



**sydney symphony orchestra**

David Robertson The Lowy Chair of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

# Steven Osborne in Recital

2018



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Simone Young conductor  
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**Brahms Revelation:  
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orchestra**

**David Robertson**  
Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL  
PRESENTED BY THEME & VARIATIONS  
MONDAY 6 AUGUST, 7PM  
.....  
CITY RECITAL HALL

# Steven Osborne in Recital

## CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

### *Estampes* (Engravings)

*Pagodes* (Pagodas)

*La Soirée dans Grenade* (Evening in Granada)

*Jardins sous la pluie* (Gardens in the rain)

## SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

### Piano Sonata No.6 in A major, Op.82

*Allegro moderato*

*Allegretto*

*Tempo di valzer lentissimo*

*Vivace*

INTERVAL

## DEBUSSY

### *Images*, Book 2

*Cloches à travers les feuilles* (Bells through the leaves)

*Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*

(And the moon descends on the temple that was)

*Poissons d'or* (Goldfish)

## PROKOFIEV

### Piano Sonata No.8 in B flat major, Op.84

*Andante dolce* – *Allegro moderato*

*Andante sognando*

*Vivace* – *Allegro ben marcato* – *Andantino* –

*Vivace, come prima*



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Tonight's recital will be recorded by ABC Classic FM for broadcast across Australia on Monday 13 August at 1pm and again on Thursday 13 September at 1pm.

.....  
Pre-concert talk by Yvonne Frindle at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.

.....  
Estimated durations:  
13 minutes, 28 minutes, 20-minute interval, 13 minutes, 32 minutes  
The recital will conclude at approximately 9pm.

.....  
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BEN GALLOVEGA

## Steven Osborne

*piano*

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Steven Osborne is one of Britain's most notable musicians whose insightful and idiomatic interpretations of diverse repertoire show an immense musical depth. His numerous awards include the Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year (2013) and two Gramophone Awards for recordings of Britten's music for piano and orchestra and of solo works by Prokofiev and Mussorgsky.

Concerto performances take Steven Osborne to major orchestras all over the world, including recent visits to the Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Salzburg Mozarteum, Oslo Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony, Danish National Radio, London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, St Louis Symphony, Aspen Music Festival and Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center. He is also a regular visitor to Australia, including frequent appearances for the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

His recitals of carefully crafted programs are publicly and critically acclaimed without exception. He has performed in many of the world's prestigious venues including the Konzerthaus Vienna, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Philharmonie Berlin, Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Carnegie Hall and Wigmore Hall.

Highlights of the 2017–18 season have included performances with the Bergen Philharmonic (conducted by Edward Gardner), Danish National Symphony (Juanjo Mena), Radio Symphonieorchester Wien (Cornelius Meister), Gulbenkian Orchestra (Mena), Ensemble Orchestral de Paris (Ludovic Morlot) and BBC Symphony Orchestra (Alexander Vedernikov). His recital appearances include Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus* at the Lincoln Center, and concerts in Rome, Mexico and both St John's Smith Square and Wigmore Hall in London.

This season marks his 19th year as a Hyperion recording artist, and his recordings span a wide range of repertoire, including Beethoven, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Liszt, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Medtner, Messiaen, Britten, Tippett, Crumb and Feldman.

Steven Osborne's most recent appearances for the SSO were in 2010 (when he performed a Mozart concerto with Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting) and 2012, when he appeared at short notice, replacing Louis Lortie. Last week, he gave the Australian premiere of Julian Anderson's *Imaginary Museum* and performed Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, with Ludovic Morlot conducting the orchestra.

[www.stevenosborne.com](http://www.stevenosborne.com)



This black lacquer Japanese panel depicting carp hung on the wall of Debussy's study and is the likely inspiration for *Poissons d'or* in his second book of *Images*. It is held by the Debussy Museum in the composer's birthplace, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## Claude Debussy Estampes (Prints)

*Pagodes (Pagodas)*

*La Soirée dans Grenade (Evening in Granada)*

*Jardins sous la pluie (Gardens in the Rain)*

First performed by Ricardo Viñes at the Société National on 9 January 1904, Debussy's *Estampes* confirmed his reputation as a composer of evocative music, emerging from the world of its titles.

