

SYDNEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Donald Runnicles conducts Bruckner Symphony No.7

MUSIC OF INSPIRATION

17 – 19 OCTOBER

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE




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


Emirates
Principal Partner

WELCOME



Principal Partner

Donald Runnicles guides us in Bruckner's expansive Symphony No.7.

We are delighted to welcome you to tonight's Emirates Metro Series concert featuring one of Anton Bruckner's best-loved symphonies led by Principal Guest Conductor Donald Runnicles, as part of his artistic project *Music of Inspiration*.

Bruckner's Seventh is a magnificent monument of sound. You are about to experience a vigorous work of music, that will yet envelop you with a delicate embrace. Inspired by a dream and written at the time of Wagner's imminent death, the *Adagio* could be read as an elegy to Bruckner's music idol. As it did in the Symphony's premiere in 1884, the Orchestra today also features four unusual Wagner tubas.

Maestro Runnicles is one of the great Bruckner's conductors and advocates, enjoying enduring titles and relationships with several of the world's most significant opera companies and orchestras, including the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Atlanta Symphony and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

At Emirates, we are also honoured to have forged long-lasting relationships in Australia and around the world with an extensive portfolio of sports and cultural partners for over 30 years now. We believe sponsorships are one of the best ways to connect with our passengers, allowing us to share and support their interests. Our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is no exception, as we celebrate 17 years of rewarding collaboration.

On that note, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this Emirates Metro Series concert, *Donald Runnicles conducts Bruckner Symphony No.7*.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry Brown".

Barry Brown

Emirates' Divisional Vice President
for Australasia

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER, 1.30PM

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David Robertson

The Lowy Chair of Chief Conductor
and Artistic Director

Donald Runnicles conducts Bruckner Symphony No.7

Donald Runnicles *conductor*

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908–1992)

Les Offrandes oubliées (The Forgotten Offerings)

ANTON BRUCKNER (1824–1896)

Symphony No.7

Allegro moderato

Adagio. Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam

Scherzo. Sehr schnell

Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht schnell



Saturday's concert will be broadcast on
ABC Classic on 29 October at 8pm, and
again on 17 January 2020 at 8pm.

Pre-concert talk by Scott Davie in the
Northern Foyer, 45 minutes before the
performance.

Estimated durations: 11 minutes;
1 hour and 4 minutes.

The concert will be performed without
interval and conclude at approximately
2.50pm (Thursday), 9.20pm (Friday)
and 3.20pm (Saturday).



Cover image: Donald Runnicles
(Photo by Robert Catto)



Principal Partner



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Donald Runnicles *conductor*

PRINCIPAL GUEST CONDUCTOR, SYDNEY SYMPHONY

Sydney Symphony Principal Guest Conductor Donald Runnicles is General Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival (Jackson, Wyoming), as well as Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. He is also Conductor Emeritus of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, having served as its Chief Conductor from 2009-2016. He enjoys close relationships with several of the world's most significant opera companies and orchestras and is especially celebrated for his interpretations of Romantic and post-Romantic symphonic and opera repertoire.

Recent conducting appearances have included the Deutsche Oper's appearance in a concert performance of *Manon Lescaut* at the Edinburgh Festival, *Carmina burana* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and *Mahler's Song of the Earth* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Other 2018-19 season highlights included the world premiere of Detlev Glanert's *Oceane* at the Deutsche Oper along with new Deutsche Oper productions of Berg's *Wozzeck* and Zemlinsky's *Der Zwerg*, and Strauss' *Elektra* at the Lyric Opera

of Chicago. In summer 2018, he conducted the complete *Ring Cycle* with the San Francisco Opera, and led the World Orchestra for Peace performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Proms.

