

*LENKO – Album Liner Notes 1988*

Mark Dunbar – flutes, Michael Kyriakakis – flutes, Irine Vela – guitar, mandolin, bouzouki, Chris Lesser – guitar, percussion

With thanks to Julia Boubis – vocals and Felicity Provan - trumpet

1. The New Bulgarian (Trad. Arr. Lenko)

A contemporary arrangement of a traditional Bulgarian dance melody

2. The Futility of Feudalism (Irine Vela)

Three separate songs written over three years strung together and dedicated to migrant women

3. 19/8 (Lenko)

Short but sweet. Based on an Indian nineteen beat rhythmic cycle with strong African and Latin influences

4. Charagua (Victor Jara)

A tune typical of the New Song Movement from Chile, showing the influence of traditional native Indian music culture on the music of composers like Jara, Inti Illimani and Para

5. Folkset (Trad. Greek Arr. Lenko)

A medley of two Greek folk melodies and three Greek dance rhythms, the pontiakos, tsamikos and kalamatianos

6. Mock Baroque (Telemann Arr. Mark & Irine)

It began as an eighteenth century fantasia of Telemann's, and ended up a twentieth century nightmare of ours

7. To Pasari – The Bazaar (Markopoulos & Nikolaou)

A Greek song about life and love at the marketplace written in the seventies folk idiom

8. The Old Bulgarian (Trad. Arr. Lenko)

More Bulgarian dance melodies (at least three!)

9. Karagouna – (Trad. Greek Arr. Lenko)

A slow and majestic dance that is so old that it has as many explanations of its origins as it has versions of its melody. This is Lenko's humble contribution to the debate!

10. Kalamatianos – (Trad. Greek Arr. Lenko)

Probably the most popular dance in Greece today, named after a major town in the Peloponnese – Kalamata. Although often sung, it is also played as an instrumental – the melody being quite extraordinary in its modal contortions. Examples of this tune have been heard as close as Albania and as far away as India

11. Kaval (Lenko)

A highly rhythmic piece written to feature the traditional Balkan flute – the kaval

*CANTO CORO presents: **Canto General** by Mikis Theodorakis & Pablo Neruda  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar North Melbourne Town Hall December 1993*

This inspiring choral work grew from the empathetic collaboration of Mikis Theodorakis and Pablo Neruda. These two great artists shared not only a deep understanding of human history, but the experience of political exile as well. In 1971, Mikis Theodorakis was invited to Chile as a guest of President Allende and Pablo Neruda. He was then in exile from the Greek junta, as Neruda had been from Videla's Chile in the late 1940s. In gratitude for the hospitality of the Chilean people, Theodorakis offered to set some poems to music from Neruda's enormous poetic history of Latin America, *Canto General*. As they were preparing to perform this two-hour long choral epic in Santiago stadium, the bloody coup against the democratically elected Allende government took place. This stadium, which was to have been the arena of a great celebration of liberty and creativity, became known instead as a place of imprisonment and torture. Pablo Neruda died in 1973 before the first part of *Canto General* was performed in Paris. Theodorakis then went on to complete the score in 1980 and the first complete performance was given in Stockholm in 1981 where, like Melbourne many Chilean refugees had sought, and were given refuge from Pinochet's murderous dictatorship. The work subsequently toured Europe to great acclaim, being performed eighteen times in twenty-one days. This is the first performance of *Canto General* in Australia.

My introduction to the work of Theodorakis began in 1979, when I joined the choir of the Greek-Australian Progressive Youth. There I was captivated by the luscious melodies and fantastic rhythmic intricacies of the Greek folk-music tradition, examples of which you will here tonight reincarnated through Theodorakis' music.

The idea to mount *Canto General* in Melbourne grew out of the knowledge, infatuation, obsession and love of one person for Greek music, Irine Vela. She planted the seed that has grown into this tree. It is to her that I owe a special debt for without her inspiration I would never have dared to attempt such an enormous project. And so it is to Irine, along with the members of the choir who have given me so much joy that I make my small dedication. And to the people who suffered and died under Pinochet's bloody coup and those who are still imprisoned in Chile today for the 'crime' of imagining a better future...may they hear us sing tonight and take strength from us.

Mark Dunbar – Musical Director

*CANTO CORO presents: **Axion Esti** by Mikis Theodorakis & Odysseus Elytis and **Canto General** (excerpts) by Mikis Theodorakis & Pablo Neruda  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Melbourne Town Hall December 1994*

*Axion Esti* (It is Worthy) is considered to be one of the great collaborative works of contemporary Greece. The poem *Axion Esti* was written in the late fifties by Nobel Prize winning poet, Odysseus Elytis. In this epic poem, Elytis bears witness to the tragic history of Greece in the forties and fifties, while at the same time celebrating the pagan, sensual world of ancient Greece.

The composer, Mikis Theodorakis recognised that this work represented a powerful and lasting symbol for all Greek people. In setting the poem to music, he was especially attracted to the form of the poem. It combines prose-narratives, popular folk-odes, and complex metered poetry all held within a large structure based closely on the Greek Orthodox liturgy.

Theodorakis maintains the formal pattern of *Axion Esti* in his now famous musical setting of the poem. Mirroring Elytis' poetic structure, Theodorakis combines spoken narrative, melodic material closely based on the Orthodox rite (and thus dating from Byzantium), and popular song to create a work that speaks on many levels: musical, literary and emotional.

In particular, the five popular songs (*A Solitary Swallow, With the Stars' Lamp, Unimaginable Sun of Justice, The Blood of Love, I Open my Mouth*) became rallying cries for those people who opposed the military junta in power in Greece during the sixties and seventies. Subsequently they have endured as symbols of democracy and justice far beyond the borders of Greece.

Tonight we have a rare opportunity to hear *Axion Esti* in its entirety. It is a work that will resonate with lovers of poetry, lovers of choral music, lovers of history, lovers of Greece and lovers of democracy!

Musical Director – Mark Dunbar

Reputedly (well according to me mum) of Scottish and Irish stock, I arrived at Maribyrnong Hostel in 1963 aged three. I grew up in Footscray surrounded by the tsamika and souvlakia of other recently arrived migrants. In a state of absolute denial of my working-class roots and culture, I studied classical flute, conducting and composition at the Victorian College of the Arts while secretly perfecting the eradication of my western suburbs patois.

At the height of this denial, I traded the one mate I had (Aydin Abdullah) for the sniff of a middle-class fame fantasy. The strength of my family's politics, along with my adoption by an organisation named the Greek-Australian Progressive Youth luckily saved me from a life of forever feeling artistically inferior.

I have been lucky enough to play music throughout Australia and in places like Vietnam, Bulgaria, Hungary and Greece. But I can honestly say that my recent work with Canto Coro has been something else! Thanks and all my love to Kari and Jessi for their patience, endurance and song.

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO in association with BEMAC & the Brisbane Biennial  
Festival present: **Canto General** by Mikis Theodorakis & Pablo Neruda  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar City Hall Brisbane May 1995*

In the tradition of popular novels *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits*, *Canto General – Songs of Life, Liberation and Struggle* presents the history, politics and mythology of South America in song.

*Canto General* consists of twelve songs based on poems from Neruda's work of the same title, as well as a very moving requiem written by Theodorakis for Neruda, who died in 1973, before *Canto General* was finished in 1980. Scored for two soloists, chorus and mixed ensemble (flutes, guitars, pianos, bass, bouzouki and five percussionists), *Canto General* is a song of the struggles and triumphs of ordinary people in an unjust world. The music is modern but written in a 19<sup>th</sup> century idiom, and the powerful rhythms of Greek folk music combine with the passion of Neruda's poems to create music that is strong and full of sentiment without being sentimental.

*Canto General* is one of those rare musical works that seems to have an energy all of its own. It refuses to be stuffy or sterile. It refuses to remain contained or imprisoned within artificial boundaries. It refuses to be tokenistic or to merely serve someone's notion of cultural diversity.

*Canto General* is about coups and dictatorships. There are plenty in this choir who have direct experience of these things. It is also about celebrating struggle, liberation and life. The process of putting *Canto General* together seems to embody this celebration.

A group of ordinary people comes together to sing. Some read music, some don't. Some speak Spanish, some don't. Some sing in choirs, some don't. At the end of four months we have a choir ready to sing this complex work with great passion and dignity. This is the energy of *Canto General*. I would like to dedicate this performance to this fantastic choir, and to the memory of those who were murdered in Pinochet's bloody coup for the 'crime' of daring to imagine a sane, more just world.

Mark Dunbar

*CANTO CORO presents: **Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique** by Luis Advis and **Sono Forte** by Irine Vela  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar West Wyck Hall, Brunswick November 1995*

This is Canto Coro's third year. Who would have thought one cold June Saturday in 1993 that this choir would still be singing today, and in Both Melbourne and Brisbane. Certainly not me! If someone had told me four years ago I would be spending a large part of my musical life conducting Canto Coro, I would have thought they were in fantasyland. But here we are – daring to be in fantasyland. We owe a lot to Pablo Neruda, Odysseus Elytis and Mikis Theodorakis for their inspirational music and poetry. This year we add the Chilean composer Luis Advis to that list. Just as important is the commissioning and premiering of a new Australian choral work by Irine Vela, titled *Sono Forte*. Community choirs seldom present new compositions, and it is just as rare to have a work like *Sono Forte* that is both challenging and a delight to sing.

There is something about group singing that both unifies and transcends. It connects with a collective impulse deep within us, an impulse that makes a mockery of the new right-wing rhetoric espoused by governments like Kennett's. It reaffirms those essential ingredients of humanity – compassion, respect and tolerance – in an age where we are conditioned to believe self-interest is the prime human motivator. So it is with pleasure that we present tonight's program, both historical and relevant. *εμαστε δυνατοι* is an important lyric from *Sono Forte*. It means 'we are strong'. I believe it's true.

### **Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, large nitrate deposits were discovered in the north of Chile. The exploitation of these mines created the need for a massive labor force. The workers, lured by salaries more attractive than the miserable pay earned in the fields, abandoned their families in the hope of a better life, but found themselves subject to the most vile working and living conditions that closely resembled those of slaves. They witnessed the growth of cities, the bitter fruit of their labors, a constant reminder of the wealth they did not share. Out of this situation developed a keen awareness of social justice, which led to the first manifestations of class-consciousness.

In 1907, the miners called mass strike, which led thousands of strikers to the city of Iquique. The authorities reacted with the indiscriminate machine-gunning of men, women and children at the school of Santa Maria that left 3,600 dead in less than ten minutes, one of the largest massacres recorded in the history of the working class in Chile. Their bodies were carted away to mass graves. The President offered banquets to the owners. In the 1930s, the crash of the stock market and the discovery of synthetic nitrate caused the collapse of the nitrate industry.

## **Sono Forte**

*Sono Forte* has its origins in two pieces I composed in the late 1980s – *The Futility of Feudalism*, which was written for the Lenko Ensemble recording, and *Gucluyum*, a song for the Melbourne Workers Theatre production of *Aftermath*, a play about the nurses strike led by Irene Bolger.

When commissioned by Canto Coro to write a short piece for these performances, I used these compositions as a foundation because I felt they had orchestral and choral potential and suited *Canto Coro's* political and culturally diverse orientation.

I also set out to write a piece that was both melodic and challenging and different in style to what they had previously performed. I also wanted *Sono Forte* to be somewhat integrated with the *Cantata* hence the use of Lorca's poem, *The Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard* sung in Spanish.

An added attraction to my job was that I felt enthusiastic about Mark Dunbar's musical direction, not only because of his ability, but because he has an intimate knowledge of my music. Furthermore, the nature of this work and the singers create a very supportive and exciting environment in which to work.

Hopefully this piece represents a precursor to a much larger project scheduled next year – a choral musical, combining the forces of Melbourne Workers Theatre and Canto Coro, which has as its central premise the potential of fascism creeping into our own backyard and the strength, solidarity and sacrifices necessary to resist it.

Irine Vela

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO and BEMAC present: **Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique**  
by Luis Advis and **Somos Fuertes** by Jorge Rico & Mark Shortis  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE YUNGABA, Brisbane July 1996*

In 1993, when I was talking to people about the possibility of getting a choir together to present *Canto General*, several people from the Chilean community spoke of another work they wanted to see performed. At the time I had never heard of Luis Advis' *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*. Two people, almost on the same day gave me a tape of this extraordinary work to listen to.

So here we are tonight, after hours of rehearsals, countless cups of tea, and possibly thousands of phone calls finally realising a dream. The *Cantata* is a stark and beautiful work, all the more so because it tells the story of one of Chile's darkest moments in history with incredible hope. It captures musically the inherent dignity of struggle, the very essence of what it means to be human.

It has been fantastic to pair the *Cantata* with a new work written especially for us by Mark Shortis and Jorge Rico. *Somos Fuertes* (We Are Strong) developed from the choir's past work. Both Jorge and Mark worked closely together during the rehearsal period for *Canto General* and began formulating ideas for a new piece in the spirit of *Canto General* and the *Cantata*.

It is exciting to present a new, Australian composition; especially a work like *Somos Fuertes*, which has been both a challenge to learn and a pleasure to perform. On behalf of the choir and BEMAC I would like to thank Robert Austin who tracked down a copy of the score of the *Cantata* whilst in Chile. This act alone saved us months of time-consuming work writing out parts from tape recordings. I would also like to thank the Brisbane's Chilean and Latin American communities for their strong support for this wonderful choir.

