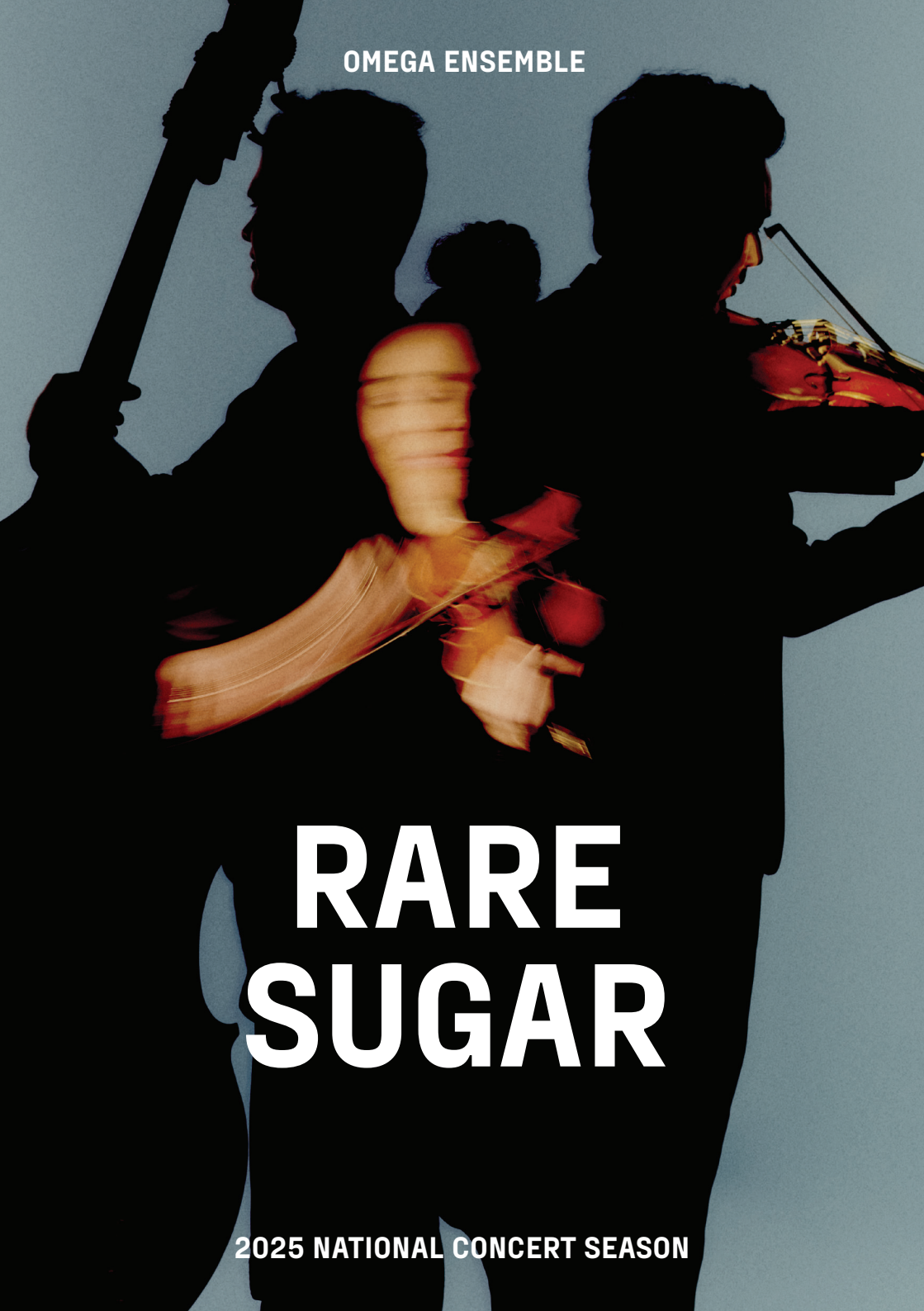


The background of the poster features the dark silhouettes of three musicians against a light blue-grey gradient. On the left, a musician is shown in profile holding a double bass. On the right, another musician is shown in profile playing a violin. In the center, a third musician is partially visible, with a violin and bow blurred in motion, creating a sense of dynamic energy. The overall composition is artistic and minimalist.

