

8–11 May 2024

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH 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*

Jennifer Booth

Brielle Clapson

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Alexandra Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Léone Ziegler

Benjamin Tjoa°

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

Benjamin Li

Marcus Michelsen°

Emily Qin°

Riikka Sintonen°

Natalia Harvey*

VIOLAS

Carrie Dennis

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Assistant Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Jane Hazelwood

Graham Hennings

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Felicity Tsai

Leonid Volovelsky

Stephen Wright°

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Kaori Yamagami

Principal

Simon Cobcroft

Associate Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Timothy Nankervis

Elizabeth Neville

Christopher Pidcock

Adrian Wallis

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

Dylan Holly

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Jaán Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

Alexandra Elvin*

FLUTES

Emma Sholl

Acting Principal

Carolyn Harris

Laura Cliff†

OBOES

Joshua Oates*

Guest Principal

Callum Hogan

CLARINETS

Christian Stene*

Guest Principal

Christopher Tingay

BASSOONS

Ben Hoadley*

Guest Principal

Fiona McNamara

Laura Brown*

HORNS

Guillaume Tétu*

Guest Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Emily Newham°

Acting Principal 3rd Horn

Rachel Silver

Alex Hambleton*

TRUMPETS

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glémot

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont

Acting Principal

Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré

Principal

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Timothy Constable

Bold Principal

* Guest Musician

° Contract Musician

† Sydney Symphony Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

EMIRATES MASTERS SERIES

Wednesday 8 May, 8pm

Friday 10 May, 8pm

Saturday 11 May, 8pm

EMIRATES THURSDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Thursday 9 May, 1.30pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

INTOXICATING MELODIES

HAN-NA CHANG conductor

BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV piano

MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804–1857)

Ruslan and Ludmila (1837–1842)

Overture

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Piano Concerto No.2, Op.16 (1912/1923)

i. Andantino

ii. Scherzo: Vivace

iii. Intermezzo: Allegro moderato

iv. Allegro tempestoso

INTERVAL

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Symphony No.5, Op.64 (1888)

i. Andante – Allegro con anima

ii. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza

iii. Valse (Allegro moderato)

iv. Finale (Andante maestoso – allegro vivace – moderato assai e molto maestoso)

Pre-concert talk

By Jim Coyle in the Northern
Foyer at 7.15pm (12.45 Thursday)

Estimated durations

Glinka – 5 minutes

Prokofiev – 35 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes

Tchaikovsky – 50 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately two hours

Cover image

By Craig Abercrombie

Principal Partner



WELCOME

Welcome to **Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony**, another superb concert in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Emirates Masters Series.

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra have enjoyed one of the longest-standing and most significant relationships in Australia's performing arts, one of which we remain extremely proud.

Exhilarating, swirling and richly romantic, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is a work of his Heroic period, noted for its driving melodies. Guest conductor Han-Na Chang has long been associated with the music of Tchaikovsky, both as a cellist and now as a very fine conductor. Here she leads the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in works of power, beauty and driving rhythm that are certain to delight.

We're passionate about growing music, arts, and culture to enrich the lives of the communities we serve and connecting the finest talents with audiences globally. Our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is a cornerstone of our ongoing support of music and arts around the world and reflects our long-standing commitment to Australia.

Uzbek pianist Behzod Abduraimov was an unknown 18-year-old when he won the London International Piano Competition. His blazing performance of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto launched his now stellar career. No stranger to Sydney audiences, Abduraimov is well known for his brilliance and mastery and his continuing exploration of the music of Prokofiev. In this concert, he performs the fiendishly difficult Second Piano Concerto, a work the composer himself premiered in 1921.

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.

The brilliant soloist and passionate symphony you will experience in this performance embody the highest level of excellence, a quality the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Emirates aspire to in equal measure.

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



Barry Brown
Divisional Vice President for Australasia
Emirates



YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

COMPOSERS

MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804–1857)

Ruslan and Ludmila (1837–1842)

Premiered in 1847, along with Schumann's Symphony No.2, Verdi's *Macbeth*, Mendelssohn's String Quartet Op.80, and the publication of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

Ruslan and Ludmila opens with a burst of energy, with scurrying strings and woodwind curlicues. In a mere five minutes we are introduced to some of the intensely hummable tunes of this opera, which laid the foundations for a century of works based on Russian fairy-tales and myths.



Mikhail Glinka in the 1850s

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Piano Concerto No.2, Op.16 (1912/1923)

Premiered in 1913, the year that saw the completion of the Panama Canal, the first assembly line, packaged cigarettes, phonograph records and chemical fertilisers.

