

Linda KOUVARAS

PIANO MUSIC, CHAMBER WORKS AND SONGS, VOLUME THREE
SHE, WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN A QUEEN FOR SOPRANO AND PIANO
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE FOR BRASS QUINTET
BUNDANON SUITE FOR PIANO

Antoinette Halloran, soprano
Coady Green, piano
Lyrebird Brass

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

REFLECTIONS ON KOUVARAS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Coady Green

Linda Kouvaras was a Lecturer in Music at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, when I was a young Bachelor of Music student there in the early 2000s. Her subject, 'Sex, Death and the Ecstatic in Music', was vividly intellectually stimulating and colourful, and one that, not surprisingly, I remembered for years after finishing my studies and relocating to London. It was for a concert of Australian music at St James's, Piccadilly, that I decided in 2009 to programme Linda's *Shoalhaven Nightpainters*.¹ It's a work I love – capturing the unique colours of Australian wilderness with a resonant, often virtuosic picturesque quality that is typical of Kouvaras' style. The critic (and composer) Robert Matthew-Walker, editor of the journal *Musical Opinion*, commented after the concert that the Australian repertoire on the programme seemed to share a certain spacious quality and a vividness of colour. We wondered if these qualities inherent in the Australian music that afternoon were influenced by the extraordinary, unique outback in Australia – a wilderness that is unlike anywhere else in the world, vast expanses, with places untouched by humans, full of dazzling hues and idiosyncratic sounds. *Shoalhaven Nightpainters* has always been a popular work with audiences. People are drawn to the unique, romantic story – artists painting in the middle of the bush in the darkness of the night, but I believe they are also captivated by the essence of the Australian wilderness that is present in the music.

Selecting other works by Kouvaras to perform in subsequent concerts, I found the early *Three St Kilda Sketches* (1994/1997)² and the half-hour, eight-movement *Ormond Collection* (1999),³ which show that Kouvaras is inspired by a sense of place,

¹ My recording can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0729.

² My recording of this work also appears on TOCC 0729.

³ To be released on a later volume in this series. Linda Kouvaras' own performances of *The Ormond Collection* and the *Three St Kilda Sketches* can be found on Move Records MD 3233 (2000).

with vibrant and often moving music evoking specific locations and her own personal emotional responses to them. The writing for piano is often technically virtuosic and demanding, but never un pianistic – Kouvaras is herself a highly accomplished pianist.

Upon returning to live in Australia after over a decade in London and taking a position lecturing at the Melbourne Conservatorium, where Linda is now a Professor of Music, I commissioned the *Night Pieces: Reflections after COVID-19* (2021) for my ensemble Duo Eclettico (with the saxophonist Justin Kenealy).⁴ The resulting suite is a major addition to Australian saxophone-and-piano repertoire and captures the complex emotional turmoil of the Melbourne lockdowns during the pandemic. This commission began a kind of creative avalanche, as the work with Linda blossomed. Further commissions were supported with generous grants and awards from Creative Australia, the City of Melbourne, the Australasian Performing Right Association/Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (APRA/AMCOS) and Faculty Research Grants from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne. I commissioned the *Herring Island Piano Sonata* for piano, recorded sound and narrator (2022),⁵ the *Buluwirri Bugaja Piano Suite* (2023), both works in collaboration with Indigenous artist Tiriki Onus, the song-cycle *Winter Came Early* for soprano, mezzo-soprano and piano, for the pianist Georgina Lewis (2022),⁶ another song-cycle, *She, Who Should Have Been a Queen*, for the soprano Antoinette Halloran (2024), *A Gwen Harwood Cycle* for soprano saxophone, piano and narrator (2025), in collaboration with the iconic Australian actor Helen Morse, the fiendishly difficult little left-hand étude *Assay for a Lone Hand* (2022), composed by Linda after a terrible accident injured my right hand, requiring months of recovery, and a new work, *Talk Valentina: Ally* for SATB choir and piano (2024) for the young chamber choir Divisi Chamber Singers. I wanted to document all of this material, and recording Linda's complete solo-piano music seemed to be a good start. As much of her output involves collaboration with other artists, the project quickly evolved to encapsulate her entire solo-piano and chamber music written from 1991 to 2026.

⁴ Our recording of this work also appears on TOCC 0729.

⁵ My recording can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0734.

⁶ Georgina Lewis, with the soprano Jane Magao and mezzo-soprano Karen van Spall, has recorded this work on Toccata Classics TOCC 0734.

