



PARADISE CONCERTS INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

Kirtley Leigh , Artistic Director/Solo Violin

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**KIRTLEY LEIGH (Walker-Halstead)
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & SOLO VIOLIN**

BIOGRAPHY

BIRTHDATE December 19, 1960



American-born, Dual National, American/Australian violinist Kirtley Leigh has a career that has taken her across the globe, as soloist, in chamber concerts, recitals, and orchestras worldwide. Her performances have been celebrated in over 20 countries. Her home is currently Australia, since relocation from London, and since receiving her Australian citizenship. She was born and educated in the USA and called Atlanta home for many years. She has played violin professionally since the age of 16- having begun lessons at the age of 5. She has been on stage as long as she can remember!

*A student of the legendary virtuoso Josef Gingold, she holds a B Mus (honours) degree from Indiana University, (1982) as well as a Suzuki Teaching qualification. The US then honoured her with the prestigious American Federation of Music Prize/Recitalist in New York. She has also studied with Dorothy De Lay and in Masterclasses with Joseph Silverstein and Henryk Szering, amongst others. Her early tuition was from two distinguished violinists-Kathleen De Berry Brungard, author/composer of the innovative string series books, *Orchestral Expressions*, Alfred Music, that are recognized as the main string teaching curriculum in many states, and Ronda Respess of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.*

She began a *Master's Degree* at IU, but left when she won the international position as Associate Leader with the Hong Kong Philharmonic in 1983.

As a chamber musician and recitalist, Leigh has appeared in the *Australian Festival of Chamber Music*, and festivals including *Aspen, Point-Counterpoint* and *Chautauqua* (USA), *St. Endellion* and *Classics Live* (UK), *Klassik Aften, Bergen Festspille*, and Oslo (Norway), Amsterdam, Vienna, Pollensa (Spain), and Hong Kong.

Leigh was *Associate Leader* of the *Hong Kong Philharmonic* (1983-87), and started her teaching career on the faculty of the *Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts* as *Assistant Violin Professor*. In Europe she held orchestral positions as *Leader* in Amsterdam (1988), and in Norway where, as *principal second violin* of the *Stavanger Symphony Orchestra*, she was *Artistic Director* of her own chamber music series, performed as soloist and recorded for Norwegian radio from 1988-1991.

Residing in London for 14 years, her Duo gave its debut recital at the *International Classics Live Festival*. Leigh was in the UK's finest chamber and symphony orchestras, including *principal second violin* of the *London Chamber Symphony*, *Assistant Leader* of the *Midlands Philharmonic*, and member of the *Academy of London, Oxford* and *European Union Chamber Orchestras*. She has also appeared as chamber musician/soloist at the *Endellion Festival* and *Prussia Cove* under conductor Richard Hickox.

Leigh ran her own private teaching studio while in London from 1990 - 2003, in addition was *Head of Strings* at *Franciscan School*, and appointed *Violin Tutor* at the *Wimbledon Academy of Arts and Music* (2000-2003). She was also on the faculty of the *Wandsworth Music Academy* (London) during this time.

European engagements included performing for Queen Sophia of Spain as *Leader* of the *Pollensa Chamber Orchestra*, and for King Olaf of Norway with the *Bergen Philharmonic*, as well as tours with Pavarotti and the *Oporto Orchestra*, Portugal, and with Soprano Kiri te Kanawa.

Leigh was one of the *Australian Festival of Chamber Music's* performers in '05, as *masterclass teacher and chamber music artist*, ABC recording artist, and *Leader* of the chamber orchestra. She gave her Australian recital debut in '03, and founded, as *Artistic Director*, *Paradise Concerts International Chamber Music* series. In '05 Leigh toured Papua New Guinea, giving a command performance for the Prime Minister at Parliament House. The *Queensland State Arts Council* appointed Leigh as an ongoing touring artist.

She regularly has performed in recital with the internationally acclaimed pianist Pascal Roge, and appeared as guest leader and soloist with the *Barrier Reef Orchestra* under conductor John Hopkins OBE. She was *soloist* with *Opera Queensland* in '06, and toured New Zealand, giving recitals and the *world premiere* of a *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* written for her by Ross Carey. In '07 she was soloist at *Opera in the Outback* and she appeared as *soloist/director* in the debut of the *Paradise Chamber Orchestra* for *Festival Cairns* in *The Eight Seasons*, an innovative programme of her creation, juxtaposing Piazzolla and Vivaldi 4 Seasons. She is founder of the *Paradise Chamber Orchestra*, Cairns' first professional orchestra.

