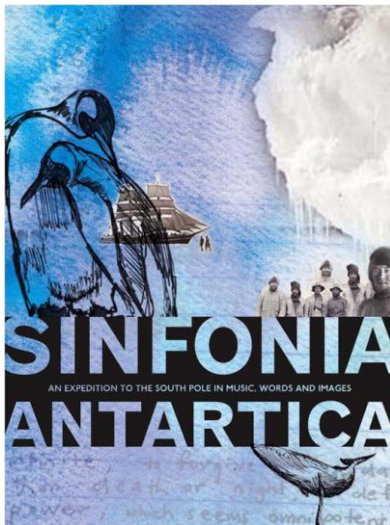


MEDIA RELEASE

Be transported to the icy heart of Antarctica where heroes are made...



March 14, Sydney – In a special multi-media event created by Sydney Symphony, the final days of Scott's famous and tragic expedition to Antarctica will be brought to life in words, images and music on March 22 & 24.. Built around the eloquent diary entries and farewell letters written by Captain Scott, the performance captures the silent drama of the South Pole and the intimate last moments of best friends faced with death a long way from home.

John Bell reads the last brave words from the diary of Scott's 1912 journey through Antarctica, where he and his team died just 11 miles from safety. Adding vision to the words, photographic images captured by Herbert Ponting on the expedition will be projected on-screen. And Sydney Symphony sets the scene to music with Vaughan Williams' "Sinfonia Antartica" (the Italian translation of 'Antarctic Symphony'), a haunting evocation of the sounds of the continent, capturing the icy wind, calls of whales and cries of birds, originally composed for the film *Scott of the Antarctic*.

Almost a hundred years ago the Antarctic represented the last frontier to the modern world – Scott's expedition was a heroic journey that captured the hearts and minds of the early 20th century. Transformed into a concert performance, "Sinfonia Antartica" will take audiences beyond the Sydney Opera House and into the icy maelstrom to experience the tragedy, beauty and pioneering spirit of young men on the journey of a lifetime.

The performance has been devised by Sydney Symphony, inspired by the images from the expedition and the seductive appeal of the white continent.

Raff Wilson, part of the artistic team at Sydney Symphony says 'I came across a book of Herbert Ponting's photographs from the expedition, and was stunned by what he managed to capture on film. Ponting shot the vastness and solitude of the icy landscapes, and the expedition's preparations for Scott's attempt on the South Pole. The Antarctic inspired so many adventurers at this time – people like Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and Mawson were instinctively drawn to the challenges of exploring such a desolate landscape. And their stories inspired artists and musicians such as Vaughan Williams in turn. Our concept is to combine Scott's journal, Ponting's images, and the music inspired by the Antarctic in this concert. The result is completely unique, and I'm very excited that it will be on our stage with John Bell and the Sydney Symphony.'

Also featuring as part of the concert is the Australian premiere of **Barry Conyngham's** *Monuments*. As Australian as Uluru and the Sydney Opera House, it in fact depicts both. This dazzling piano concerto originally written to celebrate the Australian Bicentenary is a breathtaking vehicle for the virtuosity of **Michael Kieran Harvey**.

For further information regarding Antarctic Symphony, interviews with Raff Wilson and/or performers, and photo opportunities, please contact:

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Concert details

**8pm, Thursday 22 & Saturday 24 March at Sydney Opera House Concert Hall
Pre-concert talk by Raff Wilson at 7.15pm in the Northern Foyer.**

To book tickets to Antarctic Symphony contact the Sydney Symphony Box Office on (02) 8215 4600 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri or visit www.sydneyssymphony.com.

Richard Mills conductor

Michael Kieran Harvey piano

John Bell speaker

by arrangement with Bell Shakespeare Company

Penelope Mills soprano

Cantillation

Images from Scott's expedition by **Herbert G. Ponting**

CONYNGHAM Monuments – Concerto for piano, synthesiser and orchestra (Australian Premiere)
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Sinfonia Antartica

Notes to editors:

Images used in Sydney Symphony's performance of Sinfonia Antartica are courtesy of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, UK.

