



ROSS HARRIS F A C E SYMPHONY No. 6 'LAST LETTER'

Allison Bell, Soprano • Fiona Campbell, Mezzo-soprano
Henry Choo, Tenor • Joel Amosa, Baritone
Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir
Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
Giordano Bellincampi • Antony Hermus

Ross Harris (b. 1945) Symphony No. 6 'Last Letter' • Face

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 30 years. In 1985 he was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for his opera *Waituhi* (with libretto by Witi Ihimaera), and in 1990 he received the Composers Association of New Zealand (CANZ) citation for services to New Zealand music. In 2004 he took early retirement from teaching and began working as a freelance composer. His residency with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (2005–06) led to the composition of three symphonies. Named as Arts Laureate by the Arts Foundation in 2014, Harris is one of New Zealand's leading composers. He has written more than two hundred compositions, with a repertoire that spans opera, symphonic works, chamber pieces, klezmer and electronic music. He has been a finalist in the prestigious SOUNZ Contemporary Award nine times, and won the award four times. His collaborations with poet Vincent O'Sullivan have produced two operas, two symphonies and three song cycles, alongside *Requiem for the Fallen* and *Face – Symphonic Songs and Choruses*.

Vincent O'Sullivan (b. 1937) is a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit. One of New Zealand's leading writers, he is a prolific poet, short story writer, novelist, playwright, critic, editor, biographer and librettist.

Symphony No. 6 'Last Letter' (2015)

Symphony No. 6 was premiered in 2016 by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Giordano Bellincampi with mezzo-soprano Fiona Campbell. The work is a setting of four poems by Vincent O'Sullivan with three linking musical interludes.

The first poem, *Last Letter Home*, is the source of the subtitle of the *Symphony* and is important in determining the overall character of the work. The poem was inspired by a news item about an Iranian woman, Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was condemned to death for killing a policeman who had raped her.

'When I read about that intelligent, brave young woman's execution and her marvellous letter I at once thought it had the emotional expansiveness and human significance that would give Ross a wide canvas to work on and offer him the kind of depth he explores so finely.' – *Vincent O'Sullivan*

O'Sullivan then found and worked on three similar poems that fitted the overall subject of the *Symphony*: he had already made a version of a Greek folk song in which a dead daughter asks her mother 'not to sing about me when the sun has set' and the words expand on that theme for the third song, *This word I carry with you*. The final song, *Listen as I tell you*, is an adaptation of a poem by Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral.

'In the vocal sections, Harris makes the darkness of the subject bearable by the consoling beauty of music that empathises with the singer's words. But between the songs are three interludes where he expresses his own feelings – worried, despairing and at times furious.' – *Rod Biss, The New Zealand Listener, July 2016*

Face (2018)

Face – Symphonic Songs and Choruses was commissioned jointly by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and premiered by both orchestras within a week of each other in April 2018. *Face* was commissioned by the Creative New Zealand (WW100) Co-Commissioning Fund. The performance on this album is the Auckland premiere, featuring soloists Allison Bell, Henry Choo and Joel Amosa with Voices New Zealand and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Antony Hermus. The libretto by Vincent O'Sullivan deals with the trauma of facial injuries suffered by soldiers in the First World War, and the pioneering work of Sir Harold Gillies, the New Zealander who became the 'father of plastic surgery'. When performed live, *Face* is a multimedia work featuring projected images of faces projected behind the performers. The video by Tim Gruchy was based on an original artwork (*The Soldier's Face*) by Barry Cleavin.

To commemorate a war assumes we are speaking of an event that began and ended on defining dates. And so history 'remembers'. Yet, for many of those not killed in these years, and especially those with facial wounds, survival meant, for the rest of their lives, that their own personal struggle did not come to an end.

As the First World War centenary approached its conclusion, it was these that *Face* had in mind – no matter how many men there have been, it always comes down to the story of the solitary enduring man, who survives as something other than what he hoped to be.

