

VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

BORDERLANDS

20-28 OCTOBER 2023

FRANKLIN - TULLAH - HAWLEY HOUSE
MUNATRIK/STANLEY - SCOTTSDALE
ST HELENS - NIPALUNA/HOBART

PRESENTED BY VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

VAN DIEMEN'S BAND ACKNOWLEDGES WITH DEEP RESPECT THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND LUTRUWITA (TASMANIA) ON WHICH WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE TO MAKE MUSIC.

ARTISTS

VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

JULIA FREDERSDORFF BAROQUE VIOLIN
SIMONE SLATTERY BAROQUE VIOLIN, RECORDER
KATIE YAP VIOLA
LAURA VAUGHAN VIOLA DA GAMBA
ANTON BABA VIOLA DA GAMBA, CELLO
DONALD NICOLSON HARPSICHORD
SIMON MARTYN-ELLIS THEORBO

TOURING TEAM

JULIA FREDERSDORFF ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
JENNIFER KERR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RACHEL MEYERS COMMUNITY & SPECIAL PROJECTS
KATIE YAP ARTISTIC COORDINATOR
SAMUEL TAN PRODUCTION & BOX OFFICE

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

This program was conceived at a time when domestic borders were on everyone's mind. COVID-enforced restrictions gave us all a demonstration of what it's like to be contained to smaller spaces; to be shut in – or shut out.

With ongoing conflicts and war escalating around the globe, we find ourselves performing a program of Baroque music that reflects the current zeitgeist, as well as a theme three hundred years removed from present times.

Borderlands explores the music which came from those places 'in between': the marginals, the people whose geography confused their cultural identity, or those who were constantly under threat of invasion from cultures different from their own.

Art born out of a time of conflict, no matter how long ago, must reflect in some way the same emotions we feel at present. Music is a tool for expression, for escapism, to have a direct influence over our emotions, with the power to change our mood. It is a form of catharsis for the composer, the performer, and the audience alike, and events such as war only serve to amplify the need for it. Even in the most adverse of circumstances, we play music to give others courage, to heal, or just to escape that which is almost impossible to bear. The greatest works of art soar in the aftermath of terrible events, like a phoenix from the ashes.

PROGRAM

DIETRICH BECKER Sonata No. 5 in F
(1623-1679) from Musicalische Frühlings-Früchte (Hamburg 1668)
Adagio-Allegro-Adagio-[gigue]-Adagio

BORDERLANDS SUITE (ASSEMBLED BY JULIA FREDERSDORFF)

SAMUEL SCHEIDT Galliard battaglia à 5 SSWV 59
(1587-1654)

DIETRICH BECKER Paduan (from Musicalische Frühlings-Früchte)

JEAN DE SAINTE-COLOMBE Les Pleurs (from Concerts à 2 violes égales)
(1640-1700)

SAMUEL SCHEIDT Courant à 4 SSWV 57

GEORG MUFFAT Passacaglia from Sonata No 5 in G Major (Salzburg 1682)
(1653-1704)

TOMASO GIOVANNI ALBINONI Sinfonia à 5 Op. 2, No. 3 in C Major
(1671-1751) (Venice 1700)
Largo-Allegro-Grave-Allegro

ANONYMOUS ATTR: H.I.F. BIBER Sonata Jucunda
(1644-1704) (Manuscript from the Kromêříž Collection, Czech Republic)

DONALD NICOLSON Spirals*
(B.1979) (Melbourne 2022)

*Commissioned by Van Diemen's Band

DURATION

This program runs for 60 minutes with no interval.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

'Borders? I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people.'
Thor Heyerdahl

The world has changed dramatically in the two years between Van Diemen's Band's devising of this program and the performance you're about to hear, freighting the term 'borderlands' with renewed and disturbing resonance. But hearing this Baroque music at a time of present-day geopolitical stress is to have a kinship with the circumstances of its composers, many of whom experienced first-hand the tensions of seventeenth-century Europe; in particular, within the German states of the Holy Roman Empire riven by the Thirty Years War that ended in 1648. For VDB Artistic Director Julia Fredersdorff, the German music of this post-war period written by the generations preceding Johann Sebastian Bach is an endlessly fertile and innovative legacy.

The trading city of Hamburg was completing its fortifications against the War when composer **Dietrich Becker** was born there in 1623. Initially an organist before switching to violin, his playing career took him to other states such as Schleswig-Holstein and Saxony, and as far afield as Stockholm, before returning to his hometown in 1662 where he ultimately became a Cantor in the city's cathedral. His *Musicalische Frühlings-Früchte* (Musical Spring-Fruits) was published in 1668 and dedicated to Hamburg's city council in gratitude for the granting of a full-time job after years as a freelancer. The F major Sonata from the collection is an example of Becker's acquaintance with other national styles beyond the border, notably the Italianate contrasting of fast and slow sections, and the French predilection of the time for writing in five instrumental parts. (Elsewhere in the series, he appears to be the first composer ever to use the sequence of French dances Allemande-Courante-Sarabande-Gigue in successive movements, setting a precedent for J.S. Bach and others.)

Fredersdorff has assembled a **Borderlands Suite** from works whose combined *affect* suggests to her a trajectory of emotions stemming from war and its aftermath. The opening *Galliard battaglia*, with its evocation of opposing trumpet calls on the field of war, comes from a three-volume set of instrumental works by Halle's court Kapellmeister **Samuel Scheidt** in the 1620s. War and plague would later take away Scheidt's employment and all four of his surviving children, as well as half of Halle's entire population.

