

8 March 2025



JAMES EHNES PERFORMS

BRAHMS' VIOLIN CONCERTO

Presenting Partner



HANTEC MARKETS
— AUSTRALIA —

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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

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant Concertmaster

Sun Yi

Associate Concertmaster

Emeritus

Jennifer Booth

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Léone Ziegler

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton

Principal

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Acting Associate Principal

Monique Irik

Acting Assistant Principal

Victoria Bihun

Rebecca Gill

Emma Hayes

Shuti Huang

Wendy Kong

Benjamin Li

Nicole Masters

Robert Smith*

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider

Principal

Richard Waters°

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal Emeritus

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Amanda Verner

Leonid Volovelsky

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Kaori Yamagami

Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Timothy Nankervis

Elizabeth Neville

Adrian Wallis

DOUBLE BASSES

Alex Henery

Principal

David Campbell

Dylan Holly

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Benjamin Ward

FLUTES

Emma Sholl

Acting Principal

Carolyn Harris

Lloyd Hudson*

Guest Principal Piccolo

OBOES

Shefali Pryor

Acting Principal

Miriam Cooney°

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Francesco Celata

Acting Principal

Christopher Tingay

BASSOONS

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

Fiona McNamara

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

HORNS

Manuel Escarriaza*

Guest Principal

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

Emily Newham°

TRUMPETS

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glémot

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont

Acting Principal

Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Edwin Diefes*

Guest Principal

TIMPANI

Mark Robinson

Acting Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Joshua Hill°

Associate Principal

Timpani/Section Percussion

Timothy Constable

Brian Nixon*

Alison Pratt*

HARP

Louisic Dulbecco

Principal

KEYBOARDS

Susanne Powell*

Guest Principal Celeste

Bold Principal

* Guest Musician

° Contract Musician

† Sydney Symphony

Fellow

2025 CONCERT SEASON

HANTEC GREAT CLASSICS
Saturday 8 March, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

JAMES EHNES PERFORMS BRAHMS' VIOLIN CONCERTO

EVOCATIVE STORYTELLING

FINNEGAN DOWNIE DEAR conductor
JAMES EHNES violin

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Violin Concerto in D, Op.77 (1878)

- i. Allegro non troppo
- ii. Adagio
- iii. Allegro giocoso

INTERVAL

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)
Mother Goose (Ma Mère l'Oye) (1911)

- i. Prelude –
- ii. First tableau: *Dance of the Spinning Wheel and Scene* –
- iii. Second tableau: *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*
- iv. Interlude –
- v. Third tableau: *The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast* –
- vi. Fourth tableau: *Tom Thumb*
- vii. Interlude –
- viii. Fifth tableau: *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas*
- ix. Interlude –
- x. *Apotheosis: The Magical Garden*

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)
Capriccio espagnol, Op.34 (1887)

- i. Alborada –
- ii. Variations –
- iii. Alborada –
- iv. Scene and Gypsy Song –
- v. Fandango asturiano

Pre-concert talk

By Francis Merson on
the Lounge level of the
Northern Foyer at 1.15pm.

Estimated durations

Brahms – 40 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Ravel – 30 minutes
Rimsky-Korsakov – 15 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour
and 50 minutes.

Cover image

James Ehnes
Photo by Benjamin Ealovega

Presenting Partner



Principal Partner



WELCOME

Welcome to **James Ehnes performs Brahms' Violin Concerto**, the opening performance of the *Hantec Great Classics* series.

As the inaugural Presenting Partner of *Hantec Great Classics*, we are delighted that our support will bring some of the world's finest soloists to Australia, including the extraordinary Canadian violinist James Ehnes.

Since its establishment in 1990, Hantec Group has grown from its roots in Hong Kong into a globally recognised leader in financial services and diversified industries. As we proudly celebrate our 35th anniversary, we reflect on our journey of excellence, innovation and unwavering commitment to empowering businesses and investors worldwide.

Described by *The Strad* as 'eloquent, expressive and moving', and *The Times* as being 'in a class of his own', in this concert, you will hear Ehnes at his very best, as he performs the breathtaking Brahms Violin Concerto.

