



River City Voices

Cancel Choir

17 August 2024
Macarthur Girls High School
Parramatta

PROGRAM

WELCOME TO RIVER CITY VOICES

Warami/ Welcome to River City Voices' **Brave** program!

River City Voices' Brave program for 2024 explores gorgeous and well-known classical music – music, however, surrounded by controversial stories. Choristers have been exploring the meaning or impact of these stories throughout the rehearsal period. And in true River City Voices style, this has meant choristers have reflected on the complexities of classical music through their own individual lives and experiences, drawing together different perspectives, and yet delivering the holistic experience River City Voices audiences have come to love.

Working with Macarthur Girls High School, our performance has been enriched by the contribution and experiences of Macarthur Girls students and their families. Thank you for coming on the journey and being open to considering the classical canon with the Western Sydney spirit – a little bit different and with depth of community, culture and lived experience.

Since our Luscious program in May, River City Voices has been thrilled to appoint two new Directors, Emma Ringland and Anthony Cannell, whose depth of experience in very different careers will strengthen the organisation's ability to deliver on its strategic objectives.

Our Artistic Advisory Committee has also re-formed, and its first meeting saw overwhelming enthusiasm and creative excitement about our 5 year Artistic Plan. We appreciate their time and insight to ensuring the program has the right resources, delivery and collaborations to achieve it. Our 2025 Season has also been recognised by Create NSW as delivering engagement and music experiences relevant to River City Voices' mission and we are grateful to receive funding towards delivery of next year's programs.

To our first ever subscribers – our RCV true believers – thank you!

It strengthens our ability to program and budget effectively.

Finally, we hope you will join us on November 23 for our first ever Kids' Proms, the original and fun 'All Aboard with Beethoven' - an interactive program that shares choral musical excellence for a slightly younger audience !



Catherine Dolle

Chair, Board of Directors

BOARD

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Inara Molinari

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Olivia Sanders Robinson

ARTISTIC STAFF

Principal Conductor

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Assistant Conductor

Oliver Cameron

Principal Pianist

Kevin Wang

Rehearsal Conductor/Pianist

Dr Philip Eames

ARTISTIC ADVISORY

COMMITTEE

Bina Battacharya

Cath Dadd

Robert Love AM

Amy Moon

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Brett Weymark OAM

2024 CHORISTERS

SOPRANO

Jennifer Baker
Kirstie Barfoot
Catriona Champion
Josephine Chan
Theresa Cheung
Maria Costello
Tamara Craig
Susan Forss-Clarke*
Lyn Higgs
Wendy Hopley
Deborah Howitt
Iona Mathias
Christine Pendleton
Casey Poon
Tracy Samuel
Naomi von Senff
Nicole Senior
Karla Stewart-Sykes
Lynn Taye
Ingrid Turner
Daniella Verde
Eleni Waugh
Sarah Wielgosz

ALTO

Grace Bondoc
Clare Brown
Catherine Dolle
Sarah El-Khansa
Sally Glass
Danica Gluvakov
Belinda Huang
Rufina Ismail
Jane Jamieson
Laima Karklins
Linda Kemp
Lou Merrington
Liz Mulcare
Nancy Nicholls
Rina Pinto
Huong Tran
Isabelle Truong
Hiroko Uchihara
Helen Yiu
Fiona Yue

TENOR

Clive Arasaratnam-Smith
Tanja Frzop
Richard Heagren-Gibbs
Ian Jenson*
Brian Julien
Nathan Knight
Gabriel Newman
Isaac Powell
Yana Taylor
Spencer Thew

BASS

Jose Augusto
Steve Barnett
Don Church
Philip Gerber
Cameron Glass
Sam Huynh
Ivars Karklins
Geoff Kerr
Mark Nguyen
Collin Rozario
Lorence Tan
Michael West
Dominic Wong

*Chorister Representatives

Cover Photo: Grant Leslie
2024 Program Publicity Images: Alphabet Studio

ARTISTS

CONDUCTOR

SARAH PENICKA-SMITH

PIANIST

PHILIP EAMES

Assistant Conductors

OLIVER CAMERON[^]

ASHLEIGH LANE

Rehearsal Pianists

BEN BURTON | OLIVER CAMERON

ANTHONY CHEN | PHILIP EAMES

RIVER CITY VOICES

Soprano Jennifer Baker | Kirstie Barfoot | Catriona Champion | Teresa Cheung | Maria Costello
Tamara Craig | Lyn Higgs | Wendy Hopley | Deborah Howitt | Iona Mathias | Casey Poon
Tracy Samuel | Naomi von Senff | Nicole Senior | Ingrid Turner | Daniella Verde | Eleni Waugh
Sarah Wielgosz

