

30 & 31 August 2024

BEETHOVEN'S SEPTET

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WELCOME

Welcome to **Beethoven's Septet**, an exceptional concert in the intimate surroundings of the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House.

Handpicked Wines is delighted to be a Presenting Partner of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's *Cocktail Hour with Handpicked Wines* series.

At Handpicked, we understand the power of passion and artistry.

We draw on technical skill and creative inspiration in equal measure to craft wines that elevate and enhance, just as the wonderful musicians of the Orchestra draw on their years of dedication and artistry to bring us the music of Beethoven and Webern today.

In the string quartet you will hear in the first half of this concert, Beethoven's compatriot Webern expresses powerful and wildly varied emotions from yearning to turmoil to peace, all within the one movement. *Langsamer Satz* (Slow Movement) is said to have been composed on a mountain hiking holiday, inspired by his soon-to-be fiancée, and later wife. While it has many twists and turns, it is a beautifully resolved and satisfying piece.

Beethoven's Septet was one of his early successes. Written in a time before recordings or radio, it was performed in the salons of Vienna to almost instant acclaim. It's easy to understand why – the music is bright, brisk and even playful at times, demanding virtuosity, yet offering plenty of opportunity for each player to shine.

This delightful program showcases and highlights the brilliant musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in a setting that takes you right into the heart of the music as it is created before you.

Handpicked and Sydney Symphony Orchestra's shared values of creativity and technical excellence are at the foundation of our exciting new partnership, along with a strong commitment to unique and wonderful experiences like this concert of Beethoven and Webern.

I hope you enjoy this exciting concert and the wines we have selected to accompany the stunning music of **Beethoven's Septet**.



William Dong
Managing Director
Handpicked Wines

2024 CONCERT SEASON

COCKTAIL HOUR WITH HANDPICKED WINES

Friday 30 August, 6pm
Saturday 31 August, 6pm

Utzon Room,
Sydney Opera House

BEETHOVEN'S SEPTET

RICHNESS AND DEPTH

GENEVIEVE LANG presenter

ANTON VON WEBERN (1883-1945)

Langsamer Satz (Slow Movement) for string quartet (1905)

LERIDA DELBRIDGE violin

SERCAN DANIS violin

JUSTIN WILLIAMS viola

TIMOTHY NANKERVIS cello

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Septet in E flat, Op.20 (1800)

i. Adagio – Allegro con brio

ii. Adagio cantabile

iii. Tempo di minuetto – Trio – Tempo I

iv. Tema (Andante) con variazioni

v. Scherzo (Allegro molto e vivace) – Trio – Scherzo

vi. Andante con moto alla marcia – Presto

LERIDA DELBRIDGE violin

JUSTIN WILLIAMS viola

TIMOTHY NANKERVIS cello

JAAN PALLANDI double bass

ALEXANDER MORRIS clarinet

MATTHEW WILKIE bassoon

EUAN HARVEY horn

Estimated durations

Webern – 10 minutes

Beethoven – 40 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour

Cover image

Associate Principal Clarinet
Francesco Celata

Photo by Craig Abercrombie

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT ANTON VON WEBERN

In one of the great ‘what if...?’ scenarios of music history, Anton von Webern approached Hans Pfitzner in Berlin for composition lessons in 1904. Pfitzner (best known for his opera *Palestrina* and friendship with some of the Nazi elite) held reactionary views on the music of Richard Strauss and Mahler. This, rather than Pfitzner’s politics, gave Webern pause, and he returned to Vienna where he began his association with Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg was a great lover of the canon and traditions of Western art music – for instance, throughout his life he used music examples from Beethoven in his composition lectures. But in the first decade of the 20th century he became convinced that the traditional tonal system of Western harmony, based on major and minor chords and scales, was moribund, and that it was inevitable that composers would begin to use all available twelve notes of the chromatic scale more or less equally. In 1908, Schoenberg produced his Second String Quartet which outraged his audience not only because a soprano voice appears in it, but because it gradually loses all sense of key and, as traditionally understood, consonance. Thus was ‘atonal’ music discovered (though Schoenberg didn’t approve of the term); in 1921 Schoenberg attempted to rein in the chaos of atonality by inventing the twelve-note serial method, where each of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale occurs in a predetermined order.