Finnegan Downie Dear is a rising star conductor and a protégé of Chief Conductor Simone Young, making this concert the perfect showcase of a world-class soloist, a brilliant young conductor and the masterful players of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Such mastery arrives after decades of investment, trust and deep thought. Over almost two decades, these same principles and practices have guided Hantec Markets Australia to its position as a trusted leader in financial services specialising in CFD trading services for Australian clients.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to driving innovation, accelerating global expansion, and delivering value-driven solutions. As we continue to shape the future, Hantec Group will build upon its strong foundation to solidify our position as a world-class international brand, empowering our clients and partners to succeed in an ever-evolving financial landscape.

We are immensely proud of our inaugural partnership, which reflects our commitment to supporting cultural initiatives and Sydney's vibrant cultural life. Together with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, we share a deep dedication to excellence and investment in the future.

I look forward to sharing many concerts with you in 2025, and I hope you enjoy this performance of **James Ehnes performs Brahms' Violin Concerto**, the opening concert of the 2025 *Hantec Great Classics* series.



Damon Sze
Chief Operating Officer
Hantec Markets Australia

YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

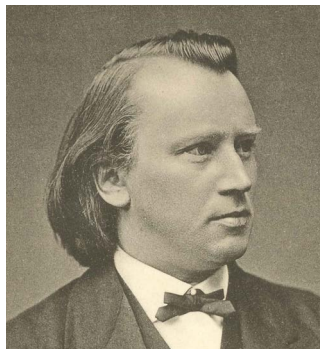
Violin Concerto in D, Op.77 (1878)

Written for the great 19th century violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim, Brahms' concerto is epic in scale, full of drama, lyricism and irresistible rhythm.

The first of its three movements is huge and expansive, alternating brilliant solo work with serious and well-wrought orchestral sections. The Adagio has one of Brahms' finest and most simple melodies as its theme, while the finale shows the influence of Hungarian music and Brahms' facility with rhythmic variation.

The piece premiered in 1879, the year that saw Thomas Edison's first successful lightbulb, the elevation of John Henry Newman to Cardinal and the establishment of the Royal National Park – now the world's second oldest – south of Sydney.

Contemporary music included Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, César Franck's Piano Quintet and Widor's Fifth Organ Symphony (the one with the Toccata).



Johannes Brahms c. 1875 by German photographer Fritz Luckhardt (1833–1894).

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Mother Goose (Ma Mère l'Oye) (1911)

Originally a set of character pieces for two pianos, Ravel's *Mother Goose* became a ballet featuring the stories of the Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and Beast, Tom Thumb, Laideronette (the Princess of the Pagodas), and the fairy garden where Prince Charming wakes the Sleeping Beauty.

The ballet premiered in 1912, the year that saw the end of the Meiji period in Japan, the sinking of the Titanic and Australia's first aircraft crash.

Contemporary music included Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Alban Berg's 'Altenberg' Lieder.



Photo of Maurice Ravel published in *The Musical Times* on 1 December 1913.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)

Capriccio espagnol, Op.34 (1887)

The *Capriccio espagnol* was composed as a virtuoso piece for orchestra, a series of five linked pieces using actual Spanish melodies; hearing it, Tchaikovsky pronounced the composer the 'greatest master of the age'.

It appeared in 1887, the year that saw the first appearance of Esperanto, Glenfiddich whisky, and Sherlock Holmes.

Contemporary music included Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, Verdi's *Otello* and Bruckner's Eighth Symphony.



Portrait of Composer Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1893) by Ilya Repin (1844–1930).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

FINNEGAN DOWNIE DEAR conductor

Finnegan came to international attention in 2020, when he was awarded first prize at the Bamberger Symphoniker's International Mahler Competition. The jury spoke of his 'rare combination of open heart and brilliant mind', with 'an ability to evoke truly magical moments as if there were nothing more natural to do'.

