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Acclaimed Australian ensemble Halcyon presents fascinating programs of new vocal chamber music from the 20th century and beyond. In the past decade Halcyon has commissioned and premiered over forty substantial new chamber works. Our recent focus has been to record these wonderful and diverse pieces - we want to get this music out into the world! Waves I is the first in this upcoming series of studio recordings.

Award-winning composers Elliott Gyger and Andrew Ford share a deep appreciation of both the singing voice and the written word. Setting the poetry of a celebrated but fictional poet, Ern Malley, Gyger's *Petit Testament* is a virtuosic and mercurial tour de force for the two singers. Ford's *Willow Songs*, with text by Anne Stevenson, is at times brassy, innocent, sorrowful and sinister, the singers charged with bringing to life all its poetic twists and turns.

1 Elliott Gyger *Petit Testament* (2008) 9:41

Alison Morgan *soprano* Jenny Duck-Chong *mezzo soprano* Sally Whitwell *piano*

2 Andrew Ford *Willow Songs* (2009) 18:05

Mark Shiell *conductor* Alison Morgan *soprano* Jenny Duck-Chong *mezzo soprano*
Sally Walker *flutes* Jason Noble *clarinets* John Douglas *percussion* Sally Whitwell *piano*

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HALCYON is a dynamic force for the promotion of new and recent chamber music for voice. Halcyon directors Alison Morgan (soprano) and Jenny Duck-Chong (mezzo soprano) are both successful Australian solo artists, with a shared commitment to contemporary classical music. They are joined in Halcyon performances by some of Australia's most esteemed chamber soloists, conductors and singers.

Petit Testament (2008) - Elliott Gyger

Petit Testament, the last of the Ern Malley poems, is intimate and autobiographical in tone, at times veering perilously close to confessing the bogus nature of the author's identity. My setting re-enacts James McAuley's and Harold Stewart's dazzling feat of ventriloquism (two real poets masquerading as one fictional poet) in employing two voices to project a single musical line, slipping unpredictably between unison, heterophony and interior dialogue. The pitch material is derived from musical ciphers of the three poets' names. Coincidentally, my cipher for "Ern Malley" – spelled out by the accompaniment at the very beginning – uses only the notes of a pentatonic scale (Pelog) strongly associated with Indonesian gamelan music, a common trope in the self-conscious quest for Australian musical identity in the 1960s and 1970s.

- Elliott Gyger

Willow Songs (2009) - Andrew Ford

I discovered Anne Stevenson's poetry only when her collection Poems 1955–2005 came out. There were quite a few that I felt might sound well sung. 'Willow Song', in particular, seemed to be there on the page just waiting for its tune. Of the other poems that struck me, several were about women at different points in their lives. I decided to make a group of these to form the main body of the work, before finishing with 'Willow Song' itself. The obvious strategy was to begin with the poem about the 12- year-old girl and then arrange the others in ascending order of age. But I thought this might be too obvious (and anyway I'd done precisely that in my song cycle Learning to Howl). So I reversed the order and opted to begin with the wildness and energy of the 'cold woman' in her 'cold sea'. Adding the little 'Epigraph' was an afterthought, though it comes first.

Willow Songs was commissioned by Halcyon, with generous financial support from Barbara Blackman.

- Andrew Ford

Elliott Gyger studied composition with Ross Edwards, Peter Sculthorpe, Bernard Rands and Mario Davidovsky. His instrumental works explore dramatic interactions between soloists and groups. His substantial vocal and choral output is similarly multilayered, with many pieces setting texts in multiple languages.

Important works include *on air* (2011), which was awarded the Sydney Symphony 80th Anniversary Composition Prize; an hour-long solo piano work for Michael Kieran Harvey, *Inferno* (2013); and a chamber opera based on David Malouf's novella *Fly Away Peter* (2015). Since 2006 he has written four works for Halcyon, of which *giving voice* (2012), setting texts by several contemporary Australian poets, was awarded the 2013 Paul Lowin Song Cycle Prize. In 2011 he acted as composer-mentor for Halcyon's young composer development project, First Stones.

Elliott Gyger was Assistant Professor of Music at Harvard from 2002 to 2007, and has taught at the University of Melbourne since 2008. He is also active as a conductor and scholar on new music, with a particular interest in Australian composer Nigel Butterley.

Andrew Ford is a composer, writer and broadcaster, and has won awards in all three capacities, including the 2004 Paul Lowin Prize for his song cycle *Learning to Howl*, a 2010 Green Room Award for his opera *Rembrandt's Wife* and the 2012 Albert H Maggs Prize for his large ensemble piece, *Rauha*. His music has been played throughout Australia and in more than 40 countries around the world. He was composer-in-residence with the Australian Chamber Orchestra (1992–94), Peggy Glanville-Hicks Fellow (1998–2000), Australia Council Music Board Fellow (2005–06) and resident composer at ANAM in 2009. In April 2014 he was Poynter Fellow and Visiting Composer at Yale University. A former academic, Ford has written widely on all manner of music and published eight books, most recently *Earth Dances: music in search of the primitive* (2015). He has written, presented and co-produced four radio series, including *Illegal Harmonies* and *Dots on the Landscape*, and since 1995 he has presented *The Music Show* each weekend on ABC Radio National.

Recorded at Trackdown Scoring Stage Sydney September 2009 & May 2011
Engineered, mixed and mastered by Daniel Brown
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