Alto Grace Bondoc | Catherine Dolle | Sarah El-Khansa | Sally Glass | Danica Gluvakov
Belinda Huang | Rufina Ismail | Jane Jamieson | Laima Karklins | Linda Kemp | Lou Merrington
Liz Mulcare | Nancy Nicholls | Rina Pinto | Huong Tran | Isabelle Truong | Fiona Yue | Helen Yiu

Tenor Clive Arasaratnam-Smith | Richard Heagren-Gibbs | Ian Jenson | Brian Julien | Nathan Knight
Gabriel Newman | Isaac Powell | Yana Taylor | Spencer Thew

Bass Jose Augusto | Steve Barnett | Philip Gerber | Cameron Glass | Sam Huynh | Ivars Karklins
Lorence Tan | Michael West | Dominic Wong

MACARTHUR GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR

Chorus Master

MICHELLE HIGHAM

Jaanvi Agarwal | Marcelle Danello | Tuhina Ghosh | Titiksha Karkuvel | Tanvi Kulkarni | Aanya Kumar
Radhika Kumari | Shruthika Medisetty | Maryam Nigroh | Hallie Porter | Indianna Porter | Siah Sabik
Vaani Saraf | Nesiha Sasikumar | Anshrutha Shanmuga Sundaram | Suhana Shivpillai | Puja Subramanian
Sherona Suthakaran Croos

[^] RCV's 2024 Assistant Conductor through its Conductor Development Program

PROGRAM

Welcome to Country - Ingrid Turner

In te Domine speravi

*In you, Lord, I have hoped.
I will not be confused, ever.
In your justice, free me.*

*Be for me God the protector,
And a house of refuge
to save me.*

*Lead me from the trap
which they have hidden for me,
because you are my protector.*

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Carlo GESUALDO (1566 - 1613)



Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770 - 1827)

Welten singen, from Christ on the Mount of Olives

*Worlds sing thanks and honour
to the exalted Son of God.
Praise Him, choirs of angels,
Loud in holy jubilation.*

Lob auf den Dicken ('schuppanzigh')

*Schuppanzigh is a rascal.
Who knows him, who doesn't?
The fat pig's stomach, the inflated donkey-head.
Schuppanzigh, we all agree you're the biggest ass.*



An die Freude , from Symphony No 9

*Joy! Joy!
Beautiful spark of the Gods!
Daughter of Paradise!
Drunk with fire, we enter your shrine, Heavenly One!
Your magic binds once more what fashion split harshly.
All humans become brothers where your gentle wing rests.*

Humming Chorus

Madama Butterfly, Giacomo PUCCINI (1858-1924)

L'ombre descend des cieux

*Darkness descends from the heavens,
The night opens its veils
And the white stars bathe in the azure of the silent waves.*

The Pearlfishers, Georges BIZET (1838-1875)

Treulich geführt

Lohengrin, Richard WAGNER (1813-1883)

*Faithfully guided, go forth
where love's blessing protects you.
Victorious courage, winning love,
unite truly as a most blessed couple.*

*Champion of virtue, go forward
Glory of youth, go first!
From raucous revels have you both escaped,
winning the delights of the heart!
A sweet-smelling room, decked out for love,
now take for yourselves, away from the splendour.*

*As God has given you blessed consecration,
so we consecrate you to joy.
In the joy of love here may the hour seem long!*



PROGRAM

1812 Overture

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840 - 1893)

*Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance
Give victory to those who fight for the right belief
and for Holy Russia against enemies,
saved by Your life-giving cross.*

Bogoroditse Devo

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

*Rejoice, Virgin Mother of God.
Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
You are blessed among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,
for you have borne the Saviour of our souls.*

A Quiet Night

Natalia TSUPRYK

Lyricists: Serhiy Zhadan & President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

with Macarthur Girls High School Choir

*It is us who sing in the quiet of the night
when the inner town is silent
burying the seeds of our sighs
in the breath of black earth*

*Our land was sown with bullets and shells
No enemy was able to take root here
No shackles can bind our free spirit
We are free people who have their own path*

O Vos Omnes

*Oh, all you who pass by this way,
pay attention and see
if there is any pain like my pain.*

Carlo GESUALDO

Brahma, divin Brahma

*Brahma, divine Brahma, whose hand protects us,
Come and remove the trap of the night spirits.
We are at your mercy!*