RETHINKING CLASSICAL MUSIC FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

by Linda Kouvaras

I'm a composer/musicologist/pianist, Professor of Music at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. I started my musical life as a pianist, catalysed by a visit to extended family at age four, where there was a grand piano in the house. My elder half-sisters got me to play it with everything other than my fingers, while they rolled around on the floor, laughing; anything that captivates my revered sisters' attention like this, I thought, must be a Good Thing, and so, after two years' hard campaigning, my parents finally allowed me to start piano lessons. With a few years after secondary school spent playing keyboards and electric violin in post-punk/rock bands – chief among which was Voxpop¹ – playing piano in Melbourne for the Oxford Children's Theatre and the Hawthorn Ballet School and teaching at Allen's School of Music and for the Yamaha Foundation, I returned to an intensive focus on classical piano and went through to a Masters in Piano Performance at the then Faculty of Music of the University of Melbourne (my piano teachers including Max Cooke, Ronald Farren-Price and Stephen McIntyre, with Honours and Masters theses under guidance of Malcolm Gillies and Brenton Broadstock, respectively), before branching out into a Ph.D. in Musicology, penning the first feminist musicological thesis in Australia (under the supervision of Naomi Cumming).

I also started my compositional practice at this point, at the invitation of musician friends (Andrée Greenwell and Esmé Tintner in particular), who divined that I'd come to embrace this added musical direction – and right they were! Although I underwent no formal training, I do want to acknowledge the really helpful and

¹ Chris Spencer, Zbig Nowara and Paul McHenry (eds.), 'Voxpop', *Who's Who of Australian Rock!*, Five Mile Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 428; cf. also Voxpop, *You & Your Ways/Guilty Man*, vinyl, seven-inch single, Cicada Records, Melbourne, 1981.

generous-spirited feedback I received on my writing, especially in the early days, from Katy Abbott, Brenton Broadstock, Stuart Greenbaum, Matthew Hindson, Richard Ward and Richard Zatorski and, latterly, Maria Grenfell. I am now one of the longest-standing Australian composer-scholars working in contemporary music and gender studies, and one of the foremost feminist musicologists in the country.

My musical language centres on postmodernist neo-tonal/neo-modal explorations, often inflected by idioms from popular music and minimalism. Extra-musical catalysts incorporate a wide variety of subject-matter – from humour to the tragic, the mundane to the deeply philosophical – all with the human condition as focal point.

I have now had over sixty recordings and publications of my compositions and played as pianist on prestigious international and national labels, and 100+ performances at major festivals and other concerts, frequent radio broadcasts, across Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, USA, Asia and Europe; and I'm also published by Reed Music. I have full artist representation at the Australian Music Centre and with the Australasian Performing Right Association, with frequent invitations to comment on/review/assess/endorse high-profile and varied events, programmes, publications and recordings, nationally and internationally. I am a piano examiner for the Australian Music Examinations Board and was Senior Resident Tutor in Music and a Research Fellow at Ormond College from 1993 to 2021. I have enjoyed several artist-in-residence positions at Bundanon (New South Wales), the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Estate bequeathed to the nation, since 1999, and I was the 2024 Artist-in-Residence at the Lyceum Club, Melbourne. This is the third in a multi-album project curated by the concert-pianist Coady Green of all my solo keyboard, songs and chamber works to date, through Toccata Classics.

<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/kouvaras-linda>

<https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/13773-linda-kouvaras>

She, Who Should Have Been a Queen for soprano and piano (2024)

In this, my third song-cycle, Antoinette Halloran's texts are based on well-known female characters from opera, viewed from a 21st-century, feminist perspective – which

augments the subject matter explored in my first two cycles, *Art and Life* (1999), on the theme of domestic violence,² and *Winter Came Early* (2022), about the relationship between a mother and daughter and the mother's perspective of negotiating family life in a completely 'other' country.³ That Antoinette Halloran herself has played so many iconic operatic heroine roles made *She, Who Should Have Been a Queen* (2024) all the more heightened for me. She supplied her 'Reflections on a Libretto' for me:

During Melbourne's long pandemic lockdown, I woke in the deep of night, from a fever dream. I picked up my laptop and out poured Lady Macbeth's diatribe: why was she to blame for the shit show that progressed, when Birnam Wood crept toward Dunsinane?

Then a long line of wronged heroines I have played came to me thus, asking for a contemporary voice to address their undoings.

