

Camerata fills Museum with music inspired by *Life in Irons*

Camerata – Queensland’s Chamber Orchestra, will perform new works inspired by Museum of Brisbane’s current exhibition *Life in Irons: Brisbane’s Convict Stories* in two musical performances at the Museum on Sunday 16 September at 1pm and 2pm.

This unique concert, *A place in time*, will feature five new works composed and performed by a quintet comprising: Artistic Director Brendan Joyce, violin; Jonny Ng, violin; Alice Buckingham, viola; Julian Sharp, cello; and Marian Heckenberg, double bass.

Each of the works was composed during Camerata’s residency at the Museum in June and responds to a different aspect of *Life in Irons: Brisbane’s Convict Stories*. The exhibition presents a vivid insight into life in the settlement from 1824 – 1839 through the personal accounts of convicts, officers, children and Traditional Owners.

Three of the new works respond to the stories of the female convicts, providing a moving aural narrative to individual and collective stories of loss, hardship, separation and isolation, while two of the others were inspired by the children who played and grew in the settlement and the density of the atmosphere and surrounding landscape.

Museum of Brisbane Director Renai Grace said hosting Camerata as part of the Artist-in-Residence program was really exciting for both visitors and the Museum team.

“The Artist-in-Residence program invites artists to respond to the Museum’s exhibitions, collection, our home in City Hall, and aspects of Brisbane culture and lifestyle more generally,” Ms Grace said.

“We have had the privilege of watching some amazing artists create new works over the past two years, but this is the first time we’ve had musicians in residence. Watching Camerata’s team respond to the exhibition and then compose these new works to bring emotion and drama to historical objects and stories has provided a rare insight into the artists’ practice.

“Set within the exhibition itself, *A place in time*, will be a memorable performance, especially as each concert has a capacity of just 40, making it a very intimate, very exclusive event where you can also stay and chat with the performers after the concert.”

Camerata Artistic Director Brendan Joyce said this project has been one of the more fascinating, interesting and challenging ones to have come our way.

“As well as our own guided tour by the curators, it has involved some discussions as a group – something we are used to in our usual rehearsals and performances – but also a lot of time alone in the exhibition, contemplating what ‘a life in irons’ in early European Brisbane settlement must have been like,” Mr Joyce said.

“Camerata’s players have responded directly to narratives of both the transported convicts and the Indigenous people that already inhabited the land, but also to the atmosphere – the sounds, the humid, tropical environs so far removed from the modern concrete cityscape that we have today.”

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“My own response has been to try to imagine the life of the children in the colony – kids always seem to find innovation, humour and a fair degree of optimism in even the most trying situations.

“We’ll play solos, improvise some sections, and juxtapose musical styles. We’ll also give a brief introduction before bringing the audience into the exhibition where they can hear our responses while seeing the artefacts that inspired the sounds.”

To book tickets to A place in time with Camerata – Queensland’s Chamber Orchestra visit museumofbrisbane.com.au/whats-on/

Museum of Brisbane’s Artist-in-Residence program is supported by Mr Tim Fairfax AC and donors. Life in Irons is presented in partnership with Queensland State Archives with support from Liquid Interactive and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

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Quotes from Camerata players:

Marian Heckenberg:

It struck me how imprisonment and deportation from Ireland would have been utterly devastating for the unfortunate women who found themselves on the wrong side of the tyrannical British. In the 1700s such an event would likely mean permanent loss of contact with loved ones and the homeland. Of all the female prisoners exiled to Brisbane (Moreton Bay) 70% were Irish and many were named Mary, sometimes by misadventure or poor prison record-keeping. The sultry thick atmosphere of sub-tropical rainforest would have been as foreign as the Amazon and just as isolated and remote. MARYS' LAMENT is an homage to all the Marys' that found their unfortunate lives oppressed here amongst the heat, rain, insects and hunger.

Jonny Ng:

One of the stories that drew my attention was about the female factory in Eagle Farm. One of commandant Sydney Cotton’s first actions was to move all the women from Brisbane town to Eagle Farm. One of the main problems was the number of children they had brought with them from Sydney and the infants born after arrival. Although there was not much elaboration on the newborns, I make the assumption that not all would have thrived in this environment. The other issue I take from this exhibition is the devastating effects of settlement on the Indigenous population in the area. There is so much pain and anguish resulting from these historic events.

Alice Buckingham:

I’ve been drawn to the story of Mary Ryan, in particular the sad circumstances of her death. She gave birth to a baby boy and had complications afterwards and, after all the female convicts had been transported back to Sydney, she was the only one left at Moreton Bay (deemed too ill to travel), with a friend who stayed with her. She passed away in hospital not much later. My musical response is based on Mary’s last day.

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About Museum of Brisbane

Here at Museum of Brisbane we believe art, culture and history should be experienced.

We encourage you to think boldly, share your ideas and challenge your perceptions. From co-creating with artists to reflecting on contemporary identity, our goal is to ensure you have a memorable and insightful experience every visit.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Brisbane and surrounds, the Yuggara, Turrbal, Jinibara and Quandamooka people. We are privileged to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, artists, curators, writers and storytellers to share and celebrate the rich knowledge, art and histories of our First Nations communities.

The Museum is dedicated to supporting the city's many talented artists, designers, writers, historians and storytellers. We invite artists to create works inspired by our beautiful city and engage our visitors in a global conversation.

Any day in the Museum you may find Traditional Owners sharing local lore, an artist-in-residence creating new work, a performance in one of our exhibitions and our artist educators nurturing the curiosity and creativity of families and school groups.

Our Museum Guides are among Brisbane's best storytellers and every day we take hundreds of visitors on tours of City Hall and to the top of the iconic Clock Tower. These tours blend historical fact with tales about some of the city's best-known personalities, anecdotes and trivia.

Museum of Brisbane is a not-for-profit cultural organisation that relies on the support of visitors and our community. Thanks for helping us share the best of Brisbane.

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