

# ASTRA 2007

5 pm, Sunday 4 November  
GASWORKS THEATRE  
Albert Park, Melbourne

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whether

'OLD' OR 'NEW'

ABSTRACT OR TRUE

QUITE FANCY OR PLAIN

FOR ORCHESTRA OR CHOIR

PERCUSSION OR PIANO

WOODWINDS OR STRINGS

A MASS OR A DANCE

they'll give you your chance

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**Johanna Magdalena Beyer**

CHAMBER AND CHORAL WORKS 1931-1936

**Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, Lou Harrison**

**Merlyn Quaife** *soprano*  
**Miwako Abe** *violin*, **Aaron Barnden** *violin*  
**Erkki Veltheim** *viola*, **Rosanne Hunt** *cello*  
**Nicholas Synot** *double bass*  
**Mardi McCullea** *flute*  
**Craig Hill** *clarinet*  
**Kim Bastin** *piano*, **Peter Dumsday** *piano*  
**Jon Drews** *percussion*, **Steve Fitzgerald** *percussion*,  
**Timothy Phillips** *percussion*

**The Astra Choir**  
**with soloists:**  
**Jessica Aszodi**, *soprano*, **Catriona Seiffert** *soprano*  
**Hana Crisp** *mezzo soprano*  
**Christopher Nye** *tenor*  
*soprano*  
**Jessica Aszodi**, **Catriona Seiffert**,  
**Irene McGinnigle**, **Yvonne Turner**,  
**Louisa Billeter**, **Maree Macmillan**, **Kim Tan**  
*alto*  
**Hana Crisp**, **Gloria Gamboz**, **Anna Gifford**, **Rebecca Lane**,  
**Beverley Bencina**, **Aviva Endean**, **Frances McKinnon**,  
**Aline Scott-Maxwell**, **Lisel Thomas**  
*tenor*  
**Christopher Nye**, **Lachlan Brown**, **William Thompson**,  
**John Clarke**, **Greg Deakin**, **Jon Drews**,  
**Marc Hiatt**, **Simon Johnson**, **Scott Sanders**  
*bass*  
**Karl Billeter**, **Peter Dumsday**, **James Harland**,  
**Nicholas Tolhurst**, **Stephen Whately**,  
**Andrew Rostas**, **Chris Smith**, **John Terrell**

*conducted by* **John McCaughey**

## PROGRAMME

**Lou Harrison**  
**MASS FOR ST ANTHONY** (1939)  
I. Kyrie II. Gloria  
choir, piccolo and percussion

**Johanna Beyer**  
**SUITE FOR CLARINET No. 2** (1933)  
I. Giocoso II. Lamentation III. Contrast (Sonnet form) IV. Accelerando

**STRING QUARTET No. 1** (1933-4)  
I. Allegro II. Lento III. Moderato IV. Presto

**THREE SONGS FOR CLARINET AND SOPRANO** (1934)  
1. Total Eclipse 2. To be 3. Universal—Local

**Henry Cowell**  
**THE TIDES OF MANAUNAN** (1912)  
solo piano

**THE MORNING COMETH** (1937)  
choir *a cappella*

**Johanna Beyer**  
**MOVEMENT FOR TWO PIANOS** (1931)  
*to Henry Cowell*

**THE FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT** (1936)  
choir *a cappella*

**BEES** (date unknown)  
solo piano

**Henry Cowell**  
**TIGER** (1928)  
solo piano

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**Charles Seeger**  
**THE LETTER** (1931)  
*to R.C.S* solo melody

**Ruth Crawford-Seeger**  
**STUDY IN MIXED ACCENTS** (1930)  
solo piano

**CHANT 1930**  
choir with solo soprano

**Johanna Beyer**  
**MOVEMENT FOR DOUBLE BASS AND PIANO** (1936)

**BALLAD OF THE STAR-EATER** (1934)  
soprano and clarinet

**THREE CHORAL PIECES** (1937)  
1. The Main Deep 2. The Composers' Forum Laboratory 3. 'The People, yes'

**STRING QUARTET No. 2** (1936)  
I. Allegretto II. Largo III. Moderato IV. Allegro quasi presto

**HAVE FAITH!** (1937)  
soprano and flute

**Lou Harrison**  
**MASS TO ST ANTHONY** (1939)  
choir and percussion

**I. KYRIE**

Kyrie eleison.	Lord have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord have mercy.

