



Garry Walker

Winner of the 1999 Leeds Competition, Garry Walker studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. In October 1999, at very short notice, he replaced Daniele Gatti in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's opening concert of their Barbican season. Their ongoing relationship led to his appointment as permanent guest conductor, a post he has now relinquished. Garry Walker was principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2003–2007, principal conductor of the Paragon Ensemble and now enjoys a close association with Red Note Ensemble, Scotland's leading contemporary music ensemble. He has worked with orchestras across the world including all the BBC Orchestras.



Ekehard Stier

Ekehard Stier has attracted considerable attention as one of the outstanding conductors working today. He was Music Director of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, the Opera House Görlitz and Neue Lausitzer Philharmonie. He has appeared with major orchestras all over the world including the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Tokyo Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Dresdner Philharmonie and the Athens State Orchestra among others. Ekehard Stier has developed fruitful relationships with soloists such as Alina Ibragimova, Nicolas Altstaedt, Chloë Hanslip, Ragna Schirmer, Natalia Lomeiko, Gilles Apap, Cédric Tiberghien, Nikolai Demidenko and Andreas Boyde. Stier has built strong audience and critical support for his distinguished performances as well as his championing of contemporary and lesser-known masterworks. In addition to the established repertoire he conducts many works of composers such as John Corigliano, Christopher Rouse, Paul Schoenfield and Mieczysław Karłowicz.

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

The Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra is New Zealand's full-time professional Metropolitan orchestra, serving the country's largest and most vibrant city with a comprehensive programme of concerts and education and outreach activities. In more than fifty mainstage performances annually, the APO presents a full season of symphonic works showcasing many of the world's finest classical musicians. The APO also supports both New Zealand Opera and the Royal New Zealand Ballet in their Auckland performances, as well as working in partnership with the Auckland Arts Festival and the Michael Hill International Violin Competition. Through its numerous APO Connecting (education, outreach and community) initiatives the APO offers opportunities to more than 20,000 young people and adults nationwide to participate in music, ranging from hip-hop and rock to contemporary and classical. 100,000 people hear the orchestra live each year, with many thousands more reached through special events, recordings and other media.



Photo: Adrian Malloch



ROSS HARRIS

Symphony No. 5

Violin Concerto



Ilya Gringolts, Violin
Sally-Anne Russell, Mezzo-soprano
Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
Ekehard Stier • Garry Walker

Ross Harris (b. 1945) Violin Concerto • Symphony No. 5



Photo: Gareth Watkins

Ross Harris's *Violin Concerto* has a strange effect on the listener, who seems to be almost drawn into its creation. It starts hesitantly, the soloist on his own playing fragmentary ideas: then the clarinet enters and his brief melody invites the other woodwind to join him. In effect, the beautifully textured concerto, hovering tantalisingly between tonality and atonality, is at last under way.

The soloist is hardly ever out of the limelight, decorating and rhapsodising on the material. Then the orchestra arrives on a hushed, seamless chord, over which the soloist reflects on its melodic ideas and draws them together. The concerto ends with the orchestra finally bowing out, leaving the soloist to return to the same fragments with which the concerto opened. It is a work that captures perfectly the essence of our time – a work of extraordinary and haunting beauty.

The emotional core of Harris's *Fifth Symphony* comes from three tender, slender settings of poems by Panni Palasti. The poems are crucial to the whole symphony as even in the instrumental movements that surround the songs it is Palasti's story that drives the music. That's not

Ross Harris was born in Amberley, New Zealand. He studied in Christchurch and Wellington and taught at the Victoria University of Wellington Music Department for over thirty years. In 1985 he was awarded a QSM for his opera *Waituhi* (with libretto by Witi Ihimaera) and in 1990 he received the CANZ Citation for services to New Zealand music. Since 2004 he has worked as a freelance composer including residencies with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and Victoria University. His relationship with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra has been unique as they have (in ten years) given the première of five symphonies and his *Cello Concerto*, all written for the orchestra. Harris has been a finalist in or awarded the SOUNZ Contemporary Award (the most prestigious annual prize offered in New Zealand) more times than any other New Zealand composer.

Harris's *Violin Concerto No. 1* was commissioned by Christopher Marshall for the English violinist Anthony Marwood and premièred by him with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and conductor Tecwyn Evans in 2010. *Symphony No. 5* was inspired by the poetry of Hungarian poet Panni Palasti and funded by Christopher Marshall. The première was given by alto Sally-Anne Russell and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra under the baton of Eckehard Stier, in Auckland Town Hall in 2013.

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to say that the instrumental movements are in the same vein as the three songs, indeed they aren't, but one can hear that the violence in the scherzos is a reflection of what Palasti tells, and the beautiful slow movements which open and close the whole work are like a consolation for the horrors that Palasti lived through as a child. The words of the poems are unfailingly simple, childlike, honest, frightening but relentlessly un sentimental.

And it is that lack of sentimentality that is the key to Harris's setting – he treats them as though they were innocent folksongs – and it is this that gives them their quiet dignity. They are gentle melodies backed with hushed, sophisticated orchestration.

