



Elena Kats-Chernin: Ancient Letters Music for piano and orchestra, and piano solo

**Tamara-Anna Cislowska *piano*
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra • Johannes Fritzsch *conductor***

ABC Classic is thrilled to present the world premiere recordings of two concertos by Elena Kats-Chernin: **Ancient Letters**, inspired by 1700-year-old letters from the Silk Road, and her third piano concerto, **Lebewohl**, written expressly for acclaimed Australian pianist Tamara-Anna Cislowska, who brings these passionate and profoundly moving works to life with her unique combination of dazzling virtuosity and poetic sensitivity.

Kats-Chernin and Cislowska have worked together closely on many music projects over the past three decades, with a rare level of mutual understanding; past albums include *Butterflying* (2016) and *Unsent Love Letters* (2017), both spending weeks at the top of the ARIA Classical charts. For this project, Kats-Chernin has once again written works specifically with Cislowska's artistic genius and inimitable sound in mind, supported by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

The 'Ancient Letters', preserved in string and silk across the centuries, are the first known documents of the Sogdian people who lived across what is today Uzbekistan – the place where Kats-Chernin was born. They tell of a woman named Mewnai – Tiger Cub – whose husband has not returned, leaving her in fear that she and her daughter will be sold into slavery. Kats-Chernin's sweeping and evocative concerto offers what the composer calls 'a portrait of this feisty, desperate, beautiful, deserted woman: her story spoke to me across the ages.'

Commissioned for Cislowska, Kats-Chernin's third piano concerto, *Lebewohl* (meaning 'Farewell') explores the core and soul of Johann Sebastian Bach at its nadir, as he returned home from a journey only to discover as he crossed the threshold into his house that his beloved wife of 13 years, whom he had left hale and hearty just six weeks earlier, was now dead – and buried. 'How did this affect him?' wonders Cislowska. 'At what cost the psychological torment of being powerless to intercede in the most disastrous loss? Did Johann Sebastian have a crisis of faith? Shake his fists in rage at his beloved

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God?’ The five movements follow the imagined stages of JS Bach’s bereavement that ensued: shock and denial, pain and guilt, anger and bargaining, reflection and loneliness, acceptance and reconstruction.

The album also features a new version of Kats-Chernin’s magical **Eliza Aria**, reimagined for piano solo and orchestra, along with three solo piano works celebrating the composer’s deep love of the music of Bach: **Prelude Machine**, full of ‘vigour, joy and Bach’; the energetic **Bach Study**, built out from the opening notes of Bach’s first Cello Suite; and **1720**, a lament for Maria Barbara Bach – ‘quiet, dignified, sorrowful, the way I imagine this extraordinary woman lived her life.’

Tamara-Anna Cislowska is one of Australia’s most renowned pianists, performing and recording in Australia and internationally to critical and public acclaim. Earning international prizes in London, Italy and Greece, her accolades include ABC Young Performer of the Year and the 2015 ARIA Award for Best Classical Album (Peter Sculthorpe: Complete Works for Solo Piano). Her recent engagements include as soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the 2025 Classic 100 live concert, broadcast on ABC iView and with the Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras, Australian Chamber Orchestra and Guizhou Chinese Orchestra. She is also celebrated as a librettist, and radio presenter on ABC Classic with her weekly show *Duet*, featuring interviews and live performances with international and Australian stars such as Lang Lang, Anne-Sophie Mutter, and Cate Blanchett.

Elena Kats-Chernin AO has written for ballet, opera, theatre, television and the concert hall, as well as the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and 2018 Commonwealth Games. Her vibrant and distinctive music has reached millions worldwide, performed by all the major symphony orchestras in Australia, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Brandenburg Orchestra and Australian World Orchestra; London Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Orchestras, Komische Oper Berlin, Deutsche Kammerorchester Berlin, and many more. Kats-Chernin’s accolades include the Helpmann, Limelight, Sounds Australian and Sydney Theatre Awards, Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award and the 2022 Australian Women in Music Award (AWMA) for Artistic Excellence, and she was the highest voted Australian composer for the second year running in the ABC Classic 100 Countdown. Kats-Chernin composed the music soundtrack to William Yang’s acclaimed new show, *Milestone*, for the Sydney, AsiaTOPA and Brisbane Festivals, and for Oscar-winning director Adam Elliott’s film *Memoir of a Snail*, official finalist in the Academy Awards and the Golden Globes, and winner at notable film festivals around the world.

Album available 22 August 2025 on CD and across digital platforms | ABCL0118

Single: Tiger Cub to be released on 8 August 2025

TRACKLIST

1	Eliza Aria (Version for piano and orchestra)	3’22
	Ancient Letters	[23’31]
2	I. Tiger Cub	7’17
3	IIa. Musk	6’23
4	IIb. Trade	2’38
5	III. Goodbye Samarkand	7’13
	Piano Concerto No. 3 ‘Lebewohl’	[25’20]
6	I. the deep and bitter flood	5’20
7	II. ...behind night and clouds	6’49
8	III. you thunderous word	3’34
9	IV. so aflame in love	5’53
10	V. allow, princess, allow just one ray beam	3’44
11	Prelude Machine	3’23
12	Bach Prelude	4’42
13	1720	1’34
	Total Playing Time	61’52

All world premiere recordings

Tamara-Anna Cislowska piano

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (Tracks 1–10) | **Johannes Fritzs** conductor (Tracks 1–10)

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