

22 & 23 June 2024

ALEXANDER MELNIKOV

PERFORMS SHOSTAKOVICH



SYDNEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate Concertmaster

Alexandra Osborne

Associate Concertmaster

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant Concertmaster

Jennifer Booth

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Léone Ziegler

Robert Smith^o

Benjamin Tjoa^o

Dominic Azzi[†]

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton

Principal

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Acting Associate Principal

Alice Bartsch

Acting Assistant Principal

Emma Hayes

Shuti Huang

Monique Irik

Wendy Kong

Benjamin Li

Nicole Masters

Maja Verunica

Marcus Michelsen^o

Emily Qin^o

Riikka Sintonen^o

Rain Liu[†]

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider

Principal

Christopher Moore*

Guest Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Jane Hazelwood

Stuart Johnson

Leonid Volovelsky

Brian Hong*

Neil Thompson*

James Wannan*

David Wicks*

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Kaori Yamagami

Principal

Simon Cobcroft

Associate Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Timothy Nankervis

Elizabeth Neville

Christopher Pidcock

Adrian Wallis

Eliza Sdraulig^o

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

David Campbell

Dylan Holly

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Jan Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

FLUTES

Joshua Batty

Principal

Emma Sholl

Associate Principal

Carolyn Harris

Laura Cliff[†]

OBOES

Shefali Pryor

Acting Principal

Callum Hogan

Miriam Cooney[†]

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Francesco Celata

Acting Principal

Clare Fox[†]

Olivia Hans-

Rosenbaum*

Alexander Morris

Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

Fiona McNamara

Hayden Burge[†]

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

Greg Taylor*

Guest Principal

Contrabassoon

HORNS

Samuel Jacobs

Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Emily Newham^o

Acting Principal 3rd Horn

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

TRUMPETS

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glénot

Anthony Heinrichs

Joel Walmsley[†]

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont

Acting Principal

Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré

Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Mark Robinson

Associate Principal

Timpani/Section Percussion

Timothy Constable

Brian Nixon*

HARP

Melina van Leeuwen*

Guest Principal

Bold Principal

* Guest Musician

^o Contract Musician

[†] Sydney Symphony

Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

GREAT CLASSICS

Saturday 22 June, 2pm

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Sunday 23 June, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

ALEXANDER MELNIKOV PERFORMS SHOSTAKOVICH ORCHESTRAL FIREWORKS

GIORDANO BELLINCAMPI conductor

ALEXANDER MELNIKOV piano

DAVID ELTON trumpet

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

Festive Overture (1954)

Piano Concerto No.1 in C minor, Op.35 (1933)

i. Allegro moderato

ii. Lento –

iii. Moderato – Allegro con brio

INTERVAL

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

Don Juan (1888)

Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, Op.28 (1894–95)

Pre-concert talk

By Douglas Emery in the
Northern Foyer at 1.15pm.

Estimated durations

Overture – 7 minutes

Concerto – 21 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes

Don Juan – 17 minutes

Eulenspiegel – 15 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately 90 minutes

Cover image

Alexander Melnikov

Photo by Julien Mignot

These performances have
been generously supported
by Paolo Hooke.

Principal Partner



CONCERT DIARY

Visit sydneyphilharmonicsymphony.com for more information,
or call our Box Office on (02) 8215 4600

JULY 2024

Royal Caribbean
Classics Under the Sails

Friday 5 July, 7pm

Saturday 6 July, 7pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

DALIA STASEVSKA CONDUCTS SIBELIUS' FIFTH SYMPHONY

MUSIC OF THE NORTH

Finnish conductor Dalia Stasevska conducts this program of works by her homeland's greatest composers – Sibelius' extraordinary Fifth Symphony, Einojuhani Rautavaara's Cantus Arcticus and Kaija Saariaho's Harp Concerto featuring soloist Xavier de Maistre.

RAUTAVAARA Cantus Arcticus
SAARIAHO Trans for Harp and Orchestra
SIBELIUS Symphony No.5

DALIA STASEVSKA conductor
XAVIER DE MAISTRE harp



Emirates Masters Series
Emirates Thursday Afternoon
Symphony

Wednesday 10 July, 8pm

Thursday 11 July, 1.30pm

Friday 12 July, 8pm

Saturday 13 July, 8pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

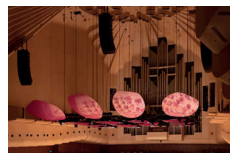
SAINT-SAËNS' ORGAN SYMPHONY

THUNDEROUS AND TENDER

Virtuoso French organist Olivier Latry is one of the world's top organists. A professor at the Paris Conservatoire, he was appointed organist at Notre Dame Cathedral at just 23 – and in this program with conductor Stephane Deneve, he brings his fabulous technique to two great works by two French masters.

GUILLAUME CONNESSON Flammenschrift
POULENC Organ Concerto
SAINT-SAËNS Symphony No.3, Organ

STEPHANE DENEVE conductor
OLIVIER LATRY organ



Symphony Hour
Tea & Symphony

Thursday 18 July, 7pm

Friday 19 July, 11am

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA WITH JESS GILLAM

INTOXICATING RHYTHMS

Jess Gillam may only be 25, but the British saxophonist is already a star. Her natural effervescence makes her the perfect choice for Michael Nyman's *Where the Bee Dances*. Gillam brings her vivid and bright playing to the piece, losing herself in its swirling drive. Don't miss this exuberant and entirely original performer.

RAVEL La Valse*
MICHAEL NYMAN Where the Bee Dances
RACHMANINOV Symphonic Dances

**Symphony Hour performance only*

UMBERTO CLERICI conductor & presenter
JESS GILLAM saxophone



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

GIORDANO BELLINCAMPI conductor

Giordano Bellincampi is the Music Director of the Auckland Philharmonia. Previously, he was the Principal Conductor of I Pomeriggi Musicali, Milan, Chief Conductor of the Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra from 2013–2018, General Music Director of the Duisburg Philharmonic from 2012–2017, General Music Director of the Danish National Opera, Aarhus from 2005–2013, Music Director of the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra from 2000–2006 and, between 1997–2000, he was also Chief Conductor of the Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, the leading contemporary ensemble in Denmark.

Bellincampi enjoys regular relationships as a guest with numerous orchestras and musical institutions around the world, from Scandinavia and Europe, through North America to Asia and Australasia. With an enormous repertoire embracing classical, romantic and contemporary music, he is particularly celebrated for his prowess in the Central European, Italian and Scandinavian symphonic traditions, and for his interpretations of significant choral and vocal works.

Recent highlights with his Auckland Philharmonia have included a complete cycle of Beethoven's symphonies to celebrate the composer's 250th anniversary, a gala performance to celebrate the renaming of Auckland's Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre, and a performance of a new horn concerto by Hans Abrahamsen, co-commissioned with the Berlin Philharmonic. He also conducted the New Zealand premiere of Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt*, the latest in a sequence of annual concertante opera performances which has seen the orchestra undertake a varied repertoire including Verdi's *Aida* and *Otello*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*.

During the 23/24 season Bellincampi conducts signature repertoire with the Auckland Philharmonia, including the fifth symphonies of Mahler and Mendelssohn, returns to conduct the Estonian National Symphony and Queensland Symphony and makes his long-awaited debut with the Sydney Symphony. He also leads a new production of *Tosca* at the Gothenburg Opera.

Born in Italy and moving to Copenhagen at a young age, he began his career as a trombonist with the Royal Danish Orchestra before making his professional conducting debut in 1994. As Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Academy Giordano Bellincampi is dedicated to the work of educating coming generations of orchestra musicians and conductors, and he also regularly gives masterclasses and serves as a jury member for a number of international conducting competitions. In 2010 he was created a Knight of the Order of the Dannebrog, an award bestowed by the Danish Royal Family for services to Danish culture, and he also holds the title of Cavaliere from the President of Italy for his international promotion of Italian music.



Giordano Bellincampi. Photo by Andreas Köhring.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ALEXANDER MELNIKOV piano

Alexander Melnikov completed his studies at the Moscow Conservatory under Lev Naumov. His most formative musical moments in Moscow include an early encounter with Svjatoslav Richter, who thereafter regularly invited him to festivals in Russia and France. He was awarded important prizes at eminent competitions such as the International Robert Schumann Competition in Zwickau (1989) and the Concours Musical Reine Elisabeth in Brussels (1991).

Known for his often unusual musical and programmatic decisions, Alexander Melnikov developed his career-long interest in historically informed performance practice early on. His major influences in this field include Andreas Staier and Alexei Lubimov. Melnikov performs regularly with distinguished period ensembles including the Freiburger Barockorchester, Musica Aeterna and Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin.

As a soloist, Alexander Melnikov has performed with orchestras including the Koninklijk Concertgebouw Orkest Amsterdam, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Philadelphia Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, HR-Sinfonieorchester, Munich Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic and BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, under conductors such as Mikhail Pletnev, Teodor Currentzis, Charles Dutoit, Paavo Järvi, Thomas Dausgaard, Maxim Emelyanychev and Vladimir Jurowski.

Alexander Melnikov's association with the label harmonia mundi arose through his regular recital partner, violinist Isabelle Faust, and in 2010 their complete recording of the Beethoven sonatas for violin and piano won a *Gramophone* Award. This album, which has become a landmark recording for these works,

was also nominated for a Grammy. Their most recent releases feature Brahms and Mozart sonatas for violin and piano.

Melnikov's recording of the Preludes and Fugues by Shostakovich was awarded the *BBC Music Magazine* Award, Choc de classica and the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik. In 2011, it was also named by the *BBC Music Magazine* as one of the 50 Greatest Recordings of All Time. Additionally, his discography features works by Brahms, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and Scriabin.

Highlights of the 2023/24 season includes concerts with the Melbourne and Sydney Symphony Orchestras, his residency as 'Porträtkünstler' at the Kölner Philharmonie, performances with François-Xavier Roth's orchestra Les Siècles, concerts with Bayerisches Staatsorchester, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Münchener Kammerorchester and the baroque orchestra B'Rock, and collaborations with Maxim Emelyanychev, Anja Bihlmaier, Vladimir Jurowski, Nicholas Collon and Osmo Vänskä, among others.



Alexander Melnikov. Photo by Julien Mignot.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DAVID ELTON trumpet

Principal Trumpet of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, David Elton enjoys a performance career that has seen him hold positions with many of Australia's and the world's leading orchestras. Most recently, David was Principal Trumpet of the London Symphony Orchestra (2017-2021) under the baton of Chief Conductor Sir Simon Rattle.

David also performs regularly as a guest Principal Trumpet with leading international orchestras, these include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Malmö Symphony Orchestra, the the Hong Kong Philharmonic. He frequently performs as part of the Australian World Orchestra.

As a soloist, he has performed concertos with the London Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Canberra Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He has performed and recorded the Trumpet Concerto by Andrew Batterham (2021), and gave the world-premiere of the Trumpet Concerto by James Ledger with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (2007).

As an educator, David has served on the faculties of many of Australia's tertiary institutions. He is currently Visiting Professor of Trumpet at the Royal College of Music in London and is currently on the faculties of both the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne and the Sydney Conservatorium.

David is proud to be a Yamaha artist.



David Elton. Photo by Jez Smith.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

Shostakovich was an adolescent at the time of the 1917 revolution. Unlike his near contemporary Prokofiev, or the slightly older Stravinsky, Shostakovich saw no need to travel abroad, let alone emigrate. The twenty-one year old composer's First Symphony premiered in his home town of Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1928; its introduction to the West by Bruno Walter assured Shostakovich of world celebrity, but was also an announcement of the optimistic, outward looking Russia of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. That Shostakovich was broadly in sympathy with the ideals of early revolutionary Russia is suggested by his Second and Third Symphonies, subtitled 'To October' and 'The First of May' respectively. It should be noted, however, that these works pre-date the official promulgation of the concept of 'socialist realism'; in them, Shostakovich displays an exuberant interest in the techniques of Western art music, such as dissonance and irony.

