14 & 15 September 2024

# KAREN GOMYO

## PERFORMS DVOŘÁK'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner
Emirates

# 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.

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**Harry Bennetts**
*Associate Concertmaster*
**Alexandra Osborne**
*Associate Concertmaster*
**Lerida Delbridge**
*Assistant Concertmaster*
**Fiona Ziegler**
*Assistant Concertmaster*
Jennifer Booth
Sophie Cole
Sercan Danis
Claire Herrick
Georges Lentz
Emily Long
Alexandra Mitchell
Benjamin Tjoa°
Dominic Azzi†
Katherine Lukey*
Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba*
Jasmine Tan*

**SECOND VIOLINS**
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*Principal*
**Marina Marsden**
*Principal*
**Emma Jezek**
*Assistant Principal*
**Emma Hayes**
*Acting Assistant Principal*
Alice Bartsch
Victoria Bihun
Monique Irik
Wendy Kong
Benjamin Li
Nicole Masters
Maja Verunica
Emily Qin°
Rain Liu†
Tamara Elias*
Elizabeth Jones*

**VIOLAS**
**Tobias Breider**
*Principal*
**Anne-Louise Comerford**
*Associate Principal*
**Justin Williams**
*Assistant Principal*
Sandro Costantino
Rosemary Curtin
Jane Hazelwood
Leonid Volovelsky
Andrew Jezek°
Harry Swainston†
Charlotte Fetherston*
Raphael Masters*
James Wannan*

**CELLOS**
**Kaori Yamagami**
*Principal*
**Simon Cobcroft**
*Associate Principal*
**Leah Lynn**
*Assistant Principal*
Kristy Conrau
Fenella Gill
Timothy Nankervis
Elizabeth Neville
Christopher Pidcock
Eliza Sdraulig°
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Dylan Holly
Steven Larson
Richard Lynn
Jaan Pallandi
Benjamin Ward
Alexandra Elvin†
Sebastian Pini*

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**Emma Sholl**
*Associate Principal*
Carolyn Harris
**Lily Bryant***
*Guest Principal Piccolo*

**OBOES**
**Shefali Pryor**
*Acting Principal*
Callum Hogan
**Alexandre Oguey**
*Principal Cor Anglais*

**CLARINETS**
**Francesco Celata**
*Acting Principal*
Christopher Tingay
**Alexander Morris**
*Principal Bass Clarinet*

**BASSOONS**
**Matt Ockenden***
*Guest Principal*
Fiona McNamara

**HORNS**
**Samuel Jacobs**
*Principal*
**Euan Harvey**
*Acting Principal*
Marnie Sebire
Emily Newham°
Lee Wadenpfuhl*

**TRUMPETS**
**David Elton**
*Principal*
**Brent Grapes**
*Associate Principal*
Anthony Heinrichs

**TROMBONES**
**Scott Kinmont**
*Acting Principal*
Nick Byrne
**Christopher Harris**
*Principal Bass Trombone*

**TUBA**
**Steve Rossé**
*Principal*

**TIMPANI**
**Antoine Siguré**
*Principal*

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*Principal*
**Joshua Hill°**
*Acting Associate Principal Timpani / Section Percussion*
Timothy Constable
Jack Peggie†

**Bold** Principal
* Guest Musician
° Contract Musician
† Sydney Symphony Fellow

# 2024 CONCERT SEASON

**GREAT CLASSICS**
Saturday 14 September, 2pm

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Sunday 15 September, 4.30pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

# KAREN GOMYO PERFORMS DVOŘÁK'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

## SWEEPING LOVE STORIES

**DANIEL CARTER** conductor
**KAREN GOMYO** violin

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)**
**Violin Concerto in A minor, Op.53 (1879)**
i. Allegro ma non troppo –
ii. Adagio ma non troppo
iii. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo

INTERVAL

**SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)**
**Symphony No.2 in E minor, Op.27 (1907)**
i. Largo - Allegro moderato
ii. Scherzo: Allegro molto
iii. Adagio
iv. Finale: Allegro vivace

**Pre-concert talk**

By Natalie Shea in the Northern Foyer at 1.15pm (Saturday), and 3.45pm (Sunday).

