



SYD FEST 19

LA PASSION DE SIMONE

SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE SONG COMPANY | AUSTRALIA
AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

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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 Eisleay, 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 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.

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★★★★★

“A COLLABORATION OF
STAGGERING AMBITION,
REALISED WITH A LEVEL OF
FINESSE THAT MAKES IT A
PRIVILEGE TO EXPERIENCE
IN ITS OWN RIGHT”

THE MUSIC

ALSO AT SYDFEST 19

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19 JANUARY
THE CRESCENT
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