
RICERCAR

2015 Theatre Works Season



Present Tense

*Presented from November 24 to December 12
Theatre Works, St.Kilda
as part of Theatre Works Selected Works Program*



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Introduction to *Ricercar*



Bach knew that the access point to the divine was through art. Not only was he a master technician, but an artist steadfastly and systematically seeking the divine; and for moments in his music, he allows us to know it.

He knew that only by people coming together in a communion could this experience happen. Few artists can, through their work, will a room to levitate, to make the lights seem brighter, to make time seem slower for a brief moment, to expand into a glorious ecstatic moment and collapse into the deepest part of the self, as if all of the human experience could fit into a brief fermata. These things are at the core of Bach's work and he is an artist whose legacy we are still trying to unpack.

It is also the core of what the artists of Present Tense seek, to find the inner music and to bring people together to 'sing'. *Ricercar*, literally meaning 'to seek', is what we strive for. We strive to keep seeking.

Ricercar is a work that we hope will continue to evade categorisation. It is a work that reaches for Bach the artist, the theologian, the universe, and the divine.

For our audience it was a bold step into an unknown: a journey through space and time, a space to reflect, a social space, to be together, to commune, to listen, to see. We hope the audience was emboldened by broad thinking, carefully considered image and sound, and crafted performance. It was this that was the culmination of two years of work and the basis of the presentation in December 2015 at Theatre Works.

Founded in contemporary music the work asks: What is the legacy of an artist nearly 500 years after his death? What does the universal impact of Bach's music mean when Bach himself couldn't have imagined where his music would appear?

What we hope through the performance of this work, is that ultimately we can see ourselves, even if only briefly: To see a people, existing momentarily on a vast continuum of time populating a planet in a corner of a vast cosmos. Our life and death are reminders to us to make the most of that moment that we exist for.

Through making this work we now know that this season was only part of the continuum of the work; its strongest possible middle point.

Music may be the most glorious accident of our human species. Still, in 2016, with our vast scientific knowledge and understanding of human behaviour, nobody knows why our bodies respond to music. It is at once social, universal and also deeply personal. It's only requisite is that it requires people to sit together and listen to one another.

Nathan Gilkes & Bryce Ives

January 2016

Overview



2015 Theatre Works Season & Development

RICERCAR is an original composition for theatre, founded in the music of J.S. Bach but is entirely unique in its composition and realisation.

96 minutes in length, across two halves or 'books,' RICERCAR was composed by Nathan Gilkes, Bryce Ives and the Present Tense Ensemble, between July 2013 and December 2015. It has been composed for a combination of operatic singers, jazz singers, pop singers and actors who can sing.

RICERCAR is a major work for Present Tense; it was performed in two distinct sections or 'books,' across two venues: Christ Church St.Kilda and Theatre Works.

Primary Outcomes:

- Ten public performances of RICERCAR in December 2015 as part of Theatre Works Selected Works
- Five development preview performances of RICERCAR with audiences in November and December 2015
- One public development showing of RICERCAR in October 2015
- Two residencies to develop RICERCAR at the Bluestone Arts Space in August 2015 and October 2015
- One residency to develop RICERCAR at Theatre Works in September 2015
- One public performance of music on ABC Radio National's Books & Arts program
- One public performance of music from RICERCAR on Joy FM

- One multi-camera recording of RICERCAR intended for festivals, venues and archival purposes
- One edited and mastered sound recording of RICERCAR designed for festivals, venues and archival purposes

Funding support was provided by:

- The City of Port Phillip, through the Cultural Development Fund
- Creative Victoria
- Theatre Works, through the Selected Works program
- Residencies were supported by the City of Maribyrnong and the Abbotsford Convent.

