

Australian Chamber Orchestra

RICHARD TOGNETTI – ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



MAHLER'S SONG OF THE EARTH

DIRECTED BY RICHARD TOGNETTI

Program in Short

The music you're
about to hear

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An Encounter in Five Movements

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of Gustav Mahler

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Catherine Carby and
Stuart Skelton

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Inside you'll find features and interviews that shine a spotlight on our players and the music you are about to hear. Enjoy the read.

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WELCOME

We are delighted that two of Australia's most acclaimed singers, mezzo-soprano Catherine Carby and heldentenor Stuart Skelton, have returned to our shores to join us for this celebration of Mahler's astonishing *Das Lied von der Erde*, a triumph of beauty and expression.

Catherine and Stuart will take to the stage with Richard Tognetti and the Orchestra to perform Schoenberg's strikingly intimate arrangement of the work, which Stuart and the ACO first performed at Scotland's Edinburgh Festival in 2016 to critical acclaim. Also on the program are the sublime songs of Alma Mahler-Werfel, to be sung by Catherine, as well as Wagner's touching *Siegfried Idyll*.

I extend deepest thanks to ACO patrons Philip Bacon AO, Susie Dickson and Iphy Kallinikos for their generosity in supporting Stuart and Catherine's appearances across this national tour.

On behalf of the ACO, I acknowledge the passing of a dear friend of the Orchestra's, Ara Vartoukian OAM, the founder and director of Theme & Variations Piano Services. One of Australia's most esteemed piano experts and a supporter of the ACO's for over two decades through our partnership with Theme & Variations, Ara was a master of his craft and a tireless champion for classical music performance and education. He will be greatly missed by us all and our thoughts are with his wife and Theme & Variations co-founder and director Nyree and their sons Haig and Tro.

Thank you for joining us and I hope you enjoy the performance.



Richard Evans AM
Managing Director

Join the conversation

#ACO24Season |     

@AustralianChamberOrchestra

News



ACO Academy

ACO Academy returns to the University of Melbourne's Ian Potter Southbank Centre in July, where a selection of talented high school string players from around the country will gather together for a week of music-making, led by ACO Violin Aiko Goto.



Farewell Maja Savnik

After nearly ten years performing as a full-time member of the ACO, we recently farewelled much-loved violinist Maja Savnik, who has returned to Europe with her young family.

ACO Pier 2/3



ACO Up Close: ACO Underground

1 JUNE

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

The ACO's renegade spin-off band, ACO Underground, returns to ACO Pier 2/3 with *Satu in the Beyond*, a show featuring an all-star line-up of musicians drawn from the punk, indie and classical soundworlds, led by ACO Principal Violin and vocalist Satu Vänskä.



ACO Total Immersion

7 & 8 JUNE

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

A unique and unforgettable way to experience classical music, *ACO Total Immersion* sees an intimate audience weave their way through the award-winning architectural spaces at ACO Pier 2/3 to explore a series of immersive performances from the ACO, featuring music by Bryce Dessner, Samuel Barber, Wojciech Kilar and more.



ACO Families: How To Catch A Star

6-11 JULY

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

"Once there was a boy and the boy loved stars very much..."

Don't miss the return season of our enchanting ACO Families production of Oliver Jeffers' bestselling children's book, brought to life onstage by the musicians of the ACO.



ACO Up Close: Omar Musa & Mariel Roberts

2 AUGUST

ACO Pier 2/3, Sydney

Award-winning hip-hop artist Omar Musa brings his music, poetry and theatre performance, *The Offering*, to ACO Pier 2/3 in collaboration with cellist Mariel Roberts.

National Tours

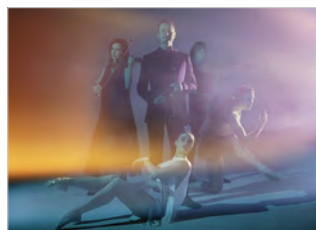


Altstaedt Plays Haydn & Tchaikovsky

14-30 JUNE

National Tour

The world-renowned cellist and master storyteller Nicolas Altstaedt makes his ACO debut as soloist and guest director, performing Haydn's Cello Concerto No.1 and Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*.



Silence & Rapture

2-19 AUGUST

National Tour

A spectacular showcase of dance, music, vocals and lighting, *Silence & Rapture* is a mesmerising collaboration with **Sydney Dance Company** centred around the music of JS Bach and Arvo Pärt.

Cellist Nicolas Altstaedt joins the ACO to perform Haydn's beloved Cello Concerto No.1 and Tchaikovsky's enchanting *Rococo Variations*.

 Australian Chamber Orchestra



ALTSTAEDT PLAYS HAYDN & TCHAIKOVSKY

14-30 JUNE

Canberra, Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle,
Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

Single tickets from \$49* | \$35* for U35s

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GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



PROGRAM

The Australian Chamber Orchestra acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country, on whose unceded land we perform today. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Richard Tognetti Director
 Catherine Carby Mezzo-soprano
 Stuart Skelton Tenor
 Australian Chamber Orchestra

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The ACO thanks Philip Bacon AO, Susie Dickson and I Kallinikos for generously supporting Stuart Skelton and Catherine Carby's appearances at these performances.

The concert will last approximately one hour and 55 minutes, including a 20-minute interval. The Australian Chamber Orchestra reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.



ACO concerts are regularly broadcast on ABC Classic.
Mahler's Song of the Earth will be broadcast on Thursday 26 May, 1pm and available on demand for 30 days after.

MUSICIANS

The musicians on stage
for this performance.

Discover more

Learn more about our musicians, go behind the scenes and listen to playlists at:
aco.com.au



Richard Tognetti
Director and Violin

Richard plays a 1741–44 Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù violin, kindly on loan from an anonymous private benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Gaby Kennard, Peter McMullin AM & Ruth McMullin, Andrew & Andrea Roberts, and Rosy Seaton & Seumas Dawes.



Catherine Carby
Mezzo-soprano



Stuart Skelton
Tenor



Satu Vänskä
Principal Violin

Satu plays the 1728/29 Stradivarius violin on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. Her Chair is sponsored by David Thomas AM.



Stefanie Farrands
Principal Viola

Stefanie plays her own 2016 viola made by Ragnar Hayn in Berlin. Her Chair is sponsored by peckvonhartel architects.



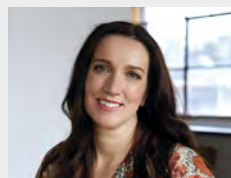
Timo-Veikko Valve
Principal Cello

Tipi plays a 1616 Brothers Amati cello on loan from the ACO Instrument Fund. His Chair is sponsored by Prof Doug Jones AO & Prof Janet Walker CM.



Maxime Bibeau
Principal Bass

Max plays a late-16th-century Gasparo da Salò bass kindly on loan from a private Australian benefactor. His Chair is sponsored by Darin Cooper Foundation.



Sally Walker #
Flute/Piccolo

Sally appears courtesy of the Australian National University School of Music.



Shefali Pryor #
Oboe/Cor Anglais

Shefali appears
courtesy of Sydney
Symphony Orchestra.



Olli Leppäniemi #
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Olli appears courtesy
of Tapiola Sinfonietta.



**Christopher
Tingay #**
Clarinet

Christopher appears
courtesy of Sydney
Symphony Orchestra



**Todd
Gibson-Cornish #**
Bassoon

Todd appears
courtesy of Sydney
Symphony Orchestra.



Timothy Jones #
Horn

Timothy appears
courtesy of London
Symphony Orchestra.



Ben Jacks #
Horn



Visa Haarala #
Trumpet

Visa appears courtesy
of Kymi Sinfonietta.