**Estimated durations**

Dvořák – 35 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Rachmaninov – 60 minutes

The concert will run for approximately two hours

**Cover image**

Karen Gomyo.
Photo by Gabrielle Revere.

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# YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)**
Violin Concerto in A minor, Op.53 (1879)

Dvořák's only Violin Concerto took some time to reach its final shape and character, thanks to the slightly uncooperative behaviour of its dedicatee, Joseph Joachim.

The work that was eventually premiered (not by Joachim) is in three movements, though the first two are linked, and throughout Dvořák balances an innovative approach to standard form with the rhythms and tunes of Bohemian folk-music.

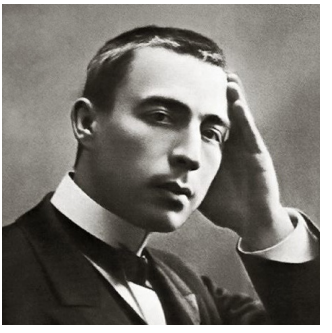
The premiere happened in 1883, the year that also saw the eruption of Krakatoa, the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge and the foundation of Sydney Boys High School. Other new music included Brahms' Third Symphony, Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* and Johann Strauss II's *A Night in Venice*.

Dvořák in 1882.

**SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943)**
Symphony No.2 in E minor, Op.27 (1907)

After the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony, Rachmaninov retreated and regrouped. His return to the medium was with this hour-long celebration of Romantic feeling. It's in four movements: a slow introduction kicks off the spacious opening movement, which is then contrasted with a fast, dance-like scherzo in which joy is tempered by sadness. The adagio is one of his most lyrical works (shamelessly appropriated by the pop world) before a triumphant close.

It premiered in 1908, the year that also saw the Hoover Company acquiring patents for the portable vacuum cleaner, Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* and the ascent of Mount Erebus by Douglas Mawson and Edgeworth David. Other new music included Mahler's Seventh Symphony, Elgar's First, and Saint-Saëns' score (one of the first ever) for the film *La Mort du duc de Guise*.



A photo of Rachmaninov in 1906.

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**DANIEL CARTER** conductor

Australian conductor Daniel Carter is Generalmusikdirektor of Landestheater Coburg, one of the youngest Generalmusikdirektors in Germany and the youngest in the history of the house.

In the 2023/24 season Carter will make his debuts at Vienna State Opera (*Die Zauberflöte*) and at Malmö Opera for a new production of *Turandot*. He returns to Deutsche Oper Berlin with a new production of John Adams' *Nixon in China* and has been invited to return to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, as well as making his debut with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

In recent seasons he has debuted at Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and at the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, Oper Köln, Münchener Kammerorchester, Konzerttheater Bern, Theater Trier, Theater Erfurt, Essen and the National Theatre in Mannheim, as well as with the Akademie of the Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks.

From 2019-2021 he was Kapellmeister at Deutsche Oper Berlin, where he continues to be regularly invited. During this period he also undertook a European tour with the Australian Youth Orchestra as Associate Conductor and also as conductor in Australia with the AYO's Momentum Ensemble.

Daniel made his mainstage debut for Victorian Opera conducting the Australian premieres of Elliott Carter's *What Next?* and Manuel de Falla's *El Retable de Maese Pedro*. He was nominated for a Green Room Award for Best Conductor for the world premiere of Calvin Bowman's *The Magic Pudding,* and led Victorian Opera's *Threepenny Opera* at Sydney Theatre Company. He also assisted on *Nixon in China* (Adams) for Victorian Opera. Prior to his debut with Victorian Opera, he was awarded the Susan Harley Living Bequest, which enabled him to travel to New York to study with Elliott Carter.

Daniel began his association with Opera Australia as Assistant Conductor on *Così fan tutte* and *Aida,* and as conductor on the Opera Australia 2013 Tour of *Don Giovanni*. He has also conducted the Sydney Symphony; the West Australian Symphony (as part of the Young Performers' Awards Grand Final); and at Melbourne and Sydney Festivals, including performances of *Pierrot Lunaire* with soloist Merlyn Quaife at the Melbourne Recital Centre.

While assistant to Simone Young and resident repetiteur at the Hamburgische Staatsoper, his performances included *Die Zauberflöte, Il Barbiere di Siviglia,* and a double bill for the Opera Studio of *In the Locked Room* (Watkins) and *Persona* (Langemann).

