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An Alpine Symphony

Music at the Peak

Fri 17 February 8pm
Sat 18 February 2pm

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2012 SEASON

EMIRATES METRO SERIES

Friday 17 February | 8pm

GREAT CLASSICS

Saturday 18 February | 2pm

Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

An Alpine Symphony: Music at the Peak

Vladimir Ashkenazy CONDUCTOR

Stephen Kovacevich PIANO

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58

Allegro moderato

Andante con moto –

Rondo (Vivace)

INTERVAL

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

An Alpine Symphony, Op.64

Night – Sunrise –

The ascent – Entry into the wood –

Wandering by the side of the brook –

At the waterfall – Apparition –

On flowering meadows –

On the alpine pasture –

Through thicket and undergrowth on the wrong path –

On the glacier – Dangerous moments –

On the summit – Vision – Mists rise –

The sun gradually becomes obscured –

Elegy – Calm before the storm –

Thunder and tempest, descent –

Sunset – Conclusion – Night

(The 22 sections are played without pause)



Friday's performance will be recorded for later broadcast across Australia on ABC Classic FM on Wednesday 7 March at 8pm.

Pre-concert talk by David Larkin in the Northern Foyer, 45 minutes before each performance.
Visit sydneySymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations: 35 minutes, 20-minute interval, 47 minutes.
The concert will conclude at approximately 9.50pm (Fri), 3.50pm (Sat)



▲ The view from the Villa Strauss on the outskirts of Garmisch, Bavaria, looking out to the Alpspitze and the Zugspitze, the highest mountain in Germany. The Strausses set up home in the villa when Richard was in his mid-40s and most of his major works were written here.



The façade of the Villa Strauss ▶

Music at the Peak

This concert represents ‘music at the peak’ in more ways than one, although – as Vladimir Ashkenazy suggests – perhaps not in all the ways you might think.

We begin with Beethoven and a concerto, the Classical genre in which a virtuoso soloist plays against and with the orchestra. And in Beethoven’s case we also have a composer playing with convention. This was the last concerto for which Beethoven himself was able to give the premiere; perhaps he knew this when he decided to depart from the normal concerto structure and give the solo part the first word. And this is just one of the flashes of originality in this great concerto.

Both Beethoven and Strauss shared a deep love of the countryside and found inspiration in nature. That love can be heard in a work like Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*, and in *An Alpine Symphony*, in this concert. These two works are often referred to as program music, music in which a narrative shapes the structure. This is a fair assessment, but in the world of classical music there is still a bias – lingering from the 19th century – that program music is somehow second rate when compared to abstract works shaped by classical forms. Strauss himself would joke that he was a ‘first-rate second-rate composer’ and no doubt his preference for programmatic music lay behind the quip.

Ashkenazy likes to say of *An Alpine Symphony*, ‘It’s not program music!’ By which he means that the overtly programmatic elements – the musical depiction of sunrise, cows in the pasture, even the astonishing thunderstorm – ‘are there simply to entertain you.’ What is truly important in this music, he says, is ‘the spiritual element of identification with nature’. The pictorial elements might suggest the details but the music is bigger than that. The success of *An Alpine Symphony* lies not in the effect of its huge orchestra or its clever scene painting but in this: ‘at the end, you feel like you are a part of nature – you dissolve in it.’

bravo!

This year sees the addition of a new feature to Sydney Symphony program books: we’re incorporating our Bravo! newsletter into the back pages. There will be nine issues over the course of the year, which means we can share orchestra news with you more frequently. The Bravo! pages will also be available for separate download from sydneysymphony.com/bravo so you need never miss an issue, regardless of how many concerts you attend. Meanwhile, turn to page 31 to check out the debut issue in the new format.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ludwig van Beethoven Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58

Allegro moderato
Andante con moto –
Rondo (Vivace)

Stephen Kovacevich PIANO

Beethoven composed his Fourth Piano Concerto, among what was surely the richest outpouring of his life, as a companion to such works as the *Appassionata* Sonata, Fourth Symphony and Violin Concerto, the three great string quartets for Count Razumovsky, and the first versions of the opera *Fidelio* (including the three *Leonore* overtures). At the same time, works in progress included the Fifth and Sixth symphonies, the *Coriolan* Overture and the Mass in C.

Rehearsals for *Fidelio* went badly during the winter of 1805–06, and it would be tempting to infer that the composer worked out his frustration in the turbulent C minor symphony, had we not already ample evidence that Beethoven's music may not be taken as a mirror of his mind. But Beethoven did make a habit of varying his work pattern by proceeding simultaneously on contrasting compositions, often sketching an idea for one work and eventually finding a home for it in something completely different.

In the Fifth Symphony and the Fourth Piano Concerto, we have a case where a single rhythmic idea, one which must have been powerfully exercising his mind, serves two utterly contrasting purposes – in each case as the pervasive rhythmic pattern for the first movement of the work. In the symphony it is the peremptory four-note motif which the composer much later characterised – how seriously, we can only guess – as 'Fate knocking at the door'. In the concerto (where it is preceded by a single introductory chord), the same four-note rhythm appears in much gentler guise, not picked out as a motto but recurring continuously in a flowing melody. Its milder mien notwithstanding, the rhythm still dominates the concerto movement as effectively as it does that of the symphony.