The Pearlfishers, Georges BIZET

Allegro energico

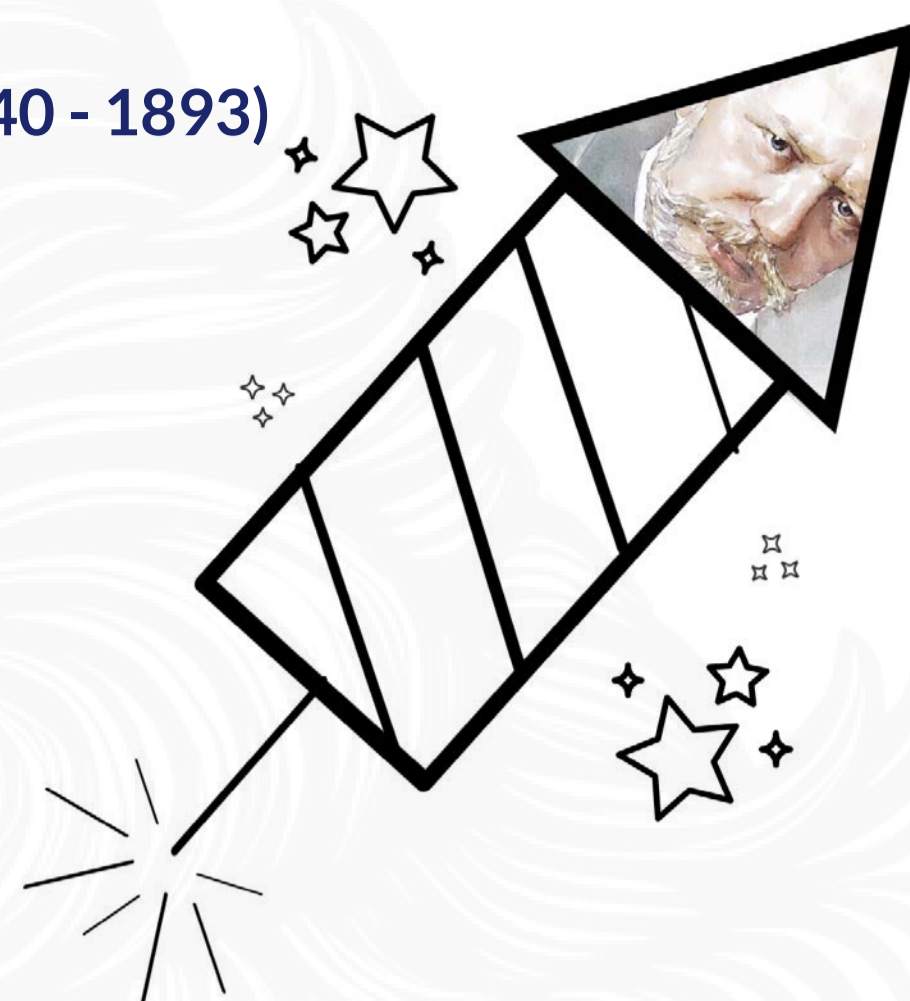
*Joy! Joy!
Beautiful spark of the Gods!
Daughter of Paradise!
Drunk with fire, we enter your shrine, Heavenly One!
Your magic binds once more what fashion split harshly.
All humans become brothers where your gentle wing rests.
Be embraced, all you millions!
This kiss is for the whole world!
Are you falling down, all you millions?
Do you sense the Creator, world?
Seek Him above the starry dome!
Brothers, up there must live a loving Father!*

Allegro ma non tanto

*Daughter of Paradise!
Drunk with fire, we enter your
shrine, Heavenly One!
Your magic binds once more
what fashion split harshly.
All humans become brothers
where your gentle wing rests.*

Poco allegro, stringendo il tempo, sempre piu allegro

*Be embraced, all you millions!
This kiss is for the whole world!
Brothers, up there must live a loving Father!
Joy! Joy!
Beautiful spark of the Gods!
Daughter of Paradise!
Joy! Beautiful spark of the Gods!*



Natalia Tsupryk

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE ON THE MUSIC

*"I don't want to erase anything from the history books - I prefer to add.
I'm interested in what happens when the silence is lifted."
- Helen Molesworth*

In 2022 Sex And The City star Chris Noth ('Mr Big') was dropped from two TV series, a lucrative deal for his tequila brand, and from his talent agency's books, after four women made allegations of sexual assault against him. Noth denies the claims.

In 1590, Italian composer Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa (1566-1613) murdered his wife and her lover. Being a nobleman, he was acquitted of the crime, despite there being no doubt of his guilt. Gesualdo's career and status were unaffected; his music is frequently performed in church services today.

So, what's the difference?

Is it just a matter of time - four hundred years, in this case?

Is Gesualdo's art better, somehow more worthy than Noth's?

Is it simply that not enough people know about Gesualdo?

In 2024, it can feel like we cancel people with abandon. But is that really the case? Almost every composer on today's program has been cancelled at some point, or in some way. All have been reinstated, sometimes with modifications. Between each piece, we offer a range of viewpoints. Which ones align with your own? While the conversations between each piece are fiction, all the information contained in them is true.

