

2009 SEASON
MEET THE MUSIC

A HERO'S LIFE

Wednesday 5 August | 6.30pm
Thursday 6 August | 6.30pm
Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Simone Young conductor
Cédric Tiberghien piano

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Variations on a theme by Haydn, Op.56a

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)
Piano Concerto No.2

Allegro
Adagio – Presto – Adagio
Allegro molto

INTERVAL

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)
Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op.40

Der Held (The Hero)
Des Helden Widersacher (The Hero's enemies)
Des Helden Gefährtin (The Hero's companion)
Des Helden Walstatt (The Hero's deeds of war)
Des Helden Friedenswerke (The Hero's works of peace)
Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung
(The Hero's retirement from the world)

This concert will be introduced by Andrew Ford, award-winning composer, writer and broadcaster, and presenter of *The Music Show* on ABC Radio National.



Wednesday night's performance will be broadcast live across Australia on ABC Classic FM.



Wednesday night's performance will be webcast by BigPond. Visit sydney.com.au/symphony/bigpondmusic.com

Pre-concert talk by Genevieve Lang at 5.45pm in the Northern Foyer.

Estimated timings:
17 minutes, 28 minutes,
20-minute interval, 40 minutes

The concert will conclude at approximately 8.35pm.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Simone Young conductor

RETO KLAR



Australian-born Simone Young is General Manager and Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Music Director of the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg, and

has celebrated many successes including the commencement of the Hamburg *Ring* Cycle. She was Music Director of Opera Australia (2001–2003), Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra (1999–2002) and has conducted the Berlin, Vienna, Munich, London and New York Philharmonic orchestras, the Staatskapelle Dresden and the Bruckner Orchestra, Linz.

She is an acknowledged interpreter of Wagner and Strauss operas, and has conducted *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to acclaim at the Berlin and Vienna State Opera companies. She has also worked with the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Metropolitan Opera, the Bastille in Paris, Covent Garden, Los Angeles Opera and Houston Grand Opera. At Opera Australia her opera and concert work with the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, and her development of musical standards in the company received praise from the profession and the public.

Simone Young has received numerous prestigious awards and accolades, and in 2004 was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. In 2007 she was elected to the Akademie der Kuenste (Academy of Artists) in Hamburg and nominated as Conductor of the Year by *Opernwelt* magazine. Her most recent engagement with the Sydney Symphony was in 2007 when she conducted the *Turangalila-symphonie*.

Cédric Tiberghien piano

ERIC MANAS



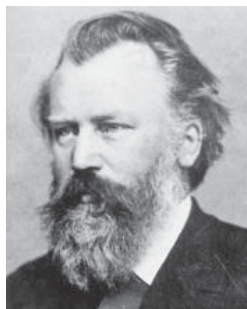
Cédric Tiberghien studied at the Paris Conservatoire and was awarded a Premier Prix in 1992, aged 17. He was subsequently a prizewinner at several

international piano competitions, culminating with the First Prize and five special awards at the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud Competition in Paris in 1998. Since then he has enjoyed the momentum of an international career as concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, performing in some of the world's most prestigious concert halls and appearing in leading festivals in Britain, Europe and Japan.

With more than 50 concertos in his repertoire, he has appeared with an impressive line-up of international orchestras and collaborated with conductors such as Jiří Bělohlávek, Myung-Whun Chung, Christoph Eschenbach, Kurt Masur, Ivan Fischer, Leif Segerstam and Louis Langrée, as well as Simone Young. Highlights of future engagements include the Hamburg, Rotterdam and Malaysian philharmonic orchestras, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre de Paris. In 2011 he will be the guest of Musikkollegium Winterthur for a Bach project that will include keyboard concertos and Book II of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

His recordings include Brahms' First Piano Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and five recital discs of music by Debussy, Beethoven, Bach, Chopin and Brahms. Cédric Tiberghien made his Sydney debut in 2007 in performances of the *Turangalila-symphonie* and in recital.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



JOHANNES BRAHMS

German composer
(1833–1897)

Variations on a theme by Haydn

The Variations begin by setting out the theme (not actually by Haydn, as it turns out). This is followed by eight variations. The first three are energetic, the fourth is melancholy. The remaining variations form a kind of scherzo, with the playful variations 5, 6 and 8 and a contrasting interlude in the graceful variation 7. The conclusion to the whole work takes the form of a grand passacaglia, giving the music the overall shape of a symphony (fast movement, slow movement, scherzo and finale).