**II. GLORIA**

Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus. bonae voluntatis Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam Domine Deus, rex coelestis, Deus pater omnipotens Domine fili unigenite, Jesu Christe, Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, filius patris,	Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Lord God, celestial king, God the father omnipotent, Lord the only begotten son, Jesus Christ, Lord God, lamb of God, son of the father,
qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram qui sedes ad dexteram patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei patris. Amen.	you who take away the sins of the world have mercy on us, who take away the sins of the world give heed to our prayer, who sit at the right hand of God have mercy on us. For you alone are holy, you alone are the Lord you alone the most high, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in glory with God the father. Amen.

**Johanna Beyer**

**SUITE FOR CLARINET No. 2** (1933)

I. Giocoso II. Lamentation III. Contrast (Sonnet form) IV. Accelerando

**Johanna Beyer**

**STRING QUARTET No. 1** (1933-4)

I. Allegro II. Lento III. Moderato IV. Presto

**Johanna Beyer**

**THREE SONGS FOR CLARINET AND SOPRANO** (1934)

**1. Total Eclipse**

Moving of masses,  
Stirred by astro-phenomena,  
Directing matter,  
Their slave, yet their master,  
Still to be.

Effort, research, action,  
Thought bearing power, strength,  
And courage abundant  
To wrestle from the elements  
The secret kept.

The world is aghast,  
Nature pales in hush  
And feeble protesting  
Sinks into last motions,  
Activity before death.

Birds and beasts bow in fear,  
Frightened leaves tremble,  
Emaciated sunbeams die below swaying grass,  
Leaving the planet colorless,  
Faint, deathlike at rest.

Here and yonder  
Beads of light — lost,  
Erring through valleys of the moon,  
Still shed their love upon earth,  
While shadow-beads pattern designs.

But behold the heavens,  
Phenomenous climax!  
Burstin the shielding surface,  
The fiery glow of the corona  
Circles its dance of life.

And its secrets alight,  
Reaching out beyond spheres,  
Expanding towards searching  
Restless thoughts of men,  
Begging to be known, to be loved.

But though men try,  
Time and again  
These longing elements flee back  
Hiding their shame — “misunderstood” —  
Wearing mourning-veils another time untold

– J.M. Beyer (August 1932)

## **2. To be**

To be a sunbeam, a sparkling ray,  
To fall as raindrop, chattering gay,  
To be a grain of sand, bathing in sun and wind,  
Waiting for tides to come and go —  
To be a tiny shoot, just from home “root”,  
To leaf off from the stem that holds you firm,  
To be a blossom, oh, with spellbound hue,  
Forthcoming fruit promise, crystallized in dew —  
To be a wandering cloud, sailing along,  
To shine as star above, meet moons and suns,  
To rise and fall in curves, in space an time,  
Thus an enduring cycle, majestic, sublime.

– J.M. Beyer (December 1934)

## **3. Universal—Local**

Stars, moons, suns,  
Penetrating love —  
Endless time, infinite space —  
Forever —  
Boundless beauty —

Sleepers, toiling with a minute,  
with a grain of soil —  
Poor foorgotten creatures, dragging on —  
But void,  
Where could be wings!

– J.M. Beyer (July 1932)

**Henry Cowell**  
**THE TIDES OF MANAUNAN** (1912)

solo piano

(‘Manaunan was the god of motion, and long before the creation he sent forth tremendous tides, which swept to and from through the universe, and rhythmically moved the particles and materials of which gods were later to make the suns and worlds.’)

