

# pressquotes

**BRETT DEAN - COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR, VIOLIST**

**Brett Dean's *The Last Days of Socrates* receives its world premiere by Berlin Philharmonic under Simon Rattle, with Sir John Tomlinson as soloist**

“Ein paar Nummern größer ist nun “The Last Days of Socrates” gewachsen, Brett Deans neuester Streich: ein riesenhaftes Oratorium über Verurteilung und Tod des griechischen Philosophen. Und zugleich ein engagierter Ruf nach Meinungsfreiheit. Atmosphärisch. Lautmalend. Referenzenschwanger. Unverkennbar die Nähe zu mitteleuropäischen Großmeistern wie Ligeti, Kurtag, Lutoslawski und Henze. Doch Dean ahmt nicht nur begeistert nach, er erjagt sich auch verblüffende neue Sounds. Virtuos verschiebt er die Grenzen zwischen Geräusch, Klang und Musik. Wer sich schon immer mal gerne anhören wolke, wie der giftige Trank in Sokrates' Kehle tropft – Brett Deans Partitur gibt effektiv Auskunft. Sir John Tomlinsons massiger Wagner-Bassbariton verleiht dem verurteilten Philosophen raue Würde. Philharmoniker und Rundfunkchor wirbeln unter Rattle mit Lust und Mut zum Risiko.”

“Brett Dean's latest triumph is a colossal oratorio about the trial and death of the Greek philosopher, and yet it is also a call for freedom of expression. It was atmospheric, onomatopoeic, pregnant with references, and unmistakably comparable to the great central European composers such as Ligeti, Kurtag, Lutoslawski and Henze. And yet Dean is not simply enthusiastically imitating them; he has also hunted down astonishing new sounds. Like a virtuoso, he blurs the boundaries between noise, sound and music. If you have ever wanted to hear how the poison dripped into Sokrates' throat, Brett Dean's score gives you an effective insight... The Philharmonic and the Radio Choir under Rattle whirled through the score with joy and fearlessness.”

*Berliner Morgenpost*, April 2013

“Sein vor ca. zwei Jahren durch den Rundfunkchor Berlin in Auftrag gegebenes dreisätziges Werk behandelt *The Last Days of Socrates* (Die letzten Tage des Sokrates). Es ist für Bassbariton, Chor und Orchester geschrieben und hat eine Dauer von über einer halben Stunde. Reichlich Handlung findet sich in ihm - man könnte es durchaus auch szenisch ausprobieren; eine dahingehende Versuchung wäre es mit instinktiver Sicherheit und also garantiert wohl wert.

John Tomlinson - den wir vielleicht vor ungefähr drei Jahren ganz zuletzt als Gurnemann in Wagners Parsifal (eine seiner Paraderollen!) an der Wiener Staatsoper erlebten - hat jetzt bei der Uraufführung den Sokrates abgeleistet: eine Idealbesetzung! Tomlinson "besitzt" das Alter, die Erfahrungen und den porös-brüchigen Sound, um dieser anspruchsvollen Rolle voll gerecht zu werden. Wenn er beispielsweise dann am Schluss des Werkes, wo es um die "Existenzfrage" der Seele geht (also woher/wohin kommen und gehen wir vor oder nach dem physisch ausgelebten Leben; und Sokrates lässt uns sehr, sehr weise wissen à la 'Ich weiß, dass ich nichts weiß' oder so), sich mit den hochabseits befindlichen Damen des Rundfunkchors Berlin in stimmlich-sphärischen Überbietungskämpfen misst, wird Dieses als ein Kunst-Akt sondergleichen justament begreif- und auch erlebbar, und wir sind - ganz ohne Scham und Scheu gesprochen - fast den Tränen nah, wie wir das Alles hören.