Anton von Webern in 1912

Where Schoenberg’s other famous pupil, Alban Berg, managed a kind of fusion of Schoenberg’s ideas with the music of the past, Anton Webern looked resolutely to the future. After World War II it was Webern whose incredibly crystalline, aphoristic style provided the beginnings of the avant-garde manners pioneered by composers like Boulez and Stockhausen. Sadly the composer did not live to see the influence his music would have: one night in 1945 he went outside to light a cigar, and an occupying American soldier shot at the flame killing Webern.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE LANGSAMER SATZ

Composed in 1905, the year Einstein published his $E = mc^2$ equation, the Potemkin mutiny broke out, and Alfred Deakin became Australian Prime Minister.

Webern's period of formal study with Schoenberg lasted from 1904-1908, after which he began to compose in earnest, producing two sets of five songs on texts by the Expressionist poet Stefan George and then the Five Movements for string quartet, Op.5. These pieces, not yet as concentrated as Webern's music would shortly become, are nonetheless striking in their economy and brevity, while at the same time exploring a huge range of colour and emotional territory. In 1904 he heard Schoenberg's hyper-Romantic string sextet, *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) and as he put it, 'the impression it made on me was one of the greatest I had ever experienced.'

Verklärte Nacht's musical language has its roots in the Wagner of *Tristan und Isolde* as filtered through that of Mahler and Richard Strauss, and it describes a moonlit walk taken by two lovers. Webern's music up until 1905, when he wrote his *Langsamer Satz* (Slow Movement), is steeped in the same passionately erotic and opulent sound. This is hardly surprising, given that the work is said to have been inspired by a hiking trip in that Webern took with his future wife, his cousin Wilhelmine Mörtl. In a much-quoted diary entry, Webern ecstatically describes one evening's walk, when sharing a coat for shelter from the rain, 'our love rose to infinite heights and filled the Universe. Two souls were enraptured.'

For all the late-Romantic sensuality of the work's sound, there is more than a hint of Brahms, the presiding deity of Viennese music, in some of its melodies. The first theme, with its rising contour is perhaps Wagnerian in tone, but the second theme, after the passion of the first has been momentarily exhausted, is pure Brahms.

Formally the piece is a simple arch: these two themes contend in the first and third sections. There is a contrasting central section, and Webern ends with a long goodbye – an extended coda in which it seems he cannot bear to let the music stop.

In a sense the *Langsamer Satz* is a counterpart to *Im Sommerwind*, Webern's orchestral homage to late Romantic excess, composed the previous year. Neither work was published during the composer's lifetime, and the *Langsamer Satz* was not even performed until 1962 in Seattle, USA. Such works give us a more rounded sense of this great but enigmatic composer.

ABOUT LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

In the late eighteenth century Germany was a loose grouping of small principalities. The city of Bonn was the seat of the Archbishop Elector of Cologne and Beethoven was born here in 1770. His grandfather was a chief musician in the Elector's household; his father Johann was also a musician employed there. Johann was a violent alcoholic, and family life was far from happy, but young Ludwig nonetheless showed early promise as a musician and soon joined the Archbishop's retinue.

Beethoven almost certainly met Mozart briefly in Vienna in 1787, but in 1792 returned to that city to study with Joseph Haydn. They didn't get on. Late in life, Haydn was suddenly enjoying superstar status throughout Europe. Beethoven could be extremely rude and arrogant and felt that Haydn wasn't paying him enough attention.

Beethoven's status in Vienna was helped by the relative ease with which he was accepted into aristocratic circles. This is partly because he allowed people to think that the 'van' in his name meant he himself was noble (in German, 'von' indicates nobility), and he allowed a

ABOUT THE MUSIC

rumour to circulate that he was the illegitimate son of the King of Prussia! But it was mostly about the music, and a group of Viennese nobles supported him for the rest of his life (despite appallingly bad behaviour on occasions).