Recent concert highlights include performances with the Staatskapelle Berlin, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Athens State Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Sinfonieorchester Basel. Future plans include returns to Berlin, Salzburg, Athens and Poland, as well as making debuts with Staatskapelle Dresden, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Balthazar Neumann Orchestra and Sydney Symphony, with soloists including Gil Shaham, Isabelle Faust, Kirill Gerstein, Veronika Eberle and James Ehnes.

His debut with Staatsoper Berlin (*The Makropulos Case*) resulted in immediate reinventions for numerous opera productions and concert programs; this season includes a concert program of Kurtág and Schubert, and performances of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Elsewhere, he has had equally successful debuts at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Gerald Barry *Alice's Adventures Underground*) and at Hamburg Staatsoper (*Eugene Onegin*); he soon returns to Covent Garden to conduct *Hansel and Gretel* and to Hamburg for *Falstaff*. He will make first appearances at Garsington Opera (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Theater an der Wien (in a world premiere by Miroslav Srnka), Victorian Opera (*Káťa Kabanová*) and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival (*Billy Budd*).

Since 2014 Finnegan has been Music Director of Shadwell – an East London company that works with exceptional young musicians to champion contemporary British repertoire and experiment with new operatic forms. The company's production of Knussen's *Where the Wild Things Are* toured to the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg in 2019 and to Bamberg in 2022 for performances with the Bamberger Symphoniker. This summer they commissioned and gave the world premiere of Isabella Gellis' chamber opera *The Devil's Den*.

Born in London, Finnegan graduated with distinction from Cambridge University (musicology) and the Royal Academy of Music (piano). He subsequently worked as an assistant to Simone Young, Thomas Adès, Sir Simon Rattle, Daniel Harding and Richard Baker.



Photo by Frank Bloedhorn

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JAMES EHNES violin

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after musicians on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls.

Recent orchestral highlights include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, London Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra.

Throughout the 24/25 season, Ehnes will be Artist in Residence with Melbourne Symphony and will tour to Asia, where he will perform the complete Beethoven sonatas at Kioi Hall, Tokyo, as well as performances with Hong Kong Philharmonic and Singapore Symphony Orchestras.

Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule. He performs regularly at Wigmore Hall (including a complete cycle of Beethoven Sonatas in 2019/20, and the complete violin/viola works of Brahms and Schumann in 2021/22), Carnegie Hall, Symphony Center Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Ravinia, Montreux, Verbier Festival, Dresden Music Festival and Festival de Pâques in Aix. A devoted chamber musician, he is the leader of the Ehnes Quartet and the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including two Grammys, three *Gramophone* Awards and twelve Juno Awards. In 2021, Ehnes was announced as the recipient of the coveted Artist of the Year title in the 2021 *Gramophone* Awards, which celebrated his recent contributions to the recording industry – including the launch of a new online recital series entitled *Recitals from Home* which was released in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of concert halls. Ehnes recorded the six Bach Sonatas and Partitas and six Sonatas of Ysaÿe from his home with state-of-the-art recording equipment and released six episodes over a period of two months.

These recordings have been met with great critical acclaim by audiences worldwide and Ehnes was described by *Le Devoir* as being 'at the absolute forefront of the streaming evolution'.

Ehnes began violin studies at the age of five, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin aged nine, and made his orchestra debut with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal aged thirteen. He continued his studies with Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music upon his graduation in 1997. He is a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and an honorary fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is a Visiting Professor. As of summer 2024, he is a Professor of Violin at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Ehnes plays the 'Marsick' Stradivarius of 1715.



Photo by Benjamin Ealovega

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT BRAHMS

Brahms died neither young, nor insane; he was never a liveried servant, nor dependent on aristocratic or royal patronage; he held several music directorships, but never for long, and, while a performer of distinction, became increasingly able to support himself on composition. He grew relatively wealthy on the sale and performances of his music, but in Vienna he lived with his piano and collection of music manuscripts and books in a three-room flat for 25 years. He never married.