**Henry Cowell**  
**THE MORNING COMETH** (1937)

choir *a cappella*

Flesh weary,  
Spirit vexed,  
I went forth  
To curse and die.  
When lo  
Out beyond gray-tipped Berkshire hills  
Light glints the mist!  
I seem to see the spires of some celestial city of the sky.  
Morning comes,  
And westward above soft flowing Hudson waters  
Full veiled mists  
Part their phantom forms and the mountain range  
Stands revealed  
In spirit free and rock-bound grandeur.  
They grieve not at yesterdays tomorrow  
Nor fear the memory of the wandering years.  
Eastern calm, and western light  
My soul accepts and lives.

– T. Chalmers Furnes

**Johanna Beyer**  
**MOVEMENT FOR TWO PIANOS** (1931)  
*to Henry Cowell*

**Johanna Beyer**  
**THE FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT** (1936)  
choir *a cappella*

I know of an active bee-hive,  
it buzzes and bubbles all day,  
is full of creative ideas,  
a nucleus of a future so gay!

To it come all happy children,  
and adults so young and so old  
to find the key to music,  
to know of the secrets untold.

It all is taught with knowledge,  
with love through games and fun.  
Unavoidably what may happen  
is surely a wonderful thing.

Glad people will breathe in music,  
the babies with their milk  
and soon we will have creators  
of enduring music and skill.

The Federal Music Project,  
the bee-hive I'm talking about,  
is a remarkable, living idea  
with a future, oh, so bright!

– J.M. Beyer

**Henry Cowell**  
**TIGER** (1928)  
solo piano

**Johanna Beyer**  
**BEES**  
solo piano

I n t e r v a l  
Charles Seeger

**THE LETTER to R.C.S (1931)**

solo song

The night is measureless, no voice, no cry,  
Pierces the dark in which the planet swings –  
It is the shadow of her bulk that flings  
So deep a gloom on the enormous sky;  
This timorous dust, this phantom that is I,  
Cowers in shelter, while the evening brings  
A sense of mystery and how all things  
Waver like water and are gliding by.  
Now, while the stars in heaven like blowing sand  
Drift to their darkness, while oblivion  
Hushes the fire of some fading sun,  
I turn the page again – and there they stand,  
Traced by love's fleeting but victorious hand,  
The words: "My darling, my beloved one."

– John Hall Wheelock(1886-1978)

**Ruth Crawford-Seeger**

**STUDY IN MIXED ACCENTS (1928)**

solo piano

**Ruth Crawford-Seeger**

**CHANT 1930**

choir with solo soprano

**Johanna Beyer**

**MOVEMENT FOR DOUBLE BASS AND PIANO (1936)**

**Johanna Beyer**

**BALLAD OF THE STAR-EATER (1934)**

soprano and clarinet

Hunger assailed me with sharp, cold pain.  
I had searched for food, and searched in vain.  
I had found no berries, no pulpy root;  
and the boughs above me bore no fruit.

So I lay in the grass and gnawed a blade  
and I can't be sure, perhaps I prayed.  
I only know that suddenly  
a splendid knowledge came to me.

Stars were twinkling overhead;  
on these I knew that I might be fed.  
So up I rose with quick, glad cry  
and began to scale the wall of the sky.

Here was a crevice, there a cleft,  
so I went climbing, right hand then left.  
My breath came short, the quick air strong,  
but I thought brave songs as I climbed and clung.

Below the horizon stretched and grew  
'til the earth spun free in a tide of blue.  
Weary and stiff but fiercely proud  
I swung at last to a ledge of cloud.

Then stars were around and over me  
rare, ripe nuts on a heavenly tree.  
I crushed and cracked them and crunched the meat.  
Oh, they were rich and spicy sweet!

I crushed and cracked them and from my hand  
the shells slipped down in a meteor band.  
The strength flowed through me from toe to crown,  
I left my cloud perch and came on down.

I can still see the sky-dust on toe and heel  
where I dug for footing; and I still can feel  
the curve of clouds, where I clung to these  
with gripping fingers and gripping knees.

