

18 February
Sydney Opera House

RIMSKY- KORSAKOV'S SCHEHERAZADE



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. Australia-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

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate
Concertmaster

Sun Yi

Associate Concertmaster
Emeritus

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant
Concertmaster
Brielle Clapson
Sophie Cole
Claire Herrick
Georges Lentz
Emily Long
Alexandra Mitchell
Alexander Norton
Anna Skálová
Sercan Danis*
Alexandra Osborne*
Benjamin Tjoa*
Emily Qin*

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant
Concertmaster
Jennifer Booth
Léone Ziegler

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton

Principal

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Assistant Principal

Alice Bartsch
Victoria Bihun
Rebecca Gill
Emma Hayes
Shuti Huang
Monique Irik
Wendy Kong
Benjamin Li
Maja Verunica
Riikka Sintonen*
Elizabeth Jones*

Marianne Edwards

Associate Principal
Nicole Masters

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Acting Associate Principal
Sandro Costantino
Rosemary Curtin
Jane Hazelwood
Graham Hennings
Stuart Johnson
Justine Marsden
Felicity Tsai
Amanda Verner
Leonid Volovelsky
Stephen Wright

CELLOS

Benjamin Hughes*

Guest Principal

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Leah Lynn

Acting Associate Principal

Kristy Conrau
Timothy Nankervis
Christopher Pidcock
Adrian Wallis
Miles Mullin-Chivers*
Rowena Macneish Casual*
Paul Stender*
Fenella Gill
Elizabeth Neville

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

David Campbell

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Jaán Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

Adrian Whitehall*

FLUTES

Emma Sholl

Associate Principal

Carolyn Harris

Katie Zagorski*

OBOES

Shelfali Pryor

Associate Principal

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

Edward Wang*

Diana Doherty

Principal

Callum Hogan

CLARINETS

Francesco Celata

Acting Principal

Alexander Morris

Acting Associate
Principal

Christopher Tingay

Romola Smith*

Guest Principal Bass
Clarinet

BASSOONS

Matthew Ockenden*

Guest Principal

Fiona McNamara*

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

Todd Gibson-Cornish

Principal

Nicole Tait Associate Principal*

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

HORNS

Gillian Williams*

Guest Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal 3rd Horn

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

Jenny McLeod-Sneyd*

Emily Newham*

Joshua Davies*

TRUMPETS

David Elton

Principal

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glémot

Anthony Heinrichs

TROMBONES

Ronald Prussing

Principal

Scott Kinmont

Associate Principal

Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré*

Guest Principal

Mark Robinson

Acting Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Timothy Constable

Joshua Hill*

Alison Pratt*

Blake Roden*

HARP

Natalie Wong*

Guest Principal

KEYBOARDS

Catherine Davis*

Guest Principal Piano

* = Guest Musician

= Contract Musician

† = Sydney Symphony
Fellow

Grey = Permanent
Member of the Sydney
Symphony Orchestra
not appearing in
this concert

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S SCHEHERAZADE

DAZZLING STORIES IN FULL COLOUR

SIMONE YOUNG conductor
CÉDRIC TIBERGHIE piano

UNSUK CHIN (born 1961)

Frontispiece

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Piano Concerto in D for the Left Hand

i. *Lento* —

ii. *Andante* —

iii. *Allegro* —

iv. *Tempo primo*

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)

Scheherazade — Symphonic Suite, Op.35

i. *Largo e maestoso* — *Lento* — *Allegro non troppo*
(The Sea and Sinbad's Ship)

ii. *Lento* (The Story of the Kalendar Prince)

iii. *Andantino quasi allegretto* (The Young Prince
and the Young Princess)

iv. *Allegro molto* — *Vivo* — *Allegro non troppo e
maestoso* — *Lento* (Festival at Baghdad — The Sea —
The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock Surmounted by
a Bronze Warrior — Conclusion)

Pre-concert talk by Jim
Coyle in the Northern
Foyer at 1.15pm.

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

8 minutes, 19 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
42 minutes

The concert will conclude
at approximately 4pm
(Saturday).

COVER IMAGE

Simone Young
Photo credit Sandra Steh.

