



SONGS

OF ROSA MYSTICA



June 2023
Sydney | Canberra
Melbourne | Digital Broadcast

The Song Company



The Song Company is Australia's leading vocal ensemble, presenting music from all times and places. Since its beginnings in 1984, it has captivated Australian and international audiences with exquisite performances of vocal work ranging from the 10th century to contemporary compositions. Every project The Song Company undertakes is underwritten by its unwavering commitment to excellence and to the transcendent and transformative beauty of the human voice.

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Songs of Rosa Mystica

Friday June 9, 7pm
Sunday June 11, 3pm
Wednesday June 14, 7pm
Thursday June 15, 7pm

The Neilson, Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay, **Sydney**
The Neilson, Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay, **Sydney**
Gandel Hall, NGA, **Canberra**
Athenaeum, **Melbourne***
*Australian Digital Concert Hall Livestream

PROGRAM

Elliott Gyger
(b. 1968)

Ficta (1993)

Benjamin Britten
(1913–1976)

A.M.D.G Ad majorem Dei Gloriam (1939)
Rosa Mystica
O Deus ego amo te

Jack Symonds
(b. 1988)

Fire-Featuring Heaven (2022)
(World premiere performances)

Michael Tippett
(1905–1998)

The Windhover (1942)

Benjamin Britten

A.M.D.G Ad majorem Dei Gloriam
God's Grandeur

Kaija Saariaho
(1952–2023)

Tag Des Jahrs (2001)

The Song Company

Susannah Lawergren and Amy Moore, sopranos
Jessica O'Donoghue, mezzo soprano
Timothy Reynolds, tenor
Simon Lobelson, baritone
Andrew O'Connor, bass-baritone
Jack Symonds, Guest Director
Ben Carey, Sound Designer



SUSANNAH LAWERGREN



AMY MOORE



JESSICA O'DONOGHUE



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BEN CAREY

Program Note - Jack Symonds

This program represents what I love about vocal music: the unique ability of the human voice to illuminate poetry and text in completely fresh and imaginative ways. It is built around two of my favourite living composers: the Australian, Elliott Gyger, and Kaija Saariaho from Finland, both of whom have an instantly identifiable approach to the voice in harmony. Saariaho weaves a hallucinatory spell from her complex, resonant chords (aided here by subtle electronic transformations), colouring the vivid poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin in a way that no previous composer had ever imagined. Far from the usual German Romantic tradition encountered with this writer, Saariaho finds a very French sensuality in his gnomic words.

Elliott Gyger's *Ficta* is, quite simply, one of the most virtuosic compositions I've ever encountered for six unaccompanied voices. *Ficta* is an early work by this major Australian composer written while he was in-residency with The Song Company in 1994, and until now, has only been performed once. In this composition, Gyger sets a fifteenth century text describing the 'rules' for writing *musica ficta* alongside the text from the Prize Song from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and a poem by Ern Malley about the fifteenth century artist, Albrecht Dürer.

This three-dimensional melding of texts creates an intricately layered piece where every singer inhabits a different refracted stylistic 'tick' from the history of vocal music... all in under twenty minutes! Gyger's separation of the singers into styles deserves mention:

Soprano 1: Early 19th century, bel canto

Alto: 1950s–1960s jazz singer

Baritone: Late 17th–early 18th century high, Baroque (French?)

Soprano 2: Mediaeval (or Eastern European) folksong

Tenor: 17th century Italian, Monteverdi-style madrigal

Bass: 1930s–40s ultra-smooth crooner.

It is an extraordinary reflection on the creation of art across half a millennium of Western culture, forcing us to consider what is aesthetically 'true' vs. what is 'false' – and whose rules, standards or preferences should determine this.

Finally, a sequence of music illustrating the quirky genius of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was an iconoclastic, visionary nineteenth century poet who bent the sounds of the English language to his unique, poetic take on nature, God, and humanity's relationship with them both.

Far in advance of many twentieth century poets who conducted similar experiments on the form of words, Hopkins supercharged language with a unique pattern of accents, rhythms, rhymes, and collisions of sounds that I find musically irresistible. The content and expression for which he is most known is a kind of radiant, ecstatic positivity that unites the wonders of the natural world with our divine perception of it. Benjamin Britten's *A.M.D.G* and his contemporary, Michael Tippett's *The Windhover* illustrate this with rhythmic verve and spectacular, pinpoint madrigal technique.

However, Hopkins' late poem *Spelt from Sibil's Leaves* is a much more apocalyptic vision of heaven and hell that contains bleak ruminations on the likely fate of most of humanity: a desolate *Dies Irae*. As I was setting this poem, I found that the words seemed to grind against each other, warping and buckling under the intense pressure of Hopkins' dark cogitations. I have sought to amplify the linear arrangement of words in this poem by drawing out the correspondences between vowels and consonant sounds, and language forms.

