

**2009 SEASON**  
**TEA & SYMPHONY**  
**PRESENTED BY KAMBLY**

## **A HERO'S LIFE**

**Friday 7 August | 11am**  
**Sydney Opera House Concert Hall**

**Simone Young** conductor  
**Cédric Tiberghien** piano

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

*Allegro*  
*Adagio – Presto – Adagio*  
*Allegro molto*

**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)

 **92.9 ABC**  
Classic FM

Music from this program has been recorded for broadcast across Australia on ABC Classic FM.

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Estimated timings:  
28 minutes, 40 minutes

The concert will conclude at approximately 12.20pm.

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

Today we have the rare pleasure of a piano soloist playing one of the most visceral and exciting concertos in the repertoire. The concert title comes from Strauss' music, but you could easily say that in Bartók's powerful Second Piano Concerto the soloist is the hero, with brilliant and daredevil virtuosity.

In *A Hero's Life* Strauss cast himself as the hero. That might seem arrogant, but he had a twinkle in his eye when he did it, and the end result tells the story of the universal Artist. He has enemies (the critics!) and he must struggle, but he also enjoys peace and the affection of his beloved. And so while this enormous piece, with more than a hundred musicians on stage, is bold, colourful and dramatic, it also has moments of exquisite tenderness and great beauty.

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Kambly is a way of life, dedicated to all those who appreciate the difference between the best and the merely good. In this way it is fitting that we partner with the internationally acclaimed Sydney Symphony, whose vision is to ignite and deepen people's love of live symphonic music.

We hope you enjoy this morning's program, and look forward to welcoming you to future concerts in the Tea & Symphony series in 2009.



Oscar A. Kambly  
Chairman  
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# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## BARTÓK Piano Concerto No.2

It seems surprising that a composer like Bartók – who was also a pianist of considerable technical virtuosity – should have held off writing piano concertos until relatively late in his career. The first piano concerto, for instance, was composed in 1926 (when Bartók was in his mid-40s) and received its premiere in Frankfurt with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting and the composer at the keyboard. In fact the first concerto was technically so demanding that Bartók was its only interpreter until late in the following decade. Moreover, as Bartók realised, the first concerto was difficult not just for the soloist, but for the orchestra and the audience as well. His solution in the second piano concerto was, as Norman Lebrecht puts it, to write a work ‘less fatiguingly dense, its textures clearing to display wonders of a well-stocked mind’.

Australian scholar Malcolm Gillies has noted that around 1926 Bartók rediscovered an interest in the keyboard music of the Baroque and this fired his interest in composing keyboard works of his own, including the concertos of 1926 and 1931. Writing in 1931 about the place of his music in the wider tradition, Bartók noted:

*We can trace in Bach's music motifs and phrases which were also used by Frescobaldi and many others among Bach's predecessors. Is this plagiarism? By no means. For an artist it is not only right to have his roots in the art of some former time, it is a necessity.*

The ‘former time’ in which Bartók’s music is so firmly rooted is that which produced the folk musics of Hungary and Romania, which he assiduously collected in the years before World War I. But the composer was also well aware of, and unashamedly influenced by, the music of his own contemporaries. The composer who played Frescobaldi to Bartók’s Bach in this case was, of course, Stravinsky, whose Concerto for Piano and Winds had appeared in 1924 and whose burgeoning neoclassicism entailed his own love affair with Baroque music.

Stravinsky’s scoring left its mark on the slow movement of Bartók’s first concerto, where the strings are omitted; in the second concerto it is the **opening movement** whose tone and texture are uncompromisingly Stravinskian. Indeed, as Paul Griffiths has noted, after a scalic flourish from the piano, the work’s G major tonality is ‘bravely declared by the opening trumpet tune, which cheekily speeds up the theme from the finale to Stravinsky’s *Firebird*.’ The movement as a whole has a strongly Bachian



**BÉLA BARTÓK**  
Hungarian composer  
(1881–1945)

**‘...its textures clearing to display wonders of a well-stocked mind’**

NORMAN LEBRECHT

flavour in its use of motoric rhythms, reiterated motivic cells and the pervasive use of imitative counterpoint, where active textures are generated by the layering of voices. Even the more relaxed sections contain such devices as an imitative dialogue between horn and piano, and Bartók is careful to dissipate textures which threaten to become too intricate – often by frankly humorous means.

The **second movement** is a long three-part structure where slow, evocative music flanks a contrastingly fast central section. The slow music of this movement consists of two radically different elements: a duo texture for piano and timpani (whose role has been of some importance in the previous movement) which gives prominence to long-phrased melodies and rhetorical gestures from the piano, and a mysterious, almost completely static pattern of chords from the strings (who are now heard for the first time in this work). The irruption of the central section looks forward to similar moments in the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta of some years later, but at times bears an uncanny resemblance to certain passages in Ravel's almost exactly contemporary Piano Concerto in G. And once or twice it's as though Strauss' Zarathustra starts to come on stage before realising his error.

Bartók's overriding structural concern at this time was with symmetry – the Third and Fourth string quartets of the late 1920s are both five-movement works, where the first and fifth, and second and fourth movements form symmetrical pillars around a central pivotal movement. The Piano Concerto No.2 builds on this idea: not only is the central movement itself in 'arch form', but the final **Allegro**, as Griffiths says, 'remembers themes and textures from the first movement'. Moreover, the increasingly concentrated thematic material with its leaping two-note motif, and the greater prominence of the timpani (adumbrated in the previous movements) points even more clearly to the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta.

