

## THE FREESTYLE ORCHESTRA INFORMATION PACK 2020

**The Freestyle Orchestra** is an artist collective based between Vienna, Austria and Sydney, Australia which brings together classically trained musicians with a movement background and physical artists with a musical background developing together into strongly multidisciplinary performers. Members rehearse both movement choreography and music together, also working individually to master a variety of circus disciplines including fire manipulation (staff spinning, poi, fire eating and fire breathing), the aerial arts (silks, corde lisse, aerial harness, straps), acrobatics (gymnastics, yoga, handbalancing), circus movement (cyr wheel, card manipulation etc.) and various dance/physical movement styles. The result is a uniquely interdisciplinary performance experience where artists are challenged to switch quickly between formats. The Freestyle Orchestra seeks methodologies to more fully integrate acoustic instrumental music with modern circus, dance and physical theatre elements, examining the interplay and intersectionalities between the physical and the musical artist.



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The majority of us do not come from musical families, and as such strive to create ways of making classical music appealing to a range of audiences, both in individual artistic practice and as a group. Our approach seeks to support the music, dive deep into it; explore the expression and emotions it conveys and



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see if we can amplify those physically. This provides new experiences for traditional concertgoers while building new audiences. The integration of elements including breakdance, fire arts and modern circus has increased our ability to reach those who might not otherwise seek out classical music performances.

The first ideas for the project were formed between 2004-2006 during studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music by a collective entitled "*L'Assemblée des Rêveurs*" as the Sydney Stunt Orchestra. As members relocated for study in Europe/UK, the decision was made

to reassemble the collective in Vienna. Linking with like-minded colleagues in the Northern Hemisphere, '**The Freestyle Orchestra**' was born. 'Freestyle' refers both to our presentation philosophy (anything can happen!) and the bringing together of open minds. In 2020 our large-scale team comprises artists of 12

nationalities living between 9 countries. Performances may feature anywhere between 6-22 artists. The current core team consists of 9 interdisciplinary artists including:

**Sonja Schebeck** (*Australia/Austria*) - *founder/artistic director /violinist/fire artist/aerialist*

**Chanda VanderHart** (*USA/Austria*) - *pianist/aerialist*

**Claudia Cox** (*Australia/Norway*) - *violinist/gymnast*

**Edoardo Blandamura** (*Italy/Austria*) - *double-bassist/multi-instrumentalist/fire artist/acrobat*

**Antonio Chorbadzhiyski** (*Bulgaria/Austria*) - *cellist/fire artist/cyrwheel/aerialist/acrobat*

**Sarkhan Akhundov** (*Azerbaijan*)- *violinist/breakdancer/acrobat/fire artist*

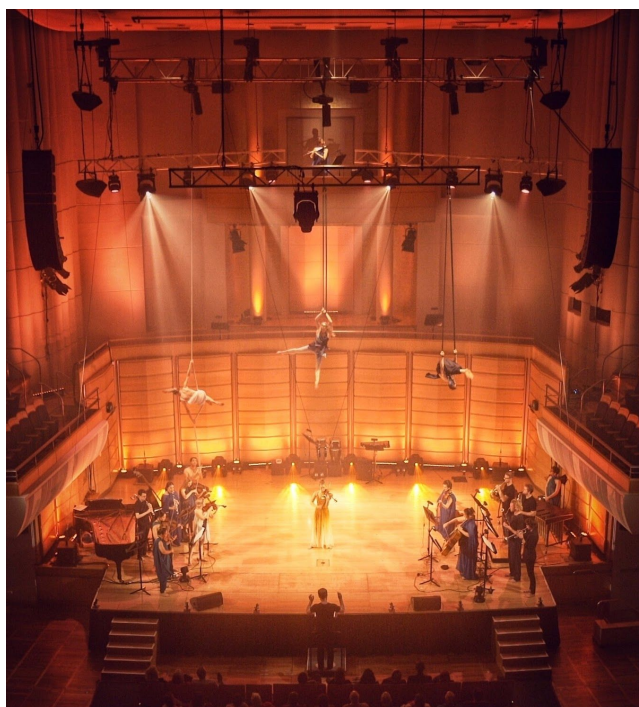
**Daniel Pini** (*United Kingdom*) - *cellist/ice and inline skater/acrobat*

