

18 & 21 August
Sydney Opera House

RAY CHEN PERFORMS
**MENDELSSOHN'S
VIOLIN CONCERTO**



Presenting Partner



Wilson Parking

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Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra 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, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra’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 Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australia-born Simone Young commences her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra makes its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

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THURSDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY
SUNDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Thursday 18 August, 1.30pm
Sunday 21 August, 2pm
Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

RAY CHEN PERFORMS MENDELSSOHN'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

Pure Joy

GEMMA NEW conductor
RAY CHEN violin

MARIA GRENFELL (born 1969)
Clockwerk

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)
Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.64
i) *Allegro molto appassionato*
ii) *Andante*
iii) *Allegro non troppo – Allegro molto vivace*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Symphony No.4 in B flat, Op.60
i) *Adagio – Allegro vivace*
ii) *Adagio*
iii) *Allegro vivace*
iv) *Allegro ma non troppo*

Pre-concert talk by Natalie
Shea in the Northern Foyer
45 minutes before each
performance.

ESTIMATED DURATIONS
9 minutes, 26 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
34 minutes

The concert will conclude
at approximately 3pm
(Thursday) and 3.30pm
(Sunday)

COVER IMAGE
Ray Chen, photo by
John Mac

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

GEMMA NEW conductor

Sought after for her insightful interpretations and dynamic presence, New Zealand-born Gemma New is the newly appointed Artistic Advisor and Principal Conductor of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. She also holds the titles of Music Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Hailed by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as “a rising star in the musical firmament”, New is the recipient of the prestigious 2021 Sir George Solti Conducting Award.

The 2022/23 season will mark Gemma New’s eighth season as Music Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and her fourth season as Principal Guest Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. 2022 marks New’s inaugural season as Artistic Advisor and Principal Conductor of New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, where she leads the 2022 Winter Festival with Hilary Hahn and Paul Lewis, Mozart Requiem with Voices New Zealand, and contemporary works by New Zealand composers John Psathas, John Rimmer, Tabea Squire and Anthony Ritchie in the orchestra’s 75th anniversary season.

Gemma regularly appears with top orchestras in North America and Europe, having conducted the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, WDR Sinfonieorchester, BBC Philharmonic, Hallé Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Helsingborgs Symfoniorkester, Ulster Orchestra, Orchestre National d’Île de France and Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

A former Dudamel Conducting Fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New served previously as Associate Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony. In 2018, she was a Conducting Fellow at Tanglewood Music Center where she led the world premiere of Michael Gandolfi’s *In America*. She is a former recipient of the David Karetsky Conducting Fellowship at the Aspen Music Festival and an Ansbacher Fellowship, in which she was selected by members of the Vienna Philharmonic to observe rehearsals and concerts at the Salzburg Festival. As a Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Fellow, she studied Mendelssohn’s music with Kurt Masur in Leipzig and led the Leipziger Symphonieorchester. Prior to receiving the 2021 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, she was awarded Solti Foundation Career Assistance Awards in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

Committed to new music, New made her Carnegie Hall debut in 2013 on works by John Adams and Andrew Norman. In 2010, she founded the Lunar Ensemble, a nine-member contemporary music ensemble that premiered 30 works over six seasons. New has conducted works by Thomas Adès, Anna Clyne, Steve Mackey, Aaron Jay Kernis and many others.



Gemma New,
photo by Roy Cox

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

RAY CHEN violin

Ray Chen is a violinist who redefines what it is to be a classical musician in the 21st century. With a media presence that enhances and inspires the classical audience, reaching out to millions through his unprecedented online following, Ray Chen's remarkable musicianship transmits to a global audience that is reflected in his engagements with the foremost orchestras and concert halls around the world.

Initially coming to attention via the Yehudi Menuhin (2008) and Queen Elizabeth (2009) Competitions, of which he was First Prize winner, he has built a profile in Europe, Asia, and the USA as well as his native Australia both live and on disc. Signed in 2017 to Decca Classics, the summer of 2017 saw the recording of the first album of this partnership with the London Philharmonic as a successor to his previous three critically acclaimed albums on SONY, the first of which (*Virtuoso*) received an ECHO Klassik Award. Profiled as "one to watch" by *The Strad* and *Gramophone* magazines, his profile has grown to encompass his featuring in the *Forbes* list of 30 most influential Asians under 30, appearing in major online TV series *Mozart in the Jungle*, a multi-year partnership with Giorgio Armani (who designed the cover of his Mozart album with Christoph Eschenbach) and performing at major media events such as France's Bastille Day (live to 800,000 people), the Nobel Prize Concert in Stockholm (telecast across Europe), and the BBC Proms.

