

THE AUSTRALIAN

Silence Augmenteth Grief: Musical innovators explore war and peace

GRAHAM STRAHLE THE AUSTRALIAN APRIL 20, 2015 12:00AM



Gabriella Smart is the founder and artistic director of Soundstream Collective. Source: Supplied

When a nation reflects on lives lost in far-flung wars, the uncomfortable truth may be that closer to home there are some horrors that remain forgotten and shrouded in silence. But not until we face them can we find peace.

Adelaide's new music innovators Soundstream Collective made that abundantly apparent in a

concert themed around “the tragedy of war and the suppression and silence that follow”, to quote the group’s artistic director, Gabriella Smart.

The four Australian works presented were at times provocative. Jon Rose’s *Picnic at Broken Hill*, receiving its world premiere, consisted of a musical transcription for detuned upright piano of suicide notes left by two protesting Muslim camel-drivers after they opened fire on a picnic train near Broken Hill in 1915.

Two “voices” on the piano meandered against one another, one high and the other low, without ever quite coinciding in time. Adding to this piece’s simple but powerful impact were images projected on a sidewall in Adelaide’s Samstag Museum of photos taken after the shooting, showing a Turkish flag and bullet holes in the side of the train.

The second work premiered, *Animal* by young Sydney composer Daniel Portelli, drew text from the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014, consisting of recollections of children who were held in detention.

Positioned upstairs in a balcony, sopranos from the Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus whispered their words like a hovering throng of tiny lost souls above the audience’s head. Then a burning flame, projected in slow-motion video, symbolically incinerated all memory of them.

Kindred of spirit, Stuart Greenbaum’s *The Foundling* (1997) seemed to musically describe the plight of abandoned children, and by extension adults too, who face a compassionless world — “Love, in the end, is the adoption we all seek”, read some of Ross Baglin’s poetry, to which the work is set.

The dense layering of voices proved a bit taxing for the choir, which often sounded tentative. But soprano Emma Horwood’s clear-voiced solos and entwining duet with viola were lovely highlights.

Liza Lim’s *The Heart’s Ear* (2002), for mixed instrumental sextet, offered a path to peace.

Inspired by 13th-century Sufi poetry and consisting of Arabic-like bending pitches, it began as six wailing voices but eventually gave way to a moment of calm as the instruments converged on a single unison melody.

Soundstream’s performances under conductor Warwick Stengards bristled with passion and technical accomplishment.

Silence Augmenteth Grief. Soundstream Collective. Conductor: Warwick Stengards. Artistic director: Gabriella Smart. Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide, April 16.

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