

20–23 March 2024

BEETHOVEN'S THIRD SYMPHONY



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.

PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate Concertmaster

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant Concertmaster

Sun Yi

Associate Concertmaster

Emeritus

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Léone Ziegler

Robert Smith*

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton

Principal

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Acting Associate

Principal

Alice Bartsch

Victoria Bihun

Emma Hayes

Shuti Huang

Monique Irik

Wendy Kong

Nicole Masters

Emily Qin*

Riikka Sintonen*

Tamara Elias*

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider

Principal

Carrie Dennis

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Assistant Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Jane Hazelwood

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Felicity Tsai

Leonid Volovelsky

Carl Lee*

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Kaori Yamagami

Principal

Simon Cobcroft

Associate Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Elizabeth Neville

Christopher Pidcock

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

Dylan Holly

Jaán Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

Alexandra Elvin†

FLUTES

Joshua Batty

Principal

Carolyn Harris

Lisa Osmialowski*

Guest Principal Piccolo

OBOES

Shafai Pryor

Acting Principal

Eve Osborn*

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Maura Marinucci*

Guest Principal

Christopher Tingay

Olivia Hans-

Rosenbaum*

Romola Smith*

Guest Principal

Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

Ben Hoadley*

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

HORNS

Samuel Jacobs

Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Emily Newham*

Acting Principal

3rd Horn

Rachel Silver

Jenny McLeod-Sneyd*

TRUMPETS

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glémot

Joel Walmsley†

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont

Acting Principal

Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré

Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Mark Robinson

Associate Principal/

Section Percussion

Timothy Constable

HARP

Natalie Wong*

Acting Principal

Julie Kim*

KEYBOARDS /

EXTRAS

Susanne Powell*

Guest Principal Piano

Nicholas Russoniello*

Guest Principal

Saxophone

* Guest Musician

° Contract Musician

† Sydney Symphony Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

EMIRATES MASTERS SERIES

Wednesday 20 March, 8pm

Friday 22 March, 8pm

Saturday 23 March, 8pm

EMIRATES THURSDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Thursday 21 March, 1:30pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

BEETHOVEN'S THIRD SYMPHONY

VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON PERFORMS RAVEL

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON piano

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

arr. **COLIN MATTHEWS** (born 1946)

Four Preludes (1910–1912, arr. 2001–06)

Book I, No.12: *Minstrels*

Book II, No.3: *La puerta del Vino* (The Wine Gate)

Book I, No.4: *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*
(Sounds and scents swirl in the evening air)

Book II, No.6: *Général Lavine*

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Piano Concerto in G (1929–1931)

i. Allegramente

ii. Adagio assai

iii. Presto

INTERVAL

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Symphony No.3 in E flat, Op.55 *Eroica* (1802–1804)

i. Allegro con brio

ii. Marcia funèbre (Adagio assai)

iii. Scherzo (Allegro vivace)

iv. Finale (Allegro molto – Poco andante – Presto)

Pre-concert talk

By Hugh Robertson in the
Northern Foyer at 7:15pm
(12.45pm Thursday)

Estimated durations

Debussy – 15 minutes

Ravel – 25 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes

Beethoven – 50 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately two hours

Artist signing

Víkingur Ólafsson will be
signing vinyl, CDs and
concert guides in the
Southern Foyer at interval

Cover image

Photo by Craig Abercrombie

Víkingur Ólafsson's
performances with the
Sydney Symphony Orchestra
are generously supported by
the Berg Family Foundation

Principal Partner



WELCOME

Welcome to **Beethoven's Third Symphony, Víkingur Ólafsson Performs Ravel**, part of the Orchestra's Emirates Masters Series. The Masters Series introduces new and potentially unfamiliar delights together with an exploration of some of the most beloved works in the classical music canon.

This performance is no exception, with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra performing Beethoven's groundbreaking Third Symphony — known as the *Eroica* — and the brilliant Icelandic phenomenon Víkingur Ólafsson making his Australian concerto debut.

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra have enjoyed one of the longest-standing and most significant relationships in Australia's performing arts, one we continue to be very proud of.

Beethoven's Third Symphony has long been associated with Beethoven's admiration and later disillusion with the actions and character of Napoleon. While Beethoven famously scratched out the dedication on the original score, there is so much more to this work than one figure. Sweeping, startling and ultimately triumphant, Beethoven's Third Symphony is revolutionary in all senses of the word.

The brilliant Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has inspired legions of new classical music fans around the world. In his Australian concerto debut he performs the witty, playful and ingenious Piano Concerto in G by Ravel. The composer wrote that his goal was to write a 'brilliant work, highlighting the virtuosity of the soloist,' and there is no doubt that in Víkingur Ólafsson we have just such a soloist.

As the Presenter of this Masters Series, Emirates is a strong supporter of superlative local and international talent, in particular the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor Simone Young AM.

This brilliant soloist and ground-breaking symphony embody the highest level of excellence and adventurous intention, both qualities the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Emirates aspire to in equal measure.

We are delighted by our continuing partnership, and we do hope you enjoy this remarkable concert.