He has appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Munich Philharmonic, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra Nazionale della Santa Cecilia and Los Angeles Philharmonic. He works with conductors such as Riccardo Chailly, Vladimir Jurowski, Sakari Oramo, Manfred Honeck, Daniele Gatti, Kirill Petrenko, Krystof Urbanski, Juraj Valcuha and many others. From 2012-2015 he was resident at the Dortmund Konzerthaus.

His presence on social media makes Ray Chen a pioneer in an artist's interaction with their audience, utilising the new opportunities of modern technology. His appearances and interactions with music and musicians are instantly disseminated to a new public in a contemporary and relatable way. He is the first musician to be invited to write a lifestyle blog for Italian publishing house, RCS Rizzoli (*Corriere della Sera*, *Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Max*). He has been featured in *Vogue* and is currently releasing his own design of violin case for the industry manufacturer GEWA. His commitment to music education is paramount, and inspires the younger generation of music students with his series of self-produced videos combining comedy and music. Through his online promotions his appearances regularly sell out and draw an entirely new demographic to the concert hall.

Born in Taiwan and raised in Australia, Ray was accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music at age 15, where he studied with Aaron Rosand and was supported by Young Concert Artists. He plays the 1715 "Joachim" Stradivarius violin on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation. This instrument was once owned by the famed Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim (1831-1907).



Ray Chen,
photo by Tom Downs

ABOUT THE MUSIC

MARIA GRENFELL (born 1969)

Clockwerk

Maria Grenfell was born in Malaysia, and completed composition studies in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where she was also a lecturer.

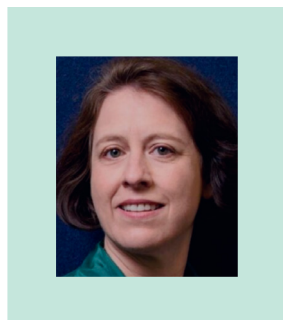
Her orchestral music has been commissioned, performed or recorded by all the major symphony orchestras in Australia and New Zealand. Her chamber music has been performed by musicians such as members of eighth blackbird, the Australia Ensemble, the Vienna Piano Trio, New Zealand Trio, ACO Collective, and numerous other ensembles. Her work is broadcast regularly in Australia and New Zealand. In 2013 Maria won 'Instrumental Work of the Year' for Tasmania at the Australian Art Music Awards for her septet *Ten Suns Ablaze*, commissioned by the Australia Ensemble, and in 2017 her double concerto *Spirals* won the Tasmanian award for 'Orchestral Work of the Year.' Her music was commissioned for the documentary film *Quoll Farm* aired in 2021.

Maria is an Associate Professor at the University of Tasmania Conservatorium of Music and co-ordinates the composition stream. She was Head of the Conservatorium from 2018-2019. She is regularly involved in mentoring young composers through various composer development programs throughout Australia. She served on the board of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra from 2009-2018. She lives in Hobart with her husband, guitarist David Malone, and they have two children.

Clockwerk was written in 1991 when Maria Grenfell was a student at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The concept for the piece comes from Béla Bartók's *Music for strings, percussion and celesta* and Bach's Brandenburg Concertos.

Clockwerk uses a Lydian-dominant scale (that is C, D, E, F#, G, A, Bb, which is equally at home in jazz, some folk music, and the folk-derived works of Bartók) and is built with a fugal construction where the opening musical subject enters one section at a time, beginning with the first violins. It works its way through many keys and gradually transforms into a new subject in triple meter, ending with an accelerated flourish.

Maria Grenfell © 2022.



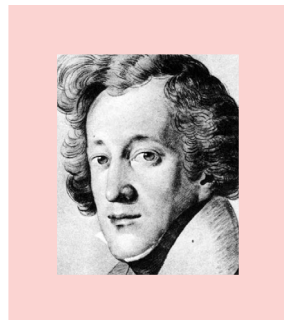
Maria Grenfell

ABOUT THE MUSIC

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847) Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.64

In 1826 two precociously gifted teenage boys met in Berlin: Felix Mendelssohn and Ferdinand David. By then Mendelssohn had already composed 13 string sinfonias and five concertos, which were premiered at a series of Sunday concerts instituted by Felix's father at the family home from 1822 on. Felix, his sister Fanny and members of the Court Orchestra, the forerunner of the Berlin Philharmonic, performed a range of music, but a great deal of the young composer's work. Among the five early concertos was one for violin and strings in D minor, written when Felix was 13 for his teacher Eduard Rietz.