Listening Guide

Disregarding Mozart's *Jeunehomme* Concerto, K.271 (in the opening of which the soloist makes a merely jocular appearance alongside the orchestra), Beethoven's Fourth Concerto makes history by giving the opening statement of the first movement firmly to the soloist, and to the soloist alone. And on top of this, it is both lyrical and delivered in hushed undertones. This of course overturns the normal procedure, in which the orchestra introduces the work, usually in fairly arresting manner, and prepares the way for

Keynotes

BEETHOVEN
Born Bonn, 1770
Died Vienna, 1827

In Vienna Beethoven found fame as a pianist and enjoyed strong support from the city's aristocratic circles, willing to cultivate an innovative composer who matched their romantic aspirations. But in 1802 disaster struck with the realisation that his deafness was incurable, and getting worse. Six years later he gave the premiere of his Fourth Piano Concerto – it was the last of his concertos in which he was able to appear as the soloist.

FOURTH PIANO CONCERTO
Completed during 1806–07, Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto received its public premiere on 22 December 1808 in a marathon concert that also saw the premiere of the Fifth and Sixth symphonies. The concerto is often called unique, and it shows its originality from the outset by allowing the soloist to begin, alone. (In the 'etiquette' of a Classical concerto the soloist was introduced only after the orchestra has presented the main ideas.) The middle movement is like a tragic and melancholy dialogue and leads directly into the substantial finale without pause – no chance here of applause or an encore spoiling the peculiar intensity of the mood.



◀ A portrait of Beethoven made at the time of the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Fifth Symphony. He was 36.

the soloist to make a properly stage-managed entrance. The Viennese audiences must have been astonished when Beethoven played this work for the first time in concerts at the palace of Prince Lobkowitz in March 1807 and the public Theater an der Wien in December 1808 (when the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were premiered).

Taking their cue from the soloist, however, the strings immediately pick up the theme and establish it, though cautiously at first, in a strangely remote key, and pianissimo. Having demonstrated his ingenuity in overturning musical tradition, Beethoven now demonstrates a remarkable inventiveness in pulling new ideas out of the same melodic hat, producing a succession of themes which are all essentially variants of the main theme. Only when the orchestra has laid out the range of themes does the soloist reappear, now rhapsodising poetically and at length. While the concerto remains essentially lyrical, an unsuspected strength is revealed in the occasional stentorian assertion by the soloist, as the main theme thunders out to begin the recapitulation in totally different style from the opening of the work. Yet even here, the sudden assertiveness evaporates as rapidly as it emerged.

...his ingenuity in overturning musical tradition...

The **second movement** is not so much a fully-fledged slow movement as a highly unusual interlude, which serves to lead without a break directly into the finale. The orchestra opens the movement in a sullen frame of mind, gruffly monosyllabic and evidently reluctant to proceed in any sort of harmony unless something is first done to mollify its ruffled sensibilities. The solo piano is cast in the calm, clear voice of reason. Gradually the piano's peaceful intervention releases the tension, the orchestra's mutterings begin to subside and are eventually silenced in the end as, with the soloist soaring in a long trill of mounting intensity, unity is restored in tender harmony. As the piano hangs expectantly in a breathless hush, the orchestra gives way and quietly lets go of the finale. Its nimbleness notwithstanding, the orchestra takes a very straight-faced view of this vivacious rondo theme, seeming to wait, as in the first movement, for the soloist to enter and demonstrate how carefree and exhilarating and, in a word, poetic it can sound.

Although Beethoven calls the **finale** a *Rondo*, it is one of those rondos (much beloved of Haydn) which cross over into sonata territory. The first rondo episode is effectively a second subject, the second episode a development of the rondo theme, and the third episode a recapitulation. Following which, an enormous coda occupying almost half the total length of the movement reviews the main ideas of the rondo with mounting excitement, and the concerto ends exuberantly.

Well may Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto be called unique, as it often is. The composer had wrestled in his first three concertos with the form handed down in Olympian perfection from Mozart, and finally come to terms with it in his Piano Concerto No.3. He no longer feels obliged to



◀ The title page of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.4, Op.58, published in 1808.

demonstrate his mastery in purely Mozartian terms but confidently explores new ways of pitting soloist against orchestra. Yet he adheres in the outer movements to the Classical structures of sonata and rondo. His originality is declared not only in the solo opening, but also in the middle movement which, in its dramatic dialogue, follows no established instrumental form. It is rather akin to operatic recitative (not altogether unheard-of in instrumental music as far back as Bach, though this is surely the first time it sustains a whole movement). Beethoven is original, too, in spilling over without pause from the second movement into the finale – a device which neatly averts the risk of applause at the end of the slow movement and the ever-possible demand for an encore; it also enhances the continuity and the sense of unity through the work as a whole. (About the same time, Beethoven similarly linked the final three movements of his *Pastoral* Symphony.) And such a disproportionately long coda in the finale was doubtless also unprecedented as well.

Rarely is a work at once so lyrical and so exhilarating, so filigree in much of its writing for the piano (looking forward to Chopin, who was not yet born!) yet balanced by sturdy, often forceful, sonorities in the orchestra. It seems transparent and apparently straightforward; though to the pianist, who must be both virtuoso and chamber musician, this most eloquent concerto can also prove one of the most elusive.

ANTHONY CANE ©1998

The orchestra for Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto calls for flute; pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets; timpani and strings.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the concerto in 1941, with Ignaz Friedman as soloist and Edgar L. Bainton conducting, and most recently in the 2007 Beethoven Festival with pianist Gerhard Oppitz and conductor Gianluigi Gelmetti.



