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MUSIC

## 'NEW LETTERS TO ESTERHAZY'- VIOLINIST RUPERT GUENTHER IN THE UTZON ROOM

11 AUGUST 2023 PAUL NOLAN



Above and featured image: Born in Melbourne and trained in Vienna, Rupert Guenther offered the Utzon Room audience a mix of eight improvised soundscapes.



Franz Josef Haydn was a key figure in the development of important musical forms enduring way past his years. These included the symphony, sonata form and the string quartet with its compact, accessible voice fitting so well the atmospheres of his musical time.

Haydn's legacy, influence and inimitable storytelling touched Mozart and Beethoven, two of the next generation's finest composers, with an affinity with drama and instrumental eloquence. They proved repeatedly in public and in their approach to composition that they possessed immense skills in the area of improvisation.

Such invention and skill was mirrored in the playing on this night by violinist **Rupert Guenther's** unravelling of performing tradition via his stunning and measured bespoke filigree.

We remain grateful that Guenther included Sydney Opera House's Utzon Room in his current cross-state tour. His presentation live of the ABC commission for recording of his work *New Letters to Esterhazy* embraced the individuality, humour and intense dramatic directness associated with the styles of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

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*La Bohème*



Gunther's seamless, mood-shifting, jaw-drop-inspiring improvisations communicated beyond chronological time, outside cultures and stock sounds for particular instruments. His unique painting of sentiment, concerns and cultural contrasts from our time reach us with a much needed freshness in the concert format.

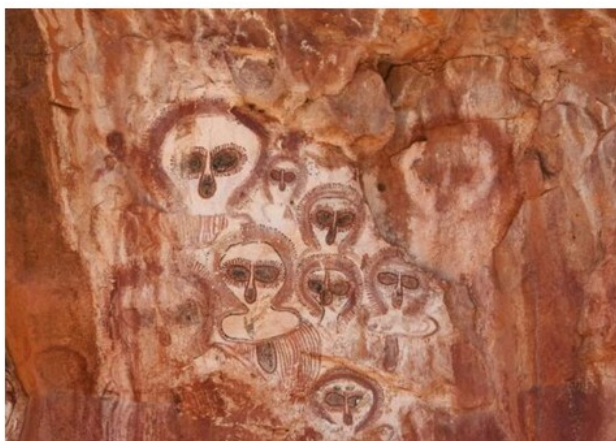
The *New Letters to Esterhazy - Sonata 1* was a sonic event which extended Haydn's three movement sonata model to a sprawling, more modern five sections. The contrasts realised crucial for a music work even in the eighteenth century were maintained in gentle, well painted flux and rolling out of hues here.



*Above: the inimitable voice of the Japanese shakuhachi flute was used as a starting point for timbral elaboration in the improvisation by Rupert Gunther, 'Hakone Maple'*

Not once in these movements did we witness the improvised gesturing resort to mere mining of cliché musical movements in the on-the-spot creation of sound sequence. It did not employ fills of virtuosic display for the sake of demonstrating this soloist's firm technique or biding time before the next idea to be extemporised entered the space. The works could have been fully scored given the even finesse of their delivery.

The soul-sharing in these new letters of hope and endurance to Papa Haydn was extemporised in economical, highly successful statements. Sound bites of mood switched from the solemn to the joyous, from the whimsical to the deeply thought provoking. Haydn, exponent of a novel concert experience in his time, would have loved to hear such shifts in colour and shape live as in this beautiful journey and communique.



*Above: the Wandjina journey guides from Kimberley cave paintings inspired the final improvised sentiment in this intimate, special concert event.*

The compelling climax to this trio of improvised solos from the classically-trained musician was a salute to Australia's First Nations as well as spirituality everywhere, celebrated in deftly drawn sounds. The evocation of the spiritual beings documented by our ancient landscape's artists in the Kimberley cave paintings.

*Wandjina*, the evening's final extemporised soundscape was consistently fresh, controlled and characterised from its opening instant, through unfaltering, unhurried storyboarding to the conclusion of its reverie. It complemented the two preceding tributes nicely.

Guenther's use of his instrumental technique, his performing experiences and obvious love of a lifetime with the violin made for an event saturated with integrity and genuinely moving sounds. He celebrated his instrument's voice, clarity as a soloist and quality as a heart-warming mimic.

This improvisational journeying filled us with hope in the intimate, uniquely positioned side venue of our iconic Opera house. The array of unique, accessible music that by its improvised nature will never be heard the same way exactly again built a solid and special soundtrack for the exact moment in time the soloists and listeners shared.

We look forward to hearing this busy musician in Sydney soon, as he continues to create for ABC recordings, in live projects, troping in gallery or museum settings and above all, soloing to guide us to a place of calm, acceptance, plus an eye-opening approach to musical development as well as live concert music making.

Such a talent and a human performing an event to touch us with endearing, clear commentary helps promote a greater understanding of each other and the function of music itself in the modern world.. I savoured the newness of every note in this unique moment spent with an eclectic musician whose intonation of hope and peace in the pieces presented was perfectly programmed.