

20 May 2024

JOYCE YANG

IN RECITAL



Presenting Partner



«SYDNEY»
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Principal Partner



IN MEMORIAM



ARA VARTOUKIAN OAM

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra is greatly saddened by the death of Ara Vartoukian OAM.

Ara was a great supporter of the Sydney Symphony for decades, as a philanthropist, sponsor, audience member, colleague and friend. His longstanding support as Presenting Partner of our International Pianists in Recital Series was deep and enduring.

One of Australia's leading concert technicians and piano experts, Ara was dedicated to achieving the highest possible standards of performance, and his care for the instruments as well as the musicians was world-renowned. Far more than a piano tuner, Ara would spend significant time with each artist upon their arrival in Sydney, sharing with them his many decades of experience about the venues in which they were performing, collaborating closely to ensure their instrument could produce the most perfect sound imaginable. His attention to detail was legendary, and our audiences have been the beneficiaries of his care in countless memorable concerts, in particular following the restoration and rebuilding of the Orchestra's Steinway Concert Grand piano.

A dedicated champion of music at all levels, Ara and his wife Nyree founded Theme & Variations Piano Services in 1985. They are also generous philanthropists within the Australian arts community. In 2011 they established the Theme & Variations Foundation in order to provide resourcing, mentorship and financial assistance to young eligible Australian pianists, and their Emerging Artists concert series provided countless performers the opportunity to prepare and perform a solo piano recital on a concert grand.

In recognition of his decades-long contribution, Ara was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2016 'for service to music as a piano technician, and through support for the arts.'

We send our deepest condolences to Nyree, Haig and Tro, and to their family.

2024 CONCERT SEASON

INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

Monday 20 May, 7pm

City Recital Hall,

Angel Place

JOYCE YANG IN RECITAL

KALEIDOSCOPIC COLOURS

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

The Seasons Op.37b (1876)

- i. January: *By the Hearth*
- ii. February: *The Carnival*
- iii. March: *Song of the Lark*
- iv. April: *Snowdrop*
- v. May: *White Nights*
- vi. June: *Barcarolle*
- vii. July: *Reaper's Song*
- viii. August: *The Harvest*
- ix. September: *The Hunt*
- x. October: *Autumn Song*
- xi. November: *On the Troika*
- xii. December: *Christmas-Tide*

SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873 –1943)

Prelude, Op.32 No.10 (1910)

Prelude, Op.32 No.2 (1910)

Prelude, Op.23 No.4 (1903)

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971) ARR. GUIDO AGOSTI

Three movements from *The Firebird* (1910/arr.1928)

- i. *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei*
- ii. *Berceuse*
- iii. *Finale*

INTERVAL

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)

***Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874)**

- i. *Promenade*
- ii. *Gnome*
- iii. *Promenade*
- iv. *The Old Castle*
- v. *Promenade*
- vi. *Tuileries*
- vii. *Bydlo*
- viii. *Promenade*
- ix. *Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens*
- x. *'Samuel' Goldenburg and 'Schmuyle'*
- xi. *Promenade*
- xii. *Limoges Market*
- xiii. *Catacombs (Roman Sepulchres) –*
- xiv. *Cum mortuis in lingua morta (With the Dead in a Dead Language)*
- xv. *The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yaga)*
- xvi. *The Great Gate of Kiev*

Pre-concert talk

By Andrew Howes in the Level 3 Foyer at 6.15pm

Estimated durations

Tchaikovsky – 40 minutes
Rachmaninov – 13 minutes
Stravinsky – 12 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Mussorgsky – 40 minutes
The concert will run for approximately two hours

Cover image

Joyce Yang

Photo by KT Kim

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Joyce Yang, Photo by KT Kim

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JOYCE YANG piano

Blessed with ‘poetic and sensitive pianism’ (*The Washington Post*) and a ‘wondrous sense of color’ (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), Grammy-nominated pianist Joyce Yang captivates audiences with her virtuosity, lyricism, and interpretive sensitivity.

She first came to international attention in 2005 when she won the silver medal at the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The youngest contestant at 19 years old, she took home two additional awards: Best Performance of Chamber Music (with the Takács Quartet), and Best Performance of a New Work.

