work, with its compound metre and lilting rhythms, is reminiscent of a Siciliana. Originally written for flute and piano, this work has been arranged for Wind Trio by Australian composer Christine Draeger, as a generous wedding gift for Melissa Coleman and her husband, Garran Hutchison-Menzer. It was performed for the processional at their wedding in April 2016, with Christine herself playing the flute alongside Ian Sykes and Alison Evans. The piece had long been a firm favourite of Melissa's, and it was a dream come true for her to hear it come alive in this new way, with warm wind tonal colours and beautifully balanced textures, on such a special occasion.

Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)

Concertino for Flute and Piano, Op 107 (1902)

Composer and pianist, Chaminade was born in Paris, and started piano tuition with her mother. When she showed musical talent, her father initially disapproved of her wishes of formal music studies, however, she did study composition, piano and violin privately. In 1878, Chaminade gave a salon performance with a program consisting entirely of her own compositions. This event set a precedence, as she embarked upon a career during which she would only perform her own works. She toured extensively throughout the USA, Britain, Vienna and Belgium until her declining health interfered in the 1920s.

Chaminade was the first female composer to be granted admission to the 'Legion d'Honneur' in 1913, and she also had the remarkable honour of recording seven of her own compositions for the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in London in 1901, which academics believe may be the first commercial release of a woman playing her own compositions. Though she was popular in England and USA, at home she was seen by critics simply as a 'salon composer', partly due to her romantic compositional style at a time when composers were exploring more avant-garde harmonies. It seems the critics are not easily pleased - whilst Chaminade's salon pieces were criticised for their 'femininity', her larger scale works were even less favourably reviewed potentially due to gender prejudices.

Chaminade composed a vast quantity of piano music, chamber music, songs, in addition to a comic opera 'La Sevillane', a ballet 'Callirhoe', and orchestral suites. Fortunately, almost all of her works (over 400 works) were published during her lifetime.

The Concertino is a staple of the flute repertoire, and is arguably Chaminade's best known work. It was commissioned in 1902 as a competition piece for the Paris Conservatoire, as is so many of the great flute works from this era, and a performance of this piece has become a rite of passage for aspiring flutists worldwide. Dedicated to Paul Taffanel, who was flute professor of the Paris Conservatoire at the time of its composition, this piece asks much from its performers in terms of technique, musicality, dynamic contrast and phrasing. It is lyrical, virtuosic, rich with luscious harmonic colour and allows for much expressive freedom.

Valerie Coleman

Portraits of Langston for flute, clarinet and piano (2007) is a suite in six short movements, based on the poetry of African-American poet Langston Hughes. Langston Hughes, was pivotal in a cultural explosion known as the "Harlem Renaissance", and like many African-American artists who lived in Harlem, Hughes had dreams of living in Europe - a life unfettered from segregation. His poems are so descriptive of the era, with references to particular settings and individuals that influenced him, in particular places such as Harlem and Europe. In this work Coleman incorporates many different stylistic elements translated into woodwind technique: the stride piano technique, big band swing, cabaret music, Mambo, African drumming, and even traditional spirituals. Each movement is a musical sketch of selected (and lesser known) poems by Langston Hughes, with the exception of "Le Grand Duc Mambo", which is a musical sketch of the Jazz Club in the scandalous red light district of Montmartre, where Langston worked as a busboy for 25 cents a night.

Valerie Coleman is an iconic, celebrated African-American flutist, composer and entrepreneur. Her 24-year legacy as the creator and founder of Imani Winds is the subject of an exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Highlighted as one of the "Top 35 Women Composers" by The Washington Post, she was named Performance Today's 2020 Classical Woman of the Year, an honour bestowed to an individual who has made a significant contribution to classical music as a performer, composer or educator. In 2019, her piece Umoja was performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, marking the first time the orchestra performed a classical work by a living female African-American composer. As a performer, she is a Grammy nominated artist who has performed with many esteemed orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout the USA and Europe.

Keyna Wilkins

Virago for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano was commissioned and premiered by Melbourne-based Syzygy Ensemble in 2022. Latin for female warrior, celebrates four contemporary female leaders, Greta Thunberg, Grace Tame, Jacinda Arden, and Angela Merkel. Each movement reflects the inspirational leadership, attributes and actions of these women who have notably overcome societal challenges, traumatic events and have inspired nations worldwide with their profound speeches. Each movement has a very different character. The Greta Thunberg movement is intense, driven, fast and quirky with spoken word chanting: "Ch... Ch... Change Is Coming". The Grace Tame movement is open and direct about things that make us uncomfortable, and really lets us sit with traumatic events and their aftermath. The Jacinda Arden movement is hopeful, graceful, lyrical and harmonic. The Angela Merkel movement is strident, direct and artful. Before the music starts in each movement, short sound bites of their most famous and profound speeches are played.

1. Greta Thunberg: How Dare You?: "We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not." (UN Climate Action Summit Speech 2019).
2. Grace Tame: Hear Me Now: "Share your truth. It is your power. One voice, your voice, and our collective voices, can make a difference." (Australian of the Year National Press Conference Speech 2021).
3. Jacinda Arden: We Need A New Generation of Leaders: "It takes courage and strength to be empathetic and I'm very proudly an empathetically-driven leader." (BBC Interview 2019).
4. Angela Merkel: Everything Is Possible "Anything that seems to be set in stone or unalterable can, indeed, change. In matters both large and small, it holds true that every change begins in the mind." (Harvard University Commencement Speech 2019).

