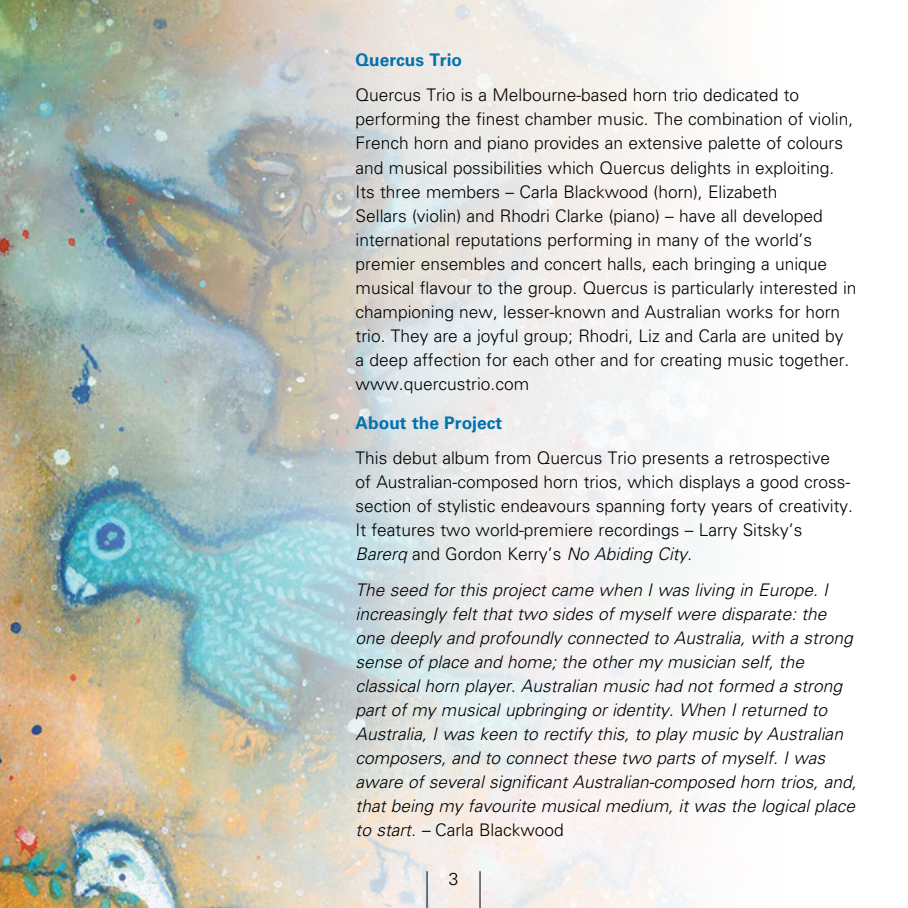




# Australian Horn Trios

QUERCUS TRIO





## Quercus Trio

Quercus Trio is a Melbourne-based horn trio dedicated to performing the finest chamber music. The combination of violin, French horn and piano provides an extensive palette of colours and musical possibilities which Quercus delights in exploiting. Its three members – Carla Blackwood (horn), Elizabeth Sellars (violin) and Rhodri Clarke (piano) – have all developed international reputations performing in many of the world's premier ensembles and concert halls, each bringing a unique musical flavour to the group. Quercus is particularly interested in championing new, lesser-known and Australian works for horn trio. They are a joyful group; Rhodri, Liz and Carla are united by a deep affection for each other and for creating music together. [www.quercustrio.com](http://www.quercustrio.com)

## About the Project

This debut album from Quercus Trio presents a retrospective of Australian-composed horn trios, which displays a good cross-section of stylistic endeavours spanning forty years of creativity. It features two world-premiere recordings – Larry Sitsky's *Barerq* and Gordon Kerry's *No Abiding City*.

