

Melbourne Recital Centre Presents

An abstract, vibrant, and textured background resembling a marbled or liquid-painted surface. The colors are predominantly bright blue, orange, red, and pink, with some darker, almost black, areas. The texture is highly dynamic, with visible brushstrokes or fluid movements creating a sense of depth and energy. The overall shape is irregular and organic, filling most of the frame.

# Satu Vänskä & Kristian Chong

— Great Performers 2019



Satu Vänskä / Photo: Kristoffer Paulsen

—Violin & Piano

‘Vänskä’s technical assurance and pristine tone, her delivery of bounding, cascading and crunching flourishes a masterclass in technique.’

— The Australian



# Satu Vänskä & Kristian Chong

Finland / Australia

**Wednesday 20 February, 7.30pm**

Elisabeth Murdoch Hall

**6.45pm**

Free pre-concert talk with Monica Curro

**Duration**

Two hours including a 20-minute interval

This concert is being recorded by ABC Classic  
for a deferred broadcast.

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Melbourne Recital Centre proudly stands on the land of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation and we pay our respects to Melbourne’s First People, to their Elders past and present, and to our shared future.



# —Program

An abstract, colorful profile of a human face, facing right. The colors are vibrant, including shades of orange, red, yellow, and blue, with a textured, painterly appearance. The profile is positioned on the left side of the page, partially cut off by the edge.

## **WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI**

(b. 1913, Warsaw, Poland – d. 1994, Warsaw, Poland)

*Subito*

## **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH**

(b. 1685, Eisenach, Germany – d. 1750, Leipzig, Germany)

Violin Sonata No.1 in G minor, BWV 1001

*Adagio*

*Fuga. Allegro*

## **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

(b. 1770, Bonn, Germany – d. 1827, Vienna, Austria)

Sonata for piano & violin in A, Op.30, No.1

*Allegro*

*Adagio molto espressivo*

*Allegretto con variazioni – Allegro, ma non tanto*

## **INTERVAL 20-minutes**

## **KAIJA SAARIAHO**

(b. 1952, Helsinki, Finland)

*...de la Terre*

## **MAURICE RAVEL**

(b. 1875, Ciboure, France – d. 1937, Paris, France)

Sonata for violin & piano No.2 in G

*Allegretto*

*Blues. Moderato*

*Perpetuum mobile. Allegro*

*Tzigane, Rapsodie de concert*

## —About the music

Tonight's program spans more than 250 years of musical history – from around 1720 to the 1990s – and is comprised of an imaginative blend of music from five different European composers. The violin is presented in a variety of different guises: as an unaccompanied solo instrument, in partnership with the piano and in dialogue with electronics. However, only in Beethoven's rather underplayed Sonata in A major, Op.30, No.1, is the conventional relationship between the violin and another part (the piano) established. Both Lutosławski and Ravel consciously treat the violin and piano medium as one where two separate protagonists perform in a non-homogeneous fashion. Ravel's colourful *Tzigane* demonstrates perhaps most emphatically the difference between the two instruments: the first half of the work consists entirely of an improvisatory unaccompanied violin cadenza, and when the piano eventually enters its mode is predominantly supportive. The solitary nature of the violin is naturally accentuated in the solo works of Bach, where accompanying parts are either ingeniously executed by the single player or are implied in the monodic writing. Finally, in Saariaho's *...de la Terre*, the violin is presented as an individual voice in stark relief against the vastly differing timbral soundscape of the surrounding electronics.



# —About the music

## WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI

### *Subito*

The Polish composer Witold Lutosławski was one of Europe's leading composers of the second half of the 20th century. He was deeply indebted to the music of Ravel, Debussy, Bartók and Stravinsky in his early compositions, and the later influence of John Cage's ideas encouraged him to allow certain controlled liberties in the rhythmic and temporal organisation of his music. These external stimuli were assimilated into his own writing in a very individual and idiomatic way. Once formed, his distinctive harmonic and rhythmic language was further refined and developed in a personal trajectory over the last 30 or so years of his life.

