

MEDIA RELEASE

Sydney Symphony turns 75! The Brahms Festival begins in celebratory style.

**15 February – 3 March
Sydney Opera House Concert Hall**

Sydney, February 15 – Sydney Symphony kicks off its 75th birthday celebrations with a special gala performance of Brahms German Requiem, accompanied by a splash of flowers, cake and champagne for all concert-goers. Attended by Her Excellency the President of the Republic of Finland, the Hon Senator Brandis, Federal Minister for Arts and Sport and special guests, the evening is a true celebration of both the artistic excellence and community engagement of Sydney Symphony in 2007.

The Sydney Symphony was established in 1932 and one of its first major projects was to perform the music of Brahms for the centenary anniversary of the composer's birth in 1933. Now, in its 75th year, the Sydney Symphony, under the baton of its Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Maestro Gianluigi Gelmetti, pays homage to its beginnings by launching its 2007 anniversary season with a Brahms Festival, giving the people of Sydney a unique insight into the music of this orchestral genius.

The Sydney Symphony has performed many festivals throughout its 75-year history, most recently a Sibelius Cycle in 2004 and Shostakovich Festival in 2002. Such composer-led musical celebrations are treasured not only by musicians of the Orchestra, but by audience members who are given the chance to embark on a musical journey with the Orchestra.

According to Maestro Gelmetti, festivals offer a rare chance to hear a composer's full cycle of works and discover new insights into the spirit of the music and its creation.

"Performing such festivals is a special challenge. It's a remarkable test of stamina but it can also take an orchestra's playing to a new level. It gives the orchestra and audiences the chance to focus on a composer's unique style, ideas and sound and understand them on a much deeper level," Maestro Gelmetti said.

Brahms is undoubtedly considered of one the greatest composers of the 19th century and his expressive compositions still speak to us today with their warmth, long lyrical melodies and rich harmonies. His music is also rigorous and precise but this is only a means to an end, a way to create the thrilling climaxes, soaring melodies and dusky, autumnal sonorities that make him so special.

For Sydney Symphony Principal Oboe, Diana Doherty, Brahms is one of the reasons to be an orchestral player rather than a soloist.

"The music envelops you," says Doherty. "It's totally satisfying both technically and emotionally and to play all Brahms' pieces together is a wonderful opportunity to feel and hear the works in context. Brahms Symphony No. 1 was the first work I ever played in an orchestra. When we began playing I didn't understand Brahms but by the end of that performance I was head over heels in love with him!"

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Brahms German Requiem

Considered one of the great choral masterpieces in classical music, Brahms' German Requiem, stands as an example of what composer/conductor Leonard Bernstein was referring to when he said Brahms composed music that 'enriched and ennobled the world'. The Sydney Symphony season opening gala performances of this breathtaking work on 15 and 17 February marks the start of the Brahms Festival which continues throughout February.

Bringing this piece to life along with Maestro Gelmetti and the Orchestra are two spectacular singers, German soprano Marlis Petersen and Austrian baritone Markus Werba, each chosen by Maestro Gelmetti for their soaring talents.

Extraordinarily warm and consoling, this masterful requiem was composed not for the dead, but for the living. It's an uplifting tribute to everlasting life and a memorial for Brahms' mother and his mentor Robert Schumann.

Of Brahms and his German Requiem, Sydney Symphony Principal Cello, Catherine Hewgill says, "Brahms is one of my absolute favourite composers, the music is so soul searching, like a sense of beginning. As an orchestral musician, he's such a wonderful composer to play as all the parts are so rich and lovely. I first played the Brahms German Requiem at 14 in Perth. I hadn't understood him before but whenever I play Brahms now I am reminded of that time of discovery."

The four Brahms Symphonies

The Brahms Festival continues in late February and early March when Maestro Gelmetti and the Orchestra perform the composer's four magnificent symphonies. By nature conscientious and severely self-critical, Brahms approached the symphonic genre with great care and deliberation – his first symphony took more than 14 years to compose. These compelling and finely crafted compositions are clothed in a grandeur and richness that will see the Orchestra at its best.

"The opening of Brahms Symphony No. 1 is such a powerful statement," says Sydney Symphony Principal Double Bass, Kees Boersma. "It's one of the great moments in classical music. Like all great works, its newness may be lost but its effect will never be. As a whole the symphonies are perfect, not too overwhelmingly big, but rich and luscious and so satisfying to play."

Experiencing all the Brahms symphonies is to experience a self-contained universe of emotion, something which is hard to replicate fully on a CD. To feel the full effect of Brahms' music you need the space of a concert-hall and the detail you can only get from live performance, and who better to bring this to life than the Sydney Symphony in its 75th year at its home in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

On Sunday 11 February, as part of the Sydney Symphony Brahms Festival, the NSW Art Gallery will host a special lecture on the life and times of Brahms. Presented by Christopher Allen, the event also includes morning tea and a light lunch.

In celebration of its 75th anniversary, the Sydney Symphony will treat audiences to not only one, but three festivals throughout 2007 celebrating and showcasing the lives and works of three of the world's greatest composers, Brahms (February), Beethoven (June) and Rachmaninov (November).

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

To hear musical excerpts from music to be performed at the Brahms Festival, visit www.sydneyphilharmonicsymphony.com/brahms

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For further information regarding the Brahms Festival, interviews with musicians and photo opportunities, please contact:

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Photographs of this evening's performance are available on request.

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Brahms Festival concert details

BRAHMS' GERMAN REQUIEM

15 and 17 February

Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Gianluigi Gelmetti conductor

Marlis Petersen soprano
Markus Werba baritone
Cantillation Chorus

*Approximate duration: 75 minutes.
The concert will be performed without
an interval.*

Tickets from \$72

BRAHMS' SYMPHONIES 1 AND 3

22, 23, 24, 26 February

Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Gianluigi Gelmetti conductor

BRAHMS Symphony No.3
BRAHMS Symphony No.1

Tickets from \$53

BRHAMS' SYMPHONIES 2 AND 4

28 February, 2, 3 March

Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Gianluigi Gelmetti conductor

BRAHMS Symphony No.2
BRAHMS Symphony No.4

Tickets from \$58

Notes to editors

Marlis Petersen

Soprano

After her studies at the Academy of Music in Stuttgart, German soprano Marlis Petersen went on to win numerous prizes throughout Germany. She has performed in a variety of roles at opera houses throughout Europe and since the beginning of the 1998/99 season, she has been a member of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf.

In recent seasons, she has sung with great success at the Opéra Bastille in Paris and at the Metropolitan Opera and made a successful debut at the Vienna State Opera and at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London.

Her future appearances include numerous concerts in Europe and USA as well as guest appearances at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and Vienna State Opera.

Markus Werba

Baritone

Born in Kartnen, Austria, Markus has sung a wide range of roles throughout Europe including performances at the Mozart Festival in Vienna, Zurich Opera and the Hamburg State Opera and in 2005 he had a great success as Papageno in Mozart's The Magic Flute at the Salzburg Festival in 2005 with Riccardo Muti conducting. Markus has also cultivated an extensive recital and concert career giving recitals in Trieste, Wigmore Hall and in the Musikverein, Vienna.

In 2006, Markus will make his debut at La Scala, Milan and will return to the Salzburg Festival.