

19 & 20 July 2024

# JANÁČEK, RAVEL & PIAZZOLLA

Presenting Partner



«SYDNEY»  
«SYMPHONY»  
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# WELCOME

Welcome to **Janáček, Ravel & Piazzolla**, an uplifting concert of heart-felt music in the intimate surroundings of the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House.

Handpicked Wines is delighted to be a Presenting Partner of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's *Cocktail Hour with Handpicked Wines* series.

At Handpicked, we understand the power of passion and artistry.

We draw on both technical skill and creative inspiration to craft wines that elevate experiences; just as the artists of the Orchestra do when they present this richly diverse program, centered on emotional connection, memory and beloved traditions.

Each of these composers reach into their fondest and strongest memories of place, person and past.

At the age of 70, the great Czech composer Janáček re-imagines the essence of youth with his wind sextet *Mládí* (Youth). Argentinian composer Piazzolla is responsible for bringing tango into the concert hall, creating a new blend of tango, jazz and classical music known as *nuevo tango* (new tango).

Together, these works create a concert of richly diverse emotions, along with the opportunity to experience brilliant arrangements you may not have heard before.

Both the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Handpicked embody a dedication to excellence and a strong commitment to the creation of unique, life-enhancing experiences.

I do hope you enjoy the concert and the wines we have selected to accompany this wonderful combination of music, wine and memory.



**William Dong**  
**Managing Director**  
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# 2024 CONCERT SEASON

## COCKTAIL HOUR WITH HANDPICKED WINES

Friday 19 July, 6pm  
Saturday 20 July, 6pm

Utzon Room,  
Sydney Opera House

# JANÁČEK, RAVEL & PIAZZOLLA

## INTIMATE AND INTRICATE

GENEVIEVE LANG presenter

**LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)**

*Youth (Mládí) (1924)*

- i. Andante
- ii. Moderato
- iii. Allegro
- iv. Con moto

**EMMA SHOLL** flute

**SHEFALI PRYOR** oboe

**CLARE FOX** clarinet

**ALEXANDER MORRIS** bass clarinet

**FIONA MCNAMARA** bassoon

**EUAN HARVEY** horn

**MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)**

*Sonata for Violin and Cello (1922)*

- i. Allegro
- ii. Très vif (Very bright)
- iii. Lent
- iv. Vif, avec entrain (Bright, with enthusiasm)

**HARRY BENNETTS** violin

**LEAH LYNN** cello

**ASTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921–1992)**

*Libertango (1974)*

*Oblivion (1982)*

*La muerte del angel (1960s)*

**FIONA ZIEGLER** violin

**LEONE ZIEGLER** violin

**JANE HAZELWOOD** viola

**ADRIAN WALLIS** cello

**ALEXANDER HENERY** double bass

### Estimated durations

Janáček – 17 minutes

Ravel – 21 minutes

Piazzolla – 15 minutes

The concert will run for  
approximately 1 hour

### Cover image

By Craig Abercrombie

Presenting Partner

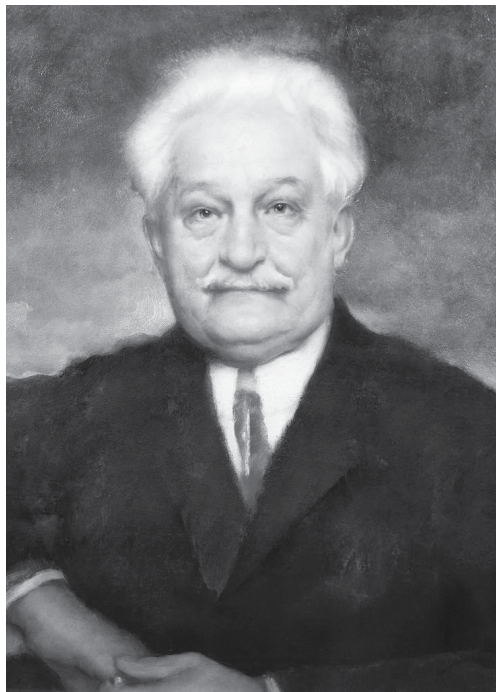


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# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## WHO WAS LEOŠ JANÁČEK?



Janáček by Gustav Böhm, 1926

Janáček is proof that life – or at least a richly creative life – starts at 50. Born in the Czech province of Moravia he grew up in modest circumstances but with excellent training in music, and studied further at conservatories in Prague, Leipzig and Vienna before returning to settle in Brno. There he taught and composed, edited a journal of music criticism, and collected folk music. After a trip to Moscow in 1896 Janáček became a confirmed Russophile, believing that Russia offered the model of a self-governing Slavic society. He founded the Russia Club for the promotion of Russian culture in Brno, and Russian themes are important to a number of subsequent works. Like Bartók, Vaughan Williams, Grainger and others, Janáček 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 how tone and rhythm varied according to social situations. This incredibly subtle research bore fruit in his setting of Czech words, 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.

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 gypsy; 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. His second quartet, *Intimate Letters*, deals explicitly with his relationship to the young married woman, but the first encodes Janáček's erotic impulses by using the framework of Tolstoy's story, *The Kreutzer Sonata*.



# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## *Youth (Mládí) (1924)*

Anthony Cane writes:

As Janáček's life ran its Biblical span, his music displayed fresh wonderment at Nature's eternal cycle – death and renewal, age and youth, winter and burgeoning spring. In July 1924, the very month he turned 70 years young, he composed the present wind sextet as 'a kind of reminiscence of my youth'. Then he set children's nonsense verses in *Nursery Rhymes*. Sustained by the pantheistic vision of his animal opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and uplifted by the conifer cathedrals of his native Moravian forests, he would go on to affirm faith in land and people in the unique *Glagolitic Mass*.

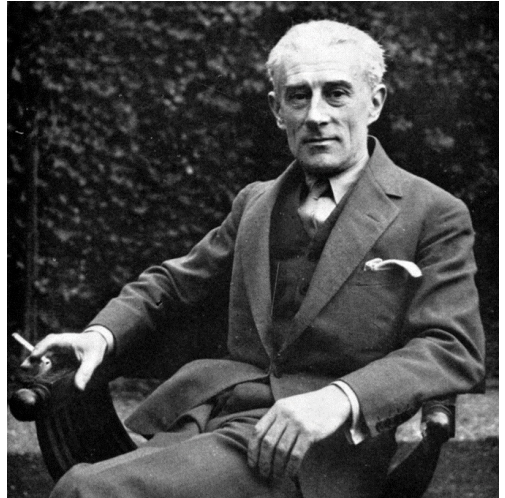
Janáček's light-hearted nostalgia trip in *Youth* grew from a cheeky little *March of the Blueboys* for piccolo, recalling his blue-uniformed monastery choirboy days in Brno, which he developed as a scherzo-like third movement with a gentle trio section (which becomes solemnly reverent on a second appearance).

If the first movement's sprightly oboe theme embodies the Czech speech rhythm of 'Youth, golden youth!' subsequent wistfully falling phrases reflect enchantment experienced from afar, and there is unequivocal yearning in the horn's final drawn-out sigh on the 'golden youth' motif.

The second movement, variations on a darkly Slavonic theme, adds a sense of regret, even pain, to the nostalgically falling phrases which underline the distance from youth, but the final variation eventually finds reconciliation in the major key.

With a flute theme clearly reminiscent of the 'golden youth' motif (which will eventually reappear in its own right), the finale casts a wiser, yet benign, eye over the follies and frivolities of youth.

## WHO WAS MAURICE RAVEL?



Maurice Ravel in 1928. Source Bibliothèque nationale de France

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.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

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 the *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose) Suite.

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.

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'.

## Sonata for violin and cello, M73 (1922)

'Dedicated to the memory of Claude Debussy', Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello was composed between 1920 and 1922. He himself realised that he had produced something quite unlike his previous work, writing:

I think this sonata marks a turning point in my career. The music is stripped to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and more and more there is a return of the emphasis on melody.

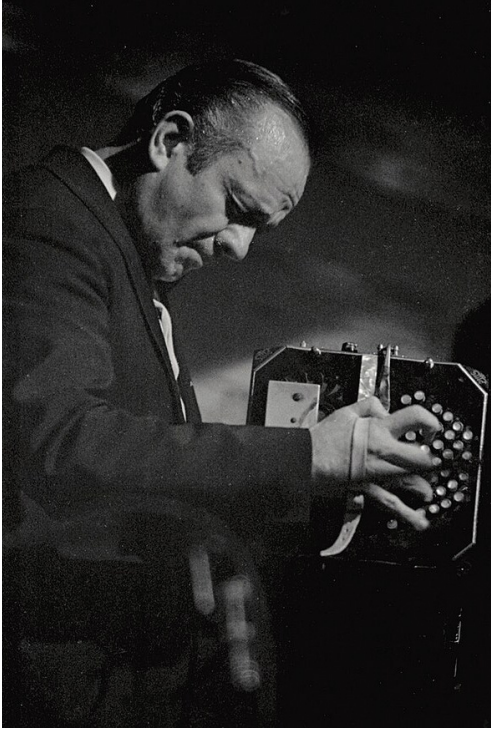
There is certainly nothing of the harmonic lushness of his early work, and the piece is characterised by the interplay, not always comfortable, of the two instruments' melodic lines and aggressive, even violent rhythms. In that regard it can be compared to the austerity of Debussy's late sonatas, and to the post-war embrace of neoclassicism.

The opening movement, whose initial calm is dispelled by obsessive repetitions, increasing chromaticism and rhythmic momentum, has a main theme is treated cyclically (that is, as the basis for material throughout the work). The 'scherzo' marked *très vif* is abrasive in its use of scrubbing figures and pizzicato. The slow movement offers no immediate comfort, with more implacable counterpoint between the two instruments, and only towards the end ascending into quiet, but still plangent textures. The finale is a tour-de-force, with self-consciously simple melodic fragments, driving rhythms, sudden percussive explosions and unexpected moments of distant calm.