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Richard Strauss

An Alpine Symphony, Op.64

Night –
Sunrise –
The ascent –
Entry into the wood –
Wandering by the side of the brook –
At the waterfall –
Apparition –
On flowering meadows –
On the alpine pasture –
Through thicket and undergrowth on the wrong path –
On the glacier –
Dangerous moments –
On the summit –
Vision –
Mists rise –
The sun gradually becomes obscured –
Elegy –
Calm before the storm –
Thunder and tempest, descent –
Sunset –
Conclusion –
Night

Around the time Strauss wrote *An Alpine Symphony*, he boasted that his powers of expression were such that he could, if necessary, describe a knife and fork in music. Indeed *An Alpine Symphony* finally marks the limit in Strauss' nearly 30-year quest to extend music's capacity for illustration and representation – an effort that began with *Don Juan* in 1888 and reached another, earlier, highpoint with *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which attempted to express in music the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. [The Sydney Symphony and Ashkenazy will perform *Thus Spake Zarathustra* next week.] Strauss turned to *An Alpine Symphony* after writing the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, with its classical forces. In one of history's ironies, critics had just remarked on the Mozartean turn in his music when he produced this piece of orchestral gigantism. The orchestra calls for well over 120 players, but what would you expect? Strauss is attempting nothing less than a portrait of a mountain.

Strauss composed this work at his studio in Garmisch, where he could look out over the Zugspitze and the Wettersteingebirge. It was completed in 100 days during the winter of 1914–15, but the work had been long in gestation. The idea of it had occurred to Strauss as a boy, after he and a party of climbers got lost during a mountain hike and were overtaken by a storm on their return. Impressed by the experience, Richard had sat at the piano on arriving home

Keynotes

R STRAUSS

Born Munich, 1864

Died Garmisch-Partenkirchen, 1949

Richard Strauss wrote two symphonies as a teenager, but this was not the musical genre that captured his imagination. Instead he made his name in the theatre and with the evocative and storytelling possibilities of the symphonic poem (or 'tone poem', as he preferred to call it) as invented by Liszt. Don't be misled by the presence of the word 'symphony' in Strauss's titles. Even the '*Sinfonia domestica*' is a large-scale tone poem with an underlying narrative.

AN ALPINE SYMPHONY

This is not a symphony, although some have tried to analyse it in that way. Instead it traces an alpine daytrip in 22 seamless musical sections, each with a descriptive title. At one level it evokes the glorious power of nature, at another it is a tribute to individual strength of will. The music itself is huge: more than a hundred musicians on stage, with a few more behind the scenes, and the 'journey' takes the best part of an hour. As Strauss's final tone poem, composed in 1915, it makes a monumental farewell to the genre.



◀ Richard Strauss in 1910, a portrait by K Bauer.

Strauss is attempting nothing less than a literal portrait of a mountain.

and, as he said, ‘conjured up a lot of nonsense and giant Wagnerian tone painting’.

The idea of *An Alpine Symphony* is spectacularly simple: the ascent and descent of a mountain. The timeframe is a 24-hour period, and with its 22 continuous sections, the structure avoids the conventions of the traditional multi-movement symphony. This format guarantees Strauss certain musical highlights: yet another opportunity to depict an opening sunrise (as impressive in its own way as *Zarathustra*’s), and a sunset sequence, eminently suited to Strauss in one of his autumnal moods. Strauss ingeniously avoids the obvious at ‘the summit’ (which could have been one of the pitfalls in such an explicit form), instead, after the predictable big statement of one of the earlier themes, he shifts focus to a halting oboe, as if we are suddenly made aware of the impact of the stupendous view on an awestruck human. And the predictability of the descent is offset by one of the most graphic storms in musical literature.

‘At last I have learnt to orchestrate,’ Strauss said at the general rehearsal in October 1915. Some of the more obvious orchestral highlights include the exhilarating depiction of spray at the waterfall (listen for a theme highly reminiscent of a famous sighing phrase from Max Bruch’s Violin Concerto). Strauss uses cowbells in *On the alpine pasture*, an idea taken from Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, but, as Strauss authority Norman del Mar says, here they are ‘so apt...that one might think this to be their first employment in the symphony orchestra’. Then there is the strange colouring of the ‘Sun theme’ mixed with organ reeds to depict rising mists (‘perhaps the most brilliantly clever section of the work’, writes Del Mar), and the aggravating high D flats on the oboe getting one’s

nerves on edge in the still before the storm, not to mention the subtle use of the organ during the waning moments.

The work has often been dismissed as just a piece of 'orchestriana', but is it more than a shallow display? Del Mar points to Strauss' 'curiously detached attitude to the Nature subject...giving it a de-humanised majestic quality reminiscent, in a unique way, of Bruckner.' The sense of the great mass of the mountain, barely discernible in the gloom, at the very end of the work, certainly has a Brucknerian scale and aspect. Yet Del Mar also says: 'It is thus not hard to understand how Strauss [for whom composing came as easily as a cow gives milk] came...idly to sketch out an orchestral fantasy on the subject of the beautiful mountains amongst which he had so recently built the luxurious villa which was to be his home for the rest of his life.'

The work should also be seen, however, in the context of the mystical importance mountains held for Germans in the 19th century. As Timothy Calnin, a former artistic administrator of the Sydney Symphony, has said, 'the lofty altitudes possess a sense of mystery and spiritual rejuvenation which were an inspiration...to German Romantics'. And it is probable that Strauss would have understood the remarks of his philosophical model Nietzsche when he said:

He who knows how to breathe the air of my writings knows that it is an air of the heights, a robust air...The ice is near, the solitude is terrible – but how peacefully all things lie in the light!...Philosophy as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary living in ice and high mountains – a seeking after everything that is strange and questionable in existence, all that has hitherto been excommunicated by morality.