*The seed for this project came when I was living in Europe. I increasingly felt that two sides of myself were disparate: the one deeply and profoundly connected to Australia, with a strong sense of place and home; the other my musician self, the classical horn player. Australian music had not formed a strong part of my musical upbringing or identity. When I returned to Australia, I was keen to rectify this, to play music by Australian composers, and to connect these two parts of myself. I was aware of several significant Australian-composed horn trios, and, that being my favourite musical medium, it was the logical place to start.* – Carla Blackwood

Our definition of Australian music is simple: it is music by composers who spent considerable time in Australia and consider themselves somehow to be Australian, no matter how multifaceted their identities. Just like the musicians of Quercus Trio – Rhodri is originally from Wales; Liz studied and worked in the UK; Carla studied and worked in Europe – most of the composers presented here cross continents in their biographies. Many were born and had their early musical training overseas, while others moved overseas to study. Yet all identify to some extent as Australian, and their music has been influenced by Australia – be it through the landscapes, the culture and audiences, or something more subliminal.



*Quercus Trio: Elizabeth Sellars, Carla Blackwood and Rhodri Clarke*

- ROGER SMALLEY (1943–2015)  
**Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano** (2000–2002) [23'06]
- 1 I. Allegro energico 5'28  
 2 II. Mirror Variations 11'12  
 3 III. Allegro molto 6'26
- LARRY SITSKY (born 1934)  
 4 **Barerq** (1984) 4'05
- CATHERINE LIKHUTA (born 1981)  
 5 **Tangle and Tear** (2018)\* 9'53
- ELENA KATS-CHERNIN (born 1957)  
**Velvet Revolution** (1999) [15'49]
- 6 I. Hymn 2'37  
 7 II. Freeze 2'55  
 8 III. Fountain 2'14  
 9 IV. Mostly Unison 3'27  
 10 V. Jump 1'24  
 11 VI. Anarchy 3'12
- GORDON KERRY (born 1961)  
 12 **No Abiding City** (2001) 12'01
- DON BANKS (1923–1980)  
**Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano** (1962) [16'28]
- 13 I. Lento – Allegro moderato 7'18  
 14 II. Adagio espressivo 5'25  
 15 III. Moderato; scherzando 3'45

### QUERCUS TRIO

Carla Blackwood *horn*, Elizabeth Sellars *violin*, Rhodri Clarke *piano*

\* Digital album only

## ROGER SMALLEY **Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano**

Composer and pianist Roger Smalley AM was a prominent figure in Australian music after migrating here from the United Kingdom in the 1970s. His compositions have been commissioned and performed by prestigious organisations around the world. Smalley studied with Peter Racine Fricker, Alexander Goehr, John White and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and was influenced by the Cologne and Darmstadt schools of modernism. He had a significant career as an academic that was closely tied to his work as composer and performer. Smalley received numerous awards for his contributions to Australian music including the Australia Council's Don Banks Fellowship and an Australian Government Centenary Medal.

Smalley wrote this horn trio in 2001 for horn player Daryl Poulsen. The pair performed it regularly, initially with Paul Wright and later with other violinists, both in Australia and internationally.

The trio is based on a deconstructed fragment of a melody played by the harp at the end of Smalley's 1998 Concerto for Contrabassoon. In each of the three movements the material is treated in a different way. In the first, the theme has been deconstructed into a 12-tone row, in a 'ghost of a sonata form', including a reduced recapitulation of the opening material.

The complete theme is heard for the first time at the start of the second movement, played by the horn. This is followed by 17 variations, leading the theme through varied landscapes, and arriving at a violent peak of descending scales punctuated by horn glissandi, before slowly unwinding through a violin solo, and a horn and violin duet in a nostalgic reference to the original theme. The movement ends indecisively with a piano chorale based on the theme. Smalley retrospectively titled this movement *Mirror Variations* after observing how often the theme was either accompanied or followed by its own inversion.

The third movement returns to the tone row of the first movement, reinterpreted as a sequence of tonalities. Smalley describes it as 'an attempt to recompose the atonal first movement in tonal terms'. It has a complex, rondo-like structure.

## LARRY SITSKY **Barerq**

Larry Sitsky AO was born in China of Russian-Jewish parents and moved to Australia in 1951. He has had a significant impact on Australian music as a composer, pianist, music educator and scholar. Following post-graduate studies in San Francisco, he returned to Australia to teach piano at the Queensland Conservatorium Music, and subsequently held positions in musicology, keyboard and composition at the Canberra School of Music and Australian National University.