Der Orchesterapparat ist riesig, und zugleich lässt Dean ihn transparent und also völlig unwichtig zum Einsatz kommen; die Berliner Philharmoniker umhegen und umsorgen Chor/Bassbariton auf musikalisch raffinierte und auch delikate Art und Weise. Simon Rattle dirigiert das Werk sehr gern; das war zu sehen und zu spüren.

Neue oder zeitgenössische Musik für Herz, Verstand UND Seele - wann hat man jemals Gelegenheiten, diese Heilige Dreieinigkeit live zu erleben?!”

“Dean's piece *The Last Days of Socrates* was commissioned by the Berlin Radio Choir around two years ago. Written in three movements, it is scored for bass-baritone soloist, choir and orchestra, and lasts just

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over half an hour. There is plenty of action in the piece, and it could feasibly be staged; it would certainly be worth giving it a try.

John Tomlinson, whom we last saw at the Wiener Staatsoper singing Gurnemanz in Wagner's 'Parsifal' (one of his signature roles), was perfectly cast as Socrates in this premiere of the piece. Tomlinson possesses the maturity, the experience and the porous and fragile sound which this demanding role requires. For example, at the end of the piece, when he is considering the existence of the soul (where we come from and where we go to before and after our physical life, which Socrates concludes very wisely that he cannot know), and joins with the ladies of the Berlin Radio Choir, each bidding to outdo the other in creating celestial sounds, it became an unparalleled work of art which the audience could both comprehend and experience, bringing us to the verge of tears.

"The orchestral forces required were enormous, and yet Dean brought each part in with clarity and delicacy. The Berlin Philharmonic took great care of the choir and bass-baritone, playing with musical refinement and sensitivity. It was obvious that Simon Rattle enjoyed conducting the piece.

Contemporary music for the heart, soul AND mind – how often does one have the opportunity to experience this holy trinity live?!"

*Kultur Extra*, April 2013

"John Tomlinson interpretiert die Partie mit einer bewegten Ruhe, die zu Herzen geht. Das Wichtigste aber sind die Klänge, Flageolets, Vokalisieren, sublimiertes Scherbengericht, gemischte Klänge, die bisweilen eine ganz ungewisse Herkunft suggerieren. Geheimnisvoll tönend dringt die Antike in die Gegenwart."

"John Tomlinson sang the role of Socrates with a moving calm, which went straight to the heart. The most important element, however, were the sounds created by the flageolets, the vocal acrobatics, the sublimated ostracism and the particular blend of sounds which occasionally suggested ambiguous origins. These were the sounds of Antiquity breaking mysteriously into the present day."

*Der Tagesspiegel*, April 2013

"essentlich differenzierter und eindringlicher gelingt das Dean. Sein Vorteil ist schon einmal der wunderbare Text, wie er uns von Platon überliefert ist, da hatte Tippett mit seinem selbstverfassten Text keine Chance. Beide Komponisten greifen auf die Tradition zurück, Tippett lässt sich von Händel inspirieren, Dean orientiert sich am antiken Drama, mit einer nicht avantgardistischen Tonsprache, immer melodisch und expressiv. Trotzdem gelingt Dean etwas, was man nicht hoch genug schätzen kann: Authentizität. Man spürt die tiefe Auseinandersetzung mit den letzten Fragen nach Sinn des Lebens und Sterbens. Dazu kam ein wesentlicher Glücksfall: Der Rundfunkchor als Chor der Athener und John Tomlinson als Sokrates. Wie selten hört man einen Sänger so in seiner Rolle leben! Dem Chor nimmt man ab, dass die Masse nicht etwa nur tumb und verblendet ist, sondern auch tief berührt von der Größe des Philosophen, die zugleich Angst macht. Ein großer Wurf."

"Dean's piece was the more sophisticated and vivid of the two pieces. He had the advantage of a wonderful libretto, handed down by Plato, against which Tippett's own libretto didn't stand a chance. Both composers looked back to tradition: Tippett's piece was inspired by Handel, whereas Dean turned to the dramas of antiquity and used a more conventional tone language, which was constantly melodic and expressive. And yet Dean achieved something which should not be underestimated: authenticity. The audience could really feel Socrates' deep exploration of the profound question about the purpose of life and death.