Lastly I would like to thank those Chileans whose hopes and dreams were snuffed out cruelly in the coup of 1973, and who bore the brunt of the following dark, murderous years. This work is a celebration of their struggle and their survival, and an affirmation that hopes and dreams continue.

Mark Dunbar

## **Somos Fuertes (part one)**

This is a composition that has developed and grown into two parts, since Mark Shortis and I began recording and exchanging ideas in 1995. The style of the first part draws on some South American indigenous, African and Spanish rhythms, including melody-sharing (hocket) arrangements. The central theme draws on ideas of respect, dignity and strength.

**Respect:** Which should be manifest fundamentally towards every living organism in nature, and extended to every human being on earth, reflecting the philosophies of many indigenous cultures, which view nature and humankind as part of the same fabric.

**Dignity:** A sense of dignity which has been shown to prevail among people, even when faced with dehumanising, cruel and unjust situations, that control sections of societies for material or political gain.

**Strength:** Calling for understanding and tolerance in a world of differences; calling for respect and acceptance among people and nations; calling for protection for every thing that lives.

Enjoy.

Jorge Rico

## **Somos Fuertes (part two)**

The music is based on a solo guitar piece I wrote in 1989. When Jorge and I got together to talk about *Somos Fuertes*, I played the piece and Jorge embellished it with charango, panpipes and vocal harmonies. From there I wrote out the four part choral harmonies. The text comprises the words:

*Somos Fuertes*

*We Are Strong*

Followed by two lines from the *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*:

*Justicia Habra Para Todos*

*Habra Tambien Libertad* (There shall be justice and liberty for all)

*Dona Nobis Pacem* (Grant us peace)

*Lacrimosa Dies Illa Eis Requiem* (On this day full of tears grant them rest)

The Latin text echoes the tragedies outlined in the *Cantata* and is a passing reference to the Port Arthur tragedy that occurred at the same time we were beginning rehearsals here in Brisbane. Thanks to Mark Dunbar and BEMAC for giving me this opportunity.

Mark Shortis

CANTO CORO & Melbourne Workers Theatre present: **Little City** by Irine Vela  
Based on a story by Irine Vela & Daniel Keene, additional text by Patricia Cornelius & Melissa Reeves, lyrics by Irine Vela, Daniel Keene, John Romeril, Federico Garcia Lorca & Luis Advis, directed & designed by Renato Cuocolo, musical direction by Mark Dunbar, assistant musical direction by Jeannie Marsh.  
Brunswick Town Hall, December 1996

Return season by popular demand May/June 1997

When Irine Vela first suggested Canto Coro and Melbourne Workers Theatre work together to create *Little City* I found the idea both thrilling and terrifying. I knew for Canto Coro it was a leap in the dark in many ways. But the thought of being part of a new work in a new form with the forces we had was irresistible.

**Singing is a symbolic act.**

I often found myself wondering about the mixture of thrill and terror I felt about *Little City* (after all, it's only a show!)

**Singing is a symbolic act.**

I often found myself wondering about the real thrill and terror the Chilean working class felt when Salvador Allende was elected; the real thrill and terror the students felt barricaded in the Athens Polytechnic; the real thrill and terror we all feel confronted with a leap into the unknowable world of seizing and moulding our own destiny.

**Singing is a collective act.**

I would like to thank Irine Vela. She constantly demonstrates what a composer can be in a new world. I would like to thank Jeannie Marsh. We simply wouldn't have made it without her preparatory work and unfaltering understanding of the process required. I would like to thank Patricia Cornelius.

**Singing is a transforming act.**

I would especially like to thank the members of Canto Coro.

**Our singing is an act of consciousness.**

*Little City* is a symbol of a just and humane world... 'and that my friends, is revolutionary'.

Thanks to Kara & Sandy – as always, and also to Penny Glass & Racheal Cogan

Mark Dunbar

*The beginning is bloodless, the evidence circumstantial. Molecular civil war starts unnoticed: there is no general mobilisation. The amount of rubbish on the side of the streets increases gradually. Piles of syringes and broken bottles appear in the park. Monotonous graffiti is daubed on the walls. Classroom furniture is smashed up, front gardens stink of shit and urine – tiny, muted declarations of war, which any experienced city dweller can interpret. Soon the signs become clearer: tyres are slashed, emergency telephones have their cables cut, cars are set on fire...*

This quote by Hans Enzensberger, from *Civil Wars*, is what propelled the initial idea for *Little City* long before a note was written. I began to think about times when people have become more enlightened and constructive than their governments. Instead of people responding to their oppression and chaos with apathy or civil anarchy, such as the LA riots, there have been examples in history when people, having had enough of chaos, poverty and oppression, consciously set out to begin to control their destinies – in the name of a better and more just future. This is what *Little City* is about – and how difficult that attempt always is – but that the attempt is symbolic of our humanity and our sense of community. Without enlightened dissent and conscious protest we are doomed – we become sheep. Without it, we do not own our history – we are no longer creators of our culture – we lose pride in ourselves as working people.

We are always living in historical times; it's just that we don't always see it. My research with the Chilean and Greek progressives in this country was interesting. For them, the scenario of *Little City* is convincing – in fact, they can identify the historical forces being unleashed on us in this country because they have been through it before. '*It could never happen here*', some would argue – but that's always the argument everywhere until it happens. History can repeat itself. It teaches us that we must never be complacent, for '*a thousand things may come to pass if we are not prepared to fight*'. (Luis Advis)

My brief was to compose a music theatre piece for actors, singers, musicians and a choir; and that, as far as the choir was concerned, most of it had to be memorised. It was an exciting brief, and one, which I took on with relish, and completed to the best of my ability. It would never have been completed without a few important people. My thanks to Jeannie Marsh, who initiated the research phase, and supported and guided me and the choir through the difficult compositional period. In many ways, she was my chief collaborator. Her work has been invaluable.

My thanks go to Racheal Cogan for indulging my midnight requests to play the piano reductions as they rolled off the printer. And also to the actors who contributed so much in little time.

My thanks go to Patricia Cornelius and Melissa Reeves, who at a relatively late stage took on the completion of the text with conviction and energy. Thanks to John Romeril for the use of his lyrics to *Melbourne at Night* (which incidentally is the one song that was actually written for another show – but readapted for inclusion in *Little City*).

My thanks to Mark Dunbar – truly a musical comrade and an inspired conductor – who has given this new work the kind of support that counts – practical, oral and political. I continue to admire his interpretive and communicative powers.

Finally, my thanks to Canto Coro; their patience, focus, insight, and constructive criticism and glorious voices defined and shaped this work, and ultimately, it belongs to them. They in fact are the protagonists in *Little City*.

I dedicate this premiere season of *Little City* to Mark Dunbar and Jeannie Marsh and all the members of Canto Coro. The work itself I dedicate to my parents Anna and Hajrullah Vela, who have seen so much history in their lives.

Irine Vela

*Little City* is a choral performance, not only because it is based on the musical and singing skills of the choir Canto Coro, but also because the tale it tells is that of community.

The actor in this play cannot but engage in a dialectic and critical interaction with the directorial choices and the textual scores. There ensues a style of acting through which characters take shape pictorially, as it were, sculpting their identities by choreographic articulations of movement.

*Little City* is the attempt to construct a performance at the centre of which there is a symphony of writings: musical, narrative and physical. Although this is the first time that I work on a mainly musical text, this experience moulds easily with my vision of theatre. Thanks to the limitations of its space and time, theatre cannot show things as we see them, but as we know them, for this it must develop the possibilities opened by associative thinking.

This approach shares a great deal with the strategies of musical composition. Music is a form of writing in which the power of the language itself gives the listener a sensory and emotional experience. In the same way, I would like to make theatre that models itself on the strategy of musical structure, the better for me to handle the materials out of which life force builds subjective human experience.

Renato Cuocolo

### **Campamento Nuevo Havana**

Chile has a history of dispossessed people setting up Campamento (temporary shanty towns) on unoccupied land. A Campamento that the people called Nuevo Havana (New Havana) was built on church-owned land in the late 1960s by squatters from different areas of Santiago. After many struggles the people were granted title to the land by the new Allende government in 1970. For the next three years, the government supported the construction of houses on the land, and the Campamento Nuevo Havana provided an example for the organisation of other Campamento throughout Chile, as people took over land and built their own houses.

Within days of the military coup on September 11, 1983 the army raided the Campamento: many people, including the leaders, were killed and houses destroyed. A powerful symbol of people's power was desolated. However, the Campamento Nuevo Havana provided potent inspiration for working people and the poor throughout the deadly days of the military junta, inspiration as potent today as it was in 1973.

## The Polytechnic in Athens

In 1973, students revolted against the military junta in Greece that had been in power since 1967. They barricaded themselves into the Athens Polytechnic, with the catch-cry: bread, education, freedom.

In the Polytechnic they set up a radio station. From there they would regularly broadcast their demands, dreams and visions to the city of Athens. The following are fragments of the last day and night of such broadcasts.

16/11/1973; 9:00pm

*People of Athens...we need medicine...help us...this is the Polytechnic. We are absolutely prepared for any attack, which we don't believe the police will attempt...the people of Athens are on our side. Here's to freedom, and to democracy...hundreds of thousands of people have gathered around the area...they are with us.*

10:15pm

*This is the Polytechnic...people of Athens don't listen to what the media is saying. We are not against the nation. We are not...we love our country...we don't love the junta. We want a government that is ruled for and by the people...we are requesting the Red Cross to bring medical supplies to help the wounded around the area of the Polytechnic...any doctors...and people in the area who can help with medicines and supplies, your efforts are needed immediately...this is the Polytechnic...we request all doctors to go to the hospitals. They are urgently in need. We request the Red Cross for supplies to treat the seriously wounded...we are unarmed, our only weapon is our belief in freedom...our bare chests...because we believe our soldiers, our brothers will not shoot, they won't raise an arm, they won't shoot their brothers...brotherly blood will not be spilt...we are all brothers.*

*Right now the tanks are circling the street...this moment we believe that every soldier, every officer of the army that loves Greece will not raise a hand...brotherly blood will not be spilt...we've just found out that there are two tanks outside the Polytechnic and they are watching us through their canons. It is unlikely, we are sure they will not attack...and kill students, and youth, and the future...soldiers have entered into the Polytechnic. We believe our soldiers will embrace their brothers, the students...may the National Anthem be sung...and I the broadcaster will start...*

2:15am

*Students are scrambling on the bars and balconies of the Polytechnic and are shouting at the tanks...to embrace their brothers...soldiers, brothers don't kill us! How could you possibly shoot! At this moment I will start to sing the National Anthem, the symbol of freedom...Greek people, your children are not likely to hurt you...the junta is sending in the tanks to frighten and intimidate us...a good sign. A soldier from one tank waved to the crowd that was cheering. The tank which is approaching the Polytechnic...tank turned back, changed course listening to the cries of the people...the junta is sending in the tanks to frighten us, but the tanks are with us...we'll say it again, the army is with us...*

The last words

*This is the Polytechnic...today, at dawn everybody is waiting to see the people proudly govern...right and left wing demonstrators have gathered nearby...dear listeners, we will briefly interrupt the broadcast...we'll return shortly...this is the Polytechnic. The radio station of the free and struggling students, the free and struggling Greeks...*

Silence followed. Fifteen minutes later the tanks reappeared and smashed through the Polytechnic gates. By morning the area had been thoroughly cleaned. Nonetheless, the Polytechnic uprising was pivotal in hastening the fall of the junta the following year.

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Based on a story by Irine Vela & Daniel Keene, additional text by Patricia Cornelius & Melissa Reeves, lyrics by Irine vela, Daniel Keene, John Romeril, Federico Garcia Lorca & Luis Advis, directed & designed by Renato Cuocolo, assistant director – Ronaldo Morales, musical direction by Mark Dunbar, assistant musical director – Mark Shortis  
Culturebank West End Brisbane, May 1997*

With the Brisbane premiere of *Little City* we have been able to explore the universality of the theme found in this wonderful work. The first sung words in *Little City* are: 'Melbourne at night', but of course the story it tells could happen anywhere...

CANTO CORO presents: **Canto Para una Semilla** by Luis Advis & Violeta Para,  
**Romance de la Guardia Civil Espanola** by Irine Vela & Federico Garcia Lorca,  
**Μία Φωνή** by Achilles Yiangoulli  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Brunswick Town Hall, December 1997

1997 has turned out to be quite a year for Canto Coro! It only seems like yesterday that we were in the thick of remounting Irine vela's enormously successful and important work, *Little City*. Now we are back again, producing three new works including two new choral commissions. While all this has been going on we have also been planning a new show in 1998 based upon the successful *Little City* model.

As artistic director I would like to thank the professional artists on the project that have combined so well in making this process as worthwhile and enjoyable as always. I would also like to thank all those people who have supported us by attending these performances, and contributing in some way to the development of Canto Coro. Finally I would like to thank the singers themselves, it's been a great year!

Mark Dunbar

## Romance de la Guardia Civil Espanola (Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard)

In 1995, I composed *Sono Forte* for Canto Coro in which the opening 'verse' and a few other lines were from the Garcia Lorca poem *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard*, were set along with my own words. I chose the opening stanzas of the poem because it imaginatively conjured up the menace of authority, a sinister authority – of a National Guard '*riding in double file towards festive streets*' – a unit where the '*horseshoes are black*', and those who ride the horses wear '*dark capes*' and are given a formal and almost invincible legitimacy via '*stains of ink and wax*'. They can do as they want for they have the blessing of the powers that be, a power whose skull is a '*vague astronomy of shapeless pistols*'. It is this frightening force that is encroaching upon the city of the gypsies and finally leaves the city in flames and ruin, utterly devastated.