Unlike his philosophical model, Strauss could lapse into banality when he attempted to express Eternal and Absolute Truths. But whether he did so here or not, he never risked another tone poem. After *An Alpine Symphony*, he turned decisively to the stage, where his skills in musical depiction were a decided asset.

GORDON KALTON WILLIAMS
SYMPHONY AUSTRALIA ©1998

An Alpine Symphony calls for a huge orchestra comprising: four flutes (two doubling piccolo), three oboes (one doubling cor anglais), bass oboe, three clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), E flat clarinet, and four bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon); four horns, four Wagner tubas, four trumpets, four trombones and two tubas; timpani (two players) and percussion (glockenspiel, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, triangle, cowbells, tam-tam, wind machine, thunder machine); two harps, organ and celesta; and 64 strings. Strauss also calls for an offstage band of nine horns, two trumpets and two trombones.

The Sydney Symphony gave the first Australian performance of *An Alpine Symphony* in 1951 under the baton of Eugene Goossens. The most recent performance was in 2008 with Charles Dutoit.

...the predictability of the descent is offset by one of the most graphic storms in musical literature.

An Alpine Symphony was composed for the Dresden Hofkapelle, and we can imagine that it was intended as a virtuoso showpiece for the orchestra that had premiered several of Strauss's prior works. This 'Strauss orchestra' premiered *An Alpine Symphony* also – not in Dresden, but at the Philharmonie in Berlin on 28 October 1915, with Strauss conducting.

“For all the drama, aural spectacle and electricity in his playing, it’s substantial, disciplined and accurate. He doesn’t splash, he doesn’t fake. It’s real.” **The Telegraph**

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and the Sydney Symphony

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Strauss and the Juggernaut

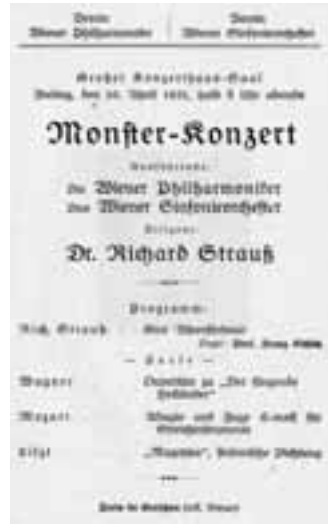
An Alpine Symphony calls for more than 120 musicians – not all of them on stage. This is the music of a proponent of musical gigantism, as Malcolm Gillies explains

The 1890s was a decade of culmination and of change. Its opening year saw Bismarck bowing out as German Chancellor, but also the births of Ho Chi Minh, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Charles de Gaulle. By the century's end, wireless, X-rays, aspirin and the modern Olympic Games were realities, although Queen Victoria still held sway over the British Empire. The heroic idealism of the 19th century was reaching some of its more absurd conclusions, and starting to raise a reaction among younger, more pragmatic thinkers. In the arts, Romanticism, already in full bloom, was turning to a state of over-ripeness as artists sought to extract the final mileage from many techniques and tendencies first tried as much as a century before.

Among lovers of classical music this 'over-ripe' decade has proven of unrivalled popularity. Within its ten years, Tchaikovsky wrote his *Pathétique* Symphony, and Dvořák his *From the New World*; Puccini created his first three operatic masterworks, while Mahler produced three monumental symphonies; Bruckner and Brahms made their final musical confessions during these years. Among those more dedicated to radical change, Debussy, Ravel and Schoenberg were starting to flex their muscles. But central to the decade's music, both as an innovator and preserver of traditions, stands the German composer Richard Strauss.

Strauss was a conductor by profession and a composer as time allowed. He was born into a well-to-do and musical Bavarian family and, after early studies in piano, violin and composition, gained a position as an assistant conductor in Munich, Berlin and Vienna. Not surprisingly, Strauss, the composer, was a master orchestrator. As with his fellow conductor-composer, Gustav Mahler, he knew all those technical tricks of the many instruments of the orchestra, understood just how their sounds would blend or jar to the ear, and could predict the acoustic effects of his scorings within the various new concert halls being built late in the last century.

During the late 1880s and the 1890s the main medium Strauss used for his orchestral writing was the symphonic poem (or, as he preferred to call it, the tone poem). These compositions were built around stories, the main characters of which were often reflected in the titles: *Don Juan* (1888), *Macbeth* (1890), *Don Quixote* (1897). The nature of the story is equally clearly reflected in other titles: *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* (1895) and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1896), which ambitiously took as its subject the 'superman' philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. But it was in his final tone poem of the decade, *A Hero's Life* (Ein Heldenleben) of 1898, that



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In 1931, *An Alpine Symphony* was the major work on an appropriately named 'Monster Concert' conducted by Strauss himself in Vienna. Music by Wagner and Mozart and another tone poem, by Liszt, made up the second half – it was not uncommon to place the longest and most demanding work first on the program.

Strauss's plot symphony turned curiously upon himself. He cast himself as the Hero, who, with his 'Helpmate' (Strauss's wife), took on the Critics, defeating them but never totally silencing them all. This form of self-advertising autobiography seemed more than a little egotistical, but then this is the same man who would later say: 'I do not see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.'

Strauss's particular gifts lay in musical pictorialism. When his plots became very explicit so did his musical images. Early in *Don Quixote*, for instance, he captures the very essence of the bleating of a flock of sheep (which the befuddled Knight has mistaken for an army). In *A Hero's Life* the themes of the main characters are magically adapted in mood to suit the circumstances of attack, defeat or repose dictated by Strauss' story. Even in the less specific *Death and Transfiguration* the faltering pulse precisely indicates the stages of ebbing and flowing of life in the dying artist.

