



STEEL CITY STRINGS

Illawarra's Chamber Orchestra



Featuring composer and soloist **Nick Russoniello** in the premiere of his new work "Body and Soul" for saxophone and string orchestra.

Body and Soul

12 November **Burrawang School of Arts**

Sunday 2pm

18 November **Wollongong Town Hall**

Saturday 7.30pm

19 November **Nowra School of Arts**

Sunday 2pm



Body and Soul is proudly supported by the
NSW Government through Create NSW



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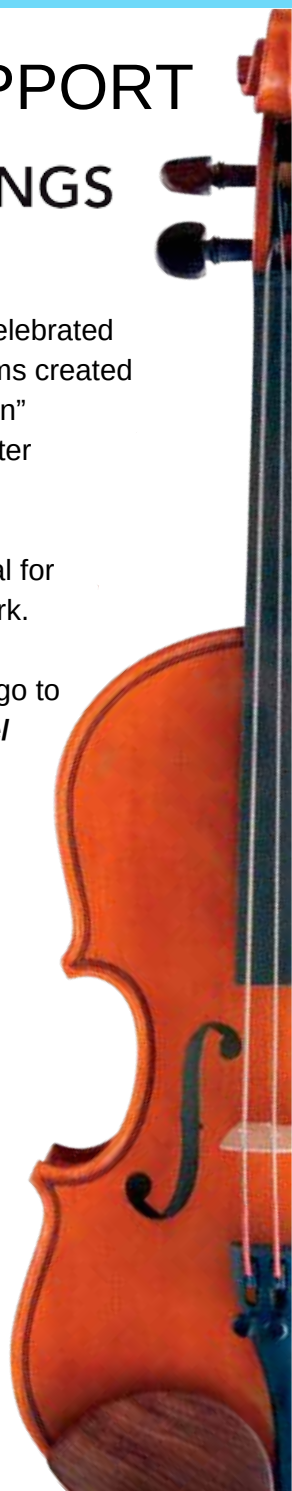
STEEL CITY STRINGS

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Kyle Little, Artistic Director and Concertmaster
Steel City Strings

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The Program

Prologue:

Making - John David Ebert [2016]

Tyalgum Mantras

Ross Edwards (b.1943)

from Little Gidding - T S Eliot (1888-1965)

Chorale and Ecstatic Dance

Ross Edwards (b.1943)

Invictus - W E Henley (1849-1903)

Body and Soul

Nick Russoniello (b. 1984)

for B♭ Soprano Saxophone and String Orchestra [2023]

Soloist: Nick Russoniello

INTERVAL

from Alice in Wonderland - Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

Entr'acte

Caroline Shaw (b.1982)

Lullaby - W H Auden (1907-1973)

Musica Serena

Peteris Vasks (b.1946)

from The Ambassadors - Henry James (1843-1916)

Shaker Dances: III. Square Order Shuffle

Graeme Koehne (b.1956)

Epilogue: *from* Letters - Lewis Carrol (1832-1898)

GUEST COMPOSER AND SOLOIST: NICK RUSSONIELLO

Wollongong Conservatorium Alumnus, Nick Russoniello, is a highly accomplished and dynamic saxophonist, composer, ensemble leader and educator. A graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the Conservatorio di Musica "Giuseppe Verdi" di Milano, Nick has appeared as a soloist or guest musician with many of Australia's premier arts organisations including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Australian World Orchestra, the Australian Opera & Ballet Orchestra, Ensemble Offspring, Metropolitan Orchestra and the Acacia Quartet. He has been the recipient of major awards including the ABC Symphony Australian Young Performer of the Year Award, Fine Music Kruger Scholarship and a finalist for the Australian Freedman Fellowship.



Nick's own projects and ensembles (Duo Histoire, Golden Age Project and his One Man Band live looping show) are highly acclaimed, with appearances for the Sydney Festival, Musica Viva Australia, the Royal College of Music (London), ABC Classic FM, Conservatorio di Milano (Italy), Strasbourg Cité De La Musique (France), City Recital Hall, The Australian Romantic and Classical Orchestras and Australian Digital Concert Hall. In addition to his performances, Nick's original compositions for saxophone are regularly performed by international artists and are featured with the Australian Music Centre. In 2023, with the support of an Australia Council award, Nick composed and premiered three original saxophone concerti that were presented by the Orange Chamber Music Festival, Queensland Chamber Orchestra, The Metropolitan Orchestra and Steel City Strings.

Nick holds a doctorate from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and is a Yamaha Australia Artist & D'Addario Woodwind Artist.

GUEST SPEAKER: AMANDA PILE

Amanda is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts Drama School. After completing her training at VCA, she worked in Theatre in Education and trained as a teacher. She has been engaged in the education sector for over 30 years, working with students in the areas of Drama and English. She has also worked in film and television and in many community theatre productions in New South Wales and Victoria. Recently she performed in *The Appleton Ladies Potato Race* in the local theatre production and in the recently released movie.



