

14–16 April
Sydney Opera House

DONALD RUNNICLES CONDUCTS BRAHMS 2

Presenting Partner



SYDNEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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

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. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

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.

Simone Young

Chief Conductor

Donald Runnicles

Principal Guest
Conductor

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Conductor Laureate

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster
*Chair supported by
Vicki Olsson*

FIRST VIOLINS

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Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate
Concertmaster

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant
Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant
Concertmaster

Sun Yi

Associate Concertmaster
Emeritus

Jennifer Booth

Sophie Cole

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Anna Skálová

Léone Ziegler

Sercan Danis*

Marcus Michelsen†

Brielle Clapson

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton

Principal

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Assistant Principal

Alice Bartsch

Victoria Bihun

Rebecca Gill

Shuti Huang

Monique Irik

Wendy Kong

Nicole Masters

Maja Verunica

Riikka Sintonen#

Dominic Azzi†

Christina Vaszilcsin*

Marianne Edwards

Associate Principal

Emma Hayes

Benjamin Li

VIOLAS

Frederik Boits*

Guest Principal

Tobias Breider

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Acting Associate Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Jane Hazelwood

Stuart Johnson

Felicity Tsai

Leonid Volovelsky

Aidan Filshie†

Andrew Jezek*

Graham Hennings

Justine Marsden

Amanda Verner

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Leah Lynn

Acting Associate Principal

Timothy Nankervis

Christopher Pidcock

Adrian Wallis

Eliza Sdraulig*

Ariel Volovelsky†

Nadia Barrow*

Paul Ghica*

Rachel Siu*

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Elizabeth Neville

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

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Dylan Holly

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Jaan Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

Oliver Simpson*

David Campbell

FLUTES

Emma Sholl

Associate Principal

Carolyn Harris

Joshua Batty

Principal

OBOES

Diana Doherty

Principal

Callum Hogan

Shefali Pryor

Associate Principal

Alexandre Oguey

Principal

CLARINETS

Alexander Morris

Acting Associate Principal

Jes Broeren†

Francesco Celata

Acting Principal

Christopher Tingay

BASSOONS

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

Fiona McNamara

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

Todd Gibson-Cornish

Principal

HORNS

Andrew Bain*

Guest Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

Geoffrey O'Reilly

Principal 3rd Horn

TRUMPETS

David Elton

Principal

Cécile Glémat

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Anthony Heinrichs

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont

Associate Principal

William Kinmont†

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

Ronald Prussing

Principal

Nick Byrne

TUBA

Edwin Diefes*

Guest Principal

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

David Clarence*

Guest Principal

Mark Robinson

Acting Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Timothy Constable

Bold = Principal

Italics = Associate

Principal

* = Guest Musician

= Contract Musician

† = Sydney Symphony

Fellow

Grey = Permanent

Member of the Sydney

Symphony Orchestra

not appearing in

this concert

ROYAL CARIBBEAN CLASSICS UNDER THE SAILS

Friday 14 April, 7pm
Saturday 15 April, 7pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Sunday 16 April, 2pm

DONALD RUNNICLES CONDUCTS BRAHMS 2

LUSH & TRIUMPHANT

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor
ANDREA LAM pianist

DETLEV GLANERT (born 1960)

Idyllium

Australian premiere

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.54

i. *Allegro affettuoso*

ii. *Intermezzo (Andantino grazioso)* —

iii. *Allegro vivace*

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Symphony No.2 in D, Op.73

i. *Allegro non troppo*

ii. *Adagio non troppo*

iii. *Allegretto grazioso (Quasi andantino)* — *Presto ma non assai*

iv. *Allegro con spirito*

Pre-concert talk by
Hugh Robertson in the
Northern Foyer at 6.15pm
(Friday, Saturday) and
1.15pm (Sunday)

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

10 minutes, 31 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
40 minutes

The concert will conclude
at approximately 8.45pm
(Friday, Saturday) and
3.45pm (Sunday)

COVER IMAGE

Sir Donald Runnicles
Photo by Jay Patel

PRESENTING PARTNER



PRINCIPAL PARTNER



CONCERT DIARY

APRIL 2023



ELGAR'S CELLO CONCERTO POWERFUL INSPIRATIONS

ALEX TURLEY *Mirage*
50 Fanfares Commission
ELGAR Cello Concerto
SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No.10
DONALD RUNNICLES conductor
NICOLAS ALTSTAEDT cello

Emirates Masters Series
Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony

Wednesday 19 April, 8pm
Thursday 20 April, 1.30pm
Friday 21 April, 8pm
Saturday 22 April, 8pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