Funeral ritual is described by a *Paduan* (or pavane) from Becker's aforementioned 'Spring Fruits', while the tears of grief in *Les Pleurs* by the still-mysterious French viol master **Jean de Sainte-Colombe** from a vast collection of 67 'Concerts' for viola da gamba duet were shed to a worldwide audience when used in the soundtrack of the 1991 film *Tous les matins du monde*. A *Courant* from Scheidt's first volume of instrumental *Ludi musici* (1621) suggests to Fredersdorff a feeling of resentment in its spiky, argumentative running figures in a dance requiring swift footwork.

Finally, a 1692 *Passacaglia* resolves these abject feelings in a triple-time dance of beneficent healing as was customary in many an opera and suite of the time; in this instance, by the remarkable **Georg Muffat**, whose life and work represents a traversal of borders in every sense. Descended from Scots, born French, part-educated in Paris (with Lully) and Italy, driven by the threat of war to Vienna, Prague, Salzburg and Passau, he ultimately considered himself a German. It was in Italy that Muffat made the acquaintance of his exact contemporary Arcangelo Corelli, whose then unpublished *concerti grossi* inspired the visitor to try his hand at the fledgling form with his *Armonico Tributo*, published in

Salzburg in 1682; Corelli's totemic Opus 6 set would not emerge from the printing presses until thirty years later. The set displays Muffat's cosmopolitan influences in the Lullian five-part string writing (casually stated as 'suitable for few or many instruments') and the Corellian alternation of tutti and solo passages – a concerto grosso hallmark.

Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni is truly an inhabitant of various borderlands: geographic - a Venetian born in a city well past its peak as a powerful trading centre - and professional, as a self-declared *dilettante* who was spared the necessity of seeking paid work at church or court by his prosperous middle-class family's finances. Even his early musical style is something of a bridge between the five-part string writing of the previous century (the Opus 2 was published in 1700) and the more overt virtuosity of his near-contemporaries Vivaldi and Locatelli. Albinoni was enough of a contrapuntist to be admired by the faraway J.S. Bach, and the technique is employed in both of the faster movements of this C major Sinfonia from the set. But it's in the two slow movements with their ravishing melodies that the fanciful listener can hear the singing from La Serenissima's canals, or at least proof that Albinoni was above all an opera composer with some 80 stage works to his credit.

It's tempting to think there must be a 'program' driving the effects and derivations of the **Sonata jucunda** – the croaking of frogs, sounds of drones, and folk-band imitations that presumably give the work its 'joking' title – but impossible to prove, because the composer is unknown. It's been suggested that **Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber** might have been responsible by virtue of the work's descriptive elements; Biber also composed a vivid *Battalia* in 1673, and the *Sonata jucunda* manuscript is housed in the same present-day Czech Republic's Kroměříž collection as the bulk of Biber's work. The violin flourishes that fizz through the score would seem a typical stroke from a composer who was deemed by his contemporaries to be the outstanding virtuoso of the 17th century, stretching technical demands of the player to absolute limits as well as those made upon the instrument itself, resorting to alternative string tunings (*scordatura*) for changes in tonal colour, and even arranging strings between bridge and tailpiece to visually depict the Cross in his series of Rosary Sonatas.

Donald Nicolson's **Spirals** (2022), commissioned by Van Diemen's Band specifically for this program, is an attempt to refract an observation of the present day through ancient materials and musical form. Taking the passacaglia, a repeated descending bassline that throughout the 17th and 18th centuries frequently connoted loss or grief (think of 'When I am laid in earth' at the conclusion of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*), Nicolson weaves in the melody of a Slavonic Orthodox lament, well-known throughout that religion's Eastern diaspora: *Dusha moya pregrashnaya* (My sinful soul/Why don't you weep?). The constant rotation of the passacaglia symbolises the circularity of human travail, history repeating. Nicolson points out that "...this paradoxical progression never finds resolution, inviting us to lose ourselves for a minute within itself".

The current global geopolitical situation has again made borders the trigger for armed conflict, and border security the *raison d'être* and campaign slogan of governments. Borders bring both protection and obstruction, but they also erase much on either side, creating a place of absence, *terra nullius* of the spirit along the ribbon of their physical space. Not so in this program, where the 'borderland' of geography, history or imagination is the stepping stone to adventure and discovery, a longed-for portal, the place where the 'other' can be met, embraced, and shared. These days we see too many borders. In the minds of those composers, they didn't exist.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

Founded in 2016 by violinist Julia Fredersdorff, Van Diemen's Band (VDB) delivers extraordinary performances across lutruwita/Tasmania as well as online. Varying in size from an intimate chamber group to a larger orchestra, VDB explores the creativity and expressiveness of the Baroque while also performing new works on original instruments.

Always seeking to break new ground, VDB has collaborated with guest artists such as French Baroque specialist Martin Gester, Persian/Afghani musicians Ensemble Kaboul and Tasmanian mandolin player Luke Plumb, and released a music video, Song of the Birds, in 2021.

VDB has performed for Ten Days on the Island, Dark Mofa and Mona Foma, toured nationally for Musica Viva Australia and internationally for Chamber Music New Zealand, and has recorded for ABC Classic and the prestigious Swedish label BIS.

VDB is also an active concert presenter in lutruwita/Tasmania, presenting Lunchbox Concerts in nipaluna/Hobart and pataway/Burnie, and delivers a range of education and community engagement programs each year.

For more information about VDB and our artist, visit www.vandiemensband.com.au.

THANKYOU

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Anton Baba's Baroque cello courtesy of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra.

SUPPORTERS

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