

15 May
City Recital Hall

STEPHEN HOUGH IN RECITAL



Presenting Partner



«SYDNEY»
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Principal Partner



WELCOME

Welcome to the *International Pianists in Recital* series for 2023, and to this concert, *Stephen Hough in Recital*.

Any opportunity to experience Stephen Hough in recital is an important event — and in this performance, we will experience yet another side to his extraordinary artistry.

The first classical pianist to be knighted for 45 years, Stephen Hough is a highly regarded composer and writer, in addition to his standing as one of the world's greatest pianists.

In this performance you will experience a work by Hough himself, as well as iconic works of Romantic and Impressionist writing, from Chopin to Liszt and Debussy.

All of us at Theme and Variations are very proud to be the Presenting Partner of the 2023 *International Pianists in Recital* series, a year in which we also celebrate 21 years of partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

The Orchestra brings the world's most charismatic pianists to the concert stages of our city, delightfully it is an honour for us to be working with long-time friend Stephen Hough once again, providing specialised piano tuning and preparation of the magnificent instruments on which they perform.

Together, the Sydney Symphony and Theme & Variations offer unsurpassed musical excellence to musicians and audiences alike.

We do hope you enjoy this phenomenal recital by the great Stephen Hough.



Ara Vartoukian

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ara Vartoukian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Ara Vartoukian OAM

Director, Theme & Variations Piano Services

STEPHEN HOUGH IN RECITAL

GREAT ROMANTICS

FEDERICO MOMPOU (1893–1987)

Cants Mágics

- i. *Energic*
- ii. *Obscur*
- iii. *Profond: Lent*
- iv. *Misteriós*
- v. *Calma*

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Ballade No.3 in A flat major, Op.47

Nocturne in F sharp, Op.15 No.2

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

Estampes

- i. *Pagodes* (Pagodas)
- ii. *La soirée dans Grenade* (Evening in Granada)
- iii. *Jardins sous la Pluie* (Gardens in the Rain)

STEPHEN HOUGH (born 1961)

Partita for Piano

- i. Overture
- ii. Capriccio
- iii. Cançion y Danza I
- iv. Cançion y Danza II
- v. Toccata

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

Années de Pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)

Deuxième année (Second Year): Italy

- iv. Petrarch's Sonnet 47
- v. Petrarch's Sonnet 104
- vi. Petrarch's Sonnet 123
- vii. *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi sonata* ('Dante Sonata')

Pre-concert talk by
Jim Coyle in the Function
Room on Level 1 at 6.15pm.

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

11 minutes, 8 minutes,
5 minutes, 16 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
13 minutes, 38 minutes

The concert will conclude at
approximately 9pm.

COVER IMAGE

Sir Stephen Hough
Photo by Robert Torres

*Stephen Hough's
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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

STEPHEN HOUGH piano

Named by *The Economist* as one of Twenty Living Polymaths, Sir Stephen Hough combines a distinguished career as a pianist with those of composer and writer. He was the first classical performer to be awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year Honours 2014, and was awarded a Knighthood for Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2022.

In the 2022/23 season Hough performs over 90 concerts across five continents. Concerto highlights include returns to the Concertgebouworkest, Detroit, Cincinnati and Washington's National symphony orchestras, BBC Symphony and Philharmonia orchestras, and the National Symphony Orchestra, Taiwan. 2023 Artist in Residence with Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, Hough performs the complete Rachmaninov concertos in Brazil as well as in Australia with the Sydney and Adelaide symphony orchestras. He is also Artist in Association with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, with whom he tours the UK in Spring 2023. Recent highlights include the New York Philharmonic, Dallas and Atlanta symphony orchestras, Singapore and Finnish Radio symphony orchestras, Wiener Symphoniker, Orchestre National de France, London Philharmonic and City of Birmingham Symphony orchestras.

