



THE
SONG
CO.



SONGS

FROM THE

Heart

Newcastle | Parramatta | Canberra
Wollongong | Sydney | Digital Broadcast

The Song Company

The Song Company is Australia's leading vocal ensemble, presenting music from all times and places. Since its beginnings in 1984, it has captivated Australian and international audiences with exquisite performances of vocal work ranging from the 10th century to contemporary compositions. Every project The Song Company undertakes is underwritten by its unwavering commitment to excellence and to the transcendent and transformative beauty of the human voice.

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Jacqui Smith, Paul Stanhope

THE SONG COMPANY TEAM

Antony Pitts, *Artistic Director*
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Eva Frey, *Marketing & Development Manager*
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Elise Morton, *Administration Assistant*

2022 Artists

PRINCIPAL ARTISTS

Roberta Diamond, Amy Moore, *sopranos*
Stephanie Dillon, Jessica O'Donoghue, *mezzo-sopranos*
Dan Walker, Koen van Stade, *tenors*
Thomas Flint, *bass*

ASSOCIATE ARTISTS

Janine Harris, Ethan Taylor, Hayden Barrington

ENSEMBLE ARTIST

Elias Wilson

GUEST ARTISTS

Brianna Louwen, Susannah Lawergren, Chloe Lankshear,
Hannah Fraser, Sonya Holowell, Katrina Mackenzie,
Elizabeth Sheppard, Jenny Eriksson, Paul Capsis, Nathan Lay,
Robert Macfarlane, Aidan O'Donnell, Christopher Richardson,
Jack Stephens, Alasdair Stretch, Gerard Willems AM,
Hylton Mowday, Neville Williams Boney

APPRENTICES

Nicola Chau, Lily Harper, Adele Kozak, Elise Morton, *sopranos*
Cassandra Doyle, Stephanie Macindoe, Emma Warburton, *altos*
Alexander Caldwell, Alexander Gorbatov, David Lee, William Varga, *tenors*
Lincoln Law, Brendan McRae, Jesse van Proctor, *basses*

Songs From The Heart Artists



Amy Moore



Susannah Lawergren



Sonya Holowell
(Dharawal/Inuit woman)



Jessica O'Donoghue



Elias Wilson
(Biripi man)



Ethan Taylor



Alasdair Stretch



Antony Pitts

The Song Company is assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW

The Song Company acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and we pay our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging
The Song Company Pty Ltd trading as The Song Company is a non-profit organisation registered as a company of limited guarantee ABN 27 001 577 377

Songs From The Heart

First Nations composers Elizabeth Sheppard and Sonya Holowell have created a new *a cappella* program that is a musical reaction to, and exploration of, the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Newcastle	Christ Church Cathedral	Thu 29 Sep, 7pm
Parramatta	Riverside Theatres	Sun 2 Oct, 4pm
Canberra	Larry Sitsky Recital Room, ANU School of Music	Tue 4 Oct, 7pm
Sydney	Cell Block Theatre, National Art School	Fri 7 Oct, 7pm* & Sun 9 Oct, 3pm
Wollongong	Wollongong Art Gallery	Sat 8 Oct, 3pm

*this performance will be live broadcast by Australian Digital Concert Hall

Program

... calling ...

Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>'Cross Country;</i> <i>Kaouwi Two Children Cooee</i>
Elizabeth Sheppard & Rhubee Neale	<i>As I walk</i>
Sonya Holowell	<i>Never Extinguished</i>

... (be)longing ...

Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>'Kaouwi ex Cordis:</i> <i>Gathering; The First Sovereign Nations; Sovereignty</i>
Sonya Holowell	<i>We Here</i>

... beating ...

Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>Ngaala Maaman (The Noongar Prayer);</i> <i>Noonakoort Karnya Respect</i>
Sonya Holowell	<i>This is the torment of our powerlessness</i>

... changing ...