The political backdrop to Shostakovich's early career was the power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin that began with the death of Lenin in 1922. By the early thirties the ascendancy of Stalin was complete and in 1934 the purges, or Great Terror, began. Within that period (1934-38) were two particularly bloody years where N. I. Yezhov, chief of the NKVD (later the KGB) oversaw the imprisonment and murder of Stalin's principal remaining Party rivals as well as leading scientists, writers and musicians. The effect of the purges was to rob the USSR of millions of its citizens, especially leading figures in most fields, so that by the end of the 1930s the country's intellectual infrastructure was almost fatally weakened.

Despite having enjoyed a spectacularly successful two year run, Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was attacked in the pages of *Pravda* in 1936 as 'chaos instead of music' and its composer warned that 'this could all end very badly'. Shostakovich, or the orchestral management in Leningrad, immediately withdrew his demanding Fourth Symphony, a powerfully disturbing behemoth of dissonance and irony. The composer, like many of his generation, is said to have slept for a time in the hallway of his apartment so that the seemingly inevitable arrest wouldn't traumatise his young family. (Shostakovich suffered several reversals of fortune: he was denounced in 1936, rehabilitated with the premiere of the Fifth Symphony, denounced again in 1948, despite having been awarded the Stalin Prize in 1940 and the Order of Lenin in 1946.)



Dmitri Shostakovich in 1950. Photo by Roger & Renate Rössing/Deutsche Fotothek.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

FESTIVE OVERTURE

In 1947 things seemed to be going well. Shostakovich regained a professorship at the Leningrad Conservatory, was elected Chair of the Leningrad branch of the Composers' Union and was named a People's Artist. As the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Revolution approached, he let it be known that he had composed a Festive Overture for the occasion.

If so, no-one heard it. The piece was never seen, let alone performed at the time. Moreover, Stalin's henchman Zhdanov had quietly begun his investigation into the 'shortcomings' of contemporary Soviet music which would lead, the following year, to the denunciation of a number of composers, Shostakovich among them.

Seven years later, though, Shostakovich was asked – at the very last minute – to compose a short work to open the Bolshoi Theatre's celebration of the 37th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. He might of course have been tempted to dust off the piece that he composed, (if indeed he had) in 1947, but contemporary accounts have him sending the piece, by courier, as sections of it were complete, with the ink still literally wet.

By 1954, Stalin was no longer among those present, and while Khrushchev would not make his famous 'secret' speech denouncing his predecessor's enormities until 1956, it is hard not hear a sense of massive relief in a work such as this. Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, completed at the time, tests the limits of 'socialist realism'; the *Festive Overture* approaches something like untrammelled joy. Perhaps Shostakovich, like Clarence Darrow, 'never killed a man, but read some obituaries with great pleasure.'

A brass fanfare of long notes followed by triplets soon involves the whole orchestra, rising in pitch and dynamics before a faster section, in which Shostakovich channels the madcap humour of Rossini – short, repeated motifs, on or off the beat, 'oompah' bass line, an irresistible increase in noise and excitement. A contrasting horn melody briefly asserts its dignity, before a louche clarinet line resumes the comic music. This reaches a massive brassy climax, before a slow and stately version of the fanfare returns, capped by a fast and furious coda.

Shostakovich's *Festive Overture* is scored for two flutes, piccolo, three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was premiered in Moscow on 6 November 1954, as part of the Bolshoi Theatre's celebration of the 37th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution, with the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra conducted by Alexander Melik-Pashayev.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the Australian premiere of this piece in February 1959, conducted by Bernard Hezine, less than five years after its world premiere.

Since then it has been a regular feature of schools, family and outdoor performances, including those led by Chief Conductor Edo de Waart (2000), Arvo Volmer (2009), Kristjan Järvi (2013) and most recently by Benjamin Northey (2019).

ABOUT THE MUSIC

PIANO CONCERTO NO.1

The early 1930s were a momentous time. In Europe, the collapse of entire economies facilitated the rise of Fascism. In Germany, Hitler came to power.

In the Soviet Union in 1933, the situation was scarcely less gloomy. The much-vaunted Five Year Plan had all but disintegrated under the weight of its unrealistic production targets, and day-to-day life was taking on an increasingly surreal aspect as influential people started to disappear without trace. Soviet life became a particularly grim affair, with everybody watching everybody else, and with the ever-present threat of the ultimate punishment for those suspected of counter-revolutionary behaviour.