Another stroke of luck was the casting of the Radio Choir as the Athenian Chorus, and John Tomlinson as Socrates. It is rare to hear a singer living out his role so intensely! The choir showed that the masses were not simply stupid and blind, but that they were both moved and intimidated by the greatness of the philosopher. The performance was a great success."

**intermusica**

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Kulturradio, April 2013

**Brett Dean conducts Australian premiere of his new electric violin concerto *Electric Preludes***

“There is a haunting, rusty swing sound in the first movement, *Abandoned Playground*, muted sonic shadows in the fourth, *The beyond of mirrors*, (the title taken from a line by Rilke), and rattling low echoes in the fifth movement. Engaging and reflective rather than astounding, it is a thoughtful piece of dark shadows amid graceful dimensions.”

*Sydney Morning Herald*, February 2013

“As conductor, Dean crafted evocative soundscapes with refreshingly clear musical ideas in the underlying accompaniment.”

*The Age*, January 2013

**Dean conducts the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra / *Dean Fire Music*, Stravinsky, Haydn, Sibelius**

“Composed last year in memory of the victims of the bushfires that devastated parts of Victoria in 2009, Brett Dean’s *Fire Music* is a towering masterpiece.

Beginning with an ominous bass-drum roll and other percussive effects on and offstage, it is a visceral work with shimmering, swirling and broiling masses of sound, whose intensity at times is downright scary. But after its cacophonous initial climax, *Fire Music* reveals another side: it is a composition that ponders the repercussions for life, in the natural landscape and in human communities, following catastrophe...

*Fire Music* does not let up: it vividly portrays nature’s never-ending cycle of destruction and regeneration, prompting us to reflect on how society is inescapably a part of, not removed from, this process...

Multi-layered and rhythmically complex, it is brutally difficult to play, and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra gave a cracking performance under the composer’s direction.

*Fire Music*’s imaginative depth, sophistication and sheer impact marks it as one of the most important works to come from an Australian composer.”

*The Australian*, May 2012

**BBC Symphony Orchestra / Total Immersion Day**

“It needed only a minute or so of the first piece [*Testament*] at this concert at the Barbican — part of a daylong celebration of Dean’s music promoted by the BBC — to explain why he has enjoyed such a rapid rise... Dean made brilliant use of the constricted medium to summon an apt sense of a struggle against something moving ever closer.

This piece also showed that Dean is one of those rare composers who can weave references to old music into his own without seeming cheap. The startling emergence of Beethoven’s first Rasumovsky quartet in this piece showed why. He does it in a spirit of love, with no trace of that postmodern smirk that calls itself “irony”. And he prepares us for the quotation’s appearance with such surpassing skill.

That skill was even more evident in *Carlo*, an astonishing evocation of the dark emotional world of Italian Renaissance composer Carlo Gesualdo.”

*Daily Telegraph*, March 2012

“The 2006 violin concerto *The Lost Art of Letter Writing* won Dean the 2009 Gravemeyer award, and the only mystery is why such a vividly engaging work, already having been taken up by so many violinists, should have taken so long to get here... the concerto underlines Dean’s remarkable ability to take precisely what he needs from the music of the past and forge a totally personal idiom from it.

In *Fire Music*, there are echoes of Stravinsky (*Firebird*, *Rite of Spring*), but the energy and sweep of the music, its moments of mystery and menace and the way in which flickering instrumental groups around the auditorium mimic how such conflagrations spread, are vividly original.”

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Guardian, March 2012

“In short, even by the end of the morning talk, which included Dean himself performing his solo viola *Intimate Decisions* composed for a Berlin colleague, I knew I was utterly involved in his music. And perhaps even at the end of the day, after hearing all the varied scores, it was the sound of his own instrument in his own hands that stood out.