He was born in 1833 in Hamburg, in modest circumstances to a mismatched couple: Christiane and Johann Jakob Brahms, a local session-musician. His early promise as a pianist was used to augment the family finances; the 15-year old played dance music in the dockside taverns (read: brothels) of his home town at night while studying by day.

Violinist Joseph Joachim encouraged Brahms, in September 1853, to meet two of the most important influences on his life: Robert and Clara Schumann. Robert hailed the appearance of a major talent, and as Schumann slipped into madness, Brahms grew closer to Clara.

Brahms settled in Vienna around 1869, where the conservative critic Eduard Hanslick felt he had found in Brahms the embodiment of the classical tradition of abstract music. Brahms never taught, but was instrumental in the state stipend given to Antonín Dvořák in the latter's early maturity.

His earliest works are for piano, some for public performance (though with an eye firmly on his posterity, Brahms destroyed a great many pieces in all genres) and some as studies.



Johannes Brahms c. 1875 by German photographer Fritz Luckhardt (1833-1894).

The period around the end of the 1850s and into the new decade see Brahms' first 'official' attempts at orchestral music, notably the First Concerto and the First Serenade. In the 1860s, Brahms focused on chamber music, though his mother's death catalysed a major choral orchestral piece: *A German Requiem*.

He suffered stage fright when it came to the symphony, and it is only in 1876 that the First, a work that had been gestating for many, many years, appeared. His symphonies, Second Piano Concerto and the two string concertos all date from the period 1876-1887 as do his three Violin Sonatas.

The String Quintet, Op.111, dating from 1890, was to have been his last chamber work, but fortunately he made the acquaintance of clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld soon after, inspiring the Clarinet Trio and Quintet. His final works were Bachian chorale preludes, including two based on the chorale, 'O world, I must leave thee'. He died of liver cancer on 3 April 1897.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

Brahms spent the summers of 1877-9 in the lakeside village of Pörschach in Carinthia, producing his first Motet, Op.74, the Ballades for piano, Op.75, Symphony No.2 and his Violin Sonata in G, Op.78 – all works which share an atmosphere of pastoral beauty shot through with nostalgia. But as Brahms scholar Karl Geiringer notes, the ‘crowning masterpiece’ of this time is the Violin Concerto.



Violinist Joseph Joachim in 1890. From The Cabinet Portrait Gallery, Cassell and Company Limited.

The Concerto, like the G major Sonata, was composed for the great virtuoso Joseph Joachim, whom an ecstatic fifteen-year old Brahms had heard play the Beethoven Concerto. In 1853 their friendship began in earnest, with Joachim writing to Brahms’ parents of how ‘Johannes had stimulated my work as an artist to an extent beyond my hopes...my friendship is always at his disposal’. Brahms similarly admired Joachim – significantly as a composer rather than performer, saying that ‘there is more in Joachim than in all the other young composers put together.’

While Joachim was intimately involved with the creation of early works of Brahms’ chamber music, it was not, strangely enough, until those summers by the lake at Pörschach in the 1870s that Brahms wrote solo music for his friend. Geiringer notes that, in the case of both Concerto and Sonata, Brahms ‘conscientiously asked his friend’s advice on all technical questions – and then hardly ever followed it’, but in fact at crucial points Joachim’s advice on technical matters was invaluable. This consists mainly of tinkering with certain figurations to make them more gratifying to play. But Joachim was also a profoundly serious artist – like Brahms – and out of their collaboration came works in which the element of virtuosity never overshadows the musical argument, despite the work’s many technical challenges. Joachim also wrote a cadenza for the concerto, which is still frequently heard today.

The Concerto has some of the expansive dimensions of Brahms’ first Piano Concerto. This is especially true of the spacious first movement which, like that of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, takes up more than half the work’s playing time, and which begins with a long, symphonic exposition of its main themes. Like its companion Second Symphony, the Concerto is in D, a key which composers like Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Sibelius used for violin concertos as it makes use of the instrument’s natural resonance; like the Symphony it has something of a visionary Romantic tone.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Brahms originally thought to write the piece in four movements, making the central pair a scherzo and contrasting slow movement. But he wrote to Joachim that the 'middle movements – naturally the best ones – have fallen through. So I have substituted a feeble adagio.' Feeble is of course hardly the word for this piece: derived from the simplest of musical figures – the falling broken chord with which the violin begins – it evolves into one of Brahms' most soulful but restrained movements. As such it provides a wonderful contrast to the gypsy style finale, with its pyrotechnic solo line and exciting use of displaced accents.

