

Briger returns for The Hall of Heroes

17, 18, 19 March 2010, Sydney Opera House, Concert Hall

After leaving Australia as a rising star, conductor Alex Briger is returning to Sydney as a firmly established name. He joins a growing list of talented Australians coming home to embrace the opportunities of our thriving classical music scene. This March he conducts the Sydney Symphony in three performances titled *The Hall of Heroes*.

The *Hall of Heroes* celebrates the richness of classical music making in Australia through Briger's superb conducting and James Ledger's powerful composition *Arcs and Planes*. It's a piece which Briger is certain will resonate with many.

"In twelve minutes Ledger covers many emotions – from fierce and rhythmical percussion to a beautiful and mystical middle section full of very moving harmonies in the strings," he explains. "I think this will really appeal to Sydney audiences."

In what will be Sydney debut of this piece, Ledger's composition sits alongside works by two of the greats – Beethoven's heroic Piano Concerto No. 5 (the 'Emperor' Concerto) and orchestral highlights from Wagner's epic cycle of operas, *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

It's been a hectic few years for the 41-year-old Briger, who has made a name for himself in Europe with ensembles such as the Philharmonia Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and BBC Symphony Orchestra, as well as the Orchestre de Paris, Berlin Symphony Orchestra and Rotterdam Philharmonic. He has also toured China and Japan, and is currently conducting Opera Australia's productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

He first conducted the Sydney Symphony in 2005, and for him conducting the orchestra in the Sydney Opera House concert hall is always a thrill. For three years, Briger's uncle and mentor, Sir Charles Mackerras, was the Sydney Symphony's Chief Conductor. It was a performance by the Sydney Symphony and Mackerras when Briger was 12 years old which convinced him to follow in his uncle's footsteps.

"I remember I was extremely nervous the first time I conducted the Sydney Symphony because of the complete respect I had for them," Briger says. "Being my home-town orchestra it was so important to me that it went well, and they were so encouraging and relaxing. It's more important to me that I have a good relationship with this orchestra than with any other. Thankfully things have gone to plan so far!"

For the *Hall of Heroes*, Briger himself has chosen the highlights from Wagner's larger than life *Ring of the Nibelung* for *The Hall of Heroes*, and it's a work which holds special significance for the conductor.

"I grew up with *The Ring* and it was kind of drilled into me as a child," he says. "We used to have Wagner weekends listening to the entire *Ring* with many different types of recordings. I can't put into one sentence how deeply I feel about these operas and I detest seeing them badly done!"

“This music is really special for symphony orchestras to play. It rarely comes up for them – the Orchestra’s *Ring* cycle with Edo de Waart was really quite unusual. And it’s so huge and emotional, a wonderful and rare experience.”

For these concerts, Briger and the Sydney Symphony will be joined by French pianist François-Frédéric Guy, making his Australian debut with Beethoven’s famous ‘Emperor’ Concerto.

For Briger, collaborating with Guy is an opportunity not only to work with a magnificent musician, but also to catch up with an old friend. They first worked together with the Orchestre de Paris in 2004, and have relished each opportunity to work together since.

“It was like a dream. We clicked and have never looked back,” Briger explains. “I always feel relaxed when he is at the piano as he has that aura. Performing with him is always a musical highlight for me, the orchestra and the audience – whether in Paris, London or Australia!”

With his exceptional command of keyboard sonority, Guy has made a speciality of works on the grandest scale, and has been described as being able to play Beethoven “like an old friend”. Guy’s talents will also be on show in the Sydney Symphony’s International Pianists in Recital series – his program of solo piano music by Chopin and Beethoven includes the famous ‘Moonlight’ Sonata.

ENDS

CONCERT DETAILS

The Hall of Heroes

17, 18 March 6.30pm

*19 March 11am

Sydney Opera House, Concert Hall

Alexander Briger conductor

François-Frédéric Guy piano

LEDGER Arcs and Planes

***BEETHOVEN** Piano Concerto No.5 (Emperor)

***WAGNER** The Ring of the Nibelung: An Orchestral Suite

François-Frédéric Guy in Recital

8 March 7pm

City Recital Hall, Angel Place

François-Frédéric Guy piano

CHOPIN

Nocturne in C minor, Op.48 No.1

Nocturne in E, Op.62 No.2

Polonaise-fantaisie, Op.61

BEETHOVEN

Sonata No.31 in A flat, Op.110

‘Tempest’ Sonata, Op.31 No.2

‘Moonlight’ Sonata, Op.27 No.2

Tickets from \$35 (booking fee of \$4 - \$8.50 may apply).

Bookings through Sydney Symphony 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday on 8215 4600 or select your own seat at:

www.sydneyphilharmonicsymphony.com

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