Dean’s *Intimate Decisions*... is full of wonderful things: hesitations, sudden urgencies, ghostly harmonics and, most memorably, the almost inaudible repeated mutterings at the very end, where each repetition somehow has its own individual timbre as the sound dies away.

In two movements, *Voices of Angels* is a half-hour work for a quintet for piano and strings: violin, viola, cello, and double bass. At this point, even only after two works, I had come to expect, and revel in, Dean’s instrumental finesse, but was still surprised in his invention, such as the effective use of a timpani stick used to create very distinctive sounds when struck either on the piano or double bass strings, a soft hollow effect like no other.

The final work of the day was the UK premiere of *Fire Music*... From unearthly grumbling to peaks of fevered activity, this 32-minute work constantly wowed the ear, bringing to mind such other pivotal works as Birtwistle’s *Earth Dances* and, of course, Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*. With snare drums battling on either side of the audience, it was like a cross between Nielsen’s *Fourth and Fifth Symphonies*, the quiet but distinctive timbres of the string quartet adding an Ivesian dimension and Dean creating some wonderful aural effects as a flute line oscillates across the space between players at the two extremes and in the orchestra. It’s a heady mix that once again completely captivates, as every one of Dean’s work had done during this thoroughly absorbing day.”

Classical Source, March 2012

## World premiere of *Fire Music* / Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra

“Fire Music is inspired by the bushfires that ravaged Australia a couple of years ago. It is possible, of course, to extricate this image from the musical experience, but otherwise it was not difficult to hear how the fire took hold of the grass, leapt up to the treetops and set entire forests aflame, before the flutes – spread out over stage and gallery – sowed the seeds of a more beautiful world.”

Dagens Nyheter, November 2011

“A fascinating, effective piece, brilliantly performed ... The ominously rumbling introduction creates the sensation that something terrible is coming this way, a feeling that is enhanced by an electric guitar solo. The combination of large orchestra and three instrumental groups distributed around the auditorium builds a sonic topography that reinforces the drama of the piece.”

Svenska Dagbladet, November 2011

“Dean doesn’t stop at the ashes and smoke – the very devastation – but studies the role of fire in Australia’s history, in the smoking rituals of the aborigines and other traditional ceremonies. He often takes this kind of dramatic historical event as the departure point of his compositions, but then lets the music take over on the strength of its own inherent logic.”

Arbetarbladet, November 2011

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## **The Australia Ensemble performs the Australian premiere of Dean's *Sextet***

"The expansive yet concise first movement started with frayed, wispy growling from bass drum and distorted strings and the inside of the piano, out of which clean, pure lines in even notes emerged, like something definite from something unformed.

The last movement had affinities in mood with this opening although the realisation was different, with tonally dense chords rotating and eventually drifting into the ether.

Between these, the central movement was rhythmically virtuosic, interleaving different patterns and metres in hyperactive brilliance, around a central moment of expressive calm on the flute.

Far from creating the impression that the second movement's energy is where the action is, one was left with the impression that it is in the ambiguity of tone and shape in the work's dawn and twilight, and in the noonday heat of the flute solo, that the work discovers its essence.

This is the first new work of Dean's heard here since the opera *Bliss* and, in one interview, he spoke of a "theatre of sound" in the manner of German composer Wolfgang Rihm. If so, it is a natural theatre marked by clarity of idea and confidence of gesture, rather than anything theatricalised or symbolic."

*Sydney Morning Herald*, August 2011

## **Nicholas Collon and the Aurora Orchestra with Brett Dean at the City of London Festival**

"Sunday's birds infiltrated the music, too, spectacularly so in Brett Dean's *Pastoral Symphony*... Everything gels brilliantly in this celebration of, and elegy for, our natural world. Through rustlings, tweets, cacophony and the rupturing sounds of man's despoilments, Nicholas Collon's orchestra delivered Dean's worried vision with vim and precision. In another register, this hot ensemble scored strongly with the subtler discourse of Vaughan Williams's *Flos Campi* — nature music carried into the spiritual by a yearning solo viola (Dean again: it's his instrument)..."