These symphonic songs and choruses weave the various experiences of anticipation, and loss, hope deferred

and then despaired of, in the voices of a soldier, his fiancée, the damaged human psyche, and the best intentions of science to reconstruct what ingenuity has already had marred. The work is a homage to 'this image of Adam' – as he was, as we attempt to restore.

The musical fabric of *Face* consists of choruses and solos punctuated by orchestral commentary. The chorus and orchestra comment broadly on the tragedy of the work's subject while the soloists express the personal tragedy of an individual soldier and his fiancée. The work freely mixes tonal and atonal elements to heighten the drama and emotional intensity of the demanding subject matter.

Ross Harris

Giordano Bellincampi

Giordano Bellincampi is music director of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, following positions as principal conductor of I Pomeriggi Musicali, Milan, chief conductor of Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra and Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, and music director of the Duisburg Philharmonic, Danish National Opera and the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra. He is particularly celebrated for his prowess in the Central European, Italian and Scandinavian symphonic traditions, and in the field of opera, notably the works of Puccini and Verdi. He is an associate professor at the Royal Danish Academy, and was appointed Knight of the Order of the Dannebrog, an award bestowed by the Danish Royal Family for services to Danish culture, and Cavaliere della Repubblica Italiana for his international promotion of Italian music. www.imgartists.com

Antony Hermus

Dutch conductor Antony Hermus is principal guest conductor of the North Netherlands Symphony Orchestra and Opera North, and artistic advisor to the National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands. He has conducted, among others, the Royal Concertgebouw, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestras. He studied piano and conducting at the Tilburg Conservatory, becoming music director of Hagen Theatre at the age of 29. From 2009 to 2015 he was music director of Dessau Opera, and has appeared as a guest in many opera houses including Stuttgart, Komische Oper Berlin, Gothenburg, Strasbourg, Opéra de Rouen Normandie and Nederlandse Reisopera. He has recorded several albums of late-Romantic symphonic and operatic repertoire for cpo, most recently works by the Dutch Romantic composer Alphons Diepenbrock with the Bamberg Symphony. His wide repertoire also encompasses many living composers and he has given numerous world premieres. www.antonyhermus.com

Photo © Ben Ealovega



Photo © Marco Borggreve



Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

The Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (APO) is New Zealand's designated metropolitan orchestra, serving Auckland, the country's largest and most vibrant city, with concerts and events throughout the year. The APO presents more than 70 performances annually with a comprehensive season of symphonic work showcasing many of the world's finest classical musicians as well as exciting collaborations with some of New Zealand's most inventive contemporary artists. The APO is renowned for its innovation, passion and versatility. Through its numerous APO Connecting (education, outreach and community) initiatives, the APO offers opportunities each year to more than 20,000 young people and adults nationwide. More than 250,000 people hear the orchestra live each year, in the concert hall and through live streams and radio broadcasts. Many thousands more are reached through special events, recordings and other media. www.apo.co.nz

Photo © Adrian Malloch



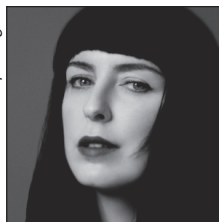
Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir

Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir, with music director **Dr Karen Gylls**, made its debut at the 1998 New Zealand International Arts Festival and later that year won awards at the Tolosa International Choral Competition in Spain. As a nationally selected choir of the highest calibre, Voices is a chamber choir that is flexible in size, and capable of performing a wide repertoire. Many of the singers are alumni of the New Zealand Youth Choir. With its distinct New Zealand sound, performing music from Aotearoa New Zealand and infusing the qualities of its pacific origins into the classic choral repertoire, Voices has established itself as the country's premier national and professional choir. Voices tours nationally and internationally and is the choir of choice for arts festivals, special projects, and collaborations. www.voicesnz.com

