LA PASSION DE SIMONE

SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SONG COMPANY

AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

CARRIAGEWORKS

9–11 JANUARY

75 MINS

Music: Kaija Saariaho

Text: Amin Maalouf

Conductor: Jack Symonds

Director: Imara Savage

Set & Costume Designer: Elizabeth Gadsby

Lighting Designer: Alexander Berlage

Video Artist: Mike Daly

Sound Designer: Bob Scott

Soprano solo: Jane Sheldon

Chorus

The Song Company: Susannah Lawergren, Jessica O’Donoghue, Owen Elsley, Mark Donnelly

Violins: Alex Norton, Veronique Serret

Viola: James Wannan

Cello: Mee Na Lojewski

Double Bass: Kirsty McCahon

Flutes: Jane Bishop, Lamorna Nightingale

Oboe: Jasper Ly

Clarinet: Jason Noble

Bassoon/Contrabassoon: Noriko Shimada

Horns: Gergely Malyusz, Neil O’Donnell

Trumpet: Callum G’Froerer

Trombone: Matthew Harrison

Harp: Genevieve Lang

Celesta: Susanne Powell

Percussion: Joshua Hill, Bree van Reyk, Kaylie Melville

Production Manager: Damion Holling

Film Producer: Sarah Nichols

Assistant Director: Clemence Williams

Assistant Conductor: Huw Belling

Stage Management: Georgiane Deal, Elizabeth Paterson

Surtitles Johannes: MacDonald

All foodstuffs used in this production are ethically sourced and will be recycled for use as animal feed.

ABOUT THE SHOW

Passion and philosophy collide in a glimmering ascent to enlightenment.

Simone Weil bestrode the 20th century as a figure of impossible grace. Acclaimed Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho tells her story through music in this deeply spiritual work, never before seen in Australia.

Saariaho’s score is luminous and coruscating, blending a single incredible soloist with the voices of The Song Company and 19 virtuoso instrumentalists. Star soprano Jane Sheldon (The Howling Girls, An Index of Metals) leads the audience through Weil’s extraordinary life, from her rejection of labour during World War II to her exile into self-imposed starvation in protest of the Holocaust’s atrocities. Director Imara Savage and designer Elizabeth Gadsby, the creative team behind the acclaimed Fly Away Peter, return to Sydney Chamber Opera for this shimmering meditation on defiance in the face of inhumanity.

SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA

Resident company at Carriageworks, Sydney Chamber Opera is a fresh and youthful answer to some of the difficult questions facing today’s opera industry. Jack Symonds and Louis Garrick established SCO in 2010 and it has rapidly developed into an important and distinctive voice in the Australian music and theatre landscapes.

Under Artistic Director Jack Symonds, SCO continues to gain critical acclaim for its innovative programming, musical rigour and strong focus on compelling theatre-making. SCO makes opera with a 21st century outlook that resonates with a new, younger audience, and that shows how vibrant and relevant the artform can be.

Each year SCO stages productions of 21st and 20th century repertoire with a balance of specially commissioned work by leading homegrown composers and the latest international operas in their Australian premieres. SCO also performs song cycles and cantatas in unusual stagings, and canonical repertoire reinvigorated by the country’s most daring theatrical talent.

DIRECTOR’S NOTE

“All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void. The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass.”

Simone Weil

“I could not Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, Looking into the heart of light, the silence.”

T.S. Eliot The Waste Land

“Whatever you do, make it an offering to me – the food you eat, the sacrifices you make, the help you give, even your suffering.”

Bhagavad Gita

Rather than staging this work as a traditional opera we have responded to the piece as an installation of object, orchestra, video and voice. Tapping into ideas around mysticism, asceticism, endurance, suffering, gravity and liberation, we were influenced by the words and life of Simone Weil, and equally by Saariaho’s luminous score in which the world seemed ever in flux, a constant state of transformation, a wall of sound in which particles become physically manifest in space. The work is an exploration of the paradox of gravity and light, and a response to the fractured, multi-faceted remembering of Simone as evident in the libretto.

Imara Savage, director

**KAIJA SAARIAHO**

Kaija Saariaho is a prominent member of a group of Finnish composers and performers who are now, in mid-career, making a worldwide impact. She studied composition in Helsinki, Freiburg and Paris, where she has lived since 1982. Her studies and research at IRCAM have had a major influence on her music and her characteristically luxuriant and mysterious textures are often created by combining live music and electronics. Although much of her catalogue comprises chamber works, since the mid-90s she has turned increasingly to larger forces and broader structures, such as the operas L’Amour de loin and Adriana Mater.

Saariaho has claimed the major composing awards in the Grawemeyer Award, the Wihuri Prize, the Nemmers Prize, the Sonning Prize, the Polar Music Prize and in 2018 she was recognised with the BBVA Foundation’s Frontiers of Knowledge Award. Saariaho continues to collaborate for the stage: Only the Sound Remains, her most recent opera collaboration with Peter Sellars, opened in Holland in 2016.

In the same year her first opera L’Amour de loin was presented in its New York premiere by the Metropolitan Opera in a new production by Robert Lepage. The Park Avenue Armory and New York Philharmonic presented a celebration of her orchestral music with visual accompaniment in October 2016. February 2017 saw Paris come alive with her work when she was the featured composer for Festival Presences. She is currently composing a new opera to premiere in 2020.