

CARRIAGEWORKS AND SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA PRESENT

AWAKENING SHADOW

30 SEP - 7 OCT

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Canticles I - V by Benjamin Britten
Awakening Shadow by Luke Styles (Australian premiere)

Music Director/ Piano Jack Symonds
Director Imara Savage
Set & Costume Design Elizabeth Gadsby
Video Artist Mike Daly
Lighting Design Alexander Berlage

Tenor Brenton Spiteri
Mezzo Soprano Emily Edmonds
Soprano Jane Sheldon
Baritone Simon Lobelson
Photogrammetry Model Luca Armstrong

Harp Rowan Phemister
Horn Carla Blackwood
Violin Emma Jardine (30 Sep, 1 Oct); James Wannan (3 -7 Oct)

Production Manager Damion Holling
Stage Manager Joshua Broadbent
Assistant Director Emily Edmonds
Floral Artist Dr Lisa Cooper
Surtitles Johannes Macdonald
Lighting Associate Lachlan Hogan
SCO Principal Artistic Associate Huw Belling

FILM
Movement Consultant Lucas Jervies
Post-Production Studio Electric Lens Co.
Technical Director Matthew Hermans
3D Model Clean-up Chris Harris
Photogrammetry Studio Spice Boys
Photogrammetry Technicians Tom Brandon & Richard Kendall
Hair & Makeup Olivia Still

1. **Stirring**
2. **Canticle I: My Beloved is Mine, Op. 40**
(Francis Quarles 'A Divine Rapture')
3. **Psalm XIX** (King James Bible, Old Testament)
4. **Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac, Op. 51**
(Chester Miracle Plays)
5. **King of Peace** (Hebrews 6:20 - 7:17, New Testament)
6. **Canticle III: Still Falls the Rain, Op. 55**
(Edith Sitwell 'The Canticle of the Rose')
7. **Nova Stella** (Correspondence between Johannes Kepler & Helisaeus Roselin)
8. **Canticle IV: Journey of the Magi, Op. 86** (T.S. Eliot)
9. **Darkness** (Lord Byron)
10. **Canticle V: The Death of Saint Narcissus, Op. 89** (T.S. Eliot)
11. **Mutability** (Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Piano sponsored by Kawai Pianos, Australia

Carla Blackwood appears courtesy of
Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne

Special thanks to the Australian Ballet School

Supported by Phoenix Central Park and the NSW Government
through Create NSW

Awakening Shadow was commissioned jointly by the
Presteigne and Cheltenham festivals

Images by Mike Daly

This production represents in a single evening the two defining poles of SCO's artistic mission: the reinterpretation of key works of the modern canon and an unstinting support of new Australian opera. When I found out that leading Australian composer Luke Styles had engaged musically with Benjamin Britten's five Canticles I knew that this was something SCO had to perform.

I have loved these Britten pieces since I was a teenager yet I have rarely been satisfied hearing them one after another without a break, due in no small part because Britten never intended them to be a 'cycle' of any kind. They are each perfectly-formed, completely separate masterpieces: snapshots of Britten's deeply personal ideas on faith written over the course of his career from 1947 until 1974.