*Subito* (the Italian term for 'suddenly') was composed in 1992 and is his last completed work. Though only five minutes in duration it is (typically, for the composer) a work of great intensity and drama. It was written for the 1994 Indianapolis International Violin Competition where it was performed by the 16 semi-finalists. *Subito* undergoes a series of rapid changes of mood, character and attack (hence the work's title) in a rondo form. Each instrument possesses its own set of motivic material, and the clear juxtaposition of these differing elements provides much of the tension on which the music is based.

In the months prior to his death, Lutosławski was working on a violin concerto for the German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. Though it remained unfinished, the sketches show a resemblance to the expressive melodic writing found in episodes of *Subito*. Perhaps the short violin and piano work provided Lutosławski with a stimulus for the projected larger concerto.

## JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Violin Sonata No.1 in G minor, BWV 1001  
*Adagio*  
*Fuga. Allegro*

The *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato* (Six Solos for Violin without accompanying Bass) were completed by Bach, according to the dated autographed manuscript, in 1720 whilst he was employed at the court in Cöthen. As he was not required to provide music for worship at the Calvinist Court, his energies were devoted solely to the production of secular instrumental works. This he did with extraordinary speed as, as well as the violin solos, he completed during this six-year period the first orchestral suites, the 'Brandenburg' Concertos, the violin concertos, numerous keyboard works (including the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*), duo sonatas involving the violin, viola da gamba and flute with harpsichord, and the suites for solo cello.

The six violin works are to be played without an accompanying bass instrument. The performer is thus

challenged – most noticeably in the set's three fugues – to produce polyphony through complex chordal writing in an effort to overcome the violin's innate single voiced character. Harmonic support is also given to melodic lines in the slow movements through double-stopping. The collection contains three Sonatas and three Partitas that are arranged in a carefully ordered alternating sequence. The Sonatas all possess four movements with the same basic pattern: a slow introduction leading to a fugue, followed by a song-like interlude in a related key, and a fast binary form finale in a linear running motion.

The *Adagio* and *Fuga* from the first Sonata illustrate these attributes clearly. The weighty *Adagio* has a preludial character that sets the tone and temperament for the entire work. The recurring chords lay down a firm harmonic ground plan upon which rhapsodic and ornamental melodic melismas wind. A masterly balance is thus achieved between structural design and improvisatory impulse.

The concise theme of the *Fuga* is distinguished by short repeating notes and a small descending tail. This is subjected to various transformations throughout, perhaps most remarkably when it is stated in four-part chords in a short rising sequence. As in the fugues of the two other Sonatas, essential relief from the polyphonic writing is provided by monophonic episodes of flowing semiquavers.

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sonata for piano & violin in A, Op.30, No.1

*Allegro*

*Adagio molto espressivo*

*Allegretto con variazioni –*

*Allegro, ma non tanto*

During 1802, Beethoven was advised by his physician to leave the bustling city of Vienna and to take residence in the quiet nearby village of Heiligenstadt in order to improve his deteriorating hearing and general health. It was here that he penned the despairing letter to his brothers (the famous Heiligenstadt Testament) that laments both his encroaching deafness and thoughts of suicide whilst resolving to dedicate his remaining energies to music. During these traumatic and critical months, Beethoven channelled his extraordinary creative spirit into a number of different projects. These included the Second Symphony, the set of Piano Sonatas, Op.31, and the three Violin Sonatas, Op.30.

The Sonata in A major is cast almost entirely in the major key, with only brief diversions to the minor occurring in the first movement's central development and the fifth variation of the finale. All three movements commence with themes that unfold with grace and spaciousness, and a general lack of dramatic force bestows the Sonata with a relaxed and leisurely mood.

## —About the music

However, the original plan of the Sonata was not so benign, for Beethoven had initially composed a broadly proportioned finale of frenetic energy and relentless speed. This virtuosic movement was set aside and used the following year as the finale for another Violin Sonata in A major, his Op.47, the 'Kreutzer'. The replacement is a finale of lesser intensity that consists of a moderately paced theme (marked *dolce*) and six variations. Beethoven undoubtedly felt that a less weighty and outwardly assertive finale would form a more balanced whole with the preceding movements.