Of all the composers in today's program, German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) is probably the most famous. He was the only German composer whose music was used by both the Allies and the Axis powers in World War 2, never being cancelled like his countrymen just for being German. In Morse code, short-short-short-long spells 'V' (for Victory) - the same rhythm that famously opens Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. And his beloved Ninth Symphony features one of classical music's best-known tunes, appearing everywhere from Die Hard to Sister Act 2: Back in The Habit (as 'Joyful, Joyful, Lord We Adore Thee'). The lyrics are a testament to freedom, joy, and humanity.

But Beethoven was also famous for his bad temper and shabby treatment of his friends. What would happen today if a celebrity wrote a song calling their best friend the fattest donkey? Would it be considered a brutal roast? Fat-shaming? What if the same celebrity often left restaurants without paying his bills? What if he threw a plate of food over a waiter?

Beethoven's friends forgave him; they saw it as part of the package, knowing he could swing from extreme generosity to temporary fury. The restaurant also knew he'd be back eventually to settle the bill. But imagine this behaviour in the context of today's news cycle. Would we cancel Beethoven? Should we?

And then there's the problem of opera. Many of our most beloved works were written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by composers looking for exotic, fairytale locations to set their stories. In 1904, when Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) wrote Madama Butterfly, Japan was only familiar from books and plays. Add to this that the character of Butterfly herself, essentially sold to American naval officer B. F. Pinkerton, is only fifteen years old. And that traditionally, performances of the opera involve largely white casts using make-up, sometimes including eye tape, to look as Japanese as possible - and you can imagine why a performance of Madama Butterfly in 2024 Sydney gets a different audience response to 1904 Milan.

Georges Bizet's opera Les pêcheurs de perles (The Pearlfishers, 1863) has similar issues. Although set in 'ancient times in the island of Ceylon', the opera was written while the country was under British rule. Traditional performances run into many of the same problems as Madama Butterfly - largely white casts donning traditional dress, wearing religious symbols out of context, using make-up to change skin tone, and generally presenting a fantasy of a culture which the composer hadn't experienced. The music is largely French romanticism, but from the classical era forward, the 'Oriental' was often signalled in music by using less sophisticated melodies and extra percussion - cymbals and, in this case, tambourine. There's an awful lot of tambourine in opera about other cultures.

Writing opera about your own culture doesn't necessarily save you from cancellation though.

German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) still gets cancelled today, often for being openly anti-Semitic. Wagner's cancellation by the Allies during both World Wars had nothing to do with his anti-Semitism however - the problem was that he was German.

We saw a similar rush to cancel all Russian composers in 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Major companies around the world, including here in Australia, scrambled to replace works in their programs by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and others. Too bad that much of Shostakovich's music is actually a reaction against the Russian leadership of his day, who regularly cancelled him (at least he wasn't shot in a basement). Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) would probably have been perfectly happy to have his famous '1812 Overture' cancelled - even he saw it as noisy propaganda.

Curiously, within a few months of the war in Ukraine starting, Russian repertoire was quietly reinstated by our orchestras. What did emerge in the time it disappeared from our concert halls were a number of Ukrainian composers, including Natalia Tsupryk, largely unknown and unperformed in our country. A beautiful way to show solidarity in the arts (if you believe that's an appropriate function for art), it's safe to say that this has been an unexpected advantage of cancel culture in classical music.

And sometimes, what looks like cancellation is actually something else. In 2012, punk protest band Pussy Riot were accused of blasphemous behaviour for singing part of Rachmaninov's 'Bogoroditse Devo' ('Ave Maria') at the altar of a Moscow cathedral. The Russian government moved quickly to cancel Pussy Riot, arresting and jailing three band members for 'a gross violation of public order'. But could their prayer to the Virgin have been legitimate? Many commentators since think so - that instead of seeking to insult religion, Pussy Riot were actually praying to the Virgin Mary for political change.

So where does all this leave us in 2024?

Some people think cancel culture has gone too far. Others think it's only just getting started; that it finally allows people without power or social privilege to gather together and condemn businesses, celebrities, and politicians, mostly through social media, and call for changes in the status quo. Some argue we should actually call it 'consequence culture' - that it's a legitimate calling-out of bad behaviour in a way that means there are real consequences for people who would previously have gotten away with, well, murder.

And others argue for 'context culture', or, in the words of Angela Duckworth from the Freakonomics podcast 'No Stupid Questions', 'more is more'. What if, rather than removing problematic things from view, we put forward as much information as possible about them, and let people make up their own minds?