Sponsorship was provided by:

- LSS Productions
- 3MBS FM
- WYN Events
- Helen's Hill Winery

Media & Interviews



'Like three hole-in-ones in a row': Bach's brilliance brought to bold new life

The Age Newspaper - November 27, 2015

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/like-three-holeinones-in-a-row-bachs-brilliance-brought-to-bold-new-life-20151123-gl5c9m.html#ixzz3wEVmimRJ>



Rosie Westbrook & Bryce Ives on The Conversation Hour

ABC Local Radio around Victoria, November 24 2015

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2015/11/24/4358702.htm>

Daniel Clarke's creative vision for Theatre that Works

Herald Sun, February 4 2015

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/entertainment/arts/daniel-clarkes-creative-vision-for-theatre-that-works/news-story/2ea16fdec599e7d102200c4eafcaef93>



Bach meets Yarraville

Star Weekly Newspaper, December 3 2015

<http://www.starweekly.com.au/lifestyle/bach-meets-yarraville-in-latest-present-tense-production/print/> <http://www.starweekly.com.au/lifestyle/bach-meets-yarraville-in-latest-present-tense-production/> - comment_section



On the Couch with Nathan Gilkes

Arts Review, November 27, 2015

<http://artsreview.com.au/on-the-couch-with-nathan-gilkes/>

RICERCAR on JOY FM Breakfast

Joy FM, December 5

<https://joy.org.au/brekkiebears/2015/12/11/theres-a-bear-in-there/>



RICERCAR on Radio National Books & Arts

ABC Radio National, December 2 2015

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/ricercar:-theatre-works/6971696>

BRYCE IVES & NATE GILKES

Theatre Works Blog, November 18

<https://theatreworksblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/18/bryce-ives-versus-nate-gilkes-meet-the-present-tense-team/>

XANI KOLAC in Beat Magazine

Beat Magazine, December 2

<http://www.beat.com.au/arts/ricercar>

BACH TO THE FUTURE in Maggie Journal

Maggie Journal, December 10

<http://www.maggiejournal.com/theatre/ricercar-bach-to-the-future/>

Reviews

Cameron Woodhead, The Age

“It's alternately majestic and meditative, with novel arrangements of a ricercar, a cantata, St Matthew's Passion, and The Well-Tempered Clavier, roving from the personal expressiveness of Kolac's solo violin to the all-consuming power of the pipe organ.”

“The musical revenant haunting the second half returns, and the piece swells into a gorgeous operatic finale, with mirage-like lighting from Richard Vabre.”

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/ricercar-review-sumptuous-romp-from-bachs-preludes-to-countryandwestern-shakespeare-20151203-gle86o.html>

Chris Boyd, The Australian

“On fortepiano, the opening notes of Bach's Ricercar a 3 are meandering pinpricks. Nathan Gilkes and Bryce Ives would have us believe the origin of the Western musical universe can be found in Bach's transfiguration of that dry and rattly theme. And in Ricercar at Theatre Works in Melbourne, they prove it in three-quarters of an hour in an ornate 1½-century-old church at twilight. Riffing on organ, Gilkes connects the dots between Bach and Philip Glass, Mike Oldfield and even the Presets. Members of the Present Tense vocal ensemble sound like tuned percussion instruments; a soprano solo is like a lead guitar.”

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/stage/ricercar-bach-to-the-future/news-story/a5b7f36b53172b68d8249f9bd0c98d4a>

Kate Herbert, Herald Sun

“The production, directed by Nathan Gilkes and Bryce Ives, is atmospheric and rich with echoes of Bach, but the second half is patchy and too long which reduces the impact of the whole.

Present Tense Ensemble and The Twoks deserve applause for this inventive and unusual work that challenges our notion of operatic performance.”

<http://kateherberttheatrereviews.blogspot.com.au/2015/12/ricercar-full-review.html>

Georgia Symons, Arts Hub

“Each one of them soars; the music holds us through each moment of our experience. From Xani Kolac’s lyrical arrangements of Shakespeare’s sonnets and brilliant loop work, through to Shauntai Batzke’s electrifying soprano, every note is a joy. And perhaps this work can teach us that that can be enough; that the theatre can be a place of sensory offers made without any specific communication in mind; a place to reflect upon whatever may arise for us out of the abstract

<http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/reviews/performing-arts/georgia-symons/ricercar-250038>



