

## "PHOENIX ANGEL"

Phoenix Central Park, Sydney 3rd March 2022

Harps: Alice Giles

Lighting: Sam Whiteside

Sound technicians: Felix Abrahams; Patrick Liney, George Nicholas (Peregrinatio track)

Costume: Lorraine Foster, The Vintage Clothing Shop

Choreography consultant: Padma Menon

World Premiere performance

### PROGRAM AND NOTES

*The **Phoenix Angel** program is a poetic-theatrical combination of **music, lighting and gesture**.*

Culmination of a Phoenix Foundation grant to explore ways to extend the possibilities of the contemporary harp, this immersive program using creative lighting and multiple harps features three especially commissioned new works, woven together as one event.

Instrumentally the works extend the natural gestures used to awaken and vary the resonances of the harp to include the use of the whole body; deepen the subtleties of colour in extended techniques to increase expressiveness, including refining the use of such string instrument related techniques as bowing and the use of a moveable fret on the strings; and use various electronic technologies to allow the instrument to create new sound worlds.

The harp has been used as an expression and symbol of the inner journey, the mythical and ceremonial, from earliest human history; enter the space and be accompanied on your own individual journey.

#### **Harp Body Her Body (2021)**

**Mary Doumany**

An Alchemical Journey for Harpist and Solo Amplified Harp with Loop Pedal

I The Calling

II Engagement

III Alchemical Marriage

IV Deepening

V Surrender to Union

#### **Peregrinatio (2021)**

**Sharon Calcraft**

Pedal harp, lever harp, bow, fret, fixed media: 20.2 channel electronics

#### **Helix Sequencing (2021)**

**Jon Drummond**

Electro-acoustic harp

**This program was made possible through the support of Judith Neilson and the Phoenix Foundation**

### **Harp Body Her Body (2021)**

**Mary Doumany**

Harp Body Her Body is a ceremony of sound and movement.

This work was born from the journey with the harp which Alice and I share, an intimate relationship beginning in childhood, which for each of us now spans almost half a century.

Form follows function when one begins to interact with the harp. The body adapts to the instrument, the shoulders and back developing to hold the arms in mid-air, the muscles of the wrists and hands becoming the interface to the strings, the torso of the player shaping itself to the torso of the harp, the player's legs becoming the cradle of the instrument's sound

And the harp can also be analogised to a human body. It is as large as a person, and each of its parts have parallels with the human: The column a spine, the crown a head, the belly, well, a belly, the harmonic curve a neck, the pedals the feet. It's a magnificent, almost Dalian reinvention of the human in the new form of an instrument.

Grappling with the relationship between the player and this strange object, this work sets out to explore the idea of two bodies in space, extending the traditional contact between the player and the played to include feet, head, knees, and forearms, as the player describes a 360-degree arc around the instrument. Harp Body Her Body then: the harp an extension of the player's body, and the player an extension of the harp's body.

The harp needs the human body for actuation.

The human body needs the harp for articulation.

The two become one in an alchemical marriage, a transformational process which can only occur over a lifetime of relationship.

### **Peregrinatio (2021)**

**Sharon Calcraft**

After quite a long period of being tossed to and fro by circumstance, accompanied by the fairly normal course of artistic deliberation and doubt, I eventually surrendered to the idea of a 'Peregrinatio' as a metaphor for this new work for the harpist Alice Giles. The various concepts and iterations involved will be discussed elsewhere, but it eventually became clear that the piece, as it was becoming more and more a piece, could best be served by the overarching thought of a *peregrinatio*: a wandering—a journey without clear destination, a journey that allows for unexpected detours and layovers and lockdowns, a peregrination that yields to the caesurae of life and the inevitable return, reorientation, and the act of simply walking on once more; a *peregrinatio* involving swift turns in currents, irruptions of energetic content and moments of lyricism and improvisation.

During the period of collaboration with Alice, the image of 10<sup>th</sup> century Irish monks (*peregrini*) in a small coracle on the high North Seas became the symbol we used as shorthand and as an element of humour in our long-distance communications—I for a period of time in Denmark and she in Yass. It seemed so very apt, a small basket-like construction tumbling over frightening ocean swells before settling into zones of relative calm. It was an excellent metaphor for our times: the *peregrini* in the coracle and the precarious, perturbing undertow that seemed to prevail. At one point this became, rather hilariously, a peregrine falcon in a coracle. This emblem became a point of contact in our communications and brought us up to speed with each other's status, creatively and

otherwise. As Alice and I worked together (for this has been a very collaborative project) we found many beautiful and compelling sounds on the harp and ended up with a lexicon of the sonic equivalent of 'lovely found objects, seashells perhaps or corals' or turning our gaze skywards, objects that could be seen to be 'the production of Nature labouring for aeons in the cosmic ocean.' (Sagan,1980)

'Peregrinatio' has as its structure two pools, as it were, the first pool containing acoustic explorations of resonance, while the second pool involves electronics and a repurposing of material from the first pool. It is in this second pool that I collaborated with Patrick Liney on the realisation of the electronic component of the piece, he working patiently, elongating, twisting and foreshortening the 'lovely found objects' of Alice's and my lexicon of sounds. This methodology of working plasticly with sound is entirely consistent with my mannerist predilections, the perturbations and disturbances in keeping with what I seek with my 'inner ear', Mahler's *geistigen ohr*.

### **Helix Sequencing (2021)**

**Jon Drummond**

Taking inspiration from the world of genetic sequencing we now find ourselves immersed in — genetic sequencing for variants, vaccines and possibly a "cure", Helix Sequencing is a free sonification of this genetic data set that has affected our lives in so many ways. As we tumble through the Helix, patterns of notes are reversed, inverted, palindromes emerge and permutations occur creating a free flowing "Fugue" through the genetic sequences. Initially sparse and pointillistic in texture, as more of the Helix is discovered and sonified individual notes are transposed and translated gradually exploring the extremes of the harp's registers. Generated in real time from the harmonics of each harp string pluck an interactive electroacoustic spectral layer gradually emerges, creating spectral drones, harmonisations and echoes of the patterns discovered in the Helix. All sounds in this electroacoustic layer are created in real time from the spectrum of frequencies released with each acoustic harp string pluck. As the work concludes we are left with these spectral electroacoustic echoes of Helix Sequencing.