

BLUE SILENCE

COMPLETE WORKS FOR STRING QUARTET BY

ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

ACACIA QUARTET



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CD1

1	Fast Blue Village 2	5:14
2	Eliza Aria	3:18
3	Moody Tango	3:06
4	Mezmer	3:43
5	Road To Harvest	4:21
6	Kwong Song	3:36
7	Luke's Painting	2:17
8	Second Door on the Left	2:40

From Anna Magdalena's Notebook [17:00]

9	I. Polonaise (1)	1:54
10	II. Musette	2:46
11	III. Aria	3:22
12	IV. Menuet (1)	2:45
13	V. Polonaise (2)	1:46
14	VI. Menuet (2)	1:46

Total for CD 1 **42:34**

CD2

1	Russian Rag	2:14
2	Butterflying	3:49
3	Pink-Breasted Robin	2:04
4	Blue Silence	7:08
5	Blue Rose	2:57

Silver Suite [11:37]

6	Burnished Silver	2:44
7	Silver Pearls	3:06
8	Silver Poetry	2:46
9	Silver Eucalypt	3:01

10	Grotesk	2:09
11	Drinking Song	1:31
12	Charleston Noir	7:15
13	Naive Waltz	1:40
14	Slicked Back Tango	1:38

Total for CD 2 **44:02**

Total Playing Time **1:26:36**

ACACIA QUARTET

Lisa Stewart Violin
Myee Clohessy Violin
Stefan Duwe Viola
Anna Martin-Scrase Cello

BLUE SILENCE



Elena Kats-Chernin

Elena Kats-Chernin's effervescent music has made her the superstar of Australian composers. At concerts she is easy to spot with her unruly curly hair and bright clothes, and her vivacious personality draws a crowd of people. Three television documentaries have been made about her; she has an exclusive photographer and several personal copyists; and she is the most prolific Australian composer today, with an output of around 300 works.

At the age of fourteen Elena entered the Gnesin Academy of Music in Moscow and studied there for three years until her family moved to Sydney. She studied at the Sydney Conservatorium and with Helmut Lachenmann in Germany where she began to show her dramatic flair writing experimental music for theatre.

Experimental music began to lose its appeal shortly after her return to Australia in 1994. Her pieces became her diary and she began a series related to her son's illness; music that was simpler and gently laced with melancholy. Elena won early distinction for the sardonic humour and originality in her music – this is the composer who wrote a Charleston for four ponderous double basses and built a piece on the rhythm of a clock – but as her voice mellowed she has won over an even broader audience.

Her music is regularly performed by ensembles like the Sydney Symphony, Australian Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Ensemble Modern, North Carolina Symphony and the Komische Oper. She has been the feature composer at festivals in America, Finland, Berlin and Australia. The diversity of her work is as outstanding as the quantity and includes operas, concertos, choral works, theatre and dance works, instrumental music and film scores. Her wide repertoire can be heard on CDs released by ABC Classics, Vox Australis and Tall Poppies as well as on German and UK labels.

Elena's rigorous technical facility, enormous capacity for work and a seemingly endless stream of creativity has resulted in an international reputation that has made her a beacon of success for Australian composers. Her work is marked by momentum and optimism, characteristics that have been essential to her survival.

The composer says, "I like to have a colourful voice, I don't want it to be boring, or bleak, or just black and white. I like to have optimism even among my dark moments, basically life on the bright side."

COMPLETE WORKS FOR STRING QUARTET

ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

Most of Elena's string quartets are miniatures. They are often revisions of pieces written for other instruments (the composer prefers to call them re-versions) and present a cross section of Elena's musical styles. In these playful, intense pieces we see the composer moving with superb fluidity across the boundaries between serious music and entertainment. More so than in many of her large scale works we see the inner thoughts of the composer revealed; her compassion, suffering, joy and tireless energy.

Elena has written for the string quartet since the beginning of her career and her early quartets are edged with dark satire. **Drinking Song** (1991-92) was written for the German theatre piece 'Return' and its simple three chord harmonic progression feels half-crazed from constantly changing time signatures and the drunken sliding of upper strings. **Grotesk** was written for the same theatre work and is propelled by a fast blues bass line. The simple, aimless melody in **Naive Waltz** (1993) hints at the lyrical style Elena would develop later. The chords change infrequently and often clash with the melody line, a technique the composer uses frequently to create tension.

The dissonant, ungainly **Charleston Noir** (1996) is an early example of the composer's fondness for dances. The bright glow of the harmonies in **Russian Rag** (1996) signals Elena's move to a simpler style. This is one of Elena's best-known dances and the version for large chamber ensemble was named in the ABC Classic FM top 100 chamber music pieces in 2008. **Slicked Back Tango** (1996) comes from the soundtrack to a documentary on Barrie Kosky and is similar to Russian Rag with every note perfectly evoking the tango genre. **Silver Eucalypt** (2006) continues Elena's fascination with the tango form.

