

Vladimir Ashkenazy conducts the Sydney Symphony's Prokofiev Festival

31 October – 20 November

Sydney Opera House, concert hall

*"In the end, he (Prokofiev) was just another human being who tried to express this in his music" -
Vladimir Ashkenazy.*

He brought us the Sibelius, Rachmaninoff and Elgar Festivals and now Sydney Symphony Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Vladimir Ashkenazy is set to thrill Sydney audiences again with his 2009 Prokofiev Festival with the Sydney Symphony.

Over three weeks and four separate programs, audiences will be taken on a journey through Prokofiev's compositional career and explore the many musical personalities of the man who wrote some of the most influential works of the 20th-century and who many called 'the prodigal Russian'.

The festival will feature an array of Prokofiev's orchestral works including both violin concertos performed by Russian **Boris Belkin**, three of the piano concertos with soloist **Alexander Gavrylyuk** and three of the symphonies.

Born in the Ukraine in 1891, Prokofiev studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory under Rimsky-Korsakov, and subsequently had a successful early career. After the October Revolution, following Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev fled Russia, leading the charge of Russian composers and artists emigrating to the west. Unlike most, however, Prokofiev returned to Russia to settle in 1936.

Mr Ashkenazy (who has performed and recorded all Prokofiev's piano concertos) views Prokofiev's output as the product of a complex and troubled life: "Prokofiev's fate was not enviable. He decided to settle in the Soviet Union in the mid 1930s and they promised him that he'd be taken care of. But he wasn't. They stopped his travel abroad. Before then he had been very witty and sarcastic, making fun of everything, but you can't make fun of the Soviet Union. You had to be very careful. And of course he was denounced, along with Shostakovich, for writing music that was not supported by the masses. My country was really something, I tell you!"

PROGRAM 1: Classical Prokofiev

Opening the festival is none other than Prokofiev's most popular symphony – the *Classical Symphony*. This sparkling work is paired with the Fifth Symphony, which Ashkenazy regards as one of the great creations of Prokofiev's soviet years, whose music represents "the greatness of the human spirit". In between is music that shows Prokofiev's lyrical side – the Violin Concerto No.2.

PROGRAM 2: Prokofiev: First and Final

At his graduation competition, Prokofiev performed his first piano concerto because he figured he had a better chance of winning if the judges didn't know the music (he was right!). In the second program of the festival, **Alexander Gavrylyuk** will take the spotlight to perform this dazzling, bravura work. The dreamy lyricism and fairytale atmosphere of the First Violin Concerto presents a pleasing contrast and will be captured here by **Boris**

Belkin. Prokofiev’s final work, the rarely heard Seventh Symphony brings a nostalgic mood and a renewed sense of classical beauty, while the lively and vigorous music of The Love for Three Oranges Suite reflects the hilarious comic opera it derives from.

PROGRAM 3: Prokofiev the romantic

Underneath Prokofiev’s cheeky wit, sarcasm and brilliance was a romantic soul, which audiences will discover in program 3. He was capable of lyrical and irresistible melodies – nowhere more poignant than in *Romeo and Juliet* – one of the great musical interpretations of this timeless love story. The Sixth Symphony from 1947 shares some of its tragic mood. With the Third Piano Concerto, the romantic Prokofiev shines through when **Alexander Gavrylyuk** again joins Ashkenazy and the Sydney Symphony.

PROGRAM 4: Prokofiev’s Russian magic

In part 4 of the festival, Prokofiev’s voice comes through in the much-loved symphonic fairytale *Peter and the Wolf*, with its colourful music and laconic narration – provided by the eloquent John Bell. In the Lieutenant Kije: Suite, an invented scapegoat takes on a life of his own and soprano **Jacqueline Porter** brings to life Prokofiev’s adaptation of the famous fairytale ‘The Ugly Duckling’. These adventures frame the unusual Fifth Piano Concerto, performed by **Alexander Gavrylyuk**, with its five movements shimmering like a string of finely cut jewels.

Ashkenazy’s Prokofiev festival is being recorded for international distribution.

Tickets can be purchased by phoning the Sydney Symphony Box Office on 02 8215 4600 or visiting www.sydneyphilharmonic.com.

ENDS

For further information, images and interview requests, please contact:

Yvonne Zammit
 PR Manager, Sydney Symphony
 Tel. + 61 2 8215 4612 / 0410 761 578
yvonne.zammit@sydneyphilharmonic.com

NOTE TO EDITORS:

ASHKENAZY’S PROKOFIEV FESTIVAL

Part 1: Classical Prokofiev	Part 2: Prokofiev: First and Final	Part 3: Prokofiev the Romantic	Part 4: Prokofiev’s Russian Magic
Sat 31 Oct, 8pm Mon 2 Nov, 7pm	Fri 6 Nov, 8pm Sat 7 Nov, 8pm	Fri 13 Nov, 11am* Sat 14 Nov, 2pm	Wed 18 Nov, 8pm Thu 19 Nov, 1.30pm Fri 20 Nov, 8pm
Vladimir Ashkenazy, conductor Boris Belkin, violin	Vladimir Ashkenazy, conductor Boris Belkin, violin Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano	Vladimir Ashkenazy, conductor Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano	Vladimir Ashkenazy, conductor Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano John Bell, narrator Jacqueline Porter, soprano
Classical Symphony Violin Concerto No.2 Symphony No.5	Violin Concerto No.1 Piano Concerto No.1 The Love for Three Oranges: Suite Symphony No.7	Romeo and Juliet: Suite Piano Concerto No.3* Symphony No.6*	Lieutenant Kijé: Suite Piano Concerto No.5 The Ugly Duckling, for voice and orchestra Peter and the Wolf