

SUPERBLOOM

1-10 March 2024

Newcastle | Wollongong | Canberra
Utzon Room | Orange | Chatswood

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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The Song Company recognises and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the unceded land and waters on which we live, perform and work, and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We honour the sharing of traditional stories that have been passed down by spoken word and song through generations.

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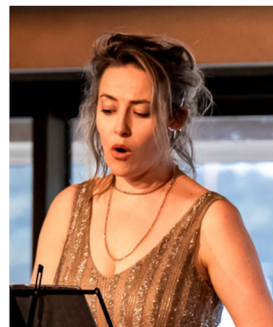
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Christie Anderson, Jane Sheldon



Jane Sheldon, Guest Director: Superbloom

Image: Cassandra Hannagan

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Find out more at:

W [the.song.company](https://www.the-song-company.com.au)
E mail@song.company
T (02) 9156 2781

Superbloom

Newcastle	Newcastle Conservatorium of Music	Fri 1 Mar, 6pm
Wollongong	St. Francis Xavier Cathedral	Sat 2 Mar, 3pm
Canberra	Wesley Music Centre	Sun 3 Mar, 3pm
Sydney	Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House	Thu 7 Mar, 7pm
Orange	Holy Trinity Church*	Sat 9 Mar, 11am
Chatswood	Our Lady of Dolours	Sun 10 Mar, 3pm

*Presented by Orange Chamber Music Festival

Program

Anonymous	Flos regalis (14th Century)
Michael Whiticker	As Water Bears Salt (1990) i. Why Shepherd? ii. As Water bears Salt iii. Sweet Nails
Katherine Balch	forgetting (2021)
Carlo Gesualdo	from Madrigali a 5 voci , libro quarto (1596) vi. Io parto' e non più dissi xii. Ecco, moriró dunque
James Weeks	Veni in hortum meum from <i>Mala punica</i> (2009)
Rebecca Saunders	Soliloquy (2007)
Hildegard von Bingen	O nobilissima viriditas (c.1140)
Jane Sheldon	Flowermuscle (2024)

The Song Company

Susannah Lawergren, Soprano
Amy Moore, Soprano
Jessica O'Donoghue, Mezzo Soprano
Timothy Reynolds, Tenor
Hayden Barrington, Baritone
Andrew O'Connor, Bass-Baritone

Jane Sheldon, Guest Director

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Program Notes

The stunning vision of a desert landscape carpeted in flora is a rare sight and one I've been fortunate enough to see in person in the deserts of California, most dramatically in Death Valley in 2016. Our own deserts experience the same phenomenon, such as when the Kati Thanda (Lake Eyre) basin fills. **Superbloom** explores musical expressions of aridness and lushness, putting these qualities into contrast. A piece might count as arid or lush due to its textures, its harmony, the amount of language it contains, the conceptual motivation for the work, or some combination of these.

Aridness is represented in the longest work on the program, Rebecca Saunders' *Soliloquy* (2007), an exquisite piece about "singing what cannot be said, from trying to speak but not having the words," and one featuring an array of dry vocal sounds and beautifully restrained harmony. Katherine Balch's *Forgetting* (2021), in its Australian premiere, portrays the mind plagued by gaps of memory, with moments of lush chordal blooms when the mind is articulate, and pitchless dryness when it is not. And I'm excited to be contributing a new piece of my own, *Flowermuscle*, which sets a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, and represents the fecund end of the scale.

These three works are new to the Song Company, but since 2024 marks the ensemble's 40th anniversary it feels important to honour its incredible legacy by revisiting music from past programs. One such work is Michael Whiticker's *As water bears salt*, which was performed and recorded by The Song Company in the early 1990s. In a completely different style are works by Gesualdo and Hildegard von Bingen, whose *O nobilissima viriditas* ("O most noble greenness") is a beautiful ode to the divine in nature.

– Jane Sheldon

Texts and Translations

FLOS REGALIS

Flos regalis virignalis chori dux egregia
quam de Jesse natam Jesse stirpe constat regia.

Royal, virginal flower illustrious leader of the choir,
who art descended from the royal offspring of Jesse.

Rosa fragrans primula vernalis
servos tuos libera de malis.

O fragrant rose, O primrose,
free Thy servants from all affliction.

Rex te salem ad regalem introduxit thalamum,
flos decoris et honoris precellentis balsamum.

The king has conducted Thee to the royal wedding room,
O flower of beauty and highly honoured balsam.

Tu glorie speculum solis umbraculum,
da famulis gaudium post hoc exilium.

Thou, sunshade and mirror of glory,
give Thy servants joy after this exile.

WHY SHEPHERD?

