

FACT SHEET

Separate Prison Chapel Soundscape

Rewards of Silence was commissioned for the chapel of the Separate Prison at Port Arthur in Tasmania.

The soundscape was created by artists Sonia Leber and David Chesworth whose collaborative work has been focused on sound for many years.

Using the human voice as its principal medium, Leber and Chesworth have created a fascinating body of work since first collaborating in 1996. In 2007, they had a major solo exhibition at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne and they have been commissioned to make soundscape artworks for both Sydney Olympic Park and the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

They were commissioned to make a special soundscape artwork for the chapel to give visitors a sense of the daily life of the prisoners.

Leber and Chesworth recorded each singer as an individual voice, so that each voice can be heard from an individual stall as a unique individual.

The 24 singers were drawn from the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir who modified their usual pristine singing style to create a sense of the ragged lives of each prisoner

Rewards of Silence presents a congregation of ragged male voices singing hymns in unison with each individual voice emerging from an individual stall. The voices are untrained, with varying abilities to hold a tune: some sing sweetly, others rather roughly. As we move about and listen, we hear signs of age, youthfulness, physical effort and resentment.

Here in the chapel, the rigid structure of physical separation, amidst the mingling of voices raised together in song, takes on a chilling dimension.



The replica pulpit in the Separate Prison Chapel was created by local craftsman Peter Rigozzi

Acknowledgements

Voices:

Stanley McGeagh - Irish,

Michael Cahill - English,

Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir

Project team: Jo Lyngcoln, conservation manager;
Julia Clark, curator; Dr Peter Emmett, consulting
curator; Tonkin Zulaikha Greer, architects;
Aegres, sound system program and install.