



RIVER CITY VOICES

western sydney. choral. excellence



Handel's

MESSIAH

TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER
2019

St Patricks Cathedral
Parramatta

Program

WELCOME TO RIVER CITY VOICES



River City Voice's inaugural season has been a massive one! From the very first round of auditions in late 2018, the choir has hit the ground running under Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith's inspiring artistic leadership. Growing from strength to strength in size, repertoire and reach, in its very first year, River City Voices is living up to its mission of bringing choral excellence to Western Sydney. Of the many positive comments about the choir's performances this year, one of the most flattering and challenging must be from ABC Sing Out Sydney's co-host Wendy Harmer who said, "What will they be like in two years? They're already brilliant!" Through diverse, artistically robust performances and programs, supported by invaluable input from our Advisory Committee, the choir has been not only entertaining but building creative relationships with other arts practitioners, emerging and established: Australian choral conductors Alex Siegers and Philip Eames through its Assistant Conductor development program; UNE senior music lecturer and composer Dr Paul Smith; Australia's leading percussion ensemble Taikoz; and secondary school Our Lady of Mercy College's Senior Chorale. And we're proud to be joining forces with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs Artistic Director Brett Weymark, its singers and orchestral players for this evening's *Messiah*, ensuring a performance of grand proportions to end 2019. It's been inspiring to see individuals, businesses, arts groups, and government equally quickly show their support through donations, sponsorship, and partnerships. I extend a heartfelt thank you to all for your generosity and acknowledge the crucial support of Create NSW, Creative Partnerships Australia and Plus1 donors, our Visionary Foundation Partner Condon Advisory Group, Ars Musica Australis, Sydney Mutual Bank, City of Parramatta and the choir's 2020 program sponsor JBS&G. River City Voices is showing no sign of slowing down, with another big year planned for 2020; I welcome your ongoing support and engagement with any and all of the opportunities this exciting new choir offers.

Leonie Cambage

Chair, Board of Directors



When River City Voices started its career with Carl Orff's thumping *Carmina Burana* in February 2019, it forecast a high-octane inaugural year for us, with a wide variety of performances and music. So although our choir is anything but traditional, it's been a delight to close our year with a great choral tradition: a Christmas performance of Handel's masterwork *Messiah*. Despite being one of the most regularly performed works in any classical choir's repertoire, many of our members are new to it, and they've worked with great energy to prepare the many colours and techniques Handel demands. I'm thrilled that Sydney Philharmonia Choirs has joined us for this concert. SPC has a long history of mentoring, and I wouldn't be the conductor I am today without the opportunities provided by SPC's Artistic Director Brett Weymark, a founding member of our Artistic Advisory Committee. River City Voices has achieved a remarkable amount in its first year and I'd like to thank all our choristers, staff, and volunteers, and also the many friends we've made in Greater Sydney's artistic community in 2019. I truly believe that making great art is best when it's made in company, and we have a very fine company indeed.

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

ABC Sing Out Sydney, City Recital Hall
Photo: ABC Radio Sydney, Georgia Moloney



*Handel's***MESSIAH**

First performed Dublin, Ireland on 13 April 1742

Conductor **DR SARAH PENICKA-SMITH****Assistant Conductors** ALEXANDRIA STAVELY SIEGERS
DR PHILIP EAMES**Repetiteur** SU CHOUNG**Soloists** SUSANNAH LAWERGREN Soprano
ALEXANDRA MATHEW Alto
DAMIEN NOYCE Tenor
WARWICK FYFE Baritone**Orchestra** FIONA ZIEGLER Concertmaster

HEATHER BURNLEY | ALEXANDER NORTON | MICHELE O'YOUNG | Violin 1

LEONE ZIEGLER Principal | CATRINA HUGHES | HANA KING | DENISA SMEU KIRILEANU | Violin 2

JAMES ECCLES Principal | ROB HARRIS | HEATHER LLOYD | Viola

ANTHEA COTTEE Principal | ROSEMARY QUINN | Cello

DORIT HERSKOVITS | Double Bass

NGAIRE DE KORTE | Oboe ANTHONY GRIMM | Bassoon

DAN HENDERSON Principal | MATTHEW CARTER | Trumpet

BRIAN NIXON | Timpani

DAVID DRURY | Organ*

RIVER CITY VOICES**Soprano**Jennifer Baker | Klara Bruveris | Maria Costello | Deborah Howitt
Maria Oei | Nicole Senior | Tilly South | Lynn Taye | Naomi von Senff**Alto**Catherine Carr | Catherine Dolle-Samuel | Danica Gluvakov
Laima Karklins | Catherine Lyons | Nancy Nicholls | Marcia Ruff
Karla Stewart-Sykes | Sarah White | Helen Yiu**Tenor**

Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Joshua Lenehan | Gabriel Newman | Peter Nguyen

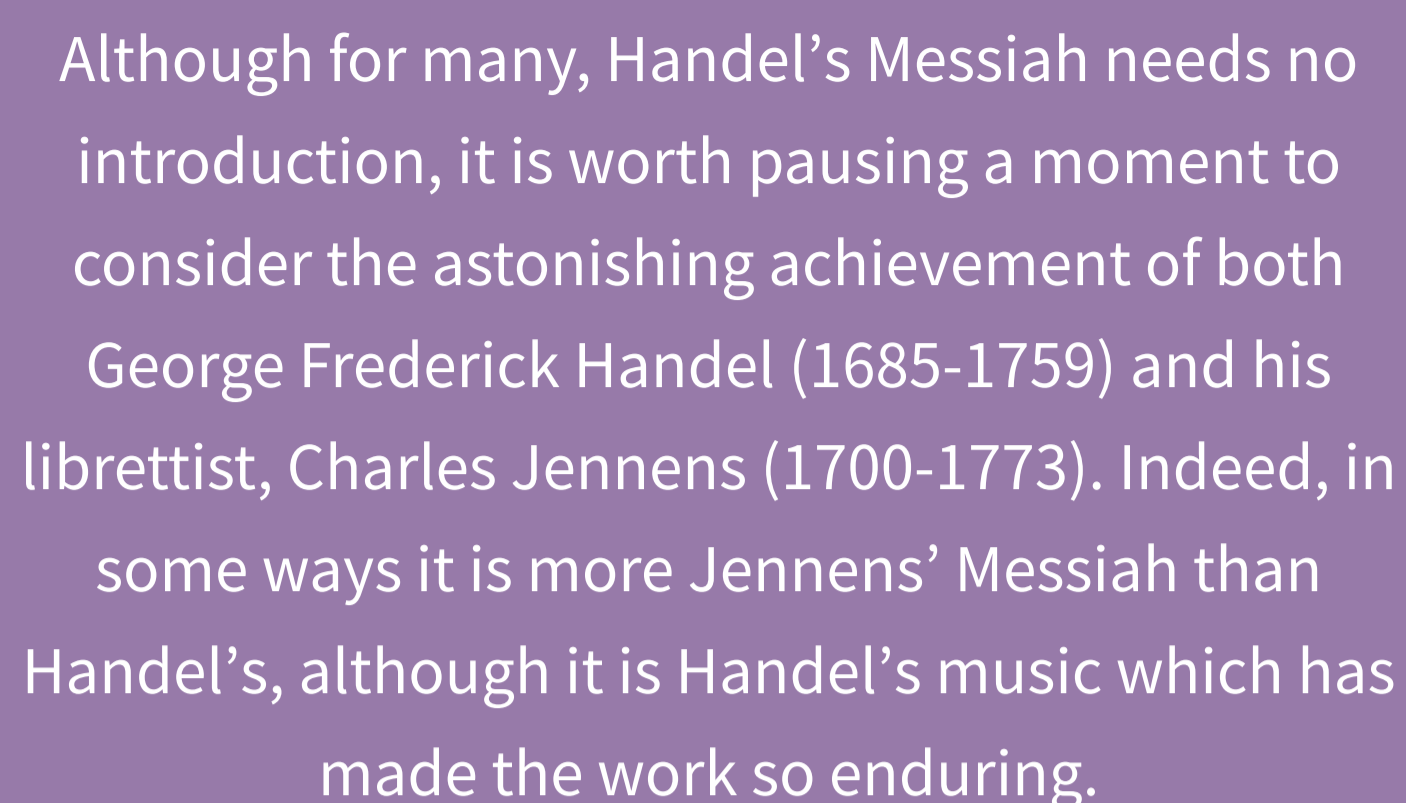
Bass

Philip Gerber | Geoff Kerr | Timi Thomas | Michael West

Singers from Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Brett Weymark, Artistic & Music Director, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Soprano: Anne Blake | Catherine Bryant | Rouna Daley | Vanessa Downing | Caroline Gude | Carine Jenkins | Sue Justice
Gillian Markham | Stephanie Mooney | Charlotte Moore | Jane Nieminska | Nathalie O'Toole | Jayne Oishi | Linda Peach
Elsa Rapon | Narelle Vance Perry | Laura Wade | Sara Watts | Dorothy Wu | Alexandra Young**Alto:** Gillian Behrens | Katie Blake | Jasmin Borsovszky | Nicola Clement | Isabel Colman | Kathryn Harwood | Natalie Lane | Ines
Obermair | Beverley Price | Lara Rogerson - Wood | Jan Shaw | Megan Solomon | Erica Venter | Marianna Wong | Noriko Yamanaka**Tenor:** Joshua Borja | Langzi Chui | Malcolm Day | Paul Ferris | Blake Garner | Denys Gillespie | Boghos Keleshian | Michael Kertesz
Joao Lourenco | Frank Maio | Dimitry Moraitis | Martin Stebbings | Nicholas Tong | Will Willitts | Isaac Wong | Kenji Yamashita**Bass:** Lee Borkman | Daryl Colquhoun | Nicholas Davison | Tom Forrester-Paton | Eric Hansen | Michael Ryan | Antony Strong
Ben Waters | Nick Whiley* Continuo organ by Henk Klop, Garderen, Nederland 2004
Supplied & prepared by Carey Beebe Harpsichords



Although for many, Handel's *Messiah* needs no introduction, it is worth pausing a moment to consider the astonishing achievement of both George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) and his librettist, Charles Jennens (1700-1773). Indeed, in some ways it is more Jennens' *Messiah* than Handel's, although it is Handel's music which has made the work so enduring.

Charles Jennens, a landowner and patron of the arts, was a keen collector of scores of current musical works, including those of Handel; he had manuscript copies made of every piece Handel wrote. His devotion to the composer was intense, and lifted Jennens' frequent depressions: 'Everything that has been united with Handel's music becomes sacred by such a union in my eyes', he wrote.

Unusually, Jennens did not write the libretto for *Messiah* at Handel's behest, but from his own desire to tell this particular story. Although often described as a narrative about the life of Jesus, *Messiah* is much more than that. The musical world is replete with cantatas and oratorios describing Christ's nativity, the Passion, or singular events within his life (such as Beethoven's *Christ on the Mount of Olives*). *Messiah* follows Christ from his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection, but its full reach goes far beyond these events, looking back into the Israelites' history to explore the prophets who preceded the Messiah, and projecting forward to the birth of the Church. How many single musical works span such an extraordinary number of years?

