

A melange of interesting notes and the promise of things to come

The wonder is not that so much cacophony appears in our actual individual lives, but that there is any appearance of harmony and progression - Lewis Mumford



Celeste Lazarenko

*“Sinuous line and pure-toned clarity”
Murray Black, The Australian*

Celeste Lazarenko is an Australian soprano of exceptional ability, and we're proud to announce that she will be our soloist for our next concert on 17 May at the Great Hall.

Celeste is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium Opera School and of the Opera Course of London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama, with Masters degrees in performance from both colleges, as well as a Bachelor of Visual Arts, majoring in painting, from The University of Sydney.

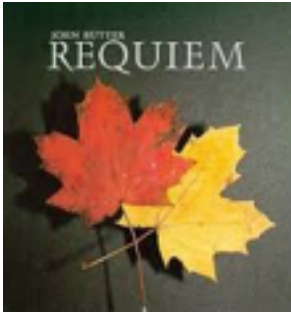
She was a finalist in the 2005 Kathleen Ferrier Competition, where she was described as '...the most darkly intense of the lot...Electrifying.'

When she sang in Pinchgut Opera's performance of Cavalli's *Giasone* recently Nicholas Routley of *Australian Stage* wrote "As the vengeful *Medea* she modulates through lust to terrible artificial sweetness to blazing hate in a way which... held the audience spellbound. Her vocal technique is truly remarkable, and I would go to anything she was in."

Her performance was particularly memorable for those of us who travelled from Newcastle - the other soprano was Miriam Allan, daughter of our Musical Director Christopher Allan. Miriam, I might add, gave an equally spellbinding performance.

Some members of the choir will remember singing in other concerts featuring Celeste as soprano soloist: Brahms *German Requiem* with ChorusOz in 2013, and with the Sydney University Graduates Choir in Verdi's *Requiem* (2013) and Christopher Bowen's *An Australian War Requiem* (2014).

Celeste is the soprano soloist in the choir's performance of John Rutter's *Requiem*. Composed in 1985, this is one of Rutter's most popular works. He wrote it in memory of his father, who died the previous year.



It is written in the tradition of Brahms and Faure, consisting of Rutter's personal selection of texts, some from the traditional Requiem Mass and some from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Rutter, influenced by his own bereavement, wrote it as a consolation, in language he describes as "one that father might have enjoyed listening to". It is suited to performance by a relatively small choir, the instrumentation is restrained, and there is only one soloist.

It was an immediate success - within six months of its publication it was performed more than 500 times in America alone, and it remains one of the most popular classical works in the repertoire. "Imbued not only with

aesthetic beauty but a sense of technical rigour, it ranks highly among the elite body of Mass settings" (Tarik O'Regan).

A personal opinion: Celeste's solo *Pie Jesu* is a personal prayer to Christ, particularly suited to the clarity and range of her remarkable voice. I'm sure it will be the highlight of this concert, and I wouldn't miss it for quids!

This performance will be a rare opportunity to hear a great soprano and a wonderful piece of music, and is certainly not to be missed.

Celeste Lazarenko. Rutter's *Requiem*. The Newcastle University Choir. One performance only. *Modern Masterpieces* - Sunday 17 May at 2pm in the Great Hall

Of course there's more: The program includes works by Morten Lauridsen, Eric Whitacre, Samuel Barber and Iain Grandage. All have written works that fully deserve our recognition as modern masterpieces.

Many contemporary composers have created ethereal harmonies that are regularly described as 'heavenly', and this certainly applies to the music of American composer **Morten Lauridsen**.

Lauridsen was, for a number of years, one of the most performed composers in America – *O Magnum Mysterium* established his reputation world-wide.



In 1975 Lauridsen was inspired by a painting that stunned him with what he described as its "unadorned, understated beauty" and "quiet radiance". *Still Life With Lemons, Oranges And A Rose* was painted in 1633 by Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán. In its serene tranquility, Lauridsen found exactly what he was striving to translate into music.

He had purchased a shop on the waterfront of a remote island off Washington State where he spent his summers contemplating and composing.

"Many people have said that the serenity there, the closeness with nature and the abiding calmness have affected my music, and I think that's true," he wrote. It was here "on a 50-dollar piano" that he wrote *O Magnum Mysterium*, a work he describes as "a quiet song of profound inner joy".

"I wanted this piece to resonate immediately and deeply into the core of the listener, to illumine through sound," he wrote.

O Magnum Mysterium was first performed on December 18, 1994 and was an instant success – its luminous, gently shifting harmonies perfectly expressing a timeless sense of serenity and wonder.

Eric Whitacre's *Seal Lullaby* was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's poem *White Seal* - it is described as loveable, dreamlike, magical, it captures the rhythm of a mother rocking her child to sleep.

Whitacre wrote of the background to his composition:

“In the spring of 2004 I received a call from a major film studio... they wanted to know if I might be interested in writing music for an animated feature. I was incredibly excited, said yes, and took the meeting.