*Sono Forte* then became incorporated into the choral opera, *Little City*, which was produced by Melbourne Workers Theatre and Canto Coro in 1996. In fact, throughout the writing of *Little City* more of the poem found its way into the music. In a sense, *Little City* dramatised the poem in a contemporary setting, or rather the poem became the metaphor for the events that unfolded there – a revolt in Melbourne that ended in violence and confusion, but a revolt that revealed the strength of taking united action. The 'gypsies' became 'the community', and the snare drum represented none other than the 'civil guard'!

And so when commissioned by Canto Coro to write a piece for this year, I felt compelled to set the poem more or less in its entirety – as a kind of sister piece to *Sono Forte*. Nevertheless it is an independent piece that stands on its own.

There are passages in the poem that escape my comprehension, although I've always felt that I have understood it all intuitively. The final words: '*O city of gypsies who could see you and forget*' makes me think of all those frightening reports we read in the newspapers, in text books, or see on television. Whether those images are of the Holocaust, or of political refugees, of victims of famine or war, of exile or genocide, or of Garcia Lorca's '*dancers without hips*'; once they are witnessed, who could see those anonymous individuals and forget them...It is as if the people in those photographs are saying, '*look at us, look what terrible things have happened*'.

The story of the *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard* in all its surreal insanity and the language Garcia Lorca uses to tell this story makes it gripping and a continually relevant read. And I'm glad I finally got the poem out of my system.

Irine Vela

## Μια Φωνη (One Voice)

Originally intended as a short prelude, *One Voice* has developed into a work that is now physically larger in scale. The message is one of harmony, experience and human triumph. *One Voice* is an overture written for choir, soloists and small orchestra. It is a work in five sections or movements.

The first section is carried by the musical ensemble and introduces the clarinet as a 'rural' voice that is developed further later in the work.

Section two, *At the Knife's Edge*, introduces the principal soloist and the choir. This then moves into the clarinet solo, which is a symbol of my Greek ancestral roots and the question of uncertainty and struggle.

Following this comes the *Lament*. It is written in an ecclesiastical style and resembles a micro-mass.

*Song for the Beautiful People*, on the other hand, is a song drawing on the popular musical traditions of Greece for its inspiration.

The finale, entitled *One Voice* begins with an opening 'sirens' section and quickly develops into an aural 'Pandora's box' of instruments and voices intertwining and fighting for every bit of available space, to be heard, to be seen, to be judged and finally, in a sense, to win. From the confusion emerges a simple melody which finds a podium from where can be heard its triumphant call, *One Voice*.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank various people from within Canto Coro who without their help and input would not have made my contribution to Canto Coro possible. Firstly, Mark Dunbar for his invaluable support throughout this project and past projects. To Irine Vela who was always there to help with any questions I had about the choir and her own experience. To Jeannie Marsh for the tea and strudel mornings where she was trying to work through my maze of a musical score, to work out where everything was to go formally and in the final finished product. To Naomi Gilson for her help in writing the soprano lines, and of course the Canto choir, thank you for your hard work and initiative in *One Voice*. *Long Live Canto Coro!*

And finally a heartfelt thanks goes to both my friend and partner Susan Phillips for her contribution in the *Lament*, and Katie Giorgiou for her contribution in *Song for the Beautiful People*, and last but certainly not least, you the people on the seats, thanks.

Achilles Yiangoulli

## Violeta Para

Violeta, the greatest folkloricist Chile has had; composer, guitarist, singer, poetess, ceramicist, painter, weaver and artisan.

She initiated the rescue of the Chilean traditions and folklore at a time when Chile was invaded by foreign music, especially from the United States. She won the battle against the electric guitar and meaningless music.

Violeta or Vida, as her family and friends affectionately used to call her, was born in 1917 in San Carlos (southern Chile). Since her birth she was considered to be special and to have exceptional talent and intelligence. Her mother said she was born with two teeth and her doctor interpreted this as a sign of intelligence and congratulated her parents!

Violeta was a self-taught musician. At the age of six, she secretly took her father's guitar that he used to hide, and started to play. Her beginnings in music were in the countryside, listening to peasants and singing with them. Later on she started to perform in the circus, pubs and hotels. Her style at that time was conventional. In 1953/54, the real Violeta Parra emerged, after giving a recital at Pablo Neruda's home in which she sang *Canto a lo Divino y a lo Humano*, authentic traditional songs.

She started to travel throughout Chile doing research and gathering material of authentic folkloric roots. In 1955, she went to Poland to participate in a youth festival. In Paris she made her first record for Chant du Monde.

In Chile she made numerous records with traditional music and her own compositions. She went back to Europe and performed in Russia, Finland, Germany, Italy and France etc. In Paris she spent three years singing with great success with her children Isabel and Angel Parra. She exhibited some of her paintings and tapestry at the Louvre in 1964.

In Chile she initiated the tradition of 'Peñas' (gatherings to perform and listen to folkloric music and poetry). Her house in Carmen Street and later on the tent at La Reina were always open to all musicians. Many well-known figures from the Chilean folkloric movement were her close friends and disciples including Victor Jara, Patricio Manns, Hector Pavez, Rolando Alarcon, Inti Illimani, Quilapayun and Margot Loyola.

Violeta was never quite aware of the importance of her work and died on February 5, 1967 not feeling recognised by the wider community in Chile.

Her exceptional talent, incredible creativity and profuse work have put her in a place of honour within the folkloric music movement in all Latin America. Her fame continued growing after her death and her work has, and continues to be an inspiration to many musicians.

Gioconda Vatcky

BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents: **Canto Para una Semilla** by Luis Advis & Violeta Parra & **Three Songs for a City** by Sue Monk & Lachlan Hurse, additional lyrics by Mario Benedetti  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE Brisbane April 1998

### **Canto Para una Semilla (Song for a Seed)**

The interpretative qualities of Isabela Parra and Inti Illimani inspired the composition of this work. Written in 1971, it took as its fundamental motivation the profound admiration I have for the poetry of Violeta Parra.

As far as the structure of the music is concerned, this work bears a great similarity to the *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*. Its realization involves a number of identical musical elements, instrumental and vocal, and an alternation of recitatives and singing which follows a definite dramatic course.

As for the text, this is a rearrangement of some of Violeta Parra's poems, which appear in her book, *Decimas*, with the exception of her poem *Gracias a la Vida* (*Thanks to Life*). These poems have slight alterations in some of the verses.

*Canto Para una Semilla* does not constitute a definitive biography or an exaltation of Violeta Parra. It was my aim to show only the projection of her creative personality in the various aspects of her life, as well as to show that she is a symbol of our times, conflict and aspiration.

Luis Advis

## **Three Songs for a City**

Having been involved with Canto Coro since its beginning we were very happy to have the opportunity to write some songs for this enthusiastic group and explore some of the issues that we have been thinking about for a long time; the contradictory feelings we have about our own city (*Sounds of a Town*), the experiences of migration and feeling 'at home' (*Ultimas Golondrinas*) and specifically to write a song (*Brisbane Barrio*) for those workers at a factory who had the courage to fight racism in their workplace.

Over many years our interest in Latin American music has led us down many interesting paths leading to friendships, performances and shared experiences. We based this work on three styles – samba, chacarera, and son – from different parts of Latin America, styles which continue to excite us. We hope the finished work contributes to a feeling of solidarity that bridges cultural difference.

Mark Dunbar is a great choral director, and we thank him for commissioning us to write this work and sharing our enthusiasm for the piece. The energy of Canto Coro is a pleasure to see and hear, and gave us an added sense of responsibility in producing a work with which we hope they could identify and enjoy. Ultimately it is the choir that gives life to the work and to them we give our heartfelt thanks.

Thanks to Jorge Rodriguez at the Migrant Workers Resource Centre and Ian MacLeod for their interest and openness in the interviews. As always thanks to our circle of friends for their advice and support.

Sue Monk and Lachlan Hurse

*CANTO CORO, IRAA & the Melbourne Festival present:  
Teatro by Renato Cuocolo and Irine Vela  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Playhouse Victorian Arts Centre October 1998*

Canto Coro grew from, and very much belongs to, the Greek and Latin American communities of Melbourne and Brisbane. It was formed in Melbourne in 1993 and in Brisbane in 1995. Many of its members sang in choirs before migrating to Australia.

Canto Coro has begun to introduce into the Australian art music tradition the great choral works of Greece and Latin America. In 1993, the choir performed the Australian premiere of *Canto General* by Mikis Theodorakis and Pablo Neruda. The same work was then presented at the Brisbane Biennial Festival in 1995. The choir presented the cantata *Axion Esti* by Theodorakis and Odysseus Elytis at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1995, and in 1996 produced the *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique* by Luis Advis in Melbourne and Brisbane. In 1997, Canto Coro presented another Advis cantata, *Canto Para una Semilla*, featuring the poetry of Violeta Parra.

The other major strand in Canto Coro's work has been the commissioning of Australian composers to write large-scale choral works for the choir. In 1995, it commissioned Irine Vela to write *Sono Forte*, and in 1996, Jorge Rico and Mark Shortis's *Somos Fuertes*.

In 1996, the choir presented the epic, choral musical *Little City* by Irine Vela, which has had three sell-out seasons in Melbourne and Brisbane. This year Canto Coro has commissioned *Three Songs for a City* by Sue Monk and Lachlan Hurse, *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard* by Irine Vela with words of Federico Garcia Lorca, and *One Voice* by Achilles Yiangoulli.

During the past six years, Canto Coro has given over 100 performances in Melbourne and Brisbane. Canto Coro's work explores, in particular, the theatricality of mass choir singing, its power, drama and ability to move people through its unity of purpose.

Mark Dunbar

When I began working on *Teatro*, what existed were thematic ideas that pertained to migration and exile – fragments of texts and ideas Renato and I wanted to explore – and the dramatic situation in which a choir has come together to rehearse a work celebrating Australia's nationhood.

The lack of a 'libretto' in fact presented a challenge. I knew I had a choir and soloists, so it followed I had to compose vocal music – songs. But I had to rethink how I could integrate 'songs' into this piece without them coming from so called 'characters' with their own individual stories. The challenge was how to conceive and integrate the songs theatrically, given the lack of a 'book', or a libretto that utilises a more or less conventional narrative or operatic form.

In thinking and researching the text in relation to the songs, the image of a ship or boat, or a flight, kept appearing as it inevitably does. And so the notion of a 'ship' occurs throughout and around the songs. The travelling vessel is used as a double-edged symbol – the ship of hope, of despair and of nostalgia. The ship that can carry us away from hardship, can also take us away from those we love; it can take us to a promised land, or a wasteland. The ship that some wait for, but never arrives – or the ship that takes us back to where we belong, or to a home that no longer exists.

The concept of a ship, and of travelling in space and time seemed to fit in with Renato's vision of the piece. I wrote a 'song cycle' about migration in which glimpses of what it is like to leave for, come to, live in and die in Australia means; what it felt like, and what it feels like.

These private glimpses are sometimes memories, sometimes reliving or re-creating a moment or actually being 'there' at that time and place in history. But the individual and collective glimpses that are expressed in the songs all happen while a 'multicultural' choir rehearses Dorothea Mackellar's '*My Country*' (*'I love a sunburnt country...'*)

The juxtaposition of celebration and grief, of taking direction and revolting against it in a public arena, reveal the many contradictions that the choristers and their director are grappling with in *Teatro*. The myth of the Canto Coro choir as a monolithic group is undermined not only in their interactions with their director, but with each other. In a sense they are a microcosm of Australia: that is, struggling to find their identity. The myth of the 'lucky country' is no longer viable – it is a cop-out. Is celebration possible, or even desirable? If not, then what should the choir sing about?

Everybody thinks that they are the pioneers of a country, which of course was never theirs. The convicts and settlers believed they built and civilised this country. The post-war migrants also claim that. 'Everybody' thinks they have suffered more than someone else. 'Everybody' thinks his or her story is more interesting. So many people are reconnecting with their migrant heritage in order to feel a sense of unity and identity, but in a context that can only perpetuate the myth of Australian equality.

Like exiles, we need to constantly justify our existence and condition. Like exiles, so many of us who live in Australia seem to be struggling to 'belong'. I have tried to capture this in the music I have written.

I would like to thank Jeannie Marsh for her support, Andrew Bovell and Patricia Cornelius for their dramaturgical assistance and thoughts, and John Romeril for the

use of some of his research material. I would also like to thank Mark Dunbar for creating the opportunity for me to write for Canto Coro – something that gives me enormous happiness. I would like to dedicate the music of *Teatro* to Canto Coro and the extraordinary singer, Gioconda Vatchky.

Irine Vela

*Teatro* is about a society in flux. It is about the diverse experiences of exile and the nostalgic longing for a sense of 'home'. It is an occasionally cynical look at people in varying states of nostalgia provoked by remoteness from their countries but also by a yearning for the wholeness of existence. Migration, with all its symmetric contours and uneven times, is a metaphor for the modern condition.

*Teatro* explores the perpetual destruction and reconstruction of the 'exile's' identity and biography, shifting perspectives from dream to memory to experience. Memory is not fixed, but infinite – you can go in any direction with it.

*Teatro* is a choral performance, not only because it is based on the musical and singing skills of the choir Canto Coro, but also because the tale it tells is that of community.

