

Benjamin Grosvenor in Recital

2018



INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL MON 17 SEP, 7PM





SEPTEMBER



Ashkenazy's Romeo and Juliet

Steinbacher plays Bruch

TCHAIKOVSKY Romeo and Juliet – Fantasy Overture BRUCH Violin Concerto No.1 PROKOFIEV Romeo and Juliet: Suite

Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor Arabella Steinbacher violin APT Master Series Wed 19 Sep, 8pm Fri 21 Sep, 8pm Sat 22 Sep, 8pm Sydney Opera House





Tchaikovsky Cello Favourites

Ashkenazy conducts Strauss

TCHAIKOVSKY Andante cantabile for cello and strings TCHAIKOVSKY Rococo Variations R STRAUSS Symphonia domestica Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor Gautier Capuçon cello Thursday Afternoon Symphony
Thu 27 Sep, 1.30pm
Emirates Metro Series
Fri 28 Sep, 8pm
Great Classics
Sat 29 Sep, 2pm
Sydney Opera House



OCTOBER



The Last Days of Socrates

Haydn's Philosopher

MENDELSSOHN The Fair Melusina – Overture HAYDN Symphony No.22 (The Philosopher) DEAN (Text by Graeme William Ellis)

The Last Days of Socrates

Brett Dean conductor
Peter Coleman-Wright baritone
Andrew Goodwin tenor
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Thursday Afternoon Symphony Thu 11 Oct, 1.30pm Emirates Metro Series Fri 12 Oct, 8pm

Sydney Opera House





Thibaudet plays the Egyptian Concerto

With Sibelius 2

DEBUSSY Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun **SAINT-SAËNS** Piano Concerto No.5 (Egyptian) **SIBELIUS** Symphony No.2

Jukka-Pekka Saraste conductor Jean-Yves Thibaudet piano APT Master Series
Wed 17 Oct, 8pm
Fri 19 Oct, 8pm

Sat 20 Oct, 8pm Sydney Opera House





Beethoven Nine

Ode to Joy

HAYDN Symphony No.104 (London)
BEETHOVEN Symphony No.9
Edo de Waart conductor
Amanda Majeski soprano
Caitlin Hulcup mezzo-soprano
Kim Begley tenor
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Thursday Afternoon Symphony **Thu 25 Oct, 1.30pm**Emirates Metro Series

Great Classics
Sat 27 Oct, 2pm
Sydney Opera House

Fri 26 Oct. 8pm





French Fellowship

Stravinsky's Pulcinella

POULENC Suite française RAVEL Three Poems by Stéphane Mallarmé STRAVINSKY Pulcinella: Suite Roger Benedict conductor

Caitlin Hulcup mezzo-soprano
2018 Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellows
Musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Tea & Symphony
Fri 26 Oct, 11am
Sydney Opera House



Dear Music Lovers

With an impressive year so far, we are honoured to present the final concert of the 2018 Sydney Symphony Orchestra International Pianists in Recital series. This series continues to inspire audiences by bringing together a collection of extraordinary artists from around the world, with an equally memorable program.

Internationally recognised for our expertise in tuning, servicing, restorations and sales we are passionate about pianos and love the work we do. Our commitment is to support our arts community by providing a high standard of instrumental workmanship on the concert stage. This high standard of technique and care allows us to be on the forefront of the international concert stage, which continues to showcase celebrated artists at this outstanding venue. It is a privilege for us to look after the magnificent instrument you see before you.

To celebrate our 15-year partnership with the SSO we are delighted to announce our upcoming piano sale featuring pre-owned Steinway & Son's pianos, plus other brands in new and pre-owned models at every budget. In recognition of our partnership and our philanthropic values, we will be donating part of the proceeds to the orchestra's Learning & Engagement program. This rare opportunity to acquire a unique and beautiful piano will be held at our store from 21-23 September. To register your interest please visit our website.

We hope that you enjoy tonight's recital and look forward to seeing you again in the new year for another exciting program of new artists and venues across Sydney.