“The creative executives with whom I met explained that the studio heads had always wanted to make an epic adventure, a classic animated film based on Kipling’s *The White Seal*. I have always loved animation... and I couldn’t believe that I might get a chance to work in that grand tradition on such great material.

“*The White Seal* is a beautiful story, classic Kipling, dark and rich and not at all condescending to kids. Best of all, Kipling begins his tale with the mother seal singing softly to her young pup. (The opening poem is called *The Seal Lullaby*).

“I was struck so deeply by those first beautiful words, and a simple, sweet Disney-esque song just came gushing out of me. I wrote it down as quickly as I could, had my wife record it while I accompanied her at the piano, and then dropped it off at the film studio.

“I didn’t hear anything from them for weeks and weeks, and I began to despair. Did they hate it? Was it too melodically complex? Did they even listen to it? Finally, I called them, begging to know the reason that they had rejected my tender little song. “Oh,” said the exec, “we decided to make *Kung Fu Panda* instead.”

“So I didn’t do anything with it, just sang it to my baby son every night to get him to go to sleep. (Success rate: less than 50%).”

Fortunately the work was revived a few years later, and you’ll hear it at the concert.

Samuel Barber was a prodigy. He completed his first musical at the age of seven. When he was ten years old, he attempted his first opera titled ‘The Rose Tree’ based on a libretto written by his family cook.



He was a prolific song composer - he wrote more than 100 works for voice and chorus. *Sure on this Shining Night* has become one of the most frequently programmed choral works in the repertoire.

Barber often recounted a story involving the song. In 1979, he moved into an apartment in New York City and needed to call home. He was trying to reach Gian Carlo Menotti, who he knew was visiting the apartment. However, upon trying to dial the number, Barber realised that he could not recall the new phone number. He called the operator, who

initially refused to provide him with the number, but confessed that she possessed a "weakness" for *Sure on this Shining Night* and requested that Barber sing the song's opening phrase to confirm his identity. Barber complied and was rewarded with his telephone number!

When he arranged the piece for chorus it proved to be extremely popular and sold over a hundred thousand copies. *Sure on this Shining Night* remains a favourite for solo singers and choral ensembles.

Of his work *The Owl and the Pussycat* Australian composer Iain Grandage writes “This work was written for a pair of dear friends of mine who bear more than a passing resemblance to the aforementioned owl and pussycat. Since the piece was first performed at their wedding (in a

version for 2 sopranos), no disrespect is intended to either the priest who married them nor the jeweller who made their wedding bands, as I can vouch for the fact that neither of those officials resemble in any way whatsoever either a turkey or a pig. It goes without saying that tongues are firmly placed in cheeks throughout this setting – the intention being to create a euphoric and simple celebration of love.”

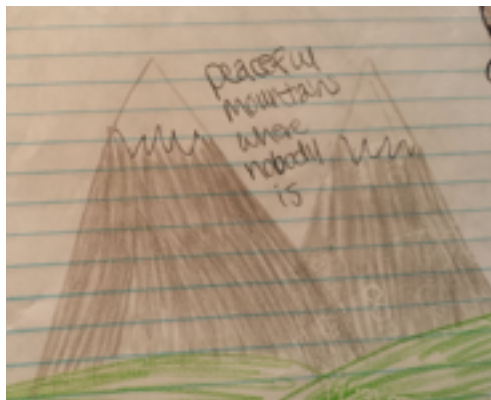


According to *The Australian* “Iain Grandage has such an eagerness to play with others that you wonder if there’s a sandpit big enough for him. He’s one of our most amiable musicians. You may have seen him conducting a symphony orchestra, at a concert headlined by one of his friends, Tim Minchin or Gurrumul... He’s like a goateed Mozart, adding music’s benevolent smile to the human dramas on stage... It is the gift of composers to hear music where other readers see only the silent page. Grandage hears music in “the rhythm of a line, the rhythm of the vernacular”

In the 1990s Grandage's hearing started to deteriorate in his left ear. The damage was to the nerves, rather than the eardrum, but no one has been able to explain what happened.

“I’m half as good as Beethoven,” says Grandage. “I still feel like a young composer, I don’t feel on any level fully formed... I think I’m in for a long journey. I’d like to be Richard Strauss, and still writing at 80. Not that I’m holding any cookies dry, I’m aware I’ve still got a long way to go.”

What If Program Notes Were Written By Kids?



That’s an interesting question, isn’t it! Program notes can be less than interesting - but here’s what one kid wrote when asked to write about Jennifer Higdon’s *Violin Concerto*:

“Searching for something that’s never been there, diving in a crystal clear lake on a white dragon spinning in a sea of wheat, background is in ruins, trying to run away but the sea of wheat goes on forever. PANIC, running up never ending stairs, keep going, going, going, fall down, start again, worrying, do I see the end, no, hurry, they are behind you. Everything slows to a stop, the enemy is creeping to you, slowly they poof away, the stairs poof away, you are in the wheat field crying in relief, the screams of the children are heard, they stop, everything is calm and quiet and peaceful.”

I wish that kid would come and help me with *Cacophony*!

You can read more [here](#).