*Times*, July 2011

## **World premiere performance of Dean's *Sextet* at the City of London Festival**

"Dean made brilliant use of his unorthodox line-up of string trio with flute, clarinet and percussion.

Sometimes he made a clear opposition between the string trio and the others; at others, he blurred the distinctions by getting the musicians to play in unorthodox ways, so you weren't sure who was making which sound. This is hardly a new technique, but Dean made it seem so in the magical opening, where musical shapes emerged gradually out of dark, inchoate noises. At the end, the music avoided a too-obvious return to this opening, while satisfying at a deeper level our desire for symmetry and closure. In all, a masterly achievement."

*Daily Telegraph*, July 2011

"The sound-world Dean has created is entirely personal and never slips from his grasp. Low rumblings on a bass drum and edgy scraping from a violin with a paper clip fixed over one string rouse the music into action and from there it keeps rising in rhythmic energy and falling back again into a pit of primeval noises, each time reinventing itself with new material. It is an evocative work and skilfully crafted."

*Financial Times*, July 2011

"A drifting, gradually emerging prelude and postlude full of weirdly wonderful textures and colours frame the substantial central movement, Double Trio, which begins with the wind and percussion and the strings and piano operating as two independent units in a Ligeti-style bundle of counterpoints, though the effect is anything but static and Ligeti-like; as the piece goes on the alliances change, though the idea of the two trios persists throughout."

*Guardian*, July 2011

## **Dean conducts the Auckland Philharmonia**

"Brett Dean's baton empowered his musicians. Driving home, Vadim Simongauz's heart-stopping timpani were still with me, as were the shapely contours of Brahms' *Molto piu moderato*". Kristian Winther was a formidable soloist, thrilling us in generous, arching lines their composer describes as homage to the violin

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concerto. My favourite of many colouristic coups saw the soloist, with piccolo, descending against sliding strings and the delicate jangle of keys, to introduce the third movement.”

*New Zealand Herald*, April 2011

## **The Wigmore Hall celebrates the chamber music of Brett Dean in a weekend of performances**

“The pieces ranged across the past 15 years, from 1996 (the solo-violin tour de force *Intimate Decisions*, wonderfully played by Dean), to just last month (a taut homage to György Kurtág that is the latest in a series of piano studies). It is the flexibility of his language that emerged most forcefully from such a concentration of Dean’s music: fundamentally chromatic and post-Bergian, but capable of absorbing a range of other influences and making them entirely personal, whether in the passionately angry string quartet *Eclipse* of 2003, or the recent string quintet *Epitaphs*, five touching memorials to friends and colleagues.

The following evening, Midori’s recital with Charles Abramovic included the British premiere of Dean’s *Berlin Music*, introduced in Stockholm a few days earlier. A reflection on the 15 years Dean spent living in the city when he was a member of the Berlin Philharmonic, it’s also a fierce virtuoso test, tuning down the violin’s G string to F to create a range of strikingly fresh harmonic and expressive possibilities that Dean exploits in a sequence of four short cameos, one of which has the violin and piano heavily muted, followed by a more substantial final movement. It is by turns charming and charged, musically exacting and wonderfully immediate.”

*Guardian*, February 2011

“Dean’s music, always as beautifully written and approachable as the man himself, conveys deep thought and poetic sources of inspiration.”

*The Strad*, May 2011

## **Angela Hewitt performs Dean’s *Prelude and Chorale* at Wigmore Hall (as part of her *Bach Book* project)**

“Brett Dean’s *Prelude and Chorale* was a terrific juxtaposition of pyrotechnics and loving transcription”

*Guardian*, November 2010

“The first half was pure joy: a crazy cascade of figurations in the spirit of Bach’s exuberant early toccatas. Reverence took over for the chorale, a straight Bach transcription, nobly beautiful...”

