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Brett Dean

Beggars & Angels

Paul Dean CLARINET

Melbourne Symphony

Orchestra

Markus Stenz



Beggars & Angels

Brett Dean b. 1961

Ariel's Music

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|---|---------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Elegy | 11'17 |
| 2 | II. Circumstances | 13'22 |
| 3 | Amphitheatre | 10'34 |
| 4 | Beggars and Angels | 26'10 |

Total Playing Time 61'23

Paul Dean *clarinet*
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Markus Stenz *conductor*



Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Dvořák, Hindemith, Bridge and Britten. All these composers had one thing in common – to a lesser or greater extent, they were all viola players. No joke.

With 15 years under his belt as a member of the Berlin Philharmonic viola section (from 1985 to 2000) and almost a decade now of serious, acclaimed compositional achievement, Brisbane-born Brett Dean can confidently be attached to that illustrious subset too.

On the possible compositional advantage of being a viola player Brett Dean remarked: 'There's something distinctive about playing inner parts, for sure. It gives you an overview upwards and downwards of what's going on, of the workings of a piece. Perhaps you're not as intensely busy as the first violins might be, and you're not so heavily engaged in pumping out the bass line ... so yes, it does give you time to take in other things that are happening around you.'

Although Brett Dean admits to having written a string quartet and some piano pieces in his teens, the official starting point for his compositional journey is 1988. Even then, his role was as an improvising performer, collaborating in Berlin with fellow Australian Simon Hunt on experimental film and radio scores. This experience opened Dean's ears up to the possibilities of pure sound: sound as music, noise as something beautiful, the sonic

potential of violently hit ceramic tiles, or screeching metal on a train track's curve or playground swing.

While this was an influential counterweight to the conventionalities of his day job in the Berlin Philharmonic, it didn't ultimately turn Brett Dean into a latter-day John Cage or hardcore experimentalist. It simply broadened his outlook and exposed him to the possibilities of electronics and sampling technology. (Simon Hunt later found a certain notoriety as 'Pauline Pantsdown', the remixed *alter ego* of One Nation leader Hanson.) The music that has followed these early years of discovery is recognisably mainstream concert music: predominantly composed, rather than improvised; notes written down onto paper and played off it live by human beings.

Dean reckons his 1995 work *Ariel's Music*, for clarinet and orchestra, to be his coming-of-age piece. Up to then, he had been receiving encouragement from musical associates in his Berlin milieu for this relatively new activity. 'It was very important in those early days that there were enough people who would say, "Look, this isn't bad. You should keep doing this,"' he recalls. 'And then, after the premiere of *Ariel's Music* in Brisbane, Richard Mills came up to me and said, "You know, you're a real composer now," which was a fantastic, encouraging thing to hear.'

Another turning point piece for him was his first commission for the Australian Chamber

Orchestra, *Carlo*. This intense, harrowing work for 15 strings, sampled voices and taped choir was premiered in December 1997 at the Huntington Estate Music Festival, in Mudjee, New South Wales. The return to Australia at that time for Dean and his painter wife, Heather Betts, 'was such a positive experience for us. It brought us back in touch with Australia, and *Carlo's* success made me realise for the first time that, yes, maybe I can do this composing thing full-time.' Dean and his family made that momentous final return from Berlin in early 2000, settling first in Noosa and more recently in Melbourne.

The superficial extremes of Dean's musical experience – Australia (sunniness, exotic) and Berlin (darkly cerebral, central to Western culture) – generate an important tension in his music. For someone who readily admits to being obsessed with Germanic culture as a teenage student at the Sydney Conservatorium ('Hesse, Mann, Webern, *Death and the Maiden*, all that stuff'), it's not surprising who his musical heroes continue to be, and with which aesthetic his own music is most aligned. In Berlin, he was known as the young Australian (he was the youngest member of the Berlin Philharmonic when he got the job in 1985) who brought a slightly dissident, new world freshness to the venerable institution. But back in Australia Dean seems (so far) very much the European, with his admiration for such middle European

heavyweights as Kurtág, Henze, Lutoslawski and Ligeti, and tendency to create the same brooding intensity in his music that he experienced living in a place like Berlin. But here, the balancing perspective of different cultures asserts itself.