'Estampes' are engravings or prints, a title that suggests not just Debussy's mania for Japanese prints (for which *estampes* is the standard French term), but the idea of impressing or stamping on the memory. These vividly characterised pieces are musical postcards, and yet there is also a pervasive sense of nostalgia and fantasy – conjuring mood, sensation, even scent.

Debussy was fascinated by the Javanese gamelan music he heard at the Paris Exposition in 1889 and 1900 – he loved the tuneful percussion sound, intricate textures and five-note gapped scales. In three distinct layers, Debussy gives us low bell notes, the principal themes and, high on the keyboard, rapid filigree. This is the sound world of *Pagodes* – floating and sensuous, its outlines thought to evoke the curves of a pagoda roof.

Debussy had not yet visited Spain when he composed *Estampes*, although he had seen gypsy performances depicting 'Andalusia in Moorish times' at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Despite this limited exposure, he brilliantly captures the colours and rhythms of Spanish dance in *Evening in Granada*, and the nocturnal mood – for which the pianist is instructed to play 'slowly in a nonchalantly graceful rhythm' – is underpinned by compelling repeated rhythms taken from the habanera. Spanish composer Manuel de Falla gave Debussy the finest compliment when he described it as 'characteristically Spanish in every detail', conjuring 'the effect of images mirrored by moonlight upon the limpid waters of the large albercas adjoining the Alhambra'.

The final movement, *Gardens in the Rain*, brings the music home to France and suggests the world of childhood with two French nursery songs woven into the rippling, toccata texture: 'Nous n'irons plus au bois' and 'Do, do, l'enfant do'. For one writer it brings to mind the picture of a child looking out the window at the rain, which sometimes patters, sometimes dashes furiously against the glass. Or perhaps the plaintive character of the nursery tunes will convey a very grownup nostalgia and regret.

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2010/2018

## Keynotes

### DEBUSSY

*Born Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1862  
Died Paris, 1918*

In attempting to establish a palpably 'French' musical style in the face of the Austro-Germanic tradition, Debussy brought about the birth of modern music. It's often said that the flute solo that begins his groundbreaking *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* 'ushered in the 20th century'. He first heard the sound of gamelan music at the Paris Exposition of 1889, and this prompted him to adopt non-traditional scales and free-floating effects. In both his orchestral and his piano music he explored new instrumental and harmonic colours, and his style has often been compared with that of the Impressionists in visual art, even though Debussy himself hated the term 'Impressionism'.

### ESTAMPES

The title refers to Japanese prints, which Debussy loved, as well as the idea of impressions and memory. Each of the three pieces in this set evokes a powerful and distinctive picture. *Pagodes* comes from the world of Javanese gamelan music, which had first reached Paris in 1889. *Evening in Granada* is in the style of a habanera and its graceful arabesques and impassioned strumming capture the Spanish character to perfection. *Gardens in the Rain* offers a moment of nostalgia, quoting songs from the composer's childhood.



## Sergei Prokofiev

### Piano Sonata No.6 in A major, Op.82

*Allegro moderato*

*Allegretto*

*Tempo di valzer lentissimo*

*Vivace*

### Piano Sonata No.8 in B flat major, Op.84

*Andante dolce – Allegro moderato*

*Andante sognando*

*Vivace – Allegro ben marcato – Andantino – Vivace, come prima*

Sergei Prokofiev burst on the scene in Russia, just before the revolutionary upheaval of 1917, as an *enfant terrible* of music. He shocked listeners with aggressive, even percussive, pianism and with his daringly avant-garde music, as when he played his First Piano Concerto for his conservatorium graduation in 1914. Working in Western Europe and the USA, he was frustrated that he was accepted as a pianist, while his music was rejected as too challenging. Then, to the surprise of some, he returned to Russia, and the music he composed there during the 1930s seemed to be aiming at a more ready acceptance (think *Peter and the Wolf*, and the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*). But World War II brought back some of the 'old' Prokofiev, especially in his trilogy of 'War Sonatas' (Nos. 6, 7 and 8).