Brian Nixon #
Percussion

Brian's Chair is
sponsored by the
late Robert Albert AO
and Libby Albert.



Richard Gleeson #
Percussion



Joshua Hill #
Percussion



**Stefan
Cassomenos #**
Piano



**Donald
Nicolson #**
Harmonium/Celesta

Donald appears
courtesy of University
of Melbourne



Stephen Lalor #
Mandolin

Guest Musicians



Scott Geersen creative response to Mahler's *Song of the Earth*.
Created in collaboration with violinist Maja Savnik.



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PROGRAM IN SHORT

Your five-minute read
before lights down.

Pre-concert talks take
place 45 minutes before
the start of every concert.
See the ACO information
desk for location details.

Sydney Opera House

Jack Stephens

Sun 12 May, 1.15pm

City Recital Hall

Jack Stephens

Wed 15 May, 6.15pm

Fri 17 May, 7.15pm

Sat 18 May, 6.15pm

Melbourne Recital Centre

Kym Dillon

Mon 13 May, 6.45pm

Wed 22 May, 6.45pm

QPAC Concert Hall

Matthew Hodge

Mon 20 May, 6.15pm

Llewellyn Hall

Bernard Rofe

Fri 24 May, 7.15pm

Arts Centre Melbourne

Kym Dillon

Sun 26 May, 1.45pm

Pre-concert speakers are
subject to change.



Richard Wagner

(1813–1883)

Siegfried Idyll, WWV103

Richard Wagner's exquisite tone poem *Siegfried Idyll* was composed in 1870 as a birthday present to his wife, Cosima, following the birth of their son Siegfried one year earlier. Cosima was the second child of Franz Liszt, who was one of Wagner's closest friends, and the newly married couple had recently moved into a villa in Tribschen on the shore of Lake Lucerne. Before going to sleep on Christmas Eve, at the end of her birthday, Cosima wrote in her diary that "...I have given nothing to Richard and had nothing from him." She did not know that Richard had been working on her present for several weeks.

Cosima described the work's premiere on Christmas morning: "When I woke up I heard a sound, it grew ever louder, I could no longer imagine myself in a dream, music was sounding, and what music! After it had died away, Richard came in to me with the five children and put into my hands the score of his symphonic birthday greeting. I was in tears, but so, too, was the whole household." Wagner had assembled a small orchestra of 15 musicians on the steps of their living room to give the intimate premiere. Among them was eminent conductor Hans Richter, who learnt the trumpet part especially, and even sailed out to the centre of Lake Lucerne to quietly practise without ruining the surprise.

The original title, "Tribschen Idyll with Fidi Birdsong and Orange Sunrise", alludes to their newborn son's nickname "Fidi". The "orange sunrise" references "the beautiful fiery glow" of the play of light on the wallpaper on the day of Siegfried's birth. Most of the musical themes in *Siegfried Idyll* are related to pastoral passages in his opera *Siegfried*, which he was working on at the time, and enthusiasts will recognise the familiar horn-calls, bird-songs and pastoral evocations. Wagner is best known for his grand operas, but he described *Siegfried Idyll* as a "quiet joy that now takes the form of music" and it forever remained a favourite among his works.



Alma Mahler-Werfel

(1879–1964)

Drei Lieder (Three Songs)

Arranged for chamber orchestra by David Matthews

Alma Mahler-Werfel (born Alma Schindler) grew up in the culturally rich city of Vienna, surrounded by some of the leading artistic figures of her time. Immersing herself in music and literature, she was a devoted fan of Richard Wagner, and had a deep fondness for the poetry of Goethe, Rilke, Heine and Falke. She received lessons in counterpoint from Josef Labor and was later a pupil of the composer Alexander von Zemlinsky. By all accounts, she viewed herself as an artist and composer, though harboured strong, socially fed anxieties around her ability to belong in a field dominated by men.

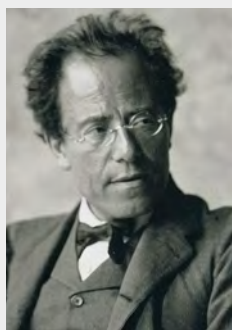
Before meeting Gustav Mahler at the age of 21, Mahler-Werfel had already composed between 70 and 100 lieder (songs), most of which are now lost. After their engagement however, Mahler penned a now-famous letter to her explaining that, if she wanted to be his companion, she would have to forego her creative ambitions and wholly dedicate herself to his music. She capitulated, but the situation was untenable: she desperately needed a creative outlet. The death of their daughter Maria in 1907 only made matters worse, and her growing depression spiralled into an affair with the architect Walter Gropius. Mahler desperately offered appeasement by organising the publication of five of her songs.

Of those five songs, three are presented here in new chamber orchestra arrangements by British composer David Matthews, providing orchestral colour that was not so readily available to a female composer as it was to her idol Richard Wagner (who could assemble a chamber orchestra as a mere birthday gift). Listeners will notice how strikingly different Mahler-Werfel's songs are in style to those of her first husband. Far from "Mahlerian", her songs bear all the hallmarks of late German romanticism, featuring a rich harmonic vocabulary and formal freedom akin to the songs of Wolf, Strauss and Schoenberg (a pupil of Zemlinsky like herself).

The three songs in these concerts tell a brief love story: in *Laue Sommernacht* (Mild Summer Night) two lovers meet in a dark wood, filling the darkness with light; in *Die stille Stadt* (The Silent Town), the day fades to a quiet rest; but indoors, in *Bei dir ist es traut* (I feel warm and close with you) the two lovers enjoy this peacefulness in each other's loving embrace. All the while, Mahler-Werfel's musical settings are in full service of the mood and the poetry: from the chromatic dreaminess and ecstatic outbursts of *Laue Sommernacht*, to the descending autumnal melodies and rapidly changing moods

of *Die stille Stadt*, and finally the pastoral tenderness of *Bei dir ist es traut*, complete with allusions to birdsong and lullaby.

Alma Mahler-Werfel's compositions, as well as her entire life story and public perception, are too often overshadowed by her socialite status and high-profile marriages. What should not be forgotten is that these songs were composed before she met any of her future husbands, as a young woman and burgeoning composer who wanted her music to stand for itself. For this reason, it's safe to say she would have been delighted to see her music feature alongside her idol Richard Wagner and first husband Gustav Mahler.



Gustav Mahler

(1860–1911)

Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth)

*Arranged for chamber orchestra by
Arnold Schoenberg and Rainer Riehn*

In 1906 Gustav Mahler completed his Eighth Symphony, a large-scale and triumphant statement of confidence in the eternal human spirit. The next “symphony” that followed comes from an entirely different universe: it is a deeply personal meditation on humankind’s mortality and destiny. This massive shift in perspective resulted from a series of tragic events that took place in the following year: his forced resignation from a longstanding directorship at the Vienna Court Opera, the deterioration of his marriage, the death of their eldest daughter from scarlet fever and diphtheria, and the diagnosis of a heart defect that for him was akin to a death sentence.

After trying to distract himself by conducting a four-month season with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, he returned to Europe and holidayed in the north-Italian region of Toblach. His physical and emotional wellbeing was at an all-time low. In a letter to conductor Bruno Walter he wrote, “I’ve long known that I must die. But all at once I have lost the serenity and confidence I’d acquired, and I find myself facing the void. Now, at the end of my life, I have to learn to stand and walk all over again like a beginner... As far as my work is concerned, it’s most depressing to have to relearn everything.”

To console himself from the pains of life, Mahler immersed himself in a volume of Chinese poems entitled *Die chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute). It was through these poems, and sheer musical determination, that he was able to establish enough inspiration to embark on *Das Lied von der Erde*, an orchestral song cycle that would constitute a ninth symphony in all but name. Mahler typically

avoided setting great literature to music, but the poems had touched on something intensely personal following the death of his child. Where he previously felt an artistic duty to present the human spirit in his Eighth Symphony, he was now certain of the need to express the brevity of life on earth through music.