'I think complexity is great,' he says. 'But if a piece is complex from beginning to end then it's not complex, is it? It's just chaos. Which, you know, some people might be into. But I think complexity only means something when it's put against something that isn't complex. Then you've got the gamut of emotions that makes complexity complex. I find it important to write music that invites the listener in, without necessarily making it easy for them. But I tend also to turn off with music that's so head-driven that it's slamming the door in my face as soon as I've heard five seconds of it. And there's quite a lot of that, particularly from the 60s. And I think we're past that now, and can take from that period aspects of it that are really searching and part of the human spirit.'

Achieving the aim of making his music simultaneously inviting and challenging comes hand in hand with a variety of extramusical influences in that work. Although never pictorial or narrative as such, each piece almost invariably bears homage, comments sociopolitically, or springs from literary and visual stimuli. *Ariel's Music* and the concluding *Elegy* of the *Huntington Eulogy* (cello and piano, 2001) are in

memory of two young people, the victims of AIDS and cancer respectively. *Carlo* is a compelling portrait of the life and work of the tortured, uxoricidal Renaissance composer, Carlo Gesualdo; while the more recent *Testament* (for 12 violas, 2003) is a vivid commentary on Beethoven's document of personal anguish and despair, written at Heiligenstadt in 1802.

Dean's social and political commentary seems to be becoming stronger with successive works, arising from a conscience that burns bright, in a gently raging, impressively articulate way. *Game Over*, his Olympic Arts Festival work for the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bang on a Can and sampled voices, set the tone with a bleak, black-humoured critique of modern society – in particular, the corrosive, soul-bludgeoning influence of television and the crushing banality of its game shows. The next year, in 2001, his *Pastoral Symphony* acknowledged both the ravishing beauty of birdsong – again through electronic samples – and the threat posed to it by 'relentless and respectless' environmental degradation. Two works from 2003 – *Ceremonial* for orchestra and the string quartet *Eclipse* – are tough commentaries on the Iraq war and the Tampa boat people/asylum crisis.

The poetic stimulus for his 1996 quintet for piano and strings, *Voices of Angels*, was some lines from Rilke's first *Duino Elegy*, and in the same year Sidney Lumet's tense courtroom drama *Twelve Angry Men* inspired Dean to

compose a compelling musical representation of this 1957 movie for the twelve cellos of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Similarly, two out of the three works on this disc have artistic and literary starting points. *Beggars and Angels* was prompted by the juxtaposition, in a Berlin exhibition, of sculpted beggars (by Trak Wendisch) and painted angels (by Heather Betts). The scene for orchestra, *Amphitheatre*, takes its inspiration from the description, in Michael Ende's children's book *Momo*, of the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre on the outskirts of a modern city.

As already noted, **Ariel's Music** is a memorial piece for a young American girl, Ariel Glaser, whose death from AIDS in 1988 prompted her mother, Elisabeth, to become an outspokenly successful campaigner and fundraiser for paediatric AIDS research. As well as being an elegy for Ariel – the first movement is titled as such – the piece pays tribute to 'this heroic woman' Elisabeth who, as Dean notes, raised \$30 million before also falling victim to the virus in 1994. (She had contracted it during pregnancy through blood transfusion.)

From the first bars of this 'coming-of-age' piece, significant hallmarks of Dean's subsequent writing are established: string writing of great personality and effect – no surprise there, from Dean the violist; a strong ability to evoke atmosphere, to draw the listener in; a compelling

sense of drama, of ebb and flow; and, in the very gradual build-up of texture and gathering of ideas along the way, a discernible sense that – in a rather old-fashioned, 19th-century way perhaps – Dean is handling his motivic material with great skill and control. The intervallic building materials in this opening *Elegy* are a rising 9th, a falling minor 3rd and an augmented 4th. The first of these, played repeatedly by timpani, harp and double bass, forms the haunting foundation for a concluding, sparse-textured dirge – all energy from the movement's central scherzo character sapped and spent.