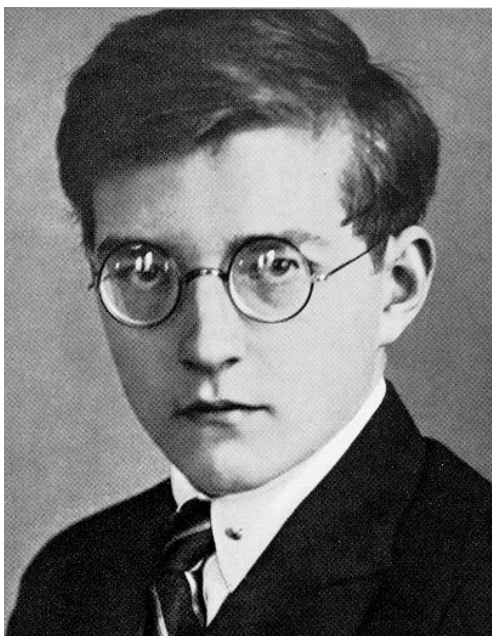
Within the arts, Stalin himself took a 'hands-on' approach. He personally rewrote Afinogenov's hit play *The Lie* to remove its deeply ironic but blatant condemnation of contemporary Soviet life. Artists deemed to be lacking in commitment to the Soviet cause were persecuted, punished, and forced to toe the party line. In the midst of the paranoia stood the 27 year-old Dmitri Shostakovich, whose high profile, compositional genius and parodic inclinations had been firmly established with the premiere of his First Symphony eight years earlier.

One can only speculate about the extent to which Shostakovich understood the vulnerability of his position. A contemporary reported that at this time Shostakovich's 'entire manner seemed to imply that whatever was taking place around him was totally devoid of any serious meaning'. A form of self-defence or youthful naivety? His behaviour will sustain debate into the future.

Among Shostakovich's works from this period are a Suite for Jazz Band in the sleazy style of Berlin cabaret, the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* about a triple-

murderess, and the outrageously parodic First Piano Concerto. These undeniably 'clever' compositions were hardly the kind of thing to endear the internationally-successful young composer to a regime bent on maintaining order at home – at whatever cost. But the reaction wasn't to come just yet. It would build over the next year or two, awaiting its moment.

In the meantime, the First Piano Concerto proved a riotous success. In its deliberate parody of multiple musical styles and conventions, it resembled the First Piano Concerto by Prokofiev, while in its superficially 'light', almost *divertissement* style, it was surprisingly (and presumably coincidentally) similar to its contemporary: Ravel's Piano Concerto in G. Unlike those works, Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto employs a solo trumpet as a collaborator with, and sometimes rival to, the piano soloist. It's a striking device and the brilliance of the trumpet adds a real sense of urgency, not to mention flash of colour, to the instrumental textures of the piece as a whole (the orchestra is limited to strings).



The young Shostakovich in 1925.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Shostakovich himself played the piano solo at the premiere with the Leningrad Philharmonic on 15 October 1933. The trumpet solo was conceived for Alexander Schmidt, who was a member of the Leningrad orchestra.

Because of the deliberately sardonic character of the piece, it can be fun to listen to the concerto as a 'spot-the-cliché' exercise. Chunks of Tchaikovskian Romantic lushness are juxtaposed with Rachmaninov-style piano rhapsodies, while the can-can and even Broadway musical gestures creep in from time to time. But as one would expect from a composer of Shostakovich's abilities, things are never that simple, and the piece is anything but a joke.

Its opening is downright magnificent. After a brief flourish, a big walking figure in the left hand of the piano introduces the principal theme, which is then worked over in a relentless, dashing development section. The second theme starts out as lush Rachmaninov, but Shostakovich quickly ushers in some Parisian nightclub. The trumpet becomes a flashy master of ceremonies and when the main 'walking' theme returns *moderato*, it's as if the revellers have staggered back out onto the street, a little bewildered perhaps, but entirely satisfied.

It is typical of Shostakovich that the *Lento* which follows is both sentimental and at the same time angry. In any case, the frivolity of the opening movement vanishes in this central slow movement, with its self-pitying shades of Mahler and continually sardonic turns.