Now I walk the earth without care,  
though roots elude me and boughs are bare.  
For stars still prickle my finger-tips,  
and the taste of stars is warm on my lips.

I fear no hunger with sharp, cold pain;  
if it dare assail me I shall climb again.

– Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet

**THREE CHORAL PIECES (1937)**

**1. The Main Deep**

The long-rolling,  
Steady-pouring,  
Deep-trenched,  
Green billow.

The wide-topped,  
Unbroken,  
Green-glacid,  
Slow-sliding.

Cold-flushing,  
On-on-on,  
Chill rushing,  
Hush-hushing,  
Hush-hushing.

– James Stephens *A Poetry Recital* 1925

**2. The Composers' Forum Laboratory**

If you are a composer,  
and don't know what to do,  
go to the Forum-Laboratory  
they'll surely hear you.  
Whether 'old' or 'new',  
abstract or true,  
quite fancy or plain,  
for orchestra or choir,  
percussion or piano,  
woodwinds or strings,  
a Mass or a dance,  
they'll give you your chance,  
and furnish an audience, so big as the hall,  
who comes to see, to hear, to know,  
whether it is really so  
that we have composers, quite a long row,  
who will bear testimony of our epoch  
So great, so tense,  
so vast, so immense,  
full of vigour and strength

fateful at glance	The greatest, active, living idea
but of future enhanced	of present and future time and space
and response we get spontaneously	and noblest monument of our race
just you are being criticised on the spot	
whether you like it or not,	
and all is being recorded,	
so you better be for it,	
The Composers Forum Laboratory,	

– J.M. Beyer

### 3. 'The People, yes'

Sleep is a suspension midway  
and a conundrum of shadows  
lost in meadows of the moon.  
The people sleep.

Ai! ai! the people sleep.  
Yet the sleepers toss in sleep  
and an end comes of sleep  
and the sleepers wake.  
Ai! ai! the sleepers wake! . . .

– Carl Sandburg, from “The People Speak” 1936

#### **Johanna Beyer**

#### **STRING QUARTET No. 2 (1936)**

I. Allegretto II. Largo III. Moderato IV. Allegro quasi presto

#### **Johanna Beyer**

#### **HAVE FAITH! (1937)**

soprano and flute

Here is a song for you,  
oh, nightingale!  
a song of what?  
of hope, of future, present, past?  
it does not matter.  
But essential is,  
that you and I and all the others  
have faith in things to come,  
in things that passed, and are  
and we must try to understand  
and love and help each other,  
have faith in things to come,  
have faith!

– J.M. Beyer

*When Johanna Beyer wrote the poems for her Three Songs for Soprano and Clarinet, “Total Eclipse, “Universal – Local” and “To Be”, she ironically forecast the tragic poetry of her life, which, along with her work, has been totally eclipsed in a shadow of obscurity.*

(John Kennedy and Larry Polansky, ““Total Eclipse”: The Music of Johanna Magdalena Beyer,’ *Musical Quarterly* 1996.)

Today’s concert focuses on the remarkable figure of Johanna Magdalena Beyer (1888–1944), whose rediscovery in the 1990s, a half-century after her death, has a special relation to Astra’s own performance history. The concert is held in conjunction with a recording project for New World Records in New York.

As a German immigrant to New York in 1924, Johanna Beyer joined the vital circle of 1920s/1930s composers whose work provides the link between the earlier generation of Charles Ives and the well-known names of postwar American music, such as Carter, Cage and Nancarrow. She studied composition with three of the most important – Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell and Ruth Crawford, each of them represented in this concert – and was a passionate supporter and activist in the contemporary music scene, although reportedly an intensely shy and solitary person. She also continuously produced works of her own, ranging from the entirely new genre of percussion-ensemble to a large array of chamber and vocal combinations that she observed being used by other composers in the group. The young John Cage took her percussion music on tour with his ensemble, but much of her output appears to have remained ignored during her lifetime.