Beyond his annual commitments, Donald Runnicles is active in symphonic repertoire and guest conducts some of the world's finest symphony orchestras. Though fully engaged with five titled positions, he maintains regular guest relationships with the Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

From 1992 to 2008, Donald Runnicles was Music Director of the San Francisco Opera. During his tenure, he led more than 60 productions including the world premieres of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic* and Conrad Susa's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Recent recordings include Glanert's *L'Invisible* and James MacMillan's Violin Concerto (with Vadim Repin) and Symphony No.4.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)

Les Offrandes oubliées

(The Forgotten Offerings)

About the composer:

Born in Avignon, Olivier Messiaen entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 11, later becoming a teacher there and Professor of Composition in 1966. He first became known only as a composer of organ music (he was organist at the church of Sainte-Trinité in Paris from 1931 until his death); but as a pupil of Paul Dukas, he began early to compose for orchestra. A devout Roman Catholic, his compositions are mainly in the nature of religious praise and commentary.

Many of Messiaen's most famous works date from the 1940s. In 1941, while in a German prison camp, he wrote the *Quartet for the End of Time*. A lengthy piece for two pianos, *Visions de l'Amen*, was completed in 1943. *Trois Petites Liturgies de la présence divine* followed, building up a series of religious works, such as the 20 pieces making up the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* inscribed to his pupil and great interpreter of his works, the pianist Yvonne Loriod, who later became his wife.

Messiaen's characteristic sound results from his distinctive blend of harmony and rhythm. Interestingly he referred to himself as 'compositeur et rythmicien', which underlines the place of rhythm in his music, utilising the elasticity of Gregorian chant and the complexity of Greek and Indian (tala) rhythms. His harmony derives from his own invented modes ('modes of limited transposition'). Able to perceive sounds as colours, Messiaen used his synaesthesia as a compositional tool to effect a special bloom or colour.

An ardent, ecstatic quality can be heard in the frequent emulation of birdsong in works such as *Oiseaux exotiques* and *Chronochromie*, and the 'Tristan-esque' yearning in works such as the *Turangalîla-symphonie*. Later pieces included *Des Canyons aux étoiles* (From the Canyons to the Stars), inspired by a visit to southern Utah and completed in 1974; and Messiaen's only opera, *St Francis of Assisi*, completed in 1983. Australian birdcalls were incorporated in *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà* (Illuminations of the Beyond), Messiaen's last completed work.



Messiaen, 1931, Trinité

IN BRIEF

Messiaen believed that his mission as a composer was to communicate the truths of his Catholic faith, and to do so created an idiosyncratic language based on 'synthetic' modes, rhythm derived from Indian music and Greek poetry, and the ecstatic songs of birds. *Les Offrandes oubliées*, his first orchestral work, is a meditation on three key symbols of Catholic theology – the Cross, Sin and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Messiaen's compositions are mainly in the nature of religious praise and commentary.

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Messiaen taught some of the most important composers of the post-War period, including Boulez, Stockhausen, Xenakis and later George Benjamin who followed the inspiring example of the individual language he forged from a wide variety of musical and artistic sources, and the communicable strength of his vision. His music testifies to the survival of eternal beauties in a century which has often seen unwelcome change.

ABRIDGED FROM GORDON KALTON WILLIAMS
ABC/SYMPHONY AUSTRALIA © 1994

The composer himself wrote of this work:

Les Offrandes oubliées was premiered on 19 February 1931, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, under the direction of Walter Straram. I had just turned 22. It was my first work played by an orchestra, and my first contact with the public at large.

The work is in three parts:

The Cross: lamentation of the strings, the sorrowful 'neumes' of which divide the melody into groups of uneven duration, cut by long mauve and grey wailings.

The Sin: presented here as a kind of 'race to the abyss' in an almost 'mechanised' speed. You will notice the strong flexional ending accents, whistling of the harmonics in glissando, the incisive calls of the trumpets.

The Eucharist: long and slow phrase of the violins, which rises over a blanket of pianissimo chords, with reds, gold, blues (like a far away stained glass window), in the light of muted solo chords.