Barry Brown
Divisional Vice President for Australasia
Emirates



YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

COMPOSERS

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

ARR. COLIN MATTHEWS (born 1946)

Four Preludes (1910-1912, arr. 2001-06)

Composed in 1910 (Book I) and 1913 (Book II)

1910: Halley's comet appears; George V becomes King of the United Kingdom. In art and music – Puccini's *La Fanciulla del west*; first film of *Frankenstein*; infrared photography invented

1913: the invention of stainless steel in Sheffield, UK, and the assembly line at the Ford Motor Company; and the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*.

Debussy radically rethought piano timbre (and for that matter, orchestral scoring) and his Preludes represent a compendium of available styles and sounds. British composer Colin Matthews was commissioned to make orchestrations of all the Debussy preludes in 2001, when he was composer-in-residence with Manchester's Hallé Orchestra, and they were completed in 2008. Matthew's deep knowledge of Debussy's work makes his renditions uncannily beautiful.



Claude Debussy

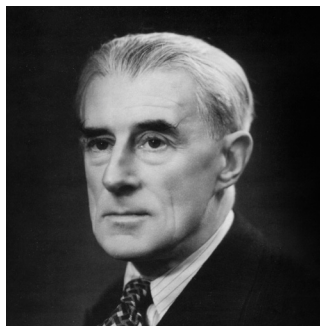
MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Piano Concerto in G (1929-1931)

Completed in 1931

Isaac Isaacs becomes first Australian-born Governor-General. In art Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* appears; Salvador Dalí's *Persistence of Memory*; Rachmaninov's 'Corelli' Variations; Bartók's Piano Concerto No.2

Maurice Ravel's art was about simulacra, and here he creates pitch perfect version of everything from American jazz in the outer movements of this concerto, to the childlike world of Mozart's music in the central slow movement.



Maurice Ravel in 1935

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 –1827)

Symphony No.3 in E flat, Op.55 *Eroica* (1802–1804)

First publicly performed in 1805

In art there were several new works by David, Blake and Goya, and many pictures of battles and of Napoleon.

Beethoven's Symphony may or may not have been inspired by Napoleon, but is nevertheless an essay in musical heroism. It is on a scale unheard of before then, and replaces the elegant wit of Haydn and Mozart with the noise and brute force of French Revolutionary opera. It contains one of the great funeral marches, but concludes with joyous music celebrating renewal.



Beethoven in 1806



Víkingur Ólafsson. Photo by Air Magg

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

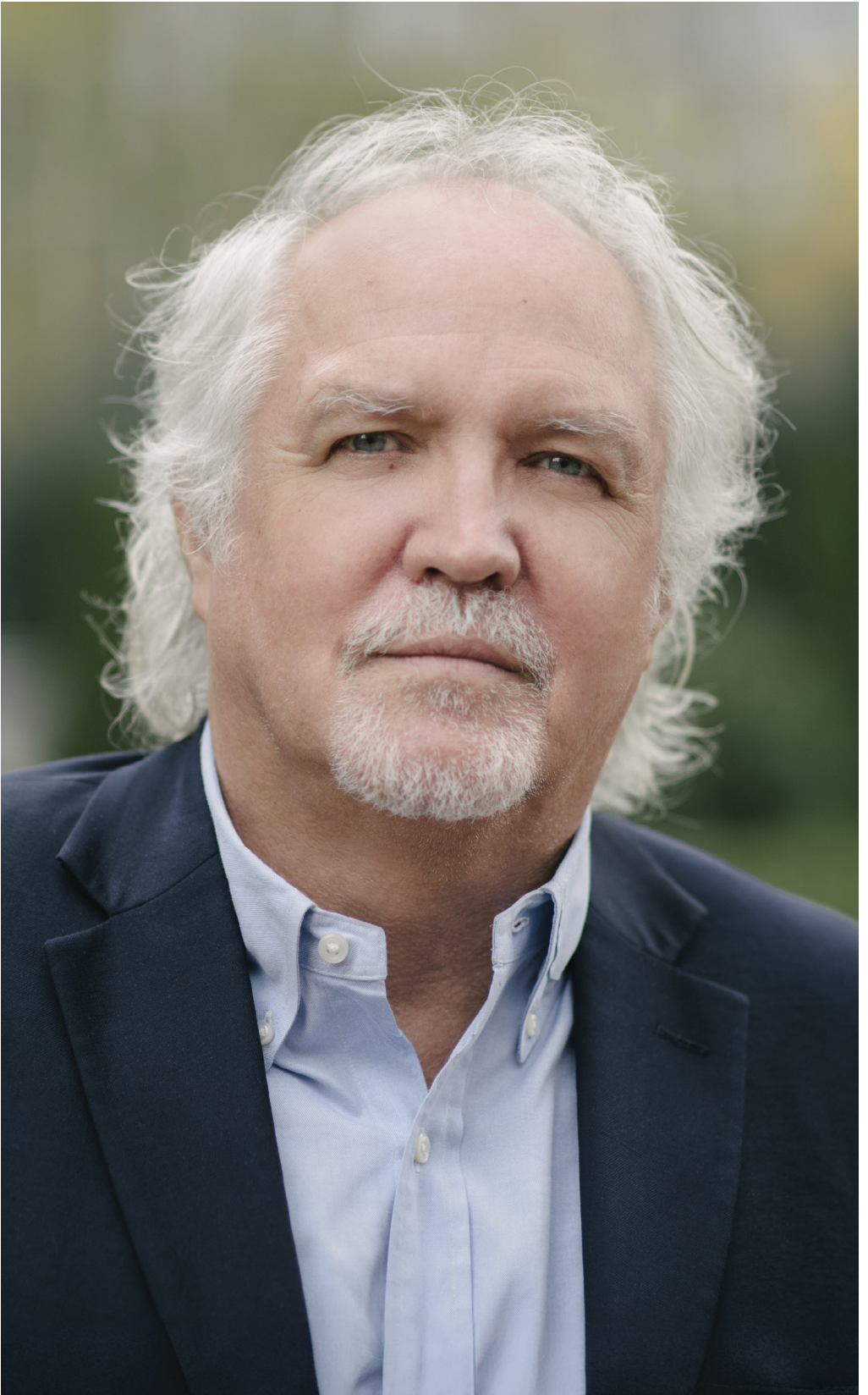
VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON piano