In the last decade, Yang has blossomed into an ‘astonishing artist’ (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), showcasing her colourful musical personality in solo recitals and collaborations with the world’s top orchestras and chamber musicians through more than 1,000 debuts and re-engagements. She received the 2010 Avery Fisher Career Grant and earned her first Grammy nomination (Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance) for her recording of Franck, Kurtág, Previn & Schumann with violinist Augustin Hadelich ‘One can only sit in misty-eyed amazement at their insightful flair and spontaneity.’ (*The Strad*).

In recent years, Yang has focused on promoting creative ways to introduce classical music to new audiences. She served as the Guest Artistic Director for Laguna Beach Music Festival in California, curating concerts that explore the ‘art-inspires-art’ concept – highlighting the relationship between music and dance while simultaneously curating outreach activities to young students.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Yang received her first piano lesson from her aunt at the age of four. Over the next few years she won several national piano competitions in her native country. By the age of ten, she had entered the School of Music at the Korea National University of Arts, and went on to make a number of concerto and recital appearances in Seoul and Daejeon. In 1997, Yang moved to the United States to begin studies at the pre-college division of The Juilliard School with Dr Yoheved Kaplinsky. During her first year at Juilliard, Yang won the pre-college division Concerto Competition. After winning The Philadelphia Orchestra’s Greenfield Student Competition, she performed Prokofiev’s Third Piano Concerto with that orchestra at just twelve years old. She graduated from Juilliard with special honor as the recipient of the school’s 2010 Arthur Rubinstein Prize, and in 2011 she won its 30th Annual William A Petschek Piano Recital Award. She is a Steinway artist.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893) *The Seasons Op.37b (1876)*

Tchaikovsky was perhaps not a 'natural' composer for the piano in the same way as, say, Schumann or Chopin – both of whom he admired – yet he consistently produced piano music from as early as 1854 through to the year of his death, 1893. But as he wrote to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, in answer to her questions about composition:

the instrumentation of a work which is completely thought out and matured is a most enjoyable task. The same does not apply to the bare sketch of a work for pianoforte or voice, or little pieces in general, which are sometimes very tiresome.



Tchaikovsky in 1875

This apparent disdain for writing 'little pieces' may be part of the reason for the relative neglect of such works by performers. His best-known work for solo piano (and one which has, like much of his piano music, been arranged for numerous other instruments and ensembles) is probably *The Seasons*, Op.37b, written between December 1875 and November 1876. The title and opus number are later, misleading accretions, the composer having been commissioned to write short pieces for

monthly publication in the literary magazine *Nuvellist*. The five were seemingly written and dispatched to the editor piecemeal (and sometimes late), while the last seven appear in a single manuscript book so were probably written in one go; there is no evidence for the much-retailed story that the composer had to be reminded by his valet each month when the piece was due.

When they were published, each piece was given a literary superscription from a well-known Russian poem, though in the manuscript only the first and third have such epigraphs, and Tchaikovsky's original titles did not include the names of the months. Nevertheless, they constitute a set of pieces that describe in charming poetic detail some aspect of each month. The spirit of Schumann, especially *Carnaval* and the *Kinder-* and *Waldszenen*, animates the work, especially in its concentrated ability to evoke sights and sounds in short pieces that contrast strongly with each other – the warmth of a fire-lit room in winter, the raucousness of carnival, the ornate song of the lark. In many cases the pieces are in ternary form, where more or less identical material frames a contrasting central section. 'Snowdrop' and 'White Nights' are both in a lilting compound metre, while, perhaps perversely and certainly unusually, Tchaikovsky opts for 4/4 in his 'Barcarolle'. July brings a boisterous 'Reaper's Song' and August a busy 'Harvest'; September's 'Hunt' is full of horn-calls that would make Vivaldi proud. October's 'Autumn Song' is melancholy, as is the 'Troika' which refers to the horse-drawn sled, festooned with bells, rather than the dance of the same name (here the superscription may be helpful: 'In your loneliness do not look at the road/ and do not rush out after the troika...') Finally, 'Christmas-Tide' is represented by a waltz, looking forward, perhaps to *The Nutcracker*. Certainly these 12 'characteristic scenes' remind us that short-strongly profiled pieces are the lifeblood of the great ballets, of which the first, *Swan Lake*, was written at just this time.