The Sin is the forgetting of God. The Cross and the Eucharist are the Divine Offerings. 'This is my Body, given for you – this is my Blood, spilled for you.'

Les Offrandes oubliées requires an orchestra of 3 flutes, 3 oboes (1 doubling cor anglais), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass), 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussion and strings.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the Australian premiere of this work in 1973 under Willem van Otterloo, and performed it most recently in June 2001 under Reinbert de Leeuw.

His music testifies to the survival of eternal beauties in a century which has often seen unwelcome change.



16th-century stained glass window depicting the legend of the Cross: the authentication of the Cross, Eglise Saint Quentin, Dienville, France.

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

Symphony No.7

Allegro moderato

Adagio. Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam

Scherzo. Sehr schnell

Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht schnell

At the age of 60, the diffident, pious Anton Bruckner suddenly achieved international fame as a composer, and the work which catalysed Europe's attention was the Seventh Symphony. The composer had moved from the provinces to the imperial capital in 1868 to take up a position at the Vienna Conservatory, where he succeeded his teacher Simon Sechter as Professor of Harmony and Counterpoint, as well as accepting an honorary appointment as organist to the *Hofkapelle*, or court chapel. He also taught at the teacher training College of St Anna, and travelled as far afield as Paris and London in his capacity as one of the greatest organists – and improvisors – of the age. But until the mid-1880s, his own music had failed to find a foothold in Vienna.

This is partly the result of Bruckner's idolisation of the music of Richard Wagner, which was anathema in a city where Brahms presided as the resident Great Composer and the powerful critic, Eduard Hanslick regarded Brahms, not Wagner or Liszt, as embodying the 'true' tradition of German music. He routinely attacked Bruckner's music in print, and Brahms himself dismissed Bruckner until late in his own life, saying 'In the case of Bruckner one needn't use the word "Symphony"; it's enough to talk of a kind of "fake" which will be forgotten in a few years.'

Wagner, on the other hand, seems genuinely to have admired Bruckner's work. The two composers had met in 1873 when Bruckner approached Wagner for permission to dedicate his Third Symphony to the 'Master of all masters'. Their meeting, over several beers, was a highlight of Bruckner's life; Wagner's acceptance of the dedication gave Bruckner immense confidence. Sadly, the premiere of the Third was a fiasco; Bruckner responded by retreating – revising extant scores rather than writing anything new. In 1881, however, Hans Richter gave a triumphant first performance of the Fourth Symphony. Bruckner was already back at work, but the success must have encouraged him: he completed his Sixth Symphony and began work on the Seventh later that year.

The composition took place over two years during which time Bruckner wrote little else. He did, however, travel to Bayreuth to hear the first performance of Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*, conducted by Hermann Levi. Bruckner and Wagner saw each other several times during the visit. Gabriel Engel writes: 'Wagner would deplore the disappointing state of contemporary music, exclaiming: "I know of only one who may be compared to Beethoven — and he is Bruckner!"'



Bruckner, 1890

IN BRIEF

Like Messiaen, Bruckner was a devout Catholic whose work was almost entirely dedicated 'to dear God' and sought to proclaim God's greatness. After God, Bruckner idolised Richard Wagner, though his music emulates Wagner's much less than is often assumed, and uses a much more modest orchestra. The *Adagio* of this work reflects Bruckner's premonition of Wagner's death and his grief on the 'master's' passing. Overall the piece takes the classical symphonic form and expands it in a cosmic vision that ends in radiance.

While working on the Seventh Symphony, Bruckner later remarked, 'One day I came home and felt very sad. It occurred to me that the Master would soon die, and at that moment the C sharp minor theme of the *Adagio* came to me.' Indeed, during the composition of the slow movement, Bruckner heard the news of Wagner's death, incorporating his grief into the final pages of the movement. But the piece as a whole was conceived before Bruckner's premonition, and our response shouldn't be over-determined by the Wagner connection.