He began composing sometime after his arrival to Toblach in June 1908, and had completed the entire work by 1 September. Those who visited Mahler saw him transform before their eyes, emerging from his crisis as a different man, now at peace with the world. Writing to Bruno Walter, he remarked “I can’t yet say what the whole work will be called. I’ve been granted some beautiful moments, and I believe this will be the most personal thing I’ve done so far.” He was aware of the “curse of the ninth” that had prevented Beethoven, Schubert and Bruckner from composing more than nine symphonies, so he instead scribbled the words “The Song of the Earth, from the Chinese” on the manuscript.

The work as a whole encapsulates then juxtaposes two profoundly different aspects of the world: its earthly pleasures and escapes (beauty, youth, intoxication), and its bitter realities (melancholy and the inevitable approach of death). *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde* (The Drinking Song of Earth’s Sorrow) is based on a drinking poem, and combines drunken exhilaration with a deep, regretful sadness. *Der Einsame im Herbst* (The Lonely One in Autumn) laments that nature’s beauty is only fleeting. *Von der Jugend* (Of Youth) is a light scherzo that reflects the inanity of beautiful youths drinking tea in a “porcelain pavilion”. *Von der Schönheit* (Of Beauty) depicts young maidens gathering lotus flowers at the river’s edge, an image of beauty that seems as fragile as life itself. Mahler returns to the idea of the drunkard in *Der Trunkene im Frühling* (The Drunkard in Spring), depicting a careless man who cares only for meaningless pleasures.

Der Abschied (The Farewell) is as long as the five previous movements combined, and is the culmination of the entire work. It opens with a slow funeral march followed by free-flowing music in which the singer muses on aspects of the natural world while night falls. A mandolin represents a singer’s lute, the woodwinds imitate birdsong. The singer waits for her friend to say a final farewell and, after a lengthy orchestral interlude, the two friends share their final dialogue and the music fades into silence. After exploring the highs and lows of the human condition, Mahler leaves the listener with feelings of peace and consolation – as he must have finally felt upon the work’s completion.

SILENCE & RAPTURE

JS BACH & ARVO PÄRT

A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING



Australian
Chamber
Orchestra



The Australian Chamber Orchestra in collaboration with Sydney Dance Company presents *Silence & Rapture*. Directed by Richard Tognetti with choreography by Rafael Bonachela, featuring countertenor Iestyn Davies and artists from Sydney Dance Company.

2–19 AUGUST

Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide,
Perth, Canberra and Brisbane.

Tickets from \$59* | \$35* for U35s

*Transaction fee of \$8.50 applies



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Scott Geersen creative response to Mahler's *Song of the Earth*. Created in collaboration with violinist Maja Savnik.





Gustav Mahler 1902, by Emil Orlik (1870–1932).

AN ENCOUNTER IN FIVE MOVEMENTS

The music of Gustav Mahler creates
meaning through a continuous series
of startling transformations.

Written by Daniel Keene

Daniel Keene is a Melbourne playwright whose work has been widely performed nationally and internationally. His accolades include two Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, three NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award. More than 100 productions of his work have been presented in Europe, predominantly in France, and he is the first (and so far, the only) Australian playwright to be produced in the main program at the Avignon Festival. In 2016 Daniel was appointed to the rank of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture.

1

In what often seems an increasingly atomised world – and especially after the isolating and alienating effects of the Covid pandemic protocols – attending a concert to listen to music has become a singular kind of event: a conscious decision to gather with other people in a common space to share a particular inclination, to satisfy a collective hunger. But we gather in that space to enjoy what is, finally, a private experience.

We listen alone but in the presence of others. We come to the concert hall to satisfy a personal desire with others who have the same need to engage with the pleasure of music, but we will each leave with our own impressions and responses to the music we have heard together. The orchestra shares that space, that time, that air with us, but their experience is very different from ours. The music we hear is the reason for their artistic practice, it lives in their intellect and their understanding of how to express the music's emotional possibilities. Out of this knowledge they will sculpt in sound a moment that stimulates or cajoles, that lulls, excites, delights or moves their audience. The energy exchanged between those who play and those who listen – that tangible connection – is an ancient, never changing, ever human and humane phenomena.

For much of his life Gustav Mahler earned his living as a conductor. During his six years at the Stadttheatre in Hamburg alone he conducted no less than 744 performances. Composing was an almost part-time occupation. He is reported to have said that “what is most important in music is not to be found in the printed notes”. It was the *performance* of the work that mattered, especially when it came to his own music, which demanded large orchestras, symphonic choruses and operatic soloists. He often requested many more rehearsals than the orchestras he worked with were accustomed to, unifying and shaping the sound of the ensemble, setting the tempo, structuring the phrasing, closely guiding the interpretation. It seems particularly true for Mahler that this was as much a part of his creative practice as his initial setting down of the notes.

I have never attended a live performance of Mahler's work. My encounter with his music will be a solitary affair: my concert hall a pair of headphones, the presence of my orchestra something imagined. I will listen to the nine completed symphonies, the unfinished 10th and *Das Lied von der Erde*. It will simply be me and the music.



Franz Kafka, c1923.

2

In 1904, writing to Oskar Pollak, the writer Franz Kafka – himself a German-speaking Bohemian Jew like Mahler – informed his friend that his firmly held conviction was that “a book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside of us”.

Kafka is speaking of the transforming and liberating potential of art, insisting that it must confront and break through the denials and refusals we may hold onto in our inner selves, awakening our emotions and thoughts.

Like Kafka's axe, the music of Mahler insists on this awakening. His symphonies invite us into a world that sounds at one moment like the crashing of tectonic plates moving under the surface of the earth and, in the next, the sweet, high song of a lark. The symphonies are never anything less than a complete, multi-dimensional world. Notwithstanding Mahler's use of text – prayers, dramatic extracts or poetry employed to illustrate or express certain narratives or emotions – his symphonies do not merely tell a preordained story or illustrate an imagined scene: they are essentially an experience of meaning being created through a series of startling transformations.

Or perhaps they could be called revelations. Because these transformations, some sudden, some slowly evolving, are always a kind of epiphany. They develop out of what is inherent in the music itself, as if they were nascent, always there waiting to be revealed. They can be surprising, yes, but they also always seem inevitable.

I have never attended a live performance of Mahler's work. My encounter with his music will be a solitary affair: my concert hall a pair of headphones, the presence of my orchestra something imagined.



Gustav Mahler with his wife Alma and daughters Maria and Anna, 1910.

The symphonies sustain themselves with their own continually generated energy, creating their own dynamic, their own context. They are nothing but themselves: the apprehension of a possibility that transcends the limitations of the quotidian in which the listener is immersed in insistent, deeply human expressions of longing, of grief, of hope, of love, of creation itself.

The opening of the first symphony is a deep, reverberating hum. Rising out of silence, it is the other-worldly sound of music coming into existence. It lasts a few moments, calling into being all that will follow. It is a sound taking us into a world where some other force is already threatening to erupt. It creates a kind of unsettling calm, an ambient disquiet. You can feel it in the pit of your stomach. It shakes you. You listen: perhaps this is what the act of creation sounds like.

Particularly in Mahler's first three symphonies, certain passages of music might suggest something like the formation of a star out of cosmic darkness or water cascading down a mountainside. But he isn't fashioning an image of a star or a waterfall. It is the sound of the power unleashed at the moment of the star's making, the weight and force of the water's fall. It is sound reaching for the ineffable, wanting to express creation itself; life coming into being and persisting.