Musetta explains to an impatient lover that true love is a seed that needs nurturing. Juliet's Nurse regrets her counsel, wondering whether Juliet's hot Romeo was worth the wrath. An ageing Buttercup urges young women to claim their power before they are, too soon, dismissed as 'Karens.' Butterfly rises from her tomb to stir Pinkerton's remorse. Even the Black Snake, facing imminent beheading, wishes she once had a leg to stand on. And Gilda, speaking from death, reminds us that she still joins the ranks of just another murdered girl this week.

Our heroines are back.

They are sad.

They are angry.

And they are demanding change.⁴

The music of *She, Who Should Have Been a Queen* is virtuosic, for both soprano and pianist. The language is overwhelmingly neo-tonal, with much use made of modal scale structures, and the odd brief foray into aleatory, where the scenes described call for musical treatment that goes 'beyond' the scope of five lines and four spaces. I have also

² A recording of which can be found on Toccata Classics TOCC 0729.

³ A recording of this work appears on Toccata Classics TOCC 0734.

⁴ E-mail to me dated 11 March 2026.

made use of intertextuality – using quotes from and/or pastiche of the original operas as a feature throughout – a device I always find compelling, with its layers of reference and signification, and which is most apposite for Antoinette Halloran’s conceptual frame for her set of texts. She sent me ‘prompts’ from the lexicon to launch my creative responses; in this way, the song-cycle was very much a creative collaboration, after Coady Green’s curatorial vision to unite different artistic voices under a single thematic umbrella, centring on traditional opera and gender-based issues, that brought us all together.

‘Lady Macbeth on a Soapbox at Last’ (after Verdi’s *Macbeth*) [1] starts with a deranged, unmetred, stuck-in-a-groove, manic piano motif, played in octave unisons and punctuated with acerbic chords but muted at first under Lady Macbeth’s furious *Sprechstimme* rant about her grossly unfair, misogynistic treatment by society. This passage gives way to a more subdued, lilting, but still crazed main section in F minor, with the augmented dominant a harmonic feature. A sudden rupture in the remote key of B minor presents the piano now in highly agitated semiquavers, with Phrygian-mode interjections, as Lady Macbeth develops her thesis. The first two sections return as our heroine becomes more and more unhinged, crossing the human/other-worldly border into full witch persona, surrendering herself to the fire.

‘The Nurse’s Curse ... in retrospect, or, She, Who Should Have Been a Queen’ (after Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet*) [2] provides a gentle contrast to the opening song. Cast in the key of E minor, its main section has an uncomplicated, rhythmically clarified texture, the piano playing an ostinato rocking backdrop, the wistfulness of the words, laden with regret, on the part of the Nurse who failed to warn Juliet of the dangers of her becoming entwined with her paramour. A middle section loses the regularity of the pulse, the piano part only a left-hand tremolo in the lowest register, and the Nurse also declaring, recitative-style, in her lowest tessitura, as she confronts the fact that ‘my Juliet [is] now dead’. The opening material is then reprised, now in the key of A minor, as the Nurse reiterates, full of sadness, that Juliet ‘should have been a queen’.

‘Pinkerton’s Lament’ (after Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*) [3] starts with a pompous, purposefully insensitive piano solo in F major, incorporating a snatch of the American National Anthem, to delineate the bullish, entitled, culturally bigoted main character,

Pinkerton, of this song. However, it is tinged with chromaticism, which dissolves into the parallel minor, inflected by modal mixture⁵ through the use of the major-third scale degree, to hint at Pinkerton's internal disquiet as he reflects on the forsaken mother of his son. The voice enters, and the instability of the modal-mixture treatment endures, warping a second quoted reference to the *Star-Spangled Banner*. The readily recognisable quote of Butterfly's aria intensifies the sense of the pathos of the situation – the loss of the child she bore, the betrayal of the father of that child, and the buried guilt on the part of Pinkerton that now rises if he ever 'chances upon a butterfly'.