This is also the way the second movement, *Circumstances*, concludes – a tense, desperate sob. Described by Dean as a *Todestanz* (Dance of Death), it features the soloist, he says, as a 'solitary, anxious figure, forever trying to establish a dialogue with other solo voices in the orchestra'. Rhythms are jagged, textures forever changing, the grotesquely dancing solo figures often featuring a characteristic downward glissando (another Dean trademark in the making, especially from string instruments) and climaxing with a unison rhythmic tutti and impassioned, tumbling cadenza.

Such virtuosic solo writing was conceived for Brett Dean's brother Paul, Principal Clarinet of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. It was premiered by these forces in the Brisbane Concert Hall in September 1995, and was a Selected Work

at the 1999 UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers in Paris.

That same year – in the penultimate month of the century – came the first performance of Dean's first purely orchestral work, **Beggars and Angels** – by the performers on this disc, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Markus Stenz. Just as Dean was intrigued by the apparent opposites – but uncanny similarities – of the sculpted beggars and painted angels in the Potsdam exhibition, there is a similar paradox in the fact that the piece which formed the motivic template for this colossally scored orchestral essay was in fact Dean's 1996 work for a single viola, *Intimate Decisions*.

'Every piece,' Dean has said, 'might have just one bar in it where I think, "Hey, I want to visit that again and take it a bit further."' Teasing motivic scraps, such as a rising minor 3rd in *Intimate Decisions*, are indeed taken quite a bit further in *Beggars and Angels*. And it is not the only instance of such compositional revisits. '*Twelve Angry Men* originated as a piece for five violas, a little five-minute thing,' Dean recalls, 'and it turned into this 17-minute sort of tone poem for 12 cellos.' *Game Over* grew out of a sound installation for Berlin's Millennium celebrations, while the ballet score *One of a Kind* is closely linked to *Carlo*.

Motivically, *Beggars and Angels* is as tightly controlled and focused as *Ariel's Music*, though perhaps in a more subtle, less intervallically rigorous way. Joining the tentative, questing rising 3rd that begins both *Intimate Decisions* and *Beggars and Angels* is the other predominant melodic cell from the viola piece – a repeated falling semitone followed by a repeated rising minor 6th. Clearly, in such an extended work, other material is introduced and investigated; but the motivic influence of *Intimate Decisions* is pervasive and binding.

Broadly, *Beggars and Angels* divides into two sections: the first, one of frequent mood shifts, violent climaxes and abrupt jerks of rhythmic emphasis; the second, calmer, dreamier, texturally sparser. Dean, as with all his scores, is eloquent and specific in his performance markings – a teeming succession of instructions such as 'restless but very quiet ... distinctly slower, still agitated and unsettled'; or later, in successive bars 'somewhat agitated ... more agitated...calming down'. Dean's beggars and angels, sometimes confronting each other, sometimes commingled, generate a musical world of ethereal spaciousness, foreboding and desperation, harried pursuit and – can we presume this? – visions of heaven and hell.

Inevitably, without *Ariel's Music's* focus on a soloist, the orchestration in *Beggars and Angels* is more immediately compelling. A vast array of

percussion is used, alongside occasionally prominent piano and harp. Certain instrumental groupings are used to great effect – either colourful alloys such as piccolos, celeste and vibraphone, or discrete euphonies of flutes, clarinets or three trombones and tuba. The last of these has a major solo in the second section, and it is effectively an elegy for an exceptional young Australian tuba player Frank Barzyk, who had died the previous year after a long struggle with cancer.

