



Embassy of Australia

Washington

UNBREAKABLE

FOR VIOLONCELLO & PIANO

COMPOSED BY
MICHAEL SALVATORE GREBLA

SCORE

PREMIERED 29 OCTOBER 2024

**COMMISSIONED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
IN CELEBRATION OF THE OPENING OF
THE NEW EMBASSY OF AUSTRALIA IN WASHINGTON DC
ON ITS ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

THE EMBASSY OF AUSTRALIA

WASHINGTON DC

The Australian Government is proud to commission “Unbreakable” by Michael S. Grebla in celebration of the opening of the new Embassy of Australia in Washington DC. Built on the site of the original Australian Embassy, which had hosted Australia’s diplomatic presence in Washington since 1969, the new Embassy is a place for all Australians in the United States and a platform to advance Australia’s priorities in the US. Just blocks from the White House and looking out across historic Scott Circle, our new headquarters captures the character of Australia. It’s there in the scent of the Tasmanian Blackbutt timber panelling that greets you as you step into the central atrium, and in the magnificent contemporary Australian art seen throughout the building. It’s evident in the Embassy’s state-of-the-art green design and construction credentials, as well as the public spaces and meeting rooms named after Australians who have contributed to the shaping of our national identity.

The Embassy of Australia is a testament to the depth and strength of Australia’s relationship with the United States. Characterised by genuine friendship and a spirit of collaboration, our alliance encompasses many shared fields of endeavour – from defence and security cooperation, trade and investment, to cultural exchange and tourism, education, research and development, and sporting rivalry. Australia and the United States have a proud history of working side by side for more than 100 years to ensure peace in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Since our soldiers fought together at the Battle of Hamel on 4 July 1918, our partnership of shared values – one of respect, friendship, creativity and courage – has endured and deepened. It is a cornerstone of our foreign and security policies, reflected across many areas of strategic cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral.

The new Embassy of Australia showcases the very best in Australian design, materials and architectural excellence. Designed by Australian architects Bates Smart and built by American company Clark Construction – both involved in the construction of the original Embassy on the same site – our new HQ captures an enduring vision of a contemporary and innovative Australia, while paying tribute to the unique Australian landscape. Its design

references Australia's distinctive geography, with bright and clear natural light and open skies, warm materials, and vast scale — creating a symbol of Australia that is both welcoming and enduring.

Reflecting Australia's commitment to a greener world, the new building is designed to achieve the highest global environmental design certifications available, including a thermally efficient façade, a green roof with an extensive photovoltaic array, the expansive use of natural light, and the latest building services technologies. The building also hosts a rooftop apiary, which can serve as home to approximately 240,000 resident bees. To capture the Australian spirit within the Embassy's walls, we named our public spaces and meeting rooms after some of the people who have inspired us and helped to shape our country. From the Julia Gillard Auditorium honouring our first woman Prime Minister, to the Neville Bonner Conference Room recognising our first Indigenous Senator, and the Jan Jandura Pucek Room, in honour of the first migrant to receive Australian citizenship – the Embassy's named rooms are a heartfelt acknowledgement that Australia's diversity is its greatest strength.

To celebrate the opening of the new Embassy and Australia's creative excellence, we commissioned Australian artists to create new large-scale artworks as well as this musical work by Grebla. The Embassy's art is a profound insight into our nation's beating heart. Art displayed throughout the building, in our Quentin Bryce Gallery, and presented in our programs emphasises Australia's unique cultural identity, including Australia's rich Indigenous heritage and vibrant diaspora communities.

Through Grebla's "Unbreakable" we invite you to hear and feel all that the Embassy encapsulates and radiates — the award-winning architecture, design and art, the inspiring work and diplomatic mission, the people (staff and visitors), together with the enduring friendship of two nations.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

MICHAEL SALVATORE GREBLA (b.1989)

Spreading music described as “a testament to the universal strength and endurance of the human spirit” by Cut-Common Magazine and “accessible and meaningful... music of great depth and beauty” by Seesaw Magazine, Michael Salvatore Grebla is an international award-winning Australian composer and United States Permanent Resident based in New York City.