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has made a profound impact with his remarkable combination of highest level musicianship and visionary programmes. His recordings for Deutsche Grammophon – *Philip Glass Piano Works* (2017), *Johann Sebastian Bach* (2018), *Debussy Rameau* (2020), *Mozart & Contemporaries* (2021) and *From Afar* (2022) – captured the public and critical imagination and have led to career streams of over 600 million.

In October 2023, Ólafsson released his anticipated new album on Deutsche Grammophon of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Ólafsson has dedicated his entire 2023-24 season to a *Goldberg Variations* world tour, performing the work across six continents throughout the year. He brings Bach's masterpiece to major concert halls including London's Southbank Centre, New York's Carnegie Hall, Wiener Konzerthaus, Philharmonie de Paris, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, Harpa Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House, Walt Disney Hall, Sala São Paulo, Shanghai Symphony Hall, Tonhalle Zurich, Philharmonie Berlin, Mupa Budapest, Teatro Colón, KKL Luzern and Alte Oper Frankfurt, to name a few.

Now one of the most sought-after artists of today, Ólafsson's multiple awards include CoScan's International Nordic Person of the Year (2023), the Rolf Schock Prize for Music (2022), *Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year (2019), Opus Klassik Solo Recording Instrumental (twice) and Album of the Year at the *BBC Music Magazine Awards* (2019). In 2023, Ólafsson is nominated for three Opus Klassik awards, including Instrumentalist of the Year.

A captivating communicator both on and off stage, Ólafsson's significant talent extends to broadcast, having presented several of his own series for television and radio. He was Artist in Residence for three months on BBC Radio 4's flagship arts programme, *Front Row* – broadcasting live during lockdown from an empty Harpa concert hall in Reykjavík, and reaching millions of listeners around the world.



Donald Runnicles

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

Over the course of a career spanning 45 years, Sir Donald Runnicles has built his reputation on long-lasting relationships with major orchestral and operatic institutions. Focusing on depth over breadth, he has held chief artistic leadership positions at the Deutsche Oper Berlin (since 2009), San Francisco Opera (1992-2008), Grand Teton Music Festival (since 2005), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (2009-2016), and Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001-2007). Sir Donald was the Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for two decades (2001-2023), and he is the first ever Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra (since 2019).

Known as a consummate Wagnerian and conductor of German Romantic repertoire, Maestro Runnicles leads Deutsche Oper Berlin this season in productions of *Parsifal* and two full performances of the *Ring* Cycle. He will also conduct a new production of *Il Trittico* by the young German theatre director Pinar Karabulut. For the Metropolitan Opera, he conducts eight performances of the Otto Schenk production of *Tannhäuser*. He appears as guest conductor with the Dresden Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony and Utah Symphony, where he will lead the world premiere of a new concerto written and performed by Sir Stephen Hough.

Runnicles tours regularly with Deutsche Oper Berlin to destinations such as the Edinburgh International Festival, the London Proms, Royal Opera Oman, and Dubai. He has joined the Philadelphia Orchestra in tours to China, summer residencies at Bravo! Vail Music Festival in Colorado, and annual subscription concerts. He is a frequent guest conductor with the Chicago Symphony, with a performance history dating as far back as 1997. He has a long relationship with the Vienna State Opera, conducting new productions of *Parsifal*, Britten's *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, as well as other core repertoire pieces.

Mr. Runnicles' extensive discography includes 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 Award 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.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Claude Debussy

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

Born near Paris in 1862 to a family in modest circumstances, Debussy began learning music at the age of seven and by ten years old was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire where he spent, on and off, 12 years studying. In the ‘off’ periods during the early 1880s he served as in-house pianist to Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky’s patron; for Meck and himself to play, Debussy produced a number of two-piano reductions of works by Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns and others.

Like most of the canonical French composers Debussy applied for the Prix de Rome, failed on his first attempt, was runner-up on his second but, on his third, won. ‘My heart sank,’ he confessed. ‘I had a sudden vision of boredom and of all the worries that inevitably go together with any kind of official recognition.’ Nevertheless, in January 1885 he arrived in Rome where he would be accommodated in the Villa Medici, hated it, and spent the bare two-year minimum there. But while in Rome he did meet Liszt and Verdi, and it is from this time that his brief but consequential love of Wagner’s music dates.

