

ROSS HARRIS

Symphony No. 4
'To the Memory of
Mahinārangi
Tocker'

Cello Concerto

Li-Wei Qin, Cello

Auckland
Philharmonia
Orchestra

Garry Walker
Brett Dean

Ross Harris (b. 1945)
Cello Concerto • Symphony No. 4, 'Dedicated to the Memory of Mahinārangi Tocker'

Ross Harris was born in Amberley, New Zealand. He studied in Christchurch and Wellington and taught at the Victoria University of Wellington Music Department for over thirty years. In 1985 he was awarded a QSM for his opera *Waituhi* (with libretto by Witi Ihimaera) and in 1990 he received the CANZ Citation for services to New Zealand music. Since 2004 he has worked as a freelance composer including residencies with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and Victoria University. His relationship with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra has been unique as they have (in nine years) given the première of five symphonies and his *Cello Concerto*, all written for the orchestra. Harris has been awarded the SOUNZ Contemporary Award (the most prestigious annual prize offered in New Zealand) four times and been a finalist eight times in its 15-year history.

Harris's *Cello Concerto* was inspired by the playing of cellist Li-Wei Qin and funded by Christopher Marshall. Li-Wei Qin's "incredible speed and clarity of articulation" matched with profound musicianship caught Harris's ear, and he decided that he wanted to write a concerto with Li-Wei Qin as soloist. This première of his 'dark-to-light oily-hued concerto' was given by Li-Wei Qin and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra under the baton of Garry Walker, in Auckland Town Hall in 2012.

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Ross Harris is a master of beginnings and endings. What happens in between is equally important, but the opening has to grab your attention and the final note has to spark the applause. With his *Cello Concerto*, Harris does both. From the lowest note possible in the orchestral basses, barely audible and made even more mysterious by a quiet rumbling from the bass drum, the cello soloist's entry starts on the same lowest note, though you can immediately single the soloist from the orchestral background. There is nowhere for the cello to take the melody other than upward, and this is what the long singing lines in this concerto consistently do; they emerge from the dark, they climb upwards, they grow in intensity, picking up extravagant decorations as they go.

The concerto is in one continuous movement, yet falls into clearly delineated sections. Rhythmic dance sections flow into lyrical meditations rich in counterpoint. The woodwind instruments and soloist often seem to be in conversation, picking up each other's ideas, imitating, anticipating, extending and decorating them. Those meditations are in turn interrupted by exuberant orchestral outbursts. The most violent of these is wonderfully tamed by the soloist's cadenza, where his fortissimo high-note entrance is the most dramatic moment in the concerto. The cadenza is a brilliant piece of virtuoso writing, and when the orchestra rejoins the soloist it is in a non-stop, helter-skelter rush towards the final unison.

Rod Bliss

From an article in *The New Zealand Listener*, May 2012
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Mahinārangi Tocker and Ross Harris

Photo: Robert Catto

Symphony No. 4, 'To the Memory of Mahinārangi Tocker' (1955–2008) was commissioned by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra with funding from Creative New Zealand. It is a portrait of the Maori/Jewish composer, poet and songwriter, Mahinārangi Tocker who died tragically three years before the piece was composed.

In spite of their very different cultural backgrounds, Tocker and Harris shared a musical curiosity; this symphony is a representation of that. As noted by New Zealand composer Victoria Kelly, at a pre-performance talk at the work's première, "Mahinārangi's words serve as points of departure for the music and excerpts of her music are scattered throughout the piece. *Symphony No. 4* is a testament to their friendship."

Each of the five movements begins with a brief reference to one of Mahinārangi's songs, the funeral ringing of bells and the interwoven sounds of solo viola and harp reminiscent of Mahinārangi's guitar. As the work progresses, the solo viola, played by APO principal violist Robert Ashworth, takes on more and more the character and personality of Mahinārangi.

Below is a brief outline of the song references and a brief explanation for each of the five movements:

- I. *The sea mimics a thousand applauding kanuka*
 This movement evokes the sound of waves on a beach with turbulence and spray evoked by swirling woodwind and snare drums.
- II. *I'm happy, dressed for laughter.*
Cave me wild under tonight's moon
 This dance-like movement is a portrait of Mahinārangi – wild and wonderful!
- III. *The window fogs*
To track my finger
Smudge my eyes in mist
In questions asked of beauty
 A slow, almost sparsely textured movement – poetry of emptiness
- IV. *I'm the only one turning*
The world has stopped
 In this movement solo viola spins wildly against sustained chords in the orchestra. The music builds to a kind of madness and collapses into the fifth movement.
- V. *No sky in her day*
Nor clouds below her feet
No body to shroud her in linen
Of earth's flax woven warmth
 The last movement calms down into a lament ending with a quote from the Mahinārangi Tocker song *Forever*. The words of the song are:
I will not walk these streets of angels,
Into forever alone

Ross Harris



Photo: Dong Wang

Li-Wei Qin

Li-Wei Qin has appeared all over the world as a soloist and as a chamber musician. He has enjoyed successful artistic collaborations with leading orchestras including the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the London Philharmonic, the Prague Symphony, the BBC Symphony and the Sydney Symphony, as well as chamber orchestras such as the Kremerata Baltica and the Munich, Zurich and Australian Chamber Orchestras. In recital and chamber music, he is a regular guest at the Wigmore Hall, the BBC Proms and the City of London, Jerusalem, Rheingau and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Music Festivals, with musicians such as Daniel Hope, Nobuko Imai, Mischa Maisky, David Finckel, Wu Han, Vladimir Mendelssohn and Peter Frankl, among many others. Recent appearances include performances with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, the NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Platz, the BBC Symphony, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Auckland Philharmonia and the Adelaide, Melbourne and Singapore Symphony Orchestras, as well as appearances as guest artist for the Lincoln Centre Chamber Music Society, New York, the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and a recital at the Melbourne Recital Centre. Li-Wei Qin has also recently recorded the Elgar *Cello Concerto* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He plays a 1780 Joseph Guaragnini cello, generously loaned by Dr and Mrs Wilson Goh. Li-Wei Qin is Associate Professor at Yong Siew Toh Conservatorium of Music, Singapore.