Daniel Carter graduated from Melbourne University with a Bachelor of Music (Honours) having studied Composition and Piano. In 2012, he won the Brian Stacey Memorial Award for Emerging Conductors. A graduate of the Symphony Services International Core Conductors Program, he worked with the symphony orchestras in Queensland, Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, Sydney and Auckland and also taught at Symphony Services International as part of the Scholar Conductors Program.

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**KAREN GOMYO** violin

Karen Gomyo possesses a rare ability to captivate and connect intimately with audiences through her deeply emotional and heartfelt performances. With a flawless command of the instrument and an elegance of expression, she is one of today's leading violinists.

Highlights of recent seasons have included Karen's subscription debuts with the New York Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony, Orquesta Nacional de España, the Czech Philharmonic and Rome's Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Karen also returned to the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in Paris under Mikko Franck and the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln with Cristian Macelaru.

Karen's 2023/24 season engagements include debuts with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig with Semyon Bychkov, the Chicago Symphony with John Storgårds, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland with Lio Kuokman, and KBS Symphony Orchestra in Seoul with Pietari Inkinen. She also appears with Mozarteumorchester Salzburg with Constantinos Carydis, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra with John Storgårds, Gulbenkian Orchestra with Giancarlo Guerrero, Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao with composer-and-conductor Samy Moussa, and the Vancouver Symphony with Gerard Schwarz. In February 2024 Karen returned to the Dallas Symphony Orchestra for the world premiere of *Year 2020, a Concerto for Trumpet, Violin and Orchestra* by Xi Wang, with trumpeter Tine Thing Helseth and conductor Fabio Luisi. Together with conductor Jakub Hrůša, with whom she collaborates regularly, Karen returned to Japan to perform with the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra.

Renowned for her commitment to commissioning new repertoire, Karen has given the US premieres of Samy Moussa's Violin Concerto *Adrano* with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and Matthias Pintscher's Concerto No. 2 *Mar'eh* with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington under the baton of the composer. In May 2018 she performed the world premiere of Samuel Adams' new Chamber Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen, a work written specifically for Karen and commissioned by the CSO's *Music Now* series for their 20th anniversary.

Born in Tokyo, Karen began her musical career in Montréal and New York, She studied under the legendary pedagogue Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School before continuing her studies at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and New England Conservatory. Karen also participated as violinist, host, and narrator in a documentary film produced by NHK Japan about Antonio Stradivarius called *The Mysteries of the Supreme Violin,* which was broadcast worldwide on NHK WORLD.

Photo by Gabrielle Revere

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT DVOŘÁK'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

It was probably on the recommendation of Brahms that the great violinist Joseph Joachim became the dedicatee of the only violin concerto composed by Dvořák. Ironically, however, Joachim was never to play it. Brahms had composed his own Violin Concerto for Joachim in 1878, and seems to have given him a couple of Dvořák's chamber works for performances in Berlin and London.

Encouraged by Joachim's interest, Dvořák visited him in Berlin in July 1879 to discuss the idea of a concerto. He sent him a completed draft in November, followed by a full revision, incorporating Joachim's suggestions, in May 1880. In its new version, he believed, 'the whole concerto has been transformed.' Even so, it was not altogether to the virtuoso's liking.

Dvořák in 1882

After a further two years, Joachim revised the solo part and suggested that Dvořák lighten the orchestration. Although the composer would agree to only minor changes, in particular rejecting any suggestion of separating the linked opening movements, Joachim nevertheless committed himself to launching the work in London in 1884. That premiere was abandoned when Dvořák found he was not free to conduct. Joachim now lost interest. Dvořák turned to the young Czech violinist František Ondříček, who promptly gave the first performance in Prague on 14 October 1883 and proceeded to play the concerto throughout Europe with great success.

Violinist Joseph Joachim in 1884, dedicatee (but ultimately not the first performer) of Dvořak's concerto.