A cluster of works for Clarity Clarinet Quartet were moulded into string quartet pieces, often changing significantly in character as the composer explored the colour and blend offered by strings. The gently rising arpeggios in **Burnished Silver** (2006) move between just two chords with rippling buoyancy. The repetitive simplicity is typical to many of Elena's works and has led critics to make comparisons with minimalist composers. In **Pink-Breasted Robin** (2006) the layers of rising melodies give the sense of ascending a mountain, but this time the harmony is built on a bluesy bass line. **Second Door To the Left** (2006) was written for Elena's

youngest son Nick and the constantly changing harmony is built around a repeated rhythmic pattern – another favourite compositional technique.

Blue Silence (2006) was written (originally for cello and piano) for a book launch and exhibition by artists with schizophrenia. The string quartet version opens with icy tremolo – the string players causing their bows to shiver on the strings – and a melody of descending thirds. Long, intense pedal notes beneath slowly moving chords create a bluesy, thick and anguished sound. It has a stillness and sadness unique among Elena's works. **Fast Blue Village 2** (2006) comes from a group of pieces called Village Idiot and was inspired by a poem by schizophrenic artist Graeme Doyle. The composer draws on techniques from her early works including icy harmonics, aggressive syncopations and darker harmonies. **Kwong Song** (2006) also has a melancholic feel generated by clashing harmonies in the inner two string parts framed by slow stepping arpeggios of the cello and a languid melody in the violin.

But Elena's soundworld is more typically optimistic, perhaps best encapsulated in the popular **Eliza Aria** (2003) from her award-winning ballet *Wild Swans*. In this version for string quartet the naively simple vocal line is given a sinewy, silvery sheen when played on violin and the plucked arpeggios give a folk feel to the accompaniment. **Silver Poetry** (2007) is similar but in a slower, tango form; **Silver Pearls** (2006) has a similar three-quaver upbeat in the melody line, while **Butterflying** (2003) is slightly darker. **Road To Harvest** (2006) is a study in beautiful melody writing and **Luke's Painting** (2007) has a gentle questioning.

Almost all of Elena's works are written in minor keys. **Blue Rose** (2001) is one of the exceptions. It is a short, snappy version of *For Rosa* which was written in memory of Rosa Zervas and is based on two folk melodies. The uneven bar lengths give a whirling, dance-like feel and the piece grows increasingly earthy and joyful as it progresses.

Elena's technical facility is revealed when she emulates her favourite composers. *Recollecting ASTORoids* (2010) was written for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in tribute to Astor Piazzolla. **Mezmer** and **Moody Tango** from this suite work especially well as string quartet pieces. **Mezmer** has an intimate, smoky feel with a bluesy violin solo laden with vibrato while the inner string parts in **Moody Tango** capture the wheezing graininess of the bandoneon.

From Anna Magdalena's Notebook (2006) pays tribute to Bach and his wife Anna Magdalena – mother, wife, housekeeper, singer and (according to Elena) general superwoman. The composer takes her favourite works from the Notebook and –her rigorous Russian harmonic training coming to the fore – appropriates not just Bach's melodies but also his harmonic development and rhythmic momentum into her own language. *Polonaise in G minor* is given a minimalist repetitive feel while *Musette* has

a fast cello bass line with the original melody heard in syncopated fragments. *Aria* is arranged as a chorale with the melody 'Bist Du bei Mir' stated tenderly in the cello towards the end. Bach's harmonic structure is given a hint of jazz treatment in *Menuet 1* with a plucked bass line, and in *Polonaise 2* Elena uses a canon – Bach's own technique! – to reimagine the decorative original melody into a complex new piece. The final movement *Menuet 2* uses mathematical formulas (another Bach trick) with the original material played by different instruments at opposing speeds. The suite is a perfect display of miniature writing – concise, distilled clarity.

Composer profile and program notes by Rosalind Appleby

Rosalind Appleby is the author of *Women of Note: The Rise of Australian Women Composers*, published by Fremantle Press.



ACACIA QUARTET

The Acacia Quartet is comprised of four remarkable musicians: Lisa Stewart and Myee Clohessy (violins), Stefan Duwe (viola) and Anna Martin-Scrase (cello). Their diverse careers led them to play in chamber ensembles and orchestras the world over before forming the Acacia Quartet in 2010.

Their performances couple established repertoire with the unorthodox and have notably included debut performances of contemporary compositions. In the short time the group has been together, they have collaborated with acclaimed soprano Jane Sheldon, bassoonist Kim Walker, singer songwriter Katie Noonan, vocal ensemble Halcyon and composers Elena Kats-Chernin, Gordon Kerry and Lyle Chan.