For me, this is where the sacred resides in Mahler's music: not the sacred expressed through music created for the celebration of the divine, but music that celebrates the sacredness of life, of being, of music itself.

Mahler's religious beliefs seem ambiguous. Facing a rabidly anti-Semitic administration, he converted from Judaism to Catholicism

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in 1897 to better improve his chances of gaining the position of principal director of the Vienna Hofoper (the court opera). He got the job.

He would say in later years that this decision cost him a great deal. Turning away from the faith into which he was born would be, as it would for anyone, a difficult, wrenching choice. But what was he turning to? He never became what could be called a practising Catholic. His choice was not about religion; it was about music. In his position at the Hofoper he directed countless operas, conducted numberless symphonies, introduced new composers to his audience and continued to compose. Music was his spiritual home. If for some of his audience his music spoke of a divine being, if for them it praised their God, then that praise was born out of Mahler's vision of the sacred – and his vision of the sacred was his own.

3

In the 2023 recording of Mahler's second symphony by the Wiener Philharmoniker, conducted by Gilbert Kaplan, there is a moment close to the end of the final movement when you can hear a deep intake of breath as the male chorus prepares to sing the final two words of the text. The preceding lines are sung softly, almost whispered:

*tremble no more, tremble no more
prepare yourself...*

And then the enormous, audible intake of breath before:

...to live!

I hear that breath as part of the music, as much as the voices themselves and the words they sing. That booming exhortation to *live* feels like the heart of this work. It is not so much a forceful encouragement as an outright demand.

This part of the text was written by Mahler. It follows and takes its inspiration from an eight line poem, "Arise, yes, you will arise from the dead" by Friedrich Klopstock, which is sung in the opening of the fifth movement of the symphony.

As with this demand to live, there is a repeated insistence in Mahler's music that we do not despair, that we have no right to abandon hope, no matter how faint or distant it may seem. Continually throughout his music, themes unfold, seem to collapse and are then remade. If sometimes there is a foreboding ambience thrumming beneath lyric phrases that suggest love's



Gustav Mahler,
c1909.

bounty or a celebration, as if beneath the paradise of Eden there may lie an abyss, there is just as often a sense of healing light rising triumphantly out of darkness, the sacred nature of life striving to assert itself. Implicit in this assertion is that destruction contains the seeds of resurrection, that life can defy death, that the tragic is not an end but a new beginning.

4

Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* is considered by some to be his ninth symphony but, although he sometimes privately referred to it as his ninth, he himself never used that term in public. This was because Beethoven, Schubert and Bruckner all died before or while writing their 10th symphonies and Mahler wanted to avoid this curse. By disguising it as a song cycle, even though it's structured as a symphony in multiple movements with various tempos and tonalities, he thought to cheat fate. This superstitious sleight of hand, however, failed: Mahler did not live to complete his 10th symphony.

Das Lied von der Erde is a setting of six poems from the "Golden Period" of Chinese poetry (Tang dynasty, 618–907). Though some traces remain of Chinese imagery, we are very far from China in this work. Translated into German from earlier French translations, their transposition into European languages gave them a whole new meaning; they are European creations, and Mahler's settings make them very much his own.

Das Lied von der Erde opens with a short, bright flourish that introduces an explicit expression of what is often central in Mahler's work – the never-ending struggle between hope and despair, light and darkness.

Dark is life, dark is death...

But the wine is golden and plentiful. Now is the time to drink and enjoy what you can, sorrow is always drawing near...

As male and female voices alternate throughout the piece, everything in this work centres on ideas of balance: between waking and sleeping, drunkenness and sobriety, leave-taking and homecoming, losing then finding a friend, fading away and rebirth in the cycle of the seasons, living and dying.

This work contains some of Mahler's gentlest, most lyrical passages. There is less turbulence than in some of his earlier work, and more opportunities for solo instruments to emerge from the ensemble with a single theme delicately expressed.

But even in the midst of this beauty, there are moments of bleakness, of surrender. In the second song of the cycle, "The Solitary One in Autumn", a lone figure laments the weariness in her heart. The small lamp that she carries has "gone out with a splutter". The song finishes as she asks:

*Sun of love, will you never shine again,
Gently to dry my bitter tears?*

In the final and longest song, taking up almost half of the duration of the piece, this same voice, alone as ever, yearning for a companion, is still able to experience the beauty and abundance of the world: the soft grass, the breathing of the earth, the song of the brook.

*O beauty! O eternal love –
life-drunk world!*

Nothing has seemed rushed,
nothing forced, but something
has been transformed,
reshaped and made anew.

The music heightens this sense of finding relief from sorrow. At times it drifts under the poems in slow, dark waves, only just managing to keep the words afloat; at others it rises energetically, lifting the text into a celebration of life's (sometimes drunken) pleasures.

Taken as a whole, *Das Lied von der Erde* can be considered as a single song, rising and falling as suffering and delight, sorrows and blessings, follow one after the other in the course of a life. But it ends on a sustained, lyrical note of hope and renewal that fades gently to silence:

*The dear earth everywhere
blooms in spring...
Blue light in the distance!
Always ... always...*

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There is something that happens to time when listening to Mahler's symphonies. So much can happen in a few heartbeats that you wonder how on earth did you get from a moment when the music hits you like a gigantic, roaring wave, to this instant when you hover in a tranquility that seems to float just above a bottomless silence. Nothing has seemed rushed, nothing forced, but something has been transformed, reshaped and made anew.

It is these metamorphoses that propel the music, that accumulate one upon the other. It is this accumulation that creates the emotional weight of the symphony. The music continuously builds up inside you. You cannot linger, or hope to hold on to any one moment: you are already being drawn towards the next. This momentum creates a kind of pressure: you are held between what you have heard and what is yet to come, between what follows you and what is approaching.

It is this pressure that breaks the sea of ice, that awakens your response, that calls up what cannot have been expected, because you have never been in this moment before with this sound breaking over you like a storm or touching you as softly as the caress of a loved one's hand.

If that is what happens, then in the silence that falls at the close of the symphony your response will probably remain unspoken. In the end, words seem a poor reply to the call of music.



Scott Geersen creative response to Mahler's *Song of the Earth*.
Created in collaboration with violinist Maja Savnik.



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THE HELDENTENOR AND THE MEZZO- SOPRANO

Silence, mind-maps and discipline: how singers Catherine Carby and Stuart Skelton manage the fierce emotional and physical challenges of performing Mahler's monumental *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Written by Anna Snoekstra

Anna Snoekstra is the author of five novels that have been translated across the globe, most recently *Out of Breath*. Her next novel, *The Ones We Love*, is out May 2025 with Ultimo and PRH.



Catherine Carby and Stuart Skelton have known each other for many years, although they have long been separated by the North Atlantic Ocean. From Brisbane and Sydney respectively, Carby speaks from her kitchen table in London, while Skelton is in his office at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

Even after decades of successful careers overseas, both consider Australia their true home. “There’s nowhere quite like it,” Skelton confides. “I’ve lived in a lot of places. I’ve seen a lot of the world, but Sydney will always be home.”

Skelton was a choir boy at Saint Andrew’s Cathedral. Although he wasn’t from a creative family, this early connection with music changed the course of his life. “My mother tells this story that I came home when I was seven and said, ‘I want to learn the piano’. No one had an explanation for it. No one in our family had a piano, so my parents went out and bought one and found a piano teacher.” From there, his aptitude for music only grew.