These three piano sonatas seem to recall Prokofiev's early reputation as a musical iconoclast. The young Sviatoslav Richter, who in 1940 heard Prokofiev playing his new Sonata No.6 for friends, reported on the music's 'barbaric audacity' and the way it 'broke with the ideals of Romanticism' and conveyed 'the terrifying pulse of the 20th century'. At the same time, a listener expecting unrelenting belligerence may be surprised by the moments of tender lyricism. Prokofiev-the-poet is very much in evidence, especially in Sonata No.8, although, as he lamented in his autobiography, the lyrical aspect of his style had for a long time gone unacknowledged. As it happens, all four 'lines' of his style, as Prokofiev calls them, are present in these sonatas: alongside the lyricism, there is the classical line in the structures of the sonatas, the modern line in the harmonic language with which he expresses powerful emotion, and the motoric line with steely fingered music to test the mettle of any virtuoso.

Richter, on hearing the **Sixth Sonata**, knew he had to take it into his repertoire. In addition to its audacity and modernism, he was bowled over by its clarity of style and structural perfection. 'Classically balanced in spite of all its asperities,' he wrote, 'the Sixth Sonata is an utterly magnificent work.'

## Keynotes

### PROKOFIEV

*Born Sontsovska (Ukraine), 1891*

*Died Moscow, 1953*

For his graduation, Prokofiev played his own piano concerto, displaying remarkable skills as composer and performer. His career could have gone either way and it's possible his teachers were expecting him to become a pianist, since his marks for composition were poor. As it turned out, composition became his focus. Like so many Russian artists, he fled to the West after the October Revolution of 1917, but he was the only composer to eventually return, in 1936. In the Soviet Union he found new audiences flocking to concert halls and in the years that followed he composed popular successes such as *Peter and the Wolf* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as tonight's sonatas.

### PIANO SONATAS 6 & 8

These sonatas are part of a trilogy known, in the West, as the 'War Sonatas'. They were begun together in 1939, and completed in 1940 (No.6) and 1944 (No.8). They are powerful, substantial works (each one more than half an hour long) and strongly unified through the use of recurring themes and classical structures of the 19th century. But their sound world is firmly of the 20th century, with music that is at times furious and terrifying, made all the more powerful when juxtaposed with Prokofiev's lyrical style.

After a summer spent mastering its physical and musical demands, he gave the public premiere in Moscow on 26 November 1940, Prokofiev himself having performed the sonata in a radio broadcast on 8 April.

Prokofiev had begun work on what were to be given, in the West, the collective title 'War Sonatas' in 1939. He sketched all three, and worked on them simultaneously – essentially as ten movements – before concentrating on the first, Sonata No.6. It is considered one of the composer's most 'modernistic' works, with an enigmatic quality, veering between Expressionistic displacements of tonality and sudden bursts of folk-like lyricism; between mechanistic virtuosity and moments of touching naiveté.

Sonata No.6 opens with a shockingly brutal main theme, which will recur throughout the work. This *Allegro moderato* first movement explores the wide range of the instrument and its tonal possibilities. At one point the performer is directed to play *col pugno*, 'with the fist', as if fingers could not be enough to convey the sense of crushing blows, or perhaps the dropping of bombs. Prokofiev put this in, he said, 'to frighten the grandmothers'.

The second movement (*Allegretto*) offers some relief in the form of a jaunty march, although there is a sense of anxiety in its displaced accents, and in the middle section the movement adopts a darker tone. The third movement, 'in the tempo of a very slow waltz', reveals Prokofiev's melodic gift but its elegance is coloured by sinister undertones and a prevailing wistfulness.

In the final movement (*Vivace*) Prokofiev returns to the kind of 'perpetual motion' style often associated with his earlier piano works, as well as the percussive martial character of the first movement. Tearing high spirits race through the modified rondo form, boisterously pushing the melodies across three octaves in an impossibly short space of time. The harsh motif of the opening movement suddenly recurs, unifying the sonata and underpinning the lightness with tragedy.

The Sixth Sonata had stunned its first listeners with the force of its musical rhetoric, and although the Soviet Union had yet to enter the fray, the music's violence was prescient of the country's imminent involvement in World War II. But after the war, its 'asperities' fell from favour and in the Zhdanov decree of 1948 Prokofiev, Shostakovich and others were condemned for 'misusing dissonance'. The first recording of the sonata, made the previous year, was withdrawn and all copies destroyed. Ironically, in March 1943, the Seventh Sonata had received the coveted Stalin Prize.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Turn to page 17 to read about Debussy's *Images*, Book 2.