Taken freely from Federico Garcia Lorca's three plays *Yerma*, *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

Why, shepherd, sleep
alone in your wool quilt?
deep you'd finer sleep
your quilt of shadow'd stone
and your shirt of frost
grey rushes of the winter
on the nighttide of your bed
The oak roots weave their needles
beneath your pillow sisterly
And if you hear a woman's voice
it's the torn voice of the stream
what does the hillside want of you?
Hillside of bitter weeds.
What child is killing you?
The thorn, the broom tree.
Sleep.

AS WATER BEARS SALT

Oh what a field of sorrow
Oh this is a door to beauty closed
I beg to suffer a child
and the wind offers me daliahs
of a sleeping moon

These two teeming springs of warm milk
are in the closeness of your flesh
two rhythms of a galloping horse
which makes the branch
of my anguish throb.

SWEET NAILS

Sweet nails of Christ our Lord
And this is a knife, a tiny knife
that barely fits the hand.

Let them put on your dress
the cross of bitter rosebay
and over you a sheet of shining silk

Between your white hands
let water form its lament
Sweet name of Christ our Lord

But it slides in clean through
the astonished flesh and stops there
at the place where trembles
enmeshed the dark root of a scream!

forgetting

excerpt from *Estrangement (2020)* by Katie Ford

Only the song took formidable work to forget.

...

And so it was now hers, the labor of forgetting –

Forgetting doesn't just happen,
it takes practice. And, like any other practice,
it begins in loathing.

She began to read novels again, which was difficult –
attending to a story, if it faltered,
was an impossible practice.

IO PARTO, E NON PIÙ DISSI

«lo parto» e non più diSSI, che il dolore
privò di vita il core.
Allor proruppe in pianto e disse Clori,
con interrotti omèi:
«Dunque ai dolori io resto.
Ah, non fia mai
ch'io non languisca in dolorosi lai.»
Morto fui, vivo son, ché i spirti spenti
tornaro in vita a sì pietosi accenti.

"I am leaving" I said, and no more, because pain
deprived my heart of all life.
Then Chloris burst out in tears and said,
amid sobbing alas:
"Thus here I stay in sorrow.
Ah! May I never cease
languishing in mourning lays."
I was dead, but now I live, because my fallen spirit
returned to life at such merciful words.

ECCO, MORIRÒ DUNQUE!

Ecco, morirò dunque!
Nè fia che pur rimire
Tu ch'ancidi mirando
Il mio morire.

So, then die I will!
Do not then look,
you whose eyes kill,
how I die.

Ahi, già mi discoloro,
Oimè vien meno
La luce a gli occhi miei,
La voce, al seno!

Ah, I lose color,
Oh! there is less
light coming to my eyes,
the voice, the breast!

O che morte gradita
Se almen potessi dir:
«Moro, mia vita!»

Oh, death would be welcome
if only I could say:
"I die, my life!"

VENI IN HORTUM MEUM

Veni in hortum meum, soror mea, sponsa;
messui myrrham meam cum aromatibus meis;
comedi favum cum melle meo;
bibì vinum meum cum lacte meo;
comedite, amici, et bibite,
et inebriamini, carissimi.

(From the *Song of Songs*)

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eathen my honeycombe with my honey;
I have drunk my wine with my milk.
Eat, friends and drink,
and let us beome intoxicated, O beloved.

From *COMPANY and STIRRING STILL (1986–89)* by SAMUEL BECKETT

By the voice a faint light is shed. Dark lightens while it sounds. Deepens when it ebbs. Lightens with flow back to faint full. Is whole again when it ceases.

The strokes now faint now clear as if carried by the wind but not a breath and the cries now faint now clear.
...

As he stood there all bowed down and to his ears faint from deep within again and again oh how something and so on was he not so far as he could see already there where never till then?

O NOBILISSIMA VIRIDITAS

O nobilissima viriditas, que radicas in sole
et que in candida serenitate lucas in rota
quam nulla terrena excellentia comprehendit:

Tu circumdata es amplexibus
divinorum mysterium.

Tu rubes ut aurora et ardes ut solis flamma.

BLUMENMUSKEL by Rainer Maria Rilke

Blumenmuskel, der der Anemone
Wiesenmorgen nach und nach erschließt,
bis in ihren Schooß das polyphone
Licht der lauten Himmel sich ergießt,

in den stillen Blütenstern gespannter
Muskel des unendlichen Empfangs,
manchmal so von Fülle übermannter,
daß der Ruhewink des Untergangs

kaum vermag die weitzurückgeschnellten
Blätterränder dir zurückzugeben:
du, Entschluß und Kraft von *wieviel* Welten!

Wir, Gewaltsamen, wir währen länger.
Aber *wann*, in welchem aller Leben,
sind wir endlich offen und Empfänger?

O noblest green viridity, you are rooted in the sun
and in the clear bright calm you shine within a wheel
no earthly excellence can comprehend:

You are surrounded by the embraces of the service,
the mysteries divine.