The opening movement is in triple time with both instruments exchanging motivic material in a gentle and open manner. The lyrical *Adagio molto espressivo* that follows is characterised by a lilting rocking figure in the accompaniment. The tender main theme that floats above is always closely paired with this underlying rhythm; Beethoven already conceives of melody and accompaniment as an indivisible textural unity at this stage in his development. After passing through various episodes in a rondo pattern, the movement closes with a poignant and tranquil coda.

### **KAIJA SAARIAHO**

*...de la Terre*

Kaija Saariaho, with Esa-Pekka Salonen and Magnus Lindberg, forms a trio of living Finnish composers born in the 1950s who have established themselves at the forefront of new music. Residing

in Paris since 1982, she has produced a large quantity of music for varying forces, ranging from numerous intimate solo and chamber works to large-scale orchestral music and operas. Her early compositions owe much to the computer analysis of the spectrum of sound itself, and this investigation into timbre has formed the basis upon which her musical language is built.

The overall sound world of her music is one of sonic flux. Instability and changeability are always close to the surface and the entire continuum of sound, from noise to conventional pure pitch, is explored. The fluidity of musical elements is handled with great sensitivity by Saariaho and this frequently imparts a sense of mystery and wonder. String instruments, with their wealth of colours and a high degree of control over timbral detail, have always been particularly well suited to her compositional aesthetic.

An innate sense of drama and theatricality helps direct her music's pacing and unfolding. *...de la Terre* for violin and electronics is the third part of her seven-movement ballet score *Maa*, which dates from 1991. The title could be translated as 'earth' or 'land', and the ballet has no clear plot. It is rather steeped in symbolism, with the violin movement providing the central nucleus which generates much of the musical material for other parts of the score.



Ethereal harmonics, distortions of tone by overpressure, sul ponticello (playing by the bridge to produce a glassy sound), tremolos and sliding glissandi are all used plentifully to create a floating and captivating dream world. The electronic part essentially transforms sounds from nature (such as rushing water, birds and human speech) as well as adding reverberations. Points of contact are made between the violin and electronics, perhaps most hauntingly towards the work's end when the soloist recalls the sound of birds produced earlier in the tape part.

## MAURICE RAVEL

Sonata for violin & piano No.2 in G

*Allegretto*

*Blues. Moderato*

*Perpetuum mobile. Allegro*

*Tzigane, Rapsodie de concert*

It took Ravel four years, from 1923 to 1927, to compose his Violin Sonata in G, and it was conceived immediately after the completion of a sonata for the more unusual combination of violin and cello. Both works inhabit a texturally lean and harmonically spare style that is far removed from the lush and colourful sound world found in his popular earlier scores such as *Daphnis et Chloé*.

Ravel commented that the Sonata in G was composed for two 'essentially incompatible instruments' and that he attempted to 'accentuate this incompatibility to an even greater degree'. The French violinist Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, for whom Ravel

wrote both of his 1920s sonatas, said that the long winding melodic line that opens the work should be played in an 'indifferent' manner: a general expressive reserve pervades the entire first movement. The central *Blues* displays Ravel's enthusiasm for jazz and is wonderfully conceived. The violinist often slides between pitches and imitates the plucking chords of a strumming guitar whilst the pianist maintains stubborn rhythmic independence. The final *Perpetuum mobile* is lighter in substance with the piano taking a secondary role to the violin's dominating cascade of semiquavers.

Unabashed virtuosity continues in *Tzigane*, a showpiece that was completed while the Violin Sonata was in its early compositional stages. It was written for the dynamic Hungarian virtuoso Jelly d'Aranyi (who also premiered works by Bartók, Holst and Vaughan Williams) and is freely rhapsodic in form. It commences with a dramatic solo violin cadenza followed by a series of characterful sections that work up to a frenzied conclusion. True to its title, trademark 'gypsy' elements abound including augmented seconds, cimbalom derived figurations in the piano writing and the whole gamut of technical tricks for the violin.