Joachim premiered the piece in Leipzig in 1879, but the response was tepid, and only through Joachim's persistence did it gradually gain its rightful place in the standard repertoire. Brahms and Joachim fell out over the violinist's divorce in 1884, the rift lasting until Brahms wrote the Concerto for Violin and Cello in 1887. But that's another story.

Brahms' Violin Concerto is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns and 2 trumpets; timpani, strings and violin soloist.

It was first performed in Leipzig on 1 January 1879, conducted by Brahms with Joseph Joachim as soloist.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the concerto in 1939, with Jeanne Gautier as soloist conducted by Malcolm Sargent.

Notable performances by include Yehudi Menuhin conducted by Georg Schnévoigt (1940), Ginette Neveu/Bernard Heinze (1948), Ernest Llewellyn/Eugene Goossens (1949), Wolfgang Schneiderhan/Goossens (1953), Christian Ferras/Heinze (1956), Ruggiero Ricci/Kurt Woess (1957), David Oistrakh/Nikolai Malko (1958), Isaac Stern/Malko (1961), Leonid Kogan/Joseph Post (1962), Henryk Szeryng/Georges Tzipine (1964), Ferras/Dean Dixon (1965), Ricci/Joseph Post (1969), Pinchas Zukerman/Moshe Atzmon (1972), Itzhak Perlman/Willem van Otterloo (1973), Szeryng/Otterloo (1976), Szeryng/Charles Mackerras (1983), Frank Peter Zimmermann/ Yan Pascal Tortelier (1997), Gil Shaham/Paavo Järvi (2001), Arabella Steinbacher/Will Humburg (2005), Viktoria Mullova/Sir Donald Runnicles (2009), Ray Chen/Peter Oundjian (2011), Lisa Batiashvili/Vladimir Ashkenazy (2012), Janine Jansen/Daniel Blendlulf (2015) and Maxim Vengerov/David Robertson (2017).

Our most recent performance was in 2022, with Augustin Hadelich conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles.



Brahms and Joseph Joachim in 1855

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT MAURICE RAVEL

In some exasperation Ravel once asked a friend, 'Doesn't it ever occur to those people that I can be "artificial" by nature?' He was responding to the criticism that his music was more interested in technique than expression. There is some truth in the charge: Stravinsky described him – affectionately – as the 'Swiss watchmaker of music', and Ravel's stated aim was indeed 'technical perfection'. In fact, his love of mechanical intricacy led Ravel to collect various automata and other small machines, and he dreamed, as he put it in a 1933 article, of 'Finding Tunes in Factories'.

His passion for precision and order was also in evidence in his fastidious, even dandyish, appearance, but he was a man of great courage. In the First World War, despite being 39 years old, short and underweight, he cared for the wounded and after some months became a military truck driver. With his truck, 'Adelaïde', he faced a number of dangers, and for the rest of his life suffered terrible insomnia. (This experience may also have contributed to the debilitating aphasia of his last years when he could no longer write his own name, let alone the music which still rang in his head). His great Piano Trio, written during the War, puts paid to any idea that Ravel's music lacks an emotional heart.

Also during the war he stood against the chauvinistic Committee of the National League for the Defence of French Music, which proposed to ban performances of German and Austrian music.

Between 1900 and 1905 he had failed several times to secure the Prix de Rome, ostensibly because of musical 'errors' and despite his already having established himself as a major new voice.

In 1909 he helped to found the Société Musicale Indépendante – independent, that is, of the Parisian musical and academic establishment – and its inaugural concert saw the premiere of the first version, for piano duo, of the *Ma Mère l'oye* (Mother Goose) Suite.