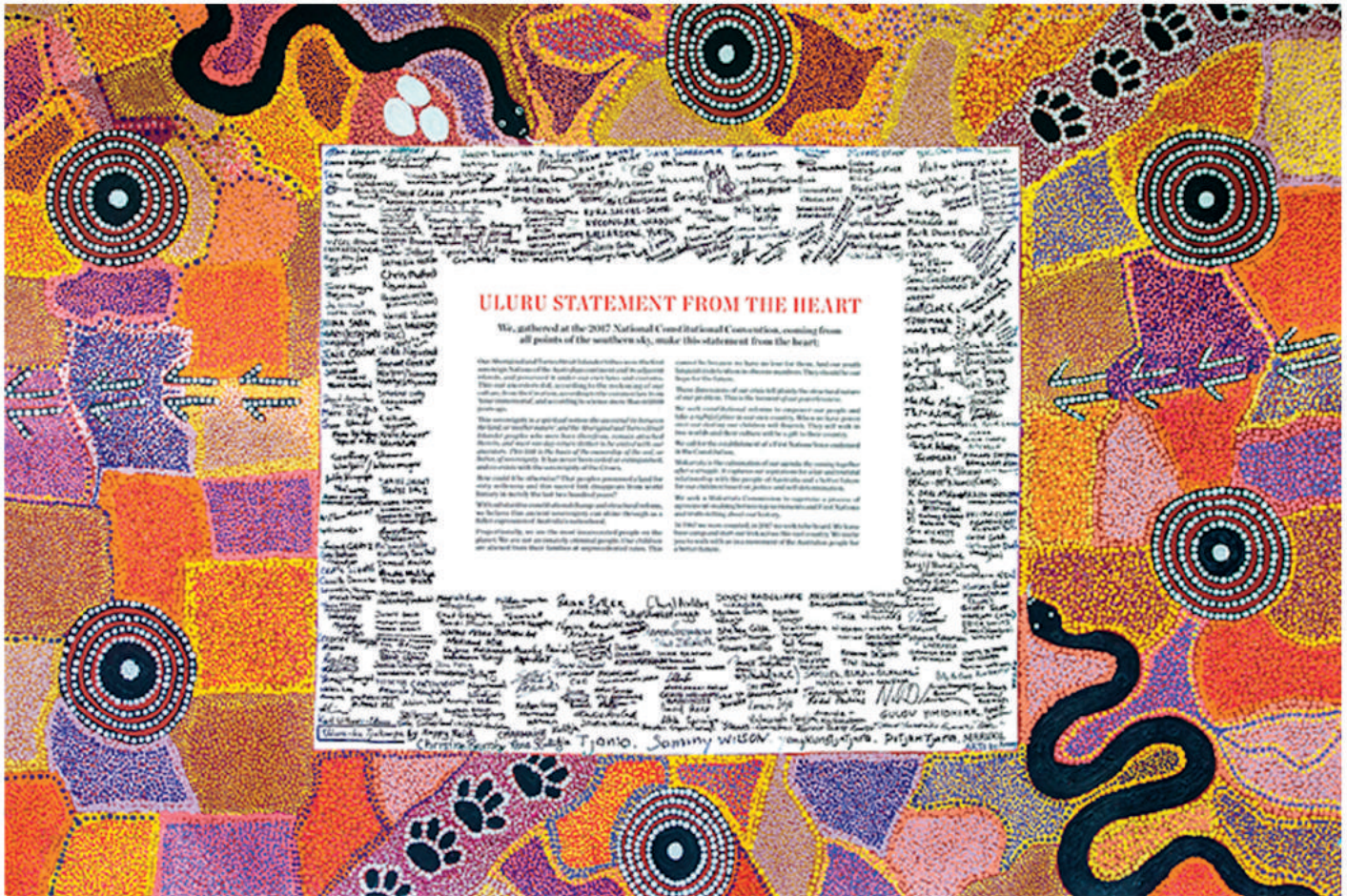
Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>Kaouwi ex Cordis:</i> <i>Miyaldjan Teardrops; Australia's Nationhood;</i> <i>A Rightful Place; Enshrinement</i>
Sonya Holowell	<i>Like You Can</i>
Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>Kaouwi ex Cordis: Makaratta; A Better Future</i>

...(be)coming...

Sonya Holowell	<i>A Way</i>
Elizabeth Sheppard & Rhubee Neale	<i>Keep Guard of our Dreams</i>
Elizabeth Sheppard	<i>Koorlangka Children; Land of Sunshine</i>
Sonya Holowell	<i>Become Like Children</i>

We honour and pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of Country.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart



We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the Southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness*.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Program Notes

ANTONY PITTS

During my seven years as Artistic Director of The Song Company, I have been slowly endeavouring to find my own authentic way of collaborating artistically with the First Nations people of Australia. As a relative newcomer to the continent myself, I have been astounded by the way the plural Indigenous cultures of the land have been sidelined and, perhaps more insultingly, paid lip service to without any real action. The peoples of my homeland of Great Britain are largely the cause of this dispossession and collective amnesia, so I feel a sense of corporate shame, if not actual personal guilt.