**Samuele d'Alcantari** (*Italy*) - *guitarist/handbalancer/acrobat*

**Bridget Rieger** (*Australia*) - *violinist/aerialist/acrobat*

These core members expand to a group of up to 22 Freestyle Orchestra members based across the world, or combine with external, local ensembles in various cities. Our physical movement mentors include **Kate Reid** (*Candy Stripe Circus*), **Nadja Puttner** (*Unicorn Art Dance*), **Sascha Bachmann** (*Coach Bachmann*) and **Shade Flamewater** (*Fire Arts*).

Recipients of a *Tarisio Trust Young Artist Grant 2016* (Audience Choice), performance highlights include the *Venice Biennale 2017* (Artists' party for Tracey Moffatt co-hosted by Australian and New Zealand delegations), *The Marble Circus* (black-and-white film shot during a residency in Carrara, Italy in collaboration with *Candy Stripe Circus* - premiered at *The Australian Circus Festival*), *International Storytelling Festival* (Austria), '*Orchestra am Berg*' (concert at 1900m in the Austrian Alps), street shows at the *Vienna International Buskers Festival* and performances at *Les Jardins Musicaux Classical Festival* (Switzerland). Members of **The Freestyle Orchestra** recently toured Australia in June 2019, combining with Australian musicians and creatives to create the #freestylesymphony for '*Concertos on Fire*' at *Vivid Festival Sydney*. Presented at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith and City Recital Hall, Sydney the performances explored new directions in concert presentation fusing modern circus, fire performance, physical theatre and contemporary classical music.



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2019 closed with a DVD presentation for the *Osaka International Chamber Music Competition* and a performance for '*Smile - The Spirit of Chaplin*' gala at Theater Akzent, Vienna celebrating 130 years since the birth of Charlie Chaplin and raising funds for Caritas. In January 2020 members of **The Freestyle Orchestra** attended the *West Australian International Circus Festival* on full training scholarships,



performing nightly cabarets as part of the festival band and presenting *'The Marble Circus'*, film and live music project in collaboration with *Candy Stripe Circus Australia*. In September 2020 we were artists in residence at *Handstand Extravaganza Convention*, Sicily.

Ongoing projects include collaborations with *Opera Moderne* (New York/Vienna) on the show *'Beyond Burlesque - L'Opera Burlesque'* (a fusion of classical music, opera, burlesque, fire and aerial arts), a series of outdoor presentations across the city of Vienna fusing Austrian Lied and Electro-swing as part of the Basis Kultur program *Kultur Vor Ort*, and performances in London in collaboration with Italian composer **Ilario Ferrari**, premiering his project featuring improvised music forms and Indian modes *'Be Yourself 2'*, raising funds for non-profit organisation *'Random Cafe'* who are working to reduce food waste. In August 2020, musicians from The Freestyle Orchestra combined with artists from *Cirque du Soleil*, *Punchdrunk Theatre* and *The Imaginarium*, undertaking an initial creation phase in Hamburg, Germany and establishing the innovative immersive theatre/circus company *New Relik*.



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In January 2021 we will begin workshops on our new project *'Circo Agitato'*, a collaboration with Australian composers **Carl Polke** and **Ania Reynolds** (*Circus Oz*, *Legs on the Wall*) to premiere at the *West Australian Circus Festival 2022*. In early 2021 we will collaborate with composer **Luke Styles** (UK) and **Cirko** (Helsinki) to reimagine his work *'Polar'* as an interdisciplinary performance. We will also provide acrobatic musicians in a collaboration with *Arts Council England*, *Chloe Charody Creations*, *Mandinga Arts*, *City Arts Nottingham* and *Cirque Bijou* for the outdoor spectacular *'JINGAH'* to premiere March 2021 at the *Nottingham International Puppet Festival*, incorporating a 2-week creation phase featuring workshops with disadvantaged and refugee children.