This 'For Frank' section is followed by a stretch of solemn rhythmic unisons – halting punctuation points – which in turn grow to a climax of broad, expansive unison melody that has, perhaps, the grandiose, almost-kitsch moments of Messiaen's *Turangalila* looking over its shoulder. The conclusion, a coloured-in revisit of *Intimate Decisions's* haunting close, has the eerie, icy harmonics of divisi violas and cellos asking questions right to the end. It is music of exceptional, disembodied beauty – arguably some of the most arresting sounds to have been written in the dying days of a troubled century.

Beggars and Angels won the Australian Music Centre Award for Best Composition in 2000, and since then has been performed more than 30 times, not only in Australia but throughout Europe and Asia. In June 2000, just half a year after the *Beggars and Angels* premiere in Melbourne, Brett Dean's 'dramatic scene for



large orchestra', **Amphitheatre**, had its first outing in Brisbane with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Daniel Harding. Dean was drawn to Michael Ende's 'mesmerising' book for children, *Momo*, which describes the ruins of an ancient Roman amphitheatre on the outskirts of a large, modern city. Amphitheatres, whether lavish or modest, Dean notes, 'were a relection of the people and communities that built them; the main thing was that everyone had somewhere to gather in order to experience theatre, to satisfy their hunger for stories and spectacles, to be part of their culture.'

The main musical idea that opens and closes this arch-shaped single movement is an oscillating chord change which Dean aims to portray as the amphitheatre's massive blocks of stone. With a deliberate crotchet pulse and shifts of orchestral colour, 'we take in different perspectives of the same object, as if taking a walk around its circumference.'

Muted trumpet fanfares appear from this musical block of stone, growing steadily and radiating into a full texture for an urgent, almost grotesque climax. For Dean, they are 'reminiscences of past glories ... momentarily replacing the stillness of time frozen.' Quickly dissipating, they once again become distant echoes in a conclusion characterised by forlorn solos for flute, violin and clarinet, and the unsettling timbres of tuned gongs and steel drums. Ende's daydreaming tourist comes back into the present, takes a photo and departs from the scene: 'Then stillness is reinstated to the stony roundness.'

Meurig Bowen

Brett Dean

Australian violist and composer Brett Dean graduated from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music in 1982 as Student of the Year. After four seasons as Principal Viola of the Queensland and Australian Youth Orchestras and numerous solo performances throughout Australasia, he travelled to Germany in 1984 with financial assistance from the Australia Council to further his studies. He became a permanent member of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1985.

While in Europe, he appeared at major festivals and collaborated with many of the world's greatest musicians, including Imogen Cooper, Markus Stenz, Oliver Knussen and Sir Simon Rattle. For the celebrations of Paul Hindemith's centenary in 1995, Brett Dean was soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic under Claudio Abbado in Hindemith's Viola d'Amore Concerto, a performance that won him special critical acclaim. He recorded this work for CPO, and appears on other commercial CDs released by Nimbus, ABC Classics and CPO. His particular interest in contemporary music has led to well over 50 premieres of new solo and chamber pieces by some of the leading composers of our time, including Henze, Kurtág, Rihm and Colin Matthews.

Brett Dean began composing in 1988, making largely improvised film music and radio projects for the ABC and independent filmmakers. He

became established as a composer through worldwide performances of the ballet *One of a Kind* (Nederlands Dans Theater) and his clarinet concerto *Ariel's Music*, which won an award from the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers. His works now attract considerable attention throughout Europe and Australia. One of his works, *Carlo*, was described in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as perhaps the 'most forcefully striking achievement in Australian writing for orchestral strings' in over thirty years. In 2000 Brett Dean won the Australian Music Centre Award for Best Composition for his orchestral work *Beggars and Angels*. In 2001 he won the Paul Lowin Song Cycle Prize for *Winter Songs*.

A broad selection of his music has been recorded and has also been featured by the English music quarterly *Unknown Public*. He has written commissioned works for, among others, the Sydney Festival, English pianist Imogen Cooper, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra and the twelve cellos of the Berlin Philharmonic. Future projects include a new work for the Auryn String Quartet and an operatic adaptation of Peter Carey's *Bliss* for Opera Australia.