The Acacia Quartet developed a special relationship with Elena Kats-Chernin when she heard them play her music in 2011. Kats-Chernin's invitation to record her complete work for string quartet resulted in the world-premiere recording made in the presence of the composer.

LISA STEWART VIOLIN

Born in Sydney, Lisa studied the violin from the age of 5 to 12 with Suzuki teachers Hiroko Primrose and Yasuki Nakamura, representing Suzuki Australia, performing solos in Japan, Australia, USA and New Zealand.

Continuing studies with Christopher Kimber, Lisa won 1st prize Wenkart Competition Australia and was a string finalist in the ABC Young Performers competition. She was awarded two Australia Council Grants, facilitating her study in Germany with Igor Ozim.

Lisa then spent the next 13 years living in Germany, performing and recording internationally. Highlights include Concerto Köln, Ensemble Fünf, Cologne Chamber Orchestra, Guest 3rd Concertmaster and principal 2nd violin with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and solo recordings of Bach Double Concertos for oboe & violin and two violins for Naxos with the Cologne Chamber Orchestra.

Returning to Sydney, Lisa has been Guest Concertmaster of the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, West Australian Symphony Orchestra and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. She has studied fine arts at the National Art School and has enjoyed residencies at Arthur Boyd's Bundanon both as a violinist and artist.

Lisa now enjoys teaching violin, illustrating children's picture books for Scholastic press and performing with Acacia Quartet.

MYEE CLOHESSY VIOLIN

Myee began the violin at ten with Ernest Llewellyn and within eight years won 1st Prize at the QYO National Youth Concerto Competition and joined the Australian Chamber Orchestra. In 1989 Myee left Australia to study with Alice Waten in Hong Kong and David Takeno in London. There she won 1st Prize at the Royal Overseas League Competition, was selected as Concertmaster of the Jeunesses Musicales World Orchestra and performed with the London Festival Orchestra and London Soloists Chamber Orchestra.

In 1994 Myee moved to Norway and played with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra as Principal 2nd Violin and then Assistant Concertmaster in 1997. During these years Myee led the 'Arctimus' ensemble and was a Guest Concertmaster with the Risør Festival Strings, Norbotten Chamber Orchestra and Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

Returning home in 2003 Myee has toured with Australian Chamber Orchestra and Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and guest led the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Pinchgut Opera and the Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra. As a chamber music she has performed at festivals with Natsuko Yoshimoto, Dimity Hall, Neal Peres da Costa, Julian Smiles, Emma Jane Murphy, Jane Sheldon and Lucinda Moon. The last few years Myee has dedicated herself to Acacia and her two beautiful daughters.

STEFAN DUWE VIOLA

Stefan started playing at the age of six with Hedwig Thierfelder in Osnabruck, Germany.

His teachers included Marcel Charpentier, Konrad Grahe and Emile Cantor. Stefan completed his Bachelor of Music in 1992 at the Folkwang Hochschule in Essen.

From 1992 on he worked in Germany with the Folkwang Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Hungarica, Cologne Chamber Orchestra, Theater Nordhausen, Philharmonie Essen, Düsseldorfer Sinfoniker, Staatstheater Koblenz and Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen.

He also attended various master classes with Konrad Grahe, Thomas Brandis, Serge Collot and Emile Cantor.

Since moving to Australia, he has been working as a freelance artist, recording various film scores and appearing regularly various ensembles, including the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. He recorded the 6th Brandenburg Concerto for the ABC and has turned his focus to chamber music since the formation of the Acacia Quartet.

ANNA MARTIN-SCRASE CELLO

Born in Vermont, Anna began playing the cello aged nine. At 16 she was chosen as her state's scholar for the Interlochen Arts Camp before moving to Salzburg, Austria, where she would remain for ten years. Anna completed a Bachelor of Music Performance at the University Mozarteum, where she studied with Astrid Sulz, Michael Tomasi and Heidi Litschauer. She has attended master classes with Detlef Mielke, Michael Beckmann and Reinhard Latzko.

Whilst in Austria, Anna performed throughout Europe with many orchestras and ensembles including the Vienna Youth Orchestra and the Salzburg Chamber Soloists. She was a member of the Dommusik (Salzburg Cathedral ensemble) and performed at the Salzburg Festival with her quartet.

Since moving to Australia in 2008, Anna has focused her interest on her young daughter, her teaching, and Acacia. Anna also performs in the Double Standard Jazz Duo and enjoys playing Baroque Cello.

Executive Producers

Lyle Chan, Anna Cerneaz

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Lyle Chan

Recording Engineer

Bob Scott / Dodgy Sound

Assistant Engineers

**Sam Weston and Simon Todkill /
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Ben Drury

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Bridget Elliot (Elena Kats-Chernin),
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