The actor in this play cannot but engage in a dialectic and critical interaction with the directorial choices and the textual scores. There ensues a style of acting through which characters take shape pictorially, as it were, sculpting their identities by choreographic articulations of movement.

*Teatro* is the attempt to construct a performance at the centre of which there is a symphony of writings: musical, narrative and physical. Although this is the first time that I work on a mainly musical text, this experience moulds easily with my vision of theatre. Thanks to the limitations of its space and time, theatre cannot show things as we see them, but as we know them, for this it must develop the possibilities opened by associative thinking.

This approach shares a great deal with the strategies of musical composition. Music is a form of writing in which the power of the language itself gives the listener a sensory and emotional experience. In the same way, I would like to make theatre that models itself on the strategy of musical structure, the better for me to handle the materials out of which life force builds subjective human experience.

Working with Irine Vela has been both a pleasure and a privilege and I would also like to give special thanks to Jeannie Marsh, Mark Dunbar and to the extraordinarily dedicated and talented members of Canto Coro.

Renato Cuocolo

BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:

***Exilio: 3 new choral works celebrating struggle, survival & justice***

***Civil Guard*** by Irine Vela lyrics by Garcia Lorca

***Exilio*** by Sue Monk & Lachlan Hulse lyrics by Suchil Tunali & Ramon Cuelho

***Mauthausen*** by Mikis Theodorakis lyrics by Iacovos Kambanellis

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE Brisbane June 1999

It was an unsettling coincidence that the backdrop for the preparation of this program of choral works entitled *Exilio* (Exile) was the nightly reporting of the Kosovo war, with those stark images of bombed, herded, disorientated and homeless people so reminiscent of newsreel footage from the Second World War. Another coincidence was that Irine Vela, the composer of *Civil Guard*, is of Albanian descent. Her father was born in Kosovo, and has his own story of forced exile during the Second World War.

Experiences of displacement, loss, persecution and exile have inspired all three choral works presented in this program. Australia is a land inhabited by people who know all too well this kind of human tragedy. There are many in this choir who have been the victims of coups and civil wars, and who have suffered because of their political views, color of their skin, or shape of their eyes.

We enter the new millennium accompanied by a sinister, brooding half-light, a potentially catastrophic explosion enveloping millions of people. People just like you and me.

When selecting the works for this program, I initially wanted to explore themes of genocide. In fact, 'genocide' was my first idea for a title for the program. At the time it seemed too bleak, too narrow and too distant from Australia's reality. Now I'm not so sure.

The central theme of Theodorakis' and Kambanellis' *Mauthausen Song Cycle* is survival. Kambanellis survived Mauthausen and Theodorakis survived imprisonment and torture during the Greek dictatorship. Mauthausen was one of the most notorious Nazi death camps. While the horrors of the holocaust have been well documented and established as historical fact, the same unfortunately cannot be said for many other organised acts of genocide, including our own.

In programming *Mauthausen* then, I wanted to avoid presenting a retelling of the holocaust that gives us a comfortable historical distance. I wanted to present the holocaust, (as the most well known act of genocide this century), as sadly present today still. Flourishing in Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda, Guatemala, Kurdistan and Armenia to name a few. I wanted to present 'genocide' (as symbolised by the holocaust), also as a living psychological reality. The 'head space' of so many indigenous peoples today. People, (just like you and me) who, in recent memory, have been hemmed in, shipped off, degraded, raped, poisoned and shot. People we now expect to behave themselves and obey the laws of civil society, despite their history! This is the reality still, of much of Aboriginal Australia.

In *Exilio*, I wanted to put together a program that encourages us to think deeply and politically about the root causes of genocide, and how often genocide is the end result of a grab for land, wealth and power.

The importance of the two Australian compositions in this program is that they give breadth to that analysis. In particular, Sue Monk & Lachlan Hurse's *Exilio* incorporates powerful images of the displacement experienced by many of our own migrants. These images are woven together by the recurring section, *Stolen Land* that directly refers to our own civil war and genocide in Australia.

It always strikes me as ironic that when a scene like Kosovo appears on our television screens, we Australians typically participate in a collective sigh of relief, that put into words would go something like, '*thank God, we are not like them*'. Yet the victims and evidence of our own grab for land, our own genocide is all around us. The continuing saga of Aboriginal deaths in custody, the failure to enact just and decent land rights legislation, the inability of our government to even acknowledge the devastation European settlement caused Aboriginal individuals, families, groups and society with a simple symbolic 'sorry' are potent signs that in many ways, the war is not yet over.

Mark Dunbar

*'At the end of the line, as always, are the actors, writers, designers and composers – those individual artists whom the (Australia) Council is pledged to support, but who suffer most as infrastructure expense increasingly eats into the scant arts dollar. It is all very well to argue, as those bureaucrats and managers who have steady jobs and assured careers do, that infrastructure funding indirectly creates work for individual artists. It does not provide careers for them and it certainly does little to support the base of struggling new or experimental artists, who funded by the Department of Social Security, have during the past twenty five years made our theatre so excitingly varied and energetic.'*

John McCallum  
The Australian 11/11/96

In this year's project 85% of total expenditure went directly to paying artists for their creative work. Imagine what Australian culture would look like if this were the rule, not the exception...

After receiving positive feedback from people who related to the issues explored in *Three Songs for a City*, we were reminded of the importance of maintaining a connection between our musical works, the people who sing them and the audiences we aim to attract. Over the years we have met many people who have come from countries caught up in violent political conflict, fueled by extremes of inequality. Our enriching association with these people prompted us to continue exploring the themes of the previous work, the search for a home and sense of belonging.

The poetry of Suchil Tunali and Ramon Cuelho, two Latin Americans living in Australia, conveys the depth of feeling caused by forced departure and exile, and dilemmas facing those who wish to return to their country of birth. We thought it was important to place their poems within the context of Australia's history, recognising that these same issues have not been resolved for Indigenous Australians, hence the recurring song *Stolen Land*.

Setting these poems to music in a way that would heighten the meaning of the text, to make them songs to which a choir and audience would respond positively was challenging. We wanted to do justice to the many people we have met who feel that this is their story, to fulfill our responsibility to those who have enriched our lives with their poetry and music.

We have written this piece as an attempt to come to terms with the sense of loss, of estrangement, and the joy of overcoming these. We hope that the piece conveys a sense of realism, of resilience, and a celebration of the capacity of people to join together in solidarity and overcome adversity.

Musically we draw on a wide variety of influences, but Latin American, in particular Cuban elements continue as a reference point. The visit of *Exaudi*, a choir from Havana to Australia in 1998 gave us another insight into the adaptation of Cuban music for choir. *Refugiado* has certain Cuban rhythmic nuances, and *Exilio* was inspired by the harmonic language of a Cuban guitarist, Frank Gonzales.

Once again it has been a pleasure to work with Canto Coro. The nervous anticipation we felt as the choir began to learn *Exilio* rapidly gave way to deep satisfaction as the members energetically threw themselves into the new works. It was great to see the choir respond with enthusiasm to the untiring effort of Mark Dunbar who ensured that the pieces were transformed from dots on the page to songs filled with passion.

Sue Monk and Lachlan Hurse

I am always surprised at the things that happen 'afterwards'.

1965: *The Mauthausen Chronicle* is being prepared for publication by Themelio. General Editor, Mimis Despotides, forever present in our memory, got an idea that both Mikis Theodorakis and I immediately agreed with: write a collection of songs to be recorded so that the record and the book could be released at the same time. That's exactly what happened.

In December of that same year, in a theatre, I read extracts of the chronicle, then the songs were sung.

An unforgettable evening! Not only for me but for Theodorakis and Farandouri as well.

1980: I decide to go back to Mauthausen for the first time. It's May and the camps former inmates, women and men from all over Europe have organised a gathering.

We met on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our liberation. In other words, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May we met in Mauthausen village to walk towards the concentration camp. We, the 30,000 survivors, kept silent during the walk up the camp as a sign of respect for the 240,000 dead who walked to their Golgotha there.

As we got closer to the courtyard, I heard some music from inside the camp, from the large square. It was carried by the morning breeze all the way up the newly wooded hills.

It seemed vaguely familiar, as if I had heard it somewhere before...I was right. Only once we were very close by did I realise I was listening to Maria Farandouri's voice singing '*Girls of Auschwitz, girls of Mauthausen, have you by any chance seen my love?*'

Quite a bit later, without mentioning who I was, I went to the camp's secretariat and asked what the song we had heard in the morning was...they told me that it had been the camp's theme song for years.

I knew the painstaking work that Theodorakis put into producing the Mauthausen collection and in presenting them in concert. It was well known in many countries. However my 'encounter' with the song in that very place, and at that very time was, well...

Ever since then, I dreamt of staging a concert on the premises and managed to convince Theodorakis to share this dream with me. The concert took place in 1988 in Mauthausen, flooded by tens of thousands of pilgrims, pacifists, wonderful people who had come from all over, all over...

Back in 1965, how beautifully and creatively unaware we were.

Iacovos Kambanellis

CANTO CORO presents:

**Mauthausen** by Mikis Theodorakis lyrics by Iacovos Kambanellis

**Black Cargo Song Cycle** by Irine Vela lyrics by John Romeril

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Trades Hall Ballroom Carlton September 1999

This is Canto Coro's seventh year. In that time what have we done? We have showcased some of the most important contemporary choral works from Chile and Greece, including *Canto General*, *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*, *Axion Esti* and *Canto Para una Semilla*. We have built a community choir that is cross-cultural, its roots firmly embedded in Australia's Greek and Chilean communities, yet open to all singers. We have extended our own creative possibilities by taking a choir into the realms of theatre, collaborating with Melbourne Workers Theatre on *Little City*, and IRAA Theatre with *Teatro*. We have commissioned a number of Australian composers from our communities to write new Australian choral works that reflect the contemporary migrant experience in Australia. We have provided countless professional development opportunities for musicians and composers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

We have developed a method of working that combines the energy and passion of community participation with outstanding professional leadership. We have given over 100 public performances, developing an audience base from within our communities and extending into the broader community. We have conducted close to 1000 hours of rehearsals, developing the musical skills of over 500 singers who have attended during the past seven years.

We have built a singing community that is confident in its cultural diversity and delightful! We have much to be proud of.

Yet this is a sad year, as it will most probably be our last based on that successful model. Arts funding, (the means by which the essential blend of professional guidance and community participation is sustained in a project like ours), is at best, a fickle business for relatively small groups like Canto Coro. In some ways it is like a lottery. Each year you apply and, in competition with many other worthwhile projects, you wait and see. As one project officer from our principal funding body, the Australia Council told me last year: we've had an excellent 'hit rate'!

Indeed this is true. But it has now been decided our time is up. Our proposal for 2000 has been rejected. In the arts, there is something quite peculiar about others deliberating on the value of your work and ultimately deciding your use-by date. Especially when, by all the 'performance indicators' you've been highly successful.

This is a crippling flaw in the current funding system that extends across art forms. It breeds insecurity, safety, mediocrity and hype as we all try to impress the 'faceless ones' deciding. It creates a club of funded clients, and an ever-increasing group rightly pounding on the door to get in. It creates a bureaucratic tangle that is self-perpetuating; processing applications and acquittals, developing and redeveloping policy and funding criteria, monitoring grants, etc. It creates a nightmare trying to evaluate the worth, and grant-worthiness of artistic work; with peer assessment leading to examples of the most cynical manipulation of the decision making process; a place where normal artistic rivalries and jealousies are sometimes viciously played out, sadly affecting the livelihoods of many artists living on the margins.

I don't write this out of sour grapes. I fully recognise and appreciate that under the present arrangements we have had a good trot. But isn't it time we consider what this funding regime does to artists and communities? Isn't it time we think creatively about alternative ways of supporting arts practice in Australia?

I would like to suggest a way of funding micro-music making that I believe would lead to a richer and fairer cultural landscape. It is simple. The government matches earned income (that is, performance contracts or box office receipts) dollar for dollar.

What are the immediate advantages of such a system?

- It values all music making equally and does not create bureaucracies attempting to define 'objective' criteria for something as subjective as artistic excellence
- It maximizes the amount of funding getting to practicing artists by eliminating the need for bureaucracy
- It encourages audience development through a cash incentive
- It cuts out the complexities of application writing, and is therefore an accessible funding source across language and cultural groups
- It empowers artists; nothing limits their ambitions or decides their fate other than their own abilities

Under this arrangement Canto Coro would have had an eighth year. Under this arrangement groups like Canto Coro would determine their own artistic destiny. Under this arrangement, a musician could build a career outside the major commercial or flagship structures, while making a significant contribution to Australia's cultural development, sophistication and diversity. It is a system that the Dutch have used quite successfully for quite a number of years. Why not give it a whirl?

I would personally like to thank all members, past and present of Canto Coro. The past seven years have been a profoundly enriching and meaningful experience for me. I can honestly say that if I never conduct another choir, I am serenely satisfied with our achievement. That much you have given me. I thank you all deeply and dearly.

Mark Dunbar

*Black Cargo* is a new song cycle by Irine Vela with a long history! It began as a short story by John Morrison first published in 1955. The story was then adapted by John Romeril and Irine Vela as a music theatre piece for Melbourne Workers Theatre. In 1991, the play was produced at Anthill Theatre.