Photo © Charles Brooks



Photo © Felipe Pagani



Allison Bell

Soprano Allison Bell is a leading performer of 20th- and 21st-century operatic, orchestral and chamber vocal music. She has given world premieres by composers such as Peter Eötvös, Unsuk Chin, Sir John Tavener, Gerald Barry and Brett Dean. Bell has featured as a soloist with ensembles such as the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, London Philharmonic, BBC and BBC Scottish Symphony, Iceland Symphony, Russian State Symphony (Svetlanov) and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras. Opera performances include appearances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival, Opéra national de Montpellier, Opéra national du Rhin, Bolshoi Opera and the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. www.allisonbellsoprano.com

Fiona Campbell

Australian mezzo-soprano Fiona Campbell was the winner of the national Limelight Award for Best Solo Performance 2011 and vocal winner of the ABC Young Performer of the Year Award and the ASC Opera Awards. Campbell appears regularly as a soloist with all the major Australian orchestras and with Opera Australia, Opera Queensland and West Australian Opera. Her international collaborators have included the Brodsky Quartet, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. She has been an associate artist for José Carreras in Japan, Korea and Australia, and for Barbara Bonney in Tokyo and London. www.fionacampbellmusic.com



Photo © Edmond Choo



Henry Choo

Australian tenor Henry Choo is a graduate of the Australian National Academy of Music and the young artist programmes of Opera Australia and Opera Queensland. He is a multiple Green Room Award nominee and has appeared regularly in leading roles for Opera Australia, West Australian Opera, State Opera South Australia and Melbourne Opera, and at the Edinburgh International Festival and Macau International Music Festival. Engagements as an oratorio soloist include appearances with all the Australian symphony orchestras, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, World Orchestra for Peace, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, the New Zealand and Christchurch Symphony Orchestras, and with the Sydney Philharmonia Choir and Melbourne Bach Choir. www.henrychoo.com

Joel Amosa

Samoan bass-baritone Joel Amosa is a freelance opera singer based in South Auckland. In 2018 he won the prestigious Lexus Song Quest competition which led to opera performances in San Diego and Italian masterclasses in Petrolo and Parma. He made his New Zealand Opera debut in 2019 as Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and made his Australian debut at the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School as John Falstaff in Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*.



Symphony No. 6 ‘Last Letter’

Original text by Vincent O’Sullivan, used by kind permission

1 I. Last Letter Home

The words I learned as a daughter I must now forget.
Forget how the word of God once stood as a friend.
Forget how the word for No does not mean Yes.

I am hurt because my hands are beautiful.
I am hurt because my eyes see the world as mine.

The things you taught me, mother, I must now forget.
Because I was taught to read, and now I sing.
Because I look to the day, and believe in light.

Let my body bring life to others, my last request,
That my hands may work for others, eyes see, heart beat.
So long as I live among you, I am not a grave!
Yet bring me, bring me flowers you pick this morning.

(The words are adapted from the last letter Reyhanah Jabbari wrote to her mother, before her execution in Iran, October 2014, for killing in self defense the man who raped her. Her last wish was that her body parts be given to others, and that her mother bring flowers.)

3 II. Mother I asked you not to

Mother, I asked you not to do it,
Not to sing about me when the sun has set.
That’s when Charon dines with his family,
When I carry a tray to serve them,
Light candles to brighten their table.
My heart breaks, I tell you.
The tray cracks that I hold, the candles’
Wax is dripping among the dead.
The brides in their golden gowns are burning.
The lovers in their silver suits are turning,
My mouth bleeds, I have nothing to say.
I ask you, Mother, not to sing.

(The words expand on those of a traditional Greek folksong)

5 III. This word I carry with me

This word I carry with me that I fear to think.
Its weight leans against my heart, a sharpened stone.
It darkens the sun as though behind trees of ink.
The word a mother carries as she walks alone.
What is it, then what is it, this word I fear?
The word that alters the world as I hear it said?
The word, my daughter, for the day you’re no longer there.
As I walk the house as I stroke an empty bed,
Touch a chair no longer yours, grief cracks the stars.
Silence crushes the songs from before you were gone,
Time stretches its plain from the cliffs where nothing stirs
It is the word I carry with me and have made my own.
The dawn begins its deceit, light’s concealing hood.
The sound of a black wind batters the door where you stood.