From the later 1790s he had been aware of the deterioration of his hearing, and by the early years of the new century his deafness caused him gradually to retreat from society. His was also chronically unlucky in love. This, along with his deafness, led him to the point of suicide and the heroic resolution to carry on which is documented in a kind of will he wrote at Heiligenstadt, his favourite holiday village, in the summer of 1802. The crisis launched his middle or 'heroic' period.

Beethoven's deafness was only part of the chronic ill-health which dogged him for most of his life, but it certainly made things worse. He retreated from society, became grumpy and paranoid (occasionally to the point of violence) and despite relative financial security often lived in squalor. His music, though, tells a completely different story. Beethoven's late works encompass a bewildering array of moods and styles, leaving classical music changed forever.



Beethoven in 1804, painted by WJ Mähler

ABOUT THE SEPTET

Composed in 1799, the year that saw Napoleon's Coup de Brumaire, Pierre Bouchard's discovery of the Rosetta Stone, Bass' and Flinders' circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land.

Composed in mid-1799, the Septet was first heard at a private concert on 20 December that year at the Vienna palace of the von Schwarzenburg family on the Mehlmarkt. There, two years earlier, Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* also had its first performance, leading Beethoven to joke of the Septet: 'This, then, is *my Creation!*' It was played again in public on 2 April 1800, on the same program as the first performance of Beethoven's First Symphony, in the presence of the Empress Maria Theresia. Beethoven dedicated the Septet to her upon its publication two years later.

The Septet became one of Beethoven's most popular works. Initially, he himself was enthusiastic to promote it further. In December 1800 he wrote to the publisher-composer, Anton Hoffmeister proposing a re-arrangement for an ensemble of strings alone in the interests of 'more frequent use'. A string-sextet version, though not made by Beethoven himself, duly appeared shortly after the original in 1802. Beethoven then made his own even further down-sized arrangement of the piece for trio – piano, violin (or clarinet), and cello – duly published as his Op.38, and gratefully dedicated to the physician and amateur violinist Adam Schmidt, then treating Beethoven for the onset of deafness, who wanted to perform it at home with his pianist daughter.

As his young pupil Czerny remembered, however, Beethoven quickly came to resent the Septet's popularity. In 1805, a review of the new *Eroica* Symphony advised Beethoven instead to stick with the more accessible style of the first two symphonies and the 'agreeable Septet'.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

And in 1815, when told the Septet was a great favourite in England, Beethoven swore and said he wished he could destroy it, explaining that he 'did not know how to compose' back then, but was certainly 'writing better now'!

The leader of the ensemble in the first performances of the Septet was the young violinist, Ignaz Schuppanzigh, who 25 years later was involved in the premiere of Schubert's Octet, a work expressly composed as a companion piece to Beethoven's Septet. Both works continued in the tradition of the very 18th-century tradition of the Austrian divertimento. Beethoven had essayed the genre previously in his string-trio Serenade (Op.8) of c.1797. Its model, in turn, was Mozart's great E flat string-trio Divertimento (K563). The lasting popular appeal of all four chamber works derives in large part from their multi-movement format, in each case filled out with a variety of good, dance-inspired tunes, musical jokes, the occasional feat of instrumental acrobatics, and typically at least one theme-and-variations.

A solemn *Adagio* introduces the first movement. Alternating stentorian chords, with softer melodic figures instigated by the first violin, it is soon followed by a bright *Allegro*. The main theme is shaped by notes from the chord of the home key in ascending order (*Doh-Me-Soh*), decorated and extended into a full melody. Throughout, melodic interest is shared between the violin and clarinet, usually with the violin proposing a melodic idea, and the clarinet echoing, developing or commenting upon it. Once or twice, the horn relinquishes its customary role of sustaining and underlining key chords in the texture, and also breaks into a brief burst of melody.

The second movement has a magical, nocturne-like quality, with the clarinet (leading this time) and violin taking turns over the melody, with brief solos, too, for the bassoon and horn.