Paul Dean

Paul Dean is a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. While still a student, he won the Australian Clarinet Competition, the Mattara National Concerto Competition, the Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition in Los Angeles (as a member of the Movellan Wind Quintet) and the Conservatorium Medal for Excellence. He has since appeared as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician in Norway, England, Germany, Japan, China, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Korea.

Paul Dean has been Principal Clarinet with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (1987-2000) and guest Principal Clarinet with the Australian Chamber Orchestra (2000 Olympic Arts Festival), the Dutch contemporary ensemble Orkest de Volharding (Queensland Biennial Festival of Music, 2001), and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony (2002). He appeared with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra as soloist on over 30 occasions, and premiered over 60 works, many written for him or dedicated to him. Solo appearances include performances with Norway's Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Youth Orchestra, China National Symphony Orchestra, West Australian, Tasmanian, Melbourne and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras and The Queensland Orchestra. In 2002 he gave the first Australian performance of John Adams' clarinet concerto

Gnarly Buttons. Paul Dean's recording of his brother Brett's clarinet concerto *Ariel's Music* with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra was a finalist in the 1999 ARIA Awards; he has also recorded the clarinet music of English composer Benjamin Frankel in collaboration with the Australian String Quartet.

Paul Dean lives in Brisbane where he is Director of the Southern Cross Soloists – with whom in 2004 he will perform over 50 concerts throughout Australia – and Artistic Director of the Bangalow Music Festival. Other 2004 engagements include a national tour with the Macquarie Trio and guest appearances for the Sydney Festival and the Australian String Quartet. He also regularly performs with his brother Brett in a trio with pianist Stephen Emmerson, Dean Emmerson Dean.

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

With a reputation for excellence, versatility and innovation developed over almost 100 years the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra attracts total annual audiences of more than 250,000. This fine orchestra is renowned for its performances of the great symphonic masterworks with leading international soloists, and for its appearances with The Three Tenors, Frank Sinatra, Kiri Te Kanawa, Elton John, John Farnham, the rock band KISS, Dionne Warwick and Meatloaf.

With Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, Markus Stenz – currently in his seventh year with the Orchestra – the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra has taken an even more prominent position on the world stage.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra has received international recognition with its tours to the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, Europe, China and most recently St Petersburg, Russia.

The Orchestra's concerts are broadcast regularly on ABC Classic FM and some performances are presented through ABC TV. In addition, members of the Orchestra have featured on numerous movie soundtracks including those for feature-films such as *Babe*, *IQ*, *Hotel Sorrento*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *Babe II – Pig in the City* and *The Dish*. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra was also involved in an interactive

information technology games project based on the *Jurassic Park* movies.

Brett Dean was the MSO's Artist-in-Residence between 2001 and 2004.

Markus Stenz

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Gürzenichkapellmeister in Cologne, Markus Stenz will assume the position of General Music Director of the Cologne Opera in September 2005.

He has held the positions of Music Director of the Montepulciano Festival (1989 to 1995) and Principal Conductor of the London Sinfonietta (1994 to 1998).

Opera appearances have included Stuttgart Opera, Munich Opera (World premiere of Henze's *Venus and Adonis*), Hamburg Opera, Frankfurt Opera, La Monnaie Brussels, English National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, San Francisco Opera, Salzburg Festival (World premiere of Henze's *L'Upupa*), Cologne Opera and the Glyndebourne Festival.

Orchestral collaborations have included the Munich Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, NDR Symphony Orchestra Hamburg, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Tonhalle Orchestra in Zurich, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Danish National Radio

Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Appearances in the UK have included the BBC Symphony, Philharmonic and Scottish Symphony Orchestras, Hallé Orchestra and several appearances at the BBC Proms.

Recordings include Kurt Weill's *Der Silbersee* for BMG and Mahler's Symphony No. 5 and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* for ABC Classics.

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For Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
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