

MEDIA RELEASE

11 FEBRUARY 2009

Vladimir Ashkenazy officially opens the Sydney Symphony's 2009 season with a midsummer night full of madness, mayhem and music

**Wed 25 Feb – Mon 2 Mar
(including Season Opening Gala Performance on Thu 26 Feb)**

Sydney Opera House, Concert Hall

The time has come

One of the most exciting partnerships ever to occur in the Australian arts scene begins in February when Vladimir Ashkenazy officially starts his tenure as Sydney Symphony Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor. He opens the Season by bringing together two artforms – music and theatre – in a magical concoction set to dazzle Sydney audiences.

It's Mendelssohn in the full flight of genius and Shakespeare at his comic best when the Orchestra and Mr Ashkenazy perform the overture and complete incidental music of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with actors delivering an abridged presentation of Shakespeare's play.

The production Sydney audiences will see was first performed by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in London in 2005 and was produced by acclaimed Shakespearean director Tim Carroll who is currently Associate Director of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The Sydney Symphony is honoured that Tim Carroll will be coming to Sydney to direct these performances for the Sydney Symphony.

According to Mr Ashkenazy: "The Shakespeare play is fantastic, unbelievable – you never know what is reality and what is a fairytale. And it's one of the best works that Mendelssohn ever wrote. He was only 17 at the time – can you imagine? I don't know how it's possible. I feel so small and humble next to his music.

"As the world marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Mendelssohn in 2009, I think it's fitting to open my inaugural season with the Sydney Symphony with one of his most loved works."

Ashkenazy's appointment as Sydney Symphony Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor was for him a logical progression from a collaboration that began when he first performed with the Orchestra in 1969.

"When I played concertos with the Sydney Symphony in the 1960's they were already very, very good," says Ashkenazy. "But I think they are even more receptive now, and somehow freer. It's a very good atmosphere."

"Sydney is a beautiful city...The people are absolutely wonderful, very unpretentious and sincere, and I'm happy to be with them. The Orchestra was always very warm to me, and they played wonderfully for me. When they offered me the position, I was very touched, and I thought, why not? It makes sense. I thought it very logical, and conducive to an interesting collaboration."

To date the collaboration has generated numerous sell-out performances in acclaimed composer festivals; Sibelius (2004), Rachmaninov (2007) and Elgar (2008) with a Prokofiev Festival planned for November 2009.

“The Orchestra is thrilled at this exciting musical partnership with Mr Ashkenazy,” says Sydney Symphony Managing Director Libby Christie. “We are certain audiences will enjoy the breath-taking performances Mr Ashkenazy has planned for his time in Sydney. His appointment has created such a buzz in Australia and around the world that we feel honoured to have him leading our wonderful musicians.”

For more information about Vladimir Ashkenazy, read his biography and see a timeline of his Australian performances, visit www.sydneyphilharmonysymphony.com/ashkenazy

CONCERT DETAILS

A MIDSUMMER NIGHTS DREAM

Wed 25 February, 8pm*

Thu 26 February, 8pm – OFFICIAL SEASON OPENING GALA (BLACK TIE OPTIONAL)

Fri 27 February, 8pm*

Sat 28 February, 8pm*

Mon 2 March, 7pm**

***EnergyAustralia Master Series**

**** Veuve Clicquot Series**

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor

Penelope Mills soprano

Sian Pendry mezzo-soprano

Sydney Philharmonia choirs

and a company of actors

Tim Carroll director

Tickets from \$35 (booking fee may apply). To book tickets call the Sydney Symphony box office on: 8215 4600 or visit www.sydneyphilharmonysymphony.com

Pre-concert talk in the Sydney Opera House Northern Foyer 45 minutes before the start of each performance.

For further information or interviews please contact:

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