On one level, *Black Cargo* is a chronicle of a dispute between the leftwing Seamen's Union and the rightwing Waterside Workers Federation of the 1950s. A ship crewed by non-union labor – a scab crew, has slunk into the port of Melbourne, towed in unwittingly by tugs crewed by the Seamen's Union. The ship is loaded with much needed coal. The Seamen's Union want to declare the ship 'black' and not touch it, the wharfies leadership have another agenda, and as it is already in port, it is up to the wharfies to decide whether to ban it or not. The battle lines are drawn and through it, issues still relevant to unionism today are played out: the tension between a militant workforce and an ambitious leadership, radicalism verses conservatism, a wider political analysis versus the traditional industrial concern for the bread-and-butter issues of wages and conditions.

Critically, *Black Cargo* poses a question: are there issues that transcend the political tug-of-war between left and right, issues that can unite all unionists, that are about the very organisation of society and why we have unions at all?

When John Romeril first spoke to John Morrison about making a musical out of *Black Cargo*, Morrison was somewhat amused. The musical, on the surface, does not seem to be the natural form for a story about a union dispute! *Black Cargo* is also a musical without the romantic, 'boy/girl' love interest so often a clichéd feature of the genre. Yet Vela's music is full of love. It is a musical score that captures the passion, humour and high emotion of people engaged in struggle. It does what music does best – it speaks on an emotional level, finding paths that build unity among people.

Mark Dunbar

In 1990 John Romeril and I began our adaptation of the John Morrison short story, *Black Cargo* which was produced and presented by Melbourne Workers Theatre as their first 'in theatre' show the following year at Anthill Theatre.

It was the first full length 'musical' I ever wrote and combined both drama and music as equal entities in the telling of its story which included a rich array of characters and situations – Canadian seamen languishing in jail in Calcutta, a ship full of coal at Melbourne dock manned by 'scab' sailors, a national coal strike, a rightwing union official, a militant leftwing union organiser whose daughter has a job writing for the Herald, rank-and-file outrage, working class suffering and solidarity, the machinations and humour of a trades hall meeting, the beginnings of new love and of course, a happy ending.

It was indeed a challenge and a joy to set this truly Australian story and the wonderful language of John Romeril to music. It was also a joy to work with such a great team of theatre workers and musicians who added so much to *Black Cargo* many years ago.

Some songs and instrumental passages from the original production could not offer themselves as candidates for inclusion in this choral song cycle because they felt they were too 'character based' or overly reliant on a dramatic context to make real sense in this adaptation. So they reluctantly excused themselves to Canto Coro and retreated back to the computer desktop. But some knew that they could make a good go of it and were dying to be printed so that they could be heard again after a nine-year silence.

Thank you Canto Coro.

Irine Vela

Stamped in your passport when you enter the land of compassion fatigue is how principled or merely self-interested you, as a human being, are. That indelible ink records the way innocent blood can stain the earth, but also stain your honour.

Might extends or extinguishes democracy, upholds or erodes human worth. It is a tool we use for right or wrong, but when wrong, opposing might is always right.

John Romeril

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*  
***Cancion Colectiva – Our Collective Song***

***Exilio*** by Sue Monk & Lachlan Hurse lyrics by Suchil Tunali & Ramon Cuelho

***Somos Fuertes*** by Mark Shortis

***Three Songs for a City*** by Sue Monk & Lachlan Hurse, lyrics by Mario Benedetti

***Canto General*** by Mikis Theodorakis & Pablo Neruda

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE Brisbane June 2000

Brisbane Canto Coro is now in its sixth year! Over that period we have established a reputation as a community choir that presents ambitious and innovative programs of rarely heard choral music. Our repertoire falls into two quite distinct categories. On the one hand, we have brought to Brisbane audiences works written in Greece and Chile, which reflect and build our relationship with those migrant communities in Australia. On the other hand, we have commissioned new works by Australian composers and poets that comment on, and deepen our understanding of the migrant experience in the contemporary Australian context. After six years we have become a regular feature of the Brisbane cultural calendar.

This regularity however defies the actual fragility of our existence. Every project employs a unique combination of professional artists working within a community choir context. Each year we employ musicians, singing tutors, soloists and composers that enable our process to be challenging, enjoyable and professionally run. Each year we apply for funding (your taxes at work) to support this work. Our major support has come from Arts Queensland and the Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council. In a sense, each year we begin afresh from a funding perspective, never knowing what funds, if any will be granted. From a planning and development point of view, this is at best an unsettling experience. For example, this year's project was initially planned to include a tour of Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle where we have large communities of Greek and Hispanic Australians who have never heard our work. Failure to secure funding from the Australia Council to showcase this retrospective program meant those plans had to be abandoned.

The limitations imposed by current arts funding practices are particularly difficult for relatively small, artist-based groups like our own. There is a real need to recognise the value of groups that invest well over 50% of their expenditure in the actual employment of artists. There is a real need to find ways to support small groups beyond the 'one year project grant' time frame, if we are serious about cultural development that goes beyond the ad hoc, and tokenistic. There is a real need to recognise the work done over a number of years by small, community-based arts organisations.

This year we present a retrospective of works that in some ways showcases the breadth of our vision. One half of the program is dedicated to presenting excerpts from *Canto General*, the glorious work this choir was formed to present in 1995 for the Brisbane Biennial Festival at City Hall. What began as a choir for one performance has not stopped singing since!

The other half of the program features three commissioned works by Brisbane composers that display our interest in building upon the fine choral traditions of

Greece and Latin America within the Australian context. The program shows where we have come from, and where we are going (by the good grace of funding bodies!)

I would like to thank the professional artswomen for their commitment beyond the call of duty once again, and this glorious community of confident, progressive and bolshie singers without whom where would we be?

Mark Dunbar

*Three Songs for a City* was written in 1998 for Canto Coro. In 1999 we were commissioned to write the second work, *Exilio*. Together the two works deal with the general themes of displacement and migration, but specifically the setting is Australia, dealing with problems of refugees and migrants trying to remake their home in a new country, which has still been unable to come to terms with its own violent history of colonisation.

Three sections in these works are the result of our collaboration with Latin American poets living in Australia, and as well as the text we also draw on the rhythms and harmony of several Latin American styles.

It's great to have had the opportunity to rework some of these pieces. As always it has been very rewarding to be part of the enthusiasm and dedication of the conductor and choir.

Sue Monk and Lachlan Hulse

*Somos Fuertes (We are strong)* was commissioned by BEMAC and performed by Canto Coro in 1996. The work is in two sections, the first being composed by Jorge Rico. In tonight's program we will hear the second section, with a new instrumental prelude written especially for this concert season.

The prelude is a set of short variations on the choral melodies, preparing the listener for the choral piece to follow.

Mark Shortis

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

***Axion Esti*** (excerpts) by Mikis Theodorakis & Odysseus Elytis

***Black Cargo Song Cycle*** by Irine Vela & John Romeril

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE Brisbane June 2001

*Axion Esti* (*It is Worthy*) is considered to be one of the great collaborative works of contemporary Greece. The poem *Axion Esti* was written in the late fifties by Nobel Prize winning poet, Odysseus Elytis. In this epic poem, Elytis bears witness to the tragic history of Greece in the forties and fifties, while at the same time celebrating the pagan, sensual world of ancient Greece.

The composer, Mikis Theodorakis recognised that this work represented a powerful and lasting symbol for all Greek people. In setting the poem to music, he was especially attracted to the form of the poem. It combines prose-narratives, popular folk-odes, and complex metered poetry all held within a large structure based closely on the Greek Orthodox liturgy.

Theodorakis maintains the formal pattern of *Axion Esti* in his now famous musical setting of the poem. Mirroring Elytis' poetic structure, Theodorakis combines spoken narrative, melodic material closely based on the Orthodox rite (and thus dating from Byzantium), and popular song to create a work that speaks on many levels: musical, literary and emotional.

In particular, the five popular songs (*A Solitary Swallow*, *With the Stars' Lamp*, *Unimaginable Sun of Justice*, *The Blood of Love*, *I Open my Mouth*) became rallying cries for those people who opposed the military junta in power in Greece during the sixties and seventies. Subsequently they have endured as symbols of democracy and justice far beyond the borders of Greece.

Mark Dunbar

In 1990 John Romeril and I began our adaptation of the John Morrison short story, *Black Cargo* which was produced and presented by Melbourne Workers Theatre as their first 'in theatre' show the following year at Anthill Theatre.

It was the first full length 'musical' I ever wrote and combined both drama and music as equal entities in the telling of its story which included a rich array of characters and situations – Canadian seamen languishing in jail in Calcutta, a ship full of coal at Melbourne dock manned by 'scab' sailors, a national coal strike, a rightwing union official, a militant leftwing union organiser whose daughter has a job writing for the Herald, rank-and-file outrage, working class suffering and solidarity, the machinations and humour of a trades hall meeting, the beginnings of new love and of course, a happy ending.

It was indeed a challenge and a joy to set this truly Australian story and the wonderful language of John Romeril to music. It was also a joy to work with such a great team of theatre workers and musicians who added so much to *Black Cargo* many years ago.

Some songs and instrumental passages from the original production could not offer themselves as candidates for inclusion in this choral song cycle because they felt they were too 'character based' or overly reliant on a dramatic context to make real sense in this adaptation. So they reluctantly excused themselves to Canto Coro and retreated back to the computer desktop. But some knew that they could make a good go of it and were dying to be printed so that they could be heard again after an eleven-year silence.

Thank you Canto Coro.

Irine Vela

BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:

***Te Quiero*** by Alberto Favero & Mario Benedetti

***Spirit Dancer*** by Mark Cronin

***Colors*** by Eric Colladetti

***Epifania*** by Mikis Theodorakis & George Seferis

***Mass*** (excerpts) by Leonard Bernstein

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar BEMAC SPACE Brisbane June 2002

When a community choir works together for a better part of a decade, it is almost inevitable that certain 'traditions' within that group emerge. If you have attended a Canto Coro performance, you may have stayed afterwards for a drink and a natter, then went home...mistake! After almost every performance, members of the choir and accompanying musicians begin 'strutting their stuff'. People sing their favourite ballad. You might hear a movement of a cello sonata, you will certainly hear a story or two...In the post performance euphoria that only community-based work brings, ordinary people get up and truly do some extraordinary things!

From these post-performance performances, it became quite clear that tucked away within the choir rank-and-file were a number of accomplished songwriters. We decided to choose two, Mark Cronin and Eric Colladetti and present some of their work chorally. Of course, writing songs is one thing, writing for over fifty voices is quite another! To bridge that gap we employed the services of composer Irine Vela. Irine has composed extensively for choir, including past commissions for Canto Coro, (*Little City, Civil Guard and Sono Forte*). Her Greek Australian background made her an ideal choice for us, a choir with historical and cultural links to Brisbane's Greek and Spanish speaking communities.

Irine assisted Mark and Eric in exploring the choral potential of two of their songs. Not surprisingly (for us at least), both songs deal with issues of racism. Also on the program in a similar vein, is a setting of a poem by Uruguayan poet, Mario Benedetti called *Te Quiero (I adore you)*. It is a love song where the 'struggle against oppression' becomes the lover. We feature tenor soloist Marco Ramirez in our rendition.

One of the aims of Canto Coro is to present music from the choral traditions of Greece and Latin America. These works are rarely performed in Australia, despite the many migrants from these lands now calling Australia home. *Epifania*, composed by Mikis Theodorakis, and setting poems by Greek Nobel Prize winning poet, George Seferis is the latest of these works we have presented. The poetry is beautiful, the music sumptuous and it features soloist Anna Stephanos and Irine Vela playing the bouzouki.

Finally in this program are a number of excerpts from Bernstein's *Mass*. The composer of *West Side Story's* take on the catholic mass is ironic, funny and at times beautifully profound. It has also been a hoot to learn! I have wanted to perform this work since I first heard it twenty years ago, so I must thank the choir for indulging me on this one!

Mark Dunbar

When the last song was finished, the couple (i.e. Maro and George Seferis) was satisfied. Seferis was always measured. But, in his eyes, I saw the lustre of the creator who rejoiced in the new form his poetry had suddenly taken. Now he was in a hurry to hear it sung...

Precisely because the verses were so intellectual, I wanted to present *Epifania* in popular dress to the widest possible audience – to make it a popular song, so that it would accompany the people everywhere, on construction sites, in the tavernas, on trips and get-togethers.

In the fall of 1962, Seferis, George Savidis, my father and I spent a whole night going from taverna to taverna in Plaka. The poet wanted, with his own eyes, to see the artists and the people singing '*on the seashore*' in all the clubs. He wanted to hear it with his own ears...maybe never before had someone like Seferis become like a small child. He laughed, he radiated happiness and I think that night he permitted his stern heart to love me.

Mikis Theodorakis

The song *Colors* is an open letter to a bigot. When I first wrote it in 1987, I directed it towards professor Geoffrey Blainey, who was being particularly negative towards Indigenous rights. Since then, from time to time, I altered the name of the person to whom the song is addressed depending on who the current headline-grabbing bigot happened to be. For this presentation of the song, arranged by Irine Vela for Canto Coro, I have inserted Pauline Hanson's name, making it, I suppose, a Pauline Epistle.

Eric Colladetti

On November 7, 1993, Daniel Yock, an 18-year-old aboriginal dancer with the Wakka Wakka Dance Company, was found dead in a police van within 30 minutes of being arrested. It took some years of thinking what happened to Daniel and about what Sam Watson, lawyer and aboriginal activist, has said about his death before I could write this song. I wrote it in 1996. I received permission from Lionel Fogarty, Daniel's brother, to sing the song, and first sang it at a street march in that year, held to protest the 'Pinkenba Incident', another case of harassment of aboriginal youth by police. Sam Watson has said about this song: 'I was very touched by the power of the words, you have certainly captured the mood of that time, and I believe that no-one who hears the song will ever be able to deny the message.'