Bartók gave the first performance of the concerto in January 1933 under Hans Rosbaud in Frankfurt. It was to be the composer's last appearance in Germany: a week later Hitler was made Chancellor, and before long the fascism to which Bartók was implacably opposed would spread even to his beloved Hungary.

**Bartók's overriding structural concern at this time was with symmetry...**

ABRIDGED FROM A NOTE BY GORDON KERRY ©2002

## R STRAUSS *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life)

In 1900 the French writer Romain Rolland described his friend Richard Strauss as 'the typical artist of the new German empire, the powerful reflection of that heroic pride which is on the verge of becoming delirious, of that contemptuous Nietzscheism, of that egotistical and practical idealism which makes a cult of power and disdains weakness'. Strauss was, of course, a quintessentially and proudly German artist, whose symphonic 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. Rolland also quotes Strauss as saying, with specific reference to *Ein Heldenleben*, 'I don't see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.' Strauss was, however, given to self-conscious (and often self-deprecating) hyperbole, and not only in his music. For instance, he once remarked that the purpose of life 'was to make art possible. Christianity had to be invented to make possible the Colmar altar, the Sistine Madonna, the *Missa solemnis* and *Parsifal*.' Accordingly, we should take his gag 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*.

The idea for *Ein Heldenleben* evidently came to Strauss while he was at work on the symphonic poem *Don Quixote*. That work, with its theme of the 'crazy striving after false ideals' seemed to cry out for a companion piece, one which, as Strauss put it, would embody 'a more general and free ideal of great and manly heroism'. In 1898 he wrote, slightly facetiously:

*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.*

The score uses eight horns, to be precise, not to mention five trumpets, two tubas, quadruple woodwind and two harps. But while the hero of *Ein Heldenleben* must in some respects be identified with Strauss, Norman Del Mar points out that Strauss had 'too much sense of humour to pompously proclaim himself a hero to the whole world'. In other words, it is Strauss' life *as an artist* which furnishes

**'I don't see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.'**

STRAUSS

**RICHARD STRAUSS**  
German composer (1864–1949)



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for tubas said to  
represent the Munich  
critic Doktor Döhrring.

the 'autobiographical' elements of *Ein Heldenleben*, elements which, like comparable moments in the poetry of Walt Whitman, can be seen as analogous to elements in the life of any creative individual. Moreover, the 'self-portrait' Strauss draws of himself in the *Symphonia domestica* [performed by the Sydney Symphony last month] is markedly different from that of the Hero introduced in the first section of *Ein Heldenleben*.

**The Hero** 'sings himself' in a long and, significantly, unaccompanied theme beginning low in the horns and strings and bounding up the arpeggio of E flat through two octaves in its first bar. The theme contains a number of strongly profiled motifs, which are subjected to development representing the 'primary unfolding of abilities'. After a fully scored climax, a new theme appears, described by Del Mar as the hero's 'ultimatum', which is stated six times and each time answered by silence. Finally, a magisterial chord of the dominant seventh leaves the hero waiting for the world's response.

In a masterly dramatic stroke, the answer comes from **The Hero's enemies**, or critics, in a complex of themes ranging from thin-lipped solos for flute and oboe to the trudging motive for tubas said to represent rhythmically the Munich critic Doktor Döhrring. The hero responds with a long and beautiful melody, which serves only to provoke the critics to more hysterical attacks.

Ignoring the critics, the music now turns to **The Hero's companion**, by far the longest and most elaborate movement in the whole work. The burden of representing the hero's companion falls largely to the solo violin – reminding us that Pauline Strauss was a singer, whose voice inspired so much of Richard's work. According to Rolland, Strauss said, 'It's my wife I wanted to portray. She is 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.' Certainly, Strauss' portrait is of a complex character, and is not, as Del Mar notes, always flattering.

The love scene is interrupted by a call to battle, which Michael Kennedy takes pains to point out is about the battlefield of the soul, rather than crude militarism. **The Hero's deeds of war** are depicted with uncompromising violence, though the progression of the music leaves it in no doubt that the hero will prevail, and the pervasive 3/4 waltz time suggests some ironic distance on the composer's part. When the tumult and the shouting dies, the music describes **The Hero's works of peace**, which Strauss depicts in 30 quotations from eight of his works. Who else's works would have been appropriate?

**The Hero's retirement from the world** formally recapitulates material and synthesises it. The home key of E flat is re-established, notably in some luminous, quiet writing for eight horns. Memories of battle are dissipated, memories of love are comforting. Strauss (aged 34 when he composed the work) can't have been thinking of retirement, but convincingly describes a state in which the hero's soul has been refined by experience. The work originally ended with the ecstatically beautiful passage for horn and violin (again representing the love of his life) which we hear before the final brass apotheosis. Strauss was stung by a friend's criticism that he could only ever compose quiet endings (so much for his egotism). In old age he derided the work's final chords as 'the Hero's State Funeral'.

GORDON KERRY ©2002

**'It's my wife I wanted to portray. She is 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.'**

STRAUSS

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## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT



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## 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 *Turangalîla-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 *Turangalîla-symphonie* and in recital.

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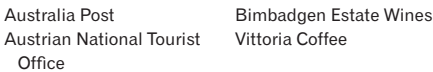
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