CONCERT DIARY

FEBRUARY 2023



JANÁČEK'S STRING QUARTET NO.2
INTIMATE LETTERS
JOAN TOWER Rising
JANÁČEK String Quartet No.2,
Intimate Letters
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MUSICIANS

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

MARCH 2023



DVOŘÁK'S STRING QUINTET NO.3
BRIGHT & SPIRITED STRINGS
BARTÓK Sonata for Solo Violin
DVOŘÁK String Quintet No.3
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MUSICIANS

Cocktail Hour
Friday 3 March, 6pm
Saturday 4 March, 6pm
Utzon Room,
Sydney Opera House



MARIE-ANGE NGUCI IN RECITAL
A RISING STAR
Works by **RACHMANINOV, PROKOFIEV,**
SCRIABIN and **KAPUSTIN**

International Pianists in Recital
Monday 6 March, 7pm
City Recital Hall



PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION
DRAMATIC & EVOCATIVE
MIRIAMA YOUNG
Reflections on the Harbour Light
50 Fanfares Commission
SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto No.2
MUSSORGSKY arr. RAVEL
Pictures at an Exhibition
MIHHAIL GERTS conductor
MARIE-ANGE NGUCI piano

Emirates Masters Series
Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony
Wednesday 8 March, 8pm
Thursday 9 March, 1.30pm
Friday 10 March, 8pm
Saturday 11 March, 8pm
Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



GERSHWIN'S RHAPSODY IN BLUE
NEW YORK STORIES
PAUL BONETTI The Bright Day Clarion
Calls the Quaking Earth
50 Fanfares Commission
BERNSTEIN
Symphonic Dances from West Side Story
IVES Central Park in the Dark
GERSHWIN Rhapsody in Blue
ANDREA MOLINO conductor
SIMON TEDESCHI piano

Royal Caribbean Classics Under the Sails
Sunday Afternoon Symphony
Friday 17 March, 7pm
Saturday 18 March, 7pm
Sunday 19 March, 2pm
Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



MOZART'S GRAN PARTITA SERENADE
RADIANT & JOYFUL
BEETHOVEN Quintet for Three Horns,
Oboe and Bassoon
MOZART Serenade No.10, Gran Partita
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MUSICIANS

Classics in the City
Thursday 30 March, 7pm
City Recital Hall

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEIN piano

Cédric Tiberghien is a French pianist who has established a truly international career. He has been particularly applauded for his versatility, as demonstrated by his wide-ranging repertoire, interesting programming, an openness to explore innovative concert formats and his dynamic chamber music partnerships.

Concerto appearances in the 2022-23 season include his debut with the Sao Paulo State Symphony Orchestra and return visits to NSO Washington (Karina Canellakis) and Sydney Symphony Orchestras. He will also perform Messiaen's *Turangilila* Symphony with both the Berliner Philharmoniker (Simone Young) and Orchestre National de France (Cristian Macelaru). His recital appearances with Alina Ibrabimova include the Wigmore Hall in London, Sao Paulo and Philadelphia and he will perform with Antoine Tamestit in both Madrid and Prague. Cédric's solo recitals will include London, Paris and performances of John Cage's 16 Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano in Australia. The latter is a collaboration with the percussion artist Matthias Schack-Arnott who is creating a kinetic installation in response to this piece. The project will receive its world premiere performance at the Perth Festival.

Recent debuts include the Berliner Philharmoniker, San Francisco Symphony, and NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra. Other recent collaborations have included the Boston Symphony, Cleveland, Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, London Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestras and at the BBC Proms with Les Siècles. His conductor collaborations include Karina Canellakis, Nicholas Collon, Stéphane Denève, Edward Gardner, Enrique Mazzola, Ludovic Morlot, Matthias Pintscher, François-Xavier Roth and Simone Young.

Cédric's most recent recording includes the Ravel Concertos with Les Siècles/Roth, which has attracted superlative critical acclaim, including the accolade of 'Editor's Choice' in *Gramophone* Magazine. This CD was released by Harmonia Mundi, for whom Cédric is currently recording the complete Beethoven Variations, having previously released repertoire by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Debussy. Cédric has been awarded five Diapason d'Or, for his solo and duo recordings on Hyperion; his most recent solo project being a three-volume exploration of Bartók's piano works.

As a dedicated chamber musician, Cédric's regular partners include violinist Alina Ibragimova, violist Antoine Tamestit and baritone Stéphane Degout, with all of whom he has made several recordings as well as performing in concert. His discography with Alina includes complete cycles of music by Schubert, Szymanowski and Mozart (Hyperion) and a Beethoven Sonata cycle (Wigmore Live).