A Criminal Justice Commission inquiry found that the police were not responsible for Daniel's death despite the controversial radio call that was made to other police, despite not following recommendations of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission of a few years before, and despite testimony from Daniel's friends, and of residents of the street in West End, where he was arrested, to the contrary. The song uses some aboriginal English. 'Bullyman' means police officer, 'charged-up' means under the influence of alcohol. Lionel Fogarty said at a memorial service for Daniel in Musgrave Park, 'he has been taken from us, but his spirit remains in our hearts and in our minds'.

Mark Cronin

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

***Hornets Wedding*** by Mark Dunbar *Libretto* by Indija Mahjoeddin

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Directed by Mark Dunbar

ST ANDREWS HALL Sth. Brisbane July 2003

When I was at school, the stories of white conquest of aboriginal land were told like fairytales; John Batman gave the local aborigines some mirrors and blankets and in return he got the land Melbourne was built upon. Then, Indigenous Australians just faded away somehow. In contrast, the heroic struggles of our white explorers were painted in great, and often frightening detail. Their struggles with this strange and harsh land were our myths, the models for our nationhood; all that we should aspire to, as people.

I first came across the book, *A Nest of Hornets* by historian Gordon Reid in 2000. It told a very different story. In fact, part of the reason for writing the book, according to Reid, was to unpack some of the white mythology that historically surrounded this particular incident at Hornet's Bank station, near Taroom in central Queensland in 1856.

Until Reid's book, the massacre at Hornet's Bank had been told like an explorer myth. A brave white family on the very outpost of civilisation is brutally murdered by marauding savages. For one hundred years the tale became part of white Queensland folklore. A ballad was even written and sung honouring the bravery of the Fraser family, in particular young Westy, who surviving the massacre at eleven years of age, and then rode for three days to fetch his older brother Billy from Ipswich.

What the ballad doesn't chronicle were the rapes, poisonings, abductions and murders of Indigenous people that led to the attack on the Frasers. Nor does it talk of the wanton retribution that followed that attack, carried out by 'brave' Billy and his cohorts for the next twenty years or so.

Reid's account is one of frontier war. Like most wars between technologically mismatched adversaries (think of the USA and Iraq for example) the invading army is virtually free to do anything it pleases. There was no justice system operating on the frontier war zone. There was fear, atrocity and revenge in this grab for land. In this context, Indigenous Australians resisted in many ways. Around central Queensland they organised a low level insurgency, led by guerrilla warriors, (again not unlike Iraq today).

Artistically, the story excited me on many levels. On the surface, the white family was the victim, thus refuting the tired notion that Indigenous people just sort of faded away. There was also an Indigenous hero, Bielbah who struck me as a sort of Che Guevara figure. Bielbah seemed a supreme strategist. He galvanised his dwindling forces. His planning was meticulous. His execution of the attack was strategically sublime. He then escaped and avoided capture for many years. He certainly knew what he was doing.

Then there was Baulie, an Indigenous man who worked for the Frasers and passed on vital information to Bielbah about when the men would be away, leaving the women and children vulnerable. Then there was Westy, who managed a miraculous survival, a three-day ride, participated in the hunting and slaughtering of Indigenous

Australians, then finally went mad, dying in an asylum. Then there was Maryanne, who Billy took to Hornet's Bank to marry not long after the massacre. Who, in Indija's evocative lyric '*mothered the lips of a fearful brute*'. Most of all, the story asks uneasy questions about cowardice, justice, truth and love.

While some colleagues were anxious about the sheer horror of the story one friend, writer Indija Mahjoeddin was as excited as I was about its creative possibilities. She began to flesh out a libretto. She developed characters and imagined its dramatic form. She provided me with words that were beautifully poetic and exquisite to set to music.

The representation of the 'Indigenous voice' was always a problem. Art is always a somewhat reluctant captive to the politics of the day. If the piece had been written in the 1960s (or hopefully 2060), we probably would have just creatively imagined their perspective and incorporated it, (as did Thomas Keneally when writing *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*). However we both felt uncomfortable writing words and music that attempted to represent the 'black voice'. The work awaits this final essential collaboration.

What we have to date is a song cycle that attempts to explore the emotional landscape of white Australia, then and now. It seeks to shine a torch on our shared secret past and corroded present. It uses the device of a wedding (Maryanne's?) – a joining ceremony, as a metaphor for what could be, if only we would acknowledge and resolve the secrets of our history. The symbolic sorry.

Creating new artistic work is always an adventure. I would like to thank my dear friend Irine vela who gave me artistic courage throughout, but especially through the more difficult moments. I would like to thank Indija Mahjoeddin my primary collaborator, and without whom there would be no songs to sing. I would like to thank Brisbane Canto Coro who constantly demonstrate the power of love and trust.

Mark Dunbar

When composer and musical director, Mark Dunbar originally approached me to write this libretto I was concerned about representing the Indigenous voice. He talked me around to approaching the work rather as an exploration of the legacy that white atrocities have left for white Australians – an inheritance of crimes, secrets and shame amongst our forefathers – and how we can confront and own those.

I found the themes contained in the material deep and heavy going, in particular the forty year and on-going retributions against Yiman and allied nations. Whilst the Indigenous resistance was not hard to appreciate, it took a long struggle with the shame of white legacy for me to begin to find the impulse for such horrific and inhuman retaliations. In the end the full story is still not told.

This work is only part way along its journey. The material presented here as a song cycle has been extracted from the larger dramatic oratorio, written for choir and two actors – a work in progress. Central to that work's ideology is the embodiment of a reconciliatory consciousness in the figure of Westy Fraser, the only survivor, witness and victim, of the Hornet Bank massacre.

Without his voice as visionary, as exile, and white spokesman for the past and future, this fragment offers just a glimpse of the direction the work will take in the future; just a hint at the urgency that compels the non-indigenous community to recognise our loss of integrity and innocence and acknowledge the hidden past.

Indija Mahjoeddin

FERNY GROVE STATE HIGH SCHOOL presents: **Little City** by Irine Vela  
Based on a story by Irine Vela & Daniel Keene, additional text by Patricia Cornelius & Melissa Reeves, lyrics by Irine Vela, Daniel Keene, John Romeril, Federico Garcia Lorca & Luis Advis, musical direction by Stephanie McCaw, directed by Mark Dunbar  
VISY THEATRE BRISBANE POWERHOUSE May 2003

When we first produced *Little City* in 1996, there were so many artistic unknowns that the entire project at times, seemed like an enormous folly! The work was new, the script was still being finalised weeks before we opened, and many of the actors had trouble understanding the form. The notion of a community choir as the central feature of a music theatre piece was certainly a challenge.

What we were certain of was the effectiveness of Irine Vela's sumptuous and marvelously eclectic score. As one review in the Australian commented: '*Once in a while, a piece of stirring musical theatre arrives quietly on the scene, fired by politics and cause rather than the hype we have come to expect. To be accurate, Irine Vela's Little City is not so much a musical as an expressive choral piece, soaringly operatic in places yet offering the raw earthiness and strident tone associated with popular musical theatre.*'

In deciding to produce *Little City* as a school musical, most of those initial unknowns had vanished. But one large unknown loomed. How would this work, created about and around a multicultural adult choir translate to the school environment? Would they get it?

The fact that these young people have 'got it' (as you will see) is a tribute to the truly remarkable place that is the Ferny Grove Music Department. It is a cliché these days to talk about the dedication of teachers, yet what this production of *Little City* demonstrates so simply, is an honest dedication to realising a sublime artistic experience; dedication from teachers, other staff members, parents, friends and above all, these gloriously anarchic students.

If by some chance I was granted a second musical education, I couldn't imagine a better place to learn about music than Ferny Grove State High School, or a better bunch of young people to begin that artistic dream with.

Mark Dunbar

If music education is about anything, it's surely about introducing young people to something new, unfamiliar and inspiring – not always an easy task. When they first encountered *Little City*, many of the students were unsure what to think about its mix of folk, pop and classical sounds, its stylised staging, its point of view.

It was all so different from the youth culture that surrounds them in pop music and on TV – the narrow range of musical style, the relentless pressure to be cool, to consume, to ignore the world's complexities.

Things have changed for the students in our *Little City*. Many of them now say they love songs that at first they found incomprehensible. Some of them are starting to see that *Little City's* simple story does actually have something to tell us about the world and the human spirit that is worth considering, even though it's a world away from boy-meets-girl and everything turning out all right in the end.

Its been challenging but its been fun to see eyes opening to new possibilities – a real 'positive educational outcome'.

None of it would have possible without the team. Huge thanks to Mark Dunbar who brought his intimate knowledge of the play and the score to the task of inspiring the students to shape the work and bring it to life. The involvement of composer Irine Vela, her encouragement and interest in the new turn her work was taking has added real depth to the production, as has the pivotal role of guest soloist Anna Stephanos.

Thanks of course to the school, the adults who gave their time to perform alongside the students and more than ever to my colleagues Miranda Myers, Jodie Riek and Grantley Sutch who took on the challenge of this unusual and unfamiliar piece, and dedicated their efforts to making it work.

Stephanie McCaw

*Little City* premiered in Melbourne in December 1996. The opening was electrifying – on of the highlights of my artistic life. The show certainly made an impression in Melbourne's theatrical world, and its relevance remained strong throughout the Jeff Kennett years. In 1997 the show played in Brisbane, then was remounted in Melbourne.

Back then; Mark Dunbar was the musical director and Stephanie McCaw one of the percussionists, while the show was produced by Melbourne Workers Theatre. Now six years later, Mark is directing, Steph is the MD and ferny Gove State High is the producer.

I can't tell you how exciting it is to hear Ferny Grove students perform this work. I visited their weekend music camp earlier this year and was astounded at the quality, truthfulness and exuberance of the performers and the singing. Some of the pieces had transcended the original production. At times I was blown away – I would never have thought a high school capable of such high standards.

Ferny Grove has an extraordinary music department with inspired, committed leadership and talented students, and I thank them all for producing *Little City*.

Irine Vela

### *Little City – background*

There are all sorts of echoes of real events in *Little City*, which was originally written for a multicultural choir in Melbourne. Many of the choir's members had actually lived through major social upheavals like that in the play, in their countries of birth.

So there are references to the student takeover of the Athens Polytechnic in 1972, which preceded the fall of the Greek military dictatorship; the Campamento movement in Chile; and even local parallels to the selling off and running down of much of Victoria's public infrastructure, which was occurring when the play was written.

It might seem a strange mix, but it points up one of *Little City's* underlying messages – we're always living in historical times; it's just that we don't always see it. As Irine Vela says, 'it could never happen here' is always the argument until 'it' happens.

One thing leads to another and you never quite know where they'll end up.

The other big message is that it's possible for people, when they have had enough of chaos, poverty or oppression, to consciously set out to control their destiny. It doesn't always end happily in the short term – the Greek students were overrun by tanks, the Chilean dictatorship demolished the Campamento, but those regimes did eventually fall.

The play's inspirational power lies in its testimony that the people can, if they desire, work together for the common good regardless of political pressure or difficult situations. It's not whether they succeed that matters in the end, or even whether everyone involved totally agrees about the best way to go about things; it's the fact that the effort is worth making.

### *Little City – the story*

Things are grim in a city of the near future, as schools and hospitals close, rubbish builds up on the streets and water, power and transport services start to fall apart. The government doesn't seem interested in the lives of ordinary people any more and when Magda's son Tommy dies in an avoidable accident it's the last straw.  
(*Melbourne at Night, Funeral Lament*)

The locals want to take action. Magda's friend Ruby is all for confrontation and protest, Jaan is for negotiation and compromise. Jimmy is ambiguous and ambivalent, cynical about politics but dreaming of utopia – an 'island paradise'.  
(*Another day for Us, The Stirring of the Masses*)

Gradually people come together and realise that this has all happened before, in many times and places around the world. And there have been times when people have said 'Enough!' and set out to shape their own destiny.  
(*Campamento Nuevo Havana*)

So they decide to break away from the political structure that no longer looks after their interests. Drawing on the inspiration of those who have gone down the same path they will build their own *Little City*.  
(*Hail*)

But how far should they go? (*I'm Falling*) is this revolt or revolution? How should they react when the government finally takes notice and responds with hostility? Was there really any point to what they've done? Can they even agree among themselves?  
(*At Dawn a Boat Will Sail, Words are the Poison*)

Things may not turn out well, but the fact that the attempt was made will inspire others in the future.  
(*Sono Forte*)

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

***Fatal Shore*** by Irine Vela, plus songs by Victor Jara, Manos Hadjidakis, Violeta Parra, Notis Mavrodis & Sergio Ortega

Song arrangements by Mark Dunbar Musical direction by Mark Dunbar

BEMAC SPACE Brisbane June 2004

In 1995, a community choir was formed to present *Canto General*, an epic choral work by Greek composer, Mikis Theodorakis and Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. This hymn to survival and struggle sings of a common humanity spanning Latin America and Greece, whose people were bearing the brunt of political and economic dictatorship. Many migrants, exiles and refugees to Australia came as a result of these forces. They came with hopes and dreams and grief and anger. They came with hearts torn asunder. They helped form the soul of Brisbane Canto Coro; a choir that came together for a single performance in 1995, and continues today, perhaps due to the strength of that spirit. In 2004, to celebrate our tenth year, we present a program of work that is a metaphor for our own journey here in Australia.