Even though his musical language represents mid-19th-century Romanticism in all its richness and emotive power, Brahms is often thought of as a reactionary: he valued classical forms and admired composers of the ‘distant’ past such as Bach. This emerges in his adoption of older forms such as the baroque passacaglia, which also provides the structure for the finale of his Fourth Symphony. Brahms composed the Variations in 1873, at the age of 40 and three years before he completed his first symphony.

Brahms’ inspiration was a manuscript unearthed by a librarian friend in Vienna, Carl Ferdinand Pohl, who also wrote the first comprehensive biography of Haydn. The manuscript contained six divertimentos for wind band, and included as one of the movements a “Corale St Antonii”. These pieces are now thought to be by Ignaz Pleyel, certainly not by Haydn, and the St Anthony Chorale is possibly an old Austrian pilgrims’ hymn.

Brahms imitates the wind-band sonority of the original divertimento by presenting the theme with pairs of woodwinds (plus a contrabassoon), four horns and two trumpets. The only strings at first are cellos and basses providing a plucked bass line. The variations themselves explore sweeping string figures; more delicate, Romantic ideas; brilliant rhythmic juxtapositions, and (in No.7) the lilting pulse of the *siciliano*, a baroque dance. For the great finale Brahms takes a bass line of just ten notes, repeated over and over as the ground bass of the passacaglia, and builds a ‘kaleidoscopic edifice, rising inexorably to a majestic return of the full chorale theme’.

Navigating the Variations

About the composer

Not by Haydn

In the classical spirit



BÉLA BARTÓK
Hungarian composer
(1881–1945)

Piano Concerto No.2

In 1931, when he composed his second piano concerto, Bartók was obsessed with symmetry in musical structure, and this is the thing to listen for. The concerto is in three movements: two fast movements (*Allegro*) framing what is basically a slow movement. This central movement is itself in a symmetrical ‘arch form’, with the slow *adagio* sections framing a *presto* (‘as fast as possible’). To cap it off, the finale recalls musical ideas from the first movement.

Bartók was a piano virtuoso and both his piano concertos are demanding, challenging works. (For a long time Bartók was the only pianist who played his first concerto.) He gave the premiere of the second concerto in 1933, his final appearance in Germany. His influences included baroque keyboard music, especially its motor-like toccatas and intricately woven melodies. He also took inspiration from Hungarian and other folk music, which he collected. The music of Stravinsky, who had also discovered an interest in music of the past, left its mark as well. Finally, Bartók’s own style as a pianist belonged to the 19th-century Romantic tradition, bringing flexibility and colour to his often driving and percussive music.

“I think [my First Piano Concerto] is a good work in spite of the slight or even considerable difficulties it presents to both orchestra and audience. For this reason, I wanted my Second Concerto...to be a kind of antithesis to the First, easier in its orchestra part and more lucid in its structure. This is the purpose and at the same time the reason for the more conventional and simpler treatment of most of the themes.”

In a concerto the soloist always claims the most attention, but listen and look for the way Bartók employs the orchestra, and in particular the way he highlights choirs of instruments. The first movement, for example, uses woodwinds, brass and percussion only; the second movement includes a hymn-like section for strings and timpani, and then in the Presto just strings with a few winds and percussion. Only in the finale (*Allegro molto*) does he bring in the full orchestra for the first time.

Navigating the Concerto

About the composer

The composer writes...

Bartók’s use of the orchestra

Listen, too, for the imitative dialogue between horn and piano and the way Bartók dispels – often in humorous ways – textures that threaten to become too intricate. In the second movement the duo arrangement is between piano and timpani, in fact the piano is introduced with a timpani roll. The strings are given an almost completely static pattern of chords. A highlight of the finale is a section of shimmering colour, a moment of calm before the brilliant conclusion.



