

# *Fable*



Jacinta Dennett | *harp*

The breadth of this remarkable collection of solo harp music encompasses sixty-six years of original Australian composition, performed by Jacinta Dennett, featuring Australian women composers and showcasing the harp's unique sonic and expressive qualities as a solo instrument. The stylistic diversity among this cohort of composers is illuminated, advocating the extraordinary capacity of the harp to sound and express the richness of their differences.

**Helen Gifford** (b. 1935)

**1** *Fable* (1967) 5'01"

**Peggy Glanville-Hicks** (1912–1990)

*Sonata for Harp* (1951)

**2** *Saeta* 4'11"

**3** *Pastorale* 2'44"

**4** *Rondo* 3'37"

**Miriam Hyde** (1913–2005)

**5** *Sunlit Waterfall* (1993) 4'03"

**Elena Kats-Chernin** (b. 1957)

**6** *Chamber of Horrors* (1995) 7'01"

**Eve Duncan** (b. 1956)

**7** *The Sun Behind It, Burning It* (2004) 2'18"

**Jennifer Fowler** (b. 1939)

**8** *Threaded Stars 2* (2006) 10'47"

**Johanna Selleck** (b. 1959)

**9** *Spindrift* (2008) 8'16"

**Alicia Grant** (b. 1978)

*Three Pieces for Harp* (2017)

**10** *I Sea breezes* 3'44"

**11** *II Footprints in the sand: Homage to Debussy* 3'01"

**12** *III Ocean floor* 1'41"

Track 8 recorded in Hanson Dyer Hall, Ian Potter Southbank Centre, 8 April 2019. Tracks 10, 11 and 12 recorded 19 December 2019, tracks 1, 5 and 7 recorded on 15 December 2020, tracks 2, 3 and 4 recorded on 16 April 2021, tracks 6 and 9 recorded on 18 April 2021, in the Prudence Myer Studio, Ian Potter Southbank Centre.

All tracks performed on Lyon and Healy, Style 3 except tracks 10, 11 and 12 Lyon and Healy, Style 30.

*Recording Engineer:* Haig Burnell

*Mastering:* Martin Wright

*Cover art and photography:* Adrian Dennett

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**HELEN GIFFORD OAM** (b. 1935)

***Fable* (1967)**

Helen Gifford's career is marked by extensive critical acclaim and significant honours, including a Senior Composer's Fellowship (1973), being the Australian Opera Composer-in-Residence (1974), an Edward H Green Foundation grant (1994), an Australia Council fellowship (1995), a Medal of the Order of Australia (1996), and the APRA/AMCOS Art Music Award for Distinguished Services to Australian Music (2016). She has a Bachelor of Music from the University of Melbourne (1958) and an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Monash University (1996).

*Fable* is the first harp solo written by an Australian living in Australia at the time of its composition and premiered in Australia. It was commissioned by the Melbourne branch of the International Society of Contemporary Music for a performance at the 1968 Adelaide Festival of Arts. Huw Jones, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra principal harpist, gave its premiere at Melbourne's Moomba Festival and in Adelaide. Jones's comment on first seeing the work was that Gifford had composed "a fable for merry Mable." Gifford explains that "*Fable* explores the evocative aspects of the harp; the capacity of the instrument to suggest the mystery of an old legend, to conjure up the magic in fabled places, or the splendour of another age." *Fable* is a 48-bar through-composed work with a chromatic language derived from the altered Locrian mode with a flattened fourth, and it features a diminished fifth (tritone) interval in its linear composition. The work is a tour de force

of harp writing as the composer explored a multitude of techniques, including harmonics, trills, arpeggiated chords, *glissandi*, *près de la table* (played close to the soundboard including using a plectrum or the fingernail) and the *portamento* (a pedal-slide technique).

**PEGGY GLANVILLE-HICKS** (1912–1990)

***Sonata for Harp* (1951)**

This recording uses the American Harp Society Edition, based on correspondence between Lucile Jennings and the composer in January and February 1984.