7 IV. Listen as I tell you

Listen, as I tell you what I hear at midnight
I hear the joints of the rosebush,
The push of earth to become the rose.

I hear more than that. I am hearing
The great tiger with its scorching stripes,
How it stalks, the great tiger!

Someone sings, and I hear its dunes
Spread midnight sand. At midnight,
The lacing surf.

My mother, I hear you breathing
As you breath for us both.
I hear the dark silent as a moth.

And at midnight, now I hear nothing.
I fall and fall, I fall
To the walls of Arles, its marvelous walls.

(The words of this song, for the most part, are drawn from or adapted from ‘La Medianoche’, a poem by the Chilean Gabriela Mistral. The mysterious reference to ‘the walls of Arles’ concludes her poem.)

Face – Symphonic Songs and Choruses

Original text by Vincent O’Sullivan, used by kind permission

8 Chorus:

Blessed be the features of the living man, whether God
or not.

9 Chorus:

It is the same line of trees, for those who see them,
for those who do not.
The lark in the August heat, what does the lark know of
the dead?
How the day smells with the hay’s cutting,
How frost crunches with the morning’s walking,
How a word that is once said, is forever said.
Those who have stood there once, they stand there again,
If only in tides of mud, in endless rain.

10 Soprano (solo):

The words one hears in silence as the news comes in.
I turn the last photo I have of his summer grin.
A song I try not to remember, and the ride back home,
With the promises, promises, all that is yet to come.
His cheek as smooth as touching velvet,
The bone beneath the cheek where God had put it –
But now the man remains, but the face I loved
In my mind alone, my mind alone.

Tenor (solo):

How do I look my best so she looks at me still?
How to take in the fact that destroys us both?
How the avalanching of time has touched my mouth.
As we stand in the garden in the frail sun.
What war has achieved, I tell her.

Tenor and Soprano (duet):

As I walk from the garden and leave him,
Beneath frail sun.
And the garden again lies empty
Now all’s said and done.
You might hold my hand at the least, dear friend.
We are flesh and bone.

11 Chorus:

Blessed be the features of the living man, whether God
or not
Has a part in this marred miracle.

12 Baritone (solo):

They’ll want to talk about home.
Always let them talk.
We can’t prevent the legless
Wanting to walk.
They wear their dream
As their sweethearts wear a locket.
Even the dead man carries
Scraps of life in his pocket.

Remember each of these men
Is a father, a son.
Say what we can to calm them.
Now there’s work to be done.

13 Chorus:

The jawline, even if absent, can be accurately assessed.
The structure of bones, whether there or not, is precise.
The distortion of facial features you’ll find universal.
We must look a hundred times where no one wishes to
look twice.

Scalpel is a word for pity honed for those who attend.
A suture an act of compassion from fellow men who care.
He is wrecked as man never should be, disfigured
By human skill. Now a finer skill restores him. Each vein
is dear.

14 Tenor (solo):

‘How do I look my best so she’ll want to kiss
My face, to have her remember when I’m not here.’
Hear it, hear it, the word that each pulse beats,
The thought riding each second, the clock’s thud repeats,
What in God’s name remains, once no longer there?
As light’s tide floods the morning, as it seeps from
evening,

The sun our prayer is to darken, lest you see things, clear.
Ah, close them gently, nurse, close every door
To the word that will never arrive, the word, Before.

15 *Chorus:*

It's the constant thing he's thinking once the fear
And the shit and the barrage and the next bloke's head
Is the one who cops it, and you know 'Not dead'
Is the best you can say for the moment to prove you're
alive.

What more, what more, what more can he ever have,
As he stands in the garden in the trail sun?
Private Smith, Otago Rifles, not yet set in stone.