ARABELLA STEINBACHER PERFORMS LENTZ LUMINOUS & TRANSCENDENT

BIBER *Battalia in D*
GEORGES LENTZ "...to beam in distant
heavens..." – Violin Concerto
R STRAUSS *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
UMBERTO CLERICI conductor
ARABELLA STEINBACHER violin

Royal Caribbean Classics Under the Sails

Friday 28 April, 7pm
Saturday 29 April, 7pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

MAY 2023



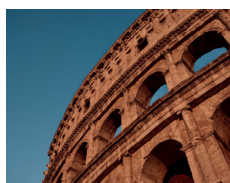
STEPHEN HOUGH PERFORMS RACHMANINOV 2 GLORIOUSLY EXPANSIVE

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No.2
RESPIGHI
*Roman Festivals**
*Fountains of Rome**
Pines of Rome
**Great Classics performance only*
JOHN WILSON conductor
STEPHEN HOUGH piano

Symphony Hour
Great Classics

Thursday 11 May, 7pm
Sat 13 May, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



RESPIGHI'S ROMAN TRILOGY GLORIOUS LANDSCAPES

RESPIGHI
Roman Festivals
Fountains of Rome
Pines of Rome
JOHN WILSON conductor

Tea & Symphony

Friday 12 May, 11am

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



STEPHEN HOUGH IN RECITAL GREAT ROMANTICS

MOMPOU *Cants màgics*
CHOPIN *Ballade No.3*
CHOPIN *Two Nocturnes*
DEBUSSY *Estampes*
STEPHEN HOUGH *Partita*
LISZT
Années de Pèlerinage:
Three Petrarch Sonnets
Dante Sonata
STEPHEN HOUGH piano

International Pianists in Recital

Monday 15 May, 7pm

City Recital Hall

WELCOME

Welcome to *Donald Runnicles Conducts Brahms 2*, part of the *Classics Under the Sails* series.

As the first Presenting Partner of the inaugural *Classics Under the Sails* series, we are both proud and delighted to be giving audiences the opportunity to hear classical music's greatest works performed by the world's leading artists.

In this concert, Principal Guest Conductor Sir Donald Runnicles leads the Orchestra in a program of sweeping emotions and glorious music by Brahms and Schumann.

These quintessential Romantic composers sought to illuminate the human experience in all its joy, drama and tenderness, and here the Orchestra gives full reign to its remarkable powers of expression.

Australian pianist Andrea Lam, with her "melting lyricism" is the perfect soloist for Schumann's Piano Concerto — the only piano concerto he completed, and surely one of the most beautiful of all.

When in port, our stunning ships are a feature of the stunning backdrop of Sydney Harbour, a backdrop shared by the equally iconic Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

We are immensely proud of our inaugural partnership with the Sydney Symphony, and with an unwavering focus on creating extraordinary experiences, both Royal Caribbean and the Orchestra share a deep and longstanding commitment to excellence.

We hope you enjoy these performances of *Donald Runnicles Conducts Brahms 2*, just one of a total of five extraordinary concerts in the 2023 *Classics Under the Sails* series.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gavin Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Gavin Smith

Vice President & Managing Director
Royal Caribbean

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

Sir Donald Runnicles is the General Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival, as well as Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In 2019 Runnicles also took up the post as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's first ever Principal Guest Conductor. He additionally holds the title of Conductor Emeritus of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, having served as Chief Conductor from 2009-2016.

In the 2021-22 season, maestro Runnicles will lead performances of the complete *Ring Cycle*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Der Zwerg*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and Britten's *War Requiem* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin; *Elektra* at the Metropolitan Opera; and concerts with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, including a concert version of *Hansel and Gretel*.

Sir Donald enjoys close and enduring relationships with many of the most significant opera companies and symphony orchestras. His previous posts include Music Director of the San Francisco Opera (1992-2008), during which he led world premieres of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*, Conrad Susa's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and the US premiere of Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*; Principal Conductor of the Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001-2007); and General Music Director of the Theater Freiburg and Orchestra (1989-1993).

Mr. Runnicles' extensive discography includes complete recordings of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, Mozart's Requiem, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Britten's *Billy Budd*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and Aribert Reimann's *L'invisible*. His recording of Wagner arias with Jonas Kaufmann and the Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin won the 2013 *Gramophone* prize for Best Vocal Recording, and his recording of Janáček's *Jenůfa* with the Orchestra and Chorus of the Deutsche Oper Berlin was nominated for a 2016 Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording.

