

5pm Sunday 2 October  
Fitzroy Town Hall

in association with the City of Yarra

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(1)

Martin Friedel  
**ELECTRIC SONGS**

Warren Burt  
**AFTER SEA PIECES**

Charles Ives, Heitor Villa-Lobos

George Antheil, Charles Dodge

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The Astra Choir with soloists and ensemble

Miwako Abe *violin* Joan Pollock *piano*

**Miwako Abe** *violin* **Joan Pollock** *piano*

**Ensemble:**

**Miwako Abe** *violin* **Aaron Barnden** *violin* **Ceridwen Davies** *viola*

**Rosanne Hunt** *cello* **Nicholas Synot** *double bass*

**Tristram Williams** *trumpet* **Robert Collins** *trombone*

**Timothy Phillips** *percussion*

**Kim Bastin** *piano* **Joan Pollock** *piano, organ*

**Nicholas Tolhurst** *theremin*

**Soloists, *Electric Songs*:**

**Jerzy Kozlowski** *bass* (Tiberius, Benjamin Franklin)

**Jessica Aszodi, Catrina Seiffert** *sopranos*

**Hana Crisp** *mezzo soprano* (William Kemmler)

**Amy Boland, Robert Franzke** *ensemble*

**The Astra Choir:**

*soprano*

**Jessica Aszodi, Irene McGinnigle, Catrina Seiffert, Yvonne Turner,  
Larissa Cox, Maree Macmillan, Kim Tan**

*alto*

**Pen Alexander, Amy Boland, Hana Crisp, Anna Gifford,  
Beverley Bencina, Bidy Connor, Frances McKinnon, Lisel Thomas**

*tenor*

**Wally Gunn, Simon Johnson, Kevin March,  
Justin Thomas, William Thompson, Phillip Villani**

*bass*

**Robert Franzke, Andrew Ferguson, James Harland, Jerzy Kozlowski,  
Chris Smith, John Terrell, Nicholas Tolhurst**

*accompanist*

**Kim Bastin**

**Michael Hewes** *sound design*

**John McCaughey** *conductor*

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**Production Manager: Gina Gascoigne**

**Recording Engineer: Michael Hewes**

**Astra Manager: Bobbie Hodge**

## PROGRAMME

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**Charles Ives**                    **PROCESSIONAL. LET THERE BE LIGHT** (1901)  
choir and instruments  
**FROM THE STEEPLES AND THE MOUNTAINS** (1901)  
two pianos, voices, trumpet & trombone  
**VITA** (1921)  
arranged for choir and instruments  
**PSALM 135** (1900)  
choir and instruments

**Charles Dodge**                **TWO ETUDES** (1994)  
violin and electro-acoustic sound

**Heitor Villa-Lobos**            **BENDITA SABEDORIA – BLESSED WISDOM** (1958)  
six pieces for six-part choir

**Georg Antheil**                 **SONATA No.2** (1923)  
violin and piano

**Warren Burt**                  **AFTER SEA PIECES** (2005)  
*first performance*  
choir and electronics

### i n t e r v a l

**Martin Friedel**                **ELECTRIC SONGS** (2005)  
*first performance*  
soloists, choir, theremin, bells and instrumental ensemble

#### Part I. **The Approaching Storm**

1. The cause is hidden
2. Have no fear: the Emperor Tiberius
3. It is a dogma of faith: Thomas Aquinas
4. A servant girl

#### Part II. **The Flash of Enlightenment**

Benjamin Franklin

#### Part III. **Long Rolling Thunder**

1. The First Execution, August 6 1890: William Kemmler
2. Dover Beach, Mathew Arnold

**THE NATURAL WORLD**, with its infinity of simultaneous sounding occurrences, has often provided inspiration for the human construct of music – its techniques and materials, ideas and imagery. Especially in the American experimental tradition starting with **Charles Ives**, sounds and rhythms are measured out in radical new ways, and musical environments are created that reflect the ‘messiness’ of social interactions and their place in the wider world of Nature. *From The Steeples And The Mountains* is one of many such ‘experimental’ pieces, in which four groups of bells (pianos and voices), chiming in different keys and speeds, are set against a wilder ‘craggy’ pattern from solo trumpet and trombone.

