

2009 SEASON
TEA & SYMPHONY
PRESENTED BY KAMBLY

THE PRODIGAL RUSSIAN:
ASHKENAZY'S PROKOFIEV FESTIVAL

PROKOFIEV THE ROMANTIC

Friday 13 November | 11am
Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor
Alexander Gavrylyuk piano

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Piano Concerto No.3 in C, Op.26

Andante – Allegro
Andantino (with variations)
Allegro non troppo

Symphony No.6 in E flat minor, Op.111

Allegro molto
Largo
Vivace

FESTIVAL PARTNER



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Music from this program can be heard again when Saturday afternoon's performance is broadcast live across Australia on ABC Classic FM (14 November, 2pm).

Estimated timings:
27 minutes, 43 minutes
The performance will conclude at approximately 12.20pm.

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the final concert in the 2009 Tea & Symphony series.

We're privileged to be able to finish the year with a concert from Ashkenazy's Prokofiev Festival, and to be among those audiences who will hear the much-loved Third Piano Concerto. This was music that Prokofiev wrote for himself to play, but it doesn't just appeal to virtuoso pianists such as the young Alexander Gavrylyuk; the concerto is also thrilling to hear, mixing with perfect good taste soaring melodies and astonishing brilliance.

The other treat on this morning's program is a symphony that most of us will probably be hearing live for the first time: the beautiful and intensely emotional Sixth Symphony. It's been described as 'Beethovenian' and Prokofiev originally intended to dedicate it to the memory of Beethoven, whose legacy has influenced generations of symphonic composers even to the present day.

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We hope you enjoy this morning's program with Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Sydney Symphony, and look forward to welcoming you to the Tea & Symphony series in 2010.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Oscar A. Kambly". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Oscar A. Kambly
Chairman
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ABOUT THE MUSIC

PROKOFIEV Piano Concerto No.3

Prokofiev was a virtuoso pianist, who made an authoritative recording of his own Third Concerto. One of his most successful and popular concert works, the concerto shows the most typical aspects of his mature musical style in ideal balance: a mixture of rather Romantic passages with incisive, humorous, sometimes even grotesque episodes. This is obvious right at the start: the opening **Andante** melody for clarinet is lyrical, almost wistful, and Russian-sounding. But immediately the piano comes in, the music becomes very busy, incisive, almost icy. The lyricism of the opening will return in place of a 'development' section in the middle of the first movement.

Prokofiev conceived musical materials for his first three concertos in the years before he left Russia at the time of the 1917 Revolution. The first two concertos, in their driving rhythms and crunching discords, illustrate Prokofiev's casting as the 'enfant terrible' of Russian music, and evoked a corresponding critical reaction ('cats on a roof make better music,' wrote one Russian critic of Concerto No.2). No.3, on the other hand, shows much more of the tunefulness and accessibility which it is wrong to regard as having entered Prokofiev's music only after he returned to Russia in the 1930s. The lyrical opening of this piano concerto, completed in 1921, recalls that of the First Violin Concerto (1916–17). Even earlier, the great Russian impresario Diaghilev had perceived Prokofiev's true musical nature: 'Few composers today have Prokofiev's gift of inventing personal melodies, and even fewer have a genuine flair for a fresh use of simple tonal harmonies...he doesn't need to hide behind inane theories and absurd noises.'

Prokofiev had been collecting themes for over ten years by the time he put them together in 1921. He began the concerto in Russia in 1917, completed it in France in 1921, and gave the premiere later that year in Chicago. An American critic wrote of the concerto, 'It is greatly a matter of slewed harmony, neither adventurous enough to win the affection nor modernist enough to be annoying.' You can't win! A New York critic was wrong, but more perceptive, when he wrote, 'It is hard to imagine any other pianist than Mr Prokofiev playing it.' Prokofiev's own playing pioneered a new kind of piano virtuosity. A rewarding piece for any virtuoso, this concerto is formally clear and satisfying, full of memorable tunes



SERGEI PROKOFIEV
Russian composer (1891–1953)

harmonised and orchestrated with a peculiarly personal piquancy, and sufficiently of our time to be bracing and refreshing.