RICHARD STRAUSS
German composer
(1864–1949)

A Hero's Life, Op.40

A Hero's Life ('Ein Heldenleben' in the original German) is a tone poem – a symphonic work in which the structure is determined by an extramusical scenario rather than by Classical forms (sonata form, rondo and so on). The music is in six movements, played continuously, and each is given a title.

The music calls for a huge orchestra: quadruple winds (four of each of the main instrument types: flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons); eight horns, five trumpets, three trombones, tuba and tenor tuba; timpani and percussion, two harps and a string section of at least 60 players.

Strauss was a proudly German artist, whose tone poems attempt to bring together the philosophical and descriptive with the abstract ideals of the symphonic tradition. And he was blessed with a healthy ego. Referring to *A Hero's Life*, he told his friend Romain Rolland: 'I fail to see why I should not write a symphony about myself; I consider I am just as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.'

Strauss was, however, given to self-conscious exaggeration, and we should take his quip about being 'as interesting as Napoleon' with a grain of salt, especially in light of his remark to his father that it was only partly true that Strauss himself was the 'hero' of *Ein Heldenleben*. Rather, he was trying to embody a 'general and free ideal of great and manly heroism'. It is Strauss' life *as an artist* which furnishes the 'autobiographical' elements of *A Hero's Life*,

Navigating *A Hero's Life*

About the composer

and those elements could be recognised in the life of any creative individual.

The Hero is introduced with two themes, an unadorned idea that begins low in the horns and strings and bounds up to the higher registers, and (after a climax) the hero's 'ultimatum', which is stated six times. The 'answer' comes eventually from the Hero's enemies, and since the Hero is an Artist, those enemies are Critics – pedants all! The thin-lipped solos for flute and oboe suggest smug, unpleasant types. The trudging tubas represent the Munich critic, Doktor Döhning. The hero's long and beautiful melody simply provokes the critics to more hysterical attacks.

The Hero's companion is given the most elaborate music, in which the concertmaster plays a solo part, perhaps a reminder that Strauss' wife, Pauline, was a singer. She was also, according to Strauss, 'very complex, very much a woman, a little depraved, something of a flirt, never twice alike, every minute different from what she was the minute before.' That loving complexity emerges in the tenderness of a musical love scene.

The Hero's battles are battles of the soul, rather than literal ones, but this doesn't make the music any less violent or tempestuous. The deeds of war are followed by the works of peace, and here Strauss introduces no fewer than 30 quotations from eight of his own works. These include themes from *Death and Transfiguration*, *Don Quixote*, important themes from *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Macbeth* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – a medley, in other words.

Exhausted, the Hero retires from the world in music that returns to earlier ideas and combines them. Memories of battle are dispelled, memories of love provide comfort. *A Hero's Life* was written in 1898, when Strauss was 34. He can't have been thinking of retirement, but he convincingly describes a state in which the hero's soul has been refined by experience.

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PROGRAM NOTES ADAPTED IN PART FROM NOTES BY ANTHONY CANE (BRAHMS) AND GORDON KERRY (BARTÓK AND STRAUSS).

Meet the Music plays a central role in the Sydney Symphony's Education Program, developing new audiences and introducing school-aged audiences to orchestral music. For more information about concerts for children and students write to: education@sydneyssymphony.com

A life in music

'Beethoven's *Eroica* is so little beloved of our conductors, and is on this account now only rarely performed, that to fulfil a pressing need I am composing a largish tone poem entitled *Heldenleben*, admittedly without a funeral march, but yet in E flat, with lots of horns, which are always a yardstick of heroism.'

STRAUSS, WITH TONGUE IN CHEEK, IN A LETTER OF 23 JULY 1898

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT



The Sydney Symphony is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council and by Arts NSW, Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation.

Sydney Symphony

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Founded in 1932, the Sydney Symphony has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the Sydney Opera House, the Orchestra also performs throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and has toured internationally. The Sydney Symphony's first Chief Conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by conductors such as Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and, most recently, Gianluigi Gelmetti. The Orchestra's history also boasts collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky. This year Vladimir Ashkenazy begins his tenure as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor.

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