

A Series of Oddities

Composed by Nicole Buetti

Many years ago, I got to go on an adventure in the beautiful land of Australia and see some of the most amazing, but also some of the strangest animals in the world. I always wanted to compose a piece about these creatures, and was so grateful for this perfect opportunity from the WSMTA. Many creatures are misunderstood and underestimated by humans. They are cunning, compassionate and curious. While thinking about these odd creatures, I thought it would be fun to write in odd and mixed meter and have it performed by the oddest musical instruments in the orchestra, the bassoon and contrabassoon. In short, this piece is an odd number of movements, in odd meters, performed by odd instruments, and is about some of the oddest creatures in the world. Enjoy!

The Movements:

1. *Platypus in the Garden*

This movement was inspired by a quote from a conversation I had with a parent of one of my students many years ago. She said to me “The bassoon is really the platypus of the orchestra.” This stuck with me, because it is really true. The bassoon and contrabassoon are the strangest and most misunderstood musical instruments in orchestra. So, naturally, the first movement of this piece had to be about my spirit animal, the platypus. People originally thought that the platypus was a fictional animal because of their strange almost comical appearance. They are fascinating creatures that are both land dwelling and aquatic, and the platypus is an egg-laying mammal or monotreme. The male platypus is venomous. Platypuses don’t have teeth or a stomach – they don’t need either to eat their diet of worms, insect larvae and shrimp. They can’t see underwater, so the platypus has electroreceptors and mechanoreceptors on its bill that help it detect electrical fields and movement in the water. The bassoon and contrabassoon may not have electroreceptors or venom, but they definitely are odd compared to most other musical instruments. They have a very large range, they can blend with any other instrument, and they look very strange (the bassoon like a tree with only one branch, and the contra is like a giant wooden paperclip). The double reeds for the bassoon and contrabassoon, even look a little like a duck bill. What better combination of instrument and animal?! The movement is written in mixed meter of 7/8 and 8/8 and is very pointillistic to showcase the peculiarity of both animal and instrument.

To learn more about platypus Conservation:



2. *The Shrewd Emu*

The next movement was inspired by a sauntering flightless bird, the emu. They are quite a sight. The second largest bird (next to the ostrich), emu look almost like shaggy Muppets with their unique, thin, fine feathers. Australia is the only country where they are found in the wild. The term bird brain is often used as an insult, but if someone calls you an emu bird-brain, take it as a compliment. Emu and humans in Australia actually had a war in the winter of 1932, and the Emu won. Shrewd, wouldn’t you say? They can’t fly, but they can run fast – up to 48 km/hour and they can swim too! When they walk, they have a bit of saunter, which inspired the slightly jazzy, almost pompous 12/8 feel of this movement.

Learn more about Emu and the Emu War:



3. *Wombat Waltz*

The devastating fires that plagued Australia in 2019-2020 led to an estimated **3 billion** animals being lost. During this tragedy, a small, burrowing hero emerged from the devastation – the wombat. Wombat's burrows are an excellent shelter from fires, and wombats have been observed sharing their burrows with lots of different species of animals during and after fires. A group of wombats is known as a "wisdom" which is very fitting. I had to dedicate a movement to these adorable creatures. Wombats are marsupials and are closely related to the koala. They can run as fast as humans, and wombats poop cubes...yes, it's true. They also have very large posteriors, that they use as defense against predators. There are 3 sub-species of wombat: Bare-Nosed Wombat, Southern Hairy-nosed, and Northern Hairy Nosed. The northern Hairy Nosed wombat is critically endangered. This movement celebrates their bizarre nature as well as their compassion for their fellow animals with a lilting waltz in 3/8 time.

To learn more about Wombat Conservation:



4. *A Contemplative Blue-ringed Octopus*

The octopus is one of the most alien-like creatures on this planet. They are elegant, venomous shape-shifters, and hypnotic to watch. Octopi are infinitely smarter than humans think they are, with problem-solving and reasoning skills. They can recognize faces of people, even if the person wears a disguise. They also have 3 hearts, one that pumps blood through the body while the other two pump it to the gills to pick up oxygen. The Blue-ringed octopus is covered in stunning and distinctive blue-ringed patterns. These patterns are an example of aposematism, where animals use bright colors as a warning to potential predators. Blue ringed octopi are one of the most venomous animals in the world. Beautiful, but deadly. Naturally, this movement is in 8/8 time. A very legato movement to reflect the graceful beauty of this underwater marvel.

Learn more about Blue-Ringed Octopi here:



5. *Wallaby Bounce*

I couldn't compose a piece about Australian animals without including a wallaby. The Brush-Tailed Rock-Wallaby (BTRW) is one of the most fascinating of the roughly 30 species of wallaby. Wallaby are marsupials similar to kangaroos but smaller and more agile. Mountain goats have nothing on the BTRW. They can hop up almost vertical rock walls! They love rocky outcrops and cliffs, especially ones with caves and cracks to hide in. Tragically, 1/3 of their population was lost in the 2019-2020 fires. I used mixed meter 3/4 and 4/4 and a fun pointillistic motif to emphasize the death-defying hopping up cliffs by the BTRW.

Learn more about BTRW conservation:

