

30 April – 1 May
Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

TCHAIKOVSKY & GRIEG



Presenting Partner

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SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON **Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley** AC 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.

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

GRIEG

Claire Herrick violin

Marianne Edwards violin

Rosemary Curtin viola

Timothy Nankervis cello

TCHAIKOVSKY

Sun Yi violin

Wendy Kong violin

Amanda Verner viola

Leonid Volovelsky viola

Kristy Conrau cello

David Campbell double bass

2021 CONCERT SEASON
COCKTAIL HOUR

Friday 30 April, 6pm
Saturday 1 May, 6pm
Utzon Room,
Sydney Opera House

TCHAIKOVSKY AND GRIEG

PROGRAM

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907)

String Quartet No.1 in G minor, Op.27

Un poco Andante — Allegro molto ed agitato

Romanze: Andantino

Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato

Finale: Lento — Presto al Saltarello

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Souvenir de Florence, Op.70

Allegro con spirito

Adagio cantabile e con moto

Allegretto moderato

Allegro vivace

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

35 minutes, 34 minutes.

The concert will conclude at
approximately 7pm

COVER IMAGE

Sun Yi, Sydney Symphony
Associate Concertmaster

Photo: Nick Bowers

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WELCOME

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Welcome to a superlative evening of music with the musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Tonight's performance marks a wonderful new experience in our long history as the Orchestra's Premier Partner.

The Sydney Opera House is home to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and tonight's venue, the Utzon Room, is located at the heart of the Opera House's architectural and natural beauty. It is a very appropriate setting to hear two compelling pieces of music performed by six of the nation's finest musicians.

Edvard Grieg's String Quartet No.1 is matched with Tchaikovsky's Souvenir de Florence. Both pieces are amongst the most admired works of chamber music. Bringing both together might appear to be a bold pairing, but it promises to be a mesmerising journey.

Credit Suisse is proud to renew our decade old partnership this year with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and to stand by this world-class Orchestra as they make a welcome return to live performance at the Sydney Opera House.

Thank you for your support.



Richard Gibb

Chief Executive Officer
Credit Suisse Australia

ABOUT THE MUSIC

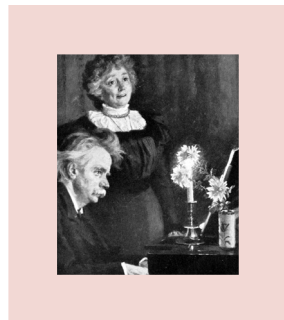
Like Richard Strauss and Mozart, Grieg married a singer, Nina Hagerup. In later life said, 'I loved a young girl who had a wonderful voice and an equally wonderful gift of interpretation. That girl became my wife and my lifelong companion to this very day. For me, she has been – I dare admit it – the only genuine interpreter of my songs.'

Not that their marriage was always easy – as cousins they had faced difficulties in getting married, and were snubbed by their parents, and there were several periods of estrangement including one in the late 1870s when it was rumoured that Nina had had an affair with the composer's brother. All of which would be merely gossip, except for a curious aspect to Grieg's G minor String Quartet.

The young Grieg had been sent to Leipzig – the city of Bach and more recently Mendelssohn, Liszt and Carl Reinecke, with whom Grieg studied. He wrote one quartet as an exercise for Reinecke, but that has been lost, hence the G minor work's No.1 status. It is a truism that Grieg was basically a miniaturist; apart from his early and justly popular Piano Concerto and his Symphonic Dances there are few large-scale works. Even the incidental music to *Peer Gynt* by his fellow Norwegian Henrik Ibsen naturally consists of short numbers appropriate for a stage show and Grieg was clearly more comfortable in self-contained, focused works like his Lyric Pieces for piano, and his many songs (many written for Nina).

Given the Ibsen-like nature of his marital complications, it is hardly surprising that Grieg set Ibsen far beyond just the songs in *Peer Gynt*. In 1876 he composed, among others, the song 'Spillemand' to Ibsen's text: here a minstrel or fiddler has become separated from the woman who represents 'all his longing'. As the constellation Aquarius passes, laughing, overhead he calls to a water-sprite in the river to teach him a magic song to win her back. But in the meantime she has become his brother's bride, and he is left with the song he can't get out of his mind.

