

## Programme Note

Southern Ocean was commissioned by Symphony Australia for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Intervarsity Choir Festival and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Porcelijn. The work is a setting for choir and orchestra of a new text by Margaret Scott and was composed in 1999. The text has beautiful and dramatic nautical imagery and is set in a town in southern Tasmania. It contrasts contemporary experience with the sometimes violent history of the town against a backdrop of the ocean's many faces.

The piece falls into three large choruses and two dialogues for male and female voices. The mood of place and time and a commentary on addressing the past as we move towards the millennium emerge as themes in the outer sections; the middle sections are a series of optimistic reflections from the shore. The drama of the natural environment and the toughness of the human spirit in enduring natural and man-made storms are key ideas throughout.

The Southern Ocean was of interest because of the immensity of its natural forces as well as its imaginative and mythical position in the Australian consciousness - a vast ocean of unbroken waves, great icebergs and terrible peril for sailors (past and present) yet also the route for much migration to Australia in the nineteenth century. Hence, embodying hope and fear. The focus on the sea is important - the image of people struggling from the sea to create a new life seemed a good metaphor for the Anniversary of the Intervarsity choral movement; that is, extreme optimism and determination to create art and beauty in the face of any number of obstacles.

Musically, the idea of the unbroken wave that rises, propels and swamps within an ocean of continual momentum, was firmly in mind.

### Southern Ocean Margaret Scott

#### Chorus 1.

The ocean is all about us, ever changing.  
Lair of life, nurturer of the earth,  
leisure's dream and cold grey widowmaker,  
it rises in savage tempest and tidal wave.

Among feeding swans it ripples in quiet coves,  
lipping the sand like a child at the mother's breast.  
At the road's turn it's a shimmer of bridesmaids' satin  
cupped in hills, and from the headland extends  
as a vast floor of sheen and shadowed blue  
into distant haze. Beyond is mystery where  
landbound imagination raises up cliffs of ice,  
imprisoned ships and blizzards swirling out of the polar night.  
So, under the wave, the inner eye builds visions  
that serve to fortify the self or enters the glint of shell,  
the whale's pith, the delicate dance of mote and plant  
and fish in loving curious acts of recreation.