*Times*, November 2010

## **With Berlin Philharmonic’s Scharoun Ensemble at the Melbourne Recital Centre**

“Dean’s recent *Epitaphs* for string quintet eulogises five of the composer’s friends who died in a short time. Its most striking movements open and close the work: a splendidly textured memorial to Dorothy Porter, packed with high, light textures, and a wrenching requiem for the former artistic director of Opera Australia, Richard Hickox.”

*The Age*, November 2010

## ***Bliss* / cond. Simone Young / Staatsoper Hamburg**

“I cannot remember when I was last so gripped by a big new opera.

[Dean’s] ear for orchestral sound is as button-holingly engaging as, say, Birtwistle’s, his brand of modernism rather more listener-friendly...Dean’s [orchestra] envelops you in its virtuosic inventiveness and sheer variety of timbre. His command of dramatic pace and, again, its variety is consistently, insistently ear-catching.

I look forward more than anything else to Dean’s next work for the stage. He is an Opera Composer writ large.”

*Opera*, November 2010

## ***Bliss* at the 2010 Edinburgh Festival / Opera Australia**

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"Brett Dean's score really does drive the drama. With Elgar Howarth confidently at the helm of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, that score is revealed as brilliant, yet never merely clever, fiercely opulent and all-involving."

*Times*, September 2010

"Dean's Music is a whirlwind of complex but logical ideas (...) the sung lines are memorably lyrical, a gnawing thread to orchestral writing that provides a gritty underscore"

*The Scotsman*, September 2010

"Dean's score [...] moves purposefully and with varied pace and mood. Crucially, the vocal lines manage to combine lyricism with character in a way that is direct yet never simplistic; underneath, the complex and substantial orchestral writing is charged with vivid colour and momentum."

*Guardian*, September 2010

"This is something which I already want to hear again, combining instant popular appeal with high artistic quality...Brett Dean and Amanda Holden make grand opera out of this fable of mortality... the libretto has provided Dean with the inspiration for a wonderfully energetic and inventive score."

*Daily Telegraph*, September 2010

## **String quintet *Epitaphs* at the Cologne Philharmonie with the Australian String Quartet**

"Here, the way in which [Dean] told, through most subtle means, of the incomprehensibility of death simply took one's breath away. Chromatic scales and descending glissandi imbued life on the downhill track with a compelling symbolic force while every movement, at the same time, maintained its distinct characteristic as to expression and tone. This was a chamber music masterpiece, authentically performed."

*Kölnische Rundschau*, September 2010

"[Dean] is above all an "Ausdrucksmusiker", a musician of expression, who keeps the flame of expressiveness burning beyond all the character changes."

*Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, September 2010

## **Solo work *Intimate Decisions* and string quintet *Epitaphs* at the 2010 La Jolla Summerfest**

"Violist Brett Dean, performing his own music, made his instrument do things that just didn't seem possible. But more telling, Dean's 1997 *Intimate Decisions* for solo viola is that rare contemporary piece that if not a masterwork (it's a little early to make that proclamation), then at least a work that every violist ought to consider."

Dean, whose 2010 *Epitaphs* for String Quintet was also a welcome part of the program, might as well have been standing naked on the stage, such is the personal nature of his *Decisions*.

His affection for his instrument and its sound was obvious. He exploited the viola's entire range and then some, up into its highest harmonics. And the tone colors he achieved were a revelation. He was as expressive as a human voice, sometimes whispering, sometimes pleading, sometimes rejoicing. There were no gimmicks, no stunts; it was all in service of some inner impulse."

*San Diego Union-Tribute*, August 2010

## **Brett Dean, Composer-in-Residence and performer at the 2010 Cheltenham Festival**

"The composer conducted his own *Winter Songs*, settings of EE Cummings completed 10 years ago for the unusual combination of tenor (Thomas Hobbs) and wind quintet (London Wind). Dean creates webs of deliquescent, wintry sounds, through which the singer threads the atomised texts, syllable by syllable; it's fragile and transient, and finally delicately elusive."