In writing the quartet in 1877-8 Grieg made no attempt to compose in the Leipzig-sanctioned manner of extended development of ideas, motivic transformation and so on. His keywords were 'imagination' and 'sonority', so while the work is in the four substantial movements of a classical quartet, its internal drama consists in sudden shifts of mood and key, speed and dynamics, between short, self-contained sections that reflect the forms of song or dance. Grieg often uses the quartet as a 'single instrument' producing rich and resonant sound, though the writing for solo violin in particular frequently recalls the energy of traditional Norwegian fiddling styles.



Grieg and his wife,
the singer Nina Hagerup

ABOUT THE MUSIC

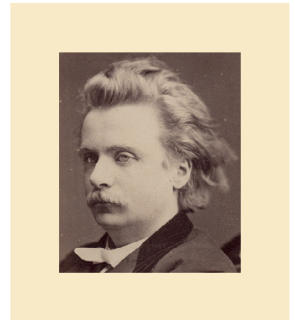
What links the disparate material is the use of a motto or theme, heard in grim unison at the very opening, which is derived from the opening of the song, 'Spillemænd' and which recurs in various guises but always recognisable throughout the work. It appears at dramatic moments in the first movement, fragments of it interrupt the bland 'romance' of the second. It introduces the 'Intermezzo' in forceful mode, while in the finale acts as a lyrical or declamatory foil to the dance rhythms of the movement.



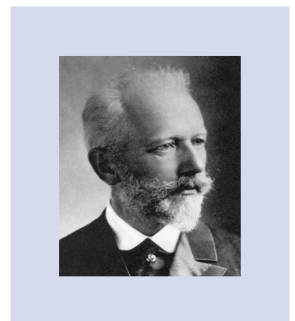
Tchaikovsky outside the Hotel Bellevue in San Remo, Italy.

The last five years of Tchaikovsky's life saw the composition of, among other things, the two final symphonies, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker* ballets and the opera *The Queen of Spades* alongside a busy schedule of touring which took him as far afield as the USA in 1892. While many commentators have been quick to identify a valedictory quality in much of his late work, it is clear that Tchaikovsky's inspiration and technique were in fine form: *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Queen of Spades* each took him a few short weeks to compose. Most recent scholarship agrees that accounts of the composer's suicidal depression have little basis in fact.

Perhaps because of the volume of work that he was producing, Tchaikovsky put off the composition of a new string sextet that was to celebrate his being made an honorary member of the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society in 1886. In fact he got only as far as writing down what was to become the theme of the *Adagio* of this work while visiting Florence in 1887. The rest of the work was composed in June and July 1890, with the composer beginning work just days after the completion of *The Queen of Spades*.



The young Grieg



Tchaikovsky in 1891

ABOUT THE MUSIC

There may have been other reasons for avoiding the work, however. Tchaikovsky wrote comparatively little chamber music. His Piano Trio is an undoubted masterpiece, but it is generally accepted that in his string quartets, Tchaikovsky struggled with the relatively limited mass and palette of colour afforded by the ensemble. He was, of course, much more at home with the resources of a full orchestra, and said to one friend that he was concerned that in writing the *Souvenir* he was in danger of thinking in orchestral terms first, and then refining his ideas for the sextet. While the work is more often played by string orchestras than sextets these days, it is extremely successful with one player to a part. In writing it Tchaikovsky solved the problem not just of producing a 'big' sound – through, for instance, the use of double stopping of six instruments, but also of maintaining musical interest in passages of light scoring.

Just how 'Italian' the work is is moot. Tchaikovsky and his brother Modest had travelled to Italy in 1879 in the wake of the composer's disastrous marriage. Tchaikovsky explicitly celebrated the recuperative effects of the landscape, history and culture of the Mediterranean in his *Capriccio italien*; in discussing this work, however, he never made any particular connection between it and Italy. Some of the melodic and rhythmic material may evoke Italian song and dance (such as Tchaikovsky was to explore in the *Nutcracker*), especially in the slow movement and scherzo, but the work is always permeated by Tchaikovsky's distinctive voice. And perhaps in deference to the chamber music *aficionados* for whom the work was written there are also many demonstrations of Tchaikovsky's mastery of sonata form and fugue in the outer movements.

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Monument to Tchaikovsky in Florence



Tchaikovsky (right) with Nikolai Konradi, Modest Tchaikovsky and Alexei Sofranov in San Remo, Italy

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