The first part of the program is a collection of songs from Greece and Latin America from the 1960s and 1970s. Despite political repression, artists led a cultural renaissance of extraordinary beauty. Fuelled by a rediscovery of rich folk traditions, songwriters, poets and composers created work that was beautifully subversive. To speak of beauty and love became an act of resistance and treason. Many were imprisoned and tortured, some, like Victor Jara paid with their lives. Immortality is sweet, and these artists now smile at us through a sublime body of work that transubstantiated the worst of human nature into simple joy; monuments of resistance and liberation, irresistible. We present a number of songs from the New Song Movement in Chile and the New Wave in Greece. They feature soloists Anna Stephanos and Marco Ramirez, both of whom were foundation members of Brisbane Canto Coro.

The second part of the program features a song cycle by Greek Australian composer, Irine Vela called *Fatal Shore*. A major part of the Brisbane Canto Coro journey has been to extend the traditions we have inherited from Greece and Latin America. Over the years, we have commissioned a number of major, new choral works that seek to explore and examine the migrant experience in Australia. The work of composer Irine Vela has been central to this endeavour. This latest song cycle is a set of four large musical essays about exile. Typical of Irine's music, the songs abound with sumptuous melody and evocative rhythms. The lyrics are a mixture of poetry and commonplace, weaving a multitude of ironies that aptly express the mixed emotions that inevitably accompany the act of migration, whether forced or voluntary.

No musical director's note on the occasion of a tenth anniversary would be complete without thanking the choir members that have made all this possible. Over the decade well over 500 people have sung under our banner. A dozen or so souls have been there from the beginning, and to them I salute you. You have been the seed from which, each year a remarkably fresh and exhilarating plant has flourished. You contain the genetic stuff of Canto Coro. By being there you have become indispensable. You furrow a channel through which others flow to join you. And to every last singer I owe a debt of thanks, and express it now, knowing full well that words can mean and express very little. And that is why we sing.

Mark Dunbar

In thinking and researching the text in relation to the songs, the image of a ship or boat, or a flight, kept appearing as it inevitably does. And so the notion of a 'ship' occurs throughout and around the songs. The travelling vessel is used as a double-edged symbol – the ship of hope, of despair and of nostalgia. The ship that can carry us away from hardship, can also take us away from those we love; it can take us to a promised land, or a wasteland. The ship that some wait for, but never arrives – or the ship that takes us back to where we belong, or to a home that no longer exists.

Everybody thinks that they are the pioneers of a country, which of course was never theirs. The convicts and settlers believed they built and civilised this country. The post-war migrants also claim that. 'Everybody' thinks they have suffered more than someone else. 'Everybody' thinks his or her story is more interesting. So many people are reconnecting with their migrant heritage in order to feel a sense of unity and identity, but in a context that can only perpetuate the myth of Australian equality.

Like exiles, we need to constantly justify our existence and condition. Like exiles, so many of us who live in Australia seem to be struggling to 'belong'. I have tried to capture this in the music I have written.

Congratulations to Brisbane Canto Coro for ten fantastic years.

Irine Vela

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO & BLACKFACE PRODUCTIONS present:*  
**Anderson & Ipeta** by Mark Dunbar, book by Carmen Attel, Mark Dunbar,  
Dwayne Peachey & Yvette Walker  
Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Directed by Mark Dunbar  
BEMAC SPACE Brisbane July/August 2005

**Anderson & Ipeta** is the second part of a trilogy of new musicals that explore the notion of human choice. Not the banal 'choice' that politicians are so fond of insisting we all need more of, rather those moments in our lives when we make decisions that involve confirming or forfeiting our very humanness. In an interview a few years back, the author Toni Morrison spoke about the idea of 'choosing to be human'. She used an example from the American civil rights movement where a group of white mothers gathered to tip over and set on fire a busload of black children rather than allow them to attend the same school as their white children. These 'white mothers' had certainly forfeited their 'humanness' at this moment in Toni Morrison's eyes. History, including Australia's, is littered with such examples of 'human' behaviour.

In the first part of the trilogy, entitled **Hornets Wedding**, we used an aboriginal massacre of a white frontier family (the Frasers), and the subsequent indiscriminate reprisals throughout central Queensland as the basis for our tale. **Anderson & Ipeta** reverses the scenario. This time we use a white on black massacre. Our story is loosely based upon the Myall Creek Massacre and the extraordinary two trials that eventually led to the hanging of seven white men for the crime. Many in the colony of New South Wales could not believe the government would dare to execute young men (even if convicts) for partaking in a little sport. After all, everyone involved in clearing the land was doing it. Amidst this mass forfeiture of 'humanness', there were also incredible examples of people who, despite the coercion and very real danger, chose to be 'human'. These acts of courage help illustrate for us that despite the social context there is always a choice. Anderson made this remarkable choice and deserves to be celebrated as a 'real Aussie hero'.

The third part of the trilogy will attempt to connect these historical threads and weave them into a more contemporary tapestry. In ways large & small, we are all still confronted with that difficult choice, the choice to be human or to forfeit.

**Anderson & Ipeta** would not have happened without a number of people. I would like to thank Roger Milliss whose book, **Waterloo Creek** provided a treasure trove of detail that informed this work. I would like to thank my artistic collaborators, Carmen Attel, Dwayne Peachey & Yvette Walker who throughout provided support, friendship and a wealth of stories during the long writing stage. Finally I would like to thank this strange and gorgeous choir, Brisbane Canto Coro! Is there another choir anywhere like it? Without the choir and the wonderful cast, only a few pencil scratchings would remain.

Mark Dunbar

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

**1975: A Love Story** by Irine Vela, book by Irine Vela

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar Directed by Sue Rider

Judith Wright Centre Brisbane September 2006

Brisbane is a difficult city for independent artists to get significant work up. It suffers from a corporatisation of the arts dominated by major organisations and their gatekeepers. In this way it differs markedly from Melbourne where a tradition of independent small venues, companies and collectives provide viable options for artists to work and create. Getting *1975 – A Love Story* up in Brisbane well illustrates this grim, mediocre situation. Having already raised \$30,000 (just under 50% of the current production budget) we sought a meeting with a number of major arts organisations, including the Brisbane Festival. In our minds, a co-production of a new Australian music drama which had already had significant success and critical acclaim in Melbourne, and which examines one of the most turbulent moments in Australia's recent history would be an attractive proposition for the Brisbane Festival... a win-win situation in common parlance. We received a tepid response. 'Maybe in 2009' I recall was the denouement of a quite laughable meeting where it was obvious the gate keeper in question had neither read the script, nor the reviews or viewed the video provided to him before hand. We soldiered on, raised a further \$30,000 and here we are, a totally independent production on Brisbane's fair shores.

Brisbane Canto Coro has survived in this climate for 13 years now. That is a tribute to the energy and political will of its members. In fact, when I established Canto Coro in Melbourne in 1993 and its sister choir in 1995 I could never have imagined that they would still be alive and singing today! Both were formed for a single performance but could not be stopped! Having two choirs which share a way of working and an artistic aesthetic is a rare opportunity which has lead to a sharing of repertoire, and the even rarer ability to have two goes at new large scale and important works. *1975's* trajectory has tapped into this possibility and would have been extremely difficult to re-mount without it.

The music of Irine Vela has been one of the major reasons for the longevity and success of Canto Coro. We have performed more of her works than any other composer. It is always an intriguing process. On the one hand, never having had a formal music lesson in her life, there are always lots of I's to dot and T's to cross in her scores musically. This certainly gets the blood flowing for the musical director! On the other hand, she brings to her work such a thought-through understanding of how music functions in theatre (never merely decorative or as a break from the text) that her real antecedents are classic opera composers such as Verdi and Wagner and the great Brecht music theatre composers such as Weill, Dessau and Eisler. You can throw in Bernstein into that mix as well! Add to this her concerns for revealing the truths about how we live in this place, and you have a composer that history will judge to be among our most significant for many a day.

I know the hardships she endured in creating this work, (no large creative effort comes without a cost) and so to her go my admiration and thanks. My one hope is that we can do her, and her work justice in this production. I would also like to thank director Sue Rider who took on with insight and skill (and without once looking askance at a ridiculous budget, and in particular her line in it!) this enormous work and very idiosyncratic choir and process! Choreographer Nik Hills has added another dimension

to our work over two years now. His good humour and fantastic way of getting singers to move with beauty has been a pleasure to witness. I would also like to thank Carmen Attel who has done so much of the unseen leg-work in this production, (and created a wonderful poster) which has allowed me the time to focus on more musical concerns. Carmen is one of many young Indigenous artists in this production. Their energy and ability to empathise with the major concerns of the work has enriched the experience for all of us.

Lastly my heartfelt thanks go to each of the members of Brisbane Canto Coro who continually astound me!

Mark Dunbar

*1975* is a work of pure fiction although based on events in Australia between 1972 and 1975. The political party represented is the Australian Labor Party but in my mind it could be any social democratic party in the world where followers are forced to confront their own mythologies and identities in dealing with similar dilemmas and contradictions.

The piece was first performed in 2003 as a co-production between Melbourne Workers Theatre and Melbourne's Canto Coro. I feel very heartened and privileged to see a new production of the work take place in Brisbane and I thank Mark Dunbar for instigating and realising this in the face of considerable financial, logistical and time constraints - but he is indefatigable. Where others would give up and say it was impossible, Mark always finds a way to make things happen.

The beauty of having a second go at a show is that you get a chance to rewrite and improve some things. In this respect I was aided and guided by my wonderful dramaturge (and director) Sue Rider who helped me to make the story clearer and say the things I wanted it to say. Hence our new title – *1975 - A Love Story!* It was a joy collaborating with her.

I am also delighted that two performers from the original production, Lisa-Marie Charalambous and Melita Jurisic have travelled many miles to take part in this production.

I would like to thank the entire original cast and crew, MWT and Canto Coro for giving birth to *1975* in the first place and in particular Jeannie Marsh, who along with Mark Dunbar has inspired, encouraged and initiated the creation of new work for many years.

I also wish to thank Patricia Cornelius, Louise Gough, Cathy Dowden and Maryanne Lynch for their valuable input.

More importantly I want to express my gratitude to Brisbane Canto Coro and the 2006 cast and crew for their hard work and passion, for making *1975 - A Love Story* a reality again.

The work is dedicated to Jeannie Marsh, Eugenia Fragos and Mulaim Vela.

Irine Vela

One of the joys of being a freelance artist is the range of projects one gets to work on and the different artists one gets to meet and learn from.

When Irine Vela approached me to work on *1975 – A Love Story*, I was attracted to the project for three reasons: *1975* was one of Australia's most significant years and it has barely been explored on stage; I loved the idea of collaborating with a composer whom I had long known by reputation for strength, innovation and political conviction; and I was excited by the prospect of working with Brisbane Canto Coro, whose production of Irine's choral opera *Little City* I was fortunate to have seen in Brisbane some years ago. The musicality and emotional power of that performance stayed with me as a work, which touched the heart and intellect of the community, inspiring utter commitment from the performers and passionate response from the audience. This was performance work with something to say and I said yes to Irine and Mark Dunbar, founding director of Canto Coro, excited at the thought of working with such a group of people.

Uncertainty followed. Would funding come through? Would it be enough? With two-thirds of it acquired, Irine and I began work. *1975* had had a first production in Melbourne in 2003 and Irine was keen to develop the libretto further. Playworks contributed towards the dramaturgy for our new production and Irine and I spent fervent, delightful hours between other projects, discussing themes, issues and characters by email, phone and face to face, grappling with the balance between the personal and the political, the music and the text, until gradually her rehearsal draft took shape.

In the meantime I had met the choir and began to understand a little of the power I had felt as an audience member. Much of it stems from Mark, whose passionate, inclusive and often unorthodox approach gives value to every choir member and makes the business of learning both serious and fun. Mark is indefatigable, an inspiration. But the choir also has its own integrity, a vibrant mix of cultures and personalities with a collective warmth, which makes it unlike any group, I have worked with before.

The missing third of the funding never did eventuate but by the time we knew that, we were hooked and there was no turning back. Local performers Sandro Colarelli, Lionel Theunissen and Lily (Qing) Chang joined choir regular Libby Schmidt as principals and we found to our excitement that Melita Jurisic and Lisa-Marie Charalambous, who had featured in the Melbourne production, were available to complete our cast. With Alison Ross and Kylie Mitchell on board as designers and Nik Hills as choreographer, we had a great team and *1975 – A Love Story* was on its way!

This production has been characterised by generosity and commitment. I'd especially like to thank Nik and Carmen Attel for their support. Thanks too to the students from ACPA (Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts) who have become such an integral part of the production and to Nada Cordasic and Renee Roelands for stepping into stage management with such willingness. To both Mark and Irine I express my gratitude and admiration for their courage, passion, good humour and trust. Finally, a big thank you to the cast and to members of Brisbane Canto Coro, all of whom have given so much of themselves to bring this mighty work to life.

Sue Rider

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

**Damage** by Mark Dunbar, book by Graham Akhurst, Carmen Attel, Mark Dunbar,  
& Nik Hills Directed by Nik Hills & Mark Dunbar Choreography by Nik Hills

Musical direction by Mark Dunbar

AHIMSA HOUSE West End Brisbane August 2007

*Damage* is the third part of a trilogy of music theatre works I have written over the past six years with various collaborators who have assisted in creating the librettos for these works. All have strong Indigenous themes, and in fact are an artistic reflection on Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations today. I call the three works the *Unsung Trilogy* as in a way each deals with 'heroes' who I feel remain unsung in our present historical consciousness and in most Australians' contemporary lives.