Six voices often form an unruly, heterophonic unison that is further augmented by live electronics which take the percussive points of vocal contact in the Hopkins to their logical extreme. I have attempted to give Hopkins' vision 'linear form' in time by distorting the natural rhythm of his sonnet, attempting a three-dimensional representation of the 'inner sound' of the poem itself. These will be the first performances of my work.

This program, especially *Ficta*, demands much of the performers and audience but is some of the most rewarding music I've ever experienced. I can't wait for the thrill of presenting this virtuosic program: an immersive and masterful interweaving of music and history.



Texts & Translations

FICTA: Text 1: Contrapunctus (Prosdocimo de' Beldomandi)

De ficta musica notanda sunt hee regule,
quarum prima est hec,
quod ficta musica nunquam ponenda est
nisi loco necessitatis,
eo quod in arte nihil est ponendum
et maxime fictio, sine necessitate.

Secunda regula est hec,
quod ficta musica inventa est solum
propter consonantiam aliquam colorandam,
que aliter colorari non posset.
Et ex istis apparet manifeste
quomodo quasi omnes cantuum compositores
circa hanc fictam musicam sepiissime errant
in suos cantus figurando,
quoniam utuntur in loco ubi non est necessitas.

Tertia regula est hec,
quod signa huius fictæ musicæ sunt duo,
que demonstrant vocum fictionem
in loco ubi tales voces esse non possunt,
unde ubicumque ponitur b rotundum sive molle
dicere debemus hanc vocem fa,
et ubicumque ponitur b quadrum sive durum
dicere debemus hanc vocem mi,
sive tales voces ibidem sint sive non.

Quarta regula est hec,
quod hec duo signa sunt signa totaliter opposita,
eo quod modo opposita totaliter operantur,
quoniam si sit in descensu
b quadrum descensum diminuit
et b rotundum ipsum augmentat.
Si vero sit in ascensu fit e contrario,
quoniam tunc b quadrum ascensum augmentat
et b rotundum ipsum diminuit;
et non addunt vel minuunt ista duo signa
nisi semitonum maius, ut supra dictum est.

Quinta regula est hec,
quod quando aliquod
horum duorum signorum ponitur,
semper poni debet immediate ante notam
que in voce propter talem consonantiam
colorandam varianda est,
sive talis nota sit in tenore sive in contratenore
sive in aliquo discantum,
et sive sit in linea sive in spacio,
cum quodlibet tale signum non deserviat
nisi note immediate sequenti ipsum.

Sexta et ultima regula pro noticia collocationis
horum duorum signorum in contrapuncto est hec,
quod octavis quintis, et sibi similibus
ponenda sunt hec signa secundum quod oportet
addere vel diminueri ad ipsas reducendum
ad bonas consonantias, si prius forent dissonantes,
eo quod tales combinationes in contrapuncto
semper maiores sive consonantes esse debent.

Concerning musica ficta, these rules must be noted,
the first of which is this:

that musica ficta is never to be applied
except where necessary,
because in art nothing is to be applied –
least of all a feigning – without necessity.

The second rule is this:

that musica ficta was invented exclusively
for the sake of colouring some consonance
which could not be coloured in any other way.
And from these things it appears plainly
that almost all composers of song
very often err with respect to musica ficta
in notating their melodies,
since they use it where there is no necessity.

The third rule is this:

that the signs of musica ficta are two,
which show us the feigning of syllables
in a location where such syllables cannot be;
wherever round or soft 'b' is applied,
we ought to sing the syllable fa,
and wherever square or hard 'b' is applied,
we ought to sing the syllable mi,
whether these syllables are in those places or not.

The fourth rule is this:

that these two signs are totally opposite signs,
because they work in totally opposite ways.
For in descending,
square 'b' lessens the descent
and round 'b' increases it.
In ascending, on the contrary,
square 'b' increases the ascent
and round 'b' lessens it.
The signs do not increase or lessen
except by a major semitone, as stated above.

The fifth rule is this:

that when either
of these two signs is applied,
it should always be placed just before the note
whose syllable is to be varied
in order to colour some consonance,
whether the note be in the tenor or the contratenor
or in one of the descants,
and whether it be on a line or in a space,
for any such sign serves
only the note immediately following it.

The sixth and last rule to understand the placement
of these two signs in counterpoint is this:

that for octave, fifths and similar intervals,
these signs are to be applied as needed
to enlarge or diminish them to create
good consonances if they earlier were dissonant,
because such combinations in counterpoint
ought always to be major or consonant.

Sed in vocum combinationibus
imperfecte consonantibus,
sicut sunt tertia, sexta, decima, et huiusmodi,
ponenda sunt etiam hec signa
secundum quod oportet addere vel diminueri in ipsis
reducendo ad maioritatem vel minoritatem opportunas,
eo quod tales combinationes
in contrapuncto esse debent
aliquando maiores et aliquando minores;
cuius ratio non est alia quam dulcior armonia.