Ravel's works are frequently, exquisite simulacra of existing styles and forms. In his *Tombeau de Couperin*, twentieth century piano music pays a genuine homage to the baroque suite and keyboard style of the earlier



Photo of Maurice Ravel published in *The Musical Times* on 1 December 1913.

French master. In *Gaspard de la nuit* he famously set out to write his version of Lisztian piano music, wryly suggesting that he 'might have overdone it'. His *Shéhérazade* songs evoke a typical early-20th century view of Asia where orchestration and subject matter relate directly to Russian music, especially that of Rimsky-Korsakov. His most famous piano piece, the *Pavane for a dead Infanta*, resurrects a gracious renaissance dance, tinged with his beloved Spanish idiom.



Ravel at the piano

Ravel was born in south-western France to a Basque mother and Swiss father, but spent his entire life in Paris. Like Tchaikovsky, he saw a strong connection between childhood and enchantment. In his opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* a destructive child learns the value of compassion when furniture, trees and animals in the garden all come magically to life. The evocation of 'the poetry of childhood' in the original piano duo version of *Mother Goose* led Ravel to 'simplify my style and refine my means of expression'.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT *MA MÈRE L'OYE*

The first version of this music, the *Mother Goose Suite (Ma Mère l'Oye)*, a set of five piano pieces for four hands, subtitled *Cinq pièces enfantines*, expressed Ravel's affection for two young children, to whom he dedicated the music:

...my young friends Mimi and Jean Godebski. My intention of awakening the poetry of childhood in these pieces naturally led me to simplify my style and thin out my writing.'

Two ten-year-old girls gave the first public performance of the piano duet version at the Salle Gaveau in 1910. Afterwards Ravel wrote to one of them, Jeanne Leleu:

Mademoiselle,

When you are a great virtuoso and I an old fogey, covered with honours or else completely forgotten, you will perhaps have pleasant memories of having given an artist the rare satisfaction of hearing a work of his, of a rather unusual nature, interpreted exactly as it should be. Thank you a thousand times for your child-like and sensitive performance of *Ma Mère l'Oye*.

In 1911 Ravel orchestrated the suite, and created the ballet for a production in 1912 at Jacques Rouché's Théâtre des Arts, adding a prelude, a new opening scene and interludes connecting the individual numbers. (He also altered the sequence of the original movements.) In either of these later forms, Ravel's orchestration brings an even greater sophistication to the music, and in places a certain opulence.

The title *Mother Goose* and most of the stories were taken by Ravel from Perrault's *Contes de Ma Mère l'Oye*, published in 1697. Ravel included some quotations from the stories at the relevant points in the music.

The *Prelude* sets the fairytale atmosphere with a key motif, tiny fanfares and a stirring of bird-song in the woodwinds, anticipates some of the music to come, then leads straight into the vivid *Dance of the Spinning Wheel*, which depicts the princess who pricks her finger and is plunged into a seemingly endless sleep.

Pavane de la Belle au Bois dormant (Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty) is only 20 bars long. Ravel had already composed a pavane for another princess, and this courtly dance of a slow, stately character, with its modal music, suggests the 'once-upon-a-time' character of the stories.

In the slow waltz music of *The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast*, the voice of Beauty is represented by the clarinet and that of the Beast by the contrabassoon. The conversations inscribed in the score are taken from the story by Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1757):

'When I think how good-natured you are, you do not seem so ugly.'

'Yes, I have indeed a kind heart, but I am a monster.'

'There are many men more monstrous than you.'

'If I had wit, I would invent a fine compliment to thank you, but I am only a beast.'

'Beauty, will you be my wife?'

'No, Beast!'

'I die content since I have had the pleasure of seeing you one more time.'

'No, my dearest Beast, you shall not die; you shall live to be my husband.'

The Beast had disappeared and she saw at her feet a Prince more handsome than the God of Love, thanking her for having ended his enchantment.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Tom Thumb (Petit Poucet) is prefaced with this quotation from Perrault's tale:

He believed that he would easily find his path by means of his bread crumbs which he had scattered wherever he passed, but he was very surprised when he could not find a single crumb – the birds had come and eaten everything up.