STEEL CITY STRINGS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: KYLE LITTLE

Kyle Little is founding Artistic Director and Concert Master of Steel City Strings. He completed his Bachelor of Music in violin performance from the University of Dalhousie, Canada in 2006. He graduated from the University of Wollongong in 2010 with a Graduate Diploma in Education and in 2013 with a Masters in Education - Research.



Leading Steel City Strings since 2015, Kyle is committed to offering quality musical experiences to regional audiences, supporting local musicians and presenting acclaimed soloists.

Kyle is the full-time instrumental ensemble director and music teacher at Campbelltown High School of Performing Arts. He was awarded the NSW ACEL Mary Armstrong Award for educational leadership in 2017.

Kyle teaches violin at Wollongong Conservatorium and taught the Music Methods course at Wollongong University in 2019. He advocates for the importance of quality music education in schools.

STEEL CITY STRINGS CONDUCTOR: LUKE SPICER

An acclaimed Violist and chamber musician, Luke Spicer is now establishing himself as one of Australia's foremost young conductors. Graduating with a Masters of Conducting from the Sydney Conservatorium, he has furthered his studies in Freiburg, and Manchester; and attended the Fondazione Musicale Chigiana, Siena, working under Maestro Gianluigi Gelmetti. Luke became a participant in the Symphony Services International Conductor Development Program during 2016 working with Johannes Fritzsch, Giordano Bellincampi, and Marco Letonja.



Luke has been a regular conductor and music director with Opera Australia and has appeared as guest conductor of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Canberra Symphony Orchestra. In 2014 he was appointed Principal Conductor of the Sydney University Symphony Orchestra, in 2016 he became Music Director of Blush Opera in Sydney and was the Associate Conductor of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra for several years. In 2022 Luke conducted Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* for Opera Australia's National Tour, and Handel's *Alcina* for National Opera Canberra.

The Orchestra

First violins	Samantha Boston (Concertmaster) Monique Ziegelaar Matthew Tsalidis Janine Jackson
Second violins	Jacob Antonio * Alexandra Dening Clinton Lau
Violas	Adrian Davis * Monique Mezzatesta Jo Landstra
Celli	Rita Woolhouse * Karella Mitchell Catherine Barnett Louisa Lovasz
Double Bass	Ethan Ireland *

* denotes principal

Program Notes

The genesis of today's program springs from an invitation to complement a forthcoming exhibition at the Shoalhaven Regional Gallery (Dec 9 – Feb 3) entitled *Death Love Art* in which the curators invite visitors 'to consider how love and loss shape our lives' through the lens of art. We recognise our humanity through these experiences: we know that bodies are born, live and ultimately die. In a quest for meaning, many people argue for the existence of a soul, an intangible essence that continues beyond death.

But how do we explain the concept of a soul? What is, and where lies, the soul? Is there such a thing at all?

Seeking an answer to this question has occupied the human mind across the centuries, generating multiple and sometimes opposing systems of belief, prompting vigorous philosophical and religious debate, and sparking serious physical or intellectual conflict, sometimes with fatal consequences.

The selection of music for today's concert aims not to resolve the issue – an impossible demand - but rather to explore through words and music some of the ways in which creative artists have responded to the relationship of body and soul.

So we begin with a reading of Ebert's poem, *Making*, that takes the body as its starting point. The writer depicts the creation of living worlds as a random pastime for gods. In this scenario, human bodies evolve from the miasmal swamp and, driven by love, generate new life. Having done that, they move on and 'return to the dark'. There is no soul to be found here.

This seems not the case for the music of Ross Edwards which regularly invokes the existence of both body and soul and their intrinsic connections. *Tyalgum Mantras*, composed for the 1999 Tyalgum Festival, was originally performed by an ensemble of didjeridu, shakuhachi and percussion. The cross-cultural implications of that specific scoring suggest a spiritual dimension: the didjeridu is associated with ceremonies invoking sacred spirits; similarly, the Japanese flute is linked with Zen Buddhist rites. But the instrumentation is flexible: today a soprano saxophone is joined by bells, woodblock and strings.

Program Notes

The initial drone establishes a reference point from which small musical cells emerge, repeat and regroup, suggesting the teeming insect life of the Australian bush, and the continuing creation of living matter, animated by some eternal force or spirit, symbolised in the drone.

Similarly in *Chorale*, Edwards engages with origins, suggested again by the droning open fifths from the cellos that preface a slowly evolving melody for violin. Greater harmonic variety, modal rather than diatonic, is found in the central section before a recapitulation of the opening passage. The title *Chorale* instantly alludes to a sense of the sacred and the spiritual. *Ecstatic Dance* however immediately embodies a very corporeal celebration. The music is jubilant, energetic and life-affirming and owes its language to what the composer describes as his *maninya* style characterised by a 'chant-like quality, resulting from the subtly varied repetition of material within a narrow range of limitations; [a] static harmonic basis; [and] the general liveliness of its tempi.'

