

Sounds of Now:

Paul Cutlan String Project

23 March 2019 7:30pm

ARA Darling Quarter Theatre



Program:

Times Past	Paul Cutlan
Thanks for the Espresso	Jann Rutherford
Perhaps Next Time	Paul Cutlan
The Eleventh Hour	Paul Cutlan
After the Rain	John Coltrane

Performers:

Paul Cutlan – bass clarinet, soprano saxophone
Elsen Price double bass
Liisa Pallandi and Lachlan O'Donnell – violins
James Eccles – viola
Oliver Miller – cello

In my life as a musician, I have loved, listened to and played many styles of music. Although I now mainly play jazz and improvised music, I have spent a lot of time listening to and looking at the music of 20th century heavyweights such as Stravinsky, Bartók, Berg, Webern, Britten, Penderecki and Ligeti. I wondered for a long time how to unite these influences in my own music. That opportunity was realised in the formation of my String Project, culminating in the release of our album **Across the Top** (Tall Poppies). Not only did that allow me to write ambitiously for highly skilled classical musicians, I could also incorporate spaces for them and me to improvise.

This was made possible thanks to some of the best and most creative string players on the scene. Ollie Miller and James Eccles have been collaborating with me since 2011, Liisa Pallandi a little more recently and Lachlan O'Donnell since only last year. (Other regular members of the String Project include Veronique Serret and Brett Hirst.) For this set we welcome the extraordinary talents of double bassist Elsen Price.

Times Past (2011) was initially positioned as an introduction to the Across the Top suite, and still seems like a nice way to set the tone for the rest of the set. Its simple melody was inspired by Renaissance dance music. The double bass and bass clarinet are both introduced as mainly improvising instruments.

Thanks for the Espresso features on the debut CD by New Zealand born composer and pianist Jann Rutherford. I had given Jann a stove-top espresso machine for a birthday and she wrote me this lyrical tune to be played on soprano saxophone. It's a beautiful example of Jann's vivid harmonic imagination and is an ideal piece to set for strings.

Perhaps Next Time (2011) is a gentle jazz composition in a quasi-Bossa Nova feel, featuring bass and soprano saxophone solos.

The Eleventh Hour (2018)

- I. Prelude
- II. Portent
- III. Intransigence
- IV. Conflict
- V. Desolation

The Eleventh Hour was written during the centenary of the end of the First World War. It is a personal, philosophical reflection on human-kind's predilection to fall into patterns of war and destruction.

It wasn't intended for the music to graphically depict anything. However, here is a possible narrative:

Prelude could be a cross between a prayer or plea for peace and a sorrowful acknowledgement of the fallibility of human nature. Portent and Intransigence paint a picture of the mounting inevitability of war, while Conflict progresses from the disciplined energy of armies of combatants marching willingly against each other, to the reality of chaos and destruction.

Desolation follows a long journey of suffering, enervation and human frailty, with the final chords offering solace and peace.

After the Rain is an example of the gentler side of John Coltrane's output in a rubato ballad style without regular pulse. As well as reflecting my ongoing passion for Coltrane's music, this is a perfect antidote to the intensity of The Eleventh Hour.

Paul Cutlan

...many thanks to Lee McIver of Elmac Creative for putting on this concert and for inviting us to share the bill with the Polymorphic Orchestra.