This is an approach slowly taking real hold in some circles. The Asian Opera Alliance is one example. Formed in 2021 by a group of Asian-identifying opera professionals, tired of the way they were represented on stage (or their lack of representation when it came to hiring decisions), the Alliance has become a vital resource for companies wanting to do better when it comes to staging problematic works. It's also a fierce advocate for better casting decisions, not just for Asian artists, but for many under-represented creatives - such as female conductors. Major American opera companies have worked with the Alliance to provide better information to their audiences around the contexts of operas including Pearlfishers and Madama Butterfly, as well as re-thinking their presentation.

And the asks aren't all that big. Natural make-up as opposed to changing people's skin tones? Hopefully we can all get behind that. After all, we're often asked to accept that a middle-aged woman can play the teenage Salome. So, where do you stand? And what would it take to cause you to think again?

© Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith

Learn More

The Asian Opera Alliance: <https://asianoperaalliance.com/>
Freakonomics 'No Stupid Questions' - 'Should we separate the art from the artist?'



**SHOW CONCEPT
PRODUCER
STAGE MANAGER
CHOIR COORDINATOR
AV/BACKSTAGE SUPERVISOR
AV ASSISTANTS**

**SARAH PENICKA-SMITH
INARA MOLINARI
MELANIE PENICKA-SMITH
OLIVIA SANDERS ROBINSON
HARRISEN WALDEN**

**ARWA ARKOUB
AMANI DERNAIKA
DUA SUKHERA
AYAH TARABIYA**

AV VOICE-OVERS

**CLIVE ARASARATNAM-SMITH
PHILIP EAMES
PHILIP GERBER
RUFINA ISMAIL
JANE JAMIESON
IONA MATHIAS
LOU MERRINGTON
LIZ MULCARE
SARAH PENICKA-SMITH
ISAAC POWELL
NAOMI VON SENFF
NICOLE SENIOR
HELEN YIU**

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

TAMBOURINE

**BELINDA HUANG
NANCY NICHOLLS
SPENCER THEW**

Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith Artistic Director & Principal Conductor, River City Voices

A passionate advocate for music as a force for change, Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith is a unique and innovative voice in Australian music, who thrives working across genres & disciplines. A conductor from Western Sydney with a socially-engaged arts practice, she is dedicated to giving a platform to artists whose voices are missing from the mainstage.

Currently Sarah is the Artistic Director & Principal Conductor of River City Voices, a symphonic choir for Western Sydney combining access to major choral classics with telling local stories. Pioneering programs from 2022 include 'What The World Needs', an album of choral arrangements of work by the neurodiverse musicians of Club Weld, and 'Slam Messiah', where Handel's masterwork meets performance poets. Sarah is also the first Associate Conductor of Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, where her work has included collaborating on the Young Composer Award, and contemporary music programs with physical theatre company Legs On The Wall.

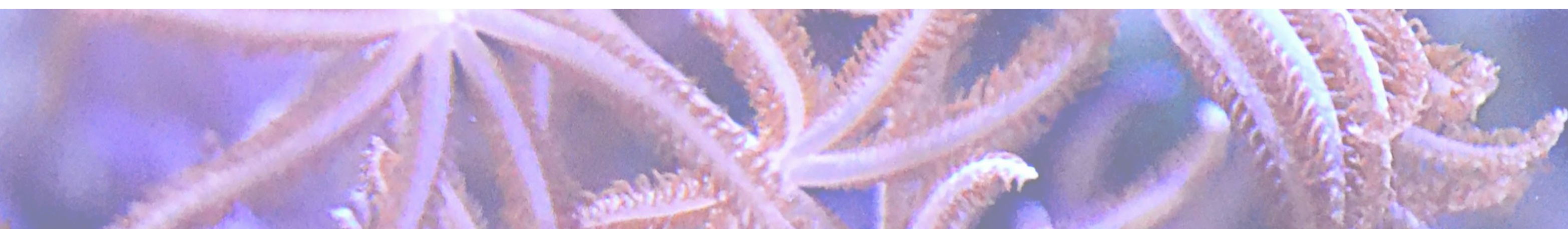
In 2022, Sarah was also one of The Cad Factory's four inaugural CASE Incubator artist residents, for contemporary artists with a socially engaged practice. This led to two further 2023 projects in the regional communities of Pinnaroo, SA, and Narrandera, NSW; the second project was in collaboration with the Parkside Cottage Museum.

Sarah is an alumna of the 2018 Hart Institute for Women Conductors at The Dallas Opera, with whom she made her international debut. Her opera credits include Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* (the first opera staged by a queer choir, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, 2009) & *Dido & Aeneas* (Macquarie Singers, 2017), Korie & Wallace's *Harvey Milk* (Left Bauer/SGLC 2015), Phillip Glass's *Akhnaten* (Ondine Productions, 2013), Campra's *Tancredi* (2010), Cummins' *Anacreontea* (2011) and *Timor* (2015), Krasa's *Brundibar* (2014), Leon's *Monsoon* (2015) and Menotti's *The Medium* (2015), all with Opera Prometheus.