Social Media Feedback

Via Twitter

- Esther Anatolitis, Regional Arts Victoria
“The majestic sound of Present Tense’s Ricercar.”
<http://estheranatolitis.net/2015/12/29/what-did-this-year-mean/>
- Theatre Works, 12 Dec 2015
Congratulations to @present_t for a fantastic season of #Ricercar..standing ovations..extra seats added. Great work. ♥
- Alison Croggon, 4 Dec 2015
RICERCAR at @Theatre_Works is a must-see: at once raw and exquisite, austere & overwhelmingly sensual. Plus the enduring modernity of Bach.
- Simon, 12 Dec 2015
Just saw an awesome show at Theatre Works called Ricercar, by Present Tense Ensemble.
- Katie McLeish, 12 Dec 2015
Exhilarated after Ricercar @Theatre_Works
- Sarah Wilmot, 3 Dec 2015
So much love for @present_t @bryceives for this amazing show. #ricercar #Bach #theatreworks... <https://www.instagram.com/p/-os1QlC79s/>
- ben opie , 10 Dec 2015
@present_t #ricercar was one of the best works I've seen in a long time. New. Invigorating. Inspiring. Go if you can.
- Casey Binks, 10 Dec 2015
Ricercar by @present_t is must see piece of theatre. It is moving both visually and aurally. I'm still lost for words. GO SEE RICERCAR!
- Bradley Storer , 8 Dec 2015
Just got home from @present_t RICECAR - words cannot describe. Transcendent, pure emotion. As always, pushing the bounds of theatre-making.
- Jane Howard, 2 Dec 2015
So Melbourne: do take yourself to see Ricercar. It's a stunning work; and if you're like me excitingly outside your usual wheelhouse.

- Mariese Shallard, 3 Dec 2015
OMG @present_t #ricercar is amazing! We were happy one moment, heartbroken the next FANTASTIC!
- Kayla Hamill, 2 Dec 2015
Ricerca is an experience that envelopes all your senses. You HAVE to see it. Y'all were brilliant. @present_t
- Hannah Monson , 29 Nov 2015
Present Tense you have created a storm. #ricercar @present_t
- Lucinda Horrocks, 27 Nov 2015
Saw #ricercar last night & it's wonderful. Go see it. Go see it. Well done @bryceives @nate_gilkes & team.

Via Facebook

- Deborah Cheetham
“Huge congratulations to the Present Tense Ensemble on Ricercar featuring the beautiful and amazing Shauntai. I highly recommend this wonderful contemporary opera event.”
- Paul Morris
“I can't explain just how much I loved this piece. It's was captivating and fascinating. The music was masterful and the performers were amazing and seem less. It was a journey that made me think, but I'm not quite sure what about. These guys have seriously nailed something here. Don't miss it. Nah seriously, don't.”
- Lucinda Horrocks
“Go see this show! It's beautiful, absorbing, sublime, entertaining. Wonderful production by Bryce Ives and Nate Gilkes who have assembled an extraordinary group of performers. Saw it last night, still dreaming it today.”
- Madeline Jones
“I will need weeks to process everthing i felt during tonights performance of Ricercar. At one point it felt like my body could not contain all the sensations at once. I am truly humbled that i was able to witness something i will never again see the like of. Bryce Ives and Nate, how you possibly dreamed that up is a mystery.... phenomenal”
- Doug MacLeod
“Easily one of the best pieces of theatre I have ever attended. There are times where the music and visuals are so powerful that it's hard not to tear up. Congratulations to all involved.”