'Buttercup and the Cruel Stomp of Time' (after Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*) [4] begins with a humorous G&S motif. Set in C major, in $\frac{4}{4}$ march-like time, it is jaunty and upbeat – until it isn't, when, with parallel minor-key intrusions, poor Buttercup faces the reality of the cruel 'stomp of time'. The next section is in $\frac{3}{4}$, the piano providing a soothing, plaintive, rocking-quaver texture, the key now A flat major, as Buttercup reflects on her state and her fate. The dark mood intensifies in the third, contrasting, large section of the song, in G major, with a dactylic rhythm reminiscent of the 'intro', 'outro' and 'death' parts of Schubert's song 'Der Tod und das Mädchen'. In a vain attempt to deny the passage of time and its inevitable destructions – on body and on career, for a soprano – Buttercup utters a few poignant bursts, in unrelated keys, of Mozart's 'Queen of the Night' signature arpeggio figure. The song reworks all the foregoing material, with a dolorous piano interjection in G minor to respond to Buttercup's reminder to us that she 'was Josephine, once'. The opening sunny texture returns to end the piece, as Buttercup 'snaps to', to note – in 'meta' positioning, 'breaking' the theatrical 'fourth wall', smiling 'at the joke' – 'that Gilbert and Sullivan should provoke such a feminist, philosophical howdy do.'

The mood in 'Just Gilda' (after Verdi's *Rigoletto*) [5] returns to the introspective, the texture transparent, in a Satie *Gymnopédie*-esque, $\frac{3}{4}$ crotchet-minim E minor, with added ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords. After a transition to the unexpected key of G sharp minor, tinged with major/minor thirds and sixths modal mixture, the middle

⁵ Modal mixture is the technique of borrowing notes or chords from a parallel mode (that is, with the same tonic) – for example, introducing a chord or melodic note from a passage in C minor into one in C major.

section suspends the musical tapestry, the piano holding chords over several bars, as Gilda cries out about her rape, her murder.

The piano intro to ‘Musetta’s Schmalz’ (after Puccini’s *La bohème*) [6] conjures a heavily French-Impressionistic, dreamy soundscape, to set the scene of romantic-hued reminiscence. When Musetta enters, her C sharp minor waltz-song is fairground-carousel-like, to denote the ‘love-trap’ that has ensnared the lovers in an unbroken ‘ride’ that goes around and around, ever-repeating, ‘mired’ in a toxic relationship. Excursions to the Phrygian-related D major and secondary-mixture⁶ key of C major, spiced with augmented-harmony sonorities, are Musetta’s attempts to break out of the stultification in which she finds herself.

‘The Snake’s Perssspective: A Revisionist Commentary on *The Drover’s Wife*’ (after Mills’ *The Ghost Wife*⁷) [7], like ‘Lady Macbeth on a Soapbox at Last’, has a semi-aleatoric opening section, as the Snake hisses its way into the song to piano glissandos, either on the keys or inside the instrument on the strings. Fiery semiquaver outbursts from the piano in E minor burst forth, first in a transition to a lilting $\frac{6}{8}$, E Mixolydian mode main section, marked by a languorous, expansive, rapturous sensibility. A rude interruption to this texture takes the form of a mocking pastiche, describing a colonialist, wayward husband who’s ‘pissed off a-drovin’ and she [his wife] don’t know where he are!’ – the poor main protagonist, the Snake, as it informs us, having to ‘take the rap for *him*, for leaving the screen-door ajar!’ – the ‘rap’, of course, meaning the Snake’s murder at the hands of the Wife, ‘out of her depth in [the] sunburnt land’ of Australia. The last piano eruption ends in a final *gliss*.

To the Lighthouse for brass quintet (2021–22)

To the Lighthouse [8] was written to a private commission from Lyrebird Brass, to whom it is dedicated, and who gave its first performance at the Hanson Dyer Hall, Ian Potter Southbank Centre, Melbourne, in October 2022.

⁶ Secondary mixture goes beyond modal mixture by introducing into the harmony elements from a key beyond the parallel mode.

⁷ *The Ghost Wife* is a chamber opera (1999) by the Australian composer Jonathan Mills (b. 1963), to a libretto by Dorothy Porter, based on a horror story by Barbara Baynton set in the Australian bush and published in 1896.

The title is taken from Virginia Woolf's novel of the same name, and it refers to the advances made in feminism over the decades since the publication of the book in 1927. I was energised by the appointment of a woman, Carla Blackwood, to be first Lecturer in Horn at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, and by one of my Masters students, whose topic was women tuba-players and their under-recognised achievements.

The work starts with a sense of awakening, enunciated by solo tuba, and burgeons into an ensemble melody for the quintet cast in D major with mixture-mode inflection: the D-centred scale is tinged with light, positivity (F sharps) that is offset by dark, melancholy (B flats), encapsulating the dynamic at play here – that of women breaking into the 'steely' world of elite brass performance. Calls-to-arms in the form of a rapid, syncopated monotone figure recur throughout; these contrast with moments in homophonic rhythm to denote accord. This narrative continues to play out throughout the piece, with snatches of fugal activity to represent the height of the complexities of negotiating the profession for a female brass-player. The conclusion of the piece takes the form of homophonic rhythmic 'snatches of breath' for the spent fighters, then finding repose after their battle over a quietly triumphant A major chord.