The changes in direction of the accompaniment, joined by solo oboe, depict Tom Thumb's lost wandering, and the chirruping of the birds is suggested not only by the woodwind, but by a solo violin playing harmonics – a similarity of sound likely to trick the listener who is not watching the players. (Ravel loved this kind of deception.)



Costume design for *Laideronnette* by Jacques Drésa for the premiere season of the ballet.

The story *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* is from a collection by the Comtesse d'Aulnoy, contemporary and imitator of Perrault. A former princess has been made ugly by a wicked witch – hence her name, which means 'Ugly Little Girl'. With a Green Serpent who had once been a handsome prince, she has voyaged by sea to the land of the Pagodas, tiny people like articulated figurines, with bodies made of

jewels and porcelain. Here the two travellers were restored to their former appearance and married. The scene described is the Empress' bath, accompanied by the Pagodas and Pagodines singing and playing on miniature instruments, brilliantly evoked by the music, whose Oriental features include the pentatonic scale and the gong. The slithering Green Serpent is there, too.

In the scenario of the ballet, the final movement forms an apotheosis: Prince Charming finds the Princess asleep in *The Magical Garden*. As the sun rises, she awakens; there is a joyous fanfare as the other characters gather around her and the Good Fairy blesses them all.

Ravel's *Mother Goose (Ma mère l'Oye)* is scored for 2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (second doubling cor anglais), 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons (second doubling contrabassoon); 2 horns; timpani, percussion, harp, celeste and strings.

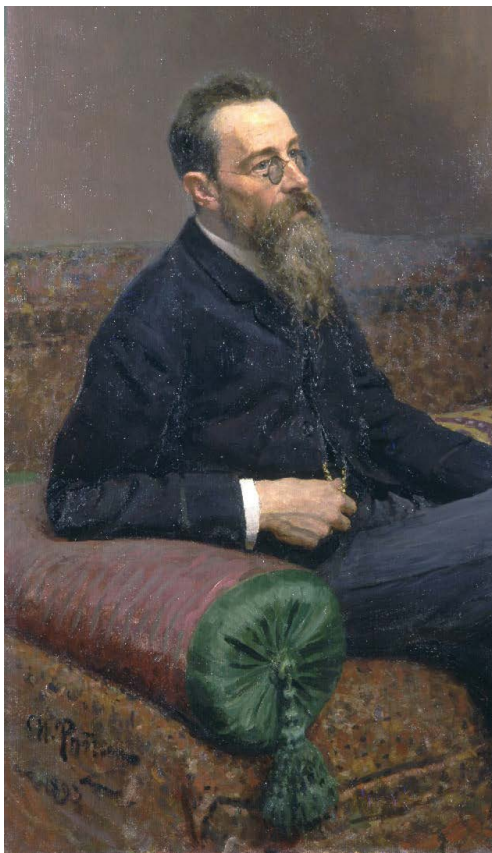
ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Russia in the 1860s was an amazing place. In 1861 this country, bypassed by western European movements such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment, suddenly dismantled its feudal system by emancipating its serfs. Social and political transformation was reflected in a burgeoning arts scene, with one group of painters, the Wanderers, 'seceding' from the St Petersburg Academy in 1863 in order to bring art to the people. 'Reality,' they believed, 'is more beautiful than its representation in art.' In the following decade these painters, along with composers and writers like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy would, under the patronage of the railway baron Savva Mamontov and other members of the mercantile class, inaugurate an immensely rich period of cultural experimentation. The 1860s also saw the foundation, by the Rubinstein brothers, of the great music conservatories in St Petersburg and Moscow.

In 1861 the young Rimsky-Korsakov, then serving in the Russian navy, met composer Mili Balakirev for the first time. With César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Alexander Borodin, they came to be known after 1867 as 'The Five', or in English the 'Mighty Handful', dedicated to producing music that was unpolluted by the influence and musical techniques of the West. Like the Wanderers, the Five wanted to express an unmediated, distinctly Russian reality. Under Balakirev's influence, Rimsky-Korsakov composed his First Symphony – before, as he later noted, he had ever 'harmonised a Bach chorale'.

