

17 & 18 February
Sydney Opera House

JANÁČEK'S STRING QUARTET NO.2



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CONCERT DIARY

MARCH 2023



DVOŘÁK'S STRING QUINTET NO.3 BRIGHT & SPIRITED STRINGS

BARTÓK Sonata for Solo Violin
DVOŘÁK String Quintet No.3

**SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
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Cocktail Hour

**Friday 3 March, 6pm
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Sydney Opera House



MARIE-ANGE NGUCI IN RECITAL A RISING STAR

Works by **RACHMANINOV, PROKOFIEV,
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Monday 6 March, 7pm

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PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION DRAMATIC & EVOCATIVE

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Reflections on the Harbour Light
50 Fanfares Commission
SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto No.2
MUSSORGSKY arr. RAVEL
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Emirates Masters Series

Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony

**Wednesday 8 March, 8pm
Thursday 9 March, 1.30pm
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Concert Hall,
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GERSHWIN Rhapsody in Blue

Royal Caribbean Classics Under the Sails
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**Friday 17 March, 7pm
Saturday 18 March, 7pm
Sunday 19 March, 2pm**

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BEETHOVEN Quintet for Three Horns,
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Thursday 30 March, 7pm

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Great Classics

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Concert Hall,
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DAVID GRECO baritone
**SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
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COCKTAIL HOUR

Friday 17 February, 6pm
Saturday 18 February, 6pm
Utzon Room,
Sydney Opera House

JANÁČEK'S STRING QUARTET NO.2

INTIMATE LETTERS

GENEVIEVE LANG presenter

JOSHUA BATTY flute

LERIDA DELBRIDGE violin

ANNA SKÁLOVÁ violin

JUSTIN WILLIAMS viola

TIMOTHY NANKERVIS cello

JOAN TOWER (born 1938)

Rising

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)

String Quartet No.2, *Intimate Letters*

i. *Andante*

ii. *Adagio*

iii. *Moderato*

iv. *Allegro*

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

16 minutes, 26 minutes

The concert will conclude
at approximately 7pm.

COVER IMAGE

By Pierre Toussaint

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



ABOUT THE MUSIC

JOAN TOWER (born 1938)

Rising

In a recent radio interview with Michael Schell, Joan Tower recounts the story of a friendly disagreement with composer Arvo Pärt. 'Music', said Pärt, 'starts with the voice'. 'No', rejoined Tower, 'it starts with the drum'.

Tower has long been one of the most distinguished composers in the USA. After study at Bennington College she enrolled in a doctoral program at Columbia where, as she told interviewer Kyle Macmillan, she 'wound up with the uptown crowd, and those were mostly 12-tone composers. They were all very smart and nice people...But I decided, "I'm wasting my time here. I've got to step away from this 12-tone stuff."' More recently she notes influences in the music of Stravinsky, Messiaen, Beethoven and Copland.

In 1981 her first major orchestral work, *Sequoia*, was premiered by Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers' Orchestra. Its success drew the attention of Leonard Slatkin of the St Louis Orchestra, who championed her work. Subsequently her orchestral music has been played by the major orchestras in the US and elsewhere, and among her popular works are the six pieces grouped under the title *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*, in which, naturally enough, she pays homage to Aaron Copland, but also makes a firm statement of her feminist principles. (The first of these fanfares, composed in 1986, was recently featured in the inaugural festivities for President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris.) In her interview with Macmillan she notes that 'I was kind of on the cutting edge for women composers. When I was growing up in New York, there weren't that many women composers being played, especially in the traditional classical-music world. It got better and better as time wore on, but the history is not a very good one for us. We came in very late among the arts.'



Joan Tower
Photo by Bard College

ABOUT THE MUSIC

By the time of her orchestral successes Tower had already established herself as composer and performer of chamber music. She co-founded the Da Capo Chamber Players, of which she was pianist for 15 years, in 1970, and the ensemble commissioned some 100 new works. Later she said 'I learned more from that experience than getting a Ph.D.' Marriage to a jazz pianist for 10 years also influenced how Tower thought about harmony and rhythm. An earlier formative experience was when Tower, still a young child, went with her family for several years residence in Bolivia, Chile and Peru where her father worked as a geologist. There Tower remembers being immersed in the music of the regular festivals held by the Indigenous peoples of those countries. Little wonder that for her 'music starts with the drum,' and that her music is so much concerned with rhythmic impetus.

Tower has also been a great champion of the flute, featuring what she believes to be a neglected instrument in four works, including *Rising*, composed for flute and string quartet in 2009.