For the eighty biblical verses in his libretto, Jennens selected only ten verses from the gospels (including the angel's appearance to the shepherds). The rest of the libretto he selected across the Old and New Testaments, from Job to Revelations. In all of *Messiah*, the name 'Jesus' appears only once – in the chorus 'But Thanks' (which we are not able to perform today). As chorister and retired minister Denis McIntyre once pointed out to me, Jennens' careful text selection from across the entire Bible renders the oratorio a work about the figure of the Messiah, rather than being a biographical account of Jesus. And there is a crucial reason for this.

Messiah is not simply a work to the glory of God, or a retelling of the Christmas and Easter stories. It is a political work. Jennens was a non-Juror, refusing to swear allegiance to William of Orange and his wife, Mary, and like most non-Jurors, he belonged to the High Church. His convictions were more than just politically unwise, with the Low Church holding much of the power under William and Mary; they were also unfashionable. Jennens was living through the Enlightenment and the rise of Deism, where the natural world itself was taken as adequate proof of divine creation, and revelation, miracles, and the Messiah were rejected. Jennens was engaged in a campaign to keep his orthodox Church of England alive. The pillar of this Church was belief in a Messiah, and the figure of the Messiah was defined largely by the prophecies contained in the Old Testament.

Messiah is therefore not just an act of homage. For Jennens, it was a call to arms, a vibrant and colourful illustration of Biblical prophecy, and a reminder to his backsliding compatriots that they were straying from the path of truth laid out in the Old Testament, and brought to fruit in the new. Jennens wrote for, and offered this work to, the finest composer he knew – George Frederick Handel.

Born in Germany, Handel moved to England in 1712 after a stint in Italy. He had made a name for himself as one of the great operatic composers of his day, as well as an impresario who staged lavish productions of his own copious material. Yet, like Jennens' passion for the High Church, Handel's love of opera became dangerously unfashionable in England. In the 1730s, Handel therefore had to reinvent himself, and did so by transferring all his brilliant operatic writing to a medium which still allowed for arias, choruses and characterisation, only without the staging – oratorio. Many commentators have noted that Handel's oratorios are just as operatic as his operas, and in some ways *Messiah*, with its dramatic storytelling, gripping recitatives, and decorative arias, is no different.