*Guardian*, July 2010

"The slipping and sliding of Brett's multilayered language is the perfect vehicle for seeing into the madness and music of Hugo Wolf. His *Wolf Lieder* also reveals the deeply observant and compassionate side of Dean as composer, as five songs (here splendidly sung by Claire Booth) explore the sad psychodrama of Wolf's dementia."

*Times*, July 2010

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## **World Premiere of *Bliss***

“Although the project outlasted two musical directors, the company continued to devote considerable resources to bringing the opera to fruition. Was it worth it? The answer is an unequivocal yes. A coalescence of Australian artistic talent has created a compelling opera. *Bliss* was performed with an assurance and confidence that is rare on any opening night.

Although Dean and his librettist Amanda Holden considered Carey's multi-layered novel an ideal operatic subject, I had my doubts. Dean and Holden confounded my scepticism. Certain strands of the story have been incorporated, and others discarded. It is still recognisably Carey's work but it has been successfully transferred into an operatic context.

*Bliss* also displays Dean's mastery of orchestral colours. Bluesy muted trumpet and jazzy drum beats greet the arrival of the call-girl Honey Barbara. Disturbing tutti shrieks often accompany moments of high drama.

But Dean employs his orchestration talents for higher purposes. Shades of light and dark match the emotions of the characters. Great care was taken to ensure the text was heard clearly over the multi-hued music.

*Bliss* is a success in every way... ”

*The Australian*, March 2010

“Brett Dean's *Bliss* is a formidable piece of work, compelling at every point. Opera Australia delivers it in an authoritative production by Neil Armfield, under the masterful baton of Elgar Howarth and with a central performance from Peter Coleman-Wright where the singing and acting are seamless and there is an absolute sense of conviction through all the loops and lacunae of this difficult story of madness, betrayal and cancer-inducing commerce, some of it translated into music of searing brutality or banality. *Bliss* makes the dark glory of Britten's *Peter Grimes* seem chocolate box...Brett Dean's score is very impressive.”

*The Spectator*, April 2010

"The first standing ovation was for Peter Coleman-Wright's warm, wry, beautifully sung performance in the role of Harry Joy, the advertising tycoon who descends into a modern Dante's hell on realising the extent of his life's dysfunctionality.

The second was for composer Brett Dean and librettist Amanda Holden and was prompted in part by relief that this long-awaited contender for the still-unclaimed crown of "great Australian opera" has lived up to expectations, and any sense of duty in supporting something homegrown could give way to genuine enthusiasm.

*Bliss* is a significant work and unusual in operatic terms for the amount of plot detail that Holden works into the narrative. ...The work holds the attention to the end, sustained by Dean's wonderful score.

To his well-known skills as an orchestral composer, Dean has added an under-utilised empathy for the voice. The sung lines drive the musical and dramatic pace, underscored by beautifully detailed instrumental textures, wrought with an innate feeling for the expressive power of instrumental timbre, watched over by counterpoint and fine motivic workmanship."

*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 2010

“Indeed, *Bliss* is more deserving of – and more likely to get – wide currency than any other large-scale contemporary opera of recent years. As befits a black comedy, the music bubbles away energetically. Unlike in many new operas, characterised by meandering parlando and descriptive, film-score effects, Dean's music is the motor that drives the drama. His swirling dissonances find space for keen musical parody, and hard edges are softened by lyrical expansiveness”

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*Daily Telegraph*, May 2010

"Long live *Bliss* - a Joy forever..."

Brett Dean's score pulses with energy and bristles with invention and clarity. There is special beauty, too, in the elegiac ending, as Harry and Honey sing rapturously of their simple and, indeed, blissful, world. In itself, *Bliss* can only add joy to the operatic firmament. Long may it live."