The **second movement** is a set of five variations on a theme Prokofiev had composed in 1913, intending it even then for variation treatment. This theme has an old-world, gavotte-like character, which in the first variation is treated solo by the piano in what Prokofiev describes as 'quasi-sentimental fashion'. Then the tempo changes to a furious allegro, one of the abrupt contrasts in which the concerto abounds. After a quiet, meditative fourth variation, and an energetic fifth one, the theme returns on flutes and clarinets in its original form and at its old speed, while the piano continues at top speed but more quietly. This has been compared to a sprinter viewed from the window of a train.

Prokofiev's own program note describes the **finale** as beginning with a staccato theme for bassoons and plucked strings, interrupted by the blustering entry of the piano:

The orchestra holds its own with the opening theme, however, and there is a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key. Eventually the piano takes up the first theme and develops it to a climax. With a reduction of tone and slackening of tempo, an alternative theme is introduced in the woodwinds. The piano replies with a theme that is more in keeping with the caustic humour of the work.

The unabashedly Romantic 'alternative theme' is worked up to an emotional pitch that shows Prokofiev as having more in common with Rachmaninoff than is usually suspected, and both as owing much to Tchaikovsky. Then the opening returns in a brilliant coda.

ADAPTED FROM A NOTE BY DAVID GARRETT ©2003

'Few composers today have Prokofiev's gift of inventing personal melodies...'

DIAGHILEV

The Sydney Symphony first performed this concerto in 1941 with soloist Raymond Lambert and conductor Edgar L Bainton. The most recent performance in a subscription series was given by Boris Berezovsky with conductor Tugan Sokhiev in 2007. Other recent performances have included Geoffrey Tozer in 1996, conducted by Vladimir Verbitsky, and a summer special in 2000 (with pianist Roger Woodward and Edo de Waart).

PROKOFIEV Symphony No.6

Several writers have commented on the striking contrast between Prokofiev's final two symphonies. While the Seventh is ostensibly meant to charm and entertain, the Sixth is one of Prokofiev's most sombre and concentrated compositions. The first ideas for the Symphony No.6 occurred to Prokofiev during World War II when the Soviet Union was at war with Nazi Germany and the outcome was by no means clear. Its genesis predates the Fifth, whose optimistic tone is often taken as prophetic of the victorious outcome of the war. Prokofiev sketched the symphony in short score during a summer spent at Ivanovo, a country house run by the Union of Composers not far from Moscow. For a number of reasons, including ill health (he had recently suffered a concussion which forced him to limit himself to a two-hour working day at the time), the orchestration was not finished until 18 months later.

The first performance was given by the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeny Mravinsky on 10 October 1947, and the new symphony was initially hailed as 'one of the most beautiful, most exalted of his works'. The first Moscow performance took place in December, but barely a month later Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Khachaturian were condemned by the Communist Party for writing music that did not adhere to the dictates of Soviet Social Realism – in other words, for atonalism, 'contempt for melody', 'neuropathic discords'. Prokofiev told his biographer Israel Nestyev that Symphony No.6 was inspired to some degree by the war years: 'Now we are rejoicing in our great victory, but each of us has wounds which cannot be healed. One has lost those dear to him, another his health. This must not be forgotten.'

Such sombre stern thoughts can be heard from the outset in a **first movement** that is by turns austere, lyrical, and agitated, but with a wealth of imaginatively wrought yet well-integrated thematic material. It is not for nothing that this symphony has been described as 'Beethovenian [in its]...sense of musical purpose and direction'.

The emotional core of the work is the **Largo** second movement, which begins with an almost heartbreakingly intense harmonisation of a long melody. Shriill woodwinds give way to a repeat of the melody scored more conventionally on violins. Soon there is a poignant theme from trumpet and violin, which contains an unmistakable, though passing, suggestion of the 'Spear' motif from Wagner's *Parsifal*. The poignant theme is extended. The



Music of particular peacefulness contains twists of anguish...

relentless beating of a cymbal betrays Prokofiev's desire to wring every drop of suffering and intensity from this music. A very expressive lyrical theme is soon begun by the cellos before being interwoven with the preceding material. Music of particular peacefulness contains twists of anguish, which rise to the surface before a brutal clock-like beating gives way to a beautiful serenade-like passage for horns. This seems to begin its own self-contained section, returning later accompanied by harp. Softly, out of the higher reaches, the violins bring back the poignant theme, eventually enriched by the trumpet, and then the opening material returns, having gained in emotional significance. The oboe introduces an elegiac epilogue and the movement ends almost celestially.