Debussy’s near contemporary, Erik Satie, took credit for persuading Debussy to write music ‘without sauerkraut’ – in practice that meant abandoning several features of the Austro-German tradition including what we

might call ‘goal-directed structures’ such as symphonic forms that move away from and back to a tonal centre, and the rich upholstery of late-Romantic orchestration.

Debussy’s credo would become ‘there is no theory; pleasure is the law’, composing works that explored moments of sensual beauty with no – apparent – urgency to develop a musical argument. But we should be wary of simply assuming that his works are illustrative. And we should certainly avoid comparisons with ‘what imbeciles call Impressionism’ (as Debussy put it) in painting, which after all gained notoriety while the composer was still a child. Like Beethoven in the *Pastoral* Symphony, Debussy’s musical response to the world was one of ‘feeling rather than painting’.

He was more drawn to the literary ideas of Symbolism, and works like Stéphane Mallarmé’s dreamy *Afternoon of a Faun* would inspire one of Debussy’s most characteristic works of erotic languor. One of Debussy’s objections to Wagner was that ‘symphonic development and character development can never unfold at exactly the same rate’. In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy allows the text to dictate its own speed. The vocal lines are as simple and fluid as Gregorian chant. The harmony and orchestral writing, honed in such works as the *Prélude à ‘L’après-midi d’un faune’* and the *Nocturnes*, responds with infinite subtlety to the emotional fluctuation of the texts.

THE PRELUDES

Debussy’s *litterarité* is particularly evident in his piano works. In this regard – while it is easy to trace a ‘line of succession’ that includes Mozart, Chopin and Debussy – it is a reminder of how indebted Debussy was to Robert Schumann’s piano music, with its similar ability to create music of immediate, allusive and emotional affect. Significantly, Debussy put the titles of his piano preludes at the end of each piece, in brackets, as if to forestall too ‘visual’ an interpretation.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The two books of Preludes were composed in 1910 and 1913 respectively. They each contain works that adhere to certain recurrent ideas in Debussy's work – ancient mythology and 'the mysterious correspondences between Nature and Imagination' which Debussy found in Symbolist poetry. Those of the first book are more conventionally 'poetic' than the second, in which Debussy experiments with a sometimes ironic style.

COLIN MATTHEWS (born 1946)

Distinguished British composer Colin Matthews was born in London in 1946. He studied with Arnold Whittall and Nicholas Maw; in the 1970s he was assistant to Benjamin Britten, and worked for many years with Imogen Holst. His collaboration with Deryck Cooke on the performing version of Mahler's Tenth Symphony lasted from 1963 until its publication in 1975.

Over five decades his music has ranged from solo piano music through six string quartets and many ensemble and orchestral works. Matthews was Composer-in-Association with the Hallé Orchestra – for whom he completed his orchestrations of Debussy's 24 Preludes in 2007 – from 2001-10. He is now the orchestra's Composer Emeritus.

In his own note he asks:

Why undertake such a project?

In my own (very inadequate) playing of the Preludes I had always heard the sounds of the orchestra, and had in fact annotated two of them (*Voiles* and *La sérénade interrompue*) with possible instrumentation sometime in the 1970s. I have always enjoyed working with the music of other composers and the insights that this brings, and the challenge of adding around 90 minutes to Debussy's orchestral sound world proved irresistible.

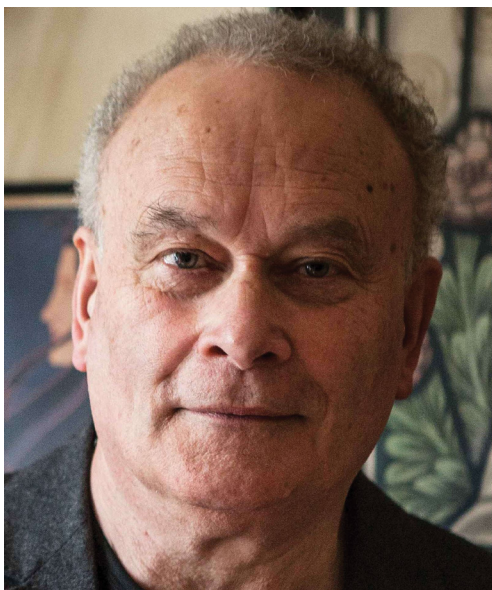
Minstrels represents an early European appropriation – and a loving one – of African-American music, introduced

to Paris at the turn of the century. Like ragtime, it features duple rhythm with accented offbeats in the left hand.

Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (Sounds and scents swirl in the evening air) shows Debussy using the unusual 5/4 metre. Its title is a quotation from *Harmonies du Soir* (Evening Harmony) by the great 19th century French writer Charles Baudelaire.

Spanish composer Manuel de Falla once sent Debussy a postcard depicting the Puerta del Vino, or 'Wine Gate' of the Alhambra palace in the Andalusian city of Granada. (The Spanish name is probably a mistranslation from the Arabic). The piece contains several parallels with Falla's *Homenaje* for Debussy: we hear guitar-derived sounds, such as the downwards strum, carefully etched habanera rhythms and the use of the 'Moorish' scale. The piece is driven by what Debussy calls 'abrupt contrasts of extreme violence and passionate sweetness'.