Despite the ravages of the 'Great Patriotic War', Prokofiev enjoyed a brief period of favour with the Soviet regime in the early 1940s, spending the summer of 1944 with composers Khachaturian, Shostakovich and Miaskovsky in the relative luxury of a government-run artists' colony and getting through an amazing amount of work, including the Fifth Symphony and Piano Sonata No.8, both works of great breadth and richness of inspiration.

Emil Gilels, who premiered the **Eighth Sonata** on 30 December 1944, described it as: 'a profound work demanding a great deal of emotional tension. It impresses one by the symphonic nature of its development, the tension, breadth and charm of the lyrical passages.' Richter considered it the richest of all of Prokofiev's sonatas, with a 'complex inner life'.

The sonata begins with a reflective, slow introduction (*Andante dolce*) and Prokofiev's characteristic use of harmonic sidesteps creates a sense of unease and distortion before the release of energy in the following *Allegro moderato*. The music builds to a furious rage – all the more powerful for the sorrowful second theme that acts as a foil – and it is only after a wild coda that the movement finds peace.

The slow movement is marked 'sognando' (dreamily) and for a few minutes it offers relative calm as Prokofiev builds variations on a gentle, dance-like theme. In typical fashion, the song-like melody is deceptive, with odd dissonances and unexpected harmonies tempering its sweetness.

The third movement (*Vivace*) then erupts with a mixture of brittle virtuosity and grotesque militarism. It's a march – perhaps too hectic to be truly heroic but rousing nonetheless. Midway there's an unexpected shift into triple time and Prokofiev transforms the music into an outlandish waltz before retreating to the original march via a magical passage that suggests a Russian fairy tale. The whirlwind coda makes for a thrilling and sonorous conclusion.

ADAPTED IN PART FROM NOTES BY DAVID GARRETT,  
KATHERINE KEMP AND GORDON KERRY  
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2018



**Prokofiev at the piano –  
an autographed sketch by  
Hilda Wiener from 1936**

A woman in a black dress is the central focus, holding a violin. She is looking towards the right. In the background, there are other people in formal attire, including a man in a tuxedo and a woman in a black dress. The setting appears to be a formal event or concert.

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## 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.

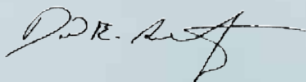
The music we share with you in the Concert Hall tonight is the artistic realisation of pen and ink, ideas on paper – it may be a bit different to how it was in rehearsal, or how it sounds on other nights. That's one of the gifts of live music-making – the shared energy, here and now, makes each performance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

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 musicians 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

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>FEBRUARY</b> | Season Opening Gala – Diana Doherty performs Westlake<br>The Sydney Symphony Orchestra<br>and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra  |
| <b>JUNE</b>     | Lang Lang Gala Performance – Mozart Piano Concerto No.24  |
| <b>JULY</b>     | Britten's <i>Peter Grimes</i><br>with Stuart Skelton and Nicole Car   |
| <b>AUGUST</b>   | Keys to the City Festival<br>Kirill Gerstein – piano concertos by Grieg, Ravel and Gershwin   |
| <b>NOVEMBER</b> | André Previn and Tom Stoppard's <i>Every Good Boy Deserves Favour</i> – A play for actors and orchestra<br>with Mitchell Butel and Martin Crewes<br><br>American Harmonies – Adams, Copland and Rouse |



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Principal Partner



## Debussy

### *Images, Book 2*

*Cloches à travers les feuilles*

*Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*

*Poissons d'or*

Soon after composing his *Estampes* in 1903, Debussy completed two similarly three-part sets of colourful and evocative piano pieces, this time under the title *Images*. The idea had been in his mind since 1901 and by the middle of 1903 he had already settled on his titles. The first set was published in 1905, tonight's in October 1907. (An earlier set, from 1894 was eventually published in 1978 under the title *Images (oubliées)* – forgotten images.)

From the name alone, one might expect the *Images* to be overtly 'pictorial', the individual titles functioning as a point of departure. But if anything the *Images* are relatively abstract works, less reliant on concrete imagery. The first book begins with the aptly rippling *Reflets dans l'eau* (Reflections in the water). It continues, however, with 'pure music': a sarabande entitled *Hommage à Rameau* and a concluding toccata entitled *Mouvement*. The titles in the second book are certainly wonderfully evocative – but the music unfolds according to purely musical demands, being in no sense coupled to a narrative. In a sense, the titles of the *Images* seem to be there to encourage a certain openness in the listener (especially when they are as cryptic as those in this second book of *Images*) rather than simply providing a convenient aid to musical digestion.