Cédric Tiberghien
Photo by Jean Baptiste Millot



Simone Young AM
Photo by Sandra Steh

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

SIMONE YOUNG AM conductor

Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor, Simone Young, was General Manager and Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Music Director of the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg from 2005-2015. Her Hamburg recordings include the *Ring Cycle*, *Mathis der Maler* (Hindemith), and symphonies of Bruckner, Brahms and Mahler. An acknowledged interpreter of the operas of Wagner and Strauss, she has conducted complete cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Vienna Staatsoper, Berlin Staatsoper and in Hamburg.

This season she returns to the Berlin Philharmonic, Orchestres National de France and Lyon, Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra, Madrid Symphony, Orchestre Suisse Romande and to La Scala Milan (*Peter Grimes*), The Metropolitan Opera New York (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and Vienna State Opera (*Die Fledermaus* and *La Fanciulla del West*). She will also lead the ANAM orchestra in their co-production with Victorian Opera of *Capriccio*.

Simone Young is regularly invited by the world's great orchestras and has led the New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Stockholm, New Japan, Helsinki, and Dresden Philharmonic Orchestras; the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo; Orchestre de Paris; Staatskapelle Dresden; the BBC, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago, Dallas, and National Symphony Orchestra. In Australia she has conducted the West Australian, Adelaide, Melbourne and Queensland Symphony Orchestras and the Australian World Orchestra.

Highly sought-after by the world's leading opera houses, most recently Simone Young has appeared at the Vienna State Opera (*Peter Grimes*); Opera Nationale de Paris (*Parsifal* and *Salome*); Bavarian State Opera, Munich (*Tannhäuser*), Berlin State Opera (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and Zurich Opera (*Salome*).

Simone Young has been Music Director of Opera Australia, Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Lisbon and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra. Her many accolades include Honorary Member (Ehrenmitglied) of the Vienna State Opera, the 2019 European Cultural Prize Vienna, a Professorship at the Musikhochschule in Hamburg, honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Western Australia and New South Wales, Griffith University and Monash University, the Sir Bernard Heinze Award, the Goethe Institute Medal, Helpmann Award and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

UNSUOK CHIN (born 1961)

Frontispiece

In the late 19th century Camille Saint-Saëns wrote that

The exclusive use of the major and minor modes is over and done with. Ancient modes are re-entering the scene and, following in their footsteps, Oriental modes, in which the variety is immense... All this will inject new life into worn out melody; harmonies will change as well, and rhythm, scarcely explored, will develop. From all this a new art will be born.

Of course Western 'classical' music had been appropriating non-European elements for ever, but Saint-Saëns had a point. In addition to providing a means of creating 'local colour', such things profoundly affected the way composers thought: for instance Debussy's experience of the tune percussion orchestra from Java, the gamelan, in 1890 went far beyond surface mannerisms, with effects on generations of composers after him. A year or so before Rimsky-Korsakov produced his *Scheherazade*, an evocation of a mythical Middle-East. French composers in the early 20th century were also leading enthusiasts for jazz, as we hear today in a Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand, where Ravel democratically blends it with pentatonic melodies and French Baroque rhythms.

As classical music become increasingly open, it ceased to be merely Western, such that a great many of the greatest living musicians are of non-European backgrounds. Among them is composer Unsuk Chin. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she studied there with Sukhi Kang and then in Germany with György Ligeti. She has lived in Berlin since 1988. Much awarded, she works in numerous genres – her opera *Alice in Wonderland* appeared in 2007; she composes electronic music, chamber works and pieces for solo instruments but is perhaps best known for her large body of orchestral music. This includes a number of concertos for violin, cello, piano and *sheng* (Chinese mouth-organ), often multi-movement works that are frequently substantial in scale, and which seem to grow out of and return to silence. *Frontispiece* is a concert overture dating from 2019.



Unsuk Chin
Photo by Priska Ketterer

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The composer writes:

Frontispiece for orchestra was commissioned by the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra to open Alan Gilbert's inaugural season as their Chief Conductor. This occasion prompted me to write a short piece which presents a time lapse of a kind of the history of music: certain aspects of a number of key symphonic works of different epochs are being evoked and poured into new moulds by letting them interact and comment upon each other. These are never actual style quotations — mere allusions, and faint references. On the level of details, the work consists of many tiny fragments which all refer to gestures typical to certain works and composers, and these are being 'translated' to each other in numerous different and occasionally unexpected ways. As to give but a few examples: certain chord sequences by Anton Bruckner are interpreted in a manner akin to Anton von Webern, splinters of Strauss, Scriabin and Stravinsky collide, Brahmsian harmony passes through the prisms of, say, Charles Ives, and certain material from Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony — Heaven forbid — is being presented *a la manière de* Pierre Boulez. This process of 'translating' happens on several levels: diverse materials and gestures, ranging from Baroque music all the way to the avant-garde, are being transcribed and transformed in an alienating manner so that something very different arises as a sum of their interactions. All of this happens at a rather microscopic level: all aforementioned allusions, as well as other ones, are not immediately perceivable, and it is most certainly not necessary to trace them in order to be able to 'understand' the piece. On the level of the macrostructure, the work's form is being held together by a certain chord, which could be called its supporting pillar — a chord which, by way of exception, is completely autarchic. *Frontispiece* reflects on my decades-long experiences with landmark works of the symphonic literature as

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composer and recipient. In extracting distinct aspects of works of certain composers, Anton von Webern's art of revealing a 'universe in a nutshell' by means of extreme compression served as a particular inspiration.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 –1937)

Piano Concerto in D for the Left Hand

Having lost his right arm in combat during World War I, pianist Paul Wittgenstein, with characteristic single-mindedness, set about commissioning concerto-style works for left hand alone. The composers who, he commissioned include Richard Strauss, Benjamin Britten, Paul Hindemith and Sergei Prokofiev, but the most enduring is Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand.

Ravel worked on both of his piano concertos in 1930 and 1931, which he described as:

an interesting experience. The one on which I shall appear as the interpreter [the concerto in G major] is a concerto in the true sense of the word: I mean that it is written very much in the same spirit as those of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. The music of a concerto should, in my opinion, be light-hearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects...The concerto for left hand alone is very different. It contains many jazz effects, and the writing is not so light. In a work of this kind, it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands. For the same reason, I resorted to a style that is much nearer to that of the more solemn kind of traditional concerto.

The two works differ markedly: the G major is, as Ravel says, in three movements and behaves much like a classical — that is, Mozartean — concerto, with energetic and lightly scored outer movements framing a slow movement of restrained pathos. The D major work, by contrast is in one movement, though it falls into two main sections, and is much more given to heroic brilliance and almost Romantic excess.



Ravel at the piano

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Pianist Paul Wittgenstein

Not enough for Wittgenstein, however, who complained about various things and took it upon himself to make wholesale changes to the score (Wittgenstein: 'Performers must not be slaves.'). Ravel, as it happens was unable to attend the premiere in Vienna in January 1932 (he was touring the 'other' concerto with pianist Marguerite Long) so only heard Wittgenstein's 'amendments' at a private play-through at the French Embassy in Vienna later that month. Hearing Wittgenstein's additions, cuts, translations of material from orchestra to piano, Ravel was appalled, and the very public fight that ensued led to him demanding a contract that Wittgenstein would play the score only as written. (Ravel: 'Performers *are* slaves.') Wittgenstein gave some ground, insisting that after long study he now realised what a 'great work...astounding' it was, but despite a public rapprochement, Ravel was happy to give the performing rights to another pianist minutes after his agreement with Wittgenstein expired. (Ravel was not alone: Strauss and Britten both had serious problems with the liberties Wittgenstein took with their work.)

Where the G-major Concerto starts with a glittering explosion, the D-major work uses another gambit, where the music seems to form itself while slowly ascending out of quiet amorphous material. (Ravel does something similar to evoke sunrise in the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, and in *La Valse* dance fragments only gradually emerge from a musical mist.)

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Here the low strings roil quietly in 3/4 as a contrabassoon spins out motifs based on the characteristic ceremonial dotted rhythms of the Baroque-era French overture. This is answered by a horn playing a plangent blues-inflected tune. By developing and combining these elements Ravel builds to the work's first climax; a thundering low A in the piano introduces a lengthy cadenza (Wittgenstein: 'If I had wanted to play without the orchestra I would not have commissioned a concerto!'). The orchestra returns with a fully-scored version of the 'dotted' music and amore lyrical section before speed and scoring increase in a tension realised by a new fast tempo. This central section alternates two main ideas: a jaunty march in 6/8 that is larded with 'jazz' gestures, passed between piano and solo winds, and a balletic lighter music, dominated by high woodwind chords, that might suggest French folk-song in Russian orchestration. This section features a faster version of the horn's opening theme, and moments of glassy string harmonics and music-box piano writing; it too gains in speed and urgency and reaches a massive climax as the tempo returns to the opening *lento*. This releases massive energy, which gradually dissipating to introduce a second cadenza based on now-familiar themes. As the piano becomes more and more frenetic the orchestra enters imperceptibly, with low string chords, the dotted rhythm gradually work its way upwards, the music gaining strength until a shattering final climax.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908) ***Scheherazade***