In the third movement, Beethoven recycles just the opening eight bars of the second movement of his Piano Sonata, Op.49 No.2, as the catchy first phrase of a minuet, the remainder of which is newly composed. The *Trio*, in the same key, involves a playful exchange between violin, horn and clarinet.

The fourth movement is based on an *Andante* theme (which Czerny recalled, sceptically, was 'said to be a Rhenish folksong'). Variation 1 is scored for a string trio of violin, viola and cello. Adding the bass, Variation 2 is for all four strings with colouristic 'pointing' from clarinet and bassoon. Then the roles are reversed, and these two wind instruments take the lead for Variation 3. The horn introduces the obligatory minor-key variation, No.4. And Variation 5 is a grand tutti reprise of the theme in otherwise original guise, with a playful coda tacked on.

From its opening call, the horn takes over (from the clarinet) as leading wind instrument for the fifth movement. The sixth movement, like the first, is preceded by a brief but unexpectedly funereal slow introduction in E flat minor. In the ensuing E flat major *Presto*, cross-rhythms, horn calls, swirling triplet figures, and a long brilliant cadenza for the violin before the final reprise, contribute to the sense of sheer fun that suffuses this finale to Beethoven's deservedly most-popular lighter chamber work.

**Notes by Gordon Kerry © 2015
(Webern, Beethoven biography)**

Graeme Skinner © 2010 (Septet)



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Pale light-yellow with a delicate, complex bouquet of peach, green apple, and lemon, intertwined with floral and Mediterranean notes. Fresh and soft on the palate with a delicate creamy foam and balanced acidity. Grapes are gently pressed and fermented at a controlled temperature before blending for secondary fermentation.



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Regional Selections Yarra Valley Pinot Noir

With tangy cherry fruits, fresh basil, and a hint of menthol, this wine tantalizes the palate with its vibrant flavours and impeccable balance. Awarded an impressive 95 points by James Halliday, this wine is a true standout of the vintage. From the cool weather to the slow flavour accumulation, every element contributes to the allure of this remarkable wine.

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Sarah Falzarano
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Daniela Ramirez
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Euan Harvey
Interim Finance Manager
Nusrat Khan
Finance Officer
Emma Ferrer
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Laura Soutter
Payroll Manager
Jonathan Zaw
IT Manager

DEVELOPMENT

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Director of Development
Rachel Mink
Development Manager

Corporate Relations

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Head of Corporate Relations
Chloe Bassingthwaite
Corporate Relations Officer

Philanthropy

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Head of Philanthropy
Patricia Laksmono
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Laura Brotodihardjo
Philanthropy Officer
Gabriela Postma
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LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

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Director of Learning & Engagement
Meklit Kibret
*Education & Communities Engagement
Producer*
Daniella Garnerio
Fellowship Manager
Alice Jarman-Powis
*Education & Communities Booking
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MARKETING

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Alison Primmer
*Associate Director,
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Head of Digital
Hugh Robertson
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Alexandra Barlow
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Nicola Solomou
Marketing Manager
Chris Slavez
Digital Marketing Coordinator
Lynn McLaughlin
Head of CRM
Amy Zhou
Graphic Designer
Ann He
Marketing Coordinator

Customer Service & Ticketing

Pim den Dekker
Head of Customer Service & Ticketing
Jennifer Calacoci
Customer Service Team Leader
Georgia Mulligan
Customer Service Team Leader
Meg Potter
Customer Service Team Leader

OPERATIONS & PRODUCTION

Kerry-Anne Cook
Director of Operations
Elissa Seed
Production Manager
Tom Farmer
Senior Production Support
Aeva O'Dea
Operations Manager
Jacinta Dockrill
Production Administrator

ORCHESTRA MANAGEMENT

Aernout Kerbert
Director of Orchestra Management
Brighdie Chambers
Orchestra Manager
Emma Winestone
Orchestra Coordinator

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Daniel Bushe
Director of People & Culture
Rosie Marks-Smith
Senior Advisor, Culture & Wellbeing
Yen Sharratt
People & Culture Advisor
Keanna Mauch
People & Culture Coordinator

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