She writes of the piece:

I have always been interested in how music can 'go up.' It is a simple action, but one that can have so many variables: slow or fast tempos, accelerating, slowing down, getting louder or softer — with thick or thin surrounding textures going in the same or opposite directions. For me, it is the context and the feel of the action that matters. A long climb, for example, might signal something important to come (and often hard to deliver on!). A short climb, on the other hand, might be just a hop to another phrase. One can't, however, just go up. There should be a counteracting action which is either going down or staying the same to provide a tension within the piece. (I think some of our great composers, especially Beethoven, were aware of the power of the interaction of these 'actions'.)

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The main theme in *Rising* is an ascent motion using different kinds of scales — mostly octatonic or chromatic — and occasionally arpeggios. These upward motions are then put through different filters, packages of time and varying degrees of heat environments which interact with competing static and downward motions.

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928) **String Quartet No.2 *Intimate Letters***

Leoš Janáček is proof that life — or at least a richly creative life — starts at 50. Born in the Czech province of Moravia where his father was an impoverished but cultured schoolmaster and music teacher, he grew up in modest circumstances but was given excellent training in music and at the age of 11 won a scholarship to a choir school in Brno. In due course he studied further at conservatories in Prague, Leipzig and Vienna before returning to settle in Brno. There he taught and composed in the then current late-Romantic manner and edited a journal of music criticism.

In the late 1880s he became ardently pro-Russian, seeing Russia's culture as a model for an authentically Slavic one in opposition to that of imperial Vienna, and in 1896 founded a 'Russian Circle' in Brno. Like Bartók, Vaughan Williams, Grainger and others he also collected folk song, finding in the melodies and rhythms of such music something authentic and fresh, which offered opportunities for music that was far removed from that of the German-speaking countries. And not only did he collect folk song, he would sit in public places and listen intently to spoken language, noting down how tone and rhythm varied according to social situations. This incredibly subtle research bore fruit in his setting of Czech texts, notably in the opera *Jenůfa* of 1903, which established the now 50-year old composer as a master with a distinctive voice. Other than *Jenůfa*, though, Janáček's music before 1914 is less performed than his later work.



Leoš Janáček in 1926
Photo by Gustav Böhlm

ABOUT THE MUSIC

In last decade of his life, Janáček was passionately and obsessively in love with Kamila Stösslová, the 20-something wife of a dealer in antiques. Janáček, separated from his wife Zdenka but still living with her, was over 30 years Kamila's senior. They met in 1917, and opinions differ as to the extent, if any, to which she reciprocated the composer's feelings. (Zdenka wrote that Kamila 'was completely unimpressed by my husband's fame, and also by his person'.)

Most of Janáček's greatest music dates from this time and reflects powerful erotic motivations: within weeks of meeting Kamila he had begun work on the *Diary of one who disappeared*, a song cycle about a man seduced by a beautiful Roma woman; his next opera, *Káťa Kabanová* undermines traditional family values with the heroine's extramarital affair and its terrible consequence, as does, ironically, *The Makropoulos Affair* with its seductive 337 year-old heroine. Janáček's First String Quartet encodes his erotic impulses by using the framework of Tolstoy's story, *The Kreutzer Sonata*. He composed it in a matter of days in 1923, saying 'note after note fell smouldering from my pen...I had in mind a miserable woman, suffering, beaten, wretched, like the great Russian author Tolstoy wrote about in his *Kreutzer Sonata*.'

Composed in the last year of his life, 1928, and in contrast to Tolstoy's rather sadistic fantasy, Janáček's second quartet, *Intimate Letters*, deals explicitly with his relationship to the young married woman in a series of real or imagined scenarios. 'Our life' he told her, 'will be in it.'

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Kamila Stösslová and her child Otto in 1917

Paradoxically, perhaps, this intensely erotic moods are achieved in music that is almost sparse in places. As Alex Ross has written, 'Janáček's late style is lean and strong. Melodies are whittled down but do not lose their grace. Rhythms move like a needle on a gramophone, skipping as if stuck or slowing down as if someone were fiddling with the speed.' The spare simplicity of Janáček's melodies give any chromatic or rhythm variation that he might introduce an immense emotional force.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Intimate Letters' passionate first movement, Janáček, wrote, is 'my impression when I saw you for the first time....Kamila, it will be beautiful, strange, unrestrained, inspired, a composition beyond all.....It's my first composition that sprang directly from things remembered; this piece was written in fire.' It begins with a motif that supposedly represents the composer, and which recurs throughout the work.

The second depicts a visit to a spa where they kissed, beginning slowly, with a latent passion that quickly catches fire; a after a quiet interlude there is hint of dance music, followed by a yearning theme, a frenetic coda.

In the third 'love letter', Janáček remembers 'the times of being with you when I felt as though the earth was trembling under my feet...' A couple of simple dance tunes give way to, and then alternate with, slower moving, but nonetheless active music. The finale draws on emotional imagery from earlier movements, and creates the effect of 'a great longing — and as if it were fulfilled.'

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