Astra’s 68th year of concerts in Melbourne continues its path through the ever-changing surroundings of contemporary and choral music, where emerging works, styles and voices give rise to new historical perspectives on the recent and more distant past.

The procession of activities in 2018 begins in February, with the release of Astra’s latest CD in New York – first-recordings of choral works by Morton Feldman and five American contemporaries. In April, June, September, October and December, five concerts explore a wide terrain of works new and old, Australian and international, vocal and instrumental, filmic and theatric. Associated with the concerts, several additional Australian scores are launched in the Astra Publications series; and new recording projects are embarked on, with music of Romanian, Italian and Australian composers.

Familiar names from previous years of Astra concerts join the array of newer creations. The late composers Lawrence Whiffin and Keith Humble are present in premiered and little-known works. The 10th anniversary of the death of Mauricio Kagel is marked by two of his inventions in choral theatre. A specially revised symphonic-poetic work celebrates the 75th birthday of Australia’s leading expatriate composer Graham Hair. The Harmonic Labyrinth of pre-eminent Romanian figure Dan Dediu is revisited as part of a recorded retrospective of his music.

Charles Ives’s friend and contemporary John J. Becker is a ‘new older’ name awaiting rediscovery. And Melbourne’s Helen Gifford adds the new work Ancestress for viola and piano to her many contributions to the Astra series, which go back more than 50 years. Other premieres include a venture into musical performance with 16mm film and projectors, in a commissioned piece of expanded cinema by Hanna Chetwin and Rohan Drape.
Recording
New in 2018

“We like Salangan Swallows ...”
A Choral Gallery of Morton Feldman and Contemporaries

Works by Morton Feldman, Will Ogdon, Earle Brown, Pauline Oliveros, Warren Burt, Robert Carl

The Astra Choir
with guest instrumental ensembles and solo singers Catrina Seiffert, Jenny Barnes, Louisa Billeter.
Conducted by John McCaughey

NEW WORLD RECORDS, NEW YORK
RELEASE IN FEBRUARY 2018
In April and June, two significant string chamber works by the late Keith Humble are heard among two contrasting networks of choral music. Humble’s String Trio, written in Paris in the 1950s, belongs in the Germanic expressive tradition of Mozart and Schoenberg. The string quartet Four All Seasons of nearly 40 years later is influenced more by American ideas of a continuous sonic environment and variable open forms.

The April 15 concert at the Chapel of the Abbotsford Convent completes the Astra Choir’s cycle of Max Reger’s monumental Three Motets Op.110. Composers from other national origins – Romania, Argentina, Italy and Greece – take up different creative stances towards the cultural tradition of the German chorale and other poetic texts. Dan Dediu’s Harmonic Labyrinth and Fugue sets a sonnet of Goethe, whose famous opening words – “Nature and Art, they seem to flee apart, but then, before you know it, find each other” might be contra-factured in our time as “Things sacred and secular, they seem....”

The June 10 program, in the sonorous space of the Carmelite Church, draws an arc of choral soundscapes of the American tradition – from Charles Ives and his neglected colleague John J. Becker to Donald Martino and Robert Carl – around Keith Humble’s spiralling perpetuo-moto of string quartet sound and his open-form choral continuum ACCJ, first composed for the Astra Choir 10 years before the quartet, in 1979.

CONCERT 1

Harmonic Labyrinth

5.00pm
Sunday April 15
Good Shepherd Chapel
Abbotsford Convent
1 St Heliers St, Abbotsford

Natasha Conrau violin, Zachary Johnston violin, Phoebe Green viola,
Alister Barker cello, Nicholas Synot double bass, Calvin Bowman organ
Kim Bastin, Peter Dumsday, Joy Lee keyboards

The Astra Choir with soloists, conducted by John McCaughey

Dan Dediu, Harmonic Labyrinth & Fugue (1999); Keith Humble,
String Trio (1953); Max Reger; Ach Herr, strafe mich nicht, Motet Op.110/2
(1911); Constantin Silvestri, Night and Dreams (1929); Mauricio Kagel,
The Mutation (1972); Filippo Perocco, Ich ruf zu dir (2017), 1ST PERFORMANCE;
Francesco Zorzini, Omnes enim (2017); Stathis Giftakis, Hilf dem Schwachen!
(2017); Max Reger, O wie selig seid ihr, chorale cantata (1904).