98

Ara Vartoukian OAM
Director, Theme & Variations
Piano Services
Piano Technician



INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

PRESENTED BY THEME & VARIATIONS MONDAY 17 SEPTEMBER, 7PM

CITY RECITAL HALL





Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

Benjamin Grosvenor in Recital

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) French Suite No.5 in G major, BWV 816

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavotte

Bourrée Loure

Gigue

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791) Piano Sonata No.13 in B flat major, K.333

Allegro Andante cantabile Allegretto grazioso

INTERVAL

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849) Barcarolle in F sharp major, Op.60

ENRIQUE GRANADOS (1867-1916)

Two pieces from Goyescas:

Los requiebros Quejas ó La maja y el ruiseñor

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Gaspard de la Nuit - Three poems for piano according to Aloysius Bertrand

Ondine Le gibet (The gallows) Scarbo

PRESENTING PARTNER



Pre-concert talk by David Larkin in the first floor Reception Room, 6.15 pm.

Estimated durations: 21 minutes, 15 minutes, 20-minute interval, 8 minutes, 15 minutes, 22 minutes. The recital will conclude at approximately 9pm.

COVER PHOTO: Sophie Wright/Decca





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THE ARTISTS



Benjamin Grosvenor

British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is internationally recognised for electrifying performances and insightful interpretations. His virtuosic command over the most strenuous technical complexities underpins the remarkable depth and understanding of his musicianship. He is renowned for his distinctive sound, described as 'poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clearminded, intelligent but not without humour, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch' (The Independent), making him one of the most sought-after young pianists in the world.

Benjamin Grosvenor first came to prominence as the outstanding winner of the Keyboard Final of the 2004 BBC Young Musician Competition at the age of eleven. Since then, he has become an internationally regarded pianist performing with orchestras across the world, including the Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, Filarmonica della Scala, Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, the London Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic under the baton of such esteemed conductors as Riccardo Chailly, Sir Mark Elder,

Emmanuel Krivine, Gianandrea Noseda, François-Xavier Roth, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Nathalie Stutzmann and Michael Tilson Thomas. A BBC New Generation Artist from 2010-12, Benjamin has performed at the BBC Proms on a number of occasions and in 2015 starred at the Last Night, performing Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No.2 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Marin Alsop.

In 2011, he signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever to sign to the label and the first British pianist to sign to the label in almost 60 years. During his sensational career to date, he has also received Gramophone's Young Artist of the Year and Instrumental Award, a Classic Brits Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, a Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award and a Fellowship from the Royal Academy of Music. In 2016 he was announced as the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic.

Johann Sebastian Bach French Suite No.5 in G major, BWV 816

Allemande Courante Sarabande Gavotte Bourrée Loure Gique

How do we think of Johann Sebastian Bach? As the greatest of baroque masters, of course. As a devout Lutheran who composed cantatas and passions - sacred music of tremendous power. An organist capable of the spectacular Toccata and Fugue in D minor. The composer of the Brandenburg Concertos. Famously the father of 22 children, and the teacher of many young musicians.

It was likely as a teacher that Bach came to compose the French Suites (not his name for them). The earliest drafts date from 1722. although some movements may have been written earlier, and the set was completed by about 1725. Each one takes the form of a suite of characteristic dances, imported from the French court, with the allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue providing the core of the suite, augmented by other dances such as the gavotte and minuet. The influences here are Jean-Baptiste Lully and, especially, François Couperin, and the prevailing style is tuneful and relatively simple in texture, approaching the popular style galant.

In other respects, however, the suites are not particularly French, and we may never know why F.W. Marpurg chose to label them so in 1762. Most obviously, the suites lack the majestic ouverture typically found at the front of French suites (the first movement of the Keyboard Partita No.4 in D is a fine example). And, ironically, the dances in the English Suites are often truer to their French models. In the French Suite No.5, for example, the Courante is closer in feel to the lively Italian corrente than its more deliberate French cousin.

