

Tura New Music welcomes you to *Speechless*, an experimental opera by Cat Hope

About the Project

I have been watching and reading helplessly from the sidelines about what the elected Australian government does under my name. I have been particularly horrified by the processes applied to asylum seekers who come to Australia, the attitudes to indigenous communities, the apparent disregard for the equality of women and those suffering domestic violence. These are groups without a voice, who have been silenced, cut out or spoken for.

I started to question what I could possibly do other than worry and complain. How could I contribute to a body of material that draws attention to some of these problems? How can I do this in an environment saturated with compassion fatigue? Can sound itself be a conduit for treating difficult subjects, a medium that speaks without words and that overcomes the communication limits and barriers in a way words cannot? This is where I found my idea for a wordless opera. An opera for those who have no voice . . . perceived, real or smothered.

I took some time and building of confidence to get to the idea of writing an opera. Whilst I had always seen this large scale musical form as a historically successful medium for transmitting the concerns, morals or even just trends of thinking of a certain time, I saw it as an outdated format. But what of me, now - my morals, of my people, in my time? What is our 'large scale musical form'? Could I make opera a medium relevant to my practice? What are the qualities of opera that make it a poignant and relevant to us today? I would say it requires a grand narrative, humanist philosophical dilemma, a mixture of aria, recitative and music driven drama. I decided to make large scale work my own-borrowing aspects of the opera, but replacing others with materials more familiar to me.

I came up with the idea of using a report or government document - that plainly states one source of the concern - as primary material for the opera. Seeing the way Gillian Triggs was denigrated, and how the presentation of the Human Rights Commission's 2014 report *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration*

Detention was politicised, was something that had bothered me for some time, leaving me feeling helpless watching from the side lines. Asylum seekers, particularly children, are voiceless politically - they exist in a no man's land. When I got hold of the report, it was suddenly clear - there was so much material in this document I could use musically. I decided to use elements of the text, drawings, tables, maps and even design elements of the document in the construction of my graphic score. I could use my work with drone, noise, improvisation and experimental notation to create a work that used the document, without making a preachy experience. The musicians, and audience, could almost re-read this report through my adaptation of it. My impression, and my plea. It has never been my intention to speak on behalf of anyone other than myself.

Music has so much more power to be abstract. The work is strictly notated, but there are always choices for the performers to make. There are some moments where performers improvise freely for a determined period of time, offering an opportunity for them to speak with their own type of musical expression. Engaging vocalists with radically different practices, and a community choir who can read the graphic notation without bringing the harmonic baggage of trained singers all aims to give the opera a new, relevant and fresh sound. It was important to me that members of the local community could be involved to give them voice as part of this process that was taking place in their home. We have engaged community choirs from the Port Adelaide area, and musicians from wider Adelaide in the orchestra.

Lastly, I would like to highlight my recognition of the incredibly privileged position I hold in having opportunity to undertake this workshop period, and to be able to share this work in progress with you. Large scale experimental work is rarely supported in Australia, and I am grateful to all of those who have invested in it. From discussions with trusted friends, to the support of funding bodies, organisations, people I have worked with in the past and those who I have met through the project. It wouldn't be possible without you, and I am humbled by your support.

Cat Hope

participates in Vitalstatistix and other professional artistic projects. Led by Ella Pak poy.

Hoi Polloi

Hoi Polloi is 'slightly organised group singing'. It is a spontaneous coming together of an online linked community for a joyful and fun evening of singing. Gina Zoia as the choir master and a guest musician leads us. Proceeds go to support the Anti-Poverty Network.

Speechless Choir members:

Tania Brice

Sally Clapson

Branwen Davies

Liz Dodd

Sandra Elms

Jude Elton

Liz Ey

Christine Frensch

Margaret Horgan

Naomi Hunter

Jenn Manders

Nikki Marcel

Anthony Pak poy

Ella Pak poy

Kathryn Reeves

Michael Riggs

Janette Riggs

Michèle Saint-Yves

Caren Siegfriedt

Rhen Soggee

Nadia Vernari

About Tura New Music

Driving the evolution of music and the sonic arts.

Tura New Music is proudly approaching its 30th year as an internationally recognised organisation for the production and advocacy of groundbreaking programs, works and partnerships in music and the sonic arts.

Through its award-winning programs, Tura engages with tens of thousands of people across Australia every year, enriching lives through music and sonic art experiences. Linking artists with new audiences, connecting rural and urban culture, and creating experiences which transcend mainstream performance.

Board of Directors

Gavin Ryan (Chair), Rod Campbell, Simon Dawkins, Liesbeth Goedhart, Robyn Johnston, Justine Lawler, Helen Symon QC.

People

Tos Mahoney: Artistic Director

Annalisa Oxenburgh: General Manager

Alice Strang: Development Manager

Tristen Parr: Program Manager

Anna Sparkes: Marketing, Communications & Admin Coordinator

Josten Myburgh: iMprov and Club Zoo Coordinator



About Vitalstatistix

Vitalstatistix is a South Australian contemporary arts organisation with a focus on the development of multidisciplinary artworks, which experiment with ideas, forms and engagement.

We provide a site for big ideas and intimate experiences, for long-term development and hothouse intensity, for contemporary art and community life.

Each year Vitals offers a program of performance, residencies, projects, events, exhibitions, festival experiences, collaborations with like-minded makers and presenters, and initiatives for South Australian artists. Vitals is a feminist organisation and has a proud and continuing tradition of supporting women artists.

Seeing the creative process of artists, and participating in experimentation and social investigation, is the hallmark of Vitalstatistix. Our heritage-listed home the Waterside Workers Hall and location in Port Adelaide is sublimely suited to this endeavour, and it is a unique offer that the organisation makes to both artists and audiences of art.

Vitalstatistix aims to be a vibrant home on the Port River for Australian artists who are experimenting with and changing the world.

About Incubator residency

Incubator is one of our residency and development programs that supports the creative development and premiere of new art and performance works.

People

Emma Webb: Director

Emma O'Neill: Production Manager

Toby Nevill: Operations Manager

Becci Love: Program Coordinator

Gemma Beale: Communications Coordinator

VITALSTATISTIX

Thank You to:

Gabriella Smart, Hilary Kleinig, Andrew Penrose, Elizabeth Layton and Maria Pinna (Elder Conservatorium of Music), James Sweeney, Malones Transport, Tim Irrbang, Michael Cenich, Osmond Electronics, Staging Connections, Karl Ockelford, Luke Hope-Ockelford, Jack Sargent, Sally Richardson, Rakini Devi, the Decibel team, Brien Keys, Barry Strickland, Daniel O'Hare and all at Quest Apartments Port Adelaide, Emma Webb, Emma O'Neill, Toby Nevill, Becci Love, Gemma Beale and all at Vitalstatistix.

Monash University

The Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music at Monash University supports new Australian work and artistic research in music.

<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/music/>



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Program Notes

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