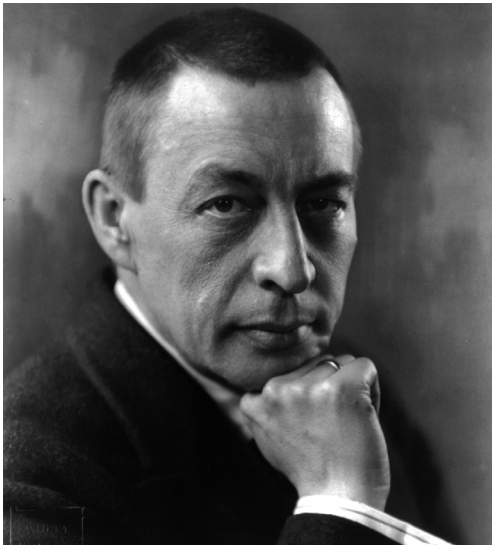
ABOUT THE MUSIC

SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873 –1943)

Preludes

Western music since the late 18th century has been built on a system of tuning known as equal temperament, which makes each major or minor scale sound just like any other. JS Bach was an early adopter of something like modern temperament, and in his two books of *The Well-tempered Clavier*, showed that Preludes and Fugues could be written in all twelve major and minor keys. A century or more later, Chopin would do something similar with his 24 Preludes, each in its unique key.

Sergei Rachmaninov wrote his first published Prelude in the early 1890s as part of his Op.3 and soon wished he hadn't, as the C-sharp minor piece soon became the one and only piece that audiences wanted to hear him play. Nevertheless, he persisted, writing a set of ten preludes in different keys between 1901 and 1903 which he published as Op.23, and then, in 1910, completing the 'set' of 24 with the 13 Preludes, Op.32.



Rachmaninov in 1900

Around this time, the composer noted that:

A prelude, in its very nature, is absolute music, and cannot with propriety be twisted into a tone-poem or a piece of musical impressionism...Absolute music can suggest or induce a mood in the listener; but its primal function is to give intellectual pleasure by the beauty and variety of its form.

Thus each of the 13 Preludes is a self-contained work, though in several we hear a version of a rhythmic motif (long-short-long) that sounds, when played at speed, like a canter, but played slower evokes the *siciliana* beloved of Baroque composers.

Op.32 No.10 is a *Lento* in B minor dominated by the dotted-rhythm motif, becoming more impassioned before a brilliant flourish and return to the opening.

Op.32 No.2 is a cantering *Allegretto* in B flat minor, which issues in a faster section with much florid right handwriting.

Op.23 No.4 is Chopinesque. A rippling left hand pattern of triplets supports a lyrical melody at first, with the music rising slowly but inexorably and the triplet pattern moving upwards through the voices until a powerful climax, after which the music falls away.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

ARR. GUIDO AGOSTI

**Three movements from *The Firebird*
(1910/arr.1928)**

Glinka's 1842 opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, with its heroic knight, abducted princess, evil magicians, malevolent gnomes, gigantic singing head and final wedding, influenced Russian works from Tchaikovsky's ballets to Prokofiev's *The Love of Three Oranges*. The Russian fairy-tale world was irresistibly exotic to audiences abroad, so for the 1910 Paris season of the Ballets Russes, artistic director Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Anatoly Liadov to compose a score to be choreographed by Mikhail Fokine. Diaghilev had already whetted the Parisian audience's appetite for Russian music in concerts presented as early as 1907; this new work would be 'the first Russian ballet' – Tchaikovsky's ballets, while exploiting the Russian love of fairy-tales, are largely based on non-Russian stories, but Fokine's scenario for *The Firebird* is drawn exclusively from Russian folklore.