**Martin Friedel’s** *Electric Songs* is his fourth cantata performed at Astra concerts over the last 15 years on themes from the history of science. In these cantatas the exploration of natural phenomena is itself explored in terms of musical expression, along with both the brightness and darkness of its historic-social outcomes. Currently holding a Creative Fellowship at the State Library of Victoria, Martin Friedel has a broad output in music for both theatre and films, for which he has received awards at the Chicago Film Festival and the Emmies. His own background as a scientist has led to concert works around texts on atomic power, space flight and science of the mind, together with a string quartet and choral miniatures after philosophic reflections of Walter Benjamin. *Electric Songs* was composed with support from the Arts Development programme of Arts Victoria.

The second premiered composition of the concert, *After Sea Pieces* for choir and electronics by **Warren Burt**, revisits an earlier piece for the Astra Choir and was made on a surf beach in NSW in late September this year. As in Ives’s *From The Steeples And The Mountains* polyrhythmic patterns (of choral/ electronic sounds) are set into this natural environment, singing ‘poly-tunings’ derived from the measurement of sound itself. Warren Burt first came to Australia in the 1970s to join the then Music Department at La Trobe University, following broad experience as student and collaborator with important figures in experimental music such as Pauline Oliveros, Kenneth Gaburo and John Cage. Through subsequent decades he has been a germinal influence in Australian music, and is currently based at the University of Wollongong where he is writing a book on microtonality.

Two violin works in the concert represent further significant figures from different stages of the American progressive tradition. **Charles Dodge** (b. 1942) is a leading pioneer in the field of computer music composition, whose works frequently explore how the computer can generate sounds of unusual timing, tuning and colour played in combination with live instruments. His *Violin Etudes* were composed for his violinist son Baird Dodge, and take simple violin ‘practice patterns’ as the basis for a poetic exploration of this kind. **George Antheil** (1900-59), as an American expatriate radical in Paris, epitomised the post-Futurist mechanistic ideal of the 1920s. His *Second Violin Sonata* was commissioned by Ezra Pound for the poet’s violinist companion Olga Rudge, with a concluding drum part written for Pound himself to play. The sonata brings together Antheil’s prized “environment of the machine, become a spiritual thing...” with rapidly shifting images of popular culture, at the end moving to the open-air environment of a Persian market tune.

**Heitor Villa-Lobos** (1887–1959) developed an original style of choral music that has remained little known outside his native Brazil, combining indigenous New World elements with more French-based traditions. His last choral work *Bendita Sabedoria* was written shortly before his death for the choir of New York University, and praises human wisdom in a series of graceful choral sentences, some condensed to a few seconds in length, others suspended as a moment of ritual.

– JMcC

## Warren Burt : on *AFTER SEA PIECES*

In 1979, I wrote *Sea Pieces* for the Astra Choir and 4 channel electronic tape. In 2005, I revisited the piece, and using the same ideas (and trying to keep my technology at a 1979 level), made a new work. The idea behind both pieces is that the choir uses recorded electronic tones to get both pitches and rhythms for repeating loops which are in different tempi and tuning, thus singing polyrhythms and tunings that they would otherwise find extremely difficult. This piece happens by the sea, and various aspects of the sea, both natural (in this case, the lively gulls and other birds of Bellambi Lagoon), and man-made (Debussy's *La Mer* played on a cassette recorder with small speakers strapped to my waist while I run and whirl on the beach past a microphone), coexist with the polyrhythmic singing. In 1979, I noticed that water waves exhibited polyrhythmic characteristics (ocean rhythms as the prototype of mixed sine wave synthesis), and thought of the sung loops as vastly slowed down and simplified versions of these. Later, however, in the mid-1980s, I heard a bunch of seagulls in St. Kilda playing polyrhythmic games, each squawking in their own rhythm, assembling complex 3:4:5 and even 7:8:9 polyrhythms, and keeping these rhythms going for a considerable time. Everyone I mentioned this to thought I was wrong - that gulls can't do "counting" things like that - but as a musician, I knew what I was hearing, and what I continue occasionally to hear. So the polyrhythmic loops the choir is performing can be heard as quite refined and extended versions of the gulls' noisy and happy games. For the technically minded, in this piece the women sing pitches which are harmonics of a fundamental, while the men sing pitches which are subharmonics of a fundamental. And keeping with the nautical image (and perhaps being even a bit Mediterranean?), the fundamental for this piece is, of course, middle C.