Under the banner of Penicka-Smith Arts & Event Management, Sarah and her wife Melanie Penicka-Smith run Pacific Pride Choir, a touring choir founded to travel to regions where LGBTQIA+ rights may be legalised, but not accepted. They have toured to Poland, Vietnam and Cambodia. The Penicka-Smiths are both founding members of the Global Alliance of Queer Choirs, and together began the Lifehouse Volunteer Orchestra, bringing music to patients and their families at the Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, a Sydney oncology hospital. They are currently touring 'OCDiva', a one-woman opera with mezzo-soprano Yasmin Arkinstall and composer Eve Klein, about Yasmin's experiences living with OCD.

Sarah has conducted many Sydney orchestras, including Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra and Sydney Youth Orchestra. From 2005-2017, she was the longest-serving Music Director of the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, and for eleven years she was Director of Music and Head of Creative Arts at St Andrew's College, and Principal Conductor with the Macquarie Singers & Macquarie Chamber Orchestra. Sarah chorusmasters for a range of ensembles and festivals, including Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, and conducted all four years of ABC Sydney's 'Sing Out Sydney' event. As part of the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program (2012-2015), Sarah worked with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra under the guidance of Maestri Asher Fisch, Johannes Fritzsich, Marko Letonja and Christopher Seaman. Her most recent studies are with Maestro Carlo Montanaro.

Sarah is also in demand as an adjudicator and panelist, including serving on the Musica Viva Artistic Review Committee and as a juror for the Vocal/Choral section of the APRA/AMCOS Art Music Awards. In addition to her musical credits, she holds a PhD from the University of Sydney.



Dr Philip Eames Piano

Hailing from Brisbane, Dr Philip Eames studied piano with Dr Max Olding and Dr Stephen Savage at the Queensland Conservatorium where he was a category finalist in the ABC Young Performers Awards. Philip then underwent further study on scholarship at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, before completing his doctorate in 2017 at the Sydney Conservatorium on the choral music of Percy Grainger. Currently, Philip is a Research Associate at the Sydney Conservatorium with the Spencer-Bennett NeuroMusic Collaborative, and the Classical Convenor and lecturer at the Australian Institute of Music.

Philip maintains a diverse professional career as a composer, pianist, academic and conductor. He was appointed principal conductor of the Macquarie Singers in 2023, and most recently conducted Operantics 2023 season of Menotti's chamber opera *The Medium*. Philip's music has frequently been commissioned and performed throughout Australia by artists including the Australian Voices, Queensland Ballet and the Australian National Piano Award.

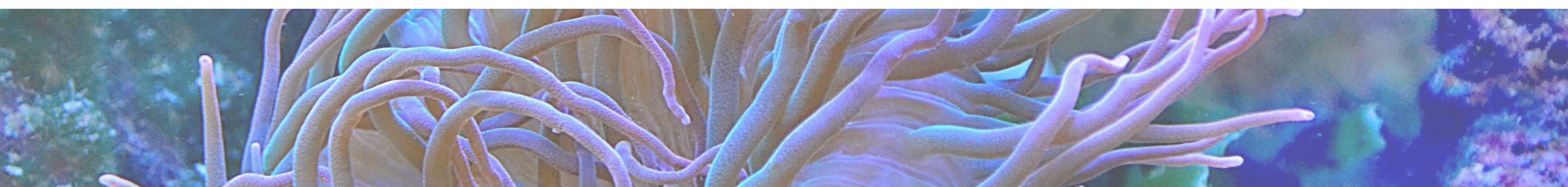
His choral cycle "This Great Unrain" was selected as the winner of the 2020 Willgoss Choral Composition Prize, the Tagore, and ASKM Composition Competitions. In 2019 he collaborated with the Black Square Quartet and the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation to create a large-scale string quartet based on the stories of Oodgeroo Noonuccal. This work "Minjeribah Dreaming" received a string of acclaimed performances during the 2019 Quandamooka Festival.



Oliver Cameron Assistant Conductor

Oliver John Cameron is an acclaimed Sydney-based composer known for his versatility across musical genres, that explores music theatre and pop aesthetics through modern classical forms, with a particular interest in writing music for the voice. His accolades include the Emerging Artist Award at Adelaide Fringe Festival for his musical, 'The Colour Orange', and his work 'five lullabies for uncertain times' that won the Willgoss Choral Prize (2021). In 2022, Oliver was selected as a composer for the NEO Voice Festival in Los Angeles, scored the radio play, *Acqua Profunda*, as part of Bondi Festival and provided orchestration for the Netflix film, *True Spirit*. Oliver's largest concert-piece to date, *Lanterns* for choir and orchestra, was premiered at the Sydney Opera House in November 2022.