Born in Western Australia to immigrants from Sicily and Romania, Grebla grew up in the hills of Perth and graduated from Mazenod College among the top of his class. Though he had a deep passion for music from a young age – having learned piano and later, voice – he also had an aptitude for the sciences, and found it difficult at the time to imagine what a career in music might look like. Following the loss of his father in high school, he was encouraged to take the ‘sensible’ path and enrolled in a combined bachelor’s degree in science and mechanical engineering at the University of Western Australia (UWA). However, unable to turn his focus away from music, he began composing by the end of his second year. He quickly gained admission to the UWA Conservatorium and began a combined Bachelor of Music and Mechanical Engineering degree the following year.

During these years as a student, Grebla was deeply influenced by the orations of then-President Obama, and it was a back-to-school speech that first ignited his desire to study in America:

“What makes us who we are is that here, in this country, we not only reach for our own dreams, we help others do the same. This is a country that gives all its daughters and all its sons a fair chance. A chance to make the most of their lives. A chance to fulfill their God-given potential.”

During the latter part of his studies, with the support of the Wolff and Knight music scholarships, he became a resident at St George’s College. Inspiration would strike while procrastinating studying for a Vibrations final exam. Grebla identified the acoustic space of the College’s historic dining hall as ideal for chamber music, and subsequently arranged for the acquisition of a concert grand Fazioli piano.

This resulted in the founding of an idyllic world-class concert venue and the larger initiative “Music at St Georges”: a chamber music program to bring together the greatest national and international talent, while also elevating his peers and emerging artists. Simultaneously, the program would provide public access to novel concert experiences and build a community for chamber music in Perth. By the end of Grebla’s three-and-a-half-year tenure as director, at age 26, he had welcomed 13,500 audience members and artists such as Maxim Vengerov, Kathryn Stott and Angela Hewitt; raised more than \$800,000 in scholarships, instruments and endowments; and founded enduring traditions and programs that continue to elevate young Australian artists.

Grebla graduated with first class honours and earned the University’s “Matilda Award” for cultural excellence. His honours project “Portraits of UWA” featured a series of musical and photographic portraits he composed, inspired by the iconic Australian campus. His mechanical engineering thesis examined the acoustic implications of piano lid angle on a venue, earning high distinctions.

The subsequent year, he was awarded Australia’s most prestigious international post-graduate scholarship, the 2016 “Sir Zelman Cowan” General Sir John Monash Scholarship, awarded to future leaders of Australia for excellence. With “The Monash” in hand and additional support from the American Australian Association, Grebla was able to realise his ambitions to study in the United States. He gained entry to the New England Conservatory (with scholarship), one of the nation’s oldest and most prestigious music schools, and in August 2016 he moved to Boston to complete a two-year Master of Music Composition.

Grebla’s time in Boston proved transformational. Access to high-level, specialised instruction and exposure to new influences radically transformed his approach to composition. It also opened his mind to the richness of possibility and opportunity that the United States provided to realise a composing career. He was taken by the warmth of its people and was adopted by neighbours as his ‘American family’. Quickly, he developed a rich community of Australians and Americans, each building bright futures, and became enamoured with the American way of life.

Grebla graduated with honours in 2018, and despite originally intending to return home, he could not ignore the enormous promise which life in the United States held. With the support and encouragement of friends, he decided to move to New York City to establish an international composing career. It was here in the years that followed that he found his 'voice' as an Australian composer in the United States, and in 2020, he successfully petitioned for the EB-2 National Interest Waiver to become a permanent resident, finally calling the United States 'home'.