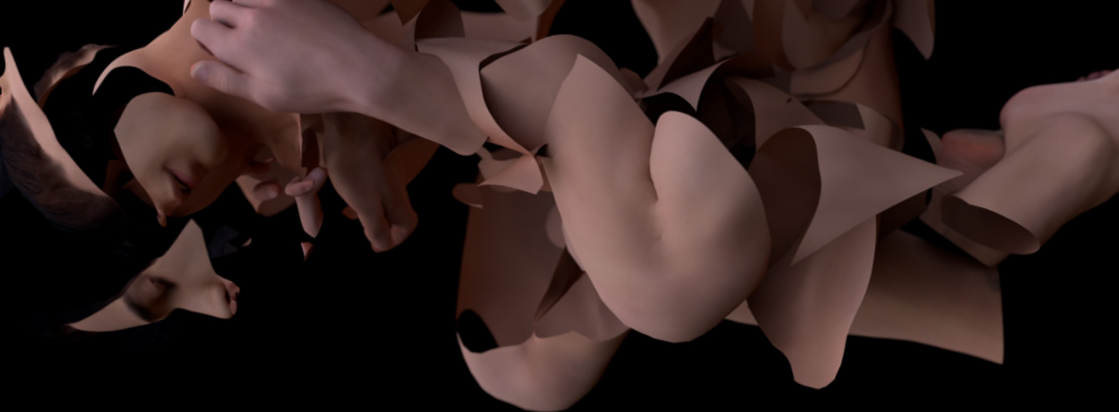
The evolution of a complex artist such as Britten is fascinating to trace and these works give us an unusually penetrating gaze into his psyche. Canticale I is easily one of the most joyous evocations of love (divine or mortal) Britten ever penned, directed squarely at his muse and partner, the tenor Peter Pears. Canticles II and III reflect on divine grace, sacrifice, war and violence – themes Britten is famous for tackling with great emotional honesty, and prove a highly contrasted pair of works, each written in the wake of a major operatic milestone (Billy Budd and The Turn of the Screw, respectively). Canticles IV and V come as quite a shock – bleak, gnarled, harmonically and rhythmically disjunct, and seemingly grappling with an existential loss of faith. Written around his final operas Owen Wingrave and Death in Venice, they deftly sum up Britten's vocal achievements with music of great originality and aphoristic exactness.

Until I knew of Luke Styles's ingenious plan to create a 'frame' to separate and embed the Canticles in a continuous musical and dramatic flow I had almost given up on the possibility of SCO producing them. Luke's work takes musical fragments and thematic ideas from Britten and pulls them into the contemporary world in a game of reflections and echoes. Sometimes his contributions feel like a reliquary for the precious Britten works they enclose, at others they feel like counter-arguments or ripostes that paradoxically draw from the wellspring of Britten's own musical language. The first three of his six pieces struggle to articulate words at all, language and unbroken vocal lines are precious commodities. The balance is shifted just as Britten's own writing takes on a more gnomic kind of expression; Styles's final three pieces expand outwards to create a balanced whole, re-connecting text, voice and line just as Britten is seemingly in danger of abandoning them.

I am immensely proud of the work the creative team of Imara Savage, Elizabeth Gadsby, Mike Daly and Alexander Berlage have done to realise these works visually and dramaturgically. Sitting in a space between opera, concert, theatre and installation, they have framed this extraordinary musical and spiritual journey with reverence and originality and left space for each of us to contemplate the fundamental questions posed by these essential works.

JACK SYMONDS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA





Written over 30 years of Benjamin Britten's life, the Canticles are an extraordinary insight into Britten's changing relationship to his faith, his art, and ultimately his selfhood. When woven together with Luke Styles's more humanist composition we are presented with a work that defies neat categorisation.

Indeed, much of the pre-production creative discussions centred around the basic questions of: what is the form of this work? Who are these characters (or more loosely: people)? Where are they in time and space?

The Canticles have less in common with opera (essentially: a story with characters) than they might with a form like oratorio. Especially when interwoven with Styles's work, they are a poignant reflection on faith, self, and the human experience. However, our team decided early on that *Awakening Shadow* is neither an opera nor an oratorio – the work is a slipperier fish than that. We ask ourselves: are we in the theatre, or at a concert; at a cabaret or at a church? Rather than try and wrangle it into "one thing" we committed to the strangeness of the form which is, in fact, what makes it interesting.

We discussed the arc of the Canticles, which start with the simplicity of a personal monologue about young love ('My Beloved is Mine') and end with an anarchic and colourful trip into the world of Saint Narcissus (also the Narcissus of Greek mythology). With an understanding of that arc, we had a useful framework in which to explore the changing nature of Britten's relationship to faith and self. It is evident to see how these evolve, break, and reconstruct over the course of the 30-year period of their composition. The male body, war, pacifism, the love of men, violence and the State, binaries and non-binaries, certainty and disillusionment, death and birth (and re-birth) are all put into powerful juxtaposition.

One of the earliest discussions with the creative team centred around medium: what medium best serves the music of Britten's Canticles; what medium best serves the Styles? Styles's music and themes immediately lent themselves to the interplay between light and dark: in the Britten we were struck by the distilled quality of the works. The Canticles also contain unavoidable religious imagery, and Biblical / mythical characters / stories that have emerged from the Western canon.