Photo: Adrian Malloch

Robert Ashworth

Robert Ashworth is principal viola of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, a position he has also held with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, as well as the post of assistant-principal for the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. He is violist with the Jade String Quartet in Auckland, and can be heard performing as soloist and chamber musician throughout the country. He is twice a recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts Award for Emerging Artists, and has performed with various groups at international chamber music festivals in Europe, North America and Japan.



Garry Walker

Winner of the 1999 Leeds Conductor's Competition, Scottish-born Garry Walker studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. In October 1999, at very short notice, he replaced an indisposed Daniele Gatti in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's opening concert of their Barbican season. Thus began an ongoing relationship leading to his appointment as Permanent Guest Conductor, a post he has now relinquished. Garry Walker was Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2003–2007, Principal Conductor of the Paragon Ensemble and now enjoys a close association with Red Note Ensemble, Scotland's leading contemporary music ensemble. He has worked with orchestras across the world including all the BBC orchestras, the Hallé, the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Amsterdam Nieuw Ensemble, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Musikkollegium Winterthur, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and the Utah Symphony Orchestra. An experienced opera conductor, Garry Walker conducted David McVicar's production of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and Raskatov's *A Dog's Heart* for English National Opera, Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage* for Scottish Opera and Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine* at the Linbury Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Abroad he has conducted *Curlew River* for Lyon Opera and a new production by Calixto Bieito of Hosakawa's *Hanjo* at the Ruhr Triennale.



Photo: Robert Piccoli

Brett Dean

Brett Dean, born in 1961, is one of the most internationally performed composers of his generation. His music is championed by many leading conductors worldwide including Sir Simon Rattle, Marin Alsop, David Robertson, Andris Nelsons and Simone Young. In 2009 he won the Grawemeyer Award for music composition for his Violin Concerto *The Lost Art of Letter Writing* and in 2011 received the Elise L. Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York. Commissions include a new *Trumpet Concerto* for Håkan Hardenberger commissioned by Grafenegg Festival and the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Danish National Symphony and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras. Dean also enjoys a busy career as a viola player, and since 2005 has been performing his own *Viola Concerto* with many of the top orchestras worldwide. He also has a blossoming conducting career, with recent and upcoming engagements including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Melbourne Symphony, the BBC Philharmonic and Northern Sinfonia.

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra is the city's leading performing arts organisation, and Auckland's only full-time professional symphony orchestra. In more than 80 annual performances the APO presents a full season of symphonic works showcasing many of the world's finest classical musicians. Recent and upcoming soloists include artists of the calibre of James Ehnes, Cameron Carpenter, Stephen Layton and Dame Evelyn Glennie. The APO is also proud to work with leading local arts organisations including New Zealand Opera, the Royal New Zealand Ballet, Auckland Arts Festival and the Michael Hill International Violin Competition. Through its numerous education initiatives the APO offers opportunities to more than 20,000 young people and adults nationwide to participate in music, ranging from hip-hop and rock to contemporary and classical. More than 100,000 people hear the orchestra live each year, with many thousands more reached through special events, recordings and other media.



Photo: Adrian Malloch

Commissioned by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Ross Harris's *Fourth Symphony* is a tribute to and a portrait of poet and songwriter Mahinārangi Tocker. Her movingly evocative words and songs serve as references for each movement, while a solo viola increasingly takes on her character and personality. The *Cello Concerto* was inspired by the brilliant playing of cellist Li-Wei Qin, its single continuous movement a dramatic dark-to-light journey filled with rich singing lines and extravagant virtuosity. Ross Harris's *Symphonies 2 and 3* can be heard on Naxos 8.572574.

Ross
HARRIS
(b. 1945)

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|---|-------|--|------|
| 1 Cello Concerto (2011)* | 24:23 | 4 III. The window fogs
To track my finger
Smudge my eyes in mist
In questions asked of beauty | 7:25 |
| Symphony No. 4, 'To the
Memory of Mahinārangi
Tocker' (2011)† | 29:28 | 5 IV. I'm the only one turning
The World has stopped – | 3:38 |
| 2 I. The sea mimics a thousand
applauding kanuka | 5:52 | 6 V. No sky in her day
Nor clouds below her feet
No body to shroud her in linen
Of earth's flax woven warmth | 6:46 |
| 3 II. I'm happy, dressed for
laughter. Cave me wild under
tonight's moon | 5:46 | | |

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Li-Wei Qin, Cello*
Robert Ashworth, Viola†
Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
Garry Walker* • Brett Dean†

Recorded at Auckland Town Hall, New Zealand, 6–7 April 2011 (Symphony) and 3 May 2012 (Concerto)
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Li-Wei Qin appears courtesy of Universal Music China
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