Based in East Harlem, he has built a thriving creative practice, receiving more than 45 awards, honours, scholarships and grants internationally for his work from institutions including the New York Composer's Circle, The City of New York, New York State Council on the Arts, Creative Australia, Creative Partnerships Australia, The President's Own United States Marine Band, Spectrum Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth, Indiana State University, The Greater Bridgeport Symphony and The University of New South Wales.

His work has been performed internationally at festivals including the June in Buffalo; the Atlantic Music, Zodiac, Connecticut Summerfest, Charlotte New Music and TUTTI festivals; and by ensembles including the Melbourne Chamber Players, Arditti String Quartet, CreArtBox, ETHEL, BEO, Penny Quartet, Hub New Music, Hyvinkää Salonkiorkesteri, the Australian Youth Orchestra, UNSW Orchestra and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

He has developed his practice with a deep conviction for the role music plays as a unifying mechanism in society, both constructing identity and building community. He endeavours to create meaningful and inclusive cultural experiences, bridging tradition and the present through his music. His works have dealt with ideas of journey, displacement, transience, hope, and spirituality, offering his own deeply introspective expression and examination of the human experience.

He remains an active contributor to Australia's music landscape and looks forward to using his creative practice to champion Australia-United States cultural cooperation and exchange in the arts.



CONNECT WITH
THE WORK

MICHAEL SALVATORE GREBLA

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michaelgrebla.com

"It is the greatest of privileges to offer the dedication of this work to the friendship of two nations that I call home, that profoundly shape the person I am, for my hopes, joys and ambitions are the beneficiaries of their peoples' cooperation and sacrifice over a century of generations."

NOTES FROM THE COMPOSER

“Unbreakable” is inspired by the enduring bond between Australia and the United States as embodied, exemplified and served by the new Embassy of Australia building—an “unbreakable alliance.”

The notion of something being truly ‘unbreakable’ led me to reflect: what makes something unbreakable? While I am not a philosopher, I am an engineer, and in my understanding, nearly everything is breakable. If something were unbreakable it would be an ‘ideal’ material. Thus, for the alliance to be unbreakable, it must be made of ideal materials.

I believe this to be true, because the “unbreakable alliance” is grounded in our shared pursuit of freedom, liberty, justice, the right to self-determination and to ‘a fair go’ – these ideals (to name a few) are those that we hold to be infallible, even if we ourselves are not. They are the ‘light’ in which we flourish, that guides us, that we strive to reach for, that is core to our identities as Australians and Americans. When tested we have stood by each other, and for over a hundred years, our resolve and shared commitment to these ideals has endured and prevailed, even inspiring others from distant lands to join in our way of life (including my own family).

This is what I see when I walk into the Embassy building: a welcoming and aspiring ‘light’ coded into its very architecture, beaming through its centre; the glass and copper exterior reflecting brilliant and warm light, evoking the vast skies and red earth of home; the sunlit interiors, the atrium, and the vertical wood paneling, with ascending lines drawing our gaze upward to the light.

These architectural motifs of light and ascending lines – connected to the notion of something that is ‘unbreakable’, something that is solid and unyielding, something that is tested, endures, and ascends – form the core rhetoric of this work.

Vertical and ascending gestures are embedded within the identities of phrases, melodic lines and harmonic progressions evoking a sense of forward and upward motion, hope, and optimism. The intervallic identity of the work is the ascending perfect fifth (a strong and stable interval with a sense of openness, as well as a subtle nod to “The Last Post”), followed by the major second (a less stable interval, which adds a sense of forward movement, yearning, and aspiration).

Throughout its duration, the work progresses from low, heavier textures to higher, lighter ones, whilst exploring and developing the overarching transformation of an enduring, ascending light. It begins with deeper, solid, lustrous colours before moving to spacious and radiant sonorities, brilliant sparkling piano figurations, and eventually to pure bright light in the form of cello harmonics.