The other boy, sixteen year-old violinist Ferdinand David, was employed in the orchestra of Berlin's Königstadt theatre. Between 1826 and 1829 David worked in Berlin and frequently played chamber music with Mendelssohn, Rietz and others. Mendelssohn and David would remain friends under Mendelssohn's early death in 1847, and David would be involved in editing his friend's work for posthumous publication.



Mendelssohn, portrait by
Johann Joseph Schmeller



Violinist Ferdinand David

Between 1829 and 1835 David lived at worked in Estonia, but in 1836 accepted Mendelssohn's invitation to move to Leipzig and become leader of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. There he also performed frequently with Mendelssohn in chamber concerts, and when the Leipzig Conservatorium opened in 1843, David established its violin department, with 14-year old Joseph Joachim among his first pupils. (With David, Mendelssohn and Schumann on staff, it must have been quite an institution.)

In 1838 Mendelssohn remarked in a letter to David that:

I would like to compose a violin concerto for next winter. One in E minor keeps running through my head, and the opening gives me no peace.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Assuming that it is the same opening that Mendelssohn eventually got down on paper, we can understand how the composer might have felt he was onto something. Despite Mendelssohn's reverence for the past (Berlioz sniffed that he was 'a little too fond of the dead'), this work is by no means neoclassical in form or manner. The opening, with its flowing arpeggios and distant, Beethovenian drum-taps, launches without introduction or exposition into a beautiful, Romantic melody for the soloist that starts high and gently ascends further into the stratosphere; the contrasting second subject groups shows Mendelssohn's exquisite ear, as he exploits unusual warm voicing in the wind section (flutes below the clarinets, for instance) as it accompanies the solo violin.

But for various reasons Mendelssohn was unable to complete the work that winter or the next, despite David's constant reminders. In 1839 he wrote politely to the violinist:

*It is nice of you to press me for a violin concerto!
I have the liveliest desire to write one for you and,
if I have a few propitious days, I'll bring you
something. But the task is not an easy one.*

It was made less easy by the sheer amount of work Mendelssohn had at this time. As well as duties with the Gewandhaus, he directed six music festivals in Germany and England, and devoted himself to reviving historical music from Bach to Schubert that had sunk into obscurity. In 1841 he was appointed Kapellmeister by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, so divided his time between Leipzig and Berlin until moving back to the latter in 1843. There, with the establishment of the new Cathedral choir, and with various composing and conducting engagements in Germany and abroad, Mendelssohn continued his hectic pace until the summer of 1844, when he took a vacation. Finally, after nearly a decade, he was able to return to the Violin Concerto, which he completed in September of that year. David performed it under the baton of Niels Gade (Mendelssohn was ill) in March 1845. Joachim played it soon after, and the rest is history.

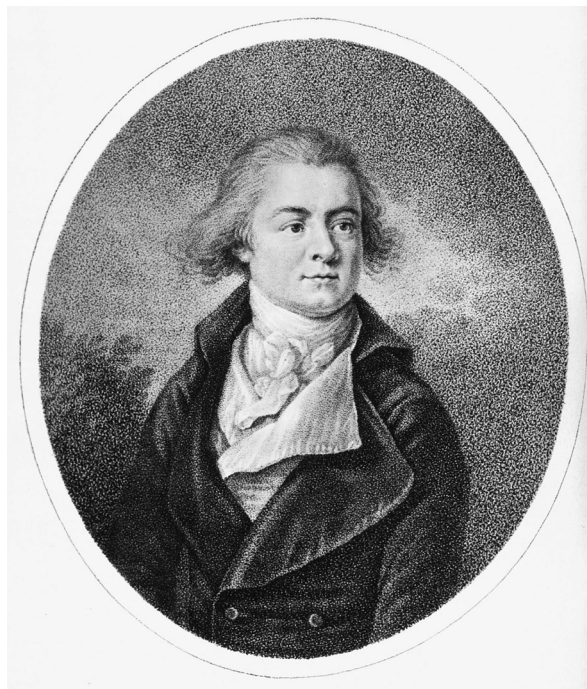
Mendelssohn was averse to virtuosity for its own sake, likening such effects to 'juggler's tricks'. Part of his diffidence may have been a response to the challenge of writing a genuine concerto that was not empty show. He was no doubt helped by David's technical artistry and personality, and there seems little doubt that David wrote the first movement's cadenza. But it was Mendelssohn's genius to place the cadenza before the recapitulation, thus making it part of the dramatic structure of sonata form, rather than an 'add-on', as in many other concertos.