Sir Donald Runnicles was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was appointed OBE in 2004, and was made a Knight Bachelor in 2020. He holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.



Donald Runnicles

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ANDREA LAM piano

Pronounced a "real talent" by *The Wall Street Journal*, New York-based Australian pianist Andrea Lam performs with orchestras and leading conductors in Australasia, Japan, China and the United States, including the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic, and all major Australian symphony orchestras.

Most recently, Andrea toured nationally for Musica Viva Australia performing Bach's Goldberg Variations, and played concerto soloist engagements with the Sydney, Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras. She performed as pianist alongside renowned baritone Bo Skovhus at the Sydney Opera House and as solo pianist in regional concerts for Musica Viva, for Melbourne Recital Centre, Phoenix Central Park (Sydney) and Blackheath Chamber Music Festival, as well as for Sydney Opera House' 2022 International Piano Day livestream.

In 2023, Andrea performs concertos with Sydney Symphony and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras with conductors Sir Donald Runnicles and Jaime Martín, and features in Adelaide Festival in both the *Chamber Landscapes* weekend curated by Paavali Jumppanen, and the Ngapa William Cooper Project, commissioned by UKARIA and Finding Our Voice, composed by Lior and Nigel Westlake and performed with the Australian String Quartet. Andrea also performs for the Sydney Opera House's Utzon Music Series, Newcastle and Sanguine Estate Music Festivals, with the Australia Ensemble @ UNSW, in recital at Elder Hall (Adelaide) with violinist Emily Sun, alongside several regional concerts.

Andrea Lam was a Semifinalist in the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition, Silver Medalist in the 2009 San Antonio Piano Competition, and winner of the ABC's Young Performer of the Year Award in the Keyboard section, and the Yale Woolsey Hall Competition. She holds degrees from both the Yale and the Manhattan Schools of Music. Recordings include Mozart concerti with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and for Huntington Festival's commemorative album (ABC Classic) and with renowned cellist Matt Haimovitz (Pentatone Oxingale). Andrea features as pianist on *Nocturnes*, violinist Emily Sun's critically acclaimed, ARIA Award-nominated album for ABC Classic, earning a rare 5 star review in *The Australian* and described as "a winner on every count" — *Sydney Morning Herald*.



Andrea Lam, photo by Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

ABOUT THE MUSIC

DETLEV GLANERT (born 1960)

Idyllium

Like a number of his teachers, including Hans Werner Henze, German composer Detlev Glanert has long been celebrated for his creative engagement with the Romantic tradition in Western music. In a number of works, of which *Idyllium* is one, he enters into dialogue with the music of Brahms. *Idyllium* was composed in 2019 for the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam of which Glanert was ‘house composer’ from 2011 until 2017.

The work with which *Idyllium* specifically engages is Brahms’ Symphony No.2, though as the composer has noted, it uses only ‘microparticles’ of Brahms’s material. We don’t hear any fully-quoted themes, but on the other hand the work is suffused with tiny motifs and the characteristic palette of Brahms’ orchestral work.

The opening is mysterious, as muted violins sound a soft semitonal clash in harmonics with disembodied, short motifs from double bass, horns and flute. (Brahms’ scoring for winds in the Second Symphony give it much of its pastoral character, which Glanert echoes sensitively.) These gestures are gradually extended, and their accretion produces more sustained textures. Some of the melodic material begins to sound more Brahmsian, such as the flute motif that begins with a half step down and back up, which is soon given to strings with the rich, dark sound of divided violas and cellos. Up-down patterns of octaves can also be traced to Brahms, as can Glanert’s occasional use of a simple, slow, downwards scale, or pervasive rhythmic ideas like a three-note upbeat that begins several motifs and is used to create a tracery of woodwind lines.

The music gains tension through gradually faster sections: faster, repeated chords from muted brass; syncopated chords that call forth a big tune from the woodwinds; a yet more agitated texture of triplets against duplet figures (also a Brahmsian staple) that supports a bigger tune for the violins.



Detlev Glanert,
photo by Bettina Stöss

ABOUT THE MUSIC

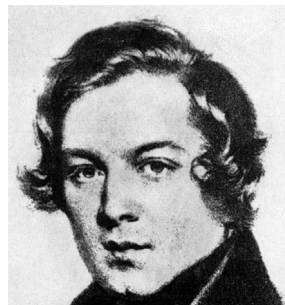
The piece explores the warm, broad timbre of paired unison horns in counterpoint with the violas, as much of the motivic material we have already heard is overlaid to weave a complex web of sound, before this dissolves in patterns of chirping woodwinds and trilling strings. As the piece progresses its rhetoric becomes more urgent, building to often powerful moments followed by momentary retreats into calm.