OMEGA ENSEMBLE

RARE SUGAR

2025 NATIONAL CONCERT SEASON







OMEGA ENSEMBLE
2025 NATIONAL CONCERT SEASON

RARE SUGAR

Béla Bartók

Contrasts

- I. Verbunkos (Recruiting Dance)
- II. Pihenő (Relaxation)
- III. Sebes (Fast Dance)

Ella Macens

Through the Mist

- I. Slow, Spacious, Grand
- II. L'istesso tempo
- III. Più mosso, con motto

Nigel Westlake

Rare Sugar

Sydney

Sat 29 Nov 2025, 2PM

Sat 29 Nov 2025, 7PM

ACO on the Pier

Melbourne

Tue 2 Dec 2025, 7PM

Melbourne Recital Centre

Duration

This performance is approximately
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Love me or leave me

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following the performance to be
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MUSIC NOTES

Béla Bartók (1881 – 1945)

Contrasts

1938 • 20 minutes

- I. Verbnos (Recruiting Dance)
- II. Pihenő (Relaxation)
- III. Sebes (Fast Dance)

Béla Bartók's fascination with folk music shaped his entire creative life. Over decades of travelling through Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Turkey and North Africa, he collected and transcribed thousands of folk tunes. He absorbed their rhythms and structures and wove them into his own musical language, creating music of rare clarity and force that united two distinct worlds.

When Benny Goodman, the "King of Swing," and violinist Joseph Szigeti commissioned a new work late in Bartók's life, he brought to it this fully formed, folk-infused style. Aware of the virtuosity of both performers, he stretched the expressive and technical possibilities of clarinet and violin. While a clarinetist regularly alternates between A and B-flat instruments, it is unusual for a violinist to switch between two violins, one tuned scordatura. Bartók uses this to striking effect at the start of the finale, where the altered tuning casts the harmony in vivid, almost diabolical colours.

The first movement, *Verbunkos*, takes its name from a Hungarian recruiting dance. Its rhythmic snap and insinuating melodies create a sense of bravado, with violin and clarinet sparring in playful competition. Sweeping violin arpeggios, tremolos and double stops are met by a clarinet line that moves between lyricism and sharper, more agile gestures, creating a taut sense of propulsion.

In the slow central movement, *Pihenő*, the music turns inward. Bartók's nocturnal writing appears in lines that seem to drift without clear destination, the violin and clarinet moving gently through the piano's trills, tremolos and stark intervals. The effect is one

of suspended stillness, a quiet world edged with tension.

The final movement brings the folk energy surging back with fierce momentum. The scordatura violin opens with unmistakable bite before the music erupts into a breakneck dance. Syncopated rhythms, abrupt shifts of mood and a fiery violin cadenza keep the movement teetering on volatility, driving the trio toward a rhapsodic and exhilarating conclusion.

Ella Macens (1991 –)

Through the Mist

World Premiere • 20 Minutes

- I. Slow, Spacious, Grand
- II. L'istesso tempo
- III. Più mosso, con motto

Ella Macens is rapidly becoming one of Australia's most distinctive young composers. Her music is regularly commissioned and performed by leading ensembles across the country and increasingly abroad. Drawing on elements of her Latvian heritage and a deep affection for both popular and classical traditions, she creates work that is vivid, lyrical and emotionally attuned. Her distinctive voice has earned her growing recognition in Australia and beyond.

From the composer:

Through The Mist is a meditation on perception - both visual and emotional. Scored for piano and string quintet, the work evokes mist not simply as a veil over landscape, but as a metaphor for inner terrain and hidden currents. It gestures toward the symbolic, where meaning is felt rather than seen. Mist obscures, but it also softens; it invites stillness, reflection, and a quiet turning inward.

Like a dream, where sensory impressions veil deeper truths, the piece moves through



Composer Ella Macens

cycles of obscurity and revelation, drifting between the literal and the symbolic. Moments of searching and stillness give way to glimpses of grace. The haze becomes a cocoon - a space in which to dwell, to trust what has not yet come into view. The unknown is not always perilous; it can be a place of gestation and quiet trust.

The compositional process was guided by three interwoven themes - absolute beauty, grace, and assurance. These are not presented as conclusions, but as qualities that surface gently, offering comfort without insistence. The music offers a reminder that even when the way forward is unclear, we are not without direction. To be in the mist is to enter a space of solace, reflection, and quiet transformation.

This work was commissioned by Omega Ensemble as part of the Living Music Project and generously supported by the Darin Cooper Foundation.