Bundanon Suite for piano (1999)

The *Bundanon Suite* was written while I was Artist in Residence at Bundanon, the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Estate bequeathed to the nation, on the Shoalhaven River in New South Wales. In accordance with the stipulations of the Bundanon Artist in Residence programme, the Suite is a response to my experience of the site. Bundanon could be described as a sanctuary for artists. Its magnitude, variety and isolation stimulate creativity. The Suite comprises six pieces, all dealing with the idea of the haven of nature for urban-dwellers.

'Secrets of the Amphitheatre' [9]: the 'Amphitheatre' is actually an impressive geological formation which suggests a theatrical setting, where plays and other events are staged in the bush. The musical response to it is in the form of quasi-ancient modal melodic lines played simultaneously as triads, broken up with scalar passages and culminating in a triumphant, rapid final section.

‘Shimmering Haze on the Shoalhaven’ [10] is characterised by rippling added-note arpeggios and placed in a high register on the piano, with long pauses at the end of each sustain-pedalled arpeggio while the sound slowly decays, as space for sensual absorption in the feeling of midsummer heat.

‘Lament for Helen’ [11], the most directly programmatic work in the collection, is a response to an account of a tragic event in 1922. Two members of a local family, the twelve-year-old Helen Mackenzie, and her father, Kenneth, were washing ponies in the Shoalhaven river when both drowned, Helen when her animal got into difficulties and her father when he tried to rescue her.⁸ The music contains a song-like musical essay about Helen’s imagined character; it then depicts the drowning in tumultuous arpeggios, the hands in contrary motion; and the last section is the lament proper. This part is written predominantly in a high register to denote Helen’s youth. Underpinned by the traditional dotted rhythm of a funeral march, and the D minor setting (many Requiems are set in this key), the high register attempts to undermine the pomp and rather impersonal, patriarchal/masculine associations suggested by this rhythm, and by funeral dirges more generally. Re-cast in the subdominant, Helen’s ‘signature tune’ returns at the end: her spirit endures.

‘Haunted Point’ [12]: also part of the bush, this site is realised in the form of three chords which form the basis of the slow-paced, meditative piece, used in cyclical arrangements and combinations, representing the ‘timelessness’ of the place.

‘Bundanon Rhapsody’ [13] is a fast-moving étude of consistent texture in quintuplets in the right hand accompanying a left-hand melody; the ‘dream’ becomes disturbed in the middle of the piece and then tension is released at the very end.

‘Old Forest Growth’ [14] is mostly forceful in mood; the bush is slightly anthropomorphised to sound ‘angry’, decrying the detrimental effect humans can have on the environment. It centres on augmented chords and a semiquaver bass ostinato pattern.

⁸ The full details, including eye-witness reports, can be read at <https://www.bundanon.com.au/our-stories/social-history/bundanon/mackenzies/>.

The Suite is structured so that ‘nature’ (represented in purest form in [9] and [14]) flanks the ‘human’ component (depicted most strongly in [11]), of the pieces, with [10], [12] and [13] encompassing both human and non-human subjects. In this way, nature is seen to affect and ultimately absorb the humans who interact with it.

One of Australia’s most accomplished and best-loved sopranos, **Antoinette Halloran** performs frequently with all the major Australasian opera companies and symphony orchestras. Before the pandemic struck, she sang the title role in *Tosca* for Opera Queensland and Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*) and Olive (*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*) in Adelaide, and since then her engagements for Opera Australia and the state opera companies have included the title roles in *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *The Merry Widow* and *Rusalka*, Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*), Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Mimi (*La bohème*), Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (winning a Green Room Award) and Fata Morgana (*The Love for Three Oranges*). She has also appeared as Associate Artist for José Carreras, Nick Cave and Elvis Costello.