16 *Chorus:*

Blessed be the features of the living man, whether God
or not
Has a part in this marred miracle, (the remnants we have
got.)
Behold the body of man, another man has shot.

17 *Soprano (solo):*

I remember your hands at the buttons at my throat,
Yes and no, I said, yes and no, and yes.
The notes of one last thrush as we left the woods.
Yes and no, the thrush was singing, yes and no, and yes.
The ordinary streets were gold,
Time would do as it was told.
The things we believed before words grew old,
Yes, we promised each other, yes.
Now it's 'Yes?' I say to the postman's step,
But a different yes.
That is the time, correct, I say.
This is the right address.
But the name of the man, the man,

Are you sure the name is his?
These are different mornings, these are different skies.
Who is it looks at me now with enduring eyes?
Are you sure it's him?
And the man in the white coat tells me,
'It's the best we can do for you, miss.
'It's him.'

18 *Tenor (solo):*

This morning is all that matters,
The surgeon in his white coat,
The chink of the scalpels in their dish,
Fingers tender at my throat.
Where there were lips and murmurs
Of what it meant, our love,
I feel, before the needle's snow descends,
The probing of his glove.

19 *Tutti:*

That last enchanting summer
The surgeon's soothing word
The walk to the station's cheering
The doctors staunching blood
Only in the distance, the waiting,
That summer of endless grace
What is it, the shadow we smile away?
What now, my darling, what now, we dare to face.

Chorus:

Blessed be the features of the living man, whether God
or not
Has a part in this marred miracle, the remnants we have
got.
Behold the body of man, another man has shot.
Pulse regular. Breath steady. This image of Adam. Of me.
Of you.

In *Symphony No. 6 'Last Letter'*, Ross Harris explores settings of four poems by Vincent O'Sullivan, interlinking them with three musical interludes. The darkness of the subject matter draws from the composer music of powerful and at times despairing intensity. *Face* was written as the First World War centenary approached its conclusion and confronts the trauma of facial injuries suffered by soldiers in the conflict. Choruses and solos are punctuated by orchestral commentary, the music freely mixing tonal and atonal elements to heighten the expressive gravity of the personal tragedies depicted.

Ross HARRIS

(b. 1945)

Symphony No. 6 'Last Letter' (2015)

1 I. Last Letter Home	5:52	10 The words one hears in silence – and How do I look my best?	4:38
2 Interlude I	4:35	11 Blessed be the features II	2:10
3 II. Mother I asked you	2:32	12 They'll want to talk about home	1:34
4 Interlude II	3:36	13 The jawline	3:13
5 III. This word I carry with you	5:04	14 How do I look my best?	2:22
6 Interlude III	2:16	15 It's the constant thing	3:41
7 IV. Listen as I tell you	3:32	16 Blessed be the features III	1:30
		17 I remember your hands	4:44
8 Blessed be the features I	3:30	18 This morning is all that matters	2:26
9 It is the same line of trees	3:24	19 That last enchanting summer	3:59

All texts by Vincent O'Sullivan (b. 1937)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Allison Bell, Soprano **10 17 19** • Fiona Campbell, Mezzo-soprano **1 3 5 7**

Henry Choo, Tenor **10 14 18 19** • Joel Amosa, Baritone **12 19**

Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir **8 9 11 13 15 16 19**

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

Giordano Bellincampi **1–7** • Antony Hermus **8–19**

The sung texts are available in the booklet and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/573994.htm
 Recorded: 21 July 2016 **1–7** and 19 April 2018 (live recording) **8–19** at Auckland Town Hall, New Zealand
 Producer and editor: Wayne Laird • Engineer: Adrian Hollay (services provided by RNZ Concert) • Publisher: SOUNZ • Booklet notes: Ross Harris • Cover image: *Soldier's Face* by Barry Cleavin (courtesy of the artist)



8.573994

DDD

Playing Time
65:03



www.naxos.com

Made in Germany

© & © 2020
 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd
 Booklet notes in English