## Martin Friedel: on *ELECTRIC SONGS*

### **A SHORT HISTORY OF ELECTRICITY**

A flash of lightning forking over a dark landscape, followed by long rolling thunder speaks of the power of the natural world. The deadly strike a reminder of our fragility. Lightning is the source of two great gifts; fire and electricity. Without fire and electricity, our ascent through the natural world could not have happened.

The duality of lightning as divine punishment and human enlightenment is an ancient thought. In Greece, the god Zeus hurls lightning bolts invented by the wise god Minerva and forged by Vulcan, the blacksmith god. When Zeus decides to destroy the newly created human race, Prometheus steals the heavenly fire, gives it to humanity, saves it from destruction and brings enlightenment. With enlightenment comes the desire to understand the natural world in a way that is consistent with experience.

In 600 BC, the Greek philosopher, Thales records the strange behaviour of amber, which when rubbed, attracts small particles by invisible means. "Elektron" the Greek word for amber is the origin of our 'electricity'.

In the first explanation of lightning as a natural force, Aristotle proposes that lightning, wind and storms are contained in an 'exhalation, created and collected in a layer between the earth and the moon'. Ovid the poet and elegant chronicler of folklore and myth, defines the basic scientific dilemma by his observation 'the cause is hidden, the effect is known'

The divine theory holds sway for another two millennia and the connection between lightning and the attractive power of amber remains hidden until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when science wrests understanding of natural world away from religion and theology providing a rational appreciation of electricity and a means of creating and harnessing its power. During the transformation from faith to reason, the lightning storm still remains deadly and divine. The Reformation begins with a lightning bolt striking the ground near Martin Luther's feet at Erfurt in Germany. In the thirty-three years to 1784, lightning strikes destroy or badly damage nearly 400 churches in Germany killing 103 sextons who are ringing the bells of 'consecrated metal' to protect the faithful from lightning in accordance with Thomas Aquinas' instructions.

The lightning conductor is invented around 1750 by the New World all rounder Benjamin Franklin, who demonstrates (so he says) that lightning is electricity by flying a kite into a thunderstorm. On the basis of this famous and disputed experiment Franklin invents the lightning conductor and finally tames the bolt from the sky. There is a social dimension too; the term 'spark' is used for electricity in 1742; by 1746 a 'spark' is a young, sexually active male. The Italian scientist Luigi Volta notes that 'enlightenment likes to play with electricity'

New discoveries and inventions follow rapidly. The invention of electric motors and generators becomes possible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the discoveries of Faraday, Ampere, Volta, Ohm and others. The commercial generation of electricity soon follows. In 1880 'Alice Vanderbilt descends a stair case decked out in incandescent light globes', and on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1882 the Electric Age starts in Pearl St., New York where generators power 400 light globes for 85 wealthy customers...

The physiological effects of generated electricity have been keenly observed and experimented with for a long time. Innocent domestic animals are the subjects and victims. Franklin uses electricity to kill fowls and turkeys. Thomas Edison's early experiments on dogs and cats lead to electrocution as a 'humane' method of execution. Edison helps to develop the first electric chair, although the patent is ascribed to Edwin Davis the first electric executioner, who retires in 1914, after carrying out 240 electrocutions. In the USA during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 4000 legal executions using electricity have been carried out.

