

# VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

WHERE

EVERYTHING  
IS MUSIC

7PM WEDNESDAY

1 MARCH 2023

PRESENTED BY

AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL CONCERT HALL

& VAN DIEMEN'S BAND



AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL  
CONCERT HALL

# ARTISTS

## ENSEMBLE KABOUL

**KHALED ARMAN** RUBAB

**SIAR HASHIMI** VOCALS/TABLA/PERCUSSION

## VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

**JULIA FREDERSDORFF**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/BAROQUE VIOLIN

**LUKE PLUMB** MANDOLIN

**RACHEL MEYERS** VIOLA

**LAURA VAUGHAN** VIOLA DA GAMBA/VIOLONE

**MARTIN PENICKA** VIOLONCELLO

**DONALD NICOLSON** HARPSICHORD

**MATT STONEHOUSE** PERCUSSION

# PROGRAM

## ***Ay naynawâ***

F.A Naynawaz arr. K. Arman (2022)

## ***Yo m'enamori d'un aire***

Traditional Sephardic arr. R. Meyers (2023)

## ***More than Memory***

Luke Plumb (2009)

## ***Gnossienne No 1***

Erik Satie arr. D. Nicolson (2023)

## **Rubab/Tabla/Percussion Improvisation**

including traditional tune *Ya rassul allah*

## ***Ba tu del Dâdam***

S.W. Taranasaz arr. K. Arman (2022)

## ***O Virtus Sapentie***

Abbess Hildegard of Bingen arr. D. Nicolson (2021)

## ***Obsession***

Luke Plumb (2009)

## ***Nos esprits libres***

A.Boesset arr. D. Nicolson (2023)

## ***Naghma-e Kabouli***

Trad/J.S Bach arr. K. Arma (2022)

## ***Dar dâman-e saharâ***

F. A. Naynawaz arr. K. Arman (2022)

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

*‘Where everything is music...’* (Rumi, 13<sup>th</sup> century)

Van Diemen’s Band’s latest project – created for MONA FOMA 2023 and performed to sell-out audiences in Launceston, Hobart and MONA itself – is a cross-cultural collaboration with two members of the legendary Ensemble Kaboul: rubab player Khaled Arman, and tablā player and singer, Siar Hashimi. Theirs is a practice of both advocacy and preservation, using performance to keep alive a musical culture that Afghanistan’s current regime is attempting to extinguish.

What emerged during rehearsals is a stunning composite of two distinct musical worlds, mixing the caramel sounds of VDB’s gut strings with traditional Eastern instruments, and the melismas of Afghan singing with the quixotic late nineteenth-century piano music of Erik Satie. Persian music has been arranged and developed for this unusual (but entirely harmonious) combination, and Western music has been chosen for its fluid and indistinct style, providing a vehicle to unite the oriental sound world with occidental traditions.

Khaled Arman has made the arrangements of the Afghan songs in the program. Composer and singer Fazel Ahmad Zekrya, also known as ‘Nainawaz’ (“The Reed Player”) wrote **Ay naynawâ** fifty years ago to a poem by the famous Sufi mystic known as ‘Rumi’. It describes the ney’s (or reed-flute’s) longing to return to its reed bed as an analogous reference to the pain of separation from one’s native realm and the maturation of a human being. **Ba tu del Dâdam** is a popular love song that Afghans sing during festivals; in what will become a typical cross-generic gesture in this program, Khaled’s version makes a detour towards seventeenth-century French music in the middle of the piece. He does the same in his arrangement of the late twentieth-century Persian instrumental melody **Naghma-e Kabouli**, whose Shur (Phrygian) modal setting invites a juxtaposition with one of the gavottes from J.S. Bach’s Third Suite for lute.

The legendary Nainawaz (who was assassinated in 1979 by the occupying Soviet forces in Afghanistan) also supplies the final song, again in a Khaled arrangement. ***Dar dâman-e saharâ*** depicts the mystic wandering in the desert, unaware of the world and whispering the 'song of existence':

*One who is not attached to earthly things  
likes the song of love and spiritual love.*

VDB harpsichordist and musicologist Donald Nicolson bends the West towards the East in his arrangements that exploit the capabilities of Ensemble Kaboul's master musicians, especially improvisation. The melodic line of Erik Satie's **Gnossienne No 1**, first published in 1893, suggests to Nicolson "...the sounds of the mystical East " and serves as the starting point for a vocal reimagining by Siar. By contrast, the voices of Hildegard of Bingen's medieval nuns are removed from her plainchant **O Virtus Sapentie**, and its formerly free line nailed down by driving Eastern rhythms in a purely instrumental rendition coloured by ornamental devices from Byzantine and Turkish music, creating a hypnotic effect.

