

Extended Play: Kammerklang

CITY
RECITAL
HALL

Artists

Sarah Holland-Batt **Poet**
Jenny Duck-Chong **Mezzo-soprano**
Sonia Wilson **Violin One**
Mia Stanton **Violin Two**
Hayasa Tanaka **Viola**
James Larsen **Cello**

Program

Cameron Lam **The Art of Disappearing**

1. The Art of Disappearing I

A chant for mezzo soprano and cello, negotiated in breath and silence.

2. Tracery

Based on the setting of jam and preserving of memories.

3. String Quartet No.2, Mvt I: Synchronised Time

Two pieces played simultaneously, players independently jump between timestreams to weave both realities together.

4. Meditation on the Plums I

Ruminating on loss, switching between external and internal perspectives.

5. String Quartet No.2, Mvt II: Scattered Like A Broken Crusader

Time and pulse slowly break apart and decay before restarting, again and again.

6. Elegie

Reminiscence and regret. An echo of an aria. Memories played through a gramophone.

7. Athenian Jar

The brutality and humanity of speech leads a pseudo-improvised soundscape. Time marches ever onward.

8. String Quartet No.2 Mvt III: Silence Resonating Into Sound

The ghost of a distant chorale echoes itself into full bodied existence.

9. Enduring Ritual

A repeating choose-your-own-adventure song. What do we feel guilty about when we grieve?

10. Meditation on the Plums II

A second view on the same scene from Meditation on the Plums I, moving between internal and external perspectives.

11. String Quartet No.2 Mvt IV: Which Was Always There

A melody arises through the noise; time plays backwards and forwards until only the melody remains – dueting with its reflection.

12. The Art of Disappearing II

A return to the beginning; expanded palette, deeper insight. Time and life move endlessly on.

Program Notes

The physical album launch of Cameron Lam's new song cycle, *The Art of Disappearing*, based on the poetry of Sarah Holland-Batt and performed by new music champion Jenny Duck-Chong (Halcyon) and the preeminent Geist String Quartet.

Limelight Magazine has described Cameron's music as "a fantastical world in which mythological stories comes to life". But drawn to the raw and profound poetry from Sarah's collection *Aria*, in this new work he has set aside mythic grandeur and has delved deep into the traditions of art song and string quartet repertoire in search of a work of intimate connections.

These eight songs and four instrumentals together tell stories of reminiscence, loss and grief through time. The cycle doesn't present loss as something to solve; instead, it paints the inexorable journey from stasis, as we learn to move again...

About the Artists

Cameron Lam – Composer

Cameron Lam is a freelance composer, the Artistic Director of Sydney-based hybrid-art production company, Kammerklang, and the Art Music Specialist at the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA AMCOS). After completing his Bachelor of Music Composition (Honours) at the Sydney Conservatorium, Cameron's career has focused on collaboration, interdisciplinary practice, and entrepreneurship.

Sarah Holland-Batt – Poet

Sarah Holland-Batt is an award-winning poet, editor, critic and academic. Born in Southport, Australia in 1982, she grew up in Australia and the United States, and has lived in Italy and Japan. Her first book, *Aria*, was the recipient of several literary prizes, including the Anne Elder Award, the Arts ACT Judith Wright Poetry Prize and the Thomas Shapcott Prize, was shortlisted in both the New South Wales and Queensland Premiers' Literary Awards, and was commended for The Age's Poetry Book of the Year.

About the Artists

Jenny Duck-Chong – Mezzo soprano

With a career spanning more than 25 years, Mezzo soprano Jenny Duck-Chong has established herself as a versatile and intelligent musician with extensive experience in a broad range of classical repertoire. As a soloist, she has been acclaimed for her intense and dramatic portrayals of tragic heroines, such as Purcell's *Dido*, Monteverdi's *Arianna* and Britten's *Phaedra*, her stylistic renderings of Baroque masterworks as well as her formidable and engaging performances of contemporary works such as Ligeti's *Sippàl, Dobbàl, Nahigeduvèl*, Macmillan's *Raising Sparks*, Benjamin's *Upon Silence* and Berio's *Folksongs*.