Joachim's obviously strong reservations about the concerto doubtless reflect his firmly traditionalist view of Classical structure and balance in music. He seems to have felt unable wholeheartedly to lend his name to a work so untraditional, particularly in its first two movements. He quite possibly disliked the improvisatory nature of the concerto, finding Dvořák's artistic integrity perhaps compromised by his failure to carry through a 'proper' sonata structure in the opening movement. Likewise, he doubtless agreed with the publisher Simrock that the opening movements should be separated; and as the outstanding virtuoso violinist of the day he must have wondered at the lack of opportunity for a cadenza, even though there is brilliance enough in the solo part as written out. The concerto nevertheless embodies much of Joachim, particularly in the style of the solo writing, and Dvořák never withdrew the dedication, inscribed to Joachim 'in highest admiration'.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

**HOW IT UNFOLDS**

Eschewing a conventional orchestral opening tutti, Dvořák launches immediately into his two-part main theme – the first part boldly rhythmic with full orchestra, and the second a passionate answering phrase from the solo violin. This theme, in one or other of its parts, forms the essence of the entire movement. Dvořák introduces subsidiary themes, most notably an effusive folk-like tune which appears on a flood of warm solo violin tone when the movement is already well advanced. However, the lesser themes serve in the main only as brief moments of repose while the composer gathers his forces to proceed with his main business of developing the opening subject. The development completed, Dvořák wastes no time on a conventional recapitulation of his original ideas: he merely recalls the violin's answering phrase from the opening theme, transforming it into a serenely reflective bridge which leads without a break into the sweet lyricism of the slow movement.

Here the composer, in long and tender phrases, sings a song of heartfelt rapture. Dvořák scholar Otakar Šourek likens two linked thematic ideas, stated broadly by the soloist at the beginning, to the passionate embrace of lovers. Gervase Hughes finds in this 'unwonted flight of lyricism' the composer's 'first successful attempt to prove himself a truly individual romanticist by international rather than local standards'. A slight increase in tempo briefly brings a sense of agitation, but the clouds lift on a sunny, folk-like melody with which the trilling violin soars, as Šourek puts it, 'like a lark above the flowery fragrance of Bohemian meadows'. Now bolstered by the brass, the agitated motif again tries, unsuccessfully, to make its presence felt. The movement ends with the main theme, in tranquillity.

If the thematic material of the slow movement, as Šourek suggests, is deeply rooted in the soil of Czech folk music, then the finale is even more overtly nationalistic. This is a spirited homage to Czech national dance, fundamentally a vigorous, syncopated *furiant*. Interspersed with this dance, rondo-fashion, is first a cheerful oboe motif taken up by the flute; then a swelling *dolce* theme on solo violin; and last a highly bucolic, faintly melancholy section in characteristic *dumka* rhythm. Neither pure rondo nor sonata, the movement reiterates all three subsidiary themes in different guises (as the main theme is itself varied on every appearance). At the end the *dumka* returns, now in great good humour, and the main theme sweeps the concerto to a taut, forceful conclusion.

Dvořák's Violin Concerto is scored for pairs each of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings and violin soloist.

It was premiered in Prague on 14 October 1883, with Czech violinist František Ondříček as soloist and the National Theatre Orchestra conducted by Mořic Anger.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the work in March 1953, in a Youth Concert conducted by Chief Conductor Eugene Goossens with Eugene Prokop as soloist. Notable performances include those by our Chief Conductors Nicolai Malko (with Ricardo Odnoposoff in 1954, three years before Malko became Chief); Dean Dixon (with Ladislav Jásek, 1967); Louis Frémaux (with Ruggiero Ricci in 1981 and Salvatore Accardo in 1984); Stuart Challender (with Dene Olding, 1991) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (with Janine Jansen in 2009).

Many other significant violinists have performed the work in Sydney, including Johanna Martzy (conducted by Georges Tzipine in 1961); Ruggiero Ricci (Francesco Mander, 1962); Josef Suk, grandson of the composer and great-grandson of Dvořák (Fritz Rieger, 1971); Kyung-Wha Chung (Charles Dutoit, 1977); Thomas Zehetmair (Hiroyuki Iwaki, 1986) and Pamela Frank (Paavo Järvi, 1999).

