

Dr. Sonya Lifschitz

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LINKS

[LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [ABC Classic](#), [UNSW](#)

PROFILE

Performance, Research and Teaching Overview

Dr. Sonya Lifschitz is a distinguished Ukrainian-Australian pianist, piano pedagogue, artistic researcher, and cultural leader with 20 years' experience 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 screen-based 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, and by the Woodstock Times for her "miraculous keyboard technique and musicianship", Sonya has performed on major international stages and in world's foremost arts festivals to critical acclaim.

Sonya's 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. 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.

In addition to making work, performing, and researching, Sonya is a passionate educator and pedagogue 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 UNSW 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.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Jan 2018 — present Lecturer in Music and Head of Music Performance and Creative Practice, School of Arts and Media, University of NSW Sydney

- Designing, leading, and teaching Music Creative Practice (MCP) Specialisation – a highly specialised performance program for selected BMus/BFA (Music) students focused on exploring cutting-edge contemporary approaches to performance-making through project design, industry connection-building, audience development and public performance delivery. MCP courses consistently score 5.9-6/6 on student evaluation responses
- Leading, designing and co-delivering a pioneering new collaborative course aligning Advanced Music Craft (Music) and Collaborative Making (Theatre and Performance Studies)
- Developing and teaching Music Craft courses compulsory for all BFA (Music) students. The role involves:
 - Guiding students in honing instrumental performance skills
 - Facilitating collaborative project-based learning
 - Successfully integrating Ensembles studies, private tuition, School-wide masterclass series (Forces in Music), classwork, and performance examinations as part of the course design and delivery
- Developing and teaching 'Music Styles and Interpretations' course; student evaluations typically range from 5.9 to 6 out of 6
- Developing and teaching 'Creative Projects in Performance and Composition' course; student evaluations typically range from 5.9 to 6 out of 6

- Individual piano tuition and coaching (Honours students)
- Founding and directing the UNSW New Music Ensemble and forging partnerships with external arts organisations to facilitate performances; the group established a reputation as a flagship ensemble at UNSW
- Coordinating and curating 'Forces in Music' - a series of presentations, plenary sessions and masterclasses presented by leading Australian and international practitioners across a broad spectrum of artistic practices and musical genres
- Supervision of Honours and HDR students
- Consistently producing NTROs: received the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture award for Best Creative Work of the Year (2020, 2023)
- Member of the Intermedial Composition research hub comprising staff from Theatre and Performance Studies, Film, Music and Creative Writing
- Chamber Music coaching
- Organisation, curation, and production of public-facing student performances in collaboration with UNSW Esmey Timbery Creative Practice Lab
- Assessing music auditions and performance exams
- NTRO and Music representative on School of Arts and Media Research Committee and Creative Practice Lab Committee

Jan 2017 — Jan 2018

Lecturer in Performance (Piano)/Ensemble-in-Residence, School of Music, College of Arts and Sciences, Australian National University

Canberra

- Individual Instrumental Teaching (Piano)
- Teaching Keyboard Performance Seminar
- Teaching Chamber Music Seminar
- Teaching Concert Practice Seminar
- Student Composition Readings/Workshops/Recordings
- Undertaking Regional and National Recruitment and Outreach Activities
- Public Performances with Ensemble-in-Residence and Solo
- Initiating and Producing ERA-Eligible NTROs
- Video-Conferencing with Regional and National Music Institutions
- Liaising with ACT Peak Cultural Bodies to Establish Partnerships

Jan 2007 — Dec 2007

Piano Lecturer, Melba Conservatorium of Music

Melbourne

- Piano Instruction: Preparing Students for Exams, Recitals, Competitions, and Auditions
- Presenting Masterclasses
- Coordinating and Leading Piano Performance Class
- Examining, Auditioning, and Adjudicating
- Student Advising on Appropriate Career Pathways

EDUCATION

2009 — 2015

Doctor of Philosophy (Nominated for the University Award),
University of Melbourne

Melbourne

Aug 2003 — May 2005

Masters of Music Performance (Dean's List – Top 5%), Peabody Conservatory, John Hopkins University