Patet ergo manifeste error modernorum
qui loco b quadri ponunt talem crucem,
dyesis, vel falsa musica, doctrinam malam
Marcheti paduani supradicti in sequendo;
ibi ea scripsit que totaliter ignoravit.

Text 2: The Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Richard Wagner)

Morgen ich leuchte in rosigem Schein, von Blut und Duft
geht schnell die Luft; wohl bald gewonnen,
wie zerronnen; im Garten lud ich ein garstig und fein.
Wohn' ich erträglich im selbigen Raum, hol' Gold und Frucht,
Bleisaft und Wucht...Mich holt am Pranger der Verlanger,
auf luft'ger Steige kaum, häng' ich am Baum!

Heimlich mir graut, weil es hier munter will hergehn:
an meiner Leiter stand ein Weib;
sie schämt' und wollt mich nicht besehn;
bleich wie ein Kraut umfasert mir Hanf meinen Leib;
mit Augen zwinkend, der Hund blies winkend,
was ich vor langem verzehrt, wie Frucht so Holz und Pferd
vom Leberbaum.

Text 3: Durer: Innsbruck, 1495 (Ern Malley)

I had often, cowed in the slumberous heavy air,
Closed my inanimate lids to find it real,
As I knew it would be, the colourful spires
And painted roofs, the high snows glimpsed at the back,
All reversed in the quiet reflecting waters —
Not knowing then that Dürer perceived it too.

A.M.D.G AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM

Rosa Mystica

The rose in a mystery, where is it found?
Is it anything true? Does it grow upon ground? —
It was made of earth's mould but it went from men's eyes
And its place is a secret and shut in the skies.

In the gardens of God, in the daylight divine
Find me a place by thee, mother of mine.
But where was it formerly? which is the spot
That was blest in it once, though now it is not? —
It is Galilee's growth: it grew at God's will
And broke into bloom upon Nazareth hill.
In the gardens of God, in the daylight divine
I shall look on thy loveliness, mother of mine.

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

But for the syllables
of imperfect consonant intervals,
the third, the sixth, the tenth and the like,
these signs are to be applied
as is necessary to enlarge or diminish them
to make them major or minor
as appropriate, because such intervals
in counterpoint ought sometimes
to be major and sometimes minor.
This is for no other reason than a sweeter harmony.

The error of those modern writers is clear,
who in place of square 'b' apply a kind of cross,
'dyesis' or 'falsa musica', following the bad teaching
of the aforementioned Marchetto of Padua;
for he writes here of that which he is totally ignorant.

In the morning I shone with a rosy glow, with blood and scent
the air moves fast; probably soon won,
as if dissolved; in the garden I invited horrid and fine.
I lived passably in the same place, fetched gold and fruit,
lead-juice and weight. The aspirant fetches me from
the pillory, on airy paths I scarcely hang from the tree.

I secretly grow afraid because things are going to get
merry here: by my ladder stood a woman;
she was ashamed and did not want to look at me;
as pale as a cabbage, hemp wound about my body;
blinking its eye the dog blew, winking,
what I long ago devoured, like fruit, the wood and horse
from the liver-tree.

Now I find that once more I have shrunk
To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream.
I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
the black swan of trespass on alien waters.

Is Mary the rose then? Mary the tree?
But the blossom, the blossom there, who can it be? —
Who can her rose be? It could be but one:
Christ Jesus our Lord, her God and her son.
In the gardens of God, in the daylight divine
Shew me thy son, mother, mother of mine.

Does it smell sweet too in that holy place? —
Sweet unto God, and the sweetness is grace:
O Breath of it bathes great heaven above
In grace that is charity, grace that is love.
To thy breast, to thy rest, to thy glory divine
Draw me by charity, mother of mine.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

FIRE-FEATURING HEAVEN

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, ' vaulty, voluminous, . . . stupendous
Evening strains to be time's vást, ' womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night.
Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, ' her wild hollow hoarlight hung to the height
Waste; her earliest stars, earl-stars, ' stárs principal, overbend us,
Fíre-féaturing heaven. For earth ' her being as unbound, her dapple is at an end, as-
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; ' self ín self steepèd and páshed – quite
Disremembering, dísmémbering, ' áll now. Heart, you round me right
With: Óur évening is over us; óur night ' whélms, whélms, ánd will end us.
Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish ' damask the tool-smooth bleak light; black,
Ever so black on it. Óur tale, O óur oracle! ' Lét life, wáned, ah lét life wind
Off hér once skéined stained véined varíety ' upon áll on twó spools; párt, pen, páck
Now her áll in twó flocks, twó folds – black, white; ' right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
But thése two; wáre of a wórlð where bút these ' twó tell, each off the óther; of a rack
Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, ' thóughts agaínst thoughts ín groans grínd.