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## VIDEO LINKS

Ross Edwards - 'Maninyas' highlights

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZFwzBJLY3U>

Introducing... The Freestyle Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unXBynmVCbw>

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Website: [www.thefreestyleorchestra.com](http://www.thefreestyleorchestra.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/thefreestyleorchestra](https://www.facebook.com/thefreestyleorchestra)

Instagram: @freestyleorchestra

## SONJA SCHEBECK - violinist - founder/artistic director, The Freestyle Orchestra



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Austrian/Australian violinist Sonja Schebeck began lessons at the age of 3 after being entranced by the violin at a Baby Prom. Her teachers have included **Barbara Hayward** (Suzuki Violin School), **Christopher Kimber** (Sydney Conservatorium) and **Florian Zwiauer** (Musik und Kunst Privatuniversität der Stadt Wien). She is a founding member of **Nigel Kennedy's** *'Orchestra of Life'*, touring for projects across Europe/UK and Australia and appearing as concertmaster, principal, arranger and duo-partner to Mr Kennedy since 2010. Sonja has a focus on creating interdisciplinary projects

fusing classical music with modern circus and theatre, founding **'The Freestyle Orchestra'** in 2006. Specialising in fire performance, she has training in ballet, acrobatic and aerial arts. Her Masters thesis is in "Innovations in Classical Music Presentation" (MUK Vienna) and in 2015 completed the Juilliard School of Music course 'Classical Music in an Age of Pop' with Greg Sandow.

Sonja has been a prize-winner at the Gisborne International Music Competition, International Space Time Concerto Competition, Balmain Sinfonia Concerto Competition, Kendall National Violin Competition, Marcus Edwards Violin Prize, and Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra Concerto Competition, a finalist in the Musica Viva Chamber Music Awards and Nelson Meers Outstanding Instrumentalist Awards, a recipient of the George & Margaret Henderson Postgraduate Scholarship and University Postgraduate Award and a finalist in the Symphony Australia ABC Young Performer of the Year Awards in 2010 and 2015.

Since 2007 Sonja has worked closely with Australian composer Chloé Charody on projects including 'MusiqueArt' street-press magazine for the Fine Arts and 'ReachOut' touring music education program as well as premiering many of Charody's works including ballet-opera 'Magdalene' (Dutch National Ballet), 'The Phoenix' caprice (Musikverein, Vienna and ballet creation as pas de deux for solo violinist/dancer, Dutch National Ballet) and their creation 'The Carnival' circus-opera (Melbourne Fringe Festival, London's West End, Fliegende Bauten, Hamburg, Australian tours 2009-2017).

A freelance performer, Sonja has appeared as violinist/fire artist/acrobat for Zirkus Pikard (Austria) and Igudesman & Joo's 'League of X-traordinary Musicians' (Vienna Konzerthaus New Years Eve Gala, Lucerne Festival) and the world-premiere 3-week season of 'Pigalle' for Sydney Festival, January 2019.

She is currently concertmaster of the Johannesgasse Solisten (Vienna) and Extra Sounds Ensemble (Krakow), a member of the English Session Orchestra, Beethoven Orchestra for Humanity (London), 'Music in Motion' project (London Musical Arts) and Stegreif Orchester (Berlin) and guest musician with the Wiener Symphoniker, Concertino Wien, English Session Orchestra and Sydney Symphony. Recent performance highlights include Ross Edwards' 'Maninyas' Concerto (soloist with Houston Ballet), 'Nigel Kennedy meets Gershwin' European Tour (Concertmaster), The London Jazz Festival and performances across Europe and Australia as violinist and artistic director of 'The Freestyle Orchestra'.