Carby was the only musical member of her immediate family as well. In high school she joined the Queensland Youth Orchestra: “it was my only extracurricular thing because I was so hopeless at sport.” She fell in love with the French horn, and although she was good at it, she realised that she wasn’t going to be “the best”. However, her talent for singing showed huge potential so she followed that path. “Plus,” she adds, thinking back on her decision, “I realised you got to dress up and wear costumes and wigs and all that stuff.”

After she left Australia and completed her studies at the Royal College of Music in London, Carby found that those costumes weren’t quite what she originally expected. As a mezzo-soprano, she has performed most in “trouser roles” as the lead at Royal Opera House, English National Opera and Opera Australia. “If you google it, you’ll see any number of pictures of me dressed as a bloke,” she tells me. “Wearing trousers and kissing girls, basically.”

“My mother tells this story that I came home when I was seven and said, ‘I want to learn the piano’. No one had an explanation for it.”

“...I love Mahler, as a performer as well as an audience member, and I think it’s a remarkable thing that he took the Wagnerian musical language and turned it into a language of his own.”

Skelton also began his schooling in Australia but graduated overseas. For him, it was the United States rather than Britain or Europe. The Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music is his alma mater and the office where Skelton is speaking, with its wall of bookshelves and glossy black Steinway piano, used to be his teacher’s. Skelton’s breakthrough performance was as *Lohengrin* in Karlsruhe, which got him noticed around the world. He has performed with the world’s great opera companies, from the Royal Opera House in London and La Scala in Milan to the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

After decades living and working mostly internationally, Carby and Skelton both tell me how enthusiastic they are for the opportunity to return to their homeland for the ACO’s intensive multi-city tour of Gustav Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* (*Song of the Earth*), a song cycle they both adore. The program begins with Richard Wagner’s *Siegfried Idyll*, an apt inclusion given Wagner’s impact on Mahler.

Skelton is renowned for his interpretations of Wagner. “Richard Wagner cast a shadow over western music that we still haven’t escaped,” he says. “The fabric of tonality started to fray with Wagner and through Mahler, and then Berg, Webern and Schoenberg, they just tore the fabric out... I love Mahler, as a performer as well as an audience member, and I think it’s a remarkable thing that he took the Wagnerian musical language and turned it into a language of his own.”

Like Skelton’s admiration of Wagner, Carby has great respect for the work of the Austrian composer and writer, Alma Mahler-Werfel. In these concerts with the ACO, Carby will be performing new arrangements by David Matthews of Mahler-Werfel’s *Laue Sommernacht*, *Die stille Stadt* and *Bei dir ist es traut*. “She had a crazy, hilarious, amazing life,” Carby says. “But in her own right she was a fantastic composer.”

Mahler-Werfel is largely remembered by her marriages to three very famous men. After Mahler's death she wed Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, and then Franz Werfel, a renowned Austrian poet. She wrote a lot of songs, many of which had been lost either during the war or because Gustav Mahler, older and more famous than she was, forbade her from composing in order to preserve their marriage – he believed that there could only be one composer in the household. “So, she put her composing to one side for a long time to be a good housewife, basically, to support the man,” says Carby. “In her lifetime she wrote some exquisite songs with an expanded harmony soundworld set to really beautiful poetry. She should be much more famous as a composer, rather than as the wife of famous men.”

The title card of the program, *Das Lied von der Erde*, was written by Gustav Mahler only two years before his death. He never saw the first public performance on November 1911 in the TonHalle in Munich, six months after he died. The creation of this highly intense symphony cannot be separated from the trials of Mahler's life at the time. “He'd hit rock bottom, and then had to rediscover who he was,” Carby says. “Everything that he had known in his life didn't exist anymore. His job was gone, his child was gone, his health was failing, and his wife, Alma, was desperately unhappy.”

The six songs that comprise the cycle are *Drinking Song of Earth's Sorrow*, *The Lonely One in Autumn*, *Of Youth, Of Beauty*, *The Drunkard in Spring* and *The Farewell*. Carby and Skelton alternate throughout, with their performances engaging different stratospheres of emotion.

“Two of Stuart's songs are about drunkenness,” Carby says, laughing. “The very first song is about drunkenness, and then the second one he does is about drunkenness in spring.”



Catherine Carby.
Photo by David Shoukry,
English Photo Works.

“Two of Stuart’s songs are about drunkenness,” Carby says, laughing. “The very first song is about drunkenness, and then the second one he does is about drunkenness in spring.”

Skelton finds this apt. “My contribution to *Das Lied von der Erde* is pretty much built for me because I’m typecast as a melancholy drunk,” he says. “It’s fabulous. I’m a melancholy drunk but with a really good sense of humour.”

Carby says that Skelton’s songs express an exuberance. “While my songs, apart from the second one, are much more introspective, much more thoughtful. They’re more internal than external.” Both Carby and Skelton cite her final song, *The Farewell*, as their favourite. Carby’s eyes light up as she speaks about it. “The poetry is just gorgeous and expressive, the orchestration is amazing. It’s really quite moving. I think it’s a metaphor for death and what happens after death, essentially, because the final words are “*ewig... ewig...*” which means “eternally... eternally...”

For Skelton, it provides an opportunity to be totally swept away by the music, “I get to stand there for the second half of that piece and just let it pull me to pieces and not have to worry about the end. I can literally let that last 30 minutes completely destroy me, which it’s designed to do, and not care.”

I ask him if that’s an intense experience, to stand right next to someone as they sing something so emotionally charged. “Oh yes,” he says. “In the best possible way. If you were singing that you couldn’t let yourself get carried away. You have to walk that feathers-edge of not falling over into where everyone else is going when you’re singing.”

“Channeling that emotion must be difficult,” I say, thinking aloud. “I know when I get emotional my throat feels like it’s closing up, which you can’t let happen in that situation.”

“No, you really can’t,” says Skelton. “Sometimes you can sense it coming and you have to think of something to try and divert that energy a little bit. It’s just such a remarkable piece. There are some absolute classic lines, some remarkably profound things. My favorite line in the whole piece is *‘Die müden Menschen gehn heimwärts / Um im Schlaf vergeßnes Glück / Und Jugend neu zu lernen’*, which translates to ‘The tired men go home / in sleep to learn anew / of forgotten happiness and youth’. What a line!”

Both Skelton and Carby will be performing without scores, singing the whole cycle from memory. This is no small task, especially for Carby with her half-hour finale. She is using multiple techniques to face this challenge. “When you learn an opera, it’s a lot of everyday speech, like ‘he said’, ‘she said’, and then we did this,” she says. “Whereas this is poetry. It’s all imagery. It is image after image after image that doesn’t really have a simple narrative. So, trying to get it from memory is incredibly difficult. I’ve made these great, elaborate mind maps and got my pencils out and coloured things in.”

I ask her if singing from memory changes the experience of the performance and she nods. “If you’re singing from memory, you’re physically naked, essentially. You’ve got no stand, no score, nothing to look at that distracts the audience from honing in on you. Sometimes with a score you can be a bit of an observer to the music, rather than inside the music.”

“If you’re singing from memory, you’re physically naked, essentially. You’ve got no stand, no score, nothing to look at that distracts the audience from honing in on you.”

The tour itself will also be intense, covering four states and six venues over 12 days, although this is the type of performance they would more usually perform as a one-off concert. “It takes a huge number of resources,” Carby says. “You’ve got to have orchestral players. You’ve got to have a tam-tam player, a celeste, a mandolin. And, you know, two soloists who can cope with the demands of it. It’s really unusual to do a long series of it, it will be fascinating to see how it develops or changes.”

Both performers are already planning how they will keep their momentum and protect their voices during this period. It requires a lot of discipline. They both mention methods such as intense warm-ups and warm-downs, steaming and always wearing masks in public. They also both plan to avoid speaking as much as possible during those 12 days.