Baltimore

Teacher: Leon Fleisher

Conservatory, John Hopkins University
Teacher: Leon Fleisher

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Bachelor of Music Performance (First Class Honours), Queensland Conservatorium of Music, Griffith University

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KEY RESEARCH AND CREATIVE OUTPUTS

May 2025	Duet for One – Canberra International Music Festival (WP)	Canberra
Incorporating live music performance, film, projections, ritual theatre, and sound design, this time-and-space-bending ‘live cinematic concert’ explores changing emotions, sometimes sad, sometimes surreal or exhilarating, around the vexed question of our modern-day relationship with the Australian natural landscape. <i>Duet for One</i> is a collaboration between virtuoso pianist Sonya Lifschitz, composer/media artist Damian Barbeler and pioneering interactive media artist Tim Gruchy. The show centres around the theatrical device of Sonya performing live in “duet” with projected footage of herself playing in various far-flung locations in the Australian bush on a “Portative Klavier”.		
May 2025	Phillip Glass: METAMORPHOSIS - Canberra International Music Festival	Canberra
Opus Her – Orange Chamber Music Festival (Festival Gala)		
Mar 2025	Opus Her – Orange Chamber Music Festival (Festival Gala)	Orange
Mar 2023-Sept 2024	So Much Myself: Piano Portraits – Australian Tour (WP)	Australia-wide
So Much Myself: piano portraits is a new 80-minute Australian work in 18 movements for solo piano, spoken word/narration, and video. The work features historically and culturally significant speeches/interviews by such figures as Ethel Smyth, Clara Schumann’s piano students, Nellie Melba, Nina Simone, and Patti Smith. Co-conceived with composer Robert Davidson, the work premiered at the Melbourne Recital Centre and toured Adelaide Festival, Canberra International Music Festival, Brisbane Festival, Orange Chamber Music Festival and Riverside Theatres.		
July 2024	Stradbroke Chamber Music Festival, principle artist	Stradbroke Island (QLD)
Mar 2024	Psychedelic Frenzy with Ensemble Offspring – ACO Pier 2/3	Sydney
Jan 2024	Klange: Kandinsky with Ensemble Offspring – Art Gallery of NSW	Sydney
Apr 2023	Celestial and Submerged Objects – Four Winds Festival	Bermagui
A theatrical re-imagining of George Crumb’s <i>Makrokosmos</i> , <i>Vox Balaenae</i> and <i>A Little Midnight Music</i> for the Festival’s opening concert. Directed by Sonya Lifschitz and performed by Lifschitz (piano), Lina Andanovska (flute), Matthew Hoy (cello), and Christine Johnston (spoken word, musical saw, vocals, and projections).		
Mar-Apr 2023	Creative Women – Melbourne Recital Centre (WP)	Melbourne
Major new work for piano, video and spoken word co-created with Dr. Robert Davidson		
Sep 2022	Tyalgum Music Festival, principle artist	Tyalgum
Vocal recital with distinguished Australian tenor Andrew Goodwin, comprising French, German and Russian Lied and solo piano works by Scriabin and Brahms.		
Aug 2022	Artist Residency at the Bundanon Centre with Dr. Anthony Lyons (Interractive Composition)	
June 2022	Artist Research Residency at the Bundanon Centre with Christine Johnston (performance artist)	
Creative Development for new interdisciplinary work: The Interview Project, based on interviews with my Ukrainian-Jewish grandmother and great aunt about escaping Kyiv in 1941 at the outset of WWII.		
Apr 2022	Musica Viva Australia ‘Morning Masters’ recital with Andrew Goodwin	Sydney
A program comprising French, German and Russian Lied and solo works by Scriabin and Brahms, performed at the Concourse, Sydney		
Mar 2022	Crumb’s Lyre - Melbourne Recital Centre	Melbourne
'Crumb’s Lyre' is a 60-minute music theatre work in 12 movements. Conceived by Sonya Lifschitz and realised by Lifschitz (piano, vocals); Christine Johnston (spoken word, musical saw, projections, vocals). The work pioneers new, innovative approaches to performance-making within the Western Art Music tradition by		

placing G. Crumb's *Makrokosmos* into a fully curated interdisciplinary context combining contemporary classical music, performance art and visual theatre. Performed at the Melbourne Recital Centre and recorded for MRC's digital platform.