- Stuart Hamill
 “Got an invite to the preview of Ricecar and as Nathan & Bryce had been such fantastic supporters of the 3rd year actors at Fed Uni Ballarat I figured I'd better go. As a non-operatic aficionado I thought I'd struggle a bit with the performance. I could not have been more wrong.
 This was an absolutely phenomenal show from start to finish.
 I would love to give all of the credit to Nathan & Bryce which would have been richly deserved because this show is both a visual & aural sensation. However I was stunned by the talent and the performance from the entire cast. The playing and singing of all was absolutely brilliant. Sorry if this sounds a bit like a review but it was a fantastic experience. Thank you.”
- Michelle Fox
 “To all the brilliant collaborators working on Ricercar. Last night I was blown away by the experience of the show. I spent last Saturday with you at rehearsals and (as Bryce said would happen) one week later I saw how the piece had resolved with cohesive depth, intensity, beauty, humour, delight, lushness and much more. I felt very cared for (by the whole event not least by the energy and total immersion of Mr Music Nate), enormously moved and abundantly satisfied by your offerings. I thank you all very much and I look forward to seeing the show again & again. X”
- Angela Campbell
 “Just got back from the 3rd preview at Theatreworks and the Church next door, so beautiful. I've just emerged from an alternative and very gorgeous universe. Thanks to all. XA”
- Jacqui Essing
 “Wowza what a show!! I don't even know what to say now, maybe when I see it again I'll be able to articulate something but I just thought it was phenomenal xx”
- Phillip Martin
 On Sunday 6. December Jan Foye and Philip Martin , both aged in our late 70s, witnessed one of the most exciting musical productions of our lives at Theatre Works, St Kilda, dead cheap at \$35, but sadly closing this Saturday 12. December. We were mesmerized every moment – brilliant Oz tenor now based in London, directed by Bryce Ives (History Boys at Cromwell Road Theatre in 2009) - called Ricercar (and u of course, unlike me, will know the meaning). Cheers, Jan
- Judith Frangos
 Hauntingly beautiful singing in Ricercar!
- Ruth Krawat
 Congratulations to one and all for Ricercar! What a wonderful achievement guys x

- Serge Thomann
Amazing opera! Well done to all... Glad the City of Port Phillip contributed to the success to the play through a Cultural Development Grants
- Robert Bruce
Such a great show!
- Jolyon James
Saw this last night and still can barely speak from the experience. Pure Transcendence.
- Shona Devlin
Melbourne peeps, go see RICERCAR by Present Tense. It is STUNNING. One of the most beautiful works I've seen for ages. Congratulations Bryce, Nate and the Present Tense ensemble, it was just incredible.
- Rhonda Whitakker
Tonight I experienced Ricercar at TheatreWorks with my dear friend James Razos .It touched me to my core ..it was wild ,humble,luminous and bold!!!Love to you Bryce Ives and all the Ricercar tribe ..a world festival piece
- Suzie Hardgrave
“it's taken many days to process the experience of Present Tense's new work Ricercar for the simple reason I was profoundly and unexpectedly changed by it, with joy. The best way I can express the work is through the following words: seraphic, bewitching, transcendental, muscular, melancholic, passionate, excellently-crafted, psychical, dynamic, heart-punching and vital, treacherous, lyrical, fun, intoxicating and epiphanic. Let this be a warning to Melbourne-folk who love theatre-as-experience - if you miss out on a ticket, you miss out on more than that. Just saying.”
- Craig Christie
“Tonight was one of those evenings when it was a privilege to be in an audience. I urge everyone I know in Melbourne to get along to see Ricecar presented by the Present Tense Ensemble at Theatreworks. It is one of those evenings that reminds you of the transformative power of music and theatre. Don't want to use too many fancy terms discussing it. It's just bloody wonderful. Book your tickets NOW!”
- Hillary Watts
“On Saturday I saw a preview of Ricercar! So brilliant and epic! I'm so proud of all involved! Don't miss out on this outrageous theatrical experience!”
- Kristy Fuller
“Today I was lucky enough to see a preview (well the second half anyway!) of this amazing work by Bryce Ives. If you want a really unique musical experience make sure you get along in the next couple of weeks. G and I are going next Sunday if anyone wants to join us!”

- Lachlan Martin

“I'm so impressed and inspired by theatre makers who think and work outside the norm. Bryce Ives and co. have created an immersive experience with some gut punching music. Go see it! Some incredibly moving moments that I will hold onto for a long time.”

- Rhys Velasquez

“I had the pleasure of witnessing two previews of the new exploration by Present Tense, RICERCAR.

It's hard to articulate what this monster of a show is about or what you should expect.

Both nights I went, I lived and felt and dreamt and fantasised and was turned on by different emotions and experiences. For me, it was very much a holy experience.

Something spiritual for my Christian heart and soul. But the beauty of this show is is that you will experience something completely different. Maybe you will be confused or aroused but you will FEEL something.

Get down to Theatre Works and find out what your experience will be.”