“Once you’re done, you just have to go back to the hotel room or wherever you’re staying, and just shut up till tomorrow,” Skelton says. “Sometimes you have to do that, it’s part of the discipline for your audience.”

“I’ve never done a tour of this piece with so many performances packed into such a close period of time. So ask me again at the end of May, but I can tell you what it’s like when you’re doing a run of performances of say, *Tristan* or *Peter Grimes* or something like that. They’re also incredibly musically intense, and physically intense and I imagine this will be similar. At the end of the run you feel happily spent. You’ve emptied yourself of all the things that you can give to your audience.”

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Drei Lieder

By Alma Mahler-Werfel

Laue Sommernacht (Otto Julius Bierbaum)

Laue Sommernacht: am Himmel
Stand kein Stern, im weiten Walde
Suchten wir uns tief im Dunkel,
Und wir fanden uns.

Fanden uns im weiten Walde
In der Nacht, der sternenlosen,
Hielten staunend uns im Arme
In der dunklen Nacht.

War nicht unser ganzes Leben
So ein Tappen, so ein Suchen?
Da: In seine Finsternisse,
Liebe, fiel Dein Licht.

Die stille Stadt (Richard Dehmel)

Liegt eine Stadt im Tale,
ein blasser Tag vergeht;
es wird nicht lange dauern mehr,
bis weder Mond noch Sterne
nur Nacht am Himmel steht.

Von allen Bergen drücken
nebel auf die Stadt;
es dringt kein Dach, nicht Hof noch Haus,
kein Laut aus ihrem Rauch heraus,
kaum Türme noch und Brücken.

Doch als den Wanderer graute,
da ging ein Lichtlein auf im Grund;
und durch den Rauch und Nebel
begann ein leiser Lobgesang
aus Kindermund.

Bei dir ist es traut (Rainer Maria Rilke)

Bei dir ist es traut:
Zage Uhren schlagen
wie aus weiten Tagen.
Komm mir ein Liebes sagen –
aber nur nicht laut.

Ein Tor geht irgendwo
draußen im Blütentreiben.
Der Abend horcht an den Scheiben.
Laß uns leise bleiben,
keiner weiß uns so.

Three Songs

Translations by Richard Stokes

Mild Summer Night

Mild summer night: in the sky
Not a star, in the deep forest
We sought each other in the dark
And found one another.

Found one another in the deep wood
In the night, the starless night,
And amazed, we embraced
In the dark night.

Our entire life – was it not
Such a tentative quest?
There: into its darkness,
O Love, fell your light.

The Silent Town

A town lies in the valley,
a pale day is fading;
it will not be long
before neither moon nor stars
but night alone will deck the skies.

From every mountain
mists weigh on the town;
no roof, no courtyard, no house
no sound can penetrate the smoke,
scarcely towers and bridges even.

But as fear seized the traveller,
a gleam appeared in the valley;
and through the smoke and mist
came a faint song of praise
from a child's lips.

I feel warm and close with you

I feel warm and close with you:
clocks strike hesitantly,
like they did in distant days.
Say something loving to me –
but not aloud.

A gate opens somewhere
out in the burgeoning.
Evening listens at the window-panes.
Let us stay quiet,
no one knows us thus.

Das Lied von der Erde

By Gustav Mahler

Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde (Li-Tai-Po)

Schon winkt der Wein im gold'nen Pokale,
doch trinkt noch nicht, erst sing' ich euch ein Lied!
Das Lied vom Kummer
soll auflachend in die Seele euch klingen.
Wenn der Kummer naht,
liegen wüst die Gärten der Seele,
welkt hin und stirbt die Freude, der Gesang.
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod.

Herr dieses Hauses!
Dein Keller birgt die Fülle des goldenen Weins!
Hier, diese Laute nenn' ich mein!
Die Laute schlagen und die Gläser leeren,
das sind die Dinge, die zusammenpassen.
Ein voller Becher Weins zur rechten Zeit
ist mehr wert als alle Reiche dieser Erde!
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!

Das Firmament blaut ewig und die Erde
wird lange fest steh'n und aufblüh'n im Lenz.
Du aber, Mensch, wie lang lebst denn du?
Nicht hundert Jahre darfst du dich ergötzen,
an all dem morschen Tande dieser Erde!

Seht dart hinab! Im Mondschein auf den Gräbern
hockt eine wildgespenstische Gestalt.
Ein Aff' ist's! Hört ihr, wie sein Heulen
hinausgellt in den süßen Duft des Lebens!

Jetzt nehmt den Wein! Jetzt ist es Zeit, Genossen!
Leert eure gold'nen Becher zu Grund!
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!

The Song of the Earth

Paraphrase translation by Hans Bethge

Drinking Song of the Earth's Sorrow

Already the wine beckons in the golden cup,
but don't drink yet, first I'll sing you a song!
The song of sorrow
shall ring with laughter in your soul.
When sorrow is near,
the gardens of the soul lie desolate,
joy and song wither and die.
Dark is life, is death.

Master of this house!
Your cellar holds the abundance of golden wine!
Here, this lute I call mine!
Striking the lute and emptying the glasses,
these are the things that go together.
A full cup of wine at the right time
is worth more than all the kingdoms of this earth!
Dark is life, is death!

The firmament is eternally blue, and the earth
will long stand firm and blossom in spring.
But you, humankind, however long will you live?
Not even a hundred years may you feast
on all the rotten junk of this earth!

Take a look down there! In the moonlight on the graves
crouches a wild ghostlike figure.
An ape it is! Can you hear how his wail
howls out into the sweet fragrance of life!

Now take the wine! Now is the time, comrades!
Empty your golden cups to the bottom!
Dark is life, is death!

Der Einsame im Herbst (Tschang-Tsi)

Herbstnebel wallen bläulich überm See,
vom Reif bezogen stehen alle Gräser.
Man meint, ein Künstler habe Staub von Jade
über die feinen Blüten ausgestreut.

Der süße Duft der Blumen ist verfliegen;
ein kalter Wind beugt ihre Stengel nieder.
Bald werden die verwelkten, gold'nen Blätter
der Lotosblüten auf dem Wasser zieh'n.

Mein Herz ist müde. Meine kleine Lampe
erlosch mit Knistern, es gemahnt mich an den Schlaf.
Ich komm' zu dir, traute Ruhestätte!
Ja, gib mir Ruh', ich hab' Erquickung not!

Ich weine viel in meinen Einsamkeiten.
Der Herbst in meinem Herzen währt zu lange.
Sonne der Liebe, willst du nie mehr scheinen,
um meine bitteren Tränen mild aufzutrocknen?

Von der Jugend (Li-Tai-Po)

Mitten in dem kleinen Teiche
steht ein Pavillon aus grünem
und aus weißem Porzellan.

Wie der Rücken eines Tigers
wölbt die Brücke sich aus Jade
zu dem Pavillon hinüber.

In dem Häuschen sitzen Freunde,
schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern,
manche schreiben Verse nieder.

Ihre seidnen Ärmel gleiten rückwärts,
ihre seidnen Mützen
hocken lustig tief im Nacken.

Auf des kleinen, kleinen Teiches
stiller, stiller Wasserfläche zeigt sich alles
wunderlich im Spiegelbilde.

Alles auf dem Kopfe stehend
in dem Pavillon aus grünem
und aus weißem Porzellan;

wie ein Halbmond scheint die Brücke,
umgekehrt der Bogen. Freunde,
schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern.

The Lonely One in Autumn

Autumn mists drift bluishly across the lake,
all grasses stand covered in white frost.
It seems as though an artist had sprinkled jade dust
over the delicate blossoms.