Peggy Glanville-Hicks is a venerable Australian composer of ballets, operas and chamber music. She studied at the Albert Street Conservatorium in Melbourne and the Royal College of Music in London (1931–1936) and studied composition with Egon Wellesz in Vienna and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Moving to New York, she was the music critic for *New York Herald Tribune* from 1947 to 1957. She studied in Greece with the support of the Fulbright Foundation in 1961 and returned to Australia in 1975. She was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal (1977) and an Honorary Doctor of Music by the University of Sydney (1987).

*Sonata for Harp* is arguably Glanville-Hicks's most performed composition. It was written for Spanish virtuoso Nicanor Zabaleta, who premiered it in Caracas in 1951, performed it at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1952, and recorded it in 1954. The first of its

three movements is "Saeta". *Saeta* songs date back centuries, evolved as part of the flamenco tradition and were described by Spanish poet Federico García Lorca as "like arrows going through your heart". The traditional *saeta* is offered to the *Paso*, a platform holding figures of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, in Holy Week processions. The pageantry and pathos of the procession are captured in the "Saeta" by evoking church bells and the marching bands that follow the *Pasos*. The second movement is "Pastorale", a plaintive lamentation in compound duple accompanied by a *barcarolle*. The third is the spirited "Rondo", which recalls the bold verticality of the opening chords of "Saeta" at its conclusion.

**MIRIAM HYDE AO OBE** (1913–2005)

***Sunlit Waterfall* (1993)**

Miriam Hyde was born in Adelaide and enjoyed a long, distinguished career as a pianist, composer, author, poet, teacher, lecturer and examiner. She trained at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide and the Royal College of Music in London and relocated to Sydney in 1936. Hyde's works include many for piano – from pedagogical pieces to concert works – more than fifty songs (including settings of her poems), chamber music, overtures and orchestral works. She was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (1981), made an Officer of the Order of Australia (1991), awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (1993) from Macquarie University and received APRA Distinguished Services to Australian Music award (1993).

For Sydney pianist and harpist Yuko Prasad,

a chance conversation with Miriam Hyde about the lack of solo harp repertoire led to the surprise postal arrival of this composition dedicated to her. Yuko premiered *Sunlit Waterfall* on August 20, 1994, at the Penrith Regional Art Gallery. It is a one-movement impressionistic invocation of glistening water, composed in ternary form with the bright and joyful outer sections in D major. The lyrical melodic line in the outer sections suggests the serenity of falling water. In the contrasting quasi-scherzando middle passage, the melody is more motivic than lyrical, the lower register dialogues with the lilting, upward-moving triads above.

**ELENA KATS-CHERNIN AO (b. 1957)**  
***Chamber of Horrors (1995)***

Elena Kats-Chernin was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and migrated to Australia in 1975. She studied composition in the Soviet Union, Australia and Germany. Her diverse output includes operas, orchestral works, chamber pieces, and dance, film and theatre music. She was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia (2019).

Australian harpist Marshall McGuire premiered *Chamber of Horrors* at the 1995 Sydney Spring Festival. Kats-Chernin writes, “the piece is dominated by the playful creepiness of the harmonies, which I send through various stages of development, in

order to explore the rich colour of the sound of the harp”. The work is in a minor, and its structure is rondo-like with a theme of arpeggiated chords returning to create unity out of the chaos. The composition’s spooky, creepy, and suspenseful musical effects include, rapid trills, fast ascending and descending arpeggiated figures, a pitch bend, rattling bass wire strings and cluster chords.