Community Engagement



- Five billboards strategically placed around St.Kilda, with sponsorship from Hocking Stuart Real Estate
- Radio announcements and web promotion through a media partnership deal with 3MBS Community Radio
- RICERCAR Street Team handed out postcards and flyers in Acland Street and Barkly Street St.Kilda



- Rawcus Theatre Ensemble attends *Ricercar*



Collaborating artists



Nathan Gilkes, Initiating Artist, Composer & Director
Bryce Ives, Initiating Artist, Writer & Director
Laura Burzacott, Collaborator & Performer
Rinske Ginsberg, Dramaturg & Project Mentor (Movement and story)
Xanthe Beesly, Movement Dramaturg
Daniel Han, Collaborator & Performer
Xani Kolac, Co-Composer, Violinist & Performer
Mark Leahy, Co-Composer, Percussionist & Performer
Rosie Westbrook, Collaborator & Performer
Thomasin Marshall, Collaborator & Designer
Jennifer Tran, Collaborator & Co-Designer
Richard Vabre, Collaborator & Lighting Designer
Aubrey Flood, Collaborator, Marketing Manager & Performer
David McNamara, Collaborator, Assistant Director & Performer
Karen Ireson, Collaborator & Performer
John Howard, Collaborator & Performer
Marcello LoRicco, Sound Designer
Bronwyn Shipway, Production/Stage Manager
Emma Roberts, Present Tense General Manager



Impact & Future Direction



RICERCAR was our most ambitious work yet and the firmest statement we have made about the sort of work we want to create in the future.

It was an epic undertaking for an independent ensemble: fourteen collaborating multidisciplinary artists, two venues, ninety-six minutes of original music composition. We did it, and we delivered the work well. The reviews were highly positive, we managed to invite key industry representatives to the work, and a range of opportunities and possibilities have already emerged.

In developing RICERCAR we set out to present a clear vision of both our current practice and training, and a vision for the future of our collaboration. RICERCAR was the closest step yet to the aesthetic, style and performance style we are striving for.

RICERCAR was managed and delivered well by our core-management team: Bronwyn Shipway, Em Roberts and our associate Artistic Director and Marketing Manager. Each artist was paid a fee; we negotiated local sponsorship deals to assist in the marketing of the work; we established a sponsorship deal with sound design company LSS to ensure the professional delivery of the most crucial element of the work: sound; and we connected with other arts organisations to deliver the work: Theatre Works, Arena Theatre Company and rawcus.

We strongly feel that RICERCAR requires another public development of the work. We propose to embark on this during June/July of 2016. The primary focus for this next layer of development would be to delve deeper in to the interaction between the overall production design elements of the work and how they intersect with the composition and action aesthetic which were developed and performed in the 2015 incarnation.

This need for further public development was been identified by Present Tense Artistic Directors during the lead up and season of RICERCAR. As this was a completely new work

and it included multiple elements both in performance and design that needed to be responsive to the environment of the performance, there were many 'unknown factors' compared to your usual development process. This led to rather a stressful environment for the design collaborators as many aesthetic and dramaturgical decisions could only be made when all elements of the performance were in action. We now recognise our work is unique and development process requires a flexible non traditionalist theatrical approach by all involved, and we recognise that in and of itself our methodology is an all encompassing experience for each creative involved. In addition, we understand that to progress we need to ensure that we set clearer milestones for each development period. From the experience as a company we are now instigating a more detailed developmental plan for future works.

Through the development and season; we now recognise that our original music is one of our greatest strengths from a marketing and community engagement perspective. It is something that sets us apart from other independent theatre companies. For future works, we will plan to professionally record five compositions about six months from opening. These will then be used to enhance the radio, television and online experiences for our audience as well as a method for generating interest and providing context to our work.

From the feedback, audience members had a deeply personal and unexpectedly profound connection to the work, something which we had hoped for and saw it realised.

In light of the ways of collaboration and construction of the work, the piece continues to evade categorisation by audience and critics. RICERCAR stands alone as a unique offering to the Victorian community and now has the potential to be a work of international calibre in its own right. This is something we are extremely proud of and we now know, sets the work of Present Tense apart. Present Tense has its own distinct arts practice, and is at the forefront of Australian practice.

Ultimately we consider this work as an investment towards our next steps as an ensemble. During the process of creating RICERCAR we commenced the development of our strategic plan and solidifying the direction for Present Tense across the next five years. RICERCAR will continue to be a major work in development over the next two years.

