

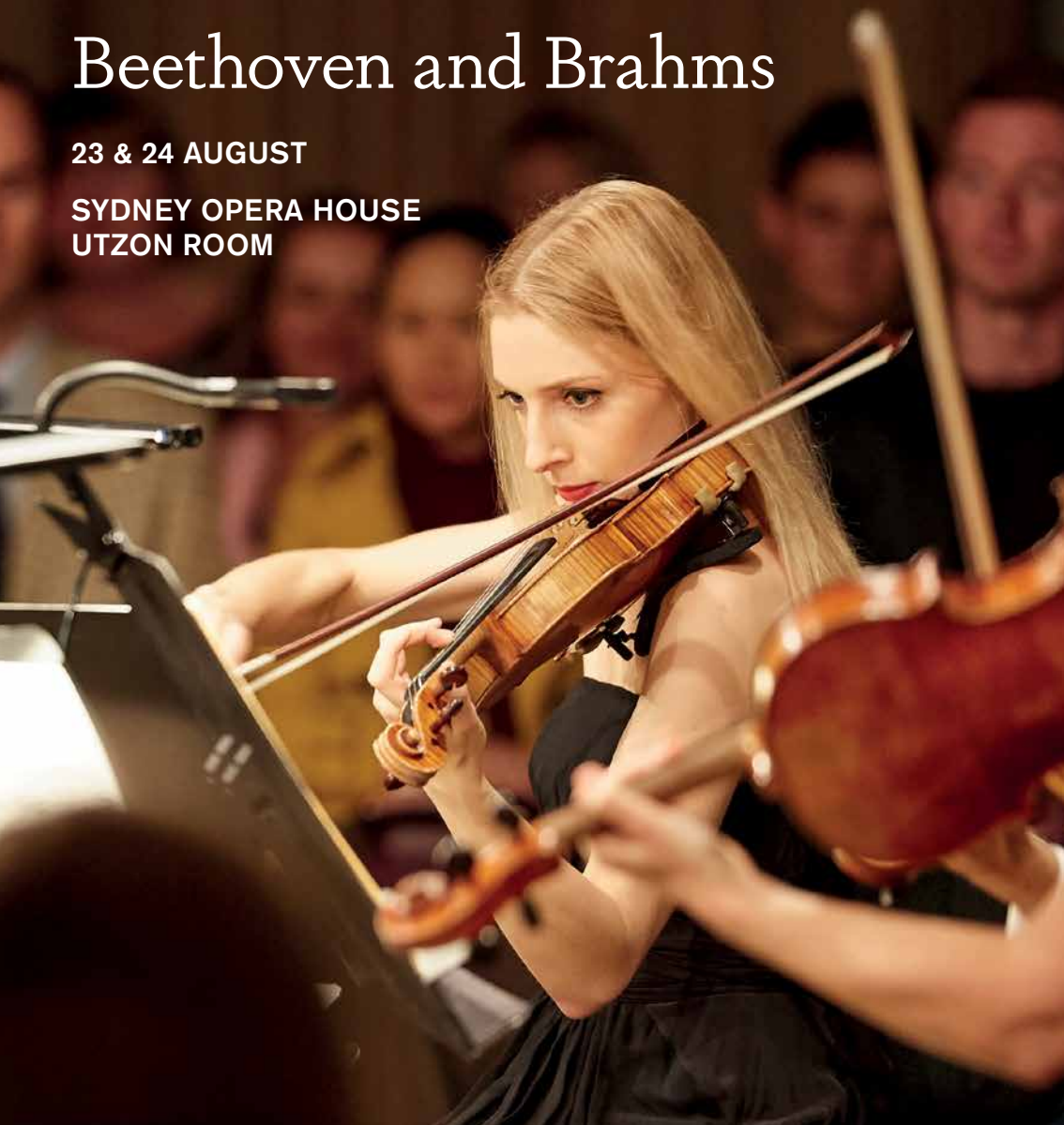
SYDNEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Cocktail Hour
Chamber music of

Beethoven and Brahms

23 & 24 AUGUST

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
UTZON ROOM




sydney symphony
orchestra
David Robertson
The Lowy Chair of
Chief Conductor and Artistic Director


Emirates
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Beethoven and Brahms

Beethoven's three 'Razumovsky' Quartets appeared in 1806, commissioned by the Russian ambassador to the Viennese court, Count Razumovsky. A fine amateur musician, he also patronised the quartet, led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, that was 'placed at [Beethoven's] complete disposal.' At Razumovsky's request, Beethoven included Russian folk melodies in the first two (and made a fair facsimile in the third).

