

MEDIA RELEASE

Level 5, 10 Hickson Road The Rocks
Sydney NSW 2000 Australia
Phone 61 2 8248 6500 Fax 61 2 8248 6599
sydneyfestival.org.au



Biographica

WORLD PREMIERE

Sydney Chamber Opera, Australia



Photo: Dean Golja

“a profound work...it exemplified that group’s ethos to perfection”

★★★★½ **Sydney Morning Herald** on *O Mensch!* (Sydney Festival 2016)

“thoughtful, compelling music drama, powerfully staged and finely sung...deserves to be taken up at international level”

Limelight on *Notes From Underground*

“The best thing at the Biennale”

Time Out on *Victory Over the Sun*

“This is audacious, arresting and original work of the sort we have come to expect from these artists even as they retain the capacity to surprise”

★★★★★ **Sydney Morning Herald** on *An Index of Metals*

Renaissance polymath **Gerolamo Cardano** was one of the most influential thinkers of all time: inventor, surgeon, gambler, philosopher, astrologer and heretic. **Sydney Chamber Opera** continues their pioneering development of the new opera canon with the world premiere of *Biographica*, telling the story of his remarkable life.

Mitchell Butel tackles the role of Cardano, a prolific inventor and flawed father, solitary, aggressive and peculiar. He was a man who listened to guardian angels, swore by science and dreamed of defeating time. He also wrote the first texts on the mathematics of gambling, was a world-renowned surgeon, invented algebra and pioneered sign-language.

Biographica features a score inspired by the principles of Renaissance music by Australian composer **Mary Finsterer**, a libretto by **Tom Wright** and is directed by Malthouse’s Resident Director **Janice Muller**.

It takes the form of a sequence of portraits as Cardano reflects on his life and focuses on moments of transformation, elation and tragedy: the events surrounding his birth, including his mother’s attempt to abort him; the rise and fall of his three children, detailing his eldest son’s crimes and beheading, his daughter’s prostitution and syphilis; and the achievements that brought him celebrity such as saving the life of the archbishop, and his correct prediction of the date and time of his own death.

Between each portrait Cardano shares his letters and aphorisms with the audience. In Beckett-like monologues accompanied by music, and ranging from insightful to outright bizarre, Cardano reveals himself as a deeply human and imaginative soul and captures the feeling of a world on the brink of a philosophical leap forward.

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Sydney Chamber Opera have been breathing new life into the art form since 2010, presenting a balance of specially commissioned work by leading homegrown composers, the latest international operas in their Australian premieres, song cycles and cantatas in unusual stagings, and canonical repertoire reinvigorated by the country's foremost theatrical talent. For this production, SCO's Artistic Director, **Jack Symonds** conducts **Ensemble Offspring** musicians.

Recognised as one of Australia's most innovative orchestral composers, **Mary Finsterer** is a multiple award winner and finalist in the APRA AMCOS ART Music Awards in 2016, 2014 and 2013 with her large-scale pieces *Falling* and *Aerea* and her latest symphonic works *Lake Ice (Missed Tales no.1)* and *Darkest Light*.

Having spent many years as an Associate Director at the Sydney Theatre Company, **Tom Wright** now works in theatre and opera both in Australia and internationally. Works include *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (2016), *Black Diggers* (2015), *The War of the Roses* (with Benedict Andrews, 2009), *The Women of Troy* (with Barrie Kosky, 2008) and *The Lost Echo* (with Barrie Kosky, 2006).

Janice Muller directed and co-adapted Mohammed Michael Ahmad's novella *The Tribe* for Bankstown Live, presented by Sydney Festival / Urban Theatre Projects in 2015. Appointed Director in Residence at Malthouse Theatre 2016, Muller was also a participant in Melbourne Theatre Company's Inaugural Women Directors' Program in 2014. Other recent credits include the critically acclaimed *Lake Disappointment*, written by Luke Mullins and Lachlan Philpott.

Sydney Festival first presented SCO's work in 2014 - the critically acclaimed double bill of works by Kurtág and Benjamin, *His Music Burns*. The Festival's commitment to nurturing and showcasing SCO's work continued in 2016 with *Passion* and *O Mensch!*

Composer	Mary Finsterer
Librettist	Tom Wright
Conductor	Jack Symonds
Director	Janice Muller
Featuring	Mitchell Butel, Jane Sheldon, Simon Lobelson, Andrew Goodwin, Anna Fraser, Jessica O'Donoghue with musicians from Ensemble Offspring.

Where Carriageworks Bay 20

When 7-13 January at 7.30pm
No performance on Tuesday

Duration 90 minutes

Tickets General Admission \$46/\$41 + booking fee

Bookings Sydney Festival on 1300 856 876
sydneyfestival.org.au/biographica

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