

# ASTRA 60

2011

6 pm, Saturday 5 November, and 6 pm, Sunday 6 November  
ELEVENTH HOUR THEATRE  
Fitzroy, Melbourne

## Erkki Veltheim solo violin

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### PROGRAM

**J.S. Bach**

*CHACONNE* (1720)

from *Partita in d minor* BWV 1004

**John Rodgers**

*SOLO FOR VIOLIN* (c.1996)

**with improvisations**

I n t e r v a l

**John Rodgers**

*1/1/94*

**with improvisations**

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Erkki Veltheim

The Astra Improvising Choir

Joan Pollock (artistic coordinator), Louisa Billeter, Laila Engle,  
Susannah Provan, Katie Richardson, Sarah Whitteron

## Erkki Veltheim, PERFORMANCES / IMPROVISATIONS

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Astra's 60th season in 2011 celebrates different facets of our work over the decades. Pieces by 20 Australian composers are heard across the six concerts, but also performances from some of the leading contemporary players whose contributions have always widened the perspective of our choir-based programs. Erkki Veltheim in this concert joins previous performances in 2011 by Genevieve Lacey (recorder), Michael Kieran Harvey (piano), and the group Speak Percussion (Eugene Ughetti, artistic director). A larger ensemble follows, in combination with the Astra Choir, for the final concerts on December 3 and 4 at Northcote Town Hall.

At the same time, this concert represents something new – Erkki Veltheim's first solo recital on the violin. As a performer, composer, improviser and arranger he is active across an extraordinary range of styles and genres, but is best known in the classical music world as a viola player, appearing internationally with leading groups from Ensemble Modern (Frankfurt) to the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and in this country from the ensemble Elision to the Australian Chamber Orchestra. For Astra he previously played Elisabeth Lutyens' solo viola *Echo of the Wind* at her centenary concert, and in the string quartets of Johanna Beyer for our New World Records CDs. Erkki Veltheim's increasing work as a violinist has placed him in an onstage role in Brett Dean's opera *Bliss*, and as virtuoso improviser in his own composition *Tract*, commissioned for the Adelaide Festival and overlaying a sound-sculpture for the London Sinfonietta and a traditional song-cycle from Arnhem Land. A regular performer at Australian improvisation events, he is active in an array of rock, gypsy and world music bands, with the indigenous collective Black Arm Band, and as band musician and song-writer for his own group Roadkill Rodeo.

Many musical strands and skills thus flow into today's concert! – mediating between improvisation, Bach's classic monument for the instrument, and two solo works by Brisbane-based composer John Rodgers. Himself a violinist of legendary ability, John Rodgers also ranges widely beyond the boundaries of classical music, and has a close association with the Australian Art Orchestra, of which he is a founding member. His noted CD *A rose is a rose...* combines him with a row of improvising soloists. Today's performances of his challenging violin works are the first by another violinist. The concert also takes the opportunity to re-voice the Astra Improvising Choir, first directed by Joan Pollock in the 1980s. A vocal presence perhaps underlines the hidden chorale singing which recent research has established within Bach's *Chaconne*, understood by some as a tribute to his first wife on her death. –JMCC

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A couple of months ago I was looking for a venue to put on a concert that would combine a few notated pieces interspersed with improvisations on violin. I wanted to finally play John Rodgers' two solo pieces from his *A rose is a rose...* record, which are telling of his obsessions at the time; the harmonic language of Elliot Carter, the rhythmic vitality of Indian Carnatic music, and playing violin ridiculously well. Similar obsessions can be heard in John's improvisations, and those of a small community of musicians such as the drummer Ken Edie, John's longtime collaborator, trumpet player Scott Tinkler, and the pianist Marc Hannaford, who have created an improvisatory language with an internal grammar that allows for real musical interplay and communication, yet to me doesn't sound derivative. I thought it would be interesting to combine John's pieces with Bach's *Chaconne*, a set of variations by another improvising musician, also an obsessive synthesizer of different styles. I was having trouble finding a suitable venue for this concert, so rang John McCaughey to ask him about the Eleventh Hour Theatre, which I heard had a great acoustic for string instruments. A bit of serendipity meant that John was looking to fill a program around the same time, and asked me if I would present this recital under Astra's auspices. This led to the idea of including a piece with the improvising members of the Astra Choir. I thought it would be a fun experiment to try an improvised piece based on the song of the lyrebird, known as the most accomplished mimic of the bird world. This gives the choir free reign to explore a whole range of rainforest sounds from bird-calls to insects, and also comments on the nature of my own creative mimesis; two of my good violinist/composer friends, John Rodgers and the fiddle champion Hollis Taylor, are well known for their own pieces based on birdsong, and it seems like an appropriate homage to some of the integral influences on my musicianship to include one in this concert. –EV

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Production Manager: Margaret Lloyd; Recording Engineer: Michael Hewes; Front of House: Bella Miller.  
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