This suite might lack an ouverture but the Allemande serves a similar function. It has the character of a prelude, with a flowing stream of notes, but the 'dotted' rhythms (in which a long note is followed by a short note for a snappy effect) make a discreet nod to the French overture style.

The Courante races along, while the Sarabande is sedate and elegant, with delicate ornamentation - 'grace notes' - in the French style.

Keynotes

BACH

Born Eisenach, 1685 Died Leipzig, 1750



ELIAS GOTTLOB HAUSSMANN

In his lifetime Johann Sebastian Bach was renowned as an organist: in the century after his death his name was kept alive by enthusiasts, and then - spurred in part by Mendelssohn's revival of the Matthew Passion - he gained new and enduring fame as a great master of the baroque era.

His career has been defined by three major periods of employment, In 1708, he became court organist in Weimar, but when he was passed over for a promotion, it was time to move on, and in 1717 Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen offered him a Kapellmeister post. It wasn't an easy departure: the Duke of Weimar briefly placed him under arrest!

In Cöthen, where the young prince 'loved and understood music' and the orchestra was a fine one, Bach composed much instrumental music, including the Brandenburg concertos. In 1722 he applied for the post of cantor at the school attached to the Thomas Church in Leipzig. He wasn't the town council's first choice, but he won the job and spent the remaining 27 years of his life in Leipzig: teaching, performing, organising the musical life of the church and composing his great series of church cantatas.

The *Gavotte* is the first of three 'optional' dances in this suite. Its distinguishing characteristic is the two-count upbeat. It is followed by the *Bourrée*, with its lively melody above a rapidly moving left hand part. The *Loure* is a slow version of the gigue (or jig) and the name alludes to a kind of musette or French bagpipe, although Bach does nothing so obvious as provide a folk-style drone.

The final *Gigue* is perhaps the best-known movement from this suite. True to the dance style, it skips along at a fast tempo, but Bach gives it gravity by writing it as a three-voice fugue – each part entering in turn, beginning with the highest.

YVONNE FRINDLE
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2013

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Piano Sonata No.13 in B flat major, K.333

Allegro Andante cantabile Allegretto grazioso

Virtuoso pianists, even some not usually associated with Mozart's music, seem to gravitate to this sonata (Horowitz, for example). No wonder. Mozart was a virtuoso himself, and this sonata was his concert display piece. Virtuosity is expected in concertos, rather than in the more intimate medium of the classical sonata, but for Mozart there were fewer opportunities for concerto than for solo performance. He first reserved this sonata for his own use, before allowing its publication in Vienna during the summer of 1784. Partly because it begins with an obvious reminiscence of a sonata by Johann Christian Bach (Op.17 No.4), this sonata by Mozart was long thought to date from soon after he met, for the last time, that composer, in Paris during 1778. But study of the handwriting and the watermarks suggests the music was written in 1783 during Mozart's return to Vienna, via Linz, from his first visit to Salzburg after his marriage. Neither the sonata nor the 'Linz' Symphony Mozart composed in Linz for a concert reveals any sign of haste.

The reminiscence of the 'London' Bach may be only semi-conscious. The beginning echoes an idea in the polished 'galant' style of that composer, from whom Mozart learnt so much about blending Italian and German idioms. Mozart remarked to his father how when he was composing in a particular key, ideas from Christian Bach would come unbidden to his mind. They never remained untransformed; here a deceptively unassuming opening unfolds into a rich design, and as the development section begins, the music soon, but briefly turns stormy. The movement heard in retrospect seems teeming with ideas, yet holds them in equipoise. A similar

Keynotes

WAMOZART

Born Salzburg, 1756 Died Vienna, 1791

Mozart began to compose at the age of five, and made his debut as a performer a year later. His father, Leopold, genuinely believed that his son was a 'miracle that God had allowed to be born in Salzburg', while being keenly aware of the commercial potential of having a child prodigy to exhibit on tours of London, Paris, and various cities in Italy and the German-speaking world.