A storm of technological change, powered by electricity sweeps us along. A dizzying array of inventions and improvements descend our staircase of material well-being. The Telephone! Radio! Radar! The Washing Machine! The Computer! The Theremin! The Refrigerator! Television.... life without electricity has become *impossible*, and *unthinkable*. Our capacity to generate and use ever-increasing quantities of electricity is a major cause of global warming... and, as the oceans warm, storms will become more frequent and violent, generating even more spectacular lightning. We have become Zeus. Where is Prometheus?

## ***ELECTRIC SONGS***

A time-exposure photograph of lightning reveals a wildly branching and forking river of electricity between earth and sky. There is no single story of electricity, but a great many branching and forking story lines; the texts of Electric Songs form one such branch. The libretto of Electric Songs is based and adapted from the following:

### **Tiberius – Roman Emperor A.D. 14 –37**

The historian Tacitus describes Tiberius as a paranoid, cunning, repressive and depressive ruler. Fearful of being struck by lightning, Tiberius keeps a laurel wreath close by to put around the neck when a thunderstorm approaches... Tiberius died quietly, aged 78.

### **Thomas Aquinas - Christian Theologian and Philosopher 1225 – 1274**

#### **A Young Man and A Servant Girl**

– from 18<sup>th</sup> Century news accounts. Detailed accounts of death by lightning strikes were a regular feature of 18<sup>th</sup> century newspapers and almanacs.

#### **Benjamin Franklin 1706-1790**

Franklin's life was so diverse and full of successful endeavour that he was called "the harmonious human multitude".

Franklin took an interest in electricity in the late 1740's, and as in all things showed original intelligence and an urge to get things done. His account of his famous kite-in-the-thunderstorm has many deficiencies and may well have been a hoax; or a forerunner of Einstein's 'Gedanken' (thought) experiment. Franklin correctly concluded that lightning was electricity, that there was only one sort of electricity and, that the vicinity of a church steeple was a dangerous place during a thunderstorm. Before moving to political and social reform, Franklin invented the lightning conductor and carried out electrical experiments on fowls and turkeys and himself. Immanuel Kant nominated Franklin as the 'modern Prometheus' and Balzac credited him with invention of 'the lightning rod, the hoax and the republic'.

#### **William Kemmler**

Kemmler, a 30 year old man convicted of murder was the first person to be executed on the electric chair. George Westinghouse, Edison's main business competitor put \$100,000 into Kemmler's appeal because he did not wish his dynamos (electric generators) to be associated with death, at a time when there was public debate over the safety of the domestic use of electricity. Some sections of the press had referred to death by electricity as 'Westinghoused'. A day before the execution, the apparatus was used to electrocute an 'old and broken' horse.

Kemmler passed his time on death row by playing banjo and was electrocuted in a bizarre and cruel procedure, resembling a mediaeval witch burning.

#### **Mathew Arnold – Dover Beach**

Arnold's poem was published in 1867, the year of Michael Faraday's death. The great shift in western thought away from faith and towards science based reason was complete and the Arnold expresses the sadness of change with a reflective and detached observation of nature which seems to mirror the perspective taken by science.

**Charles Ives**  
**FOUR PIECES** (1900-21)

**Processional “Let there be Light”**

choir, strings and organ

This is the Day of Light!  
Let there be Light,  
Let there be Light To-day.

– John Ellerton

**From The Steeples And The Mountains**

two pianos and voices (Steeple) trumpet & trombone (Mountains)

[From the Steeples – the Bells! – then the Rocks on the Mountains begin to shout!]

**Vita**

choir, strings and keyboards

"Nascentes morimur finisque ab origine pendet"      "Being born, we die; and our end hangs on our origin."

– Manlius (Roman, reign of Tiberius)

**Psalm 135**

choir, and ensemble

Praise ye the Lord, praise ye the name of the Lord.  
Praise ye the Lord, O ye servants of the Lord.