*Barerq* – which translates from Armenian as either sad song or lullaby – was written in 1984, in his compositionally prolific ‘Armenian period’. In this period (1983–1986) his compositional style undertook a profound shift away from modernism and became deeply influenced by Armenian music and culture. This interest was initially ignited by his friendship with violinist Jan Sedivka, who introduced him to the teachings of Armenian mystic and philosopher George Gurdjieff, and nourished by subsequent visits to Armenia.

*Barerq* is in Sitsky’s words a ‘de-rangement’ of the second movement of his Violin Concerto No. 2 *Gurdjieff* (1983), written for Sedivka. The concerto derives its melodic inspiration from Gurdjieff’s four-volume collection of Armenian folk music. The trio mirrors the original, with the pulsing strings replaced with piano chords. The horn melody is very close to the Armenian source. It is essentially repeated twice in its entirety: once alone with simple chordal accompaniment, and a second time with the addition of violin, which Sitsky describes as serving not just as a counterpoint, but as a commentary on the horn theme.

## CATHERINE LIKHUTA **Tangle and Tear**

Catherine Likhuta is a Ukrainian-Australian composer, pianist and recording artist. She holds a bachelor’s degree in jazz piano and a master’s degree in composition from Ukraine, and a PhD in composition from the University of Queensland. Likhuta’s compositions have been played extensively around the world, including at highly prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall and Glyndebourne Opera House, and at many festivals and conferences.

*Tangle and Tear* was originally written for violin, bass clarinet and piano, commissioned by Melbourne chamber ensemble Plexus, and later adapted for horn trio due to Likhuta’s particular enthusiasm for the French horn: she has composed more for the horn than any other instrument. Likhuta’s music is highly programmatic: for this trio she was inspired by the name Plexus – taking the definition from the

Latin root *plectere*: to braid – and thought of tangling and its opposite, tearing. In exploring this idea, she contemplates both light-hearted manifestations of this concept, such as cutting blu-tack from a toddler’s hair, and the more sinister, such as tangles and tears inside a person struggling with life-threatening addictions, or the challenges of a person leaving an unhealthy or violent relationship. The concept is reflected in the form of the piece, which is unpredictable: some sections taking a long time to tangle, and others built around the struggling of tearing apart something irreparable. Musically, the entire piece is built on the opening’s emotional four-bar motif in the piano.

#### ELENA KATS-CHEERNIN **Velvet Revolution**

Elena Kats-Chernin AO was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and migrated to Australia in 1975. Following undergraduate studies in Sydney she was awarded a German academic exchange scholarship to study with Helmut Lachenmann. Whilst in Germany she became increasingly disillusioned with the style and purpose of contemporary music and turned to the theatre for inspiration. With this impetus her instinct for drama was able to blossom, along with a fascination for the energy inherent in rhythm and movement. Now based in Sydney, Kats-Chernin is one of Australia’s most popular and prolific composers, with works in nearly every genre, from chamber music to concertos, dance works, opera and silent film.

Kats-Chernin’s horn trio *Velvet Revolution* was commissioned for the 1999 Musica Viva Australia season, for performance by Hector McDonald (horn), John Harding (violin) and Ian Harding (piano) at the Sydney Opera House. The series had the overarching title ‘Surrender to the Velvet Revolution’, in commemoration of the lifting of the Iron Curtain a decade prior.

Kats-Chernin engages with this theme not in direct reference to the Czech, so called ‘Velvet’, Revolution, but rather takes as her subject the Berlin Wall, which fell eight days prior to the start of the peaceful Czech uprising. When the Wall fell in 1989, Kats-Chernin was in Berlin, staying at a house directly across the river from East Berlin. She experienced first-hand the impacts of a divided Germany, the destruction of the wall, and the beginning of the process of reunification, and uses this as inspiration for this evocative work.

The trio is a tribute to the people who died through events connected to the geopolitical turmoil of the Cold War and the subsequent fall of the Iron Curtain. Although the movements have evocative



titles, it is a personal expression rather than a programmatic description of events. *Velvet Revolution* contains tragedy, optimism and drama, and evokes how everything was both falling apart and coming together. Each of the six movements works as an emotional snapshot of a different facet of that time. While the work is often harsh and almost desperate in its percussive forward propulsion, it also contains moments of tranquillity and vulnerability as well as slightly grotesque expressions of joy and celebration. The composer captures something that she sees as particularly European: even in the harshest of times, there are still celebrations, parties and beauty.