Hough's extensive discography of around 70 CDs has garnered international awards including the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, several Grammy nominations, and eight Gramophone Awards including Record of the Year and the Gold Disc. Recent releases for Hyperion include Beethoven's complete piano concertos (Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu), 'The Final Piano Pieces' of Brahms, Chopin's Nocturnes, a Schumann recital, Schubert Piano Sonatas, and Elgar's Violin Sonata with Renaud Capuçon for Warner Classics. His recording of Mompou's *Música callada* is released in 2023 (Hyperion). His award-winning iPad app *The Liszt Sonata* was released by Touch Press in 2013.

Hough is an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple, an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, a Visiting Fellow at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University, a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, the International Chair of Piano Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music (of which he was made a Companion in 2019), and is on the faculty of The Juilliard School in New York.

Stephen Hough's performances with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra are generously supported by Tony & Carol Berg.



Stephen Hough,
photo by Sim Canetty-Clarke

ABOUT THE MUSIC

When Liszt invented the modern public recital around 1839 it was as a vehicle for his stellar, bravura performance style; it's no accident that at one such show in November of that year he presented his *Fragment dantesque*, an early version of the work with which this recital concludes. But this program shows the huge range of manner, style and effect in the music written by composer-pianists, from the pyrotechnics of Liszt, through introspection to the radical (and deceptive) simplicity of the music of Federico (or Frederic) Mompou.

FEDERICO MOMPOU (1893–1987)

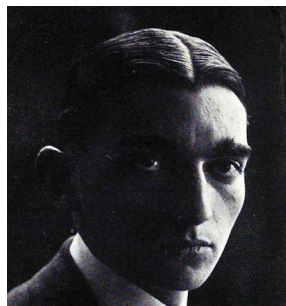
Born in Barcelona to a French mother and Catalan father, Mompou travelled to Paris in 1911 to study, returning to Spain on the outbreak of World War I, but going back to live in Paris between 1921 and 1941.

Stephen Hough has eloquently described Mompou's music as

the music of evaporation. The printed page seems to have faded, as if the bar lines, time signatures, key signatures, and even the notes themselves have disappeared over a timeless number of years. There is no development of material, little counterpoint, no drama nor climaxes to speak of; and this simplicity of expression — elusive, evasive and shy — is strangely disarming'.

Mompou himself, characteristically, was more aphoristic, saying 'The best word is the one unsaid, as we all know, I am a man of few words and a musician of few notes.' But what is striking is how early in his career lit upon what makes his work so singular. The five *Cants Mágics* (Magic songs) of 1917 represent his first published work, and display all of those rarefied and enigmatic qualities of which Hough writes. Hough goes on to say that

These are 'songs' in the loosest, or perhaps 'most primitive', sense of the word ('incantations', Wilfrid Mellers calls them, in his monograph *Le Jardin retrouvé*, describing the vocal lines as 'pre-melodic'),



Federico Mompou in 1911

ABOUT THE MUSIC

and the marking 'Obscur' at the top of No.2 has surely never seemed more apt. These spells frighten us not through their malevolence, but because we are transported to an unknown, prehistoric world. Here is Mompou's most deliberate rejection of the cerebral complexity in much artistic thought of the period.

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Chopin's friends Schumann and Liszt pioneered the illustrative miniature and, in Liszt's case, the full-scale symphonic poem in the spirit of Berlioz. This shift from the abstract forms of classicism has to do with the increasing use of chromatic harmony, which provides localised moments of emotive intensity, but can blur the structural signposts that give form to many classical pieces. Having a 'story' to tell can help the composer to plan the form, and the listener to negotiate its trajectory.

The ballad — enormously popular in the border regions of England and Scotland — appealed to the Romantic poets in Britain and Germany, especially, at the turn of the 19th century. Ballads traditionally told a story almost inevitably set in the non-urban landscape of the past, often involving the supernatural, and almost always ending badly for someone. Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who like Chopin had settled in Paris, described the ballad as 'a tale based on the events of common life or out of the annals of chivalry' and introduced the genre into Polish in 1822. In 1841 Chopin would tell Schumann that his Ballades were based on 'certain poems of Mickiewicz' but if that is the case we know not which.

