

## **SIGNUM saxophone quartet: Australia Tour 2022**

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# **The Daily Telegraph**

## **Our chance to hear Signum sax foursome who love breaking through boundaries**

Australia gets its chance to hear four charismatic young musicians who've been breaking boundaries throughout Europe.

**Steve Moffatt** November 21, 2022 - 4:39PM



The Signum Saxophone Quartet performing with Australian violinist Kristian Winther for Musica Viva. Picture: Sue Graham

It took 80 years and the 1920s Jazz Age in America for the saxophone to be accepted as a serious instrument that could be used in all kinds of music, including classical. But although a few composer – Bizet, Ravel, Richard Strauss and Delibes among them – were quick to exploit its diverse and unique tones and colours nobody thought to write for a quartet of them.

Click edit to 2006 when four young players formed the Signum Saxophone Quartet in Cologne and set about taking German concert halls by storm with their deft technique and varied repertoire of rearranged familiar classical works and contemporary pieces incorporating jazz and pop. Soon their fame spread, their good looks and onstage energy lending them a cult status more often seen in rock bands.

Finally, with the last tour of the season for Musica Viva, Australia is getting to see them, with the added bonus of exciting Australian violinist Kristian Winther performing Kurt Weill's virtuosic violin concerto in a stunning arrangement by Australian composer Jessica Wells.

And they do not disappoint. Although based in Germany, none of the quartet is German. Blaz Kemperle (soprano) and Alan Luzar (tenor) are Slovenian, and baritone Guerino Bellarosa and new member Jacopo Taddei on alto are Italian.

Their Musica Viva debut tour program, which ranges from J.S. Bach, through George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein to the flat-out jazz of the Chick Corea classic, Spain, highlights **the foursome's versatility and telepathy when it comes to tight ensemble work, rapid-fire cross rhythms and precision. In short, like all great ensembles, they breathe as one when they play together.**

This was apparent from the start with Katsuki Tochio's transcription of Bach's keyboard masterpiece, Italian Concerto, three wonderful movements rich in memorable melodies and here given an almost orchestral lushness.

Kristian Winther and Signum Saxophone Quartet performing Kurt Weill. Weill's concerto poses challenges for players and arrangers alike. Originally scored for violin and wind orchestra with percussion, including snare drum, xylophone and bass drum. It fell to Bellarosa's baritone and Luzar's tenor to provide most of the percussive effects using slap tongue techniques to imitate the snare. Still only in his 30s, Winther has a deserved reputation as one of this country's cutting edge violinists, having worked with the ACO Collective and Sydney Symphony Orchestra under David Robertson, as well as giving Australian premieres of works by several contemporary international and Australian composers. For a brief, troubled time he led the Australian Quartet in 2014. The Weill work, especially the long solo Cadenza, called on all his virtuosic skills while the fast final movement, with the quartet ducking and weaving behind him, built in intensity to its keening climax. This is not the Weill of Mack the Knife or Surabaya Johnny fame, this is the composer who rubbed shoulders with the likes of Stravinsky and Schoenberg.

Gershwin's three piano preludes are tailor-made for saxophones, invoking the smoky jazz club atmosphere of his Rhapsody in Blue in the first one, a bluesy gently rocking lullaby in the second and a syncopated Spanish dance in the third.

Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from West Side Story features showstopper after showstopper, all magnificently arranged for sax quartet by Sylvain Dedenon. Maria took flight and Somewhere made for a heartbreaking tenor solo, contrasted by the dancy numbers like America, Cool and Mambo.

Corea's Spain, inspired by the opening track of Miles Davis's 1960 Sketches of Spain collaboration with Gil Evans, itself inspired by Joaquin Rodrigo's Concerto de Aranjuez, brought the concert to an inspiring and tuneful close.

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