To achieve such graphic results in this music Strauss used many techniques. Within his richly flowing texture he frequently used easily recognisable themes or motifs to represent important characters, situations or subjects. The alternation of louder and softer passages, the smoothness or sharpness of the notes and the thickness or thinness of the sound profile became totally subservient to the precise demands of the story. But it was above all in the use of the instruments of the orchestra that Strauss excelled as a 'musical painter'. The instruments, individually or in combinations, become the protagonists. In *A Hero's Life* Strauss himself is the horn, his 'Helpmate' the violin and the critics are a ragged, cackling consortium of wind and brass instruments. In *Don Quixote* those sheep 'bleat' through the most finely calculated texture of muted brass instruments and oboes. 'Religion', in Strauss's music-philosophical *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, emerges in a complex web of over a dozen different string parts backed up by the organ.

As Strauss struggled for a more explicit depiction of his plots his orchestra grew. Occasionally he wanted more instruments just to gain a more massive sound – as in his cacophonous battle with the critics in *A Hero's Life*. But normally he wanted the extra instruments so as to gain more exquisite or unusual combinations of sounds, to achieve the eeriness of sound when the piccolo meets up with three trombones, or when three oboes decide to take on the shrill E flat clarinet.

And grow Strauss's orchestra certainly did. His early *Don Juan* of 1888 was already composed 'for large orchestra': 11 woodwind and 11 brass players, as well as a full complement of strings and a relatively small percussion section. A decade later with *A Hero's Life* his 'large orchestra' exceeds 100 players: 16 wind, 18 brass, 66 string players, plus percussion. Somehow

As Strauss struggled for a more explicit depiction of his plots his orchestra grew.



he could not control this orchestral growth. Strauss's juggernaut of an orchestra would continue to career along until World War I forced him to temper his megalomania.

His second autobiographical symphonic poem, *Symphonia domestica* (1902–03), an exposé of the Strausses' private life, added extra instruments, including a quartet of saxophones and even more bassoons and clarinets, thereby inspiring a chorus of complaint from the critics (still perhaps smarting from their defeat in *A Hero's Life*). Even such a Strauss enthusiast as the English critic Ernest Newman would write that 'the instrumental colour is grossly overdone...the realistic effects on the score are so pitifully foolish that one listens to them with regret that a composer of genius should ever have fallen so low.'

But Strauss continued heedlessly on his path of orchestral gigantism. His last tone poem, *An Alpine Symphony*, which through 22 sections describes a day in the mountains, came to involve more than 120 players, whose awesome combined power is truly demonstrated in Strauss' representation of 'Thunder and Tempest'.

Strauss was not the only rider on this juggernaut. Mahler too, was fascinated by the gigantic, writing his *Symphony of a Thousand* in 1906–07, and Arnold Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (1901–11) was written for musical forces nothing short of grotesque: 25 wind instruments (four piccolos), 25 brass (seven trombones), four harps amid masses of strings and percussion, not to mention five soloists, a speaker and four choirs! Such orchestral inflation and such massive works clearly could not be sustained. It fell to the lot of this same Schoenberg to launch a new, ultra-modern currency: the atonal miniature.

Mahler was another composer who 'rode the juggernaut' – this photo was taken at the American premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, the so-called Symphony of a Thousand (Philadelphia Orchestra with Leopold Stokowski, 1916)

MORE MUSIC

Selected Discography

BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTOS

You can hear Stephen Kovacevich play all the Beethoven piano concertos, together with selected sonatas and the bagatelles, in a 6-CD set recorded with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Colin Davis.

PHILIPS 4756319

Vladimir Ashkenazy's own interpretations of the Beethoven piano concertos include recordings with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Georg Solti and later with the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted from the piano. The 3CD set from Cleveland also includes Beethoven's Choral Fantasy for piano, vocal soloists, choir and orchestra – a kind of trial run for the finale of the Ninth Symphony.

DECCA 421 718

AN ALPINE SYMPHONY

Ashkenazy's own recording of *An Alpine Symphony* with the Cleveland Orchestra (1988) is currently out of print but can be obtained as an ArkivCD reissue from arkivmusic.com

DECCA 425112

He subsequently recorded a much-praised performance with the Czech Philharmonic, paired for release with the delightful Waltz Sequences from *Der Rosenkavalier*.

ONDINE 976

In this week's pre-concert talks, speaker David Larkin is using recordings by the Staatskapelle Weimar with conductor Antoni Wit (Naxos), and Georg Solti with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in a value 2CD set that also includes *A Hero's Life*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel* (Decca).

NAXOS 8.557811

DECCA 440 6182

STEPHEN KOVACEVICH

If you heard Stephen Kovacevich in his Sydney recital in 2009, you would have heard him play Beethoven's Diabelli Variations and Bach's Partita No.4 in D. Both works feature on his newest solo release, which was the Editor's Choice in the 2009 Gramophone Awards.