**EVE DUNCAN (b. 1956)**

***The Sun Behind It, Burning It (2004)***

Eve Duncan’s many awards include Greece’s International Music Prize for Excellence in Composition, the Recital Music Double Bass Composition (UK), the International Modern Music Award (Vienna) and the APRA Composition Award. Southeast Asian music has shaped her compositional voice, and her works are frequently performed throughout Asia. Duncan completed her music degree at La Trobe University, Master of Music at the University of Melbourne and Doctor of Creative Arts at the Western Sydney University. She was a Steiner school teacher and a founder of the Melbourne Composers’ League (1997).

Duncan composed *The Sun Behind It, Burning It* for Marshall McGuire, who recorded the work. It is a musical expression of the atmospheric opening of Australian poet Esther Theiler’s (b. 1956) “Stanza IV” from *The Simplest of Things*:

Summer’s life ends,  
and the blood coloured poppy  
the sun behind it, burning it  
to transcendence,  
is a substance close to flame,

A powerful miniature of forty bars, it uses six pitches. The texture is sparse, intensified by its dramatic rhythm. Duncan’s terminology – “metallic,” “smouldering,” “drowsy” – guides the performer’s evocations of the music’s poetic meaning. The stifling hot mood is evoked with percussive effects such as striking the bass wire strings with the palm, “guitaric sounds” produced by playing close to the soundboard and “xylophonic sounds” produced by stopping the string with one hand at the soundboard while playing with the other.

**JENNIFER FOWLER (b. 1939)**

***Threaded Stars 2 (2006)***

Jennifer Fowler was born in Bunbury, Western Australia, and lives in London. She received a Bachelor of Arts (1960) and Bachelor of Music (1967) from the University of Western Australia and was awarded the university’s prestigious Convocation Award. In 1968, she went to the University of Utrecht on a Dutch government scholarship. She has been commissioned by the BBC, ABC, Perth International Arts Festival, Australia Council Music Board, Radcliffe Award of Great Britain, Song Company in Sydney, University of Western Australia, and by Donne in Musica (Italy) and Women in Music (UK). Her prizes include an Academy of Arts in Berlin award, the Radcliffe Award (UK), the GEDOK International Competition for Women Composers and the Miriam Gideon (USA) prize from the International Association of Women in Music.

*Threaded Stars 2* (2006) is a revised version of Fowler’s *Threaded Stars* (1983), which she says is a “spin-off” from her *Line*

*Spun with Stars* (1983) for flute, cello and piano. It was premiered by Jacinta Dennett at the Bayside Arts and Culture Centre in Brighton, Victoria, on July 17, 2016. *Threaded Stars 2* is a single, through-composed movement with a “single stream of notes”, almost monophonic. The stream traces a pattern or cluster of notes that revolve around a central note that she describes as “a kind of ‘star’ pattern in which the central note exerts a gravitational pull on the surrounding notes”. With a constant change of pace, episodes lead from one “star” with a strong sense of direction that “pulls the stream of notes upwards or downwards until encountering another star pattern”.

**JOHANNA SELLECK** (b. 1959)

***Spindrift* (2008)**

Johanna Selleck is a composer, flautist and musicologist. She received the Percy Grainger Prize for Composition (1990) and the Robert H Maggs Composition Award (2006). She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in composition from the University of Melbourne, where she is an Honorary Fellow. Her compositions have been performed by internationally renowned artists and orchestras in Australia and overseas, including Europe, Israel, the US, Japan, and Vietnam. Selleck’s research is widely published, including by Cambridge Scholars Press. Her compositions are published by Lyrebird Press and the Australian Music Centre.

*Spindrift*, which refers to the ocean spray blown from cresting waves, was premiered by Jacinta Dennett at the Third Australian Harp Festival, Canberra School of Music, Australian

Capital Territory, on September 28, 2008. Eyes of sailors in love can be said to have “spindrift” in them, otherwise known as “the white goddess” – Leukothea. Leukothea came to the aid of Odysseus, saving him from drowning by wrapping him in the safety of her magic veil. The single-movement composition consists of seven sections that unfold organically from the opening motive, an ascending seven-pitch sweep representing the rising swell of waves. Throughout, a plaintive, descending melodic fragment cries out from the mists and dramatic surges.