Like many seventeenth-century French writers, Antoine Boesset (1586-1643) was drawn to timelessness and the ephemeral nature of existence. In the song **Nos esprits libres** (Our free spirits), Nicolson liberates the lilting eight-bar chordal progression from the original text and allows a blurring between the sounds of an early Baroque lute consort and a certain eccentric Frenchman who we've already heard, courtesy of improvisation.

VDB violist Rachel Meyers draws on both her Jewish heritage and her musicological research into Renaissance music in an arrangement of the ancient Judeo-Spanish song **Yo m'enamori d'un aire**. The lyrics sing of falling in love with a beautiful woman, and its melody has crossed many areas of the Mediterranean basin, making it a perfect fit for the diverse instruments in the ensemble.

Mandolinist and composer Luke Plumb, whose musical CV embraces classical, traditional folk and a long stint with famed Scottish band Shooglenifty, contributes two original compositions to the program. He writes:

*‘Obsession and More than Memory are from **The Ten Titles Project** (2009) – ten titles to serve as inspiration for creative expression in any field, taken from shared human experience. More than Memory combines nostalgia for childhood innocence, recollections that become jumbled and disjointed over time and the acknowledgment of formative moments in character building. Obsession looks at melancholy and solitude, moments where momentum overpowers freneticism, and finally how we resolve and find harmony for our fixations with the methodical movement of time.’*

Finally, an overdue mention of another VDB guest for this project, the Melbourne-based percussionist Matt Stonehouse, who has dedicated much of his musical life to the study and acquisition of many Middle Eastern playing techniques and instruments such as the *dumbak*. During rehearsals for this program, it became clear to our Western Baroque exponents that he and our esteemed Afghan guests needed a chance to return exclusively to their patch in an improvisational conversation between Matt, Siar’s *tablā* and Khaled’s *rubab* that takes as its starting point a popular melody called **Ya rassul allah**. Unlike the soloistic basis of improvisation in Western jazz, the Afghan version is based on a three-way exchange that rapidly escalates in intensity and dexterity.

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## ABOUT ENSEMBLE KABOUL

The Ensemble Kaboul explores the Persian music of Afghanistan, an unrecognised or even forgotten repertoire. In this country, rich with several musical cultures, the traditional and sacred Persian heritage testifies to a remote past and of a particular poetry.

To bring this repertoire back to life, the Ensemble Kaboul needs to work like archeologists in order to rediscover the buried musical themes, the missing ornaments and the lost motifs of a formerly flourishing musical corpus. To make this desert soil bloom again, the fragmentary melodies are completed and the instrumentations and compositions are developed.

To renovate these buried mosaics, the Ensemble Kaboul calls to musicians who belong to a large Persian musical family spread over numerous countries. Persian cultural influence can be experienced from Lahore to Budapest and from Erevan to Cordoba.

This approach is made possible thanks to the extraordinary musical abilities of all the members of the group. Indeed, each musician of the Ensemble Kaboul is endowed with both a non-European and a European musical culture.

## ABOUT VAN DIEMEN'S BAND

Based in the island state of Tasmania at the southernmost tip of Australia, 'Australia's Baroque supergroup' Van Diemen's Band breathes new life into historically-informed performance, delivering extraordinary performances across lutruwita/Tasmania and beyond.

Van Diemen's Band is made up of some of the country's most highly respected early music specialists, who between them have worked with leading ensembles such as Les Arts Florissants, Les Talens Lyriques, Ensemble Pygmalion, Il Pomo d'Oro, Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, The English Concert, Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, Le Parlement de Musique, and the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra.

Founded in 2016 by violinist Julia Fredersdorff, VDB varies in size from an intimate chamber group to a larger orchestra. VDB explores the creativity and expressiveness of the baroque while deferring to historical sources on style and instrumentation.

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 Mofo 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.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

**BRIAN RITCHIE**

**LUKE PLUMB**

**RACHEL MEYERS**

**KHALED ARMAN**

*Van Diemen's Band acknowledges with deep respect the Traditional Owners of the land lutruwita (Tasmania) on which we have the privilege to make music.*

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