In the piece's final phase, Glanert's tribute becomes more explicit, stemming from a passage that shares its marking (*Allegro con spirito*) and the literal rhythm and tonal centre of Brahms' finale. This last section generates great excitement before a closing gesture that is purely Brahmsian in spirit, if not in sound.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.54

Following their wedding in September 1840, composer Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck, a prominent piano virtuoso, set up house in Leipzig. The couple soon had children, and finding money to support a growing family was a constant worry. Clara had no intention of abandoning her successful musical life. She took pride in earning money from her performances; she also helped popularise Robert's piano works by including them in her concert programs. Robert revered his wife's extraordinary musicianship, but his pride struggled with the greater fame accorded Clara, especially when they travelled on concert tours together. Though a respected music journalist and an acclaimed composer of piano works, songs and chamber music, he had yet to write the symphonies and large-scale works that would later enhance his artistic reputation.



Robert Schumann in 1839

ABOUT THE MUSIC

A piano concerto by Robert that Clara could perform would thus serve several purposes. Before marrying, Robert had experimented with various ideas for piano concertos, none of which evolved beyond sketches. But during the newlyweds' first year, he completed a *Phantasie* for Piano and Orchestra, conceived and orchestrated during 16 days in May 1841. A private performance led to the first of several revisions, but Robert could not find a publisher for his single-movement work.

He set it aside for four years, during which time he wrote more chamber music (including his popular Piano Quintet and Piano Quartet) as well as the *Spring Symphony*, and moved his family to Dresden. From there he undertook a tour to Russia with Clara that left him exhausted and ill, triggering a severe nervous breakdown. He sought therapy by studying the works of Bach and writing fugues. Taking a break from counterpoint exercises, he added two movements — a final rondo and a connecting *Intermezzo* — to the reworked *Phantasie*, and thus created his Concerto for Piano and Orchestra.



Robert and Clara Schumann in 1850

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ferdinand Hiller, a conductor to whom Robert dedicated the concerto (hoping to heal a rift in their friendship), led the premiere in his Dresden subscription concert of 4 December 1845 with Clara as soloist. But the true dedicatee is Clara, for whom Robert characterised his devotion in the opening movement's tempo indication of *Allegro affettuoso*, the *Phantasie*'s original title. Clara took pleasure in the results; she had long wanted a more brilliant vehicle for display of her virtuosity than the *Phantasie*. Felix Mendelssohn, the Schumanns' great friend, who expressed highest regard for Clara's playing and supported (with occasional private misgivings) Schumann's work as a composer, organised and conducted the Leipzig premiere on New Year's Day 1846. Thereafter, the concerto was performed in important cities, often with Robert conducting; it remained a central work in Clara's repertoire, and is a lasting testament to the couple's remarkable personal and artistic partnership, cut short by Robert's death at age 46 in the Eendenich asylum, where he recalled, in a letter to Clara, the concerto 'that you played so splendidly'.

With an abrupt, chromatic cascade of chords, the soloist's opening entrance commands immediate attention, heralding the oboe's statement of the primary theme, echoed by the piano. The theme's three-note descending motif dominates deliberations between the orchestra and soloist. The opening key of A minor yields, via the second theme, to triumphant C major, then to an expressive reverie in A-flat major, showcasing the piano accompanied by radiant strings and plaintive woodwind. A return to earlier debates interrupts this dream, restores the opening theme and launches the soloist into an extended cadenza, capped by a quick coda that ends emphatically.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The second-movement *Intermezzo (Andantino grazioso)*, hosts a more congenial but equally passionate dialogue. Short musical ideas are exchanged politely between soloist and orchestra, but as they warm to their topic, an eloquent contrasting theme sings out richly from the cellos, ornamented expansively by the piano. As the conversation fades, clarinets and bassoons recall the opening movement's three-note motif, first in A minor, then in A major. Without pause, the piano seizes the major motif and launches into a robust, triple-metre rondo marked *Allegro vivace*, driven by the soloist's extensive bravura passagework. The third-movement theme (itself a transformation of the primary first-movement theme, subtly strengthening the concerto's structural unity) surfaces buoyantly through harmonic sequences that build to an exhilarating conclusion.

