

## DR. SONYA LIFSCHITZ, ACADEMIC BIO

Dr. Sonya Lifschitz is a distinguished Ukrainian-Australian pianist, performance maker, pedagogue, artistic researcher, and cultural leader at the forefront of classical and contemporary art music. Her deep commitment to art music's sustainability and relevance within contemporary cultural ecology has led to an inclusive and diverse artistic practice. She has collaborated with Australia's foremost composers, music ensembles, and artists from theatre, dance, spoken word, visual, and screenbased disciplines to create cutting edge work which explores boundaries of musical expression and interdisciplinary artistic processes. Praised by the New York Times and The Age for her "dynamic" and "powerful" performances, by the Woodstock Times for her "miraculous keyboard technique and musicianship", and by arts critic Gar Jones as "a life force of extraordinary density and capacity", Sonya has performed on major international stages and in world's foremost arts festivals to critical acclaim.

Sonya's creative practice and research interests are increasingly growing in the direction of diversification, inclusivity, and access in respect to performance-making and collaborative artistic processes. Of specific interest is collaboration with composers and artists from a diverse range of disciplines to create multi-artform performance works with strong social outcomes and broad community reach. Notable collaborations include video artist Angelica Mesiti, sound designer Bob Scott, and composer/director Max Lyandvert (Assembly, which represented Australia at the 2019 Venice Biennale); choreographer Rafael Bonachela and the Sydney Dance Company (YEARS, music-dance film which premiered in 2021 to an international audience of 6000 at the Brighton Digital Festival); dancer-choreographer Martin Del Amo (Mirage, commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre and presented by the 2022 Sydney Festival); performance artist Christine Johnston (Clothing Music, 2022, Crumb's Lyre, 2019, Above/Below, 2017, Cosmic Mechanics, 2016, presented by Melbourne Recital Centre, City Recital Hall, Ten Days on the Island, Canberra International Music Festival, UKARIA, BackStage, and Australian National Academy of Music); composer/media artist Damian Barbeler and interactive video artist Tim Gruchy (Duet for One, premiered at 2025 Canberra International Music Festival).

In her university award-nominated [PhD dissertation](#) "Creative Collaboration in and as Contemporary Performance Practice", Sonya argued that the composer/performer dichotomy prevalent in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' conceptualisation of Western art music is no longer a viable model through which to creatively engage with art music and the practice of music-making in the twenty-first century. She posited that successful (musical) work-realisation is contingent on a symbiotic relationship between the multiple agencies bearing on the final creative outcome, such as the composer and performer, audience and the performative space, community and cultural contexts, and contemporary technologies and the affordances they yield.

A fierce advocate for new Australian music, Sonya has commissioned and premiered works by Australian composers Kate Neal, Robert Davidson, Alice Chance, Damian Barbeler, Andrew Schultz, Jessica Wells, Felicity Wilcox, Anthony Lyons, Larry Sitsky, Bree Van Reyk, Max Lyandvert and Steve Adam among others. She regularly work with pioneering new music ensembles, including Ensemble Offspring, Topology, Clocked Out, and members from Bang on a Can All-Stars (USA), International Contemporary Ensemble (USA) and Eighth Blackbird (USA), to champion music of the 21st century. From 2014-2016 she was the Artistic Director of award-winning new music ensemble Press, Play, receiving the Contemporary Masters Award from the Melbourne Recital Centre in 2015.

In addition to making work, performing, and researching, Sonya is a passionate educator who strives to inspire and nurture the unique creative potential in all her students. She is an ardent advocate for music as a powerful agency to affect positive social change and uplift the human spirit. In pursuit of pedagogical excellence, she has designed and delivered a range of Music Creative Practice courses and Ensembles at the University of NSW that are unanimously recognized by peers and students as innovative, boundary-pushing, transformative, and current with the increasingly challenging and complex demands of the creative industries.

Sonya has been featured on ABC and SBS TV and on national radio, including ABC Classic's *Legends*, *Duet*, *Festival of Female Composers*, *New Waves* and ABC Radio National's *Music Show*. A Fulbright Scholar, Sonya studied with the legendary American pianist-conductor Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory of Music (John Hopkins University, USA) and holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne. Sonya is a Lecturer in Music and Head of Music Performance and Creative Practice at the University of NSW and is a regular presenter on ABC Classic. In 2024, she was the winner of the prestigious Australian Women in Music Awards in the Excellence in Classical Music category.