

ACO ORIGINALS

OLLI MUSTONEN

Sonata for cello and chamber orchestra



OLLI MUSTONEN born 1967

Sonata for cello and chamber orchestra [14'24]

- I. Misterioso 4'13
- II. Andantino 4'12
- III. Precipitato 1'30
- IV. Con visione 4'28

Timo-Veikko Valve cello
Australian Chamber Orchestra
Olli Mustonen conductor

Sonata for cello and chamber orchestra by Olli Mustonen
was commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra
and premiered on 12 September 2015
at Llewellyn Hall, Canberra.



Olli Mustonen – Sonata for cello and chamber orchestra

Olli Mustonen's music has attracted all the labels that tonal composers usually have plastered upon them, at various times being classified as neo-baroque, neo-classical and neo-romantic. But these attempts to fit him to a convenient category miss the point altogether: Mustonen's motivation to compose stems from a desire to make connections – with the musicians who perform his music, the audiences who hear it and with the great tradition of composers of the past.

Mustonen's personal sense of this tradition extends – like a 'red cord' – from the central inspiration of JS Bach, whose artistic mastery of contrapuntal invention has given impetus to innumerable creative musicians over centuries. This compelling force attracts Mustonen to composers such as Hindemith, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, with whom he shares an appreciation of the continuing power, and seemingly endless capacity for renewal, of tonality and the polyphonic tradition. Between such figures, with their vivid contrasts of personality and style, a sense of unity may be found, expressed in a conversation in which each composer draws in elements of contemporary style and expression, but never conceals or discards a deep feeling for the endless fascination of tonality.

To this tradition, Mustonen brings a sensibility that is born from his 'very Finnish' personal identity. Finland's natural world, language and culture provide Mustonen with his sense of place – deeply connected with nature's presence but at the same time relishing the comforts and pleasures of community. Finns feel 'surrounded by wilderness, but also not far from the settled world', and in this sense we Australians may feel a recognition too, surrounded as we are by a vast wilderness, but clinging to the comforts and security of our urban environment.

The cellist Steven Isserlis describes the Cello Sonata in terms derived from Finland's landscape – as an imagined narrative of passing clouds and thunderstorms, bells that sound out across the valleys, and the diurnal activity of 'little animals'.

Mustonen himself places the emphasis upon the sense of spiritual quest that he sees as integral to music's uplifting power. 'Even a good concert can leave you untouched,' he comments. 'To become memorable, I feel it should strive for an experience of transformation, the feeling that you have been taken to another world.' A musical work must undertake a search for something beyond – an experience, a moment of ecstatic revelation or feeling.

For Mustonen, the power of music to build connections is vital, overriding the personal expression of an artist's individualism. He invokes the model of Finland's ancient epic poets, often described as a Bardic tradition. The legends of these folk poets, gathered together in the 19th century by Elias Lönnrot in the *Kalevala*, form a mythic tradition from which the Finnish national spirit and its greatest art derive inspiration. These great poems start out in simple observations, but gradually draw the listener in to an experience that becomes gripping and transforming. As the bards sang about the episodes of ancient lives and heroes, they also drew upon their own lives and experiences, again forming broader connections across the span of time and place.



The Cello Sonata sets out on just such a path. It begins with a single line, a musical thought that perambulates at first, perhaps arising from improvisation at the keyboard, but is soon taken up into a narrative of development and variation that becomes engrossing. The four movements flow into each other organically. The melancholy mood of the introduction is interrupted towards the end of the first movement by rays of harmonic sunlight, and this interplay of light and shadow, a contest between inwardness and joy, characterises the whole work. The second movement is animated with a playful spirit, though that melancholy presence refuses to let go. The third has the rhythmic drive of a dance of exorcism, only for melancholy mutterings to return with the fourth movement, from which rising gestures of major key hopefulness eventually emerge triumphantly to bring the Sonata to an ecstatic peroration.

Composed for cello and piano in 2006 and dedicated to Heinrich Schiff, Mustonen's version of the Sonata for cello and chamber orchestra was commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra and received its world premiere in a national concert tour in September 2015.

Australian Chamber Orchestra © 2015

Australian Chamber Orchestra

'The Australian Chamber Orchestra is uniformly high-octane, arresting and never ordinary.'
– *The Australian*, 2017

The Australian Chamber Orchestra lives and breathes music, making waves around the world for its explosive performances and brave interpretations. Steeped in history but always looking to the future, ACO programs embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions, and adventurous cross-artform collaborations.

Led by Artistic Director Richard Tognetti since 1990, the ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year. Whether performing in Manhattan, New York, or Wollongong, NSW, the ACO is unwavering in its commitment to creating transformative musical experiences.

Testament to its international reputation, the ACO was invited to commence a three-year residency as International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court in partnership with London's Barbican Centre from the 2018/19 season.

The Orchestra regularly collaborates with artists and musicians who share its ideology: from Emmanuel Pahud, Steven Isserlis, Dawn Upshaw, Olli Mustonen, Brett Dean and Ivry Gitlis, to Neil Finn, Jonny Greenwood, Barry Humphries and Meow Meow; to visual artists and film makers such as Michael Leunig, Bill Henson, Shaun Tan, Jon Frank and Jennifer Peedom, who have co-created unique, hybrid productions for which the ACO has become renowned.

In addition to its national and international touring schedule, the Orchestra has an active recording program across CD, vinyl and digital formats. Recent releases include *Water | Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, *Beethoven*, a collection of the ACO's acclaimed Beethoven recordings, and the soundtrack to the acclaimed cinematic collaboration, *Mountain*.

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