Jan 2022

Sydney Festival: Mirage

World premiere of 'Mirage', an 80-minute immersive work comprising music (Morton Feldman's *Quintet for Piano and String Quartet*), dance, and performance design in collaboration with renowned German-Australian dancer-choreographer Martin Del Amo. The work had five performances and received a 4 star review in *Limelight Magazine*.

Dec 2021

UKARIA: Above/Below

Adelaide

'ABOVE/BELOW' is a 75 minute genre-defying work situating classical/contemporary classical piano performance within an interdisciplinary context. The 14 movements comprising 'ABOVE/BELOW' are drawn from two piano cycles: P.I. Tchaikovsky's *Seasons* (1876) and G. Crumb's *Makrokosmos* (1972). Directed by Sonya Lifschitz and performed by Lifschitz (piano, spoken word) and Christine Johnston (spoken word, musical saw, lap slide guitar, tuned bells, body percussion, and vocals).

Nov 2021

Musica Viva Australia: Discovery Series

Sydney

A solo piano recital presented by Musica Viva Australia's prestigious Discovery Series. The program comprised works by Bach, Brahms, Janacek and Crumb in a musical exploration of cyclic relationship between birth and death.

Oct 2021

Sydney Dance Company: Years

Sydney

A large-scale collaboration with Sydney Dance Company, 'YEARS' is a choreographic response to J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, arranged for two pianos by Stephen Emmerson. Conceived by Sonya Lifschitz and realised in collaboration with choreographer/SDC Artistic Director Rafael Bonachela, pianist Stephen Emmerson and film director Clemens Habicht. *Years* premiered globally online and was viewed by over 3000 viewers.

May 2021 — Jun 2021

Ensemble Offspring: Surge Tour

NSW, ACT, VIC

A national tour with Ensemble Offspring, Australia's leading new music ensemble, premiering 5 new works by Australian female composers in collaboration with video artists Peachey and Mosig. The tour included major capital cities and regional centres. The tour garnered extensive critical acclaim in *Limelight Magazine* and other notable publications.

Apr 2021 — May 2021

Canberra International Music Festival: Crumb's Lyre

Canberra

'Crumb's Lyre' is an interdisciplinary work comprising contemporary classical music performance, performance art and visual theatre to recontextualise George Crumb's ground-breaking work for amplified piano: *Makrokosmos*, Book 1.

World Premier of piano quartet *She Dances by the River* by Andrew Schultz.

Feb 2021

Now You Hear Her Festival

Sydney

A site-specific, roving performance comprising installation, performance design, improvised musical performance, and performance art. Commissioned by Now You Hear Her Festival which celebrated work by female musical artists. Co-conceived and realised with performance artist Christine Johnston.

May 2020

Ten Thousand Birds

Sydney

70-minute music video artwork in 6 movements conceived and directed by Sonya Lifschitz and realised by UNSW New Music Collective and the Creative Practice Lab. *Ten Thousand Birds* (John Luther Adams, 2014) is an immersive musical work comprising a folio of notated bird calls which serves as an atlas of musical possibilities for performers to use in creating their own unique realisation of the work. The work premiered online during 2020 lockdown, serving as educational model and prototype/template for subsequent digitally produced ensemble work at UNSW and other partner institutions.

Oct 2019

Melbourne Festival: Stalin's Piano

Melbourne

'Stalin's Piano: Voice Portraits of Artists and Politicians' is a new 55-minute Australian multimedia work in 19 vignettes, combining solo piano, spoken word/narration, archival footage, video and audio of recorded speeches and interviews by iconic political and creative figures of the 20-21st centuries. The work features historically and culturally significant speeches/interviews by such figures as Joseph Stalin, Corbusier, Maria Yudina, Donald Trump, Robert Helpmann, Jackson Pollock, Percy Grainger, Susan Sontag, and many others. Co-conceived by

Sonya Lifschitz and Robert Davidosn, the work was a finalist in the APRA/AMCOS 'Best Instrumental Work of the Year' category and winner of UNSW Dean's 'Best Creative Work of the Year' Award. The performance received 4.5 star review in *The Age*.