For me, the “unbreakable alliance” is not just a political concept, nor is the new Embassy just a building—it resonates on a personal level, since these are forces that have and continue to shape the lives and aspirations of many, certainly my own. As you experience this work, I invite you to reflect upon these lights that guide us, both as individuals and as nations.

DURATION: APPROXIMATELY 8'00" MINUTES

**Premiered 29 October 2024 by Ari Evan (violoncello) and Amir Farid (piano)
At a private event celebrating the one-year anniversary
of the new Embassy of Australia,
1601 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, USA**

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MICHAEL SALVATORE GREBLA (b.1989)

Maestoso (♩=66) 2 3 4 5 6

Violoncello

p espress.

Piano

pp *p*

7 8 9 10 11 12

Vc.

f *sf* *ff* *p* *pp*

Pno.

f *sf* *p*

Più mosso (♩=72) 13 14 15 16

accel.

Vc.

accel.

Pno.

sub. p *mp* *f* *ff*

2

17 - 18 **Allegro moderato** (♩=112) 19 20

Vc. *pp espress.* *sub. pp*

Pno. *sub. p* *pp*

Ped.

21 22 23 24

Vc. *mp p* *mp mf* *sub. p*

Pno. *pp*

mf

Più mosso (♩=120)

25 26 27 28

Vc. *f* *p* *p* *p* *mf*

Pno. *f* *sub. p* *con ped. (poco)* *mf*

29 30 31

Vc.

Pno.

32 33 34

Vc.

Pno.

35 36 37

Vc.

Pno.

Red.

mf *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf* *ff* *p* *f* *f* *sub. p* *mf* *espress.*

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for Violoncello (Vc.) and Piano (Pno.). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 29-31) shows the Vc. with a long note in measure 29, followed by a phrase in measures 30-31 with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *mp*, *f*, and *mf*. The Pno. part has triplets in measures 29-30 and a more complex triplet pattern in measures 31-32. The second system (measures 32-34) shows the Vc. with a long note in measure 32, a double bar line in measure 33, and a long note in measure 34. The Pno. part has triplets in measures 32-33 and a more complex triplet pattern in measure 34. The third system (measures 35-37) shows the Vc. with a long note in measure 35, a phrase in measure 36, and a phrase in measure 37. The Pno. part has triplets in measures 35-36 and a more complex triplet pattern in measure 37. A red watermark 'PREFINAL SCORE' is visible across the page.

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38 39 40

Vc.

mf *f*

Pno.

f

Ped.

Pensieroso

41 42 43

Vc.

pp espress. *sub. pp* *mf* *p* *pp*

Pno.

pp *mp* *pp*

rit.

Meno mosso (♩=84)

44 45

Vc.

p *pp* *non dim.* *f*

Pno.

pp *p* *pp*

Ped.

Poco agitato ma maestoso (♩=108)

5

46 47 48 49 50

Vc. *espress.*

Pno. *f*

Ped.

51 52 53 54 55

Vc. *sf* *ff* *f*

Pno. *sf* *ff*

Ped.

Risoluto, pesante (♩=120)

56 57 58 59 60 61

Vc. *sf*

Pno. *f*

Ped.

6 **Meno mosso** (♩=108), **raggiante, molto legato**

62 63 64

Vc. *sf* *sf* *sf*

Pno. *f*

65 (3+2) 66

Vc. *sf*

Pno. (3+2) *8^{vb}*

67 68

Vc. *ff*

Pno. *ff*

(8)

69 *rit.* 70 7

Vc. *pp* *sub. p*

Pno. *pp* *sub. p*

71 *molto rit.* 72 *A tempo, tranquillo pastorale cantabile* 73

Vc. *mp* *pp dolce con poco vib.*

Pno. *mp* *mf espress.* *pp*

74 75 76

Vc.

Pno.

8

77 78 79

Vc.

mp pp

Pno.

mp pp

80 81 82

Vc.

mp

Pno.

mp

83 84 85

Vc.

p pp

Pno.

p pp