Some historical facts about Captain Robert Scott's expedition to the Antarctic

1. Herbert Ponting's Life
2. Process of Photography in the Antarctic
3. Vaughan Williams and Film Music
4. The Scott Expedition
5. The Scott Journals – Attitudes and Criticisms

1 Herbert George Ponting was born in 1870, and was one of about one hundred applicants for the position of photographer for Scott's expedition. Styling himself as 'camera artist', Ponting was by that time already an internationally established artist. After unsuccessful attempts at working in banking, fruit farming, and gold mine speculation, Ponting had become serious about his photographic hobby, abandoned his wife and children, and headed for Asia. His extensive travels (1904-1909) in Japan, China, Burma, India and Ceylon yielded unprecedented landscape photography, and he also spent some time as a war correspondent, covering the Russo-Japanese war of 1905.

Captain Scott realised the importance of photographic coverage of the expedition, not only for scientific purposes, but also for sale to the press. To secure his services Ponting was paid a pound more per week than the other 'scientific' crewmembers. He was also allowed other benefits, including a generous allotment of space for his darkroom. By its nature Ponting's activities were set apart from the others'; photographing the heavy work of unloading the ship meant that he took no active part in it, a fact which the crew was quick to note – when it was time to unload Ponting's equipment, no volunteers stepped forward to assist!

Though by all accounts a highly-strung personality, Ponting was totally devoted to his mission, and spent all the available daylight hours taking photographs – a daunting task in the land of the Midnight Sun. When the permanent night of the Antarctic Winter fell, Ponting focused on life in the hut at Cape Evans, producing many fine indoor studies and portraits. With the coming of Summer 1911/12, having photographed the polar party heading southwards, Ponting's work was done. *Terra Nova* arrived to supply the main expedition party



in January 1912, and Ponting departed for New Zealand. Scott and his colleagues were still marching for the Pole.

After his return to England, Ponting undertook lecture tours, and released the silent film footage he had taken during the voyage. The disastrous end of the expedition drew attention to his work, but interest inevitably fell away with the outbreak of the First World War. Moreover, to his dismay Ponting found that Scott had signed agreements regarding his images with various newspapers, severely limiting the possibilities for him to profit from his work. Later in life he tried to market several inventions (including a puncture-proof inner tube for cars) without success. His career as a photographer stalled, and the last years of his life were spent unhappy and disillusioned. He died in 1935.

2. That the images projected in this concert exist at all is a miracle. All had to be painstakingly set up, posed and shot. The equipment required to take them was so bulky that Ponting had to haul it about on a sled; taking a spontaneous picture simply was not feasible. Cold conditions rendered every part of the process more difficult – ‘non-freezing’ oil actually did freeze in these extreme conditions, seizing up camera shutters and other moving parts.

Simple actions could easily go awry. Ponting wrote, ‘Often when my fingers touched metal they became frostbitten. Such a frostbite feels exactly like a burn. Once, thoughtlessly, I held a camera screw for a moment in my mouth. It froze instantly to my lips, and took the skin off them when I removed it. On another occasion, my tongue came into contact with a metal part of one of my cameras, whilst moistening my lips as I was focussing. It froze fast instantaneously; and to release myself I had to jerk it away, leaving the skin of the end of my tongue sticking to the camera...’

Condensation proved a major technical problem – simply breathing on a lens in the open air covered it with a film of ice, which had to be thawed off. Ponting learned to store his cameras outdoors; the moment they were brought in, they would start dripping with moisture. Likewise, photographic plates were brought indoors in stages taking two days. This was the only method to prevent their being instantly spoiled by the sudden change of temperature, and it still did not guarantee an undamaged photograph.

There were several accidents – Ponting was nearly caught on pack ice when several killer whales breached around him. On another occasion ice disintegrated beneath him, and only a dash for harder surface saved him and his equipment.

Several crewmembers also were injured posing for photographs, most notably Thomas Clissold, expedition cook, who fell from the summit of the ‘Matterhorn’ iceberg moments after his photograph had been taken – knocked unconscious, he was incapacitated for several weeks.