Our most recent performances were in 2015, with Jakub Hrůša conducting Anne-Sophie Mutter.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT RACHMANINOV'S SECOND SYMPHONY

Rachmaninov had always regarded himself as a composer first and a pianist second, but his early symphonic debut had been a disaster. In March 1897 the premiere performance of his First Symphony was so bad that the critic César Cui described it as sounding like 'a program symphony on the seven plagues of Egypt', and Rachmaninov asked himself how the conductor, fellow composer Alexander Glazunov, 'can conduct so badly. I am not speaking now of his conducting technique (one can't ask that of him) but about his musicianship. He feels nothing when he conducts. It's as if he understands nothing.' In fact it would seem that the fiasco was caused by Glazunov's being – as often – drunk, rather than lack of feelings or understanding; whatever the reason, the experience plunged Rachmaninov into a period of despair which he took for clinical depression and as a result consulted the well-known hypnotist Nikolai Dahl. He completed nothing substantial for some three years, but that period also saw him embark on a new career: that of opera conductor. He was first engaged by the Moscow Private Opera for the 1897–98 season directed a huge range of Russian and western opera; in 1904 he would return to the opera pit, this time as conductor at the Imperial and Bolshoi Theatres.

Rachmaninov in 1906

We can't be sure of the nature of Dr Dahl's treatment, though the composer later recalled that 'my relations had told Dr Dahl that he must at all costs cure me of my apathetic condition and achieve such results that I would again begin to compose. Dahl asked what manner of composition they desired and had received the answer, "a concerto for pianoforte".' By the turn of the century Rachmaninov's confidence had largely returned, and he was indeed able to compose the Piano Concerto No.2 in 1901. The success of that work in turn inspired Rachmaninov to compose a string of major pieces: the Cello Sonata, Second Suite for Piano Duo, a number of choral works and two operas – *The Miserly Knight* and *Francesca da Rimini*. The latter (famously treated in music by Tchaikovsky) is based on an episode in Dante's *Inferno*: the souls of Francesca and her lover Paolo, both murdered by her husband for their illicit love, are doomed to be blown around in a tempestuous wind for all eternity. It is just possible that Rachmaninov was reflecting on the difficulties of his own marriage, which also took place in 1901. His wife Natalia was a cousin, and there had therefore been serious legal and religious obstacles to their being married. (It should be noted though that her family had no objection, presenting the young couple with a house on their estate at Ivanovka, south east of Moscow. Rachmaninov would compose most of his music there until he left the country. The estate was looted and burned down during the revolutionary years of the next decade.) In any case, *Francesca da Rimini* is one of many instances where Rachmaninov's music seems preoccupied with notions of death and judgement in the hereafter.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

In early 1905 St Petersburg saw a massive strike of over 100,000 workers. The government reacted with a number of repressive measures, among them banning the right to organised marches. The workers in turn responded by organising a march, led by an Orthodox priest, to petition the Tsar directly; many marchers were gunned down by the Tsar's troops in the snow in front of the Winter Palace. The populace was outraged, strikes spread across the country and finally the Tsar was forced to accept the institution of a constitutional monarchy with elected parliament. In 1906 therefore, the atmosphere in Russia was tense to say the least. Rachmaninov decided to leave, travelling first to Italy with his wife and child and then, later in the year, settling in the German city of Dresden. It was here that he began work on his Second Symphony, which he completed the following year when he returned home to Ivanovka. Just what made Rachmaninov want to write another symphony given his experience with the First is a mystery. Even his closest friends were surprised that he had done so, and by his own admission it cost him a great deal of effort. But its premiere in St Petersburg in 1908, with Rachmaninov conducting, was a triumph. If it were simply his intention to prove his worth as a symphonist, Rachmaninov succeeded admirably; moreover, the work won him his second Glinka Prize.

Rachmaninov's estate at Ivanovka

The Second Symphony is long – or rather, its hour's duration makes it comparable in length to works by Bruckner or Mahler. This caused some problems for the composer, who seldom got to hear the work as he had envisaged it. Until comparatively recently it was common for the work to be given in a form which dispensed with up to a third of the music, and while the composer was partly responsible, his attitude to such butchery is clear from the story of his encounter with Eugene Ormandy in Philadelphia. The conductor asked Rachmaninov to make some cuts to the work; after several hours the composer returned the score with two bars crossed out.