In his *Concerto for B♭ Soprano Saxophone and Strings*, subtitled *Body and Soul* and commissioned by Steel City Strings, Nick Russoniello explores, in his words, 'the profound connection between music and the physicality of the performer through use of beatbox and body percussion.' His approach is informed by the words of the Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh who observes that

'Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts.'

The composer writes: 'Movement I begins with a fanfare-like call to action, initially sounded by the solo soprano saxophone. After a tranquil opening, this fanfare is transformed into a spirited and lyrical dance... [The second movement] introduces harmonic overtones to create complex multilayered arpeggios on the solo soprano saxophone. This movement requires extended use of circular breathing technique [The finale] is a high energy rock groove that celebrates an array of unexpected timbral and rhythmic elements.'

The work is one of three saxophone concerti composed by Russoniello in 2023 as part of a Creative Australia project, *Concerti Reimagined*, that seeks to redefine the concerto experience for modern audiences.

Just as the Cheshire Cat advises Alice that in Wonderland it does not matter which road she takes, so too does Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte* suggest that this work might take you somewhere unexpected and have it still make sense.

Hearing a performance of the minuets from Haydn's string quartet, Op 77, no. 2 and observing how Haydn's tonal shifts can suddenly carry you 'to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle transition', Shaw was prompted to write *Entr'acte*, exploring what we might think of as harmonic forks in the musical road. While the minuet form underpins the structure of the work, conventional patterns of repetition are disturbed by distorting features: dissonance intrudes only to lead phrases into strange melodic cul-de-sacs; shifting metres ask the listener to forget polite triple time dances. Instead, contradictory rhythms and timbres provide weird and wonderful versions of the dance, not without the occasional sense of whimsy. As the music progresses through various changes of mood and texture, we are finally led to a nostalgic coda where the sound of strummed cellos recalls, as the score indicates, 'fragments of an old tune or story.'

It is quite an extraordinary and captivating work from the young Pulitzer prize-winning composer who is equally at home as composer, singer, or violinist on the concert platform or in the studio recording with pop stars such as Beyoncé.

A sense of loss pervades Auden's beautiful poem of 1940, *Lullaby*. The lines 'soul and body have no bounds' encapsulate the idea that love brings enduring spiritual fulfilment even though death may intervene to separate loved ones.

Such a perspective informs *Music Serena* by the Latvian composer, Peteris Vasks who describes himself as 'a sad optimist.' The elegiac score expresses the sorrow of loss, personal as well as political for a composer whose homeland was occupied by Germany and Russia. Yet the music is never maudlin, never morbid. As in Samuel Barber's *Adagio*, the string writing is richly textured, expressing its grief and desolation with dignity, recognising that death inevitably comes to all people. It is an eloquent eulogy that comprehends the complexity of the emotions evoked by human mortality. Vasks also recognises the importance of a spiritual life, writing that 'I want to nourish the soul, that is what I preach in my works.'

Program Notes

Firm believers in the soul, the Shakers religious sect were noted for the manner in which they worshipped: they would march, sing - often composing their own songs - and dance exuberantly, performing with highly choreographed movements and gestures symbolising their belief in the union of the physical and spiritual realms. The Australian composer Graeme Koehne turned to the literature of Shaker songs as the basis for his *Shaker Dance III. Square Order Shuffle*, his score tapping into the same energy that informs Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, not surprising in that both works draw on the Shaker repertoire.

Koehne's music manages to stray considerably from the sacred into the very secular territory of a Texan hoedown, rather contradicting the Shaker's belief in simplicity and purity. Souls seem momentarily forgotten as fleshly pleasures overtake spiritual desires.

Perhaps these dancers had heard and heeded Henry James' exhortation: 'Live all you can, it's a mistake not to,' or were simply following the biblical instruction to '... eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die,' whilst ignoring the prophesied consequences.

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2024 SEASON *Sound Tracks*

Identity

Sunday 17 March	2pm	Shellharbour Civic Centre
Saturday 23 March	7.30pm	Wollongong Art Gallery
Sunday 24 March	2pm	Berry School of Arts

"IDENTITY" finds Steel City Strings traversing continents, centuries and cultures as it examines what it is to be human.



Reel Music

Sunday 16 June	2pm	Berry School of Arts
Saturday 22 June	7.30pm	Wollongong Art Gallery
Sunday 23 June	2pm	Bowral Memorial Hall

The soundtrack of our daily lives can be thoroughly mundane but not so that of a film where every sound and each note of music is calibrated to guide the viewer's response, asking them to forget that the fictional is not real.



Choral Riffs

Sunday 15 September	2pm	Bowral Memorial Hall
Saturday 21 September	7.30pm	St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Wollongong
Sunday 22 September	2pm	Nowra School of Art

Experience the beauty, colour and vibrancy of mixed voices singing as one, joined in harmonious partnership with the luxuriant sounds of Steel City Strings.



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STEEL CITY STRINGS

Illawarra's Chamber Orchestra

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