

# FUTURE REMAINS

A double bill of

**Diary of One Who Disappeared**  
by Leoš Janáček

**Fumeblind Oracle**  
(world premiere)  
by Huw Belling & Pierce Wilcox

Sydney Chamber Opera is proud to present our seventh work for Sydney Festival, *Future Remains*, a double bill of Leoš Janáček's classic song cycle *Diary of One Who Disappeared* (1917-19) and the world premiere of its contemporary commentary, *Fumeblind Oracle* by Huw Belling.

I had often thought about finding the right context for a staging of the Janáček (one of the most 'operatic' and stageable of all song cycles), and Huw and Pierce Wilcox's proposition for creating a continuation of its (arguably underwritten) female character into a very different world was irresistible. Custom fitted around the flexible, seemingly limitless voice and personality of Jessica O'Donoghue, this work simply had to be made.

Janáček (1854 - 1928) was probably born half a century too early. It wasn't until well into the second decade of the twentieth century that his mature voice emerged and by then he had barely ten years to live. *Diary of One Who Disappeared* is the beginning of this extraordinary final decade of composition and in performing it, I am constantly amazed at the audacity of its musical invention and freshness of its language.

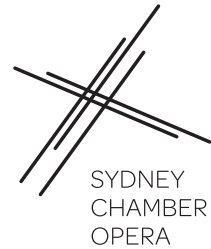
Music's great late-starter here gives us a collaged series of 22 song-fragments almost entirely without traditional development, methods of repetition or logical sequences. The piece is thus in a constant 'present tense': immediate, electric and desperately communicative. Conflicting thoughts and emotions are part and parcel of this language and the voices and piano are forced into the service of a new kind of music drama. There is some very

strange piano writing in particular that, when taken literally, shows Janáček straining at the limits of the instrument to produce attack and resonance effects far beyond the accepted sound of early 20th century pianism. The tenor part requires a voice capable of real lyric singing as well as rhythmic exactitude, an enormous range and the ability to toss off the Czech language almost as a percussive effect. The mysterious Zefka is given a 'backing chorus' of three offstage female voices that define the slow, dreamlike middle part of the piece and drive its sense of time to stasis.

Both *Diary* and *Fumeblind Oracle* are founded on a complex sense of rhythm as layered time. The second Belling song alone is a stupefyingly strange waltz that layers its dances in the ratio of 3:7:8 yet emerges as a natural 21st century continuation of Janáček's bold superimpositions of the irrational. The tangy Moravian modality of Janáček is likewise extended, amplified and decimated by Belling's enormously wide palette of harmonic colours and melodic sleights of hand, all seemingly casting a wry glance at Janáček's astonishing achievement.

It has been a consistent through-line of Sydney Chamber Opera's work to demonstrate the continuation of the radical achievements of the 20th century into the present. This double bill is one of our most undaunted experiments in this kind of dramatic-historical thought and my deepest thanks are to director Alexander Berlage and team for welding these pieces into a single work of music drama.

— **Jack Symonds**  
Artistic Director,  
Sydney Chamber Opera



## Janik

Andrew Goodwin

## Zefka/Chorus

Jessica O'Donoghue

## Music Director/Keyboards

Jack Symonds

## Actors

Amy Hack, Chemon Theys

## Director & Lighting Design

Alexander Berlage

## Set & Costume Design

Jeremy Allen

## Electronics & Sound Design

Benjamin Carey

## Dramaturg

Bernadette Fam

## Production Management

Rhys Robinson

## Stage Management

Ellen Castles

## Surtitles

Johannes MacDonald

## Duration

70 minutes

## Acknowledgements

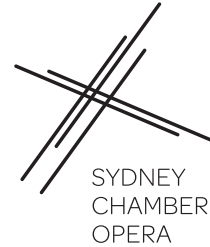
Piano sponsored by Kawai Pianos, Australia.

This production is proudly supported by Kim Williams AM and was developed as part of Carriageworks 2020 In Development Program.

The staging of *Diary of One Who Disappeared* was commissioned by Sydney Opera House, enabled by Prof Ross Steele AM.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body and the NSW Government through Create NSW.

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## ABOUT THE WORK

In *Diary of One Who Disappeared*, 'gypsy' girl Zefka (Jessica O'Donoghue) is something of a projected male fantasy. Fumeblind Oracle responds to both the power of Janáček's music (wonderful) and his male gaze (less wonderful) and the vexed issue of the objectified woman. Jessica has written extensively on women in opera, and during this collaboration has been an excellent progenitor of her own post-Zefka character.

*Fumeblind Oracle* is a piece in which Jessica's character (formerly Zefka) has forgotten - or rejected - her name: 'What use is a name / when they make you a thing'. In four parts, and twenty-four poems by Pierce Wilcox (many inspired by Sappho) she embarks upon an odyssey of identity, summoning an unlikely arsenal of musical modes and instruments including Melodica, Cimbalom, and fragments of garden pot.

The melodica is a \$20 breath-powered 'beginners instrument' from eBay with a lime case and fruity tuning. I treat this child-instrument with the utmost seriousness - its nascent loneliness forms the spine of *Fumeblind's* aural world. Our Hero-Woman's dichotomy is writ large by a hybrid of modes as described in Plato's Republic: Lydian-and-Phrygian (on D). "Soft or effete", and "Warrior-like". These sounds are ably fractured by Benjamin Carey's electronics as her character unwinds.

In Part One she rejects both her name and Janik's fantasy of her womanhood: two of the poems are a deconstruction of her *Diary* musical material. A surreal communion with the Oracle of Delphi 'unchains' her. (The 'oracle' is a real-time electronic trifurcation of Jessica's voice). In Part Two she explores ancient tropes

of womanhood, imitating ancient 'sculptures' (a tango in seven-against-eight, a demented salsa, and a Latin bergamask - why not?) Unimpressed, she vows to 'break shatter smash every marble every pot'. In Part Three she goes to war against these insulting reductions of female identity, finalising the rejection in Part Four and - against the strange tones of a piano playing in reverse - 'makes up' a name to call herself.

— **Huw Belling**  
Composer

In Janáček's *Diary of One Who Disappeared* we witness the story of a man who meets a woman by chance, sharing a fleeting moment of connection. The woman leaves and goes on with her life, yet the man does not. He remains transfixed and stuck. His captivation turns to obsession, unable to think of anything but her, unable to live without her. All of this is played out to a hauntingly beautiful score by Janáček. So beautiful and charming in fact, you could almost be excused for becoming complicit in the problems of this classic tale of delusion and unrequited love that we have heard so many times before within the operatic canon.

*Fumeblind Oracle*, which has been written as a companion piece to *Diary of One Who Disappeared*, not only holds a mirror up to *Diary* but also works across the artistic canon, calling out systemic problems of representation of women in art and dismantling the tired concept of the silent muse. As singer Jessica O'Donoghue so perfectly articulates: "Opera is a powerful art form, so let's use it for good instead of romancing stereotypes and using lovely music as a soundtrack to violence against women."

— **Alexander Berlage**  
Director