CONCERT 2

For All Seasons

5.00pm
Sunday June 10
Carmelite Church
cnr. Wright & Richardson St,
Middle Park

Natasha Conrau violin, Zachary Johnston violin, Phoebe Green viola,
Alister Barker cello, Nicholas Synot double bass

The Astra Choir with solo voices, conducted by John McCaughey

Charles Ives, The Celestial Country (1899), soloists, choir, string quintet &
organ; John J. Becker, The Pool (1924); Moments from the Liturgical Year
(1948), speaker, speaking chorus & choir; Keith Humble, ACCJ (1979) multiple
choral groups; Four All Seasons, Mouvement perpetuel (1989) string quartet;
Donald Martino, Pious Pieces (1971), choir a cappella (Robert Herrick);
Media and métier of contrasting kinds form a trilogy of events with new creations in September, November, and December. The three performance landscapes bring different traditions into play: the symphonic dimension of Graham Hair's hour-long work in the first event; interactive cross-disciplinary performances between music, film, and theatre in the second; solo virtuosity and chamber music in the third, set in an environment of new choral composition.

The September 16 concert celebrates the 75th year of Graham Hair, prominent Australian composer of the last half-century and Emeritus Professor at the University of Glasgow. His choral symphony *The Great Circle* sets a specially-crafted poem by Canberra poet Alan Gould in two large movements. Part I, “Into the South” is premiered in a chamber version with soloists, choir, 2 pianos and percussion. Shorter pieces give glimpses of the wealth of influences around Hair's composing: Josquin, Stravinsky, Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions.

Perceptions in sight and sound on October 27 take off from a new commissioned work, *Salt* by film-maker Hanna Chetwin and composer Rohan Drape, for multiple 16mm film with live performers, electronics and choir. Further film-music adventures from Hanna Chetwin & James Rushford (3 films at play), join earlier work by John Hughes & Martin Friedel, whose bio-filmic meditation on Walter Benjamin is supported by live choruses on the philosopher's street-texts. The program opens into other imagistic worlds – the choral theatre of Kagel and the Expressionism of Haydn, Schoenberg, Elgar and Webern.

Sunday December 9 brings the fourth of Astra's Lawrence Whiffin Concerts – a forum for music from Melbourne and elsewhere in the globe. Violist Phoebe Green combines with pianist Michael Kieran Harvey for two premières – *Ancestress* by Helen Gifford, completed in 2018 for these two performers, and a rediscovered viola sonata by Lawrence Whiffin. Harvey further performs Whiffin's breath-taking piano Études, launched as publications at this concert. From the choir come works ranging from Dorian Le Gallienne, who taught both Whiffin and Gifford, to younger Melbourne composers and recent Italian works.

### CONCERT 3

**The Great Circle. Graham Hair at 75**

5.00pm  
Sunday September 16  
Church of All Nations  
cnr. Palmerston & Drummond St, Carlton

Kim Bastin, Peter Dumsday, Joy Lee, pianos  
Timothy Phillips, Daniel Richardson, percussion  
Catrina Seifert, Leonie Thomson, Louisa Billeter, Robert Macfarlane, Ben Owen, Lucien Fischer, Steven Hodgson, solo voices  
The Astra Choir, conducted by John McCaughey


### CONCERT 4

**Film & Other Images**

8.00pm  
Saturday October 27  
Coburg Town Hall  
90 Bell St, Coburg  
(parking behind on Urquhart St)

Erkki Veltheim, violin, Maria Moles, drums, Rohan Drape, organ  
instrumental nonet, the Astra Choir with solo voices  
conducted by John McCaughey


### CONCERT 5

**4th Lawrence Whiffin Concert**

New from Melbourne & Italy  
5.00pm  
Sunday December 9  
Church of All Nations  
cnr. Palmerston & Drummond St, Carlton

Phoebe Green, viola, Michael Kieran Harvey, piano  
the Astra Choir with solo voices conducted by John McCaughey

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