Beethoven's revolutionary 'Eroica' Symphony left its mark on the scale and form of the first 'Razumovsky', but its mannerisms can be found in the second, as in the opening gesture. Two isolated chords followed by a bar of silence leave us none the wiser about the speed or rhythmic character of what follows. We are richly rewarded by the bewildering array of implications drawn from the ideas in the first few bars. The serene second movement unfolds expansively over some fourteen minutes, and according to Beethoven's student Carl Czerny, represents the composer's contemplation of a starry sky and the music of the spheres. A greater contrast with the restless energy of the first movement couldn't be imagined, nor with the dance movement which follows. This is an insistent *allegretto*, but it is in the central trio that Beethoven introduces a Russian theme – the same one sung in the Coronation Scene from Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*. The galloping finale, with its high violin tune and rhythmic accompaniment seems conventional at first, though we soon realise that it has begun in the 'wrong' key – C major. This allows the composer to make some dramatic harmonic side-steps, but ultimately serves to underline the fact that every movement of this quartet is in E minor or major. It is unusual in any late classical quartet for all movements to share a key; it is however a preferred strategy of Beethoven when writing in E. Any tonal monotony, however, is completely erased by the piece's immense variety of musical manners.

FRIDAY 23 AUGUST | 6PM
 SATURDAY 24 AUGUST | 6PM
 SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
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Beethoven in 1800

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)
String Quartet in E minor,
'Razumovsky'

Allegro
Molto adagio
Allegretto
Finale: Presto

In January 1896, Brahms attended a performance of his G major Quintet, led by his great friend and colleague Joseph Joachim and was persuaded – unusually for him – to come on stage to accept the audience’s rapturous applause. The response was not merely the approval of a magnificent piece beautifully performed; it was also a kind of farewell, as by then it was clear that Brahms was gravely ill and had not long to live.

In a sense, Brahms had been preparing for death back in 1890 when, at the age of 57 he began to set his affairs in order and draft a will. In the summer of that year, spent, as often, at the spa town of Bad Ischl he had composed this Quintet (his second) and had considered it to be his last work. He wrote to his publisher that with this work, ‘you can take leave of my music, because it is high time to stop’. But if the Quintet is a valediction, it is a valediction forbidding mourning.

The first movement, in an athletic 6/8 metre, begins with a theme in the cello that Brahms had toyed with using in a planned Fifth Symphony. It is a notorious challenge for the cellist to cut through the ebullient figurations of the other four players, and Brahms did write an alternative opening with a lighter texture but fortunately maintained the energetic original.

The Adagio provides scope for melancholy reflection as one of the two violas announces a pensive D minor theme. This is treated to an expansive set of variations, which Brahms scholar Karl Geiringer notes ‘are full of a fantastic freedom not very frequent in Brahms’ work. And reaches a major key conclusion. A hint of sadness hangs over the G minor third movement (Geiringer calls it a *valse triste*) but this is dispelled by the joyous momentum of the finale, which in its sudden alternation of contrasting sections and its rapid coda refer to Brahms’ much-loved Hungarian dances, such as the *csárdás*.

The highly self-critical Brahms rightly felt that he had achieved something close to perfection in this Quintet, hence his view that it should stand as a last musical testament. Fortunately, however, he continued to work giving us the Clarinet Trio and other masterpieces of chamber music. His very last piece was a fantasia on the chorale ‘Oh World, I must depart from thee’.

Gordon Kerry © 2019



Johannes Brahms

**JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833–1897)**

String Quintet in G

*Allegro non troppo, ma con brio
Adagio*

Un poco allegretto

Vivace ma non troppo presto



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About the Orchestra

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DAVID ROBERTSON

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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.

Well on its way to becoming the premier orchestra of the Asia Pacific region, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has toured China on five occasions, and in 2014 won the arts category in the Australian Government's inaugural Australia-China Achievement Awards, recognising groundbreaking work in nurturing the cultural and artistic relationship between the two nations.

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. 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 Learning and Engagement program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and commissions. Recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards, Lee Bracegirdle, Gordon Kerry, Mary Finsterer, Nigel Westlake, Paul Stanhope and Georges Lentz, and recordings of music by Brett Dean have been released on both the BIS and SSO Live labels.

Other releases on the SSO Live label, established in 2006, include performances conducted by Alexander Lazarev, Sir Charles Mackerras and David Robertson, as well as the complete Mahler symphonies conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

2019 is David Robertson's sixth season as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director.

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Claire Herrick *violin*
Justin Williams *viola*
Tim Nankervis *cello*

Brahms

Andrew Haveron *violin*
Marina Marsden *violin*
Anne-Louise Comerford *viola*
Amanda Verner *viola*
Umberto Clerici *cello*

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