This was as 'stripped back' as Ravel's music ever got, (though the song-cycle *Chansons madécasses*, written three years later, comes close at times) but while there is nothing pretty about it, the Sonata is another example of how his music strives for 'technical perfection'.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## WHO WAS ASTOR PIAZZOLLA?



Piazzolla in 1969, photographed by Eduardo Comesaña

In 1954 Astor Piazzolla won a scholarship to study with the legendary Nadia Boulanger in Paris. He was by this stage acknowledged as a great composer of tangos and performer on the *bandoneón* (concertina) in his native Buenos Aires (though, incidentally, he spent many of his earliest years in New York) and had already studied with Alberto Ginastera. But Piazzolla, like Gershwin, yearned to be a serious composer and played down the importance of tango at first. Boulanger, however, showed her usual perspicacity. Hearing Piazzolla play tango on the *bandoneón* she famously said ‘Astor, your classical pieces are well written, but the true Piazzolla is here, never leave it behind’ echoing Ravel’s advice to Gershwin that there was nothing he could teach the American.

Piazzolla took Boulanger’s advice, as one would, but at the same time his interest in ‘classical’ music allowed him to enrich his tango composition and move freely between popular and ‘serious’ musical worlds. He composed for Rostropovich, the Kronos Quartet and Gidon Kremer among others, and maintained an interest in ‘classical’ genres.

Tango itself was originally far from high art, and while its origins are complex it was the music of the *porteños* and *porteñas* – inhabitants of the slum port areas of Buenos Aires – in the early twentieth century which is the root of Piazzolla’s work. (And, we might note, plenty of people believed that Piazzolla had ruined tango by developing it into a ‘classical’ genre as he did.) These four pieces, composed between 1964 and 1970, are often referred to as the *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, but are really tango portraits of this particular aspect of the city’s life through the year.

Characterised by an immediately recognizable duple rhythm, tango developed into three major forms: *tango-milonga*, the purely instrumental form; *tango-romanza* which blends dance with Romantic song, and *tango-canción*, a more sentimental vocal form.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## PIAZZOLLA – THREE WORKS

In the early 1970s Piazzolla was associated with Conjunto 9, an ensemble consisting of *bandoneón* (played, of course, by him), string bass, electric guitar, piano, string quartet and drum kit. The group's sound was, naturally, more hi-tech than that of the roots of tango, but *Libertango*, a 'sort of song of liberty', composed for it 1974, has since been heard – like many of Piazzolla's works – in several successful arrangements.

In 1982 Piazzolla was living in Italy, where he composed the score of for Marco Bellocchio's film *Enrico IV* (after Pirandello's play) in which brain-injury leads an Italian aristocrat to imagine himself king Henry IV, a delusion in which many, including Matilda, the object of his unrequited love, are complicit. (Another of his hits, *Tanti anni prima*, also known as *Ave Maria*, depicts Matilda – played by Claudia Cardinale in the film). The calmly melancholic *Oblivion* gained some of its deserved popularity from also featuring in the film score.

*La muerte del ángel* (The death of the angel) is one of several 'angel' pieces dating from the 1960s which, as John Henkel has written 'shook the conservative world of tango. "Nuevo tango = tango + tragedy + comedy + whorehouse" was an equation Piazzolla used to define his new direction.'

**Notes Gordon Kerry © 2011/2016/2024  
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## **Regional Selections** **Veneto DOC Prosecco**

Pale light-yellow with a delicate, complex bouquet of peach, green apple, and lemon, intertwined with floral and Mediterranean notes. Fresh and soft on the palate with a delicate creamy foam and balanced acidity. Grapes are gently pressed and fermented at a controlled temperature before blending for secondary fermentation.



## **Trial Batch** **Tasmania Riesling**

This wine entices with delicate white flower aromatics leaving the palate bursting with elderflower, lime curd, honey, and subtle ginger spice. Its lip-smacking powdery acidity frames the palate and guides to a long, fine finish. Fermented naturally in a large concrete egg, this wine showcases Tasmanian style by preserving its bright acidity while offering a touch of sweetness.



## **Regional Selections** **Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon**

A signature Coonawarra character shines through with trademark aromas of blackberry, cassis, and choc-mint, showcasing ripe complexity. The palate delights with concentrated dark fruits, balanced by leafy freshness and firm, lingering tannins. Truly a classic Coonawarra Cabernet.



## **Trial Batch Murray River** **Vermentino**

A light and lively Vermentino featuring fresh citrus and pear flavours with a hint of bitter almond. Partial skin fermentation adds texture, while its bright acidity makes it a refreshing match for various foods. Originating from northern Italy and the islands of Sardinia and Corsica, Vermentino embodies Mediterranean charm.



## **Regional Selections** **Yarra Valley Pinot Noir**

With tangy cherry fruits, fresh basil, and a hint of menthol, this wine tantalizes the palate with its vibrant flavours and impeccable balance. Awarded an impressive 95 points by James Halliday, this wine is a true standout of the vintage. From the cool weather to the slow flavour accumulation, every element contributes to the allure of this remarkable wine.

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