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Australian violinist and composer James Cuddeford is concertmaster of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta.

## —About the artists



### **Satu Vänskä**

Satu Vänskä was appointed Principal Violin of the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO) in 2004. She regularly performs as lead violin and soloist with the ACO, most recently directing the Orchestra in 2017's ACO Soloists concert where she gave the Australian premiere of Locatelli's Harmonic Labyrinth violin concerto.

Satu is the curator, frontwoman, violinist and vocalist of ACO Underground, the ACO's electro-infused, experimental spin-off band. With ACO Underground, Satu has performed collaborations with artists including Midnight Oil's Jim Moginie and the Violent Femmes' Brian Ritchie in venues including New York's Le Poisson Rouge and Sydney's Oxford Art Factory, and at Slovenia's Maribor Festival.

Satu was born to a Finnish family in Japan where she took her first violin lessons at the age of three. At the age of 11 Satu was selected for the Kuhmo Violin School in Finland. She later studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich as a pupil of Ana Chumachenco.

Satu was named 'Young Soloist of the Year' by Sinfonia Lahti in 1998, and a few years later was prize winner of the 'Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben'. From 2001 she played under the auspices of Lord Yehudi Menuhin's Live Music Now Foundation which gave her the opportunity to perform with musicians including Radu Lupu and Heinrich Schiff.

Prior to working with the ACO, Satu played with the Munich Philharmonic and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. She recently performed as a soloist with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and at the Sydney Opera House as part of the venue's Utzon Room music series.

She is the custodian of the 1726 'Belgiorno' Stradivarius violin, on loan from ACO Chairman Guido Belgiorno-Nettis AM and Michelle Belgiorno-Nettis.



## Kristian Chong

One of Australia's leading pianists, Kristian Chong has performed around Australia and the world. His wide-ranging performance schedule finds him equally at home as a concerto soloist, chamber musician and recitalist. As a concerto soloist he has appeared with the Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland, Sydney and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras, and orchestras in the U.K., New Zealand and China.

Described by *The Age* as 'a true chamber musician at work', Kristian is highly sought after with extensive collaborations with ensembles such as the Tinalley and Australian String Quartets, violinists Sophie Rowell, Natsuko Yoshimoto, cellist Li-Wei Qin, flautist Megan Sterling and baritone Teddy Tahu Rhodes, with whom he has recorded with ABC-Classics.

His festival appearances include the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Adelaide Festival, Huntington Estate Music Festival, Mimir Chamber Music Festival and the Bangalow Festival.

Other recent solo and chamber highlights include the Adelaide International Cello Festival, the Xing Hai Festival in Guangzhou, Australian Music Week on Gulangyu Island (Xiamen) with the Melbourne Symphony, the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, where Kristian performed the complete Rachmaninoff Preludes, piano trios and the Beethoven Triple Concerto with Yoshimoto and Qin, the complete Beethoven Piano and Violin Sonatas with Yoshimoto and Rowell at Melbourne Recital Centre, and Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata.

Kristian studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Piers Lane and Christopher Elton, and earlier with Stephen McIntyre at The University of Melbourne where Kristian currently teaches piano and chamber music. His competition successes include the Symphony Australia Young Performers Award (keyboard) and the Australian National Piano Award.



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music. Gifts to the Mary  
Valentine Limitless Stage Fund  
are enabling us to expand  
our regional and educational  
outreach.

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### Mary Valentine Limitless Stage Fund

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The Hon Susan M Crennan <sup>AC QC</sup>  
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#### (\$1000+)

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Providing sustained support for  
all aspects of the Centre's artistic  
program through the Melbourne  
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### Encore Bequest Program

Anonymous (3)  
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### Seat Dedications

Lovina Blackman  
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& Janet Calvert-Jones <sup>AO</sup>  
The Hon Mary Delahunty  
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Catherine Heggen  
Hans & Petra Henckell  
Anne Kantor <sup>AO</sup>  
& The Late Dr Milan Kantor <sup>OAM</sup>  
Cathy Lowy  
Katherine Rechtman  
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Ian Suren  
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