

## Ross Edwards (b.1943)

One of Australia's best-known composers, Ross Edwards' distinctive sound world combines shapes and patterns from nature with a variety of musical influences which reflect and celebrate Australia's cultural diversity.

In his *maninya* (dance/chant) pieces he has tried to restore to 'serious' music such qualities as lightness, spontaneity and the impulse to dance. His belief in the healing power of music is reflected in a series of profoundly contemplative works influenced by birdsong and the mysterious polyphony of summer insects.

His compositions include four symphonies, the violin concerto *Maninyas* and the internationally acclaimed *Dawn Mantras*, which ushered in the new millennium from the sails of the Sydney Opera House.

For more information, see the Ross Edwards Web Site: [www.rossedwards.com](http://www.rossedwards.com)

### Symphony No. 3 - *Mater Magna*

*I. Feroce, II. Lontano e Misterioso, III. Con Moto*

My Symphony No. 3 'Mater Magna', especially commissioned by the 2001 Melbourne International Festival for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to perform at its Centenary of Federation Celebration Concert, offers a personal statement about Australia. Of course, for an occasion like this something affirmative is appropriate, but I found this could only be reached after much soul-searching - otherwise it would inevitably have sounded hollow.

The symphony, it seems to me, is a meditation on the need for ecological re-balancing, using as a symbol, the Earth Mother, 'Mater Magna', the vital female force in nature; it is about healing and ultimately achieving wholeness. It follows a tendency in my recent work to juxtapose exuberant, earthy, sometimes spiky, dance rhythms with moments of profound introspection. I expect that in thus highlighting the schism our society has inherited between matter and spirit, masculine and feminine, mind and body and so on, I'm subconsciously reflecting our increasingly felt collective need for balance and conciliation.

As in all my music there are abundant shapes and patterns which recall the natural world: birdsong, frog and insect rhythms and the pulsating summer drones of cicadas. It is also permeated by fragments and transformations of the plainsong *Ave Maria Gratia Plena* (Hail Mary, full of Grace), the Christian Mary synonymous, for me, with the universal and eternal feminine spirit, the Earth Mother, source and nurturer of all living things.

Pitted against this harmonious vision is the disturbed, demonic energy of the opening which erupts spasmodically throughout the first movement before yielding, a spent force, to the mysterious half-lit world of the second. Conceived high in the Blue Mountains, a daydream with distant birdsong turns into a chorale on the plainsong before we're invited to look inward in timeless contemplation. (Concert halls aren't very conducive to this sort of thing, but I've asked for subdued lighting and I hope this will help).

The trance-like episode recedes as the third movement, a ritualized dance/chant (or *maninya*) begins to throb gently as the lights come up. A joyous interplay of plainsong, birdsong and amplified insect rhythm prepares for the work's exultant conclusion, a vision of hope for Australia's future in which orchestral bells especially designed by Neil McLachlan and Anton Hasell, ring out freely and trumpets blaze the climactic theme of my song for the New Millennium, *Dawn Mantra*.

*Symphony No. 3* is dedicated to Peter Sculthorpe in celebration of thirty-seven years' close friendship and as a belated 70th birthday present. The first performance was given in the Melbourne Town Hall on 25 May 2001 by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Divall. A recording of the work by the MSO conducted by Markus Stenz is available on an ABC Classics CD (ABC 461 830-2).

. R. E.