While Chopin was not writing 'classical' sonata-form pieces, the Ballades do derive their energy from the dramatic interaction, and development, of contrasting thematic materials.

In the third Ballade, composed in 1841, the first theme is generally placid, with the tension ramping up in the second theme area.



Chopin, by Eugène Delacroix

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The work, in A flat, does not use different keys to distinguish its themes, and in fact the barcarolle-like second theme is much less assertive than its counterpart elsewhere. One gets a sense of characters, represented by the themes, being subject to various vicissitudes and emerging deeply changed by the process.

The piano Nocturne is in many respects the child of the John Field, an Irish pianist-composer who lived and worked in London and Moscow. It was Field who from 1812 began producing gently melancholic miniatures where the left hand provides a rippling accompaniment to a lyrical right hand melody. Such pieces had existed before, of course, but it was Field who gave them the evocative generic title and whose pieces, as David Rowland writes, 'were famous for the dream-like states that they induced in his listeners'.

Chopin began writing Nocturnes in 1827 with a student work published posthumously, but the Opus 15 set written in the early 1830s show his full mastery of the genre. The second of the set has an ornate but lyrical theme (reminiscent of *bel canto* opera), and a central section, marked 'double speed' where the accompaniment becomes more urgent with bass syncopations and surging semiquavers in the middle of the texture.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

Debussy is said to have held that 'Chopin is the greatest of them all, for through the piano alone he discovered everything'. Despite once saying that he'd have liked to be a painter (he said much the same thing about a career as a sailor...) Debussy hated hearing his music described as 'what imbeciles call impressionism, just about the least appropriate term possible' and preferred his work to be compared with Symbolist poetry.

Nevertheless the 1903 collection *Estampes* (Prints) consists of three stand-alone movements, each with an evocative title.



Claude Debussy

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Like Ravel, Debussy was often inspired by places he had yet to visit, and each of the *Estampes* cultivates a different 'ethnic' atmosphere:

Pagodes suggests Chinese music in its use of black-note pentatonic writing, though Debussy also makes use of the gong-like bass such as he heard in Javanese gamelan music at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889. Despite being in a kind of ternary form, the piece is harmonically quite static, with contrast and tension generated by the varying speeds at which the five notes of the scale circulate. (Pianist Roy Howat argues that the melodic contours of the phrases resemble the shapes of pagoda-roofs.)

By contrast *La Soirée dans Grenade* (Evening in Grenada) gains its Spanish flavour from an almost obsessive habanera rhythm (long-short-long-long), stated or implied in just about every bar (but for a couple of triple-time bars near the end that evoke the strumming of guitars). Debussy returns home for *Jardin sous la Pluie* (Gardens in the rain); painter Jacques-Émile Blanche remembered a summer rainstorm at Debussy's home where everyone but the composer went indoors. The piece uses snatches of two French children's songs, it: 'Do, do, l'enfant do,' and 'Nous n'irons plus au bois.'

STEPHEN HOUGH (born 1961)

Of his new Partita, Stephen Hough writes:

Having written four sonatas for piano of a serious, intense character, when I was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation to write a piece for its competition winner, Albert Cano Smit, I wanted to write something different — something brighter, something more celebratory, more nostalgic. Indeed, a piece deliberately, unashamedly drawing on some early-20th century influences and tonal gestures.

This Partita is in five movements. Its outer, more substantial bookends suggest the world of a grand cathedral organ. The first of these alternates between ceremonial pomp and sentimental circumstance, whereas the final movement, taking thematic material from

ABOUT THE MUSIC

the first, is a virtuosic toccata — a sortie out of the gothic gloom into brilliant Sunday sunshine.

At the centre of the work are three shorter movements each utilising the interval of a fifth: a restless, jagged *Capriccio* of constantly shifting time signatures, and two *Cançion y Danzas*, inspired by the Catalan composer Federico Mompou.

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

The first two volumes of Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage), depicting Switzerland and Italy respectively, appeared in the 1850s but consisted of music that had been composed, and often reworked, some time before.