Rimsky-Korsakov eventually realised, however, that a close study of Western forms and especially orchestration would enhance his musical vision. He became a superb technician and, appointed professor at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1871, teacher (of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and one or two others). He literally wrote the book on orchestration.



Portrait of Composer Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1893) by Ilya Repin (1844–1930).

Rimsky-Korsakov completed and polished the works of other members of The Five, especially those of Mussorgsky (*Boris Godonov* and *Khovanshchina*) and Borodin (*Prince Igor*), who both died before completing their best work.

Rimsky-Korsakov's embrace of Western idioms earned some scorn from nationalists, but against accusations of conservatism we might note his support for the students' strike in solidarity with striking workers in 1905 (many of whom were shot in the streets for their pains), which briefly cost him his job.

Rimsky-Korsakov was astonishingly prolific in most genres, including the symphony, songs, sacred music, keyboard works and opera, with pieces like *The Maid of Pskov*, *The Snow Maiden*, *The Golden Cockerel*, and *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (with its famous bumblebee) that are sadly neglected outside Russia.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE *CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL*

David Garrett writes:

It is a curious feature of cultural history that Spain, which had a great musical heritage in the Renaissance, and a folk music of striking vitality, virtually disappeared from the musical map for more than two centuries. It was left to 'foreign' composers resident in Spain to provide the 'Spanish' music: the Italians Domenico Scarlatti and Luigi Boccherini being the most famous among them.

In the 19th century, Romanticism attracted to Spain the traveller in search of the picturesque. Whether visiting Spain or merely travelling in the mind, Romantic composers made popular a certain musical view of Spain, drawing on the superficial features of rhythm, colour and expression in Spanish folk music - often urban street music. This is what Gilbert Chase has termed the 'Spanish Idiom'. Its notable purveyors included Bizet in *Carmen* and Lalo in his *Symphonie espagnole*.

Russian composers had also been fascinated by Spain, beginning with Glinka. While in Spain he was enraptured by the dancing, singing and guitar playing, which he wrote into several compositions, including *Jota aragonesa* (Spanish Overture No.1). Rimsky-Korsakov, a great master of brilliant orchestral colour, heard Glinka's piece at one of the first orchestral concerts he attended, and was dazzled by it. Later he cruised the Mediterranean as a naval officer, and later still, in 1887, he decided to emulate Glinka in making Spanish music the basis of a composition of his own. It was to be a study in virtuoso orchestration, in which, the composer insisted, the instrumental colouring was 'the very essence of the composition, not its mere dressing up'.

The *Capriccio espagnol* was one of Rimsky-Korsakov's greatest successes. The rehearsals were interrupted many times by the applause of the musicians. In five sections played without pause, it is unified by the *Alborada*, or morning song, which is treated to five variations, followed by the theme heard in a completely different

scoring. A series of cadenzas for solo instruments form the *Scene*, which leads to the passionately elaborated melody of the *Gypsy Song*, followed by the orgy of the *Fandango*. At the climax the dance adopts the theme of the *Alborada* for a conclusion of wild abandon.

Capriccio espagnol is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes (one doubling cor anglais), 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

It received its premiere on 31 October 1887 in St. Petersburg, performed by the Imperial Orchestra conducted by the composer.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the work in 1938, conducted by Percy Code.

Other notable performances include those led by Malcolm Sargent (1939), Eugene Goossens (1948, 1955), Nikolai Malko (1957), Okko Kamu (1975), John Lanchbery (1983 Sydney Festival), Stuart Challender (1989) and Edo de Waart (1996).

Our most recent performances were in 2007, led by Tugan Sokhiev.

**Notes by Gordon Kerry (composer overviews © 2025, Brahms Concerto © 2006);
Symphony Australia (Ravel © 2001);
David Garrett (*Capriccio espagnol* © 1988)**

Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson

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