Aug 2019

Extended Play: Love-Death Music

Sydney

'Love-Death Music' is a 60 minute music theatre work in 12 movements. Conceived by Sonya Lifschitz and realised by Lifschitz (piano, vocals); Christine Johnston (spoken word, musical saw, projections, vocals). The work pioneers new, innovative approaches to performance-making within the Western Art Music tradition by placing G. Crumb's *Makrokosmos* into a fully-curated interdisciplinary context combining contemporary classical music, performance art and visual theatre. The performance received excellent reviews in *Limelight* Magazine and *RealTime Arts*.

May 2019

Barbican Centre and De Doelen: Voice Portraits: Arts, Power and Politics

London/Rotterdam

Recent research has identified ways in which melody perception shares cognitive resources with speech prosody, illuminating how emotional expression recruits shared processing in language and music. These findings inform this work, both in its conceptual underpinning and its musical structure and material, which closely traces the spoken intonation to generate musical material and utilises solo piano, archival footage, recorded and spoken speech to juxtapose the roles, ideals and functions of notable public figures in modern history. Co-created by Sonya Lifschitz and Robert Davidson. The performance received a 5 star review in *The Guardian*.

May 2019 — Nov 2019

Venice Biennale: ASSEMBLY

Venice

'ASSEMBLY' was commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts as Australia's 2019 representation for the 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale). This 25 minute three-channel video work by Angelica Mesiti uses David Malouf's poem 'To Be Written In Another Tongue' as a conceptual point of departure. 'ASSEMBLY' establishes an evolving set of translations from the written word to stenographic code to musical notation and composition developed through collaboration between composer Max Lyandvert and pianist Sonya Lifschitz.

Mar 2019

Ten Days on the Island Festival: Above/Below

Hobart

An earlier iteration of this genre-defying work juxtaposing two major piano cycles from 19th and 20th centuries: P.I. Tchaikovsky's *Seasons* and G. Crumb's *Makrokosmos*. The work situated piano performance within theatrical/performance art context in collaboration with performance artist Christine Johnston, and included poetry commissioned specifically for this project.

May 2018 — Jun 2018

HANDWORK: Goldberg Reimagined

National Tour

'HANDWORK - Goldberg Reimagined' was a 2018 national tour by Sonya & Lisa piano duo (Sonya Lifschitz and Lisa Moore) consisting of six performances across five major Australian cities: Sydney (WSU and Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the University of Sydney); Melbourne (Melbourne Recital Centre, Elisabeth Murdoch Hall); Canberra (ANU); Brisbane (QPAC, Concert Hall); and Adelaide (Elder Conservatorium of Music, Elder Hall, the University of Adelaide). This program presented four diverse works spanning four centuries, including *Goldberg Variations BWV 988* by J.S. Bach/arr. Stephen Emmerson (1741/2012); *Hallelujah Junction* by John Adams (1996); *Handwork* by Martin Bresnick (2015) ; and *K*** by Dylan Crismani (2018, world premiere). The project explored the unique sonic, timbral, colouristic, and textural characteristics of two-piano repertoire, and the collaborative, instrumental and musical skills necessary to negotiate the inherent challenges of coordination, synchronicity, stylistic and interpretative congruity and textural cohesion. The tour received excellent reviews in several national publications, including *Limelight* Magazine and *Canberra Times*.

Apr 2017 — Sep 2018

Stalin's Piano

National Tour

The work toured throughout 2017-2018, including performances at MonaFoma Festival in Hobart; City Recital Hall in Sydney; Adelaide Festival; Riverside Theatres in Sydney; culminating in a sold out performance at the Brisbane Festival. The tour received 4.5 star reviews including from *Limelight* Magazine. 'Stalin's Piano' was selected to represent Australia at Classical: NEXT in Rotterdam (with a performance at De Doelen) - the biggest performance arts market for art music in the world.