The third movement is essentially a Baroque pastiche pivoting around two piano cadenzas and leading without pause into the final *Allegro con brio*. It is almost as if we are off to the races, with the trumpet sounding the fanfare at the start of the various events and everyone else skittering around to take their places by the rails. It sounds like a rondo of a kind, a Keystone Cops one, with the music driving on so frenetically that it can only come to an abrupt and crashing halt. Perhaps it was a strangely prescient conclusion to the Concerto, for just two years after its premiere, an eerily similar thing happened to Shostakovich's career itself, with his emphatic denunciation in *Pravda*. No party can last forever.

Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No.1 is scored for a string orchestra, with piano and trumpet soloists.

It was premiered on 15 October 1933 by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra with Shostakovich at the piano, Fritz Stiedry conducting, and Alexander Schmidt playing the trumpet solos.

The piece was first performed by the Sydney Symphony in 1950, with Eugene Goossens conducting Scilla Kennedy and the Orchestra's Principal Trumpet John Robertson. Bernard Heinze conducted it in 1952, with Igor Hmelnitsky and Robertson, but it was not heard again until 2001, when Eri Klas conducted Ignat Solzhenitsyn and Daniel Mendelow. Our most recent performance was in 2010, when Dene Olding conducted Simon Tedeschi and Paul Goodchild.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

In 1945, as the Nazi regime fell, American soldiers began commandeering villas in the Bavarian town of Garmisch. At one door, an elderly man greeted them with now famous words: 'I am Richard Strauss, composer of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*'. Fortunately for Strauss, the commanding officer knew him and his work, and the Strauss family was not evicted from its home.

Strauss was born in 1864 – Clara Schumann was still performing, Brahms and Wagner were contemporary composers. His father, Franz, was one of the finest horn players of his day. Richard Wagner regarded the elder Strauss as an 'intolerable blighter, but when he plays his horn one cannot stay cross with him'. Strauss senior loathed most of Wagner's music and said so often, yet regularly went to Bayreuth to play in Wagner's festival orchestra. Nevertheless, the older Strauss tried to ensure that his gifted son would never be seduced by Wagner's work, and Richard's earliest pieces include a very Mozartian wind Serenade.

At 17, however, young Strauss heard, or as he put it, 'wolfed the score of *Tristan*, as if in a trance'. Wagner's highly expressive chromatic harmony was a decisive influence on Strauss, and one which he put to good use in the series of massive tone-poems such as *A Hero's Life* or *Death and Transfiguration*. These in turn equipped him with the ability to write opera on something like a Wagnerian scale.

Salome was a turning point. Oscar Wilde's play is a self-consciously 'artificial' piece of work. Strauss, however brought all he had learned from Wagner to make it a gripping document of psycho-pathology. *Salome* and its companion piece, *Elektra* – which also essays madness in an ancient mythic setting – are the extreme points of Strauss at his most post-Wagnerian. As time went on Strauss returned to the example of Mozart, who had been the inspiration for some of his earliest compositions. *Der Rosenkavalier*, the greatest result of Strauss' collaboration with playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal, is set in a highly Romanticised, late eighteenth century Vienna. In works like *Ariadne auf Naxos* or *Capriccio* he moved even closer to a neo-classical manner; at the end of his life, in instrumental works like the Oboe Concerto, Strauss took great solace from the example of Mozart in the face of the horror of World War II.

Strauss, like Mozart, loved the human voice. Strauss and Mozart were married to singers, and some of their greatest works celebrate just that. Strauss was an inveterate composer of song, and even the opulence of the *Four Last Songs* never obscures his intense sensitivity to the beauty of the voice. The apparent differences between *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome* are largely superficial.



Richard Strauss in 1888, the year he composed *Don Juan*.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

DON JUAN

A thrilling opening – an uprush of thrusting figures, then a string theme launched over pulsing chords for winds and brass. This music's blood is up. Even a listener unaware of the title and subject of this music might suspect that it was about masculine ardour, even sexual conquest. And knowing that the subject is Don Juan, the legendary libertine lover, seems to give the key to the music. When Strauss composed it, at the age of 24, he was in the midst of an intense emotional attachment to a married woman, and had just met Pauline de Ahna, whom he was to marry. No wonder this subject appealed to him.