The Mozarts were employed by the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, but, reaching adulthood, Wolfgang decided to settle to Vienna in 1781.

His career there was largely very successful. Around 1782 he was Vienna's star composer and performer of piano concertos, but composing *The Marriage of Figaro* changed the course of his career, and the nature of opera, forever.

sleight-of-hand shapes the slow movement. The theme again echoes the manner of Christian Bach, as Mozart did in his piano concerto K.414. The transformation comes in the middle section of the sonata's slow movement, with highly coloured ('chromatic') ideas, developed to a pitch of intensity with ornamentation, which continues into the reprise.

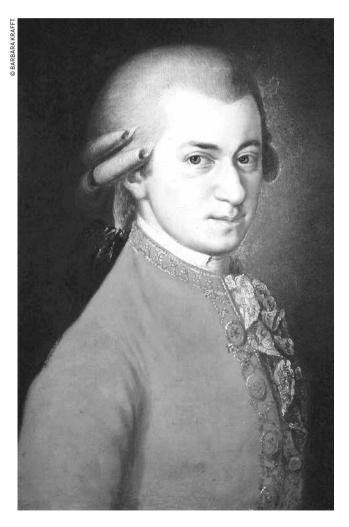
composer, in what amounts to a concerto without orchestra, complete with cadenza (in a YouTube video of a 1995 Munich concert, Friedrich Gulda, a pianist many considered eccentric, may be heard announcing 'Cadenza!' at this moment. He had a point: realizing that's what it was would enhance the listeners' enjoyment.). The re-dating of this sonata locates it as a harbinger of Mozart's great

In the finale Mozart shows his virtuoso hand as performer and piano concertos of 1784-1786. No wonder virtuosos like to play it. by 1791 the economy had recovered, and, in the last year of his life, Mozart fulfilled numerous commissions. His death at 35 was probably the result of kidney failure, certainly not poisoning; his burial in a mass grave was in accordance with the practice mandated by the imperial government.

Mozart suffered some financial

difficulties in the later 1780s but

DAVID GARRETT © 2018



◆ Posthumous portrait of Mozart by Barbara Kraft

Frédéric Chopin Barcarolle in F sharp major, Op.60

It is our great good fortune that Chopin, the great lyric poet of the piano, matured early as a composer and that he worked at a time when the piano reigned supreme in Europe and when Paris – where he spent most of his short life – was awash with great pianists such as Liszt, Thalberg, Moscheles and Kalkbrenner, to mention just a few.

Opera was a great love right from the beginning and accounts in part for the quasi-vocal melodic lines which are the stalwart of his piano pieces; he loved Rossini (*The Barber of Seville*), Weber (*Der Freischütz*) and particularly the operas of Bellini. The embellishments to a basic vocal line surely came from listening to the great singers of the day. This kind of singing (*bel canto*, 'beautiful singing'), encompassing full-blooded but flexible melody, is present in all of Chopin but is an especially compelling aspect of his only Barcarolle.

The barcarolle is a boating song, associated with the Venetian gondoliers. Perhaps the most famous example is the duet that begins Act III of Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* ('Beautiful night, oh night of love'). Its musical features are a rocking or swaying rhythm and a gentle character.

Chopin's lilting Barcarolle was published in 1846 and holds its own with the crowning achievements from his final period. The 19th-century writer Wilhelm von Lenz tells of his request to the gifted pianist Carl Tausig to play the piece for him. Tausig promised him that he would, adding: 'That is a performance which must not be undertaken before more than two persons...! love the piece, but take it rarely.' Lenz bought the music and his personal reaction to the piece was not favourable – he thought it was an overblown nocturne, with what he termed a Babel of figuration. But after hearing Tausig play it, he admitted that he was wrong, and that the virtuoso had injected into the 'nine pages of enervating music, of one and same long-breathed rhythm, so much interest, so much motion, so much action' that he was sorry the piece was not longer!