Italy and its art had cast a particular spell. Works by Raphael and Michelangelo inspired two pieces in the collection, but the literature of 14th century poets Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), known in English as Petrarch, and Dante provide the impetus for the works we hear today.

Petrarch's development of the sonnet was of immense importance to poets across Europe such as Shakespeare, and the genre became later very popular among Romantic writers in the 19th century. Liszt set three of Petrarch's sonnets as songs which were published in 1846, but revisited this music for the solo pieces in the 'Années' collection (and later went back to the poetry and composed new song settings).

Liszt's numbering differs from Petrarch's: what Liszt knew as Sonnet 47, *Benedetto sia 'l giorno*, is a celebration of all of the times that the poet see his beloved, Laura. As Wojciech Nowik has noted, Liszt's 'meticulous treatment of time' is reflected in the numerous detailed performance directions.

In Sonnet 104, *Pace non trovo*, the poet is in a maelstrom of often contradictory feelings towards Laura, which List reflects in an equally turbulent and changeable music.

Finally, in Sonnet 123, *l'vidi in terra angelici costumi*, Laura's beauty is experienced as a divine force that moves mountains and stops rivers.



Liszt, by Henri Lehmann, c.1839

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The so-called 'Dante Sonata' was, as we noted, begun in Italy in 1839. Here Liszt provides musical expression of isolated imagery from Dante's account of his voyage through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise in his *Commedia*. Reflecting the grim 'Abandon hope all ye that enter here' inscribed above the gates of Hell, Liszt offers a baleful fanfare stressing the tritone (A- E flat), which theorists once regarded as 'the devil in music.' Liszt left no descriptive program, but the music might evoke the raining fire, the endless gales that sweep up the doomed lovers Paolo and Francesca, the various tortures of hell, the hope of Purgatory and the serene beauty of Heaven. After the fanfare, which recurs structurally, we hear 'horrible cries' of the damned in a *presto agitato* — notionally in D minor but using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. The second theme, in complete contrast, is a chorale, sounded first among deafening cascades in octaves. This, Alan Walker speculates, is a vision of Hell's Monarch, 'the creature eminent in beauty once'. This theme later seems to depict, after much roiling anguish, a glimpse of heaven. The piece closes with the fanfare, now in a stable D major.

Gordon Kerry © 2023

THE MAGIC OF MOMPOU

Sir Stephen Hough reflects on his accidental life-long relationship with Spanish composer Federico Mompou.

I heard Federico Mompou before I heard Mozart.

We had no classical records in the house when I was a kid, but when I started piano lessons my parents bought a miscellaneous recital album by Clive Lythgoe, a British pianist, on the EMI Music for Pleasure imprint. And on that record were two pieces by Mompou.

Because of that record, Mompou has always stayed a very affectionate musical friend. I have released two complete Mompou albums, I have been to his small Barcelona apartment, I have met his widow, and I have played his piano.

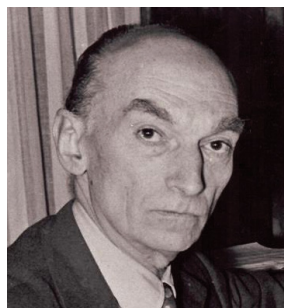
Mompou has the soul of childhood. You feel like he's someone discovering some innocence from the past. His music is very much like a sort of retreat. It's contemplative. The music is mainly slow, almost sometimes painfully slow, and you hear very much the inspiration to composers like Cage and Satie. But unlike Cage and Satie, it's very honest, and not at all self-conscious in its breaking down of rules.

The pieces I'm playing on this program are his *Cants magics* (Magic Songs). They are five short works, and they are really mantras — the sort of thing that you might chant in a transcendental meditation class. But they're very pure and there's a sort of world of great innocence about them. And I love his music.

Who would have thought that the record my parents bought all those years ago would set me off on a lifetime of musical companionship?



British pianist Clive Lythgoe.
Photo Brennan Cavanaugh



Federico Mompou in 1955

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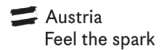
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