Whatsoever the Lord pleas'd, that did he in heaven,  
in earth, in the seas, and all deep places,  
he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth,  
and lightnings for the rain;  
he bringeth the wind out of his treasures.

Thy name, O Lord, endureth forever,  
and thy memorial, O Lord, throughout all generations.  
For the Lord will judge his people,  
and he will repent himself concerning his servants.

Praise ye the Lord, praise ye the name of the Lord.

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**Charles Dodge**

**TWO ETUDES** (1994)

solo violin and electro-acoustic sound

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**Heitor Villa-Lobos**

**BENDITA SABEDORIA – BLESSED WISDOM** (1958)

six-part choir

I. Sapientia fioris praedicat, in plateis dat vocem.  
streets.

– *Proverbs 1*

Wisdom cries outside; she utters her name in the

II. Vas pretiosum labia scientiae.

– *Proverbs 20*

But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

III. Principium sapientie, posside sapientiam.

– *Proverbs 4*

The beginning of wisdom is: get wisdom

IV. Vir sapiens fortis est

– *Proverbs 24*

A wise man is strong.

V. Beatus homo qui invenit sapientiam  
et qui affluit prudentia;  
melior est acquisitio eius  
negotiatione argenti  
et auri primum.

– *Proverbs 3*

Happy is the one who finds wisdom  
and the one who gets knowledge;  
for the merchandise of it is better  
than the merchandise of silver  
and its gain better than fine gold.

VI. Dexteram tuam sic notam fac:  
Tuum! Et eruditos corde in sapientia.

– *Psalms 90*

So teach us to number our days  
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

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**Georg Antheil**  
**SONATA FOR VIOLIN & PIANO (1923)**

**Warren Burt**  
**AFTER SEA PIECES (2005)** *first performance*  
choir and electronics

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**I n t e r v a l**

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**Martin Friedel**  
**ELECTRIC SONGS (2005)** *first performance*  
soloists, choir, theremin, bells, string quintet, trumpet, trombone, percussion, piano & organ

PRELUDE – Theremin and cello

PART I. THE APPROACHING STORM

**1. The cause is hidden**

**Choir:** The cause is hidden  
The effect is known  
A young man,  
Killed by lightning  
Which melted his watch  
Shoe and  
Knee-buckle

**2 Have no fear: the Emperor Tiberius**

**Bass:** Have no fear!  
Have no fear!  
I am your Emperor  
Tiberius

**Choir:** Listen, listen  
A Storm approaches

**Bass:** People!  
Have no fear  
Pliny the Elder  
Gave this advice  
“A laurel wreath around the neck  
Keeps lightning at bay”

**Choir:** The laurel wreath  
Saved Emperor Tiberius  
From bolt and strike  
He died another way

### 3. It is a dogma of faith: Thomas Aquinas

**Vocal quartet (Aquinas):**

It is a dogma of faith  
That demons can produce wind, storm and rain of fire from heaven  
The aspiring steeples, around which cluster the low dwellings of men  
Are to be liked, when the bells in them are ringing  
To the hen spreading its protecting wings  
For the tones of consecrated metal  
repel the demons and arrest storm and lightning

**Choir:** Amen.

### 4. A Servant Girl

**Choir:** A servant girl, struck by lightning  
Showed no mark of hurt  
But a small blue speck  
Under one eye

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## PART II. THE FLASH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### Benjamin Franklin

**Choir:**

In the year seventeen fifty-two  
Benjamin Franklin flew  
A kite to the sky  
T'was lucky that he did not fry...