Working out how to collaborate, without simply paying the artistic equivalent of lip service, was a real creative challenge. For me the breakthrough came in the first major project which The Song Company co-created with the contemporary Indigenous dance company Karul Projects back in 2018, called *Four-Colour-Season* – in which we explored local Indigenous ideas of the annual cycle of seasons interwoven with European traditions of the four seasons, most famously represented in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, in a cyclical program of music and dance sung and danced by all the members of The Song Company led by Thomas E.S. Kelly and Taree Sansbury from Karul Projects.

Delayed by lockdowns, it has taken until 2022 to present two more unique collaborations with Indigenous creative artists that examine the nature of our shared Australian culture and possible positive steps into the future. The first of these, *Arms of Love*, described by Limelight as “a revelation in musical programming – truly exhilarating”, saw us again collaborate with Karul Projects, with initial choreography by Thomas E.S. Kelly, and new choreography and dance by Neville Williams Boney (with non-Indigenous director Robert Macfarlane). In *Arms of Love*, we posed the question, as Shakespeare did in another time and context, “What country, friends, is this?”.

In *Songs From The Heart*, we confront Australia's most momentous Indigenous declaration: the Uluru Statement “From the Heart” and seek, perhaps, to answer Shakespeare's question for ourselves. *Songs From The Heart* is composed entirely by two female Indigenous composers, Elizabeth Sheppard and Sonya Holowell (with two songs co-written by another Indigenous woman, Rhubee Neale). Elizabeth and Sonya have responded both directly and indirectly to the text of the Uluru Statement, setting most of it to choral polyphony surrounded with very personal pieces of *a cappella* music that touch on its themes. They have both worked very closely together with me to make a single journey out of the program, which is sung by seven singers (I occasionally add my own voice to the mix). The result is at times contemplative, urgent, heart-wrenching, and uplifting – a kind of sacred oratorio for our time and place. I hope that those who have ears to hear, will be moved to respond in their own way.

ELIZABETH SHEPPARD

Composing a musical response to the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart for The Song Company is a privilege and a responsibility. The Song Company is skilled at confronting and exploring social issues through dramatic music, such as those raised by the Uluru Statement from the Heart, so this was a wonderful opportunity to work with them. But my response is only one response among millions; all Australians are responding wholeheartedly to this document. I look on this commission as serving my community, and as a way of collaborating with other First Nations composers who want to express their response to the Uluru Statement. I accepted the offer immediately, and the music started to flow straight away.

My Songs From The Heart music is melded into a two-way conversation about the Uluru Statement, led by Dharawal soprano and composer Sonya Holowell, and Biripi tenor Elias Wilson. Some of my pieces are just simple songs, others are full-scale oratorio pieces, and some include improvisation. They are all outcomes of collaboration.

We began at The Song Company's SongCo LAB 2021, consulting with Elders, sketching soundscapes, learning who wrote the Uluru Statement and how they agreed on it, looking at the significant Anangu art that surrounds it, and establishing protocols. My pieces just developed from there. Some are based on single words or phrases, others set my own poetry, and others are oratorio-like works. My compositions are all outcomes of cultural teamwork – as the Uluru Statement from the Heart, co-authored by 250 elected Australian Aboriginal Elders, itself is.

My Songs From The Heart compositions cite the words of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which is a diplomatic First Nations gift to the Australian people, authored and signed by 250 unified, elected, government endorsed Australian First Nations Delegates. As a principal party to negotiating a coming Treaty, it spoke federally, and proposed that an Australian First Nations Voice be enshrined in the Australian Constitution. In my culture, we've always honoured and enshrined our Elders' Voices in everlasting songs, that live on in memory, through each generation. The Uluru Statement is the combined Voice of 250 Elders, a federated First Nations Voice that has generously offered colonial Australia a co-equal Treaty, so Australians must respond respectfully to this offer. The question is, how? Not by incorporation, not by co-design – but by simple acceptance, by Acknowledgement, by Enshrinement, as a beginning – the details can then be worked out.

My musical response, one among many, can't enhance, transcend, incorporate or add anything to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. I just sat with it, and prayed, and this is what emerged. There is room for all responses, as Senator Patrick Dodson has said. But nothing can replace, add to, improve or erase the Uluru Statement from the Heart itself. Its uncensored title, its text, its art, its authors, their Australian First Nations affiliations, are legally registered, its words resonate within Australian hearts, they are an indelible part of Australia's story. We should celebrate this in song.