Geist String Quartet

Formed in 2015, the Geist String Quartet has quickly established itself as one of Sydney's preeminent young ensembles. Following festival performances at Frenswegen (Germany), Orford (Canada), Turin and Verona (Italy), and Bangalow (Australia), the Geist Quartet has received praise for their interpretations of Mozart, Beethoven, and 20th century works.

To find out more about *The Art of Disappearing* visit kammerklang.wordpress.com

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Lyrics from Aria by Sarah Holland-Batt

The Art of Disappearing

The moon that broke on the fencepost will not hold.
Desire will not hold. Memory will not hold.
The house you grew up in; its eaves; its attic will not hold.
The still lives and the Botticellis will not hold.
The white peaches in the bowl will not hold.
Something is always about to happen.
You get married, you change your name,
and the sun you wore like a scarf on your wrist
has vanished.
It is an art, this ever more escaping grasp of things;
imperatives will not still it - no stay or wait or keep
to seize the disappeared and hold it clear, like pain.
So tell the car idling in the street to go on;
tell the skirmish of chesspieces to go on;
tell the scraps of paper, the line to go on.
It is winter: that means the blossoms are gone,
that means the days are getting shorter.
And the dark water flows endlessly on.

If, in this life, I could see them again,
I would trace a fingertip
around their light-holding mouths:
the painted mason jar that sat, squat,
in ascending height,
on a ledge in my grandmother's house
Necks glazed with birds-of-paradise,
they choked on paw-paw spears,
prunes, shields of pear, and nectarines
with their claws curled in,
while the muscat grapes
wizened away in a Wedgewood cup.
The first Wednesday of December
her backyard mangoes boiled
to chutney like clockwork. It sputtered
and set in infantry rows of jam-pots
for the widows on Ladies' Day,
each lid fringed with a tartan skirt -
Of all the things I miss on earth,
what I miss the most is the perfume
of that windowsill -
jar by jar cooling under a tropic moon,
those five mouths
fragrant with the death of fruit.

Meditation on the Plums I

The dark hours drop off, one by one.
Then in the morning, these plums.
How can we fail to love them, purple-black,
arranged like cowed children's heads,
slunk home, returned to us?
Now they rest like the dead
and their skins are blue, and cold to touch -
You brought them here, each hand a polished loss.
They lay heavy as memory on the cloth.

Elegie

This is the room. These are the ruins that ruined us.
This is the sheet music, these are the books,
and last century's cups painted with roses.
Tell me, was it here the future lapsed,
became an unusable gift?
And after, did we love it still, as we always did?
Tell me before the sun breaks,
before the lovers lose their faces.
Sing the old hymn again, the hallelujah.

Athenian Jar

Night strangles the island,
yet we play on and on. Absence thickens
in my throat. In its hollow your spear
clicks on marble, moonlit
rats scatter like obols, and a ring
of mesh gleams at your neck.
The house rocks its tusks in silence
as our hands fall and fall. Funeral games -
now all we fought for is dead.
Throw the dice again,
feel the years tumble
from your fingertips
like bones.

Enduring Ritual

How could he bear that golden weight?
How could he wander the small villages singing,
leading the slow consoling eyes of the goats
and the slumberous herdsmen to the place
where nothing enters or falls, and even the simplest
beauty endures? How could he go out crying
"my love is dead" in a world where surely everything
was her, and her? In the end, Orpheus did not sing
for love. He sang for the instant he forgot
who he was and had been, for those few notes
shining shapelessly above the strings.

Meditation on the Plums II

She is thinking of the tart, thumb-sized plums
they ate together, and of one in particular.
Unremarkable, except it was the last he gave her.
Of what it was, to stand in the small stone
kitchen, tasting the bittersweet strings
of fruit clinging to the wood. The intimacy
in those ruins. Saying plum and not yet
meaning heartache. Letting the ordinary become the
last.