We conclude with Debussy's portrait of Général Lavine, an American music-hall star of the time, who has been described as 'a comic juggler, half tramp and half warrior'.



Colin Matthews

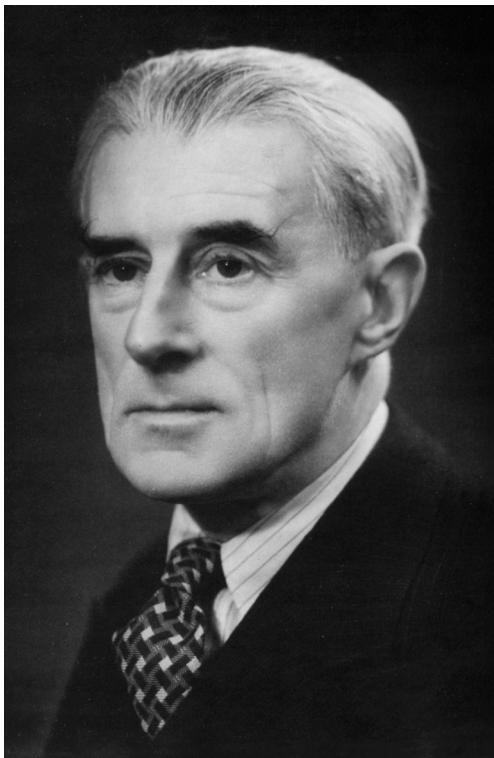
ABOUT THE MUSIC

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

In some exasperation, Ravel once asked a friend, ‘Doesn’t it ever occur to those people that I can be “artificial” by nature?’ He was responding to the criticism that his music was more interested in technique than expression. There is some truth in the charge: Stravinsky described him – affectionately – as the ‘Swiss watchmaker of music’, and Ravel’s stated aim was indeed ‘technical perfection’. In fact, his love of mechanical intricacy led Ravel to collect various automata and other small machines, and he dreamed, as he put it in a 1933 article, of ‘Finding Tunes in Factories’.

His passion for precision and order was also in evidence in his fastidious, even dandyish, appearance, but he was a man of great courage. In the First World War, despite being 39 years old, short and underweight, he cared for the wounded and after some months became a military truck driver. With his truck, ‘Adelaïde’, he faced a number of dangers, and for the rest of his life suffered terrible insomnia. (This experience may also have contributed to the debilitating aphasia of his last years when he could no longer write his own name, let alone the music which still rang in his head). His great Piano Trio, written during the War, puts paid to any idea that Ravel’s music lacks an emotional heart.

Also during the war he stood against the chauvinistic Committee of the National League for the Defence of French Music, which proposed to ban performances of German and Austrian music. Between 1900 and 1905 he had failed several times to secure the Prix de Rome, ostensibly because of musical ‘errors’ and despite his already having established himself as a major new voice. In 1909 he helped to found the Société Musicale Indépendante – independent, that is, of the Parisian musical and academic establishment – and its inaugural concert saw the premiere of the first version, for piano duo, of his *Ma Mère l’oye* (Mother Goose) Suite.



Maurice Ravel in 1935

Ravel’s works are frequently exquisite simulacra of existing styles and forms. In his *Tombeau de Couperin*, twentieth century piano music pays a genuine homage to the Baroque suite and keyboard style of the earlier French master. In *Gaspard de la nuit* he famously set out to write his version of Lisztian piano music, wryly suggesting that he ‘might have overdone it’. His *Shéhérazade* songs evoke a typical early-20th century view of Asia where orchestration and subject matter relate directly to Russian music, especially that of Rimsky-Korsakov. His most famous piano piece, the *Pavane for a dead Infanta*, resurrects a gracious renaissance dance, tinged with his beloved Spanish idiom.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ravel was born in south-western France to a Basque mother and Swiss father but spent his entire life in Paris. Like Tchaikovsky, he saw a strong connection between childhood and enchantment. In his opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* a destructive child learns the value of compassion when furniture, trees and animals in the garden all come magically to life. The evocation of 'the poetry of childhood' in the original piano duo version of *Mother Goose* led Ravel to 'simplify my style and refine my means of expression'.

Piano Concerto in G (1929-1931)

Ravel's pre-existent models were by no means only from the tradition of 'art music'. Toward the end of the 19th century composers who wanted to be free of the influence of Wagner's emotive, chromatic music looked to local ethnic musics (as did Dvořák) or did the balancing act between classical form and structural innovation (like Brahms).

The G major Concerto was originally to have been a 'Basque fantasy' – he was Basque on his mother's side. He once told someone that the theme of the first movement came to him 'on a train between Oxford and London', but it had been suggested to Ravel that he should take a new concerto to the US. He had toured there in 1927-28, enjoying everything except for the food, and planned a return trip. In the event, the piece was premiered by Marguerite Long with the Orchestre Lamoureux, conducted by Ravel, in Paris in 1932.

