

Australian Chamber Orchestra: Beethoven and Bridgetower

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.30pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

William Barton *Didge Fusion*

Hypersonic

Thomas Adès *Shanty – Over the Sea*

Ruth Crawford Seeger *Andante for Strings*

Leoš Janáček (arr Richard Tognetti) String Quartet No 1, *Kreutzer Sonata*

1. Adagio – Con moto
2. Con moto
3. Con moto – Vivo – Andante
4. Con moto – (Adagio) – Più mosso

George Walker *Lyric for Strings*

Ludwig van Beethoven (arr Richard Tognetti) Violin Sonata No 9, *Bridgetower* (previously *Kreutzer*)

1. Adagio sostenuto – Presto
2. Andante con variazioni
3. Presto

In the first concert in its residency, the ACO is joined by didgeridoo virtuoso William Barton for a programme bridging centuries and continents.

Beethoven fans might be unfamiliar with his *Bridgetower* Violin Sonata. You may be wondering if it's a new discovery. Well, no. It's his Sonata No 9, much loved and well known as the *Kreutzer*. Beethoven originally dedicated it to the black virtuoso violinist George Bridgetower, with whom he gave the premiere in 1803. However, the composer supposedly fought with Bridgetower over remarks he made about a woman and in a characteristic fit of temper, rededicated the work to Rodolphe Kreutzer – even though Kreutzer never actually performed the work and thought it 'unintelligible'.

Bridgetower had been a child prodigy and had received the patronage of the future George IV, but died in destitution. This posthumous rededication is merely what he deserves, explains Richard Tognetti: 'I came across Beethoven's own original dedication, which read "Sonata mulattica composta per il mulatto Brischdauer, gran pazzo e compositore mulattico" (Mullatic sonata written for the mulatto Bridgetower, a complete lunatic and mullatic composer). The work was originally dedicated to Bridgetower, and arguably never should have been Kreutzer's sonata at all.

'It seems that Beethoven considered Bridgetower an extraordinary musician. He virtually sightread the sonata at its 8am premiere with Beethoven beside him at the piano. It stands as one of those performances that you wish you could have attended, no matter how rough and ready it was.'

As well as its nickname changing, Richard Tognetti has arranged the violin and piano parts for the string players of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. It's his way of reimagining the work as a violin concerto, with the solo violin contrasting with the strings of the ensemble. He explains: 'I dedicated this arrangement to the great Israeli violinist Ivry Gitlis, who performed it with the ACO in 2000. This piece is an outburst, the whole universe is thrown at it. From the drama of that massive first movement to the tarantella of its finale, based on parodic music, the structure is arguably incomprehensible. It has so many characters to it, and Beethoven wrote it in the style of a concerto so it got me thinking, Why not give it a go?' He even decided to use the discarded finale of his Violin Sonata Op 30 No 1 for the last movement instead of writing an original one.

In his 1889 novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy imagined a husband's jealousy watching his wife rehearse the sonata with another man, leading him to murder her in a blind rage.

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In a case of art imitating art, Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) bases his First String Quartet on Tolstoy's story, painting in music the unsettling mood swings between desire, anxiety and fury. Tognetti expands Janáček's canvas and colours by adapting the original four parts for the whole orchestra.

Bringing their very own cultural context to these European classics, the ACO begin the concert with two works by Aboriginal Australian didgeridoo virtuoso, composer, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist William Barton – *Didge Fusion* and *Hypersonic*. Barton fuses the unique textures and vibrations of the didgeridoo with musical depictions of Australia's natural world and the orchestra's own sounds. He explains: 'My passion is to create a journey for people through music and present to them a diversity in musical styles with the didgeridoo and demonstrate to audiences the uniqueness of Australia.'

Turning to a very different tradition, shanties were originally songs that sailors sang as they worked on merchant ships. The insistent rhythms helped them work together in gruelling conditions while the words often expressed a longing for freedom, security and home. Thomas Adès's new work, *Shanty – Over the Sea*, commissioned by the ACO, builds up these hypnotic rhythms, with 15 parts heard both individually and as part of the textures that ebb and flow like the sea itself.

Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–53) may be revered as the head of the Seeger folk dynasty, but before she turned to folk music, she was one of America's leading modernist composers, and the first female composer to win the Guggenheim Fellowship, leading to studies in Berlin in 1930. It was there she began her String Quartet, from which this Andante is taken, which has become one of her most popular works. She herself described it thus: 'The melodic line grows out of this continuous increase and decrease; it is given, one tone at a time, to different instruments, and each new melodic tone is brought in at the high point in a crescendo.'

Originally a virtuoso pianist, George Walker (1922–2018) went on to become a composer, receiving commissions from leading American orchestras and becoming the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize for music. *Lyric for Strings* is one of his best-known pieces – full of warmth and beauty, but sombre and serious, too. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it was often played at Black Lives Matter vigils in 2020 – an appropriate contribution to a programme that aims to redress some of the imbalances of classical music.

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Produced by the Barbican

Performers

Richard Tognetti director & violin
William Barton voice & didgeridoo

Australian Chamber Orchestra

violin

Richard Tognetti
Chair sponsored by Wendy Edwards, Peter McMullin am & Ruth McMullin, Louise Myer & Martyn Myer ao, Andrew & Andrea Roberts

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Chair sponsored by David Thomas am

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Mark Ingwersen
Chair sponsored by Prof Judyth Sachs & Julie Steiner am

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Chair sponsored by the Melbourne Medical Syndicate

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Chair sponsored by Ian Lansdown & Tricia Bell

Véronique Serret*
Riley Skevington*

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Toby Chadd director of artistic planning
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Caitlin Benetatos head of communications
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River

Joseph Cox lighting technician
Bob Scott sound mixing
Jeremy Hoppe sound systems engineer
CVP Events, Film and TV projections

viola

Stefanie Farrands †
Chair sponsored by peckvonhartel architects
Elizabeth Woolnough

Chair sponsored by Terry Campbell ao & Christine Campbell
Meagan Turner*

cello

Timo-Veikko Valve †
Chair sponsored by Prof Doug Jones ao & Prof Janet Walker cm

Melissa Barnard
Chair sponsored by Jason & Alexandra Wenderoth
Julian Thompson
Chair sponsored by the Grist & Stewart Families

double bass

Maxime Bibeau †
Chair sponsored by Darin Cooper Foundation

† principal

* guest musician

The ACO gratefully acknowledge its ACO UK Board, Friends, and members of its Chairman's Council for their support of these performances.

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