THE WINDHOVER

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plóð makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

A.M.D.G Ad majorem dei Gloriam (continued)

O Deus, Ego Amo Te

O God, I love thee, I love thee –
Not out of hope of heaven for me
Nor fearing not to love and be
In the everlasting burning.
Thou, thou, my Jesus, after me
Didst reach thine arms out dying,
For my sake sufferedst nails and lance,
Mocked and marred countenance,
Sorrows passing number,
Sweat and care and cumber,

TAG DES JAHRS

Der Frühling

Wenn neu das Licht der Erde sich gezeiget,
Von Frühlingsregen glänzt das grüne Thal und munter
Der Blüten Weiß am hellen Strom hinunter,
Nachdem ein heitrer Tag zu Menschen sich geneiget.

Die Sichtbarkeit gewinnt von hellen Unterschieden,
Der Frühlingshimmel weilt mit seinem Frieden,
Daß ungestört der Mensch des Jahres Reiz betrachtet,
Und auf Vollkommenheit des Lebens achtet.

Der Sommer

Die Tage gehn vorbei mit sanfter Lüfte Rauschen,
Wenn mit der Wolke sie der Felder Pracht vertauschen,
Des Tales Ende trifft der Berge Dämmerungen,
Dort, wo des Stromes Wellen sich hinabgeschlungen.

Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett, 1960



Yea and death, and this for me,
And thou couldst see me sinning:
Then I, why should not I love thee,
Jesu so much in love with me?
Not for heaven's sake; not to be
Out of hell by loving thee;
Not for any gains I see;
But just the way that thou didst me
I do love and I will love thee:
What must I love thee, Lord, for then? –
For being my king and God. Amen.

Spring

Whenever earth's bright light reveals itself anew,
the verdant valley gleams with springtime rain, and gaily
Snow-white blossoms breast the bright-toned stream
Where once a cloudless day has bowed before mankind.

Such varied colours heighten our perception,
the springtime heavens linger with their peace,
Allowing man to see the year's attractions undisturbed
And heed his life's perfection.

Summer

The days drift past with gentle breezes' rustling,
Exchanging cloud for meadows' splendour,
the mountains' twilight strikes the valley's end
There where the river's waters have wound downward.

Der Wälder Schatten sieht umhergebreitet,
Wo auch der Bach entfernt hinuntergleitet,
Und sichtbar ist der Ferne Bild in Stunden,
Wenn sich der Mensch zu diesem Sinn gefunden.

Der Herbst

Das Glänzen der Natur ist höheres Erscheinen,
Wo sich der Tag mit vielen Freuden endet,
Es ist das Jahr, das sich mit Pracht vollendet,
Wo Früchte sich mit frohem Glanz vereinen.

Das Erdenrund ist so geschmückt, und selten lärmet
Der Schall durchs offne Feld, die Sonne wärmet
Den Tag des Herbstes mild, die Felder stehen
Als eine Aussicht weit, die Lüfte wehen

Die Zweig und Äste durch mit frohem Rauschen,
Wenn schon mit Leere sich die Felder dann vertauschen,
Der ganze Sinn des hellen Bildes lebet
Als wie ein Bild, das goldne Pracht umschwebet.

Der Winter

Wenn sich der Tag des Jahrs hinabgeneiget
Und rings das Feld mit den Gebirgen schweiget,
So glänzt das Blau des Himmels an den Tagen,
Die wie Gestirn in heitrer Höhe ragen.

Der Wechsel und die Pracht ist minder umgebreitet,
Dort, wo ein Strom hinab mit Eile gleitet,
Der Ruhe Geist ist aber in den Stunden
Der prächtigen Natur mit Tiefigkeit verbunden.

The woodlands' shadow lies there, spread around,
where, far away, the brook glides downward
And the distant picture can be seen at times
When man collects his thoughts and to such sense inclines.

Autumn

The gleam of nature is a higher revelation
where daylight ends with many joys.
It is the year in splendid consummation
where fruits are merged with blithe resplendence.

The world is thus bedecked, and rarely
Does a sound transcend the open fields. How mildly
Does the sunshine warm the autumn day, the fields
Extend before us like a vista, breezes blow

Through twigs and branches with their cheerful rustling
While all the fields give way to emptiness.
The total meaning of this bright-toned picture lives
As if it were a picture framed in golden splendour.

Winter

When once the year's last day has bent its head
And field and mountains all around fall mute,
The azure of the sky gleams brightly on those days
Which soar aloft like stars to cloudless heights.

The changes and the splendour seem less widespread
Where a river swiftly runs its downward course.
And yet the spirit of tranquility is mered with depths
At all those times when nature gleams with splendour.

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