

# HOURGLASS BEACH

presented in October 2015 by



Friday 16<sup>th</sup>, *The Flute Tree*

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>, *Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House*

**DreamTracks (1992)**, Peter Sculthorpe (Australia)

**White Shadows (2015)**, Margery Smith (Australia)

**Contrasts (2015)**, Michal Rosiak (Poland/Australia)

*INTERVAL (15 mins)*

**Orient Bis (2013)**, Adam Porebski (Poland)

**Piano sonata no. 2 (1953)**, Grażyna Bacewicz (Poland)

**Hourglass Beach (2015)**, Andrew Kennedy (Australia)

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Ewa Kowalski	flute/piccolo	Andrew O'Connor	baritone
Andrew Kennedy	clarinet/artistic director	Suzi Stengel	soprano
Beata Stanowska	violin	Gregory Kinda	piano

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## **DreamTracks** – clarinet, violin, piano

The recently late **Peter Sculthorpe** (1929-2015) is the best-known classical composition export from Australia. His music incorporated influences of Asian music and later Indigenous Australian sounds, saying that his father, “told me many stories of past wrongs in Tasmania. I think he was quite extraordinary for that time, as was my mother”. He’s also known to theme his works about preservation of the environment.

Dreamtracks is part of a series of works called “Songlines”. Songlines are paths across the land or sky marking the route followed by 'creator-beings' during the Dreaming. The paths of the songlines are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance, and painting. A sequence of songs could be used for real-world navigation across the continent, with each in the extensive system of songlines having a length from a few kilometres to hundreds, guided by the locations of landmarks, waterholes, depressions, and other features.

**White Shadows** – baritone, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, piano  
(world premiere commission, dedicated to Pete Smith)

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. My Imaginings Touch the Sun | 4. Shadows Fall |
| 2. Only Silence Speaks         | 5. En Plein Air |
| 3. Without a Friend            | 6. I am the Sun |

Lyrics from “White Shadows” by Lidija Šimkutė, except movement five, “En Plein Air”, by Rita Bratovich and inspired by the writings of Pete Smith.

**White Shadows** explores the themes of impermanence, loss and isolation through Lidija Šimkutė's mystical poetry. **White Shadows** becomes a meditation; the listener is drawn into a world where the natural, spiritual and sacred are close to each other inviting many voices into distilling meaning. We will hear from both the poet and the composer during the performance, but here is a brief take on the music from the Hourglass Ensemble, and some key lines of text.

1. *My Imaginings Touch the Sun* – flute and violin play a bright game evoking a Japanese dawn, while the singer contemplates the vast distances that thought can travel; from here comes the title, in the line, “I draw white shadows on the black ground”
2. *Only Silence Speaks* – a violent and fragmented piece with spiky rhythms; the absence of someone says profound things; “I’m kneeling in the corner, next to a heap of clothes. They have absorbed the past, but remain silent”.
3. *Without a Friend* – the instruments are wailing for company; ethereal, passionate, lost, lonely; “without a friend I’ll sit by my side and sing a song heard elsewhere”
4. *Shadows Fall* – the sound of low, winding bass clarinet suggests being dragged to **dark** shadows, no longer white ... death; “before the sunset I turn back the clock; when shadows fall, your presence descends”
5. *En Plein Air* – somewhat manic and jaunty, somewhat retro, an expression of freedom and delight at opportunities in life, that eventually lead, however slowly, to hell; “Nothingness out of the blue, cable ties graffiti you! What’s it all about? Transfigure it out. Andante to the inferno!”
6. *I am the Sun* – the singer is transformed from eternal thought to power natural presence; perhaps there has been a crossing from one form of physical being to a joined state with the universe; “I am light traveling through space, I am a tree branching into the unknown, I am a wave - never reaching the shore”

**Contrasts** – flute, clarinet, piano

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|------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Andante, molto tranquillo | 2. Vivace |
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**Michal Rosiak** is a flautist living in Brisbane, known for his energy and cheekiness, and it’s never more evident than in his music. The first movement of **Contrasts** starts with a hypnotic ebb, perhaps a gentle tidal lake, with a reassuring major chord in bar four – don’t get comfortable, because his particular harmonic language usually doesn’t allow the ear such a luxury! You can imagine a small boat being rowed through the cold mist on the water, whistling birds overhead, and a sudden frantic darting of fish.