3. Although Vaughan Williams’ name is virtually synonymous with lush English pastoral music – his ‘Lark Ascending’, ‘Tallis’ Fantasia and ‘Pastoral’ Symphony (the latter damningly referred to as ‘a cow looking over a gate’ by Peter Warlock) being perhaps his best-loved works – his was a musical life always seeking new languages and boundaries. Descended from the august families of Darwin and Wedgwood, he profited from a modest private income to devote himself entirely to music. Editor of the first ‘English Hymnal’, director of the Bach Choir, a dedicated folksong collector, a student of Ravel and a sensitive orchestrator, with nine varied and complex symphonies to his name, he was a central figure on all levels of English music-making during his life.

He composed ten film scores, of which *Scott of the Antarctic* (1947) was the eighth. By all accounts he found the demands of the process exciting – Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote that ‘he became fascinated by the split-hair timings: a second of music meant *exactly* a second of music and this was quite a new frame to musical thought.’ By the time of *Scott of the Antarctic* he was also experienced enough to demand control of the use of all music and sound effects on the film – and indeed, for the bleak sound world of the *Scott* film, his choice of wordless voices presented difficulties. The studio feared it would obscure the dialogue. The composer held firm, however and the chorus and soprano solo sections were used in the film. As with his other incidental music, Vaughan Williams obviously envisaged a broader application for his *Scott* material. Five years later he adapted it to become his seventh symphony.

4. The Scott Expedition

By 1909, the South Pole was regarded as the last frontier for exploration on the surface of the Earth. Robert Falcon Scott’s second expedition to the Antarctic was intended to plant the Union Jack at the Pole, as well as carry out scientific research. Biology, meteorology, and geology were all to be studied, while simultaneously, preparations were made for the push to the pole. Scott’s converted whaling ship, the *Terra Nova* departed New Zealand on 29 November 1910. After encountering very heavy weather on the southward journey, the ship navigated pack ice for three weeks. Arriving at Cape Evans on 4 January, 1911, Scott established his base camp, and set about his study program, and the laying of supply depots for the polar party. This party of five arrived at the pole on January 17 1912, to find that Roald Amundsen’s rival

Norwegian party had camped there about a month previously. Scott and his four companions perished on the return journey. His body, with those of Henry Bowers and Edward Wilson, was found in their tent, six months after their death. Alongside them were their journals, final letters, their small camera, and a sled of geological samples they had collected en route.

5.

The Scott Journals – Attitudes and criticisms

Scott's last writings became a template for English self-sacrifice and courage. His eloquent diary was a best-seller; the poignant story of Oates leaving the tent so that his companions might survive entered the pantheon of English heroism. In English eyes, the noble failure of the expedition far eclipsed Amundsen's success. Scott's diary became a popular parting gift to soldiers during the First World War – and Ralph Vaughan Williams, who drove army ambulances from the trenches to hospitals, would certainly have seen these volumes in the possession of the wounded.

Scott's later biographers found plenty to criticise, however. Why did Scott take four companions on the final push, when supplies had been laid in for only three? Why did he persist in dragging 14 kilograms of rock samples on the return journey, even as his team succumbed to serious frostbite? Ealing Studio's lavish 1948 film adaptation raised these same questions, depicting Scott's misguided faith in rudimentary motor sledges, and implying that Amundsen's expedition was much more professionally organised. The film is a celebration of British team spirit, as well as a criticism of its obvious limitations – Scott's best friends follow their flawed leader unquestioningly and pay the ultimate price. Whatever the conclusions drawn, Scott's writings, Ponting's images, and the heroic pathos of this story, remain powerful elements to conjure with.

Further reading

R.V.W. A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams by Ursula Vaughan Williams. Oxford University Press, 1964.

The Great White South by Herbert G. Ponting. Duckworth and Company, 1950. (With thanks to Elizabeth Johnston)

Scott of the Antarctic by David Crane. Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.

The Photographs of HG Ponting by Beau Riffenburgh and Liz Cruwys. Discovery Gallery, 1998. (With thanks to Rory Jeffes)

Film: 90 Degrees South: With Scott to the Antarctic. Directed by Herbert Ponting (With thanks to Elizabeth Johnston)