Keyna Wilkins is a pioneering Australian/British composer-musician. She was one of three finalists for the Australian Art Music Awards for Individual Excellence in 2021 and 2018 (APRA/AMCOS). She has written over 60 art music works that are performed internationally and published by Wirripang, has released 9 albums of original music, has been featured on ABC, and writes music for film and theatre. Stylistically broad, her music embarks on a journey of impressionistic dream-like sequences alongside landscape depictions, existential spiritual quests, and whimsical gestures alongside driving rhythms, characterised by a passion for human rights, a fascination with astronomy, Indigenous First Nations culture, jazz, dance forms and intuitive improvisation.

Biographies

Emily Long plays in the first violin section of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. She is fortunate to play a Leandro Bisiach violin on loan from the SSO. Emily studied at the Sydney Conservatorium and the Royal Academy in London. Emily has performed in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the New Zealand Symphony, Opera Australia Orchestra, and has toured to Japan, Italy, China, Malaysia and Europe. An active chamber musician, Emily has performed in the SSO's Utzon Room series and was a founding member of the Sydney Omega Ensemble. She has recorded chamber music for ABC Classic FM, as well as CDs with the Linden Quartet. She has toured NSW for Musica Viva, and in 2023 appeared in the Four Winds Festival near Bermagui, and the Craven Creek Music Festival near Gloucester. Emily first performed with the Sirius Chamber Ensemble playing *Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time* at the 2021 Riverina Chamber Music Festival.

Jeanell Carrigan (piano) studied at the Sydney and Queensland Conservatories and then in Europe with Nancy Salas, Leah Horwitz, Pamela Page, Alfons Kontarsky and Karl Engel. As a professional musician she has been involved in many educational and performance based activities. As a teacher she has experience at all levels - primary, secondary and tertiary, in the class and lecture room situation and on a one-to-one basis. She has held positions of employment at the Hochschulen für Musik in Stuttgart and Munich, the Universities of Queensland and Melbourne and the Queensland and Sydney Conservatories of Music. She is constantly in demand as an examiner and adjudicator and is presently an Associate Professor in the Collaborative Piano Unit at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Melissa Coleman is an active freelance flautist who enjoys performing both flute and piccolo in a wide range of settings, including solo, orchestral, wind symphony, chamber music and music theatre. Melissa studied with James Kortum at the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music, then later with Alexa Still at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she attained her Master of Music degree in 2013. Melissa is a core member of Sirius Chamber Ensemble. A specialist in contemporary flute techniques, Melissa is especially passionate about performing contemporary Australian chamber works. She enjoys collaborating with composers in creating new music and has premiered many new compositions. Melissa is also a passionate educator, maintaining a thriving flute and piccolo studio.

Ian Sykes (clarinet) graduated with a Bachelor of Music (first class honours) from the University of Newcastle and a Master of Music (performance) degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He is a founding member of Sirius Chamber Ensemble, with which he has toured throughout Australia and performed new works by many notable Australian composer. He is a full-time member of the NSW Police Band, and also maintains a busy career as a freelance musician, dividing his time between chamber and

orchestral music, music theatre and pedagogy. Ian has performed in productions of *Mary Poppins*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *West Side Story* and *Sweeney Todd*. Ian has performed with Sydney Philharmonia, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Blush Opera, as well as the education programs for Musica Viva and Sydney Opera House.

Dr Alison Evans is a bassoonist, teacher, researcher and co-founder of Sirius Chamber Ensemble. Alison studied bassoon at the Queensland Conservatorium, Sydney Conservatorium of Music and at the Hochschule der Musik Franz Liszt – Weimar. Her Master of Music (Performance) research thesis focussed on the bassoon compositions of the German bassoonist and composer Victor Bruns. In 2014, Alison completed her PhD at the Sydney School of Public Health, The University of Sydney. Her doctoral thesis focussed on applied functional anatomy of the soft palate in woodwind and brass musicians. Alison has a keen interest in music education and multidisciplinary research. She is an active member of the Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare and the Performing Arts Medicine Association (USA). Alison currently works as a Senior Project Officer for the Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney.

Clare Kahn (cello) graduated from the Canberra School of Music, receiving a Bachelor of Music degree with first class honours, and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she completed a Master of Music (performance) degree. Whilst in Canberra, Clare was the inaugural winner of the Ruth Pfanner Scholarship for Cello, and she was also awarded a University of Sydney Postgraduate Award to support her postgraduate study. As a professional cellist Clare has worked as a freelance performer with the Opera Australia Orchestra, Canberra Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as playing as a session musician for the recording of many film and television soundtracks. However, having had a lifelong love for music theatre, this has been the significant focus of Clare's professional career, and she has been thrilled to hold the cello chairs for the Sydney seasons of *Hamilton*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Muriel's Wedding the Musical*, *Matilda*, *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, and *Kinky Boots*, and to have played for the Opera on the Harbour seasons of *Phantom of the Opera*, and *West Side Story*.

With thanks

Sirius Chamber Ensemble would like to thank our guest performers, Emily Long and Jeanell Carrigan, and Guy Gross from Church Street Studios. We also acknowledge program notes and biographies published in other sources belong to those of the contemporary composers featured, Valerie Coleman (vcolemanmusic.com), Margery Smith (margerysmith.com) and Keyna Wilkins (keynawilkins.com).

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