Nigel Westlake (1958 –)

Rare Sugar

2007 • 15 minutes

With a career spanning almost five decades, Nigel Westlake has created one of the most recognisable and wide-ranging bodies of work in Australian music. His film, television and concert scores have become part of the national soundscape, from *Babe*, *Paper Planes* and *Miss Potter* to *Ali's Wedding* and an extensive catalogue of documentaries. His achievements include two ARIA Awards, fifteen APRA/AGSC Awards and two Paul Lowin Orchestral Prizes. A distinguished conductor, he has led all major Australian symphony orchestras and made international debuts with the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center and the RTÉ Symphony Orchestra. He holds an Honorary Doctorate in Music from UNSW.

Rare Sugar was commissioned by the late Helga Angyal in partnership with the Australia Ensemble for the 90th birthday of her



husband, the late Professor Stephen Angyal OBE, first professor of organic chemistry at the University of New South Wales.

From the composer:

Rare Sugar is in a single movement spanning three distinct sections:
1. Scherzo, 2. Tranquillo / Cadenza, 3. Scherzo

The title is a light-hearted reference to Professor Angyal's research into the chemistry of rare sugars in which he references the energy of different molecular shapes.

The idea of a molecular shape containing energy is transmuted into a musical context and forms the underlying premise of the work - an exploration of the permutations and subdivisions of rhythmic patterns to create tension, release and forward impetus, albeit with a distinctive jazz colouration.

ON STAGE

David Rowden
Clarinet Solo and
Artistic Director *

Véronique Serret
Violin I *

Emma McGrath
Violin II **

Neil Thompson
Viola *

Paul Stender
Cello *

Harry Young
Double Bass **

Vatche Jambazian
Piano *

* Principal Musician

** Guest Principal Musician

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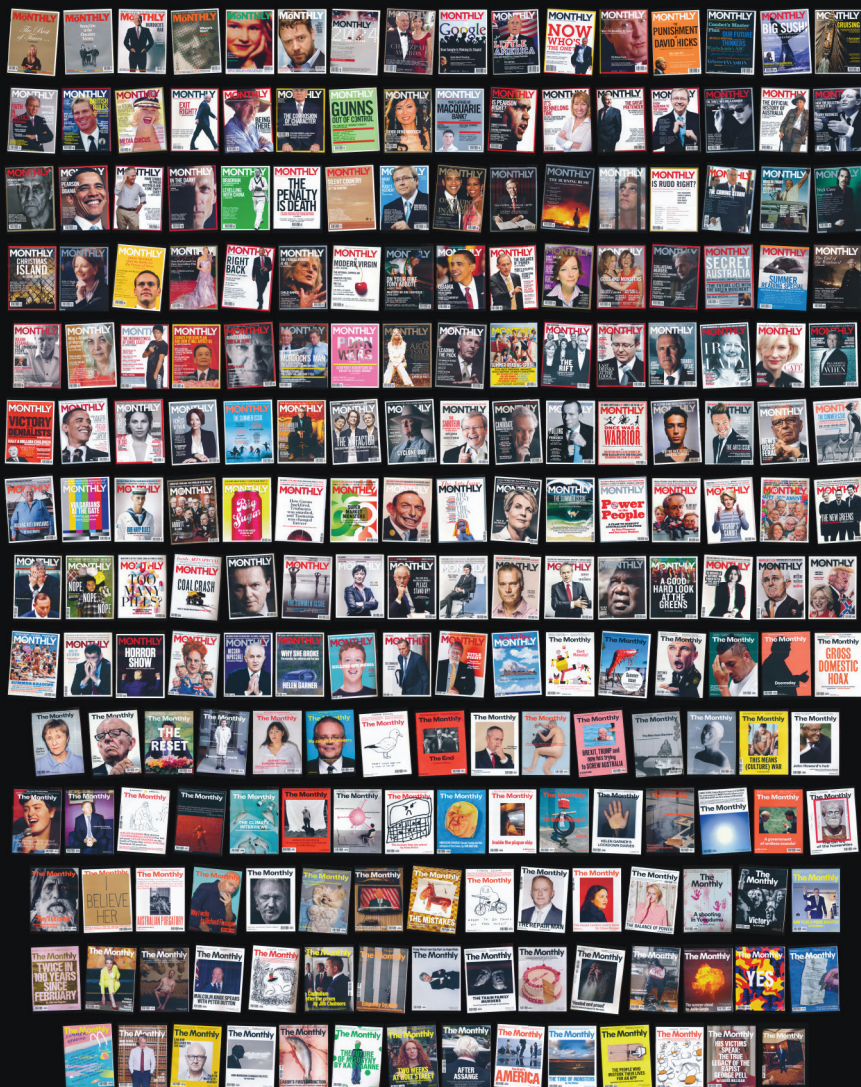
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