**HOW IT UNFOLDS**

It is a truism in the theatre that cutting great works only makes them seem longer, which makes perfect sense given that the proportions of a work – dictating where major events happen in relation to others – are distorted by too much material being removed. The Second Symphony is long but its structure is beautifully proportioned. Heard in its entirety, the work seems precisely as long as it needs to be. Like Mahler, Rachmaninov's experience in the opera house had honed both his orchestration and sense of dramatic pacing.

The overall effect of the work is one of spaciousness, in which long melodies unfurl at a relatively leisurely pace to give the impression of ultra-Romantic spontaneity. It is in four movements, beginning with a slow introduction which, as in works by Haydn or Beethoven, serves to build expectation and whet the appetite for the main material of the allegro to which it leads. It is almost always described as mysterious, with one writer going so far as to suggest that it 'surely' evokes the landscape of the Russian steppe. The transition into the main allegro body of the movement is made by solo cor anglais, establishing a pattern in the work,

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

where structural transitions are often announced by wind solos. The allegro is a study in contrasts, ranging between passages of intensely turbulent and serene music.

Like a number of Russian composers – Tchaikovsky, Borodin and Shostakovich among them – Rachmaninov placed the scherzo, or dance movement second in a four-movement work. Here, this serves the important purpose of restoring an air of musical regularity and emotional predictability after the rollercoaster ride of the first movement. What could be more upbeat than the colourful wind scoring and bright horn calls of this scherzo, or its contrastingly long, songful melody? And in the central trio section, commentators are generally agreed that Rachmaninov is evoking the bustle of village life complete with the deep tolling of church bells and a hymnal procession. But at the end of the movement, which is also the turning point of the symphony, there is an unsettling moment: the lively music of the scherzo comes apart through the interventions of a brass chorale based on the Dies irae. This Gregorian chant describes the 'day of wrath' when humanity will be judged by God at the end of history when the dead shall rise from the ashes. Rachmaninov had a particular fondness for this melody – it appears in several works, such as the 'Paganini' Variations. Here the effect is a little like those religious images where the Grim Reaper stands unseen near a crowd of happy people.

More unsettling, perhaps, is the fact that so much of what has gone before has been derived from this theme. From the very opening gesture of the work, the melodic material is dominated by notes whose contours outline a stepwise fall, stepwise rise and wider fall. Rachmaninov's structural sense is matched by an economy of thematic material.

A number of commentators have noted similarities between the adagio third movement and the love scene from Rachmaninov's *Francesca da Rimini,* yet even in this frankly erotic the *Dies irae* is never far below the music's surface. The movement begins with one of Rachmaninov's most inspired, soaring themes (which has been prefigured in the first movement) for the first violins, full of unexpected yearning dissonances. This is succeeded by an equally gorgeous tune for clarinet solo and yet one more for strings and oboe. The climax of the movement, which grows out of the elaboration of these three melodies, is arguably the most powerful in the whole work and it dispels any pessimism in favour of a Tchaikovskian finale.

In the last movement Rachmaninov achieves a kind of Beethovenian triumph. While the music revisits certain themes and moods from earlier in the work, it is clear that a watershed has been reached. The mood is buoyant, the tonality predominantly major and the down-up-down contour of the *Dies irae* is often turned literally upside down. Whether the work is programmatic in any real sense is unclear, and we can assume that Rachmaninov, like Tchaikovsky, was suspicious of attempts to 'translate' his music. And Rachmaninov was by no means religious, but in view of the 'Francesca' link and the references to the *Dies irae* it seems to be a work in which anguish and the ominous presence of death are dispelled by the power of love.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

Rachmaninov's Symphony No.2 is scored for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), three oboes (third doubling cor anglais), two clarinets, bass clarinet and two bassoons; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and percussion, glockenspiel and strings.

It was first performed at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg on 26 January 1908, with Rachmaninov conducting.

The Sydney Symphony was the first of the major state orchestras to perform this work, in August 1939 led by Bernard Heinze, who also conducted the symphony in Wollongong (1961), Newcastle (1963) and Sydney (1964). Notable performances include those by our Chief Conductors Eugene Gossens (1949), Nicolai Malko (1960), Charles Mackerras (in 1978, four years before his appointment as Chief), Edo de Waart (1996 in Sydney and on our Asian Tour) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (in 2007 and 2011, including on our Asian Tour).