ADAPTED IN PART FROM A NOTE BY LARRY SITSKY SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2010

Keynotes

CHOPIN

Born Żelazowa Wola, 1810 Died Paris, 1849

Where Franz Liszt's career traces a

magnificent arc from prodigy through virtuoso to distinguished composer of large-scale works, his sometime friend and colleague Chopin's seems a story of withdrawal from the concert platform and even from metropolitan society. After he left Poland for France in 1830, his piano music became ever more subtle more suited to the salon than the concert hall - and he himself became ever more reluctant to perform in front of large audiences. He contributed to the large-scale form of the sonata, but the more intimate solo genres that he made his own, such as the nocturne, ballade, polonaise or mazurka, often take on their own substantial



scale and an amazing intricacy

of contemporary opera.

derived in part from the ornate lines

Eugène Delacroix portrait of Chopin, 1838.

Enrique Granados Goyescas:

Los requiebros (The Flirtations) Quejas ó La maja el ruiseñor (Complaints, or The Maja and the Nightingale)

Granados described the painter Francisco Goya (1746–1828) as 'the representative genius' of his country. The Goya that Granados captured in *Goyescas* is not the artist of the War Paintings or the Black Paintings but a younger man, creator of idyllic court paintings and 'caprichos', etchings that form wry commentaries on the follies of society.

Central to Goya's early art were the *majos* and *majas* – dandies, or 'gallants', and their vibrant women. These are not impoverished people, but they do belong to the lower classes. The *majos* were part of an idealised Castilian world, a romanticised portrait of old Spain that Granados captured in music as Goya had represented in art. (Granados himself made pencil, ink and pastel sketches in his music notebooks: pretty *majas* in flirtatious poses with titles such as 'The Maja on the Balcony' and, tellingly, 'Dialogue at the Window', where a caped *majo*, with his back to us, converses through a *reja*, or iron grill, with his *maja*.)

The etching that inspired **'Los requiebros'** ('Two of a kind', Capricho No.5) was used as the cover illustration for the first edition of *Goyescas* – it shows a *maja* flirting with a man carrying a sword. In the music the flirtatious mood is represented with teasing stops and starts and changing tempos. Granados quotes a popular love song that would have been instantly recognised by his contemporaries.

'Quejas ó La maja el ruiseñor' is perhaps the most famous – and rightly celebrated – piece in *Goyescas*. The scene is a conversation between a heartbroken *maja* and a nightingale, which is given its own virtuoso cadenza at the end, a nod to the tradition that the nightingale never repeats itself in song. Alicia de Larrocha – one of Granados' most ardent champions at the piano – described this piece as 'the most tender...and at the same time the most intensely passionate' of Granados' creations. In it he quotes a haunting Valencian folk tune he'd heard on his travels, and he offers an interpretative instruction for the pianist: to play 'with the iealousy of a wife and not the sadness of a widow.'

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2016

Keynotes

GRANADOS

Born Lleida, Spain, 1867 Died English Channel, 1916 'Granados' is a Castilian name meaning 'distinguished' and, appropriately, Enrique Granados is among the most distinguished of Spanish composers, taking his place with Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albéniz. As a boy he wanted to be an architect, but he was also inspired by a harp-playing neighbour and by the age of 13 showed enough promise as a pianist to embark on a serious program of study in Barcelona. Around this time he discovered the music of Schumann, which he adored; the pianist Alicia de Larrocha described Granados' spirit as 'inextricably bound up' with European Romanticism and the soul of Spain's folkloric traditions. For many music lovers, his idiom is the most characteristically 'Spanish' of all. Granados composed operas and orchestral pieces but is best known for his piano works, in particular the Spanish Dances - the work that first brought him to prominence



- and his masterpiece Goyescas.



2019... An incredible season ahead

Every concert night, when the musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra pick up their instruments, they take musical notations that are fixed on a page and breathe extraordinary life into them. It is their artistry that miraculously brings the score alive.

The music we share with you in the Concert Hall tonight is the artistic realisation of pen and ink, ideas on paper – it may be a bit different to how it was in rehearsal, or how it sounds on other nights. That's one of the gifts of live music-making – the shared energy, here and now, makes each performance special.