She has been part of the core ensemble involved in the creation of many new Australian works. Some of these collaborations include *Midnight Son* (2012), libretto by Louis Nowra, music by Gordon Kerry; *Banquet of Secrets* (2016), libretto by Steve Vizard, music by Paul Grabowsky; *Lorelei* (2018), music by Julian Langdon, Casey Bennetto and Gillian Cosgriff, libretto by Casey Bennetto and Gillian Cosgriff from a concept by Ali McGregor, for Victorian Opera; *Motherland of the Foreign Son* (2002), libretto by Le Quy Duong, music by Dominique Probst; *Matricide: The Musical* (1998), libretto by Kathleen Mary Fallon, music by Elena Kats-Chernin, for Chamber Made Opera; and *Cloudstreet* (2016), composer and librettist George Palmer, for the State Opera of South Australia.

One of Australia’s leading and busiest concert pianists, **Coady Green** is acknowledged as a major talent on the international concert circuit. In 2005 he relocated to London after winning almost all the most prestigious awards that his native Australia had to offer. During his eleven years in London, he frequently performed at the major UK venues and held teaching positions

at the University of London and at the Royal College of Music. He has performed in major concert venues in over twenty countries. He is a frequent guest lecturer at leading international tertiary institutions and a performer in top concert-halls internationally, including the Wigmore, Royal Festival, Queen Elizabeth Halls, St Martin in the Fields, St James's Piccadilly in London, Sydney Opera House, numerous leading European venues and Carnegie Hall in New York. He established the successful International Liszt Society Piano Prize (UK) and was Artistic Director for the International Open Piano Competition in its iterations in the UK and Italy.



Photograph: Nicole Cleary

He is a lecturer in music performance, piano pedagogy and keyboard repertoire at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. He is currently working on recording the complete solo and chamber music of Linda Kouvaras in eight albums, and the complete études and preludes of Anton Rubinstein, both projects for Toccata Classics. The first Kouvaras album was released in May 2024, the second in January 2025.

He is the artistic director of the annual fortyfivedownstairs Chamber Music Festival and the Tempo Queer festival in Melbourne, and Artistic Director of the St George's Friends of Music Series. He is on the board of fortyfivedownstairs, and is musical director and board member of the Australian Contemporary Opera Company. Since 2017, he has been the recipient of over 30 awards and grants from various Australian cultural institutions for his work commissioning new Australian works.

Lyrebird Brass brings together some of Australia's finest brass musicians in a dynamic collective dedicated to the art of chamber music. The mission of the ensemble is twofold: to captivate audiences through exceptional artistry and accessible programming, and to enrich the brass repertoire through new commissions – particularly works by Australian composers and voices from under-represented communities.

Each member of Lyrebird Brass has performed with leading ensembles around the world, contributing diverse musical experiences that shape the distinctive sound of the group. Lyrebird Brass is the first professional Australian brass ensemble to feature women as core members, marking an important step toward more balanced representation of female players in brass ensembles.



The name ‘Lyrebird Brass’ pays homage to the extraordinary songbird found in Melbourne, the home city of the ensemble. Renowned for its ability to mimic and layer melodies, the lyrebird reflects the commitment of the players to versatility and creativity. The name also honours the legacy of Éditions de l’Oiseau-Lyre (Lyrebird Press), founded by Louise Hanson-Dyer, whose contributions have profoundly influenced the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, where each member of the ensemble teaches.

Carla Blackwood, Joel Brennan and Don Immel are the core full-time members of this group. Although they frequently play with Rosie Turner (trumpet) and Tim Buzbee (tuba) from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, their schedules are such that the core members frequently collaborate with other players. On this recording, the group consists of Joel Brennan and Joel Walmsley, trumpets, Carla Blackwood, horn, Don Immel, trombone, and Nelson Woods, tuba.

She, Who Should Have Been a Queen: Texts

Antoinette Halloran

1 *Lady Macbeth on a Soapbox at Last*

(after Verdi's *Macbeth*)

Ay me

I'm pissed off – who wouldn't be?

Why is it always she, she, she

*Taking the blame for the shit-show that
progressed*

When Dunsinane crept towards old Inverness?

So, I was to blame (my ambition and fight)

For terrible murders in tempests at night

Ambition and fight are just fine, if the guy

Has the appropriate chromosomes – the x and a y

But if the bitch has just an x, and an x

Then she's insane!

It's just not fair, for the just, fairer sex

'Witch!', they now call me, when clearly you see
Shakespeare already had those, fuck's sake –
there were three!

They had warts and cauldrons and Hurley

Burleys and spells,

Then why call me 'witch', when it blatantly tells

I was wife – just with pluck AND desire!

O, hang, draw and quarter me, tie me to the
pyre!