Ravel once said that a concerto 'should be light-hearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or dramatic effects'. In the first movement, with its whip-cracking opening, there is some hint of Spanish music. The sublime slow movement (which suggests profundity despite Ravel's protests) is based on the template of the slow movement from Mozart's Clarinet Quintet; and throughout there is a whole

lot of jazz. In fact this concerto for a long time was rivalled only by Gershwin's in the way in which it introduced jazz to the classical concerto. Certainly composers like Debussy and Milhaud had freely and affectionately incorporated jazz – the latter in his *Creation du monde* ballet of 1923 based on African creation myths. For composers like Ravel, American jazz helps to renovate the language of classical music through new sounds, a new kind of energy and humour.

Ravel's Piano Concerto in G calls for flute, piccolo, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, E flat clarinet and two bassoons; two horns, trumpet and trombone; timpani and percussion, harp and strings.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the first Australian performance of this concerto with pianist Peter Cooper and conductor Joseph Post in 1953, and our most recent performance was in 2022 with Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Pietari Inkinen conducting.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

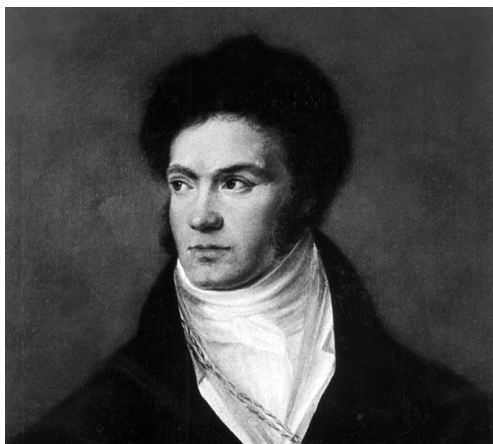
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 –1827)

In the late eighteenth century Germany was a loose grouping of small principalities. The city of Bonn was the seat of the Archbishop Elector of Cologne and Beethoven was born here in 1770. His grandfather was a chief musician in the Elector's household; his father Johann was also a musician employed there. Johann was a violent alcoholic, and family life was far from happy, but young Ludwig nonetheless showed early promise as a musician and soon joined the Archbishop's retinue.

Beethoven almost certainly met Mozart briefly in Vienna in 1787, but in 1792 returned to that city to study with Joseph Haydn. They didn't get on. Late in life, Haydn was suddenly enjoying superstar status throughout Europe. Beethoven could be extremely rude and arrogant and felt that Haydn wasn't paying him enough attention.

Beethoven's status in Vienna was helped by the relative ease with which he was accepted into aristocratic circles. This is partly because he allowed people to think that the 'van' in his name meant he himself was noble (in German, 'von' indicates nobility), and he allowed a rumour to circulate that he was the illegitimate son of the King of Prussia! But it was mostly about the music, and a group of Viennese nobles supported him for the rest of his life (despite appallingly bad behaviour on occasions).

From the later 1790s he had been aware of the deterioration of his hearing, and by the early years of the new century his deafness caused him gradually to retreat from society. His was also chronically unlucky in love. This, along with his deafness, led him to the point of suicide and the heroic resolution to carry on which is documented in a kind of will he wrote at Heiligenstadt, his favourite holiday village, in the summer of 1802. The crisis launched his middle or 'heroic' period.



Beethoven in 1806

Beethoven's deafness was only part of the chronic ill-health which dogged him for most of his life, but it certainly made things worse. He became reclusive, grumpy and paranoid (occasionally to the point of violence) and despite relative financial security often lived in squalor. His music, though, tells a completely different story. Beethoven's late works encompass a bewildering array of moods and styles, leaving classical music changed forever.

Symphony No.3 in E flat, Op.55 *Eroica* (1802–1804)

In the first years of the 19th century, Vienna experienced what has been described as an 'avalanche of French opera'. Fashion had swung decisively from comic opera in Italian or German to what was variously known as 'rescue opera' or *comédie-héroïque*. These works reflected the ideals of the French Revolution, almost always depicted the liberation of a virtuous hero from tyranny. Their composers (who, to confuse the issue, were in two notable cases Italian by birth) cultivated a musical language which was less about wit and elegance than about visceral, overwhelming excitement. Beethoven loved it. In later life he praised Gaspare Spontini for knowing how to evoke the 'noises of war' in music, and, more particularly, Luigi Cherubini, whom he regarded as the greatest living composer – after himself, of course.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

In 1805, the ‘noises of war’ in music gave way to the real thing as Austria – ill-advisedly – joined Russia and Britain to fight the expansionist and revolutionary France of Napoleon Bonaparte. That Beethoven had initially admired, and then become disillusioned with, the French leader is common knowledge – as he put it, ‘with that bastard I made a mistake’. In 1804, the composer angrily tore the dedication to Bonaparte from the manuscript of his Third Symphony when he heard that the First Consul had crowned himself Emperor, but this was not unexpected. Beethoven’s admiration was first undermined in 1802 when Napoleon signed a Concordat with the Pope to re-establish Catholicism in France. Then, while writing the symphony in 1803 he wavered between entitling the Symphony *Bonaparte* and merely dedicating it to the First Consul; this was simply because one of his patrons, Prince Lobkowitz, was prepared to pay for exclusive rights on the piece, which would normally have come with a personal dedication. On the other hand, Beethoven was not entirely happy in Vienna, and, partly to goad his patrons into stronger support, threatened to move to Paris. So, a ‘Bonaparte’ symphony would at first have been a useful job application, just as it was astute to let it be known, when relations between Austria and France were clearly deteriorating, that Beethoven had firmly rejected Napoleon. (Nonetheless, four years later Beethoven used the same ruse, threatening to go into the service of the King of Westphalia – Napoleon’s brother Jérôme – in another attempt to blackmail his Viennese patrons.) We can probably accept the 1852 assertion by a friend of Beethoven’s that the Symphony had its genesis in Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, and that ‘the rumour of Napoleon’s death in the Battle of Aboukir occasioned the funeral march’. But by the time of its publication in 1806, the *Eroica* was simply, in Beethoven’s words, ‘composed to celebrate the memory of a great man’.