ONYX 4035

Broadcast Diary

February–March



Friday 24 February, 8pm

THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor

Lisa Batiashvili violin

Beethoven, Brahms, R Strauss

Wednesday 7 March at 8pm

AN ALPINE SYMPHONY

See this program for details

Saturday 17 March, 8pm

STRAVINSKY REMEMBERED

Matthias Pintscher conductor

Isabelle Faust violin

Ravel, Pintscher, Stravinsky

Friday 23 March, 8pm

FIREWORKS & FANTASY

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor

Behzod Abduraimov piano

Roger Benedict viola

Gyger, Prokofiev, Berlioz

2MBS-FM 102.5

Tuesday 13 March, 6pm

SYDNEY SYMPHONY 2012

Musicians, staff and guest artists discuss what's in store in our forthcoming concerts.



Webcasts



Selected Sydney Symphony concerts are webcast live on BigPond and Telstra T-box and made available for later viewing On Demand. Our most recent webcast:

BEETHOVEN 9 (SEASON OPENING GALA)

Visit: bigpondmusic.com/sydneysymphony

Sydney Symphony Live

The Sydney Symphony Live label was founded in 2006 and we've since released more than a dozen recordings featuring the orchestra in live concert performances with our titled conductors and leading guest artists, including the Mahler Odyssey cycle, begun in 2010. To purchase, visit sydneysymphony.com/shop



Glazunov & Shostakovich

Alexander Lazarev conducts a thrilling performance of Shostakovich 9 and Glazunov's *Seasons*. SSO 2



Strauss & Schubert

Gianluigi Gelmetti conducts Schubert's *Unfinished* and R Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Ricarda Merbeth. SSO 200803



Sir Charles Mackerras

A 2CD set featuring Sir Charles's final performances with the orchestra, in October 2007. SSO 200705



Brett Dean

Brett Dean performs his own viola concerto, conducted by Simone Young, in this all-Dean release. SSO 200702



Ravel

Gelmetti conducts music by one of his favourite composers: Maurice Ravel. Includes *Bolero*. SSO 200801



Rare Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff chamber music with Dene Olding, the Goldner Quartet, soprano Joan Rodgers and Vladimir Ashkenazy at the piano. SSO 200901

MAHLER ODYSSEY ON CD

During the 2010 and 2011 concert seasons, the Sydney Symphony and Vladimir Ashkenazy set out to perform all the Mahler symphonies, together with some of the song cycles. These concerts were recorded for CD, with eight releases so far and more to come.

Mahler 7 OUT NOW

The most recent addition to the catalogue is Symphony No.7, sometimes known as the 'Night Music' symphony. SSO 201104

ALSO CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

Mahler 1 & Songs of a Wayfarer

SSO 201001

Mahler 8 (Symphony of a Thousand)

SSO 201002

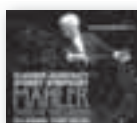
Mahler 5 SSO 201003

Song of the Earth SSO 201004

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Mahler 6 SSO 201103



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Vladimir Ashkenazy

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 has been Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic (1998–2003), and Music Director of the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo (2004–2007). This is his fourth season as 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), as well as making guest appearances with orchestras such as 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), Rachmaninoff transcriptions, Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* and Beethoven's Diabelli Variations. In 2009 he released a disc of French piano duo works with Vovka Ashkenazy.

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. In 2010–11 he conducted the Mahler Odyssey concerts and live recordings, and his artistic role with the orchestra also includes annual international touring.



KEITH SAUNDERS

In 2011 *Limelight* magazine named Vladimir Ashkenazy Music Personality of the Year. To watch his acceptance speech on YouTube, go to bit.ly/AshkenazyLimelight

Stephen Kovacevich

PIANO

Stephen Kovacevich is one of the most searching interpreters, and as a pianist he has won unsurpassed admiration for his playing of Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and Schubert. He has appeared with many of the world's finest orchestras and worked with such conductors as Colin Davis, Hans Graf, Bernard Haitink, Kurt Masur, Simon Rattle and Georg Solti. In addition to his long and distinguished career as a soloist, he has conducted for many years, winning warm praise for his work throughout the world.

In 2010 he celebrated his 70th birthday with a concert at the Wigmore Hall, a venue in which he'd performed for the first time more than fifty years earlier. Artists taking part in the concert included pianist Martha Argerich and the Belcea Quartet.

Born in Los Angeles, Stephen Kovacevich made his concert debut as a pianist at the age of 11. When he was 18 he moved to England to study with Dame Myra Hess. His international reputation has been built on both his concert appearances, renowned for their thoughtfulness and re-creative intensity, and on the highly acclaimed recordings he has made throughout his career.

His impressive discography includes a compelling series of Schubert sonatas and the 32 Beethoven sonatas, completed in 2003. More recently he released, to unanimous critical praise, a recording of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, exactly 40 years after his first recording of the work in 1968. This recording was the Editor's Choice in the 2009 Gramophone Awards.

Stephen Kovacevich is also a committed chamber music player, whose partners include cellists Steven Isserlis, Truls Mørk and Gautier Capuçon; violinists Kyung-wha Chung and Renaud Capuçon; flautist Emmanuel Pahud and contralto Anna Larsson. Future chamber music projects will include partnerships with violinists Alina Ibragimova and Philippe Graffin, pianist Khatia Buniatishvili and the Belcea Quartet.

Stephen Kovacevich's most recent appearance with the Sydney Symphony was in 2005, when he played Mozart in a concert with Yannick Nézet-Séguin. He also appeared in Sydney in recital in 2009.



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THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY



JOHN MARMARAS

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 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 iconic Sydney Opera House, where it gives more than 100 performances each year, the Sydney Symphony also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence, most recently in a tour of European summer festivals, including the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh Festival.

The Sydney Symphony's first Chief Conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, 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.