Okay, so I've no baby, nor breastfeeding skills

No sweet lullaby as alibi

For my husband's kills.

And my laundry finesse

Is shamefully repressed as I fail to unblot
That fucking goddamn spot.

I used my obvious attraction

to deliver to my postcode,

An abode with more... distraction.

As power made the blood within my veins pulse
with more vigour

I beguiled him with my figure,

to invigorate my lifestyle.

So yes, sue me – I was mercantile.

But fair is foul, and foul is fair

And boredom sucks, and a girl needs to CARE

So, unsex me *here*, if it means I will get *there*

To a place where, yet again, another little death,

Renders me more woke, than just Lady

Macbeth

Renders me more awake than sleepwalking Lady

Macbeth

untie me from the pyre!

watch me set this place on fire!

2 *The Nurse's Curse ... in Retrospect, or, She, Who Should Have Been a Queen*

(after Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*)

What a shame, I wasn't more circumspect

When I encouraged, nay, urged my Juliet to
select...

Romeo, as her one and only – oh –
That ‘fiery-footed stallion’ would have been
better,
a pony,
and thus, *not* galloped apace with my flushed-
faced Juliet,
to the altar.
I wish the stallion had faltered,
So [that] my Juliet had pondered
the finality of the ritual, of her throbbing,
urgent nuptial.

There was perhaps an alternative path,
by implying her *hot* Romeo, was not worth the
wrath.

As her nurse, I could have suffered her to get –
an education? – a buffer? – become a
suffragette?

Why did I encourage her to lengths, nay
furlongs
To risk life and limb – for a bloke?

Now her wrongs
Are my wrongs,
and my wrongs –
are my yoke.

Aye, if I had only been a better nurse
And warned her, *all* is *not* better than nothing
Because the *all* is all for *one*
And the one
has always been
and will always be
the son.

Nay... never the daughter – Nor my Juliet,
Now dead,
and so unseen
She, who *should* have been
A queen.

3 Pinkerton's Lament (after Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*)

‘Well ... life goes on,
Thought Pinkerton ... as his great white ship
Abandoned the harbour
the stolen son clutched by his father.

I've renamed him Chuck ... my boy, Chuck
Pinkerton,
He'll play polo and rugby for my Alma Mater,
Princeton.
He won't eat raw fish now ... we'll fry it in batter
That'll taste sweeter, and he'll get stronger ... and
fatter ...
Look ... it is not *my* fault I was stationed away...
and when Marines are away, we all *know*
they make hay.
but hey! Don't cancel me ... don't get all PC
It's history to blame for what the woke now call
shame!
It's all so easy to just blame the white men
... and so ... not my fault ... I'm *not* a freakin'
Ken!

My new girl is Blonde, and [my] Kate and I, we
have fun
And I hardly remember the Japanese one

Except when I smell the cool sea ...
Or I hear sorrow in Chuck's cries, and his
honest gaze meets my eyes ...
When sliding doors slide, to reveal more beauty
on the other side ...
Or one fine day in July
If I ever chance upon ... a Butterfly.

4] Buttercup and the Cruel Stomp of Time
(after Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*)

In the dim light of the wings
Buttercup swings her basket of things
Still supple-y (though sweaty...),
Is it hot in here? or is it just ... *she*?
(In this light, she could very well pass for... 43.)

These things in her basket don't fetch such a
price
As, though rich in experience, there's the scent
of 'Old Spice'

In the dim of the wings
She watches young Josephine sing ...
all pink cheeks and cadenzas and parasols
swings

'I was Josephine once!'

In the dim light of the wings
She sombrelly ponders
The obscene stomp of time
And hastily hypothesizes
(To avoid the looming existential crisis)

'If the world stopped thus (pause)
And I stood back 20 years the other way
And I stood face to face with this Josephine
today

'Some would conjecture I'd tear at her thick hair
That to fulfill some Prima Donna like vibe
I would belittle her, chastise her, and her beauty,
deride

'Too bad ... it is *not* the way ... as I would
actually say,
'Your youth and beauty beget a kind of *power*
So un-shrink the violet and un-lean the wall
flower
Sow in fresh soil, the seeds of your fate
Quiet the demons and fuck ideal weight
And now
Spare a thought for the women who came
before you
As they're weary from paving those pathways
for you ...
Position yourself in the world a fashion
So that at fifty you *can't* be reviled as a Karen.