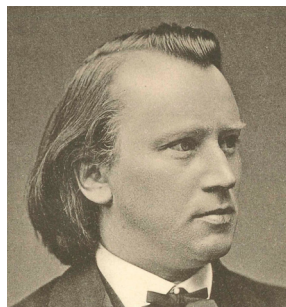
JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897) **Symphony No.2 in D, Op.73**

Defending Brahms against a common charge, American composer Charles Ives observed that:

to think hard and deeply and say what is thought, regardless of consequences, may produce a first impression either of great translucence or of great muddiness, but in the latter there may be hidden possibilities...

The mud may be a form of sincerity.

In fact, Brahms's music sounds 'muddy' only where we move too far from the original disposition of the orchestra he used. Brahms wrote for a modest band of two of each wind and brass instrument (using the latter sparingly), though with four horns and a matching compliment of strings. He uses forceful orchestral effects to be sure, but if ever proof were needed that Brahms' orchestration could be of the most refined, we need go no further than the Second Symphony.



Brahms in the 1870s

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Brahms took a long time to produce his First Symphony, and to have it described as ‘Beethoven’s Tenth’, as conductor Hans Richter called it, might well have been recipe for crippling stage fright; nonetheless the Second followed almost immediately, being completed in 1877. The relationship between the two offered another irresistible comparison with Beethoven, one which the great British writer Donald Tovey and others have seized upon: in the case of Beethoven’s Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and Brahms’ First and Second we have pairs of works where the first is a strenuous, dramatic, maybe even tragic, work in the key of C minor whose trajectory traces a metaphorical journey from darkness to light, whereas the second is a contrastingly serene, happy, Apollonian work in D major with certain elements that we might describe as pastoral. Brahms sneered at such suggestions (which is not to say they have no merit), and it is true that his orchestration in this work relies more than usually heavily on wind solos — particularly the bucolic sounds of oboe and horn, and that in the third movement, in particular, there is that reliance on vernacular music which reminds us of the peasants’ merry-making in Beethoven’s Sixth.

But as Brahms well knew, ‘et in Arcadia ego’: he joked to his publisher that this was the saddest piece he had ever written, and it is significant that the symphony begins, and ends, with the sound of trombones, instruments only dragged out of the church by Mozart (in *Don Giovanni*) and into the concert hall by Beethoven.



Pörtschach on the Wörthersee, where Brahms composed the Second Symphony.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The scoring at the start is, naturally, 'dark' thanks to the trombones, creating a slightly ominous atmosphere that is swept away by the more high-spirited material, with its hint of the famous 'Brahms lullaby' stated first by the lower strings. The overall vector of the movement is upwards to the high wind scoring at its centre, which gives way to some intensely Brahmsian counterpoint, two-against-three rhythmic figures and veiled warnings from the trombones. The movement ends introspectively, paving the way for one of Brahms most beautiful slow adagios. The lovely, endless opening melody is stated in the low strings and answered by simple falling scale passages from the higher instruments. (Paradoxically, in this movement there are moments that sound like Brahms' rival Bruckner.) But again, there is no serenity without the possibility of conflict, and the pastoral calm is more than once challenged by emotionally charged outbursts, particularly as the movement reaches its final moments.

Here as elsewhere Brahms replaces the traditional scherzo with a lighter dance-movement. Here, the *allegretto grazioso* consists of three statements of a genial triple-metre dance with two faster, possibly Slavic or Hungarian-inspired, episodes. One of these is in 2/4, with accents at the end of each bar, the other a breakneck 3/8.

The finale returns us to a purely Arcadian world (though with the memory of the darker implications that have surfaced in the inner movements). It is formally straightforward, notionally a sonata design but with no especially rigorous development. Brahms balances the impulse to Lisztian Romantic rhapsody with a strong sense of formal design. The Second Symphony is conceived on a large scale, within classical norms., But Brahms never allows an idea to stand, or to be simplistically repeated. His technique of developing variation made Brahms an unlikely hero to Schoenberg, and therefore a kind of grandfather to modern music. But Brahms doesn't just transform his themes: his treatment of forms transforms them. As such it is one solution to the problem of late Romanticism.

Notes © Gordon Kerry (Glanert, Brahms)
and Samuel C Dixon (Schumann)

DONALD RUNNICLES ON THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN MUSIC

The Sydney Symphony's Principal Guest Conductor discusses the deep personal connections between Brahms and the Schumanns, and why he has programmed them together in this concert.

By Hugh Robertson

Sir Donald Runnicles is a man who believes deeply in the power of music to bring people together.