Oliver was composer-in-residence at Meriden School (2016 - 2023), and in 2023 joined Moorambilla Voices in the same role. He has commenced a Master of Composition degree under the supervision of Paul Stanhope at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and is one of four candidates to take part in the Conservatorium's inaugural Words, Text, Voice, Music program which will culminate in the development of an original operatic work staged in conjunction with NIDA in 2024. Also this year, Oliver looks forward to developing new works for the ABC Classic Commission Fund and EDGE Festival as part of the Biennale of Sydney.





Clockwise from left:
 Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith conducts River City Voices' Mozart Requiem, 17 May 2024 in St Patrick's Cathedral; Taking bows from left, Ellena Hicks, Max Holzner, Alice Girle, Sarah Penicka-Smith, Elias Wilson, David Hidden; a full and appreciative house; Max Holzner, Concertmaster and Chair Western Sydney Philharmonic; River City Voices choristers

Photo Credit: Grant Leslie Photography

[LISTEN TO THE CONCERT](#)

ARTIST BIOS

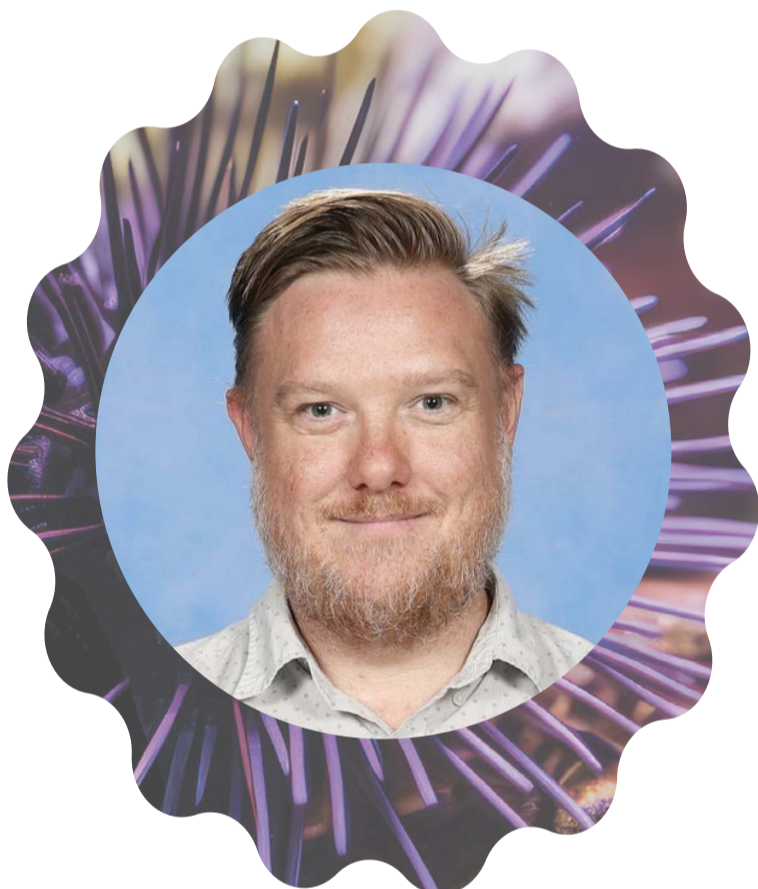
Michelle Higham Chorusmaster- Macarthur Girls High School



Michelle has been teaching Music and Art, and conducting the choir at MGHS for 7 years. She has received a Bachelor of Music (violin) and Graduate Diploma in Secondary Music Education from Newcastle University. In 1999, she graduated from the College Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA with a Master of Music Education and String Pedagogy. She is the Year 11 Year Adviser and is currently completing a Graduate Certificate in Autism, part time.

The full MGHS choir consists of approximately 50 students who rehearse twice a week for the joy and love of singing, regardless of technical ability and background. The choir's repertoire is primarily popular songs with themes of friendship, happiness, and positivity. They perform at school assemblies and presentations and sing the anthem at special events. Students are extremely excited to be participating with River City Voices this year.