Sculpture was, in fact, the medium we talked about being closest to representing Britten's music, because sculpture can capture a moment of great drama, and suspend it in time. Sculpture also lends itself to the idea of something that is memorialised – just as some of the Canticles themselves are memorials, either formally or in essence. This resonance with sculpture led us, in turn, to utilise the film technique of photogrammetry.

We worked with ballet dancer Luca Armstrong, to capture a series of choreographed poses using 120 synchronised cameras. By creating digital geometry through algorithmic analysis of the photographs, photogrammetry generates 3D models – bodies frozen in time, and manipulated digitally in space. The results are highly photorealistic yet hauntingly unreal, as if existing between life and death.

The ideas of memorial and reflection were central to our discussions of this work. These are embodied in our design world that forms a playing space somewhere between an altar, church space, and reflection pool (the pool of Narcissus). It is a place of contemplation and reflection, both in a religious sense and an existential sense. Lisa Cooper constructed the remarkable flower sculptures that frame our altar / pool space. These flower sculptures allude to places of memorial and worship, and yet somehow also belong to the deconstructed and almost paganistic world of a non-binary nature deity that represents a broken and reformed faith.

Whilst we have been rehearsing, I have often been struck not only by moments of beauty and transcendence but also by the rebellion and sheer audacity inside these works. I imagine Britten and his partner, the tenor Peter Pears performing 'My Beloved is Mine' together in 1947, the text a 17th Century religious meditation but the music clearly signalling the extraordinary love between two (all too human) men. The love between a father and son in 'Abraham and Isaac'. The quiet rage inside 'Still Falls the Rain'. The disillusioned Magi displaced by the birth of the baby Jesus and looking back on the moment it all went wrong. The erotic energy inside 'The Death of Saint Narcissus'. In art as in life, the human and the sublime sit comfortably and poignantly together, side by side.

IMARA SAVAGE
DIRECTOR

Carriageworks is honoured to present the Australian premiere of *Awakening Shadow* with one of the most exciting opera companies in the country - Sydney Chamber Opera.

Awakening Shadow is a bold new work where Australian composer Luke Styles responds to Benjamin Britten's five Canticles a deeply personal portrait written by one of the most significant composers of the 20th Century. Carriageworks is committed to presenting ambitious new work by Australian artists so it seems fitting that this is the first time that an opera by Luke Styles will be heard by a Sydney audience.

My thanks go to Jack Symonds and Huw Belling from SCO, the artists; Brenton Spiteri, Emily Edmonds, Simon Lobelson and Jane Sheldon and the whole creative team; Imara Savage, Elizabeth Gadsby, Mike Daly and Alexander Berlage for bringing this work to life.

I'd also thank the NSW Government through Create NSW and the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts for their ongoing support of Carriageworks as well as our various individual donors for supporting Carriageworks programs.

BLAIR FRENCH
CEO, CARRIAGEWORKS

CARRIAGEWORKS

Carriageworks is the largest and most significant contemporary multi-arts centre of its kind in Australia. The Carriageworks Artistic Program is ambitious, risk taking and provides significant support to leading Australian and international artists through commissioning and presenting contemporary work. The program is artist-led and emerges from Carriageworks' commitment to reflecting social and cultural diversity.

SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA (SCO)

Sydney Chamber Opera, resident company at Carriageworks, is a fresh and youthful answer to some of the difficult questions facing today's opera industry. Artistic Director Jack Symonds and Louis Garrick established SCO in 2010 and it has rapidly developed into an important and distinctive voice in the Australian music and theatre landscapes. SCO is critically acclaimed for its innovative programming, musical rigour and strong focus on compelling theatre-making. SCO makes opera with a 21st-century outlook that resonates with a new, younger audience, and that shows how vibrant and relevant the artform can be. Their program aims for a balance of specially commissioned work by leading homegrown composers, the latest international operas in their Australian premieres, song cycles and cantatas in unusual stagings, and canonical repertoire reinvigorated by the country's most daring theatrical talent.



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SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA

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THE FUTURE OF THE PIANO

