

SYDNEY  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

# Mendelssohn and Martinů

COCKTAIL HOUR

25 & 26 OCTOBER

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE,  
UTZON ROOM



## Mendelssohn and Martinů

Villa-Lobos has been quoted as saying 'one foot in the academy and you are changed for the worst!' yet had a profound effect on music education in his native Brazil particularly during the 1930s. He is said to have collected some 1000 Brazilian folk-tunes, and though he never documented that many, the influence of his country's music is pervasive. Complementing that, he was open to the developments in compositional technique of mid-century Europe.

Villa-Lobos' dream was to create music with a distinctly Brazilian flavour that would be as complex, expressive and formally sophisticated as European classical music. He brings these two worlds together in the series of *Bachianas Brasileiras* and the 14 pieces he called *chôros*, whose title refers to a form of popular urban music.

Sadly his nationalism led him to make common cause with dictator Getúlio Vargas, and when Vargas fell so did Villa-Lobos' prestige. He composed his Duo in 1957 while in Paris with his partner Arminda Neves d'Almeida, to whom it is dedicated, but the piece had to wait a decade before receiving a first performance. Like the *Bachianas Brasileiras* it is an essay in modern Baroque, with substantial outer movements full of tensile counterpoint. These frame a no less abstract and substantial slow movement which exploits the singing qualities of the winds while making an intricate musical argument.

In his book of the same title, Charles Rosen calls them the 'Romantic Generation': Mendelssohn, Schumann and Chopin, all born – in very different circumstances – within a year of each other. Mendelssohn was the eldest, born two hundred years ago in 1809 to a wealthy Jewish banker (who later converted to Lutheran Christianity). Mendelssohn's love of the Baroque and classical periods would have far reaching effects on his own music and his career as a conductor, and make him seem, misleadingly, the most conservative of the Romantic Generation.

Keen to support the musical talents of his children, in 1822 Abraham Mendelssohn initiated a series of Sunday concerts at the family home where Felix and his brilliant sister Fanny would perform with paid members of the Court Orchestra; the young composer thus had a laboratory for developing his precocious compositional talent as well.

The String Quartet Op.13 was written in 1827 during his summer vacation from the University of Berlin, where his mother hoped he would get an education 'so rare in musicians'. Beethoven had recently died, and Mendelssohn had obviously understood the importance of the late Beethoven quartets more than many of his

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER | 6PM  
SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER | 6PM

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE  
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Heitor Villa-Lobos

**HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS**  
(1887–1959)

**Duo for oboe and bassoon,  
W535**

*Allegro*

*Lento*

*Allegro vivace*



Mendelssohn by Johann Joseph Schmeller

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN**  
(1809–1847)

**String Quartet No.2 in  
A minor, Op.13**

*Adagio - allegro vivace*

*Adagio non lento*

*Intermezzo: allegretto con moto  
- allegro di molto*

*Presto - adagio non lento*

contemporaries. Like Beethoven, Mendelssohn is able to create moments of extraordinary grace out of seemingly no material, and as in late Beethoven there is a fruitful tension between the popular and the 'learned'. Mendelssohn shows his mastery of fugue, for instance, but can then write the simplest melody and accompaniment as in the *Intermezzo*, which is itself balanced by a shimmering Trio section that recalls the fairy music from the 'Dream' overture. The whole work, more interestingly, is derived from the melody of his song 'Frage', Op.9 No.1, known also as *Ist es wahr?* – Is it true?. The first three notes of the song form a characteristic 'motto' theme like Beethoven's 'Muss es sein?' which is heard, transformed, in all four movements.

Just how Beethovenian the Second Quartet is was brought home to the composer some years later when he attended a performance of the work in Paris. The man next to him at one point said 'He has that in one of his symphonies.' When asked 'Who?' the man replied 'Beethoven, the composer of this quartet'. In a letter home Mendelssohn described it as 'a very dubious compliment.'

Martinů was one of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century with six symphonies, seven string quartets, sixteen operas and eleven ballets – to name but a few works – to his credit.

He spent much of his childhood in a church tower above the Bohemian town of Polička where his father was a shoemaker and the church's watchman. Martinů often recalled the expansive views which were, by virtue of their distance, inaccessible to him. He moved to Paris in 1923 and within five years had caught the attention of Serge Koussevitsky, who immediately programmed his work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, Martinů was named cultural attaché by the Czech government in exile and as such helped a number of endangered Czech citizens to escape via Paris. He would never see his homeland again; he had to flee as the Nazis invaded France and spent the years 1941-1956 in the United States, by which time the Communist regime made returning impractical. Martinů's later music is amalgam of established form and personal style, influenced by the music of the baroque and the folk music of his native country.

The Nonet, like Villa-Lobos' Duo, is a late work, composed shortly before the composer's death in 1959 and premiered at that year's Salzburg Festival. It shows the composer bringing together his love of classical sophistication and the simplicity of folk material. The effect in the first movement's lively unfolding is not unlike some of Copland; the slow movement is sombre and lyrical, with hints of Debussyan harmony, and the finale a genial dance full of folk-inspired melody and rhythm.

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**Bohuslav Martinů**

**BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ  
(1890–1959)**

**Nonet No.2 for wind quintet,  
violin, viola, cello and double  
bass. H374**

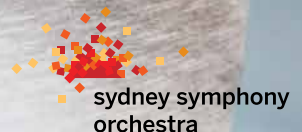
*Poco allegro*  
*Andante*  
*Allegretto*

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# About the Orchestra

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## DAVID ROBERTSON

THE LOWY CHAIR OF CHIEF CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AO QC

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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# Musicians of the Sydney Symphony

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## Villa-Lobos

Diana Doherty *oboe*  
Todd Gibson-Cornish *bassoon*

## Mendelssohn

Anna Skálová *violin*  
Claire Herrick *violin*  
Amanda Verner *viola*  
Timothy Nankervis *cello*

## Martinů

Emma Sholl *flute*  
Shefali Pryor *oboe*  
Alexander Morris *clarinet*  
Todd Gibson-Cornish *bassoon*  
Euan Harvey *horn*  
Anna Skálová *violin*  
Amanda Verner *viola*  
Timothy Nankervis *cello*  
David Campbell *double bass*

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Associate Principal Flute  
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# Sydney Symphony Orchestra

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