

TO WHOM I MAY CONCERN®



24 & 25 FEBRUARY 2023
THE NEILSON, ACO PIER 2/3

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To Whom I May Concern[®] is about doing dementia differently. It gives a voice to the differing experiences of people living with dementia and Mild Cognitive Impairment, through a live performance that will foster conversations and deeper understanding in the wider community.

In this world-first collaboration, brought to Australia by Group Homes Australia, individuals will share their stories of living with dementia in a theatrical performance, interwoven with live music performed by Australian Chamber Orchestra musicians.

The stories you will hear today are the distillation of several months of facilitated group conversations, in which participants explored their individual and shared experiences of living with dementia; from noticing initial changes in their lives, to receiving and sharing their diagnosis with others, through to the process of adjusting their daily lives, and their hopes for the future.

The inaugural performances of *To Whom I May Concern* took place in 2022, and due to popular demand, today we bring these stories to life again on stage. Prepare to be moved and confronted by our participants and their courage, sadness, insights, and humour.

PARTICIPANTS

Susan Hamilton Edgecliff: In 2019 Susan was diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). She has a one in two chance of developing full dementia. Susan has been in continuing practice as a clinical psychotherapist for 25 years.

Gwenda Darling Finley: Gwenda is a proud Aboriginal woman, descendent from the Tebrikuna tribe, born in Gamilaroi Country. Gwenda used to be a social worker, working with Aboriginal children and families. Gwenda was diagnosed with dementia at age 59.

Dennis Frost Nowra: Dennis lives with his partner of 20 years in Nowra – named after the Black Cockatoos, and was born in Moruya – ironically, named after the Black Swans.

Nell Hawe Port Macquarie: Nell is 54 years old and was diagnosed with younger onset Alzheimer's disease in February 2020. "Always be kind. . . because dementia is not."

Bobby Redman Central Coast: Bobby is a retired psychologist and lives alone. She has a daughter and three grandsons, who she describes as "the centre of my world". At the age of 66, Bobby was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia.

Val Schache Empire Vale: Val is 70 years old and was diagnosed with dementia at age 63. "Be aware not to discriminate, be inclusive and be especially kind to all, and do everything to slow or prevent the onset of dementia for your own sake".

PROGRAM

ROBERT SCHUMANN

String Quartet No.1, II. Scherzo:
Presto – Intermezzo

CYRUS MEURANT

String Quartet, II. Vivace

MEURANT

Monday to Friday, Monday III for solo piano

MEURANT

Stray Birds, IV. The bird wishes it were a cloud
(arr. cello and piano)

TRAD.

Waltz after Lasse in Lyby

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

String Quartet No.2, I. Adagio, III. Intermezzo

MEURANT

String Quartet, III. Larghetto e sostenuto

MUSICIANS

Ilya Isakovich Violin

Daniel Yeadon Cello

Caroline Hopson Violin

Cyrus Meurant Piano

Beth Condon Viola

CREATIVE TEAM

Gail Kenning Scribe & Script

Kim Hardwick Director

Cyrus Meurant Musical Director

Martin Kinnane Lighting Designer

BEHIND THE SCENES

Tamar Krebs Founder and Executive Director, Group Homes Australia

Dr Gail Kenning Research Fellow, Big Anxiety Research Centre, UNSW

Tara Smith Director, Learning & Engagement, ACO

Oliver Baker Programs Manager, Learning & Engagement, ACO

To Whom I May Concern[®] was developed by Dr Maureen Matthews in the USA. This unique collaboration between the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Group Homes Australia, Dementia Australia with support from UNSW, is the first time the program has been delivered publicly in Australia.

Phil Hazell, Penrith: Phil was diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's at age 55. Phil is the past Chair of the Dementia Australia Advisory Committee and is one of the first people in Australia to be partnered with a Dementia Assistance Dog. Sadly, his Assistance Dog Sara has passed and he is unable to join this year's public performance. Phil is pictured here with his new pup Margot.



LETTER TO SARA

Dear Sara

You came into my life at exactly the right time. I am so glad that we have spent so much time you are always with me.

Your support and having you with me on this journey means that I have retained my independence. Going out with you has meant that I am now able to be sociable. I am willing to ask people for help and have no hang-up whatsoever about my dementia. My organizational skills are good, but Sara, you have always been there to help. Like, when I am trying to leave the house and can't find my bits and pieces, and the taxis waiting outside, and I'm under pressure, my dementia cuts in and I get totally confused. You have found things for me, shown me where my wallet, keys, and phone are. Even when I put them in ridiculous places. Even when in unfamiliar hotel rooms.

We have travelled a lot together. Each time we have flown together, have carried our own tickets and flown premium economy, and I don't mind that you have always wanted the window seat. In airports, I sometimes get lost or confused, but you have taught me to stop for five minutes or half an hour, have a cuddle, and relax, before we get on our way.

Seven years together and barely a hiccup, except for perhaps that one day when we were in a lift and the woman in front of us threw me a filthy look. It was then I realised you were licking the back of her leg!

You have made my dementia journey so much better Sara, my beautiful assistance Dog.

But Sara now you are a beautiful memory as I had to say goodbye to you not so long ago. You are greatly missed!

Now I have Margot to help me on my dementia journey, she has so much to learn – if only we can get her to stay awake at her appointments with the vet!

Yours in peachy health, Phil