The sweet scent of the flowers has faded away;
a cold wind bends down their stems.
Soon shall the withered golden petals
of lotus flowers float on the water.

My heart is weary. My little lamp
has gone out with a crackle; it urges me to sleep.
I come to you, trusted resting place!
Yes, give me rest, I'm in need of refreshment!

I cry a lot in my solitude.
Autumn in my heart has endured too long.
Sun of love, will you never shine again
to gently dry my bitter tears?

Of Youth

In the middle of the small pond
stands a pavilion made of green
and of white porcelain.

Like the back of a tiger,
the bridge made of jade
arches over to the pavilion.

Friends sit in the little house,
nicely dressed, drinking, chatting,
some writing down verses.

Their silken sleeves slide backwards,
their silken caps
sit merrily low on their necks.

On the small, small pond's
calm, calm water surface
all things reflect whimsically.

Everything's upside down
in the pavilion made of green
and of white porcelain;

like a half moon appears the bridge,
the arch in reverse. Friends,
nicely dressed, drinking, chatting.

Von der Schönheit (Li-Tai-Po)

Junge Mädchen pflücken Blumen,
pflücken Lotosblumen an dem Uferande.
Zwischen Büschen und Blättern sitzen sie,
sammeln Blüten in den Schoß
und rufen sich einander Neckereien zu.

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Sonne spiegelt ihre schlanken Glieder,
ihre süßen Augen wider,
und der Zephir hebt mit Schmeichelkosen
das Gewebe ihrer Ärmel auf,
führt den Zauber ihrer Wohlgerüche durch die Luft.

O sieh, was tummeln sich für schöne Knaben
dort an dem Uferand auf mut'gen Rossen,
weithin glänzend wie die Sonnenstrahlen;
schon zwischen dem Geäst der grünen Weiden
trabt das jungfrische Volk einher!

Das Roß des einen wiehert fröhlich auf,
und scheut, und saust dahin,
über Blumen, Gräser wanken hin die Hufe,
sie zerstampfen jäh im Sturm
die hingesunk'nen Blüten,
hei! wie flattern im Taumel seine Mähnen,
dampfen heiß die Nüstern!

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Und die schönste von den Jungfrau'n sendet
lange Blicke ihm der Sehnsucht nach.
Ihre stolze Haltung ist nur Verstellung.
In dem Funkeln ihrer großen Augen,
in dem Dunkel ihres heißen Blicks
schwingt klagend noch die Erregung
ihres Herzens nach.

Of Beauty

Young girls pick flowers,
pick lotus flowers on the shore.
Sitting amidst bushes and leaves, they
gather blossoms in their laps and call out
teasingly to one another.

Golden sun surrounds the figures,
reflecting them in the shiny water.
Sun reflects their slender limbs,
their sweet eyes,
and the zephyr lifts with flattering caresses
the fabric of their sleeves,
carries the magic of their perfumes through the air.

Oh look at the handsome lads romping around
there on the shore's edge on brave horses,
shining far like the rays of the sun;
already amid the branches of the green willows
the fresh young people are trotting along!

The horse of one neighs merrily
and shies and rushes along,
its hooves sway over flowers and grasses,
trampling down in a sudden storm
the fallen blossoms,
hey! how its mane flutters in a whirl,
its nostrils steaming!

Golden sun surrounds the figures,
reflecting them in the shiny water.
And the prettiest of the maidens sends
long gazes of longing after him.
Her proud posture is but a pretense.
In the sparkle of her big eyes,
in the darkness of her fiery gaze
still echoes plaintively
the excitement of her heart.

Der Trunkene im Frühling (Li-Tai-Po)

Wenn nur ein Traum das Dasein ist,
warum denn Müh' und Plag'!?
Ich trinke, bis ich nicht mehr kann,
den ganzen lieben Tag!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr trinken kann,
weil Keh! und Seele voll,
so tauml' ich bis zu meiner Tür
und schlafe wundervoll!

Was hör' ich beim Erwachen? Horch!
Ein Vogel singt im Baum.
Ich frag' ihn, ob schon Frühling sei,
mir ist als wie im Traum.

Der Vogel zwitschert: Ja!
Der Lenz ist da, sei kommen über Nacht!
Aus tiefstem Schauen lauscht' ich auf,
der Vogel singt und lacht!

Ich fülle mir den Becher neu
und leer' ihn bis zum Grund
und singe, bis der Mond erglänzt
am schwarzen Firmament!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr singen kann,
so schlaf' ich wieder ein.
Was geht mich denn der Frühling an!?
Laßt mich betrunken sein!

The Drunkard in Spring

If life is only a dream,
why then toil and trouble?
I drink until I can drink no more,
All the livelong day!

And when I can drink no more,
because my throat and soul are full,
I shall stagger to my door
and sleep wonderfully!

What do I hear when I wake? Hark!
A bird is singing in the tree.
I ask him whether spring has come,
I feel as if in a dream.

The bird chirps: Yes!
Spring is here, has come over night!
From the deepest consideration I listened up,
The bird sings and laughs!

I fill my cup anew
and empty it to the bottom
and sing until the moon is shining
in the black firmament!

And when I can sing no more
I'll fall asleep again.
What do I care about spring?
Let me be drunk!

Der Abschied (Mong-Kao-Jen and Wang-Wei)

Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem Gebirge.
In alle Täler steigt der Abend nieder
mit seinen Schatten, die voll Kühlung sind.
O sieh! wie eine Silberbarke schwebt
der Mond am blauen Himmelssee herauf.
Ich spüre eines feinen Windes Weh'n
hinter den dunklen Fichten!

Der Bach singt voller Wohllaut
durch das Dunkel.
Die Blumen blassen im Dämmerchein.
Die Erde atmet voll von Ruh' und Schlaf.
Alle Sehnsucht will nun träumen,
die müden Menschen geh'n heimwärts,
um im Schlaf vergess'nes Glück
und Jugend neu zu lernen!
Die Vögel hocken still in ihren Zweigen.
Die Welt schläft ein!

Es wehet kühl im Schatten meiner Fichten.
Ich stehe hier und harre meines Freundes.
ich harre sein zum letzten Lebewohl.
Ich sehne mich, o Freund, an deiner Seite
die Schönheit dieses Abends zu genießen.
Wo bleibst du? du läßt mich lang allein!
Ich wand le auf und nieder mit meiner Laute
auf Wegen, die von weichem Grase schwellen.
O Schönheit, o ewigen Liebens,
Lebens trunkne Welt.

Er stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm
den Trunk des Abschieds dar.
Er fragte ihn, wohin er führe
und auch warum, warum es müßte sein.
Er sprach, seine Stimme war umflort:
Du, mein Freund,
mir war auf dieser Welt das Glück nicht hold!
Wohin ich geh'?
Ich geh', ich wandre in die Berge.
Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam Herz!
Ich wand le nach der Heimat! meiner Stätte!
Ich werde niemals in die Ferne schweifen.
Still ist mein Herz und harret seiner Stunde!
Die liebe Erde allüberall
blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu!
Allüberall und ewig blauen licht die Fernen,
ewig, ewig!

The Farewell

The sun sinks behind the mountains.
Evening descends into all valleys
with its shadows, full of coolness.
Oh look! Like a silver barque
the moon floats up the sky's blue lake.
I feel a gentle breeze blowing
beyond the dark spruces!

The brook sings full of melodious sound
through the darkness.
The flowers pale in the twilight.
The earth breathes full of rest and sleep.
All longing now wants to dream,
the tired people walk home,
to learn anew in their sleep
forgotten happiness and youth!
The birds perch quietly among their branches.
The world falls asleep!

