

11 – 12 June 2021  
Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

# MOZART & SHOSTAKOVICH

Presenting Partner

CREDIT SUISSE



SYDNEY  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner



# SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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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, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australia-born Simone Young has been the Orchestra's Chief Conductor Designate since 2020. She commences her role as Chief Conductor in 2022 as the Orchestra returns to the renewed Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

## MUSICIANS OF THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

**Emma Jezek** violin

**Anna Skálová** violin

**Stuart Johnson** viola

**Timothy Nankervis** cello

**2021 CONCERT SEASON**  
COCKTAIL HOUR

Friday 11 June 2021, 6pm  
Saturday 12 June 2021, 6pm  
Utzon Room,  
Sydney Opera House

# MOZART & SHOSTAKOVICH

## PROGRAM

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART** (1756-1791)  
String Quartet in C major, KV465, *Dissonance*

*Adagio – allegro*  
*Andante cantabile*  
*Menuetto (allegro) and Trio*  
*Allegro molto*

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH** (1906-1975)  
String Quartet No.9 in E flat, Op. 117

*Moderato con moto –*  
*Adagio –*  
*Allegretto –*  
*Adagio –*  
*Allegro –*

## ESTIMATED DURATIONS

32 minutes, 26 minutes.

The concert will conclude  
at approximately 7pm.

## COVER IMAGE

Photo by Kyla Flanagan

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# ABOUT THE MUSIC

Mozart did very well out of the six quartets he dedicated to Joseph Haydn. In 1785 the publisher Artaria paid him 450 florins for the set, as much as he would normally receive for a full-scale opera. Hearing three of the works earlier that year, Haydn himself made his famous statement to Leopold Mozart: 'I tell you before God, and as an honest man, your son is the greatest composer known to me in person or by repute; he has taste and what is more the greatest skill in composition.'

Despite Mozart's taste and skill (qualities the late 18th century prized far above emotional expression) it hadn't been easy, however. The quartets were written 'on spec' over the unusually long period of two years. Mozart, naturally, had to give priority to paid work, and we know that they were the 'fruits of long and laborious study'.

All the pieces in the set follow the four-movement design of Haydn's mature works. The most obviously novel feature of Mozart's C major Quartet is the slow introduction to its first movement. Haydn used this device frequently, as a way of gradually building up tension before the eruption of a first movement's principal, fast music. Mozart's beginning this way may well be an act of homage, but his introduction is light-years away from Haydn's work in the mid-1780s. Indeed, for all of his complimentary remarks about Mozart's genius, Haydn is alleged to have found this passage baffling.

In C minor, the introduction is, as the nickname suggests, dissonant in the extreme – so much so, in fact, that later musicians have well-meaningly tried to 'correct' Mozart's errors. But it has a precise dramatic function, as British pianist Solomon puts it, to depict the 'lineaments of chaos at the moment of its conversion into form' – in other words, after this intense and unstable music, the faster C major music is 'soaring and liberated'. Haydn must have seen the potential of Mozart's innovation, as he used a very similar music to depict the move from chaos to order (symbolised, there too, by C major) in his oratorio *The Creation* more than a decade later.

Shostakovich suffered several reversals of fortune: he was denounced in 1936, rehabilitated with the premiere of the Fifth Symphony, denounced again in 1948, despite having been awarded the Stalin Prize in 1940 and the Order of Lenin in 1946. By the late fifties, with Stalin dead, Shostakovich was back in favour, able to travel abroad and presiding over the Union of Soviet Composers from 1960. He also became a member of the Communist Party in 1960 (though full membership was conferred after two years), when, as musicologist Richard Taruskin points out, the dissident movement was finally emerging.

In the aftermath of the success of the Fifth Symphony Shostakovich began writing chamber music in earnest, producing the First String Quartet in 1938. It is overly simplistic to see the quartets as 'a secret history of Soviet Russia', but the medium acted as a small scale laboratory in which the composer could experiment, away from public and official scrutiny, on his musical technique and emotional armoury. It's been suggested that he intended to write 24 quartets – one in every available key. The fifteen he did write, nonetheless, display the composer's genius for novel solutions, formal innovation and powerfully idiomatic writing.



Mozart in 1785  
Photo: Johann Bosio



Haydn, Mozart's colleague  
and the dedicatee of this  
work.



Dmitri and Irina  
Shostakovich



After 1960 Shostakovich was, by some accounts, profoundly uneasy about his new relationship with the Soviet State and contemplated suicide in self-disgust. The Eighth Quartet, ostensibly about the 'victims of war and fascism', is saturated with the composer's musical monogram (using the German letter names for music, DSCH 'translates' into D, E flat, C, E natural) and moves inexorably into darkness and silence. Soon after, he contemplated a quartet based on 'themes from childhood' but, in the event, produced the present work in 1964, dedicating it to his wife Irina, whom he had married in 1962.

The Ninth Quartet is altogether less searing than the Eighth; its form and tone suggest a composer exploring the abstract possibilities of chamber music purely for their own sake.

Like its predecessor, the Quartet is in five movements played without a break, but in contrast to the Eighth's downward vector, this work has something of the symmetry of certain pieces by Bartók. The outer movements balance each other in scale and substance, as do the second and fourth, and the central 'scherzo' itself is itself a symmetrical 'arch' of five short sections.

The first movement begins with a sinuous melody, over gently rippling accompaniment, that is soon interrupted by more a dogged section featuring rhythmic pizzicato figures. The second movement takes up an idea introduced early – that a rich modal harmony of triadic chords moving in parallel. The effect is somewhat 'English', recalling some passages in Vaughan Williams and Britten (the latter had become friendly with Shostakovich in 1960). The central movement is vintage Shostakovich with its sardonic wit and galloping offbeat rhythms. The fourth movement, balancing the second, begins with a solo passage that has been likened to Orthodox liturgical chant, with the repeated accompaniment figures related to those of the first movement, but here again pizzicato figures and immobile drones disrupt the music's flow. The finale also creates drama out of disjunction, and concludes with bright major-key fanfares.

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– Andrew Haveron, Concertmaster



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