Jennens first approached Handel with a libretto in 1735 (*Saul*, or perhaps *Israel in Egypt*), and their relationship was well established by the time Jennens offered *Messiah* to the composer. He expected Handel to 'lay out his whole Genius & Skill' on it: 'he said he would be a year about it, & make it the best of all his Compositions'. Jennens projected an eight-month composition and rehearsal period after his completion of the libretto in July 1741. Handel, however, received an invitation to visit Ireland, and so he dashed off *Messiah* in a mere three weeks (while also squeezing in six weeks on *Samson* before he left). 'I shall put no more Sacred Works into his hands, to be thus abus'd', Jennens lamented. (Handel did, however, manage to woo him into working on *Belshazzar* a couple of years later.)

In spite of Jennens' qualms, Handel's setting of *Messiah* remains one of the great works of the choral repertoire. One wonders how much it could have been improved if Handel had taken eight months to write it – although it must be noted that Handel did in fact revise it several times, largely due to the forces with which he was performing it in any given venue.

In speaking of versions, a standard Sydney *Messiah* seems to have developed recently, and we are not deviating too far from this popular precedent. It is largely that of Handel's autograph version, with some reductions to make a two-hour work. Our performance today focuses on the text, largely keeping intact movements which are constructed of consecutive Biblical verses. Above all, we hope to tell you a story; a story which, despite its focus on one man's life and death, spans centuries and peoples.

MESSIAH: AN ORATORIO - *Part the First*

1. Sinfony ORCHESTRA
2. Comfort Ye, My People TENOR
3. Ev'ry valley TENOR
4. And the glory of the Lord CHORUS
5. Thus saith the Lord BASS
6. But who may abide BASS
7. And He shall purify CHORUS
8. Behold, a virgin shall conceive ALTO
9. O thou that tellest ALTO, CHORUS
10. For behold, darkness BASS
11. The people that walked in darkness BASS
12. For unto us a child is born CHORUS
13. Pifa ORCHESTRA
- 14 (a). There were shepherds SOPRANO
- 14 (b) And lo, the angel of the Lord SOPRANO
15. And the angel said unto them SOPRANO
16. And suddenly there was with the angel SOPRANO
17. Glory to God CHORUS
18. Rejoice greatly SOPRANO
19. Then shall the eyes of the blind ALTO
20. He shall feed His flock ALTO/SOPRANO
21. His yoke is easy CHORUS



Interval - 20 mins

MESSIAH: AN ORATORIO - *Part the Second*

22. Behold the Lamb of God CHORUS
23. He was despised ALTO
24. Surely He hath borne our griefs CHORUS
25. And with His stripes CHORUS
26. All we, like sheep CHORUS
27. All they that see Him TENOR
28. He trusted in God CHORUS
29. Thy rebuke hath broken His heart TENOR
30. Behold and see TENOR
31. He was cut off TENOR
32. But thou didst not leave TENOR
33. Lift up your heads CHORUS
34. How beautiful are the feet ALTO
35. Their sound is gone out CHORUS
36. Why do the nations BASS
37. Let us break their bonds CHORUS
38. He that dwelleth in heaven TENOR
39. Thou shalt break them TENOR
40. Hallelujah CHORUS

MESSIAH: AN ORATORIO - *Part the Third*

41. I know my Redeemer liveth SOPRANO
42. Since by man came death CHORUS
43. Behold I tell you a mystery BASS
44. The trumpet shall sound BASS
45. Worthy is the Lamb CHORUS
46. Amen CHORUS

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith-Artistic Director & Principal Conductor



Versatile, perceptive, and a passionate advocate for music as a force for change, freelance conductor & vocal coach Sarah Penicka-Smith conducts opera, orchestras and choirs. She made her international debut in 2018 at The Dallas Opera as part of the Hart Institute for Women Conductors, and is a well-known workshop presenter, including for ABC Radio's Sing Out Sydney events. Sarah's current positions include Director of Music at St Andrew's College, Principal Conductor of Macquarie Singers and Macquarie Chamber Orchestra, Principal Conductor & Artistic Director of River City Voices, and Artistic Director of Pacific Pride Choir, which in 2019 became the first pride choir to visit Vietnam and Cambodia. In 2020 Sarah looks forward to guest conducting appointments with Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Penrith Symphony Orchestra, and conducting and co-producing an international blockbuster concert for the GALA Choruses Festival in Minneapolis. Sarah is an alumna of the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program and holds a PhD from the University of Sydney.