Occasionally we need to remind ourselves of how 'new' classical music was in 19th century Russia. Aristocrats there, as in Western Europe, had maintained their own musical establishments but usually with foreign performers, and in the later 18th century societies of largely amateur music-lovers began presenting public concerts. But a home-grown musical culture only reached critical mass with the foundation of the great conservatories in St Petersburg, by Anton Rubinstein in 1862, and Moscow, by his brother Nikolai in 1866. In 1865, Tchaikovsky was in



Rimsky-Korsakov

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the first graduating class from the Moscow Conservatory, and in 1871, Rimsky-Korsakov would become the third director of the St Petersburg school.

The two composers trod very different paths, at first. Tchaikovsky benefitted from the formal discipline, based in Western techniques, of the Conservatory, while Rimsky-Korsakov was a member of the *kuchka*, which we know in English as ‘The Five’, or ‘Mighty Handful’. These composers were not opposed to Western music as such — one member, César Cui, reminisced about evenings playing through and discussing works of Liszt, Schumann and Berlioz — but they were implacably opposed to ‘conservatory’ notions of good technique.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov eventually realised that a close study of Western forms and, especially, orchestration would enhance his musical vision. He became a superb technician and teacher (of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and one or two others), and literally wrote the book on orchestration. Rimsky-Korsakov completed and polished the works of other members of The Five, like Mussorgsky and Borodin, who both died before completing their best work. Borodin died in 1887 leaving his major opera *Prince Igor* unfinished. Rimsky-Korsakov undertook to complete and orchestrate the opera, it has been suggested that in immersing himself in the world of central Asia, whose people and music it depicts, inspired his own foray into Orientalism, the orchestral suite *Scheherazade*.

Before turning to composition, Rimsky-Korsakov had been in the Russian navy and had sailed extensively in that role, but his vision of the ‘Orient’ in *Scheherazade* is wholly imaginary. A tour-de-force of orchestration, its musical language owes a lot to the fairy-tale tradition in Russian opera and ballet, and is frequently powerfully evocative of natural phenomena such as the sea.

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The inspiration for the piece is, of course, the some of the tales known in English as The 1001 (or Arabian) Nights and Scheherazade, the woman who tells them. Scheherazade finds herself married to the Sultan Shahriyar, who has become convinced that all women are duplicitous and unfaithful and so has each of his wives executed the morning after their wedding. Scheherazade keeps the Sultan in suspense, brilliantly exploiting that staple of the magazine or TV serial: the cliff-hanger. The Sultan is enthralled with her tales over 1001 nights, at which point he abandons his murderous ways.

As he grew older, the composer disavowed that his suite was meant to be directly illustrative of specific tales, and removed the descriptive headings from the four movements in the second edition of the score. But he did acknowledge that the violin solo represented Scheherazade herself, spinning out the endless stories. Before she does so, however, we hear a forbidding, angular melody given out in octaves by strings, brass and low woodwinds: this is commonly believed to represent the Sultan himself, though it appears at least once — the story of the kalendar, or beggar, prince – in a context not associated with him. Similarly, other material can be heard from movement to movement, treated, as in a symphony, to purely music development —extended or compressed, given different colouring or mood. The Sultan's music at the start of the finale, for instance, is transformed by Scheherazade's violin, into dance music. Rimsky-Korsakov also evokes exotic music and places in several ways, notably, in the second movement, with strumming pizzicato and a long 'arabesque' melody for solo clarinet to suggest the music of Middle-Eastern streets.

It is hard not to visualise seas and festivals, and to feel the passion and adventure of the stories.

Gordon Kerry © 2023

CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEEN AND THE SOUND OF ONE HAND PERFORMING

"You are seeing someone doing something extraordinary." The acclaimed French pianist Cédric Tiberghien on Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand, and his excitement at working with Simone Young again.

By Hugh Robertson

It is often said of the world's greatest artists that they felt called to their craft, that there was some cosmic predestination that drew them to their life's work. For the brilliant French pianist Cédric Tiberghien, there is a famous family story about the exact moment that he became transfixed by the piano.