The Sydney Symphony's award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The Sydney Symphony promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program. Recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards, Liza Lim, Lee Bracegirdle, Gordon Kerry and Georges Lentz, and a recording of works by Brett Dean was released on both the BIS and Sydney Symphony Live labels.

Other releases on the Sydney Symphony Live label, established in 2006, include performances with Alexander Lazarev, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Sir Charles Mackerras and Vladimir Ashkenazy. The orchestra has recently completed recording the Mahler symphonies, and has also released recordings with Ashkenazy of Rachmaninoff and Elgar orchestral works on the Exton/Triton labels, as well as numerous recordings on the ABC Classics label.

This is the fourth year of Ashkenazy's tenure as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.

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SHEFALI PRYOR

The family that plays together...

Good relationships, says Associate Principal Oboe Shefali Pryor, make for great music-making.

The oboe section of the Sydney Symphony makes for an interesting study in lineage: Shefali Pryor (Associate Principal) is a former student of Alexandre Oguey (Principal Cor Anglais), who, in turn, is married to Diana Doherty (Principal Oboe), whose former student was David Papp (Second Oboe). Simple!

Those close relationships, says Shefali, have a three-fold positive impact on the oboe section: 'We all have a very similar concept of sound, which is vital in a section. And having a strong rapport translates into a fabulous sense of cama-

raderie. It's *so* much fun to make music with people whose company you also enjoy – the oboe section really feels like a family. And even though I've graduated from the role of student, I continue to learn from all my colleagues.'

When Shefali won her first job (Second Oboe) with the orchestra, making the transition from student to colleague was tricky. 'It did pose some challenges, because the teacher / student line was blurred.' But taking a year out to study overseas 'made it easier to renegotiate that paradigm'.

Ironically there was a degree

“

If I could offer one piece of advice to my younger self, it would be to 'be braver'.

”

of regret about later securing the Associate Principal position (a promotion, in effect). 'I had – and still have – such a great friendship with Diana. And always *really* enjoyed playing second oboe to her, playing with an old friend who I really know and understand. But now I'm glad for the extra responsibility that comes with playing Associate Principal. It really developed my playing, and my personality. The more I expect from myself, the more I'm able to achieve.'

'If I could offer one piece of advice to my younger self, it would be to "be braver". I was quite shy and retiring as a student, and that translated into my playing; I was a little afraid to give it my all, in case my "all" was wrong. But I now know that there's no right or wrong in music. Diana has been a great inspiration to me in that regard – she just puts it all out there, wears her heart on her sleeve when she plays. And I believe that musician's personalities are very much reflected in their playing.'

The Associate Principal Oboe Chair is supported by Rose Herceg



Your Say

I wanted to thank you for the Sydney Symphony Brass Ensemble's very moving tribute to Japan during your visit here [Nov 2011]. The audience was tremendously moved and emotional. I have lived in Japan for over 20 years and I was ever so proud to be an Australian here, sharing the incredible spirit of solidarity your musicians displayed. Best wishes for a stable and peaceful 2012.

Melanie Brock

I would like to congratulate the Sydney Symphony, concertmaster Dene Olding and conductor Mark Wigglesworth for the thrilling performance of Lutosławski's Symphony No.4 [Oct 2011]. I had enjoyed the piece in recordings, but the impact of this live performance was far greater.

Since the publicity for this concert emphasised the Mozart and Dvořák pieces, I wanted to assure you that, as much as I enjoyed hearing the excellent performances of those well-known works, the chance to hear the Lutosławski was the reason that I bought the tickets.

Anthony Henderson

The visiting conductors and soloists last year were wonderful. In recent months two British conductors Mark Wigglesworth and Jonathan Nott brought new freshness to old favourites like Dvořák and Schubert. And having Brett Dean's brilliant and

complex violin concerto brought to this town in such a dazzling way by Frank Peter Zimmermann rounded out the year's programs wonderfully.

Alex Kan

Wow! What a great concert today [Signature Sounds, Dec 2011]. The orchestra was on fire, Zimmermann was consummate and Jonathan Nott was brilliant to watch. Please can we have more of Jonathan Nott in the future if you can lure him down here? He was so expressive it reminded me of Louis Frémaux, who was always a joy to watch.

Alexander Stitt

From the Managing Director

Welcome to the Sydney Symphony's 2012 season, and to *Bravo!* a new feature of our program books. *Bravo!* is our way of staying in touch with you, offering insights into our behind-the-scenes activities, musician profiles, and the latest news and views about the Sydney Symphony.

This year offers a tremendous variety of performances. I'm particularly looking forward to presenting stellar artists such as violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter in her Australian debut, young Australian saxophonist Amy Dickson and jazz trumpeter Chris Botti. We also welcome back conductors such as David Robertson, Donald Runnicles and young Russian firebrand Tugan Sokhiev.

The Sydney Symphony is going from strength to strength under the inspiring leadership of Vladimir Ashkenazy, with international tours and remarkable cycles of music by Mahler, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff. 2012 promises to be another great year of music-making. Outstanding performances are built on the excitement of connection between musicians and audience – and we look forward to you being a part of these in this our 80th anniversary year.

RORY JEFFES

We like to hear your comments, questions and stories about the Sydney Symphony. Please write to us at *Bravo!* Reply Paid 4338, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email yoursay@sydneyphilharmonic.com Please note that letters may be edited for length.



Brett Dean



emirates.com/au

Complimentary Concert in Vienna.

When you fly First or Business Class to Vienna.