The first part is called *Hornet's Wedding*. It took as its starting point a black-on-white massacre at Hornets Bank, near Taroom in central Queensland in the 1850s. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this story was legend in Queensland, celebrating the stoic pioneers' struggle against the harsh Australian bush, which of course included 'unruly savages'. Bielbah was the leader of the Jiman clan who organised and carried out the brutal massacre of the Fraser family. Of course he did this in response to the increasingly bloodthirsty practices of pioneers who were dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their lands and livelihoods. The subsequent white response to the atrocity was equally savage, practically wiping out the Jiman and other clans over a twenty-year period of reprisals. It was the character of Bielbah that fascinated me most. He reminded me of Ned Kelly or of Che Guevara, yet Australia never celebrates his exploits in fighting a guerrilla war of resistance against enormous odds, to save his people.

*Anderson & Ipeta* is the second part of the *Unsung Trilogy*. It was a re-telling, as an unlikely love story, of the Myall Creek massacre, which occurred in the colony of NSW in 1838. This was the first time whites were successfully tried and hanged for murdering Indigenous people. That small act of justice may not have occurred at all if the young convict Anderson had not refused to participate in the slaughter happening around him. Eventually he exposed the truth at trial, against ferocious pressure for him to hold his tongue. Anderson's act of courage still astonishes me, and his worthiness to wear the title 'hero', and perhaps even have a monument erected in his name, seems as obvious as it is unlikely!

*Damage*, the final part, is not based on any historical event. It is set in the present day, taking place in a share house occupied by four young Indigenous people. Contemporary events do form the backdrop for this story, including the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Commission, the Redfern riots and the recent death-in-custody on Palm Island. However, it is really an attempt to show four very different people and their peculiar struggles to survive today, groping through an Australian culture still prickling with prejudice. Each responds differently, and each is symbolic of the 'heroic' struggle currently being waged especially by young Indigenous people today.

I would like to thank all my collaborators in creating and realising this trilogy. Any deficiencies are purely my own doing, and their work has been an inspiration to me. In particular, I would like to thank the many students I have met while working at the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts. Without their humour, stories and uncanny survival skills none of these works would have been conceived.

Brisbane Canto Coro has been the chorus for each part of the trilogy. Without their blind faith and constant support these works would never have seen the light of day. I take my hat off to each individual member of this wonderful choir and thank you all.

Mark Dunbar

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

***The Coercive Arm:*** two choral works about when the State fires on its own people

*Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique* by Luis Advis &

*Epitafios* by Mikis Theodorakis & Yannis Ritsos

Epitafios arrangements by Mark Dunbar Musical direction by Mark Dunbar

AHIMSA HOUSE West End Brisbane June 2008

It has been a few years now, since Brisbane Canto Coro presented a program of Greek and Latin American choral music, having recently concerned ourselves with Indigenous-based theatre extravaganzas! So this year's program is kind of a rediscovery of our roots.

*Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique* we first presented back in 1996. We then re-presented it last year to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what is Latin America's worst single recorded massacre. It was then that I had the idea of pairing this haunting work with *Epitafios*, as they both are in fact, artistic responses to state perpetrated violence. The tragic illustration of what Marx calls 'the coercive arm of the State'.

*Epitafios* is part of the litany sung during Greek Easter signifying the death and resurrection of Christ. In 1936 in Salonika Greece, with fascism on the rise in Europe, a tobacco workers strike was brutally suppressed. Lives were lost, including one young worker immortalised the next day in a front-page photograph being cradled in the street, Pieta-like, by his grieving mother. The communist poet, Yannis Ritsos saw the photo and wrote a long epic poem entitled *Epitafios*, which uses the metaphor of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (the Epitafios) to explore this mother's journey through grief to hope that her son's life, like Christ's, had not been in vain. A startling metaphor, on the face of it, for a communist poet to use, but very Greek!

Two decades later, with Greece again in turmoil, composer Mikis Theodorakis set a number of the stanzas from Ritsos' *Epitafios* to music. These eight songs became anthems, symbolising Greece's long struggle against dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. For a period, like all of Theodorakis' music, (and even the bouzouki!) they were banned in Greece under the dictatorship of the colonels.

What is remarkable in these songs is the sense of joy Theodorakis captures, as he explores memory and loss, then finally, acceptance and the importance of continuing to struggle for human dignity.

I would like to thank Jorge Rico for gathering and leading the musicians that are so central to *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*. As ever, I would like to again thank the members of Brisbane Canto Coro for their patience, fine singing and commitment for once again indulging my musical whim. It's always such a pleasure!

Mark Dunbar

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*  
***songs of deAth and distrAction: a post-apocalyptic cabaret***  
*Featuring songs by Bertold Brecht*  
Arrangements by Mark Dunbar Musical direction by Mark Dunbar  
AHIMSA HOUSE West End Brisbane July 2009

On the face of it, Brisbane Canto Coro's fifteenth anniversary program seems quite a departure from previous fare. It is true; a selection of German songs from a choir with its roots in Brisbane's Greek and Latin American communities does seem from out of left field. But those of you who have seen our programs over a number of years will know that for this group, anything is possible!

In fact, the idea of presenting these particular songs came from two sources. The first was a very old and scratchy cassette I had of some of these songs from a concert I had played the flute in, back in 1986 in Melbourne. I loved the songs back then, and thought it would be fun to arrange them for choir. Many of the songs deal with social and political concerns (themes Canto Coro is not afraid of tackling!), while there is often a vicious irony between the sweetness of the melodies and the stark realities of the words (again not unlike the works of Theodorakis and Vela we have performed in the past). Also, these songs belong to a rich theatre tradition. Exploring the theatricality of group singing is somewhat of a signature for Brisbane Canto Coro.

The second source was within the choir itself. I realised that among our current membership we have half-a-dozen fluent German speakers; this fact clearly made the idea of a Brecht-song program feasible, it also meant that we could feature new voices as soloists from the choir.

Fifteen years is a considerable time to work with a single ensemble. Together, you not only create a body of work but also a method of working. If the funding term 'community cultural development' is to be anything other than hollow, it is, I believe, when artists and communities become one through a sustained commitment, then the 'cultural development' flows richly in both directions. This is my experience with this choir. I would like to dedicate this season to the hundreds of singers and musicians who, over the years have built, sustained and enriched the Canto Coro family. With my humble thanks.

Mark Dunbar

*BRISBANE CANTO CORO presents:*

***Cuba Silvio: songs by Silvio Rodriguez***

Arrangements by Mark Dunbar Musical direction by Mark Dunbar

KURILPA HALL West End Brisbane November 2010

Like many of Brisbane Canto Coro's productions, this year's program has had a lengthy gestation period. My good friend and composer Irine Vela first gave me a scratchy tape of Silvio Rodriguez's songs back in 1985. At that stage I was familiar with some of the more Andean-based music coming out of the Latin American New Song Movement – songs by Inti Illimani, Victor Jara and Violeta Parra to name a few, but I had never heard the music of this prolific and distinctive Cuban singer-songwriter. I immediately fell in love with that tape, wearing it out and redubbing it several times on my trusty Sony twin-cassette dubbing machine!

Canto Coro was formed in 1993 in Melbourne with a substantial number of Latin American members. Several of them were keen to perform a program of Silvio's music. Brisbane Canto Coro began in 1995, and again the name Silvio Rodriguez kept popping up and his songs kept being sung at our annual weekend music camps. One choir member in particular, Kerrie Woodrow would regularly ask when (not if!) we would do a season of his songs.

The issue for me as musical director was always how to arrange his songs for choir in such a way that it didn't kill the intimacy, rhythmic subtlety and musical freedom resulting from Silvio's idiosyncratic compositional style. Imagine a choir singing Bob Dylan and you will understand the problem! In other words, how could a choir add musical value to his wonderful music? As the years past, this musical conundrum always made me hesitate. I felt at the very least, we would need a soloist familiar enough with his music and style to build the program around.

In December 2007, we presented an hundred year commemorative performance of *Cantata Santa Maria de Iquique*, a choral work by Chilean composer Luis Advis that tells the bleak story of the massacre of hundreds of Chilean nitrate miners and their families by their government's military in 1907. This was a Chilean miners' story unfortunately without a happy ending. Long time Canto Coro member Jorge Rico assembled the band for that performance, and brought along a musician to play a small but vital part (about 10 notes in all!) on the charango. His name was Nelson Mansilla. Purely by accident, and maybe because I felt a little guilty about how little he had to do, I asked Nelson if he would like to sing a small solo. When he sang, I saw the smiles light up the choir members' faces. Our charango player had one of those rare gifts, a voice that effortlessly melts human hearts! We did two performances that day with two hours to kill between them. Some of us stayed in the venue to rest and gossip, including Nelson. After a little while he picked up a guitar and started an impromptu sing-along with some other singers. He sang solidly for over an hour, including some Silvio Rodriguez songs in his seemingly limitless repertoire...I began to think, maybe he's the soloist we have been waiting for.

Coincidentally, a few weeks later, our paths crossed again at a Chilean community fundraiser. I had the opportunity to hear Nelson sing again, this time in the more formal setting of a concert. Again his ease and musicality made me think of the Silvio program for Canto. Kerrie was there also and I said to her 'I think I will talk to him

about him working with us...' I then had one of those weird conversations that only occur between like-minded people separated by vastly different artistic processes. It went something like this, (minus the small talk and pleasantries):

Mark: Canto Coro is thinking about doing a concert of songs by Silvio Rodriguez and we are looking for a soloist. Would you be interested?

Nelson: Sure I love Silvio; I'd love to do it. I'm pretty free over the next couple of weeks... (uncomfortable silence).

Mark: ah, well...actually next year's program is already locked in, so it won't be for two years...but we would really like to work with you!

He looked at me, sort of puzzled, shook my hand and said the equivalent of 'no worries, love to, just let me know'.

I am pretty certain he probably thought he would never hear from me again. The reality of funding and making choral arrangements is that a two-year lead-time is pretty normal for us, but highly unusual for a troubadour!

Anyways, two years later here we are! I thank Nelson for his patience and wonderful singing spirit. I also thank Kerrie for her dogged persistence...we did it! But most of all I thank the choir who yet again have put up with all my foibles with joy and helped realise another dream.

Mark Dunbar

### **Choral Creativity: Brisbane Canto Coro by Doug Leonard**

I confess to attending church once a year, and Brisbane Canto Coro is my denomination. Founded by musical director Mark Dunbar and with its roots in Brisbane's Greek and Latin American communities, Canto Coro is a mixed community choir that presents large choral and music theatre works with the discipline to tackle complex scores and an extended repertoire that takes it beyond the usual definition of a 'community' choir.

In the past Canto Coro have presented such works as *Canto General* composed by Mikis Theodorakis to poems by Pablo Neruda and *Mass* by Leonard Bernstein; *Little City, 1975: A Love Story*, *Fatal Shore*, *Black Cargo* by Melbourne-based composer Irine Vela; and *Red Cap* by Janis Balodis and Iain Grandage.

When many were silent or closeted in despair during the Howard years over the refusal to say sorry, Canto Coro came to the fore. Mark Dunbar, who teaches at the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts in Brisbane, co-devised and composed the music for a trilogy of three dramatic choral works incorporating performers from the Centre: *Hornets Wedding* (libretto by Indija Mahjoeddin), *Anderson & Ipetá*, and *Damage*. These weren't easy works but, despite the gruesome colonial history depicted or the bleak realities of street life symbolically portrayed by the young students, Canto refused to take a moralising or simply pious stance. Instead in inclusive, challenging and celebratory ways, Canto Coro remained an unambiguous voice for recognising that it is society itself that needs to change.

After what must have seemed such a prolonged time on the barricades, Dunbar indicated a change of pace for Canto's 15th anniversary, Canto style. Within the moveable feast of the choir were half a dozen fluent German speakers so that Dunbar nursed to life the concept of arranging lyrics by Bertold Brecht and music by Kurt Weill, Hans Eisler and Paul Dessau from a scratchy old cassette of a concert in which he'd played the flute aeons ago in Melbourne. Thus *songs of deAth and distrAction/ a post apocalyptic cabaret* was born. This was mounted as an independent production during the Queensland Music Festival 2009 and was a runaway word of mouth success.

Dunbar writes in the program that there is often a vicious irony between the sweetness of the melodies and the stark realities of Brecht's words. Also the songs belong to a rich theatre tradition which choir members interpreted in poor theatre guise by bringing their own costumes. Both elements united disturbingly in the persona of Mark Shortis who looked as if he hadn't slept in a week, an effect emphasised by thick stubble and the kohl under his eyes which rolled in wicked emphasis as the MC from hell, convincing us that this man was at the very least a dangerous method actor in his brilliantly insinuating bass rendition of 'What Keeps Mankind Alive' from *The Threepenny Opera*.

At the opposite, perverse extreme from the same opera was the inability of mezzo-soprano Anna Stephanos to disguise herself as anything but the professional rembetika [Greek urban folk music. Ed] torch singer that she is in a version of 'Pirate Jenny' to die for. The beauty of Libby Schmidt's soprano singing 'The Fraternisation Song' from *Mother Courage* epitomised the searing musical ironies inherent in this music. And so it went on for another 16 acts in different combinations of voices and collective moods...you get the idea. Likewise the Brisbane Canto Coro Band 2009 was a combination of instruments that was sweet Hallelujah.