Other conductors to lead this work include Hiroyuki Iwaki (1973), Alexander Gibson (1977), David Zinman (1984), Vernon Handley (1992), Leonard Slatkin (2000), Alexander Lazarev (2002) and Marcelo Lehninger (2016).

Our most recent performances were in 2019, under Lionel Bringuier.

**Notes by Anthony Cane © 1999 and Gordon Kerry © 2007**

**Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson**

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# FROM THE ARCHIVES

## 1953 – SYDNEY DEBUT OF DVOŘÁK'S CONCERTO

'The Czechoslovakian violinist, Eugen Prokop, discussing scores with the conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Eugene Goossens, after Prokop arrived in Sydney yesterday. He will give a series of concerts for the ABC before joining the professorial staff at the Conservatorium of Music.'

So said the caption to this photo in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 3 March 1953, prior to the Sydney Symphony's first-ever performance of the Dvořák Violin Concerto on the 18th.

'Mr. Prokop is known throughout Europe and Britain as an outstanding performer,' Mr Goossens said. 'He holds the first prize of the Brussels and Prague Conservatories, and the Carl Flesch Medal, the top international award for violinists under 30.'

Goossens was both the Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony and the director of the NSW State Conservatorium of Music at the time.

Prokop was also quoted as saying that he enjoyed the general mood and attitude in Sydney.

'The atmosphere in Australia is less artificial than in Europe. In Australia there seems to be an appreciation of music for itself-not for the interpretation of a particular artist.'

*Source: National Library of Australia/Trove (trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18359778)*

# SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP

**Simone Young** AM
Chief Conductor

**Donald Runnicles**
Principal Guest Conductor

**Vladimir Ashkenazy**
Conductor Laureate

**Andrew Haveron**
Concertmaster
*Vicki Olsson Chair*

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Associate Concertmaster
*Judy & Sam Weiss Chair*

**Alexandra Osborne**
Associate Concertmaster

**Lerida Delbridge**
Assistant Concertmaster
*Simon Johnson Chair*

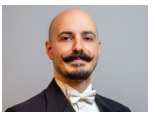
**Fiona Ziegler**
Assistant Concertmaster
*Webb Family Chair, in memory of Dr Bill Webb & Helen Webb*

**Sun Yi**
Associate Concertmaster Emeritus

**Jenny Booth**

**Brielle Clapson**

**Sophie Cole**



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**Léone Ziegler**

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Assistant Principal

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**Sandro Costantino**

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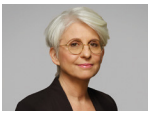

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## HARP

**Louisic Dulbecco**
Principal

# MUSICIAN PROFILE

# ANTOINE SIGURÉ

Principal Timpani

**How long have you been playing with the Sydney Symphony?**

Since the beginning of 2024.

**What has been the highlight of your Sydney Symphony career so far?**

It's already been a very eventful musical journey! The season opening concerts with Simone Young conducting Mahler's Fifth Symphony were very special – I was getting goosebumps every time I heard Dave Elton's solemn opening solo.

A few weeks later we performed another masterpiece, *Gurrelieder*. Being surrounded by over 400 colleagues was quite something!

**Who is your favourite composer to perform, and who is your favourite composer to listen to?**

There are too many great composers, luckily for us! If I had to choose only one that would be Richard Strauss. His tone poems are absolutely outstanding, particularly in the way they are orchestrated.

At home we listen to pretty much everything, from Bach to Peppa Pig via Thom Yorke and The National.

**What do you like to do with your spare time when you aren't playing or practicing?**

I love tweaking tech gadgets and am a keen audiophile – I probably own a dozen pairs of headphones by now! Other than that I recently started to surf, which on most days feels more like being inside a gigantic washing machine. There's definitely room for progress.

**What was the last book/podcast/TV series you really loved?**

Not long ago I watched a mini-series about the Chernobyl disaster. An incredibly moving and inspiring show which depicts one of the worst man-made catastrophes in history.

**What is the best piece of advice you ever received, either musical or general?**

My wife once told me, 'You create your own luck'. It's a long story. Hopefully one that lasts a lifetime.

**What is your idea of a perfect day?**

Belgian waffles at home with our daughter, who has a sweet tooth as well. Then taking off for a drive, exploring New South Wales' incredible coast line and hidden gems.

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