A long bassoon note at the end of the first movement briefly holds the music in suspense before it moves, without a break, into a classically Mendelssohnian song. The slow movement is in simple ABA form, with a contrasting central section. It too passes into the finale without a pause; here the music has all the lightness and grace of the great Mendelssohn scherzos.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

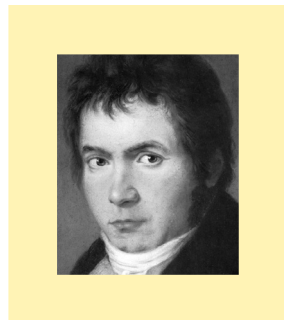
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Symphony No.4 in B flat, Op.60

Almost three years after trialling the Third Symphony there in 1804, Beethoven returned to the Lobkowitz palace in March 1807 to conduct his *Coriolan* Overture, Op.62, and the Fourth Symphony, both for the first time, in a private concert with the Prince's orchestra. He had begun composing the Fourth, and possibly completed most of it, during the summer of 1806, while also working on his Fourth Piano Concerto and revisions of his opera, *Fidelio*.



Prince Lobkowitz, whose private orchestra gave the first performance of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony.

Beethoven had been staying (near the modern Czech-Polish border) at the summer residence of another one of his princes, Karl Lichnowsky, when he and his host came almost to blows over the Prince's insistence that Beethoven (to whom he paid a handsome annual retainer) play for some visiting Napoleonic army officers. Whether in republican high dudgeon (as some suppose) or simply to accept a welcome invitation, Beethoven then left for the nearby castle of Lichnowsky's cousin, Franz Oppersdorff, whose private orchestra welcomed him with a performance of his Second Symphony. Oppersdorff also commissioned him to compose two new symphonies, and Beethoven duly received full payment for dedicating the Fourth to Oppersdorff in 1807, and part payment toward the Fifth a year later. He must have started work



Beethoven in 1804

ABOUT THE MUSIC

on the Fourth immediately. Responding to Oppersdorff's enthusiasm for the Second, it retreats from the gravity and length of the Third. But its orchestral brilliance, tonal energy and thematic focus also prepare for the Fifth.

Instead of launching directly into the *Allegro* main theme, Beethoven begins with a dramatic *Adagio* introduction. This in itself was nothing unusual: the First and Second have slow introductions; but here Beethoven was experimenting as he went. Insignificant as it may seem in retrospect, the novelty of beginning an introduction (indeed, a symphony) with a single pizzicato note for the strings, is sure to have registered with his original audience. And, to 18th-century ears only recently graduated to the 19th, the meandering harmonies and Beethoven's disinclination to find definite cadences must have seemed wilfully perverse. But there is nothing perverse or obfuscating about the way the main *Allegro* breaks. Sudden *fortissimo* chords accelerate toward it almost like a cavalry division being spurred into action. As this ebullient movement proceeds there are some especially beautiful solos, notably for the flute and bassoon, and unexpectedly too for the kettledrums.

The *Adagio* encompasses a typically Beethovenian 'dove and crocodile' mix of moods: serene and sentimental one moment, heroic and even bellicose the next. The orchestral textures vary accordingly, from a standard Classical slow movement's soft strings, winds and a pair of horns, to full fanfares for trumpets and drums, instruments which Beethoven had previously used to such dramatic effect in the Third Symphony's funeral march.

The third movement looks backward again to the minuet (still so-called in the first edition), of which it is a somewhat hyper-activated example; and forward to the scherzo of the Fifth Symphony. An innovation is its five-section form, built out of two components: the minuet proper (A), and a contrasting slightly slower Trio (B) from the winds, with a little help from the violins. These are played in the order A-B-A-B-A.

Berlioz called the finale 'an animated swarm of sparkling notes, a continual babble; interrupted only by occasional rough and uncouth chords'. That about sums it up, except to add that it also teems with unexpected sounds. There are short solo appearances for bassoon, clarinets (who also contribute a 'babbling brook' accompaniment), oboes and flute. At the very end, the music stops short, there is a coy exchange between violins, bassoons, violas and cellos, and a rush to the end.

Graeme Skinner © 2022

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