



## LIM FACTS

**1966** Born August 30 in Perth, Western Australia, to Chinese parents  
**1986** Elision Ensemble founded by fellow students including future husband, guitarist Daryl Buckley. Lim closely associated with the group ever since  
**1993** Premiere on May 16 of her first opera, adapted from Aeschylus's trilogy *Oresteia*  
**2004** Completion and premiere of *Ecstatic Architecture* by Los Angeles PO and Esa-Pekka Salonen to mark opening of Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles  
**2008-17** Works at University of Huddersfield: professor of composition and director of Centre for Research in New Music (CeReNeM)  
**2017** Joins faculty at Sydney Conservatorium of Music; nurtures young women composers as part of national development programme

This experimental spirit has led Lim to invent hybrid instruments and musician-instrument fusions (poetic counterparts to *Blade Runner* replicants?) such as the


cello-tied-to-a-violin-by-a-long-thread for *An Ocean beyond Earth* (2016). Another solo cello piece, *Invisibility* (2009), conjures its liminal sound world with a 'guiro bow', whose hair is wrapped around the stick to create an uneven, 'serrated' playing surface. *Invisibility* then evolved (as her pieces often do) into a larger form (in this case, *How Forests Think*). 'The sound I'm interested in is the seismographic relation between musicians and their instruments,' she says. 'Notation isn't the thing in my head that is the music. It isn't a divine transmission and translation. It's an invitational space for something to happen.'

The musical 'shimmer' of Lim's technique means that something is, indeed, always happening in resonantly titled works such as the instrumental *Shimmer Songs* (2006) and the orchestral *Immer fließender* ('ever flowing', 2004). Through the course of her career, she has moved with restless curiosity between systems and stories of belief worldwide, connecting them without flattening out their contours in a cultural landscape fraught with pitfalls of appropriation and trespass. Her first opera, *The Oresteia* (1991-93), is a 75-minute, English-texted distillation of Aeschylus's trilogy: marvellously exact in its violence and struggle to articulate the nature of a tragedy beyond words. Later pieces tread lightly between Chinese theatre, Sanskrit epic and Sufi mysticism.

At the close of *Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus* (2018), a contraforte with an added metre and a half of plastic tubing sounds a note at the very lowest threshold of human pitch-perception. In its way, differently from *Visage*, the growl embodies a dissolution of art into nature. 'I wanted the music to convey that everything has a living voice,' says Lim. 'Animals and trees have their own agencies, but objects can too.'

This species of ecological thinking places her in a lineage of native or émigré Australian thinkers and makers: ethnographer Deborah Rose, philosopher Peter Singer, artists Dušan Marek, Kathleen Petyarre, Fiona Hall. In their work, both the vastness and the vulnerability of the Australian land and its people are laid bare. 'One is aware of Australia being at the front line of climate change,' acknowledges Lim. More significant, however, is 'the sense of living on stolen land' and her responsibility to it as a creative artist which led her to spend time with Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory. 'It's not nature "out there." In indigenous thought, there is no separation between nature and culture.'

Many strands of Lim's musical thought and ideas come together in her third opera, *The Navigator* (2007-08), first staged (director Barrie Kosky) in Brisbane in 2008. Initially inspired by *Tristan und Isolde*, Lim composed a dreamscape, with librettist Patricia Sykes, in which the opera's eponymous countertenor-hero navigates between poles of desire and death (something of the Shepherd's piping from Wagner's music drama surviving in the opera's preludial recorder solo). A tour de force for the Angel of History, requiring the singer to use a plastic voice-distorting 'wacky whistle' in the roof of her mouth, occupies something of a mad scene moment, but the concluding sections of 'Transfiguration' and 'The Binding' issue tentative hope while glowing with the essentially frustrated, unsatisfiable nature of erotic desire.

Lim is finding that an idiom that used to be the preserve of specialist new-music groups such as Elision is now becoming second nature to sympathetic orchestras such as the Bavarian RSO, which in January 2022 will give the delayed premiere of *Mary/Transcendence after Trauma* (2020-21), the central panel of her *Annunciation Triptych* (the first one being *Sappho/Bioluminescence*). 'It's about listening,' says Lim, 'from the point of view of Mary listening to the child within her. The kind of listening you have if you're overwhelmed and immersed in an experience: at once intimate and yet an expression of cosmic awe.' 

## LIM ON RECORD – STAGE AND ENSEMBLE

Singing in tongues and without words: pivotal works

**'The Heart's Ear'**

Ensemble für Neue Musik, Zurich / Jürg Henneberger  
 Hat-Art (6/03)

This series of ensemble pieces from the first decade of Lim's career (composed 1989 to 1999) begins with *Voodoo Child*, a setting of Sappho already distinctively inflected with a voice that's by turns combative and inquisitive.

**'Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus'**

Sophie Schaffleitner v/n Klangforum Wien / Peter Rundel  
 Kairos (8/20)

The title-track, a 40-minute instrumental drama of climate emergency (at one point the musicians are almost literally suffocated in plastic like the world's oceans), sings and creaks and finally crumples with an authentic voice of nature.

**Mother Tongue. The Navigator. The Oresteia etc**

Elision Ensemble, et al  
 Huddersfield Contemporary Records

These are new recordings of Lim's major works for the stage (1993-2008) made by the singers and instrumentalists with whom she has maintained a close collaborative relationship for nearly four decades.