The **finale** opens in very high spirits. It is effectively a rondo whose episodes maintain the initially cheerful opening mood. The first of these is a comical dialogue between high woodwinds and tuba. A lumbering rhythm first sounded in low instruments and timpani however has already inserted a threatening note and this seems to gather strength later in the movement. Though its influence is temporarily suspended by a quieter, more reflective passage, including a reminiscence of the oboes' theme from the first movement, the rhythm rears up again and the symphony ends in sobering dissonance. There are wounds. Do not forget.

GORDON KALTON WILLIAMS
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The Sydney Symphony gave the first performance in Australia of the Sixth Symphony in 1973, conducted by Sergiu Comissiona; this is our first performance of the symphony since then.

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

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor

PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC ADVISOR

In the years since Vladimir Ashkenazy first came to prominence on the world stage in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, he has built an extraordinary career not only as one of the most renowned and revered pianists of our times, but as an inspiring artist whose creative life encompasses a vast range of activities.

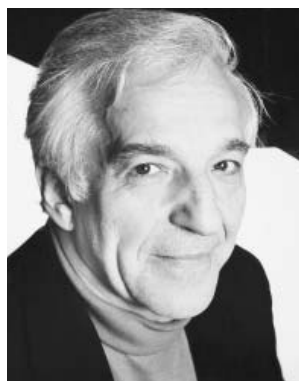
Conducting has formed the largest part of his music-making for the past 20 years. He was Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic from 1998 to 2003, and he was Music Director of the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo from 2004 to 2007. In 2009 he takes up the position of Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Sydney Symphony.

Alongside these roles, Vladimir Ashkenazy is also Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, with whom he has developed landmark projects such as *Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin* (a project which he toured and later developed into a TV documentary) and *Rachmaninoff Revisited* at the Lincoln Center, New York.

He also holds the positions of Music Director of the European Union Youth Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. He maintains strong links with a number of other major orchestras, including the Cleveland Orchestra (where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor), San Francisco Symphony, and Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin (Chief Conductor and Music Director 1988–96), and last year returned to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic.

Vladimir Ashkenazy continues to devote himself to the piano, building his comprehensive recording catalogue with releases such as the 1999 Grammy award-winning Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues, Rautavaara's Piano Concerto No.3 (which he commissioned), and Rachmaninoff transcriptions. His latest releases are recordings of Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.

A regular visitor to Sydney over many years, he has conducted subscription concerts and composer festivals for the Sydney Symphony, with his five-program Rachmaninoff festival forming a highlight of the 75th Anniversary Season in 2007. Vladimir Ashkenazy's artistic role with the Orchestra includes collaborations on composer festivals, major recording projects and international touring activities.



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Alexander Gavrylyuk piano

Alexander Gavrylyuk was born in 1984, began studying piano at seven and gave his first concerto performance when he was nine. He received second prize in his group at the 1997 Horowitz International Competition for Young Pianists, and when he returned to the competition two years later he won first prize and a gold medal. He subsequently won first prize in the 2000 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition in Japan, and he has since returned regularly to Japan, performing in some of the major concert venues and recording his first two CDs. Most recently he won first prize, gold medal and the award for Best Performance of a Classical Concerto at the 2005 Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition. He also recorded a recital performance at the Miami Piano Discoveries Festival.

He was based in Sydney from 1998 to 2006, with his Australian concert activities including recitals at the Sydney Opera House and City Recital Hall Angel Place as well as performances with the Melbourne and West Australian symphony orchestras.

As a concerto soloist he has also appeared with the Russian National Orchestra, Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Israeli Chamber Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. He has worked with conductors such as Herbert Blomstedt, Oleg Caetani, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Alexander Lazarev, Sebastian Lang-Lessing, Mikhail Pletnev, Stefan Sanderling and Leif Segerstam.

In 2007 he made his solo recital debut at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatorium; he has also performed in recital at the Kremlin. His forthcoming engagements will include concerts with the New York Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, among others, and a second recital in the Master Pianists series at the Concertgebouw. He has also been invited to record the two Glazunov piano concertos with the Russian National Orchestra and José Serebrier.

This Prokofiev festival represents Alexander Gavrylyuk's Sydney Symphony debut.



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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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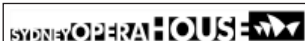
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