When the jackboots and military bands march in, in the first scherzo, we feel the horror all the more for the contrasting peace of the songs in which one senses the young Palasti hiding. The second scherzo may be more restrained and delicate in its string based scoring but is just as disturbing as the military march sounds of the earlier scherzo, only this time I could only think of ghostly, cemetery dance like images.

The first movement is as dark and austere as a Hotere painting. Over a long held bass note streams of quiet woodwind counterpoint wind out; of course it looks back to Bach, but there are moments too of Lilburn, hints of electroacoustic sound, a sense of never-ending logic that looks always forward. Eventually the strings in unison are persuaded to add their contrapuntal line to what is one of Harris's great symphonic movements.

1. The line-up

when the men come
to search us
to herd us
who'll hide me

when they make us
go to the wall
who will stand
before me?

when they shout
raise your hands
who will be
next to me

when they aim
guns at us
will Father
cover me

when they pull
the trigger
will he shield me

will he hide
me under
his body

and whisper
play dead child
play dead to
stay alive

2. Candlelight

we sit in the dark
only the centre of the
shelter
is lit by a single candle
flickering flame
our only source of light
night after night after night

contorted candle
made of wax melt
drips of old candles
scraped up
re-melted
moulded
used shoelaces
pressed in as wicks

I roll them around
on my knees
into cylinder shaped
old-new candles
I fabricate
to light up the dark
in the unending night

I gather and mould
and roll and roll
not a drop wasted
while the bombs
make the flame gutter
when big blasts
whip up the air
of the cellar

The last movement, a slow movement again, seems to brood over what we have already heard and it ends quietly, but there is a sense that the minor chord, high up in the strings, that Harris is looking for is hard to find. With bass grumblings still referring back to the symphony's opening it is an uneasy, strangely disturbing quiet the composer has to offer.

Rod Biss

I keep on
melting
and moulding
rolling and rolling
to gain a flame
something to stare at
when outside
the world is dark

my sooty wax candle
my soiled offering
to the God of Air Raids
stands tall
when the earth moves
when detonations
make us lurch
in unison

rapidly melting
collapsing candle
flickering dancer
I'll keep you alive

3. Lessons learned from my father

I have to run
on the double
to warn him to hide
climb out the window
before the soldiers arrive

he'd shown mother
the hole in his hip
said it was made
with the butt of a gun



Photo: Tomasz Trzebiatowski

Panni Palasti

Panni Palasti was born in Budapest and educated there. She entered the United States as a refugee in 1956 after the Hungarian revolution and continued her studies in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. She worked as a teacher and feature writer in California before sailing with her husband and son to New Zealand. She lived in Russell for 28 years where she started the Russell Writers Workshop and edited the Russell Review for two decades before moving to Nelson in 2002. She has been writing poems since first grade. Her poems have been published in Hungary, the United States and in New Zealand.

Many of my poems reflect my early experiences, which include facing death in a bomb shelter during the bloody siege of Budapest in the Second World War, when I was a child helping to hide my father from the Gestapo. – Panni Palasti

Sally-Anne Russell

The mezzo-soprano Sally-Anne Russell has over sixty operatic rôles in her repertoire, has sung in fifteen countries and has recorded over forty CDs/DVDs for the ABC Classics, Chandos, Move and Decca labels. She is a regular guest with Opera Australia and the Australian State opera companies, the Australian and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras, major festivals and choral organisations, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Musica Viva, and the Australian String Quartet. She has also sung for Washington Opera (DC), the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto, Italy, Oper der Stadt Köln, Germany, the Musikverein in Vienna, Pacific Baroque, the Kathaumixw Festival in British Columbia, Canada, and in Japan. She has a decade-long association with the Carmel Bach Festival in California. In the 2015/16 season, Sally-Anne Russell returned to the Melbourne, Sydney, Tasmanian, West Australian and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras, and Monash Academy, with a schedule including performances as Nancy Tang in *Nixon In China* at the Auckland Festival, *Voyage to the Moon* (Victorian Opera/Musica Viva) as well as recording projects for the ABC and further invitations to return to Europe, Singapore and Canada.

Ilya Gringolts

The Russian violinist Ilya Gringolts devotes himself as a soloist to the great orchestral repertoire and also to contemporary and seldom-played works. He has given premières of compositions by Peter Maxwell Davies, Christophe Bertrand and Michael Jarrell and is interested in historical performance practice as well. He is the first violinist of the Gringolts Quartet, which he founded in 2008. He has performed with leading orchestras, such as the St Petersburg Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, London Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, NHK Symphony and the Warsaw Philharmonic amongst others. As a chamber musician, Ilya Gringolts collaborates with artists such as David Kadouch, Peter Laul, Nicolas Altstaedt, Andreas Ottensamer, Antoine Tamestit and Jörg Widmann. Following numerous recordings on Deutsche Grammophon, BIS and Hyperion, Ilya Gringolts devoted himself to the chamber music of Robert Schumann from 2010 to 2011. In 2013, his recording of Paganini's *24 Caprices* for solo violin was released on Orchid Classics.