It's exactly what we strive to achieve each time we present a new season to you – a season that is special, that anticipates the enthusiasm you bring as a music lover, that stimulates your curiosity and inspires you to enjoy more music with us.

The 2019 season is wonderfully diverse. The Season Opening Gala places Diana Doherty – a musical treasure – centre stage with Nigel Westlake's *Spirit of the Wild* oboe concerto, reprising one of the most exciting premieres of my time in Sydney. The operas-in-concert continue with Britten's *Peter Grimes*, headlined by a powerhouse duo – Stuart Skelton and Nicole Car. And, in a first for Australia, an amazing piece of theatre-with-music: Tom Stoppard and André Previn's satirical *Every Good Boy Deserves Fayour*.

My final program in 2019 – American Harmonies – brings together all-American showstoppers: the lyrical beauty of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*; a new concerto by Christopher Rouse that showcases the incredible talent of one of our own musicians, bassoonist Todd Gibson-Cornish; and *Harmonielehre* by John Adams – one of the greats and a very dear personal friend. That spirit of warm friendship between you, me and the musicans is so important to our musical community.

Please join us in 2019 and let's celebrate together.

David Robertson

The Lowy Chair of

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

Highlights - David Robertson Conducts

FEBRUARY Season Opening Gala – Diana Doherty performs Westlake

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra

JUNE Lang Lang Gala Performance – Mozart Piano Concerto No.24

JULY Britten's Peter Grimes

with Stuart Skelton and Nicole Car

AUGUST Keys to the City Festival

Kirill Gerstein - piano concertos by Grieg, Ravel and Gershwin

NOVEMBER André Previn and Tom Stoppard's Every Good Boy Deserves

Favour – A play for actors and orchestra with Mitchell Butel and Martin Crewes

American Harmonies - Adams, Copland and Rouse





Jean-Yves Thibaudet Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No.5 The Egyptian

Jean-Yves Thibaudet is no stranger to the Sydney Symphony, and each and every performance over the past three decades of our musical partnership has been memorable. Now, after a five-year absence, he returns to perform Saint-Saëns' *Egyptian* piano concerto, full of colour and evocative themes and demanding the utmost in dazzling virtuosity. Jukka-Pekka Saraste returns to Sydney with the music of fellow Finn Jean Sibelius.

Prepare for a night of power, poetry and revelation.

DEBUSSY Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto No.5 (Egyptian) SIBELIUS Symphony No.2

Jukka-Pekka Saraste conductor Jean-Yves Thibaudet piano

Wednesday 17 October, 8pm Friday 19 October, 8pm Saturday 20 October, 8pm **Sydney Opera House**







Maurice Ravel Gaspard de la Nuit – Three poems for piano according to Aloysius Bertrand

Ondine Le gibet (The gallows) Scarbo

Gaspard de la Nuit is a set of three piano pieces 'after' poems by the minor writer Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), who called them 'gothic fantasies'. Composed by Ravel at the height of his powers in 1908, this work has claims to be his supreme achievement for solo piano, not least for what Vladimir Jankelevitch calls its 'incredible imaginative mobility', and is certainly his hardest to play.

Gaspard de la Nuit was 'the very devil to write', Ravel admitted, 'which is only logical since He is the author of the poems'. In Bertrand's conceit, the mysterious nocturnal Gaspard is Satan in disguise. The composer could also have claimed he intended the music to be 'the very devil to play'. Ravel, a persistent deflector of inquiries into his motives, claimed to his friend Maurice Delage that he set out to write something more difficult than what was regarded as the ne plus ultra of technique, Islamey by Balakirev. Ravel was throwing down a challenge to Gaspard's first performer, the Catalan Ricardo Viñes. This pianist was Ravel's closest friend for years, and fellow-member of the counter-cultural group of aesthetes who called themselves the Apaches. It was Viñes who