Napoleon I as Emperor (1805) by François Gérard (1770–1837).

It was the most revolutionary symphony the world had yet heard. Rescue opera’s musical rhetoric was often based on sheer brute force. This was a perfect fit with Beethoven’s emerging ability seemingly to generate music out of nothing: the *Eroica* begins with two terse chords whose speed and metre are completely ambiguous until the theme appears in the third bar. And the theme itself is almost not there – its simple rising and falling arpeggio on the common chord of E flat major (a key often associated with the ceremonial) is only eventually disturbed by the simple addition of the note C sharp, and the repeated, throbbing syncopations that accompany it. Out of such basic materials, Beethoven constructs a titanic first movement – as long in itself as many a Classical-era

ABOUT THE MUSIC

symphony – he does so using some of these powerful rhetorical tools. At one of the most celebrated moments in the central development section of the first movement, for instance, the orchestra insistently and repeatedly hammers a single dissonant chord in minims, against the prevailing 3/4 time signature: there is no harmonic movement, but the tension becomes unbearable. And where we expect a resolving consonance, Beethoven gives us a downbeat of silence before bringing in a new theme on the oboe. A new theme in itself at this point in a piece goes against the conventions of classical music; Beethoven raises the stakes by presenting it in E minor – in the ‘grammar’ of tonal music about as far from the home key of E flat as it is possible to get. And the moment of recapitulation – traditionally a triumphant ‘homecoming’ moment – is highly compromised: a horn plays the theme in the ‘right’ key over the ‘wrong’ harmony.

The celebrated funeral march is in C minor, a key Beethoven often used to embody tragic pathos. In contrast to the simple rhetoric of the first movement, this movement contains an intricate fugal development. The contemporary audience heard this as a symbol of bringing order out of chaos, but the theme literally disintegrates in the final pages of the movement. There is, however, an elemental sense of new life in the scherzo, with its mixture of delicate pastoral wind writing and buoyant rhythmic energy, and the ‘natural’ world conjured by arpeggio figures in the horn calls of the central trio section.

Creation out of nothing, death and new life – these ideas gain further purchase in the finale. After an introductory flourish, the orchestra picks out the simplest of bass lines – it outlines the harmonic poles of tonic and dominant, and has little rhythmic character. Attempts to weave any kind of texture above it seem, at first, to be constantly thwarted by a brusque three

note motif, but eventually it forms the basis for a statement of a theme, in turn used as for a series of variations, from Beethoven’s 1801 ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*.

In Greek myth, Prometheus created humans out of clay but disobeyed the gods’ ban on giving fire to humanity. He was chained to a mountain where each day an eagle would come and eat his ever-regenerating liver, before being eventually rescued by Hercules. In Beethoven’s ballet, however, Prometheus is executed but brought back to life – a theme, needless to say, also germane to the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* of 1803–4. The *Eroica* is not program music, but we can discern in it, as in the stories of Christ and Prometheus, a drama of creation and striving, death, and a return to life and liberty. The infinitely extensible variations of the finale, with their amazing gamut of colour, mood and style, crown the work with a sense that creativity is the reward for overcoming adversity. It is, of course, among the earliest works that Beethoven composed in the wake of the deep crisis of his impending deafness. It is he, perhaps, rather than Napoleon, who is the hero.

Gordon Kerry © 2024

Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; three horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

The first public performance of the Symphony was on 7 April 1805, at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna.

The Sydney Symphony's earliest recorded performance of the *Eroica* Symphony was in 1939 under George Szell. Other notable performances include those led by Eugene Goossens (1946), Rafael Kubelik (1947), Otto Klemperer (1950), John Barbirolli (1955), Nikolai Malko (1960), Walter Susskind (1973) and José Serebrier (1979). Our most recent performance was in 2022, led by Chief Conductor Simone Young.

INTERVIEW

VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON ON RAVEL'S 'PERFECT CONCERTO'

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson makes his Australian concerto debut with the Sydney Symphony, performing Ravel's Piano Concerto in G in four performances at the Sydney Opera House. Here he speaks of his love for this concerto, and explains why it is the perfect work with which to get to know a new orchestra.

By Hugh Robertson

Víkingur Ólafsson is one of the biggest names in classical music. Since bursting onto the scene with his first album for Deutsche Grammophon in 2017 the accolades and awards have followed in waves, each new album causing more to join the chorus singing his praises.