Harrisen Walden Head of Performing Arts- Macarthur Girls High School



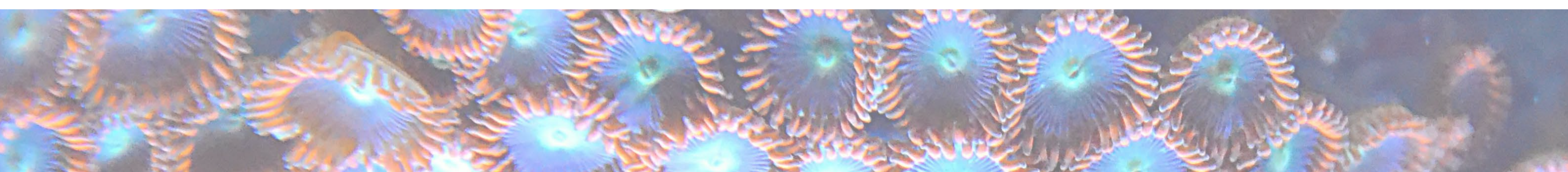
Harrisen Walden is the Head Teacher of Creative and Performing Arts at Macarthur Girls High School. He has taught Music, VET Entertainment, Visual Arts and Information Software Technology during his 12 years at the school. Harrisen is an experienced industry professional who has performed in a number of working contemporary covers and original musical ensembles. In his role as Head Teacher, he oversees the management of the schools Volunteer Technical Entertainment Crew with fellow VET Entertainment Industry teacher, Chris Johnson.



Macarthur Girls High School is a public school situated on the Parramatta River next to the CBD.

Established in 1934, the school offers students a curriculum directed towards the Higher School Certificate with a combination of traditional and Vocational Education courses.

Macarthur Girls High School's purpose is to encourage students to achieve their personal best and beyond, empowering them with the necessary skills to be successful citizens in an ever changing world.



**BOOK OUR FINAL
PERFORMANCES FOR 2024 !**

Saturday, 23 November
11.30am, 1.30pm & 4.00pm shows
Discovery Space, PHIVE
Parramatta Square

Get to know Beethoven better and meet a cast of colourful
characters on this hilarious musical journey



PROGRAM SPONSOR

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—



ARTISTS

RIVER CITY VOICES

River City Voices is Parramatta's flagship, auditioned symphony choir. It was formed in 2018 to meet the community's desire for large-scale and innovative cultural events that expand horizons closer to home.

Led by its exceptional Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, the company's vision is to become a permanent and relevant organisation, renowned for its vocal excellence, surprising collaborative artistic programs, and events that reflect and engage its diverse community, their talents, and stories.

In its brief history, River City Voices has engaged over 2,000 artists, arts workers and community members through its public performances, development programs and workshops. Performances have included curated programs, festivals, corporate and government gigs, and collaborative community events.

In its inaugural year, River City Voices sang in the Parramatta premiere performance of Carmina Burana; at the Sydney Cherry Blossom Festival alongside TaikOZ; as a featured choir for ABC Radio's Sing Out Sydney at the City Recital Hall; and with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs for its performances of Handel's Messiah at the Sydney Opera House, and then in its own sold-out performance at St Patrick's Cathedral, again with members of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs accompanied by the Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, River City Voices collaborated with the neurodiverse musicians of ACE's Club Weld to record 'What the World Needs', bespoke choral arrangements of songs by the Club Weld musicians, which featured on the ABC's Art Works.

In 2022, River City Voices premiered two works by Indigenous composers Elizabeth Sheppard and Troy Russell, performed with Willoughby Symphony (Riverside Theatres) and for its program at The Concourse. River City Voices was also featured on the Sydney Opera House steps for its opening 50th birthday celebrations event, and presented 'Slam Messiah', combining Handel's Messiah with newly conceived slam poetry (Riverside Theatres). After appearances at the Blackheath Choir Festival, members of the choir featured as the "Crocs choir" in a quirky advertisement for Catch.com.au's national campaign released in September '22 which is still running.

2023 projects included Julian Day's public participation work 'Super Critical Mass' at Parramatta Gaol, a workshop/performance event supported by a City of Parramatta Council Community Grant and Powerhouse Parramatta, followed by a concert performance of Morten Lauridsen's Lux Aeterna and Nocturnes described by one audience member as "A truly transcendent night". River City Voices then hosted its first ever fundraising gala event at PHIVE with the vivacious Monica Trapaga as MC and entertainer, and appeared as a featured choir in Sydney Philharmonia Choir's premiere performance on the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall stage of Elena Kats-Chernin's and Tamara-Anna Cislowska's "Human Waves", also broadcast on ABC Classic. Choristers were thrilled to be the only choir invited to entertain thousands of people as they toured the Opera House for its closing 50th birthday celebratory "Open House Weekend". The year ended with a truly unique and authentic Australian Christmas Concert with a program featuring composers from the the Ngarra-burria First Peoples Composers program.

River City Voices continues to demonstrate its ability to break barriers, embrace diversity, and build a sustainable future for choral excellence in Parramatta.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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River City Voices is a registered charity with DGR status.
Your support ensures that RCV continues to deliver outstanding
programs in western Sydney.

Please click [HERE](#) to make your tax deductible donation.

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