Keynotes

RAVEL

Born Ciboure, 1875 Died Paris, 1937

In some exasperation, Ravel once asked a friend, 'Doesn't it ever occur to those people that I can be "artificial" by nature?' He was responding to the criticism that his music was more interested in technique than expression. There is some truth in the charge: Stravinsky described him affectionately - as the 'Swiss watchmaker of music', and Ravel's stated aim was indeed 'technical perfection'. In fact, his love of mechanical intricacy led Rayel to collect various automata and other small machines, and he dreamed, as he put it in a 1933 article, of 'Finding Tunes in Factories'. Many of his pieces are exquisite simulacra of earlier or other forms and styles - Renaissance dances, Spanish music, jazz, or the music of the French Baroque.

◆ Ravel and Ricardo Viñes

drew Aloysius Bertrand's prose poems to Ravel's attention, guessing that their atmosphere – romantic and gothic, vaguely sinister – would appeal. Ravel told pianist Vlado Perlemuter that in *Gaspard* he had wanted to produce a caricature of romanticism; but he added under his breath that he may have got carried away.

Ravel also hinted at a third layer of challenge, a paradox typical of him: the music was to resemble not a transcription of an orchestral piece, but music that set out to be like an orchestral transcription for piano. Many pianists have more or less overcome *Gaspard de la Nuit*'s technical challenges, but neither Ravel nor anyone else has tried to orchestrate it.

Ondine is a water-sprite, appearing in raindrops on a window-pane. She tries in vain to lure the poet into her watery realm. Ravel's main text (not from Bertrand) tells of the murmur of a tender and sad voice singing. Ravel surrounds it with a cascade of arpeggios sounding multi-colored harmonies. He transcends the water music of his own *Jeux d'eau* (1901), which had emulated Liszt's *Jeux d'eau* à *la Villa d'Este*.

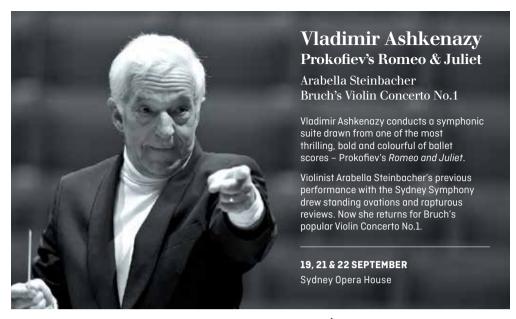
Le Gibet is an impression of a corpse hanging from a gibbet in the rays of the setting sun. A world opens up, akin to Callot's 17th century engravings of horrors, referenced by Bertrand – evil and macabre. An obsessively slow piece (Roy Howat reckons it the slowest piece of French music before Messiaen), Le Gibet's difficulty is obvious to the player more than to the listener. The pianist sounds the note B flat 153 times, shifting and manipulating the harmonies in which the note is heard: 'It is the sound of a bell tolling from the walls of a town far away on the horizon'.

Scarbo is an embodiment of the devilish – or is this vicious goblin a hallucination? He flits about the insomniac poet's bedroom, laughing in the shadow of the alcove or scratching at the silk curtains. Yet when he seems about to materialize, he turns blue and translucent, then vanishes. Under the three -note principal theme in chords Ravel wrote on a student's copy the words 'Quelle horreur!' (how horrifying), referring to Scarbo, perhaps also to the difficulty of executing the drum-like figure preceding this idea, not to mention what follows, especially the passages in rapid consecutive seconds to be played with the thumb. Ravel could twist his own thumb into the palm of his hand with unusual facility. Scarbo the wicked gnome seems to have been standing at the composer's elbow when he wrote this transcendental virtuosity, urging him to have no pity on the performer.

DAVID GARRETT © 2018



Portrait of Ravel by Achille Ouvré, 1907





Presented as part of the APT Master Series







David Robertson
Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

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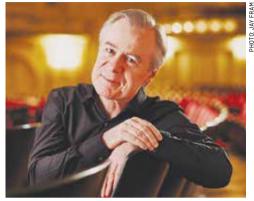
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