Liadov failed to deliver and Diaghilev turned to the 28 year-old Stravinsky, with whose orchestral showpiece, *Fireworks*, Diaghilev had become acquainted in Russia in 1909, and whom he rightly regarded as 'on the eve of celebrity'. The ballet would be the largest single piece composed by Stravinsky to date, would require what the composer in retrospect derided as merely 'descriptive' music, composed to a scenario not of his choosing, and with a deadline that was frighteningly close. But such things concentrate the mind wonderfully, and in *The Firebird*, Stravinsky emerges as a major composer of the twentieth century, not least in his bold and inventive use of orchestral sound. *The Firebird* also lays the foundations for the much greater radicalism of *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, while bringing to a radiant close a particularly Russian Romantic tradition. After the first performance in June 1910 Stravinsky was

praised in the press for the 'exquisite marvel of equilibrium...between sounds, movement and forms' and was suddenly immersed in the glamorous world of pre-War Paris.



Igor Stravinsky

In 1919 Stravinsky revisited *The Firebird* to create a new suite for reduced orchestral forces; but as Stravinsky always began work at the piano, Guido Agosti's transcription of the final three numbers might give us a sense of how the music first sounded to the composer.



Tamara Karsavina as the Firebird

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Fokine's scenario for the ballet brings together three strands of Russian folklore. The Firebird herself is a kind of phoenix and, as Richard Taruskin notes, 'a thing of preternatural, elemental freedom, she personified the indifference of beauty to the desires and cares of mankind.' Kashchei the Deathless, a demon attended by monsters, abducts maidens and turns knights to stone and has cognates in many mythologies. Finally, there is Ivan Tsarevich, who, of course, personifies a nationalist, indeed imperial, heroism.

The story begins in the enchanted forest that surrounds Kashchei's castle. The Firebird enters pursued by Ivan Tsarevich who captures her. The Firebird begs for her freedom and promises to come to his aid should he ever require it; as a token of her promise she gives him a plume from her tail. Moving deeper into the forest, Ivan finds himself in the garden of Kashchei's castle.

Thirteen princesses appear and play a game with golden apples; Ivan, enchanted by the thirteenth princess's beauty, reveals himself and they all perform a stately round-dance

Agosti's transcription takes up the story at this point.

Kashchei's monsters appear, capturing Ivan as Kashchei arrives. The monsters attempt to turn Ivan to stone in the face of the princesses' pleas for mercy. Ivan summons the Firebird; she appears and casts a spell on the monsters. An exhilarating 'Infernal Dance' to acrobatic fanfares, trills and clattering motifs, follows.

The Firebird dances a 'Berceuse', or lullaby, putting Kashchei and the monsters into a magic sleep and telling Ivan that he must destroy the egg in which Kashchei keeps his soul. As Kashchei awakes, Ivan does so, thus destroying the evil demon and plunging his world into profound darkness.

In the Finale, a long-breathed melody announces the destruction of evil and the reawakening of the knights who Kashchei had turned to stone. Ivan, naturally, marries the thirteenth princess in music of great ecstasy.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881) *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874)

Early 1874 provided the only high point of Mussorgsky's career as a composer. His opera, *Boris Godunov* had received its premiere and was an immediate popular success. The critics, however, were uniformly unkind, and the negative response from one in particular upset the composer deeply. This was Cesar Cui, one of the group of composers known in English as 'The Five' or 'The Mighty Handful' which also included Mussorgsky. Cui's criticism centred on certain technical faults in Mussorgsky's writing and this in itself was a betrayal, as The Five, under the leadership of Mili Balakirev, had assiduously avoided the techniques and formal designs they associated with Western, as against Russian, music. Mussorgsky, in a letter to VV Stasov (a critic who had coined the 'Five' epithet), equated technique with 'diapers, braces, straps' and the symphonic tradition as a stultifying 'Talmud' of rules. The deliberate 'roughness' of 'The Five's' music was part, of course, of the charm: in raving about Mussorgsky's work Debussy, meaning no disrespect, likened him to 'an inquisitive savage discovering music for the first time, guided in each step by his emotions'.



Mussorgsky in 1874

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Perhaps as a way to harness Mussorgsky's emotions at this time (which might otherwise have led Mussorgsky further into the alcoholism which killed him), Stasov suggested that the composer write a tribute piece to the artist Viktor Hartmann. Mussorgsky had been distraught when his friend Hartmann had died the previous year, and was happy to contribute such a piece when Stasov proposed a memorial exhibition of Hartmann's work. The result, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, is one of the more extraordinary works for solo piano from the 19th century – so much so that it was not immediately understood, and was only published after the composer's early death. It experiments freely with unusual metres (much of the opening alternates 5/4 and 6/4), dissonant harmony (as in the *Gnome* movement', and sheer brute force (as in *Bydlo*).