Don Juan by Hans Stengel

But the way Strauss ends his tone-poem should give us pause. This Don Juan neither satisfies his desires, nor is he dragged down to hell by a stone guest in divine retribution for his sins. The music swells towards climax, but is cut off by a sudden pause, without reaching fulfilment. The music fades away in a minor key, very quietly, but is crossed by one, jarring trumpet note.

Strauss prefaced the score of *Don Juan* with 32 lines of poetry, drawn from the unfinished verse drama of the same name by Nikolaus Lenau, who died in 1851. 'My Don Juan,' wrote Lenau, 'is no hot-blooded man eternally pursuing women. It is the longing in him to find a woman who is to him incarnate womanhood, and to enjoy.' In Lenau's play, the Don is challenged to a duel, but, on the verge of subduing yet another adversary, loses interest, throws away his sword, and allows his opponent to run him through. Don Juan's disgust at his failure to achieve his idealised quest is typical of the Romantic idealism of Lenau's poetry. This author was one of the prophets of *Weltschmerz* – world-weariness, even disgust.

Strauss' *Don Juan* is young man's music, and although the quiet ending is daring, spurning cheap musical success, what precedes it is far from world-weariness. Lenau's poem was the direct inspiration for his music, along with a play by Paul Heyse, *Don Juan's End*, and both were in Strauss' mind as he jotted down his first ideas for the symphonic poem, on a visit to Italy in May 1888. Some of the incidents in the music seem to come from Lenau. As the music unfolds, hints may be found of weariness, dejection and satiation, though these are overwhelmed by the forward thrust which keeps animating the music.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Strauss asked that the lines from Lenau be printed in the program book to indicate the music's poetic inspiration, but well-meaning friends were quick to provide 'analyses' showing how the music illustrated a 'program'. Strauss was surely teasing when he claimed it should be obvious from the famous oboe melody that the woman in Don Juan's sights has red hair!

Don Juan is one of the most successful and best-loved of all symphonic poems, because Strauss has succeeded in making a self-sufficient and satisfying artistic form from the poetic subject. 'The poetic program,' he wrote, 'is not merely a musical description of certain events in real life,' wrote Strauss. 'But if music is not to seep away in pure wilfulness, it needs certain boundaries to define the form, and a program serves as a canal bank.'

The form of *Don Juan* is shaped by Liszt's idea of the symphonic poem. Strauss' music can be heard as an expanded first movement sonata form, with major independent episodes in the development – the first, with its love song for the oboe, plays the part of a slow movement, and after the irruption of the rousing horn theme comes the so-called carnival episode, which is like a scherzo (noteworthy among other things for a glockenspiel solo). The return of the opening music marks the beginning of a condensed recapitulation where, in truly Lisztian fashion, the themes are further combined and transformed. The exhausted, resigned ending is a coda.

For the first audiences of *Don Juan*, the idea that the music represented episodes in the reprobate lover's career probably helped when so much was new about the music.

The orchestral players, at the premiere in Weimar in 1889, were mainly concerned with the unprecedented difficulties of execution. Strauss, who conducted, felt sorry for the poor horn and trumpets: '... they blew till they were blue in the face. In the performance...the orchestra wheezed and panted, but did their part capitally. They seemed to be enjoying the whole affair, in spite of their understandable amazement at such novelties.' The novelty has worn off, but the excitement hasn't. *Don Juan* was Strauss' first great international success, and has remained one of his most played orchestral works.

Don Juan is scored for three flutes (the third doubling piccolo), two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

It was premiered on 11 November 1889 in Weimar, where Strauss himself conducted the orchestra of the Weimar Opera.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the piece in September 1938, with Malcolm Sargent conducting. Other notable guest conductors to have performed it in Sydney include Otto Klemperer (1949), Charles Groves (1950), Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt (1956), Joseph Krips (1959), Alceo Galliera (1964), Sixten Ehrling (1972), Georg Tintner (1976) and Jorge Mester (1992).