The second movement is a spicy adventure using two main tunes in a modified rondo form – both tunes keep coming back in different instruments with an insistent throbbing in 7/8. The music is great fun to play and that makes the live performance so very entertaining to watch. Strangely, the end of the piece gives a rest from the complicated meter and uses the simplest four beat bar – it feels so very comfortable all of a sudden, ticking along like a smooth train. Aha! Don’t get complacent, you’ll be shocked back from your easy rhythm right at the very end.

**Orient Bis** in two movements – solo flute

The flute, but NOT as you know it. Featuring a fresh look at contemporary flute music and providing a new understanding of this instrument, composer, **Adam Porebski**, was inspired by sounds of oriental flutes. The first movement portrays a free improvisation, creating a mystical atmosphere of eastern prayers. Then in the second movement two ‘voices’ correspond in a contrasting manner, in a form of fugue. A dark, aggressive line confronts a subtle and light response. The piece demonstrates contemporary techniques, such as flutter tongue, double and triple tongue passages, glissandos.

## **Piano sonata no. 2** in three movements – solo piano *(program notes Joseph Stevenson)*

**Grazyna Bacewicz** (1909 - 1969) was a violinist and leading figure in Polish music. War and the Cold War kept her fame from the West; after a successful concert tour, she returned home to spend a summer in Poland just two months before the Germans invaded in 1939. Although the sound and personality of the sonata are her own, the style is close to that of Russian piano music of the time, particularly that of **Prokofiev**, with a few more traces of French influence. It is entirely separated from the radical experiments in atonality that were going on in Western Europe at the time: the hegemony over Poland of the Soviet Union, with its strict ideas on what was proper music for the masses, ensured that.

The sonata is a rather concentrated piece about 16 minutes long and in three movements. The first movement is severe in mood, dark, and stormy and requires virtuoso technique. It could be considered a toccata, which is a piece for keyboard or plucked instrument designed to show speed, lightness, and dexterity. **Bacewicz** uses brief, slow sections to slow momentum, and the effect is of an unstable emotional state, alternately erupting and being held in tight restraint. She uses as many dissonances as she can without breaking the sense of tonality and the dark, minor-key feeling of the music. The French quality strongly emerges in the opening chords, which are reminiscent of Impressionism crossed with **George Gershwin**.

The music then becomes - most unexpectedly in a slow movement - a fugue, which is built on the same theme as the prior part of the movement and which again builds to a rising, emotional arc. The fairly brief concluding movement trials a few variants of a main motive, with rapid, toccata-like scale passages in between. A central section seems based on the F minor repeated chords from an early part of **Stravinsky's** Rite of Spring, then the music explodes into pianistic fireworks for an exciting conclusion.

## **Hourglass Beach** – soprano, baritone, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, piano *(world premiere commission, dedicated to Erin Kenny and Manuel Weirich)*

1. Call from the island

2. Three lullabies

3. The turtle and the flare

Technology and growth inarguably comprise a poisoned chalice. Various influences on my life this year made me listen and evaluate the first world system, and I grew to understand the inequity it creates, harming people I have never met. But, the moral dilemma is, in having naively made others suffer, once the issues are realised, what action is good enough to pay it back? Charitable donation, volunteering overseas, fighting capitalism... this song cycle in three movements gives an existential answer.

I always create semi-autobiographical art, and this story of a disillusioned young man shows him escaping to the "fourth" world – not the Soviet bloc, and not the developing nations – completely out of any society and almost uncontactable and undetectable.

The first movement use lyrics in a made up language, similar to Fijian, to call the guilt-ridden young man to a mystic island far away. He talks about how his mother brought him up well by using safe tricks and lies, and in that habit, all adults continue to justify their destructive habits. The man discovers the way out is to pick up a shell from beloved childhood holidays, listen to the ocean, and be transformed into a black and white Hourglass dolphin that races away to the fourth world.

The second movement finds him dreaming, alone on Hourglass Beach. We have no idea how much time has passed. Now, tunes come to him from his home, a hymn, a dance played by the violin, and a lullaby his mother sang about a black and white dolphin. Is that where this fantasy all came from?

In the third movement, the man has found a flare gun washed up on the beach from boat wreckage. He sees a ship go past, but cannot bring himself to be rescued, to go back to the first world. Instead he waits til night time, and runs to the beach, firing the flare above the shallow reef. Bemused in the dark depths, a turtle sees the red glow and muses on what weird apparition it might be. Funny sounding marine life scurries around in the darkness. Finally, the man wakes on his last day. His brain fires up with the blue sky's light, and he watches an eagle drift away to a speck. We will never really know the way his days end.