Susannah Lawergren-Soprano

Soprano Susannah Lawergren performs both as a soloist and specialist ensemble member, bridging art song, opera, oratorio, early music and contemporary music. From 2011-2019 she was a full-time member of the Song Company, singing an incredibly diverse range of music. She has performed with ACO, Ensemble Offspring, Cantillation, Opera Australia, MSO and the Australia Ensemble as well as alongside international artists like Voces8, the Wallfisch Ensemble and Forma Antiqua. As a soloist, she has premiered Australian song cycles at the Sydney Opera House, performed Schubert's Winterreise with Bradley Gilchrist, and was soprano soloist in Hans Zimmer's Blue Planet with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Last month Lawergren was guest soloist for Bach Akademie Australia at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta



Alexandra Mathew-Mezzo-Soprano



Alexandra Mathew holds a Bachelor of Music (Honours) and Master of Music (Musicology) from the University of Melbourne, and has completed studies in Vocal Performance at the Royal College of Music, London. Recently, Alexandra premiered Andrew Anderson's song cycle Songs of Sleep in Adelaide; Hugh Crosthwaite's song cycle Metamorphoses at the Melbourne Recital Centre; performed with the Melbourne Pops Orchestra in Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy and BBC Planet Earth II; and participated in the Melbourne International Festival of Lieder and Art Song. Other recent highlights include appearances as alto soloist in Handel's Messiah, Vivaldi's Gloria, Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, Reinhard Keiser's Weihnachtsoratorium, and Handel's La Lucrezia; and a tour of China with the Australian International Opera Company. In 2020 Alexandra will perform the title role in Rossini's Cenerentola for GBD Productions.

Damien Noyce-Tenor

Damien is an Australian Tenor, based in London, who studied Acting at the NIDA, then Opera at the Australian National University School of Music & Penn State University (USA). He represented Australia in the World Championships of Performing Arts, winning Overall World Champion & Gold Medals in all of his categories. He has completed Young Artist Programs with Pacific Opera & the Opera Studio Melbourne. Damien has been supported by Roadshow Entertainment, ARS Musica Australis, the Gertrude Johnson Memorial Foundation, and the NSW & Victorian Wagner Societies. Most recently Damien was Runner Up in the London Pride's Got Talent Cabaret final which led to performances at many Pride events and throughout the cabaret circuit.



Warwick Fyfe - Heldenbaritone

Warwick Fyfe is Australia's leading Heldenbaritone and has received many awards including a Churchill Fellowship, Helpmann and Green Room Awards, the prestigious Bayreuth Scholarship and the McDonald's Aria. He is best known for his performances in challenging roles, such as Alberich (Der Ring des Nibelungen); Beckmesser (Die Meistersinger); Klingsor (Parsifal); The Flying Dutchman; Wolfram (Tannhauser); Athanael (Thais); Rigoletto; Falstaff; Germont (La Traviata); Paolo (Simon Boccanegra); Father (Hansel and Gretel); Geronio (Turco in Italia); Four Villains (Tales of Hoffman); Mandryka (Arabella); Amonasro (Aida); Tonio (I Pagliacci); Faninal (Der Rosenkavalier); Scarpia (Tosca); Pizarro (Fidelio); Dr Schoen (Lulu). Warwick has performed with every major orchestra and opera company in Australia and New Zealand; and was for many years a Senior Principal Artist with Opera Australia. Internationally, he has performed with Finnish National Opera, English Touring Opera, Welsh National Opera, Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, and with international companies in Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and China.



Dr Philip Eames - Assistant Conductor



A pianist with a penchant for 20th/21st century repertoire and an active composer, Dr Philip Eames has worked with choirs for over a decade, both as a director and accompanist. His first leadership role was with the Greater Manchester Police Male Voice choir in 2012, and since moving to Sydney, he has conducted community choirs, in addition to becoming a presence in the musical theatre scene. In 2017 he completed a PhD focusing on the choral polyphony of Percy Grainger at the Sydney Conservatorium, where he now lectures in musicology. He holds two Master of Music degrees with a scholarship from the Royal Northern College of Music and the Queensland Conservatorium, also having been awarded the Bachelor of Music in Advanced Performance with First Class Honours. Most notably, Philip was a category finalist in the 2010 ABC Young Performers Awards, and has featured in the ANAM Piano! Festival, the Australian Percussion Gathering, the Per Nørgård Festival, and the Ligeti Academy in the Netherlands. As a composer his commission highlights include writing for The Australian Voices, Queensland Ballet, the Australian National Piano Award and the Black Square Quartet. Philip was also a featured composer in New Music New York, Making Waves, the Music Box Project and the Flinders Quartet 2018 Composer Development Program.