Mar 2018

Life Cycle

Melbourne

Life Cycle (2010) is a 40 minute rendered work in 19 movements and is a world premiere recording of the complete cycle. The work, composed by Emily Hall using text by Toby Litt, is a genre-fluid song cycle for soprano, piano and cello, incorporating elements of folk, jazz, classical and contemporary music styles. The album was launched at the Melbourne Recital Centre, marking the Australian premiere performance of this work.

Jan 2016 — Dec 2017

Other Notable Creative Work

Australia/USA

Melbourne Recital Centre: '48 Ways of Looking at Bach', 2017
Canberra International Music Festival: 'Velvet Revolution', 2017
Canberra International Music Festival: "The Russian Muse", 2017
St. John's Feast of Music Festival: 'Above/Below', Adelaide, 2017
Bargemusic Masterworks Series: 'Above/Below', New York (USA), 2016
Detroit Institute of Arts Friday Night Live! 'Infinite Variations - Goldberg Re-Imagined', Detroit (USA), 2016
Toledo Museum of Art: 'Infinite Variations - Goldberg Re-Imagined', Ohio (USA), 2016
Melbourne Recital Centre: "The Great Romantic" – J. Brahms *Piano Concerto in D minor* arr. for Piano Duet, 2016
Australian National Academy of Music: 'Cosmic Mechanics' – George Crumb *Makrokosmos* Books 1-4, Melbourne, 2016
Fortyfivedownstairs Festival of Music and Words: 'The Architecture of Time', Melbourne, 2016
Australian Piano Duo Festival – G. Crumb *Makrokosmos* Book 3; J. Brahms *Piano Concerto in D minor* arr. for Piano Duet, Brisbane, 2016
Melbourne Recital Centre: "The Resurrection" – Gustav Mahler/H. Bocklet, *Symphony No. 2 Resurrection* (arr. for 2 pianos, 8 hands), 2016
Melbourne Recital Centre: 'Above/Below', 2016
Metropolis New Music Festival: 'Crashing Through Fences', Melbourne, 2016
USQ Arts Theatre: Messiaen at Twilight - O. Messiaen *Visions de l'Amen*, Toowoomba, 2016
The Piano Mill: World Premiere of *All Grist that Comes to the Mill* by Eric Griswold, Stanthorpe, 2016

PRISES AND AWARDS

2025	School Research Grant: Research Entities, School of Arts and Media, University of NSW
2024	Australian Women in Music Awards – Winner of Excellence in Classical Music Category
2024	Faculty Research Grant: Research Entities, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, University of NSW
2023	Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture: Award for Best Creative Work of the Year, University of NSW
2023	School Research Grant: Research Entities, School of Arts and Media, University of NSW
2022	Faculty Research Grant: Research Entities, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, University of NSW
2021	Bundanon Centre Artist Research and Development Residency
2021	Faculty Research Grant: Special Projects, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, University of NSW
2020	Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture: Award for Best Creative Work of the Year, University of NSW
2020	Australia Council Arts Projects for Individuals and Groups, Australia Council for the Arts
2019	Faculty Research Grant: Special Projects, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, University of NSW
2019	Australia Council UKARIA Residency, Australia Council for the Arts
2018	Australian Art Music Awards - Finalist in Best Work of the Year Category
2018	School Research Grant, School of Arts and Media, University of NSW
2015	Contemporary Masters Award, Melbourne Recital Centre
2014	Ian Potter Travelling Scholarship, Ian Potter Foundation
2013	Australia Council Skill Development Grant, Australia Council for the Arts
2013	Australian Art Music Awards - Finalist in Best Performance of the Year Category
2013	Alan C. Rose Memorial Scholarship, the University of Melbourne
2011	Australia Council Creation/Development Grant, Australia Council for the Arts

REFERENCES

Prof. Stephen Emmerson / Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University

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Prof. Vanessa Tomlinson / Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University

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Cultural Leader; Artistic Director

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