**Bass (Franklin):**

Perhaps  
That kite was never flown  
But thought is never far from deed  
So consider it was done

**Choir:**

He snatched lightning from the heaven  
An electric spark is scarce ever straight

**Bass:**

Never confuse motion with action.  
Read much, but not too many books:  
Now let me speak  
of the wonderful effect  
of pointed bodies  
in drawing and throwing electrical fire

**Choir:**

As electrified clouds pass over lofty towers  
Spires and masts draw the electric fire

**Bass:**

I try the power of a strong electric shock  
Upon some fowls  
Then kill a turkey of about ten pounds weight  
A day before Christmas

**Choir:**

Dangerous it is to take shelter under a tree  
During a thunder storm

**Bass:**

The birds killed in this manner  
Eat uncommonly tender

**Choir:**

It is safer to be in the open fields

**Bass:**

In making these experiments I find  
That men can bear far greater shock without harm

**Choir:**

Electric fire is in all bodies

**Bass:**

.... like a universal blow throughout the body  
From head to foot and followed by a violent quick trembling

**Choir:**

Lightning rends some bodies  
It is not important to know the manner in which nature executes her laws  
It is enough to know the laws.

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INTERLUDE – Theremin and cello

### PART III. LONG ROLLING THUNDER

#### 1. The first execution, August 6 1890; electrocution of William Kemmler

**William Kemmler's Song:**

*(written by him and sung with banjo while awaiting execution)*

I can't sing  
I won't sing  
I'll tell you the reason why  
I can't sing  
I won't sing  
For my whistle is getting dry

**Governor:**

William it is time

**Kemmler:**

I am ready Mr Dunstan  
Alright I am ready

**Solo voices:**

Electron, Volta, Ampere  
Yesterday a broken horse  
Today a broken man

**Choir:** *(some of the names proposed for death by electricity)*

Ampermort, Dynamort, Electroicide, Electronasia  
Electroleth, Electronabia, Electronasia  
Electrocutio  
Electrocute

Start dynamo  
Fasten bands  
Soak sponge and place on head

**Solo voices:**

Two thousand Volt  
And ten Ampere  
Is all it takes to kill a man

**Choir:**

He is dead  
He still breathes

Run dynamo at top speed!

There's a smell of burning

#### 2. Dover Beach, Mathew Arnold 1851

**Choir:**

Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

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## ASTRA PUBLICATIONS

NEW: available at this concert:

**Keith Humble, EIGHT CABARET SONGS**, voice and piano

**Keith Humble, SONATA No.3**, piano solo

copied and edited with critical notes by Kim Bastin

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## ASTRA COMPACT DISCS

- Astra CD 1: Michael Kieran Harvey, piano: *Threnody*.  
Australian piano compositions by James Anderson, Andrew Byrne, Stuart Campbell, Michael Kieran Harvey, Keith Humble, John McCaughey and Carl Vine.
- Astra CD 2: Keith Humble, piano: *Bagatelles*. Liszt, Bartok and Humble,  
from Humble's last recital, at La Trobe University in 1993.
- Astra CD 3: Lawrence Whiffin, *murchitt a daydream*, with book by William Henderson.  
Merlyn Quaife (soprano), Tyrone Landau (tenor), William Henderson (reciter),  
instrumental ensemble and the Astra Choir, conducted by John McCaughey.
- Astra CD 4: Kim Bastin and Joan Pollock, pianos: *White and Black*.  
Schoenberg, *Second Chamber Symphony* and other works for two pianos  
by Schumann, Ravel and Debussy.
- Astra CD 5: Astra Concert Archive: "**Achilles falls...**" The Astra Choir with soloists and ensemble  
Stefan Wolpe, Webern, Beethoven, Brahms. Choral works with song, melodrama,  
instrumental solo and chamber music, with soloists including Miwako Abe (violin), Tristram  
Williams (trumpet), and instrumental ensembles, conducted by John McCaughey.
- Astra CD 6: Astra Concert Archive: "**first and last things...**" The Astra Choir with soloists and ensemble  
Bach, Busoni, Kagel, Hindemith, Martin Friedel, Wolfgang Hufschmidt, Paul Celan.  
from Bach via chant, speech-chorus & poetry to Busoni's 2-piano *Art of Fugue* Fantasia  
Kim Bastin & Joan Pollock, piano duo; Margaret Ricketts & William Henderson, speakers.
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