In '07, she was presented a RADF award in recognition of cultural excellence in Cairns. The Paradise Concerts' Gala recital of '08 featured Leigh and star pianist Melvyn Tan in performance together, and Leigh was appointed guest leader of the *Cairns Community Orchestra*. In '09, engagements included 2 concerto performances in Melbourne, including a rare Violin Concerto by Mendelssohn. Leigh's collaboration with exciting International artists continued at the Centre of Contemporary Arts. Musica Viva celebrated pianist, Benjamin Martin and Leigh formed a Duo.

The Series is also proud to hold concerts in the iconic Art Deco Innisfail Town Hall, and is credited for bringing the Hall's Steinway into prominent use. In '10 Paradise Concerts made its Cooktown debut at the *Discovery Festival*, and Leigh performed for National dignitaries at the opening gala for the *Cairns Indigenous Art Fair* in a jointly-composed *World Premiere "The Elements"* with international didgeridoo sensation William Barton.

Leigh vigorously champions classical music in the region and also has a thriving studio for private tuition of violinists. Many of her students have been accepted into the Conservatoriums of Music in Brisbane and Sydney, as well as the Australian Academy of Music. Graduates are members of the *Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra*. Her Private Students are regular winners of competitions. From 2010-2013 Leigh was *Head of Strings* at *St Andrew's College*, Redlynch. In 2014 Leigh began a *strings tutor* position at *Jubilee College*, Atherton, where she presently enjoys a flourishing studio of pupils

Her debut at the Centre of Contemporary Arts as *Director* (from the violin chair) and soloist in the Vivaldi *Four Seasons* in September 2011 was met with critical acclaim and her Paradise Concerts are a regular highlight of Cairns Festivals for the last decade. In 2012 Leigh began a Residency and partnership with the *Centre of Contemporary Arts*, Cairns, that has culminated in a 4-concert series held throughout each year as a cornerstone feature of the Centre's artistic calendar. Her performance at the *Cairns Regional Gallery* in 2014 in conjunction with an exhibition of the paintings of iconic Arthur Boyd was acclaimed.

In 2013 Leigh performed in a headline partnership with Herb Armstrong, the Grandson of legendary Louis, as well as gave a command recital performance for the long-standing former Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Tun Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Siti. Leigh also instructed Madame Siti in violin. As a result of this fortunate meeting, Leigh has been invited to give a *concert tour* in Malaysia. She will give the *Australasian Premiere* performance of another contemporary Violin Concerto, *Noor*, having been invited to premiere this work in Malaysia by the composer, Katia Tiutiunnik.

Since 2010, Kirtley Leigh has also formed a Piano Trio with cellist Gwyn Roberts and pianist Jenni Flemming-Roberts, *The Serendipity Trio*. They tour and perform regularly.

In 2016, Leigh was invited by BBC Conductor Mark Eager to travel to Cardiff, Wales to be Guest Leader and hold Orchestral Strings Masterclasses for his orchestra, *BBC Welsh Sinfonia*. She additionally was invited to perform with lead of the sensation band INXS in an improvised performance with frontman Cieran Gribbon.

Kirtley was *Artist-in-Residence* in July 2016 for the inaugural *Sedona Summer Colony Festival, Arizona* at the invitation of Director Eric Holowatz. She appeared as soloist and in collaborations. Her improvised music was the feature of a project developed during her residency-a film highlighting the underwater wonders of the Great Barrier Reef.

In addition to her violin work, Kirtley Leigh also plays (and teaches) viola, and teaches some cello. She has piano skills which enable her to accompany early students in rehearsals, and gives her a thorough grounding with which to teach theory and music history at all levels when needed. Foreign languages are a passion, and Kirtley speaks Cantonese, Spanish, Norwegian, and some French.

When not on stage, Leigh also enjoys a "secret" career as an Underwater Dive Model. Her submerged self has graced some 20 International magazine covers and she is feature model in the *Great Barrier Reef* souvenir book (Peter Lik and husband Bob Halstead). She is married to Bob Halstead, celebrated Underwater Photographer and inductee into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame. She has three wonderful, creative children. Her eldest girl is also a violinist.

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