Alex Siegers - Assistant Conductor

Alex has amassed considerable experience as both chorister and soloist across jazz, sacred, classical and pop genres with leading ensembles throughout Australia. She completed a Bachelor of Music and Arts in Jazz Voice and Linguistics at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2017. Alex has been a full time chorister with the Choir of St. James King Street, performed with The Song Company, The Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney Chamber Choir, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, Luminescence Chamber Singers, Cantillation, Vocal Australia Singers, and The Choir Lab. She has also performed and recorded with contemporary musicians including Felix Riebl, Ollie McGill, Julia Jacklin, Alex The Astronaut, Bobby Fox, Liz Hughes, Goldheist and as a jazz vocalist and as a looping artist for Beams Arts Festival; UCSB Amplified 2016, Santa Barbara; Light The Night; Singing At The House, Sydney; Get Vocal Festival; and LA A Cappella Festival, Los Angeles. Alex is a participant in RCV's inaugural Assistant Conductor program which receives support from Ars Musica Australis.



Su Choung - Repetiteur

Su Choung is a dynamic and engaging collaborative pianist based in western Sydney with interest and experience in a wide range of musical genres. She completed a Bachelor of Music (Performance) degree and a Graduate Diploma in Collaborative Piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, under the guidance of some of Australia's leading pianists; David Miller, Dr. Paul Rickard-Ford and Natalia Sheludiakova. Su was elected to represent the Conservatorium for the Estivo Chamber Music Festival in Verona, Italy, where she received tutelage as both a solo and collaborative pianist. As a teacher herself, Su loves working with students of all ages to cultivate positive and passionate music education and believes in the power of communication and connection through music. Su has worked with renowned Australian musicians including: Anke Hoepfner, Alexandre Oguey, James Kortum, Dr. Neil McEwan. She has performed alongside the Sydney Male Choir as a featured artist at the Angel Place Recital Hall and is the repetiteur for River City Voices.



GALLERY

Carmina Burana, May 2019, Edith Angel Hall
Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta



ABC Sing Out Sydney November 2019, City Recital Hall



Middle Large and above: Cumberland Gets Anime-ted! August, Sydney Cherry Blossom Festival. Above (r) Western Sydney Awards for Business Excellence.

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Messiah 2019



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Anon (X7) | Russell Ashley | Jake Ausburn | Graham Baker | Jennifer Baker | Franca Barraclough | Richard Diana Bayley
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Barbara Rose | Naomi von Senff | Marie Senior | Ridwan Setiawan | Koen Van Stade | Jo-Anne Stavely | Hiroko Uchihara
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MAY Sat 2
Sun 3

Morten Lauridsen's
**LUX AETERNA
&
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*"No committed choral fan or singer will ever regret
letting Lauridsen into their life"*

American Record Guide

Reprising its successful "Come & Sing"

River City Voices will again present another first for Parramatta with a
performance of highly acclaimed, award-winning American composer

Morten Lauridsen's sublime works

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We invite singers and audience to join us!

Parramatta

COME & SING
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Join our mailing list so you don't miss out!

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A unique program featuring commissioned
choral compositions by Western Sydney based
composers and graduates of the
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**TROY RUSSELL &
ELIZABETH SHEPPARD**

**Blacktown Arts Centre
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NOVEMBER Sat 14
Sun 15

Boogie with Beethoven

For this fun, interactive, family friendly "Proms" style event
to celebrate "Duh, duh, duh, daaah's" 250th birthday,
RCV will join forces with Western Sydney Youth Orchestra!

**Casula Powerhouse
Granville Arts Centre**

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Marcia Ruff | Karla Stewart-Sykes | Sarah White | Helen Yiu

TENOR

Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Amisone Lele | Joshua Lenehan | Gabriel Newman | Peter Nguyen

BASS

Philip Gerber | Geoff Kerr | Kris Morgan | Timi Thomas | Michael West

MESSIAH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS

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