It has also been a favourite piece of many of our Chief Conductors, including Eugene Goossens (who conducted the work in 1946, 1948, 1949 and 1954), Nikolai Malko (1958, 1960 & 1961), Dean Dixon (1964 & 1967), Moshe Atzmon (1967 & 1971), Willem van Otterloo (1973 & 1975), Louis Frémaux (1979 & 1984), Edo de Waart (2000) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (2010).

Our most recent performance was in 2018 under Dima Slobodeniouk.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

TILL EULENSPIEGEL'S MERRY PRANKS

Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* appeared in 1895. It was based on the exploits of the (probably) legendary practical joker of the 14th century, whose name can be translated 'owl mirror' (or 'Owlglass') or, in less High German, something more scatological – reflecting a theme in many of the stories.

Each of Till's adventures, as Norman Del Mar has noted, falls into one of several categories: the practical joke that causes severe humiliation, if not injury; the scenario in which Till prevails against the establishment through 'lightning wit or repartee'; and those in which his ingenuity (and/or criminality) allow him to survive privation.

Strauss had planned to write an opera on the subject, in which he had hoped to avoid its diffuse and manifold anecdotes in favour of a focused story where Till becomes a foil to narrow-minded authority. Sadly, Strauss found that 'the figure of Master Till Eulenspiegel does not quite appear before my eyes [other than as] a rogue with too superficial a dramatic personality' and that developing such a character whose principal mode was contempt proved impossible.

So Strauss took some of the stories as the basis for a symphonic poem. He chose to cast it as a free rondo, in which two themes recur and interweave as representations of Till himself: there is the easy melody in common time heard in the work's introductory bars, followed by a horn-call that might be a gentle parody of Siegfried's calls in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. The horn-call, which Strauss ingeniously varies on its every appearance, presently gives birth to a new theme, associated with the winds (usually clarinet), which Strauss noted in his score showed Till's rascally side.



Wall-relief of Till Eulenspiegel, Vienna 1913. Photo by Ewald Judt.

Other than Strauss' notes in the score, and unlike, say, *Don Quixote*, there is no detailed program. Till's adventures as apprentice, joker or wit, and his constant defiance of death, provide a reservoir of moods on which Strauss draws, or as he put it, an 'expansion of rondo form through poetic content'. Strauss' evocative music leads Del Mar to suggest that the first real episode (that is, a musical section with new and contrasting material, bookended by the statements of the opening theme) represents Till impersonating a priest and almost succumbing to terror at the thought of being caught: an almost Mozartian theme in the orchestra's middle register (though the 'rascal' theme keeps threatening to erupt) culminates with solo violin free-fall. A tender episode seems to represent Till in love and, jilted, vowing revenge. Stolid repeated chords in the bass suggest Till

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scoring points off the pedagogues. The wild energy of the piece overall, however, is halted by music that recalls the 'March to the Scaffold' in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*; despite the fact that the historical/legendary Till is said to have died of natural causes, here he is hanged. But Strauss gives him the last word.

Debussy hated it, calling the piece a 'parade of clowns' and 'an extravagant orgy'. It is certainly extravagant, calling for quadruple winds but in fact, despite its huge orchestra and sometimes-gargantuan effects, it is a finely crafted piece, and the orchestration is, in the majority of cases, devoted to articulating line and harmony. While there are moments, such as the trial/hanging, where the full force of the orchestra is overwhelming, much of the score is of considerable delicacy and agility.

Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks is scored for three flutes, piccolo, three oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, one bass clarinet, one E flat clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was first performed on 6 May 1895 by the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne conducted by Franz Wüllner.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the piece in March 1939, under conductor Antal Doráti, who conducted it again upon his return to Sydney in June 1965. Other notable performances by guest conductors include those by our current Chief Conductor Simone Young during her first concerts with the Orchestra in 1996, Lorin Maazel (2002) and Thomas Dausgaard (2008).

It has been led by our Chief Conductors Eugene Goossens (1947, 1953 & 1954), Nikolai Malko (1957), Dean Dixon (1962), Moshe Atzmon (1968) and by Stuart Challender on the Orchestra's 1988 tour of the USA.

Our most recent performance was in 2018 under Dima Slobodeniouk.

**Notes by Gordon Kerry (*Festive Overture*,
biographies) © 2024, (*Till Eulenspiegel*) © 2016**

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