Marshall McLuhan famously said that the medium is the message, but the Australian way is to convey clear, simple, truthful messages, honestly and directly. Live singing can do this. Dupliciously muting, censoring or sabotaging what a respected Elder says is not part of my culture. My music walks a two-way track, it seeks to shine a light on events, and to compare diverse perspectives. This empowers audiences to draw their own conclusions – as both Cheetham and Mozart have done. The primary Australian Aboriginal instrument is the human voice, but the European a cappella choral tradition is not Australian, it comes from an entirely different time and place, it was designed to be sung in European chapels. So I've reshaped it to serve Australian Ngarraburra (listen and sing) goals and messages, via my two-way composition practice. This is done through teamwork, by consulting with Elders, and by collaborating with professional Aboriginal performers and composers, as well as non-Indigenous professionals.

So far, debates about the Uluru Statement from the Heart have presented fragmentary, divisive or diversionary agendas, rather than getting to the heart of the matter. This is confusing and paradoxical, not enlightening. When confusion reigns, anxiety takes over, and anxious people can lose their way. On the other hand, listening to choral music that walks listeners through facts and feelings without alarmism, is easy, assuring and empowering, it cuts through the confusion. Well planned, well presented dramatic choral music can be cathartic and healing. It can present the issues in digestible form, help audiences to unravel feelings in non-threatening ways, allow them to consider the facts as they walk the track together, and it may help to resolve dilemmas.



Sonya Holowell (Dharawal/Inuit heritage) & Elizabeth Sheppard (Noongar Yamatji & Gandangarra heritage)
photo credit: The Song Company

Thanks to the Delegates of the 2017 Australian National Constitutional Convention Uluru Statement from the Heart to Australia's people; to Leanne Tobin for her generous cultural consultation; to Dr. Christopher Sainsbury to use Dharug language words in Kaouwi Two Children Cooe; to Noel Nannup, Charmaine Councillor for the Noongar lyrics of Ngaala Maaman (The Noongar Prayer); to my Anmatjere/Arrernte colleague Rhubee Neale for her permission to include two of our co-composed songs in the Songs from the Heart program; to organists Bernard Kirkpatrick of St Patricks Cathedral Parramatta and Robert Nixon of New Norcia Benedictine Abbey WA for supporting my music; to my cultural and music teachers at Eora and Tranby Aboriginal Colleges in Sydney and the ANU School of Music in Canberra; and to Artistic Director and composer Antony Pitts, and singers of The Song Company.

SONYA HOLOWELL

The Uluru Statement was already of significance to me; I'd been grappling with its meaning and implications for a while. I saw this commission as an opportunity to understand it more deeply, while offering my own artistic interpretations of resonances with certain words and themes contained in, related to or sparked by the Uluru Statement.

These works combine Western notation (much more than I initially thought I'd use!) with graphic, text and conceptual scoring techniques. The pieces are quite stylistically diverse, ranging from avant-garde, to soulful, textural, and improvised. In no particular order! Accessibility is particularly important in this program, I think, so I didn't want my work to feel too stuck in any particular idiom or tradition.

There were particular themes which stuck with me, such as Sovereignty, Belonging, Identity, Reconciliation, Spirit, and Responsibility. The suite balances power, pain, vulnerability, joy, and an occasional hint of satire. Such is the complexity of the Uluru Statement; of what it means to be First Nations in a postcolonial world; and of human lived experience in general, so I wanted to attempt to capture this breadth and multifacetedness. Perhaps being unaccompanied will position a more direct focus upon the text – and the text is crucial in this program. It comprises both words from the Uluru Statement and my own composed lyrics.

I share a desire expressed in the Uluru Statement: to instil a legacy of truth-telling in this country. Alongside Truth I hope to expound upon the meaning of Agency and Sovereignty, values and policies which the Statement seeks to reinstate to the First Peoples of Australia. I hope to paint a picture of what this could mean for the entire country; how reconciliation and harmony are possible when these values are prioritised and protected. I want the audience to feel and understand that I too am on this learning journey with them. Finally, in witnessing Elizabeth's and my unique artistic approaches, I continue to stress the fact of First Nations' diversity and intersectionality, resisting essentialist tendencies to homogenise cultural 'groups'. To be human is to be complex, impossible to define and dangerous to contain.

Supporters

The Song Company depends on the generosity of individual donors to keep our artistic program thriving. With Government support at an historic low, your support is more important than ever.

Sincere thanks to all who donated so generously this & last financial year. If you would like to see your name on this list, please contact General Manager Francis Greep on (02) 9156 2781 or francis.greep@song.com.au

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NEXT UP FROM THE SONG COMPANY

FULLNESS OF
Joy

18 – 20 Nov

Parramatta | Sydney

the.song.com.au/fullness-of-joy