"My parents knew a piano teacher, and they were invited for a dinner — and were asked to bring their child along. I was two years old or so, not much more. When we arrived, she showed me her beautiful piano. And she took the time to play little bits, but also to open the instrument and show me inside the piano — the strings, the dampers, the hammers."

"That was early in the evening, but much later — around midnight — I apparently walked through the house and asked to see the piano again. I think more than anything it was the shock of the instrument. Can you imagine, for a little baby, this instrument? It is huge. It is mobile. It has things moving inside. You can push things, and it makes noise."

"After that I was asking my parents — maybe not on a daily basis, but regularly enough — 'When can I see the piano again?' And the teacher said, 'You are a little too young to start now, but come and see me when you are five.' And I think on my fifth birthday, on the precise day, I went to her place and said, 'Now I am five and I want to play the piano.'"

"It was almost like an obsession. You never know what is happening in a child's brain, but that was clearly very powerful."



Cédric Tiberghien
Photo by Jean Baptiste Millot

CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEIN AND THE SOUND OF ONE HAND PERFORMING

That natural affinity with his instrument shines through in his choice of repertoire. While many pianists specialise in a particular style, era, or even dedicate themselves to the work of one composer, Tiberghien has run the gamut from the 17th century to the 21st, and everyone from Jan Sweelinck (1562–1621) to John Cage (1912–1992).

Of course, for a French pianist, Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) is never far away. Ravel composed two of the greatest French piano concertos — and you can hear another contender for that title, the Second Piano Concerto by Camille Saint-Saëns, performed by rising star Marie-Ange Nguci in March — and they have been a significant part of Tiberghien's musical life from the very beginning.

The work that Tiberghien is playing in Sydney is the Concerto for the Left Hand, a piece whose backstory is only surpassed by its musical quality. It was commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, who had been an up-and-coming pianist in Vienna when World War I broke out and he was called up for military service. He was shot in the right arm during a battle, forcing it to be amputated, but rather than abandoning his beloved instrument he determined to forge ahead, teaching himself to play what he could with only one hand and asking many of the leading composers of the day to write new works for him. Benjamin Britten, Paul Hindemith, Erich Korngold, Sergei Prokofiev and Richard Strauss were among those who produced pieces for him, but it is Ravel's that has become a major part of the repertoire, even for two-handed pianists.

What is it that makes this piece standout from all those others?

"Well, first, definitely there is a theatrical aspect," says Tiberghien. "To see a piece played only with the left hand, it keeps amazing people and even amazing musicians. The first time you open the score, you think 'that's not possible'. You know? There's no way you can play a whole piece like this with only five fingers! You just can't understand it. You are seeing someone doing something extraordinary."

"And then I think the music itself speaks to everyone. Maurice Ravel knew better than anyone how to write for the orchestra, using perfectly every instrument. The combinations of the instruments are incredible."

CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEIN AND THE SOUND OF ONE HAND PERFORMING

“And it really speaks straight to everyone because it's connected to so many moods. You have of course classical music, but you have jazz, which is never very far away. I think it's a very universal piece just because of the many, many origins and roots.”

“It is a powerful piece. When you follow the development from this blurred, dark, opening up to this incredibly bright five bars at the end, you have been through almost everything, all the feelings you can get. There is sadness, there is happiness, there is lyricism, there is rhythm. It is so complete — I know very few pieces that give us the complete history of music, really, in only 20 minutes.”

“And there are moments when it feels like you have two hands. It gives the perfect illusion. Even after almost 100 years it is still amazing for both audiences and musicians.”

Tiberghien is also looking forward to reuniting with the Sydney Symphony's Chief Conductor Simone Young. The pair have worked together countless times stretching back almost two decades, from Paris to Berlin to Perth, and multiple performances here in Sydney. Their musical and personal connection is clear to anyone who has seen them on stage together, and it shines through Tiberghien's broad smile when he talks about working with Young.

“Ah, Simone Young! She is a very good friend. I can't wait to work with her again. It has been a while [since we last worked together] and I've been missing it very much.”

“I know it will be incredible. She has many, many, many qualities, but generosity is her maybe main quality. She gives to the orchestra, she gives to the soloist, she has almost a globe of energy around her, and everyone is just tucked inside. You can't resist. She gives you so much power and energy. There is nothing like playing with her to help you give the best of yourself.”

“And for the audience as well, it is always an experience — she shares her marvellous passion.”

Cédric Tiberghien performs Maurice Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand in Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade, 16-18 February, in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

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