'Put legislation in place
'That a woman won't be told

'That her last fuckable year comes *before* she
is old
'Josephine ... build on your great momentum ...
now *you* be the boss ... you do the owning
'Because with each spin of the globe... draws
closer *your* boning.'

In the dim light of the wings
Buttercup snaps to,
She smiles at the joke
that Gilbert and Sullivan should provoke
such a feminist, philosophical howdy do?

5 Just Gilda
(after Verdi's *Rigoletto*)

His eyes
Kind words
A gentle touch ...
a kiss
I succumb.

Drenched in Gaslight
I wake in fright
All clouded skies
His cruel eyes.

His lies revealed in bold relief ...
I'm raped ... I'm murdered

Who cares about
My crimson drops of blood

My torn maidenhead
My ridiculous love?

Just another girl this week
Just Gilda ...
I was Gilda.
Just ...
Just

6 Musetta's Schmaltz
(after Puccini's *La bohème*)

I never said it was love – but it may have been
the seed
Marcello and I made urgent love to assuage
Our simultaneous greed
But when he demanded of me a concession
to withdraw from the world's oldest profession
I suggested, 'Let's take time to see
that all this oxytocin doesn't dumb ...
and overrun ...
the slow grown and far steadier voices,
equipped to make such lifelong choices.'

He bought me flowers;
'*You may stay until they fade*'
Each day he inspected the flowers
for signs of their decay.
Why couldn't he enjoy them while they were
blooming,
Look beyond the inevitable ... Live for the day?

In my French-Quarter room,
as long shadows would loom,
We pedantically unfolded each other, as if petal
by petal,
To the smell of rich coffee that sizzled on the
metal,
And always bubbled over the lid of my stove
top espresso.
We drank its darkly rich, malty flavour,
Perched on our pillows post love's lost labour.
So not lost.
In this bliss-filled nest, the days sweetly passed
And he, beguiled by the fresh blooms in the
vase

'They still have not faded!'
He would let out a breath
But what he didn't see was that during each
little death
While he slept, I would tend them.
Changing the water and
Cutting the stems.
As the life of the flower brought me time to
know
If the seed we had planted was a love that
would grow.

He could not wait for me,
Nor my slow, stove-top coffee.
It seems he preferred the more instant fix
Of a less full-bodied Nespresso-like chick

And in a way – I am free
as Musetta, the whore,
To love my way, and to show them the door.

The blooms are now faded,
Well, there's only so much one can shear
From the stem of a flower
Before the flower disappears.
Still, I am sad, and miss my Marcello.
It was not yet love, ... not for *me*
But it was perhaps the seed.

**7 The Snake's Perssspective: A Revisionist
Commentary on *The Drover's Wife***

(after Jonathan Mills' *The Ghost Wife*)

Perhapsssss I should have been more vocal?
Cried, 'This seat is taken!'
As the yokels
built their house on the land,
where for years I had warmed my belly in the
sun-silken sand.

In a nutshell,
for those not versed so well,
the Drover droves off and Wife is now alone.
Her husband pissed off a-droving, and she 'don't
know where he are!'
and now I take the rap for *him*, for leaving the
screen door ajar.
And I slither into the house (where there never
was a home).

Sssssorry, but...
my reputation is in tatters,
by those who grow fatter on the land not meant
for squatters.

Where once I lay, colourfully dreaming –
now I lie, furiously scheming
to escape impending slaughter,
by the unhinged wife, and her unnamed
daughters

It's a bitter pill taken
to be shaken by a dog,
then rendered to the fire, like a dumb inert log.
In my fiery deathbed

I lie here, beheaded,
pondering the hasty evolution of this invasive
revolution

My shiny blackness, dark underbelly of my
'wanton corruption', became my strife.
And I, not a leg to stand on,
Guilty, narrative foil, before a skewed judge
presiding over a severed trial.
Snake is forever defiled,
scapegoat,
for a stressed-out wife.
Weapon in hand,
Out of her depth, in a sun-burned land.

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Producer-engineer, editing and mastering: Haig Burnell
Executive producers: Coady Green and Linda Kouvaras

Recorded with the generous support of a Faculty Research Development Grants (Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne, 2024)
She, Who Should Have Been a Queen commissioned by Coady Green and Antoinette Halloran, with generous support from the City of Melbourne

Booklet texts: Coady Green and Linda Kouvaras
Cover photograph: Nicole Cleary
Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)
Typesetting and lay-out: ALN Design, St Albans

Executive producer for Toccata Classics: Martin Anderson

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Supported by the
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