Some of his earliest memories are of his father's choir in Edinburgh, watching and listening as dozens of voices combined into one powerful wall of sound.

That philosophy has been the central ethos of his long and celebrated career, at the core of his many engagements and positions around the world today — especially as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Music, for Runnicles, is akin to a religious experience, one that is unique and impossible to replicate.

"It is an incredible blessing when a lot of people are together and experiencing a concert," says Runnicles. "And the moment that last chord has died away, it is gone. This is a communion, in a holistic way, where people are sitting together and enjoying the great masterworks. And that has always inspired me, the process of making music *with* and *for* people."

The 'with' part of that equation is something the Sydney Symphony knows well. Runnicles' relationship with the Orchestra stretches back nearly 25 years and it is one he treasures deeply.

The 'for' part of Runnicles' philosophy will be clear to anyone who has ever attended one of his concerts and experienced the way in which he draws musical threads together.

"It is my conviction that audiences enjoy a journey," says Runnicles. "In putting together orchestral programs, one is obviously looking for pieces that go well together, that shine off one another."

Today's concert takes us to the heart of the Romantic era, and to the close friendship between Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms.

DONALD RUNNICLES ON THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN MUSIC

Robert Schumann was one of the great Romantic composers, considered the heir to the German symphonic tradition handed down from Beethoven to Schubert and Mendelssohn. Clara Wieck was one of the most celebrated pianists of the era and a talented composer in her own right, a one-time child prodigy who would go on to redefine the role of the soloist over the course of a long and distinguished career.

Brahms was a generation younger than the Schumanns, but they saw in him the same spirit, recognising his talents and boosting his career — after their first meeting when Brahms was just 20, Robert wrote that Brahms was "fated to give expression to the times in the highest and most ideal manner".

Robert and Clara were utterly devoted to each other, and so much of their relationship is captured in this concerto — one of the main musical themes is based on the notes C-B-A (C-H-A in the German note-naming system), thought to represent the name 'Chiara,' Robert's nickname for Clara — and after Robert's death at the age of just 46, Clara performed this concerto across Europe for the remainder of her life and career, doing more than anyone else to cement her late husband's legacy. Around the time of Robert's death Brahms began to fall in love with Clara — and although (as far as we know) their relationship remained platonic, they remained close until Clara's death in 1896, just one year before Brahms.

"Robert Schumann was, in his own way, a revolutionary as a composer, as a musician," says Runnicles. "And he sensed very much that the young Johannes Brahms was a worthy successor to him, and there's this really this three-way devotion and love."

When asked what it is about Brahms that speaks to him so, Runnicles pauses for a moment — as if trying to find the words to describe the totality of the connection.

"There's a deep humanity in the music," he says eventually. "It's never showy for showy's sake. It's deeply thought-through. It is extremely emotional without the heart being on the sleeve — there's great restraint shown in it. And there is a beauty there."

DONALD RUNNICLES ON THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN MUSIC

“There was a great deal of sadness in Brahms’ life, partly because of his long, long, platonic love for other people — the most famous of all being Clara Schumann. So there’s always this yearning in his music, even when it is at its most sunny. A yearning for humanity, yearning for warmth, of course, yearning for meaning.”

“In the Schumann Piano Concerto, too, there is a plaintive aspect to it,” he continues. “There is a struggle in this music. And as we know that Robert Schumann all his life struggled with mental health. I’m not suggesting that you only need to know about that, but there is such beauty there, and yet something very fragile about that beauty.”

This concert opens with a work by contemporary German composer Detlev Glanert, titled *Idyllium*. Here, too, are the connections deep and multi-layered. “Detlev and I have been friends for decades,” he says, “and he worships at the altar of Johannes Brahms. He wrote this piece as a musical tribute specifically to the Second Symphony.”

“As the piece evolves — and it’s only a few minutes long — you realise that even though it is considerably more modern in its tonal language, it’s still very much the Brahmsian world.”

This, then, is a concert that reaches across the centuries — and Runnicles hopes that is felt by the audience, too.

“It is always one of those mysteries, when you have performed a work for 1,500 people,” he says, thoughtfully. “How do they all leave the hall? What fills their minds? What fills their souls? I would like to think that many people leave a concert changed, in some way.”

“Robert Shaw, the iconic leader of the Atlanta Symphony Choir and Orchestra, would always say, ‘You have to assume that many people are hearing this work for the first time — but you also have to assume that many are hearing it for the last time.’”

“And I think, with that as a backdrop, one hopes that one is touching people.”

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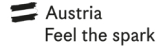
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