Following the re-emergence of Beyer’s manuscripts in the New York public library in the 1990s, the composer and researcher Larry Polansky on a visit to Melbourne made available materials for Astra concerts in 1996 at the St Kilda Town Hall and in 1997 at the Brunswick Town Hall. These performances included world premieres (very possibly) of a number of works, such as the String Quartet No.2 and the choral pieces – others being heard for the first time since the 1930s. In the succeeding decade, Johanna Beyer’s music has become more widely known and recognized. The recording company New World Records has embarked on a series of CD productions, which include the release last year of Miwako Abe’s recording with Michael Kieran Harvey of Beyer’s Suite for Violin and Piano. The American publisher Frog Peak Music has progressively brought out editions of the scores, some of them with Australian editors, Kim Bastin, Marguerite Boland and Rohan Drape.

This concert revisiting Beyer’s music has come about from a request by New World Records for Astra to undertake a recording of the chamber and choral music for release in 2008. The works from our 1996 programme are supplemented by others, which dramatically widen and deepen the picture of Johanna Beyer – in particular the String Quartet No.1, heard probably for the first time since its premiere in 1936, and the Movement for Two Pianos. We are fortunate to have assembled some of Melbourne’s leading performers for the concert and recording.

Johanna Beyer's music is a striking combination of an eccentric individuality with the great shared array of adventurous techniques that emerged from the teaching of Seeger and Cowell, and from the older tradition of American progressive music in Ives. The dazzling textures, rhythmic overlays, sound-formations out of noise, and 'process forms' of these 1930s composers were developed quite separately from European models. They anticipate some developments of 40 years later, to be hailed as innovations in composers such as Ligeti and Xenakis. In most of Beyer's ensemble (and choral) pieces we hear the characteristic 'heterogeneous' sound of American music already established in the string quartets of Charles Ives – different voices and rhythms going their own ways and creating their own events. To this is added her personality, at different times quirky and sardonic, as in the String Quartet No.2 where a familiar Mozart tune is transported through an alien territory, or serene and transfigurative as in the earlier quartet.

Beyer's greatest talent is possibly as a melodist – in the continuum of expanding and receding shapes of the solo clarinet Suite, in the detailing of short motives across the voices of the choruses, or in the vast melodic sea that forms the second movement of the String Quartet No.1. In this quartet we get an idea of what large and substantial works she might have produced if she had been given more opportunity.

The concert opens with the latest piece of the programme, the Mass of 1939 by another student of Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, then in his early twenties. He was reportedly sitting in a San Francisco tram when he heard the news of the outbreak of war, and immediately conceived of a Mass for chanting choir and percussion – the Kyrie has the metal of brake drums and piccolo, the Gloria is built around the image of pealing church bells. The piece stands for the end of a highly creative era: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford abandoned composition for activism in Left causes, in folk music research and children's education. Johanna Beyer died during the war years at the age of 56 following several years of the progressive illness ALS.

–JMcC

COMPACT DISCS  
available at this concert

NEW WORLD RECORDS

**Miwako Abe. violin, Michael Kieran Harvey, piano:**

Works by Johanna Beyer, George Antheil, Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford,  
Stefan Wolpe, Charles Dodge, Larry Polansky and David Mahler.

ASTRA

- 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,  
recorded at Humble's last public 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...**" Astra Choir, soloists & ensemble  
Stefan Wolpe with Webern, Beethoven, Brahms.  
Choral works with song, melodrama, instrumental solo and chamber music  
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...**" Astra Choir, soloists & ensemble  
Bach, Lechner, Busoni, Kagel, Hindemith,  
Martin Friedel, Wolfgang Hufschmidt, Paul Celan.  
from Bach via chant, speech-chorus & poetry to Busoni *Fantasia contrappuntistica*.  
Kim Bastin & Joan Pollock, piano duo;  
Margaret Ricketts & William Henderson, speakers, conducted by John McCaughey.

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Astra Manager: Bobbie Hodge  
Recording: Michael Hewes  
Production assistance: Chris Smith

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Marguerite Boland, ANU; Allan Walker, Joan Pollock.

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