As with the French harpsichord masters Debussy so admired (Couperin, Rameau), there is an aspect to these pieces which runs deeper than the picturesque titles. Running almost throughout Debussy's piano output is a fascination with pure sonority: the act of simply setting the instrument in vibration. The gamelan music he'd heard at the Paris Exposition of 1889 – and had returned to hear in 1900 – deeply impressed him: his own music similarly makes use of free-floating, profoundly consonant harmonies to explore the instrumental sound in itself, moving free of the goal-directed structures of 19th-century tonality.

*Cloches à travers les feuilles* [Bells through the leaves] explores the sonorities of the whole-tone scale alongside pentatonic harmonies. The title was suggested by a letter from the music critic Louis Laloy – writing to the composer he had referred to 'the touching use of the funeral bell that sounds on All Saints' Day from Vespers until the mass for the dead, crossing the yellowing forests from village to village in the evening silence'.

## Keynotes

### IMAGES

Debussy's two books of *Images* for piano show the musician-as-art-lover, exploring the possibilities of sound to conjure images and sensations in the mind. (They are not to be confused with his *Images* for orchestra, two of which the SSO played last week.) Dominant among his influences was his exposure to Javanese gamelan music, first heard in Paris at the 1889 Exposition, and his fondness for Japanese artwork: lacquered panels and Hokusai woodblock prints adorned his walls.

The second book of *Images*, from 1907, comprises three pieces, each with an evocative but often ambiguous title: 'Bells through the leaves', 'And the moon descends on the temple that was', and 'Goldfish' – or is that 'golden fish'...?

...there is an aspect to these works which runs deeper than the picturesque titles.



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# Mahler Six

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The whole-tone and pentatonic scales are practically devoid of dissonance, at least as Debussy uses them here – setting in stark relief the shudder of the dissonant appoggiatura to the very last chord.

Despite the inspiration Laloy helped provide, *Bells through the leaves* is dedicated not to him but to the sculptor Alexandre Charpentier; the second *Image* is, however, dedicated to Laloy. Debussy deliberately cast the title *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* (And the moon descends on the temple that was) in the 12-syllable Alexandrine of classical French verse – but otherwise seems to have left unspecified what might lie behind the tantalising image. Again the pentatonic scale is much in evidence, right from the opening chord of fourths and fifths. Almost the entire piece is devoted to the movement of parallel chords, punctuated by occasional descents into the bass as well as a grace-note inflected melody in repeated notes with a pentatonic accompaniment. The effect is a marvellous sense of stasis.

For *Poissons d'or* (Goldfish), dedicated to the pianist Ricardo Viñes, Debussy was inspired not directly by the fish themselves but by their stylised depiction on a Japanese lacquered panel in his study. This panel (pictured on page 8) was inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold – so these are at least as much 'golden fish' as 'goldfish', and audibly very much more active than the usual aquarium dwellers, from the shimmering opening combining major and minor modes to the flashing downward arpeggios and the staccato melody in the bass perhaps suggesting an ominous presence in the deep.

ADAPTED FROM A NOTE BY CARL ROSMAN © 2007



**Debussy around the time of the composition of his *Images* – a photographic portrait by Félix Nadar**

Turn to page 12 to read about Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No.8.

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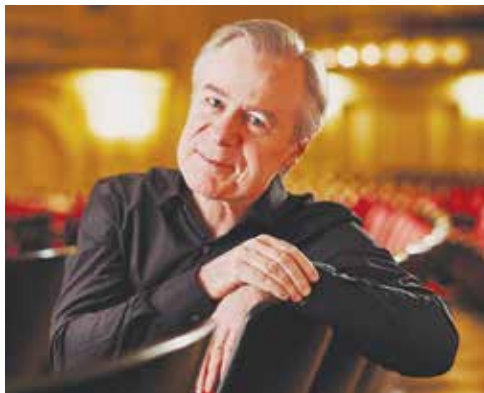


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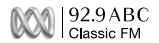
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