### GORDON KERRY **No Abiding City**

Gordon Kerry is an Australian composer, music administrator, writer and critic based in regional Victoria. Kerry studied composition with Barry Conyngham and has held fellowships from the Australia Council, Peggy Glanville-Hicks Trust, Virginia Centre for the Creative Arts and Ian Potter Cultural Trust. He has received Australian Performing Right Association (APRA) and Australian Music Centre Art Music Awards and composed for musicians and ensembles around the world.

Kerry was an artistic administrator at Musica Viva in 1999 when Elena Kats-Chernin was commissioned for *Velvet Revolution*, and was inspired to write for the trio brought together for that tour. By the time of the work's completion the trio had disbanded, however, and the world premiere was given in Osby, Sweden on 10 October 2004 by the Malmö Horn Trio: Hans Svensson (horn), Tomas Gunnarsson (violin) and Josef Nanor on piano. It received its Australian premiere by Quercus Trio in 2020.

Kerry writes the following about the trio:

*The title comes from the New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews 13:14: 'For we have here no abiding city, but seek that which is to come.'*

*One can't write a horn trio without thinking about Brahms (and Ligeti), and Brahms sets those words in his Deutsches Requiem as 'Denn wir haben hier kein bleibende Stadt.' My piece is not religious at all, just a meditation on the impermanence of things, so it is made up of short sections which contrast with each other...There are one or two memories of Brahms in the piece – fragments of that movement from the Requiem, such as the piano's first few chords which provide a four-note motif in the violin later and also the horn. The G major/D minor at the end comes from Brahms, and that's why the minor third is so important at the start.*

## DON BANKS **Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano**

Don Banks was one of Australia's most important modernist composers in the second half of the 20th century. He studied with Mátyás Seiber and Luigi Dallapiccola and spent the bulk of his career living in London (1950–1971), yet always identified as Australian. He made enormous contributions to Australian music, both through his own compositions and his tireless work to improve institutional support for Australian composers and Australian music.

Banks is best known for his serious music in a modernist idiom – a reputation that stems primarily from works he composed in London in the 1960s, including this horn trio. Banks made considerable contributions to other genres of music, including early jazz and bebop in Melbourne, third stream music, experimental and electronic music, and was a prolific composer of film scores.

Banks' horn trio was commissioned for the 1962 Edinburgh Festival for a trio of Australians: Barry Tuckwell (horn), Brenton Langbein (violin) and Maureen Jones (piano). The work was very well received and was lauded as a 'Commonwealth triumph'.

As with all of Banks' music, it reveals exceptional craftsmanship and belies his jazz background. The trio is engaging and accessible, despite the modernist methods used. It is quasi-serialist in construction: both the first and last movements are based on a seven-note tone row set up in the introduction to the first movement, based on semitones and fourths followed by an accented, falling tritone. The central movement – titled 'song without words' in an early draft of the score – is lyrical and contrasts with the groove of the first and last movements.

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Recorded 8–12 Feb and 5–8 July 2021 in Prudence Myer Studio at the Ian Potter Southbank Centre, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne.

Recorded and mastered by Haig Burnell. Edited by Haig Burnell.

Produced by Carla Blackwood and Haig Burnell.

Cover image by Greg Hyde

Artist photograph by Karen Wilson

Booklet design by Imagecorp Pty Ltd



Carla Blackwood appears courtesy of The University of Melbourne.

Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano by Roger Smalley, *Velvet Revolution* by Elena Kats-Chernin and *No Abiding City* by Gordon Kerry are published by the Australian Music Centre. *Barerq* by Larry Sitsky is published by Seesaw music. *Tangle and Tear* by Catherine Likhuta is Copyright Control. Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano by Don Banks is published by Edition Schott.

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ABC Classic thanks Natalie Waller, Fiona McAuliffe, Sereen Omran, Siobhan Flynn, Alex Lu, Basil Cook and Virginia Read.

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