**ALICIA GRANT** (b. 1978)

***Three Pieces for Harp* (2017)**

The works of Alicia Grant have been performed by renowned orchestras and ensembles, including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Choir of Westminster Abbey, the BBC Singers, New College Choir, the Oxford Philomusica, and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. Twice premiered at Carnegie Hall, her pieces have been recorded on labels such as Tall Poppies, Divine Art, Transatlantic Records, and Riverrun UK. Alicia achieved the distinction of Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) from the University of Oxford (2008) and also holds an ARAM, LRAM and first-class BMus (Hons) degree from the Royal Academy of Music.

*Three Pieces* is a musical depiction of an imagined coastal environment. Jacinta Dennett premiered it at the Chapel, Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, Western Australia, on June 8, 2017. Alicia Grant says the opening movement, “Sea breezes”, was “inspired by the

scent and movement of fresh air blowing in from the ocean”. The opening melody evolves via variations of counterpoint, modulation and character, employing repeated minimalist-type motifs and gradual rhythmic development. The second movement, “Footprints in the sand: Homage to Debussy”, is a meditation on the opening of Debussy’s Prelude *Des pas sur la neige*, replete with ostinato and cross-rhythmic patterns. Composed in the Aeolian mode (A natural minor), it follows a similar path to the first movement, and its dynamic crescendo is intensified through texture and register expansion to encompass the full range of the instrument. Alicia Grant describes the third movement, “Ocean floor”, as a “mildly menacing” depiction of a “deep aquatic environment” with a “scurrying of sea creatures across a dimly lit seabed”. It emphasises its mood by opening in the harp’s low register, and the scale is essentially c melodic minor with a raised fourth.

## JACINTA DENNETT

*BA, BMus, BMusPerf(Orch), GDipMus(Perf), GDipEd(Primary), MFA(Interdisciplinary Arts Practice), PhD*

From the outset of her creative education, Jacinta has intrinsically entwined movement and music. The responsive nature of the harp and its unique capacity to continue resounding after it has been played have led Jacinta to research the essence of gesture in harp playing and develop her idiosyncratic performance style. Inspired by Carlos Salzedo's fundamental harpistic gesture and Rudolf Steiner's eurythmy, Jacinta has continued to develop her performance style bringing a deeper authenticity and sense of belonging to her work—as is evident in this intimate study of solo harp compositions written by Australian women composers. Succeeding in exposing the harp as an instrument of ethereal mysteries, this collection of compositions embodies a life of its own. Jacinta describes this interactive experience of playing the harp as the sensation of swimming with sound. Her work is recognised for its rare fusion of poetry—through her heartfelt and intuitive embodiment of music—and physicality—enriched by her dance and martial arts study. One commentator described Jacinta's unique gift for creating something tangible from music as “making architecture through sound”. Media reviews have declared Jacinta's performance as “beyond reproach”.

The distinctive and versatile nature of Jacinta's performance style has allowed her to perform as a concerto soloist, a recitalist, an orchestral and chamber musician, a



folk musician, and a showcase performer. Career highlights include: performing in the multi-award-winning Malthouse Theatre production *The Bloody Chamber*, which featured an original score by David Chisholm for three harps (2013); being recognised on the global stage during the World Harp Congress in Sydney performing in the opening act with didgeridoo player William Barton (2014); joining the Argonaut Ensemble, performing *Boulez Sur Incises* (2015); and curating and performing in an *Australian Voices* concert in conjunction with the Melbourne Recital Centre and the Australian National Academy of Music (2016). This celebrated performance was selected for broadcast on ABC Classic FM and as a New Waves podcast. Jacinta has also authored a book chapter describing the evolution of Helen Gifford's *Fable* for solo harp (1967) in *A Century of Composition by Women: Music Against the Odds* (2022).

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