Education Focus



Clockwise from top left: Rowena Watts, Sharn McIver, Melissa Woodroffe, Neil Thompson.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Each year the Sydney Symphony Fellowship program takes nine of Australia's most talented young musicians under its wing to help them achieve their dreams. We talk to four.

Every year, hundreds of instrumentalists graduate from tertiary institutions across Australia hoping to join an orchestra. But as 2012 Sydney Symphony Fellow Neil Thompson explains, 'There's lots that *can't* be taught at university.' And this violist knows that only a handful – the best of the best – will ever enter the profession. 'The Fellowship gives me the chance to ask the pros every question I can think of. Even though I've done casual work with a few of the orchestras, that's not really the time or place to be asking. But I'm sure the SSO musicians will be anticipating my questions.'

Now in its 11th year, the Fellowship program is a world leader in orchestral training and has been supported since 2011 by Premier Partner Credit Suisse. Through intense training and mentoring, the Fellows develop their orchestral technique and musicianship, while preparing for life as a professional musician.

This year's Fellows come from all corners of the country.

'Growing up in Whyalla, I hadn't even heard a French horn until I went to university,' explains Sharn McIver. 'But I heard Barry Tuckwell, who's a legend, in a masterclass and switched to horn from trumpet straight away; my embouchure [the shape of the mouth] and sound quality immediately improved.' Now, just four years later, Sharn has been selected for the Fellowship. 'This is the real deal. I know I need a serious, professional mindset to work alongside the Sydney Symphony musicians.'

Clarinetist Rowena Watts and bassoonist Melissa Woodroffe so valued the Fellowship in 2011 that they applied again this year. 'The variety of opportunities offered to the Fellows is just invaluable. I'm an "old hand" now,' jokes Melissa, 'but I'm so looking forward to playing more chamber music, and working in the orchestra again.'

Visit sydneysymphony.com/fellowship to find out when you can hear the 2012 Fellows in concert.

The Score

Harold in Italy

1834. Niccolò Paganini, violinist extraordinaire, had taken possession of a marvellous, century-old Stradivarius viola, but he had nothing to play on it. So he approached the French composer Hector Berlioz and asked him to write a viola concerto.

Berlioz recalled it this way: 'No sooner was the first section completed than Paganini wanted to see it. At the sight of all the viola's rests in the *Allegro*, he exclaimed: "This won't do!... I must be playing the whole time." ... Now realising that my scheme could not suit him, I thought of writing a series of orchestral scenes in which the solo viola would be involved like a character... By placing it amid poetic recollections of my wanderings in the Abruzzi, I intended to turn the viola into a sort of melancholy dreamer in the style of Byron's *Childe Harold*. Hence the title of the symphony...'

The result is a strange hybrid: it's a symphony, but with a viola soloist, and a narrative that contains not one incident from Byron's poem. The viola-hero – introduced at the beginning with his own motto theme – wanders through the mountains, encounters pilgrims, witnesses a lover's serenade and (finally) a frenetic orgy of brigands.

Fireworks and Fantasy with Roger Benedict, viola

Thursday Afternoon Symphony
Thu 22 March | 1.30pm

Emirates Metro Series
Fri 23 March | 8pm

Great Classics
Sat 24 March | 2pm
Sydney Opera House



CODA

NEW FACES ON STAGE

Over the new year we welcomed three new musicians to the Sydney Symphony: Alexander Norton as a member of the First Violins; Christopher Pidcock in the Cellos; and David Elton, who comes to us from the West Australian Symphony Orchestra as our new Principal Trumpet. Among new contracts, Adam Szabo and Tara Houghton have been appointed to the Cellos and Violas respectively.

Musicians who win their audition for a permanent place in the orchestra join us on what's known as a 'trial' – a period of three months to a year, during which musician and orchestra determine whether there's a good fit of musicianship and style for the section.

STUDENTS TURNING PROFESSIONAL

You might recognise three of the names above from our Fellowship program. Alexander Norton was a violin Fellow in 2006; Adam Szabo and Tara Houghton were in last

year's Fellowship program. Their achievement of a place in the orchestra is a common one for program alumni – oboist David Papp is another musician who joined us after his Fellowship year.

Among other recent Fellowship and Sinfonia alumni achievements: Francesco Lo Surdo, a 2010 horn Fellow, has been awarded a trial with the WASO, and Lisa Bucknell, a Sinfonia violist in 2010 and 2011, is heading to London to take up a position with the Southbank Sinfonia, an orchestra of young, emerging professionals.

NEW SOUTH WALES – ONE BIG MUSIC CLASSROOM

On Friday 17 February the first of our Meet the Music professional learning seminars will be streamed to regional conservatoriums, using the Sydney Opera House's connected classroom network.

By harnessing technology in this way, the 400 teachers and students from Sydney will be joined by teachers and students from all over New South Wales – not just as observers but able to participate and ask questions of their own.

In this first session, composers Matthew Hindson, Peter Sculthorpe and Barry Conyngham will be talking about their music.

NEW PARTNER

We're delighted to welcome Roses Only as a Silver Partner.

CONCERT AT ST JAMES'

The Chanterelle Quartet will give a free lunchtime concert at St James' King St on Wednesday 29 February at 1.15pm – performing music by Bach and Mozart's String Quartet in D, K575.

NEW FACES OFF STAGE

We recently welcomed two very small newcomers to the orchestra family. Congratulations to cellists Kristy Conrau and Elizabeth Neville, on the arrival of Asha and Louis respectively.

Find out more about our Education and Artist Development programs: sydneyssymphony.com/education

BRAVO EDITOR *Genevieve Lang*

sydneyssymphony.com/bravo



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