'The new superstar of classical piano,' wrote *The Daily Telegraph* (UK); 'a breathtakingly brilliant pianist,' enthused *Gramophone*. 'Whatever he plays,' said *The Times* (London), 'Ólafsson treats the music with equal distinction: articulation wonderfully fleet and clean; the phrasing flexible, always alive; the range of touch in his fingers stretching into infinity.'

This past year Ólafsson has embarked on an extraordinary musical odyssey devoted to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, performing that landmark work all over the world – including in Sydney this past Monday. In devoting himself to Bach, Ólafsson has very deliberately limited his concerto performances, so it is a rare thrill to be here today to hear him make his concerto debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor Sir Donald Runnicles in Maurice Ravel's superb Piano Concerto in G major.

Prior to embarking on his Goldberg Odyssey, this concerto was a mainstay of Ólafsson's repertoire – and barely 30 seconds into our conversation it's not hard to understand why.

'It's a perfect concerto,' he says enthusiastically.

'What this piece does is bring together an incredible array of different things into it. You have the obvious American influence in this work. You have almost Gershwin-esque stuff in there. But you also have a lot of things coming from the East – you have a lot of Orientalism in the harmonies.

'You have this incredible second movement that everybody looks forward to and loves – both the performers and the audience. The most nostalgic waltz of all time, I would dare say, with a rhythmic tension which creates this feeling of unfulfilled longing. You have the incredible toccata in the third movement that very much looks back to the toccatas of Bach, and actually to Couperin and Rameau.

'The way he writes on the piano, it just glitters.'

It's not just the writing for the piano that Ólafsson loves, but also Ravel's writing for the orchestra.



Víkingur Ólafsson. Photo by Air Magg.

INTERVIEW

‘It’s such a good piece to debut with an orchestra,’ he explains. ‘You get to know the orchestra very personally because you’re playing duos with so many of the instruments – you are accompanying them and they are accompanying you in a very, very intimate way. It’s an ideal way of getting to know an orchestra.’

‘And you have the most perfect writing for the orchestra and the most incredible orchestration of any piano concerto that I know of. And you see it when the orchestra plays this piece how much they love how he uses their huge instrument. The way he makes the woodwinds shine, the way he makes the strings swing, you know, the way he makes the percussion give just the right spice and edge to all of this.’

‘It’s a thrilling piece of music. And the message is one of optimism and of celebration.’

‘When you have a beautiful summer day and you are by a fantastic lake, and the sun glitters on the surface of it – that’s the overall feeling of the Ravel Concerto. It’s that sort of beauty that is almost too bright for your eyes, but we are drawn to it and we want to be inside it.’

It is a concerto that offers endless delights no matter how many times you have listened to it, but Ólafsson is quick to point out that its charms are immediately apparent to the first-timer as well.

‘Just listen to these melodies and listen to the rhythms – and that’s it. Those melodies, from the very first melody from the piccolo and the trumpet, just listen to this and see where it takes you. This music creates images in your mind.’

‘Sometimes I think with music it’s just good to simply think about melody and rhythm and see what else comes. You can add to that a million elements in Ravel because he’s so complex and incredible and refined. But we don’t need that on first listening. Just listen to the good tunes.’

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How long have you been playing with the Sydney Symphony?

37 years

What has been the highlight of your Sydney Symphony career so far?

Too many! Apart from some great international tours and the chance to play in wonderful venues around the world I also have great memories of concerts with Ray Charles, Chick Corea and Gary Burton and Sting. Loved the opportunity to play concertos by Carl Vine and Takemitsu as a member of Synergy Percussion with the orchestra. *Bluebeard's Castle* with David Robertson was a more recent highlight.

Who is your favourite composer to perform, and who is your favourite composer to listen to?

To perform: Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Ravel, Messiaen, Nigel Westlake, John Adams, Steve Reich. Ditto for listening but add in Bach and Beethoven (which I don't get to play much in the orchestra).

What do you like to do with your spare time when you aren't playing or practicing?

I love to knit (sometimes crochet) everything: jumpers, scarves, cardigans, blankets, socks, hats...you name it!

What is the best piece of advice you ever received – either musical or general?

My old piano teacher once told me that it is a privilege to be able bring a composer's work to life and present it to an audience. It's a nice way to take the focus of yourself and put the music first.

If you weren't a musician, what would you most like to be?

I like to make things and would probably love to be connected to theatre somehow. I'm in awe of the skill involved in making lavish costumes and sets for opera and ballet and would enjoy that if I could actually do it!

FROM THE ARCHIVES



1949 & 1950 – KLEMPERER COMES TO SYDNEY

With Europe still recovering and international air travel minimising the tyranny of distance, the decade after World War II saw an extraordinary number of high-profile conductors and soloists travel to Australia. One of those was the great German conductor Otto Klemperer (1885–1973), a protégé of Mahler’s who was forced out of his home country in 1933 due to his Jewish background.

Klemperer toured Sydney in 1949 and 1950, and his performances were major events. He led the Orchestra in Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, Beethoven’s Third, Brahms’ Fourth and famous performances of Mahler’s Symphony No.2, ‘Resurrection’ in September 1950, which Lindsey Browne, the critic from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, wrote was ‘the experience of a lifetime.’

A recording of those Mahler concerts was released by ABC Classic and can be found on streaming services.

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