*The Age*, March 2010

## ***Amphitheatre & Moments of Bliss* / Cabrillo Festival Orchestra / cond. Marin Alsop**

"Brett Dean came from Australia to introduce his *Amphitheatre*, a short, brooding essay for massive orchestra that generates terrific energy from an oscillating chord change and trumpet fanfares. The work commands attention for its textures and suggestion of great amplitude within a confined space. Dean's *Moments of Bliss*, heard on the second programme, is a more ambitious prospect, a suite of material that will be incorporated into the composer's forthcoming, Peter Carey-inspired opera. Electronics spice the huge orchestral palette; we hear dogs barking and snatches of game-show repartee; the instrumental scoring, especially for a Fafner-like contrabassoon, is striking."

*Financial Times*, August 2009

## ***Recollections* / Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

"Dean, the 2009 recipient of the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for music composition, is a voice of fertile imagination, originality and expressive subtlety."

*Chicago Tribune*, January 2009

## **World Premiere of *The Lost Art of Letter Writing* / Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra**

"Dean is not the sort of composer whose works' first performances become their last ... Dean's string-writing is ferociously virtuosic, yet eminently playable. Zimmermann attacks his part with relish, and the poise to breathe life into the lyrical passages. *The Lost Art of Letter-Writing* is all meaty honesty and no pretension, art without artifice."

*Financial Times*, March 2007

"The applause for this premiere was as fervent as any special event in Donaueschingen. Judging by Frank Peter Zimmermann's disciplined, yet powerfully convincing performance, Dean has written a work tailor-made for the violin. The solo part is certainly difficult, technically rewarding, yet without having to rely on any circus-like displays. Above all, the violin is allowed to indulge in idiomatic, and emotionally highly-charged monologues representing the outpourings of the various letter writers (including Brahms, van Gogh and Hugo Wolf) around whom the piece revolves."

*Kolener Stadtanzeiger*, March 2007

"The last minute cancellation of Martyn Brabbins....gave Brett Dean the honour of conducting the premiere of his own piece, inspired by the wonderful violinist, Frank Peter Zimmermann, at his side. The appeal of this work lies substantially in its process of transformation. Its tendency towards celestial sounds (harmonics and glissandi in the solo part, an almost mystical pianissimo of gongs and celli in the second movement's opening) accentuates this aspect, as well as a turning towards melodic ideas. In this age of rapid fire SMS contact, the title of the concerto seems to express a sense of regret about the loss of an aspect of our culture. The letter represented in the finale, however, conjures more rebellious than poetic energies: an Australian outlaw accuses the powerful. So, after three relatively contemplative movements, comes a decidedly moto-perpetuo type finale in which Frank Peter Zimmermann demonstrates what he has to offer in terms of virtuosity, rhythmic energy and crystal clear sound production."

*General-Anzeiger, Bonn*, March 2007

"Many seductive and rewarding solo passages, stylish orchestral colours and strong rhythmic motives...a powerfully storming attack towards a precipitous conclusion. The work went down extremely well with the audience; the orchestra played sensationally."

*Koelner Rundschau*, March 2007

**intermusica**

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# pressquotes

"Dean skillfully creates intimate moods of elegy and longing in the Brahms-inspired movement, of almost phosphorescent lyricism in the Wolf movement and of longing for peace in the section dedicated to van Gogh. Frank Peter Zimmermann allowed space for the atmospheric oscillations to grow...In the rapid fire final movement, an absurdly fast presto, the phenomenal technique of the soloist was on full display."

*Klassikinfo, Bavarian Radio, March 2007*

"Brett Dean writes virtuosically for orchestra. The concise, flowing texture of the multi-layered first movement was astonishing, evoking the air of a warm summer night in undisturbed nature. Creating atmosphere is among the great strengths of Dean's work.....A soft, floating passion informs the soundworld of this piece, and a controlled flow of events."

*Sueddeutsche Zeitung, March 2007*