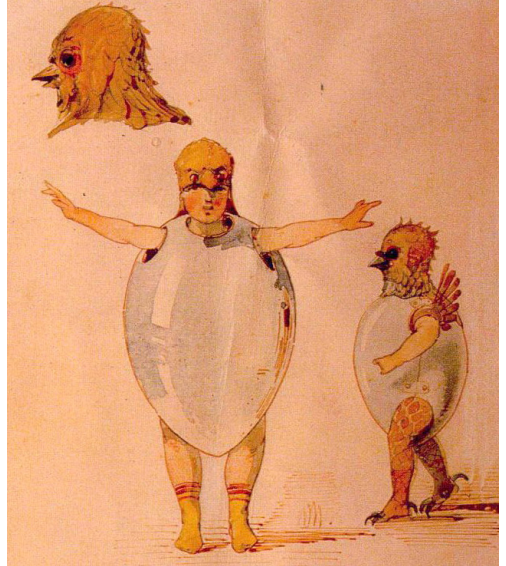
The work begins with a *Promenade* where a solo melody is answered by a series of full chords. This music recurs at various times and in different timbral and metrical guises to represent the composer strolling through the exhibition. It is interrupted by the *Gnome*, a short, cantankerous movement inspired by Hartmann's design for a nutcracker shaped like a gnome.

A new statement of the *Promenade* takes us to *The Old Castle*, a watercolour of a troubadour singing in front of a medieval pile.

The *Promenade* returns in a sombre form, but this time leading into a delicate sketch of the gardens of Tuileries. whose subtitle is 'Children quarrelling at play'.

Bydlo was said to depict an ox-cart. In Ravel's celebrated orchestration we hear it approaching slowly and deliberately from a long way away, coming close as the music reaches its loudest point, and retreating, unhurriedly into the distance; by contrast as we hear today, Mussorgsky's manuscript has the music starting very loudly.

The *Promenade* now leads to *Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens*, Mussorgsky's response to a design for a ballet on the fairy-story *Trilby*, where chickens, inside their eggs apart from their legs, racing about on stage.



Viktor Hartmann's costume sketch of canary chicks for the ballet *Trilby* by J Gerber (1871). Source: Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg/Wikimedia Commons.

'*Samuel*' Goldenburg and '*Schmuÿle*' (often sanitised as 'Two Jews, one rich, one poor') raises the unfortunate issue of Mussorgsky's anti-Semitism. As musicologist Richard Taruskin has pointed, the composer frequently referred disparagingly to Jews in his letters. There is, moreover, no known picture of two Jews in Hartmann's catalogue. Mussorgsky may have been conflating two images, but with a distasteful message: the two men's names are the same, but in different forms; however Europeanised '*Samuel*' may seem, he will always be the wheedling '*Schmuÿle*'.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

After a fifth statement of the Promenade, the music moves to the glittering world of the *Limoges Market*, which provides a huge contrast with the baleful austerity of the *Catacombs (Roman Sepulchres)*. This in turn passes into *With the Dead in a Dead Language*, of which Mussorgsky wrote ‘Hartmann’s creative spirit leads me to the place of skulls and calls to them – the skulls begin to glow faintly from within’. Here the music is based on that of the Promenade.

The Hut on Fowl’s Legs (Baba-Yaga) evokes a Russian fairy-tale of Baba-Yaga, a witch who flies through the night in an

iron mortar (of the kitchen, not military variety) propelling herself with a pestle. Mussorgsky’s music depicts the witch in full flight, although Hartmann’s image was of a clock-face which showed Baba-Yaga’s house with its distinctive feature of a pair of hen’s legs. The wild excitement of this movement builds inexorably into the final section, *The Great Gate of Kiev*. Hartmann’s design for such the so-called Knight’s Gate was never built, and was possibly not as grandiose as Mussorgsky’s music suggests.

Gordon Kerry © 2024, 2009, 2007, 2016



Plan for a city gate in Kiev (1869) by Viktor Hartmann (1834–1873). Source: Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg/Wikimedia Commons.

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