As morning's dawn you blush, as sunny flame you burn.

Translated by Edward Snow

Flower-muscle, slowly pulling open
the anemone's vast meadow morning,
until the loud sky's polyphonic light
comes pouring down into its womb,

muscle of infinite reception
flexed in the quiet flower star,
sometimes so overwhelmed by fullness
that the sunset's call to rest

is scarcely able to give you back
the wide-sprung petal edge:
you, resolve and strength of *how many* worlds!

We violent ones, we last longer.
But *when*, in which of all these lives,
are we finally open and receivers?

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The Song Company depends on the generosity of individual donors to keep our artistic program thriving. Thank you to the following donors who have supported us in 2023 and 2024:

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The Song Company at 40

Jessica O'Donoghue & Amy Moore Co-Artistic Directors

Welcome to The Song Company's highly anticipated 2024 season. This year marks a significant milestone as we celebrate our 40th Anniversary, and we couldn't be more thrilled to present a program that promises an unforgettable journey through the world of vocal ensemble music. We have curated a season dedicated to the exceptional singers in our ensemble which explores the profound connection between music and the natural world.

In 2024, we will see three exciting projects, each drawing inspiration from the powerful forces displayed in nature.

SUPERBLOOM

Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra & Sydney, March

Today, we hope you are captivated by **Superbloom**, a program that contrasts the stark beauty of arid deserts with the lush abundance brought about by unexpected rains. We welcome Jane Sheldon in her guest directorial debut program of music reaching back as far as Hildegard von Bingen and Carlo Gesualdo, to stunning works by contemporary composers Rebecca Saunders, Michael Whiticker, Katherine Balch and Sheldon herself.

THE STARS TURN

Newcastle, Wollongong, Hobart & Canberra, June

The Stars Turn takes its name from the eponymous work by Peter Sculthorpe, whose words reflect the wonder of charting the transit of Venus by James Cook in 1769. The program pays tribute to The Song Company's numerous collaborations with Australia's brightest music stars over 40 years. From Nigel Butterly through Elena Kats-Chernin and Katy Abbott to Alice Chance and Sonya Holowell, don't miss this musical celebration of musical milestones.

FIRE SONGS & MADRIGALS

Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra & Sydney, September

Led by the inspiring Artistic Director of the Adelaide Chamber Singers, Christie Anderson, **Fire Songs & Madrigals** is a beautifully curated program that will set your heart ablaze. Unaccompanied songs and madrigals by Monteverdi, Lauridsen and Gavin Bryars come to life under Anderson's direction, making this a must-see event. We also continue our celebration of Australian composers with works by Anna Meredith, Anne Cawrse, Sally Whitwell and Carl Crossin.

VESPERS FOR MOTHER EARTH – 40 ANNIVERSARY GALA

Sydney – City Recital Hall, Sunday 23 June at 3pm

To celebrate our 40th Anniversary in style, we're presenting a special performance at City Recital Hall on June 23. The program begins with repertoire from **The Stars Turn**, celebrating four decades of musical excellence. The program's second half is a musical event like no other – the world premiere of Ross Edwards' **Vespers for Mother Earth**, an astonishing composition written for an eclectic array of instrumental forces.

Roland Peelman, long-term Artistic Director of The Song Company, makes a welcome return to lead eight singers, Ensemble Offspring, and specialist instrumentalists including Genevieve Lang (harp), Julian Smiles (cello), Matthew Doyle (didjeridoo), Lu Liu (pipa), and Lindsay Dugan (shakuhachi). Join us this year as we celebrate our 40th birthday with Australia's finest singers, composers and instrumentalists.

Jessica O'Donoghue & Amy Moore

Image: Oliver Miller



Image: Green Peas for Breakfast - Monica Higgins



Next up at The Song Company



VESPERS FOR MOTHER EARTH

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF EXTRAORDINARY MUSIC-MAKING
AND THE PREMIERE OF A MAJOR NEW WORK BY ROSS EDWARDS

Join us in celebrating The Song Company's 40th Anniversary with a musical event like no other—the world premiere of *Vespers for Mother Earth*, an astonishing composition by beloved composer Ross Edwards.

Joining the Song Company on stage in this historic performance at the prestigious City Recital Hall is an eclectic array of instrumental forces, including the groundbreaking Ensemble Offspring, Genevieve Lang (harp), Julian Smiles (cello), Lu Liu (pipa) and Lindsay Dugan (shakuhachi).

The program's first half is a celebration of our rich history of collaborations with luminaries of Australian music, including Elena Kats-Chernin, Nigel Butterly and Katy Abbott. We also will showcase the next generation of composers, including Alice Chance and Sonya Hollowell, and a captivating new work by Angus Davison.



SUNDAY 23 JUNE, 3PM
CITY RECITAL HALL

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