In the shade of my spruces, the air is cool.
I stand here, waiting for my friend;
waiting for a last farewell.
I long, oh friend, by your side,
to enjoy the beauty of this evening.
Where are you? You've left me long alone!
I walk up and down with my lute
on paths swelling with soft grass.
Oh beauty, oh eternal love's,
life's drunken world!

He dismounted from his horse and handed him
the drink of farewell.
He asked him where he was going
and also why, why it should be.
He spoke, his voice was obscured:
You, my friend,
fortune did not favor me in this world!
Where am I going?
I go, I wander into the mountains.
I seek rest for my lonely heart!
I walk to my homeland! to my place!
I shall never travel far.
My heart is still, waiting for its hour!
The dear earth everywhere
blossoms in spring and grows green anew!
Everywhere and eternally the horizons shine bright
and blue, eternally, eternally!

RICHARD TOGNETTI

Artistic Director & Lead Violin

Richard Tognetti is Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has established an international reputation for his compelling performances and artistic individualism.

Richard began his studies in his home town of Wollongong with William Primrose, then with Alice Waten at the Sydney Conservatorium, and Igor Ozim at the Bern Conservatory, where he was awarded the Tschumi Prize as the top graduate soloist in 1989. Later that year he led several performances with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and that November was appointed as the Orchestra's lead violin and, subsequently, Artistic Director.

Richard performs on period, modern and electric instruments and his numerous arrangements, compositions and transcriptions have expanded the chamber orchestra repertoire and been performed throughout the world. As director or soloist, Richard has appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Academy of Ancient Music, Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra, Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Hong Kong Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Nordic Chamber Orchestra and all the major Australian symphony orchestras. Richard performed the Australian premieres of Ligeti's Violin Concerto and Lutoslawski's Partita. In November 2016, he became the Barbican Centre's first Artist-in-Residence at Milton Court Concert Hall in London. Richard created the



Huntington Festival in Mudgee, New South Wales and was Artistic Director of the Festival Maribor in Slovenia from 2008 to 2015.

Richard was the co-composer of the score for Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, starring Russell Crowe; he co-composed the soundtrack to Tom Carroll's surf film *Storm Surfers*; and created *The Red Tree*, inspired by Shaun Tan's book. He created the documentary film *Musica Surfica*, as well as *The Glide*, *The Reef*, and *The Crowd & I*. Most recently, Richard collaborated with director Jennifer Peedom and Stranger Than Fiction Films to create the films *Mountain* and *River*, the former of which went on to become the highest-grossing homegrown documentary in Australian cinemas.

His recordings have received accolades around the world, and he is the recipient of six ARIA awards, including three consecutive wins for his recordings of Bach's violin works.

Richard was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1999. In 2017 he was awarded the JC Williamson Award for longstanding service to the live performance industry.

CATHERINE CARBY



Mezzo-soprano

Currently residing in the UK, leading Australian mezzo-soprano Catherine Carby has performed with major opera companies including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, English National Opera, Scottish Opera, Opera Australia, Victoria State Opera, State Opera South Australia and Opera Queensland. As a board member of Swap'ra UK (Supporting Women and Parents in Opera), Catherine is committed to achieving gender and pay equality in the opera industry.

Alongside returns to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Catherine's engagements in recent seasons include Idamante (*Idomeneo*) for Victorian Opera, Waltraute (*Die Götterdämmerung*) for Longborough Festival Opera, Malcolm (*La Donna del Lago*) for Buxton International Festival, the title role in *Médée* for Pinchgut Opera and, on the concert platform, Wellgunde (*Das Rheingold*) with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Handel *Messiah* and Verdi *Requiem* with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* at the Lisa Gasteen National Opera Program, Brisbane. She returns to Opera Australia this year to perform the role of Gertrude in Brett Dean's *Hamlet*.

Catherine's roles for the Royal Opera include Emilia (*Otello*), Antonia's mother (*Tales of Hoffmann*), Second Maid (*Elektra*), Minerva/Fortune (*The Return of Ulysses*), Siegrune (*Die Walküre*), Sister Mathilde (*Dialogue des Carmélites*), and Voice from Above (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) and for the Royal Ballet, Katharina Schrott (*Mayerling*). Further roles include

Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*) at the Teatro São Carlos, Lisbon; Sesto (*La Clemenza di Tito*) for National Opera Company, Canberra and Penelope (*Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*) for Pinchgut Opera.

For Opera Australia Catherine has sung Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*), title role (*Carmen*), Arsace (*Partenope*, Green Room Award nomination), Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Romeo (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*), Hippolyta (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*), Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*, Helpmann Award), Mallika (*Lakmé*), Maddalena (*Rigoletto*), Cornelia (*Giulio Cesare*, Green Room Award), Ruggiero (*Alcina*), Kristina (*The Makropulos Affair*), Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*), and Auntie (*Peter Grimes*).

On the concert platform she has been heard as Nita (*The Mountebanks*) with the BBC Concert Orchestra; Haydn's *Paukenmesse* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Gardner Chamber Orchestra Boston; Mozart's *Mass in C* for the Polski Chór Kameralny Gdańsk; Karl Jenkins' 75th birthday celebrations; Verdi's *Requiem* with Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Haydn's *Arianna auf Naxos* with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Her recordings include *The Mountebanks*, Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley*, *The Love for Three Oranges*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and The Royal Opera's *Die Walküre* (Siegrune).

STUART SKELTON

Tenor

Stuart Skelton has appeared in many of the world's most celebrated opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, Seattle Opera, San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera Covent Garden, Paris Opera, Bavarian State Opera, La Scala Milan, Hamburg State Opera, Berlin State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Dresden Semperoper and the Vienna State Opera. His roles include the title roles in *Lohengrin*, *Rienzi*, *Parsifal*, *Dimitrij*, *Otello* and *Peter Grimes* as well as Florestan in *Fidelio*, Laca in *Jenufa*, Erik in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, The Kaiser in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Max in *Der Freischütz*, Canio in *Pagliacci*, Gherman in *The Queen of Spades*, and Siegmund in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

He is in constant demand on concert stages around the world, having appeared with such orchestras as the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Montreal Symphony, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gewandhaus Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Orchestras of Scotland and Wales, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Symphony Orchestras of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Western Australia and Tasmania. He has also appeared at the Edinburgh and Lucerne Festivals, and in the BBC Proms.

Throughout his career Stuart has been fortunate enough to work with many acclaimed conductors



including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Daniel Barenboim, Karina Canellakis, Asher Fisch, Edward Gardner, Phillippe Jordan, Fabio Luisi, David Robertson, Sir Simon Rattle, Donald Runnicles, Simone Young and Jaap van Zweden.

Stuart Skelton's recent recordings include performances of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with Adam Fischer and the Düsseldorfer Symphoniker, and both the Mahler and Siegmund in *Die Walküre* with Sir Simon Rattle and the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, a role he has also recorded with Asher Fisch in Adelaide and Seattle, Simone Young in Hamburg and Jaap van Zweden in Hong Kong. His recording of *Peter Grimes* with long-time collaborator and friend, Edward Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic was released to international acclaim in 2020 and received a Grammy award for best classical recording in 2021. His recording of Korngold's *Abschiedslieder*, Fried's *Verklärte Nacht* and Lehar's *Fieber* with the BBC Symphony, again under Edward Gardner, was also recently released to worldwide praise. Stuart has also recorded his first solo album, *Shining Knight* and *Tristan und Isolde* with The West Australian Symphony and Asher Fisch.

In 2021 Stuart was awarded the Icelandic Music Award's Male Singer of the Year Award.



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In 2023 the ACO launched its digital streaming platform, ACO On Demand, which hosts the Orchestra’s award-winning season of cinematic concert films, *ACO StudioCasts*, alongside live concert streams and premium on demand content.

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