The dimensions and trajectory of the work are signalled by the melody with which the first movement begins. Built over a typical shimmer of strings, the long and very beautiful tune consists of clearly delineated and contrasting phrases: the first, for instance, outlines the key of E major over two octaves, before moving through seemingly distant keys; a 'false' close gives way to yet more varied phrases and hints of further tonal exploration before returning to E for a fuller restatement of the melody itself. The movement displays Bruckner's habitual use of three contrasting groups of themes, the second of which is what he liked to call a 'song-period', and out of these he spins a lengthy series of contrasting musical worlds.

This principle governs the whole work. The key of C sharp minor, though closely related to the work's 'home key' of E major, is avoided through the first movement so that its appearance in the second is more emphatic. This is, of course, the premonitory elegy for Wagner, and Bruckner introduces four Wagner tubas into the score at this point. But the model for the movement is to be found in the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The 'very slow and very solemn' material with which Bruckner's commences is in due course contrasted with a theme in a different mood, speed and key. Bruckner was working on the climax of the movement – a majestic passage in C major – when he heard of Wagner's death. He quotes a motive from his *Te Deum* (associated with the words 'Non confundar in aeternum' – let me never be put to shame) but it is in the coda which follows with its almost Wagnerian horn calls that Bruckner farewells the Master.

After the catharsis of the *Adagio*, Bruckner produces one of his most delightfully energetic, and deceptively simple, scherzos. Again, the movement's key – A minor – has been avoided so far. The octave and perfect fifth which constitute the theme of this section are the most stable intervals in tonal music (and relate the theme to that of the opening of the first movement), but Bruckner effortlessly plays this stability off against a series of unexpected excursions into different keys, and it proves a genuinely witty foil to the central, more lyrical, Trio section.



Bruckner and Wagner in Bayreuth (1873). Silhouette by Otto Böhler

The Finale, less massive than some, is nonetheless constructed out of four large sections of material. The pattern of keys a third apart is reflected in this structure: the first section is in E major, and deliberately recalls the first movement in its use of the stable intervals of the common chord; the second and third sections are, respectively, in keys a third above and below E; finally the fourth section, using material based on the first, charts the journey from the key of A back to the home key.

With the death of Wagner, Bruckner was the heir-apparent for his now large group of supporters in Vienna. Nonetheless, he at first tried to stop performances of this work there, fearing that Hanslick's opposition would undermine his growing reputation in other parts of the German-speaking world. The Seventh's premiere was in the Leipzig Gewandhaus under Arthur Nikisch in 1884 and the applause lasted for 15 minutes. Hermann Levi, who had facilitated Bruckner's dedication of the work to the Wagner-mad Ludwig II of Bavaria, gave the work in Munich, declaring it 'the most significant symphonic work since 1827' (the year of Beethoven's Ninth) and within a few years it had been heard throughout Germany as well as in New York, Chicago, Amsterdam, Budapest and London. When it finally was heard in Vienna in 1886, Hanslick's colleague Kalbeck memorably wrote 'It comes from the Nibelungen and goes to the devil!'

Actually, it is music about going to heaven, or, as Robert Simpson puts it, 'a patient search for pacification'. Appropriately, the *Adagio* was performed at the composer's funeral. Engel writes that 'Brahms, a very sick old man, stood outside the gate, but refused to enter. Someone heard him mutter sadly: "It will be my turn soon," and then he sighed and went wearily home.'

GORDON KERRY © 2002

Bruckner's Seventh Symphony requires an orchestra of double winds, 8 horns (4 doubling Wagner tubas), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 2 percussion and strings.

Bernard Heinze conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's first performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony in May 1945. The Orchestra's most recent performance was in August 2010 under Simone Young.

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ACN 003 311 064 ABN 27 003 311 064

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PHOTO: KEITH SAUNDERS



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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 ground-breaking 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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