Music saw Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Berg's Altenberg Lieder (both the subject of riotous premieres) and Sibelius' *Luonnotar*. Lili Boulanger became the first female composer to win the Prix de Rome.

Prokofiev played the premiere of this piece to a crowd as hostile as that for Stravinsky and Berg, and even though he toned it down for the 1924 Paris premiere its four movements retain their mixture of steely energy, often madcap elements, interspersed with soulful, 'Russian' melancholy.



Prokofiev in 1918.
Image courtesy United States Library of Congress.

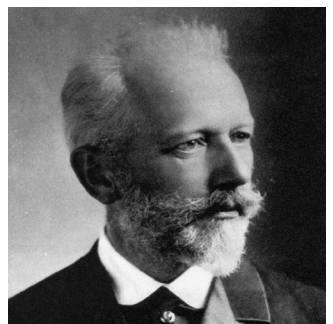
PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Symphony No.5, Op.64 (1888)

Composed in 1888, the year that Hong Kong's Peak Tram began operations, as did Jack the Ripper. Carl Benz was issued the world's first driver's license. Architecture saw the construction of the Eiffel Tower and the opening of the Washington Monument. Elsewhere, Vincent van Gogh cuts off his ear and is institutionalised.

Music sees the inauguration of the Concertgebouw orchestra, the premiere of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*, Fauré's Requiem and Mahler's First Symphony, and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* become the first recorded work of classical music.

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, in four substantive movements, might trace a journey from darkness to light, or 'defeat to victory'. It opens in darkness, and explores moments of great passion; and its slow movement deals with 'desire and passion'. After a lighter Valse, the Finale powerfully plays off contrasting emotions.



Tchaikovsky in 1891

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

HAN-NA CHANG conductor

Han-Na Chang's prestigious and unique international career spans three decades. 2024 will mark the 30th anniversary of her extraordinary debut on the international stage, when as an 11-year-old she won the First Prize at the Fifth International Rostropovich Cello Competition in Paris in 1994.

Chang has been the Artistic Leader and Chief Conductor of the Trondheim Symfoniorkester & Opera in Norway since 2017, and Erste Gastdirigentin (Principal Guest Conductor) of the Symphoniker Hamburg – Laeiszhalle Orchester since 2022. In addition, The 2023-24 season will see her guest conduct the Vienna, Sydney, Melbourne, Bern, RAI Torino, New Zealand and Singapore Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Bruckner Orchester Linz at the closing concert of the International Brucknerfest Linz 2023.

As a guest conductor, Chang has worked with Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Bamberger Symphoniker, the Toronto, Hamburg, Vienna, Singapore, Tokyo, Cincinnati, St Louis, Indianapolis, Seattle, Vancouver, Detroit, Milwaukee, Gothenburg, Malmo, Odense and Iceland symphony orchestras, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra (UK), the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra del Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli.

She first gained international recognition for her precocious musical gifts when she won the Rostropovich International Cello Competition in Paris in 1994, awarded unanimously by the jury led by Mstislav Rostropovich. Following this victory at an unprecedented age, her international career took her around the world as an in-demand recitalist and soloist. As a cellist, she has performed with orchestras

such as the Berlin, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, London Symphony Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Münchner Philharmoniker, Philadelphia Orchestra, l'Orchestre de Paris, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre National de France, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Chicago, Boston and San Francisco symphony orchestras.

Chang was born in Suwon, South Korea in December 1982. At the age of 6, she received her first cello lesson. Her family moved to New York in 1993 in order to support her continuing musical studies at the Juilliard School, and she has lived in New York since. She counts Mstislav Rostropovich, Mischa Maisky and Giuseppe Sinopoli as the most influential mentors of her formative years.

Chang read Philosophy at Harvard University. After developing an intense interest in and deep passion for the symphonic repertoire during her late teens and early twenties, she made her formal conducting debut in 2007, at the age of 24, and has since then focused her artistic output exclusively to conducting.



Han-Na Chang. Photo by Kiran West.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV piano

Behzod Abduraimov's performances combine an immense depth of musicality with phenomenal technique and breath-taking delicacy.

2023/24 performances include Chicago Symphony, Mozarteumorchester Salzburg, Houston Symphony and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras, Oslo Philharmonic, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra including a tour of Spain and Belgian National Orchestra performing at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Behzod will also appear with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Conductor collaborations include Osmo Vänskä, Juraj Valčuha, Constantinos Carydis, Robin Ticciati, Manfred Honeck, Yoel Levi, Han-Na Chang, Hannu Lintu and Andris Poga.

Behzod's second recording for Alpha Classics, featuring works by Ravel, Prokofiev and Uzbek composer Dilorom Saidaminova, was released on 12 January 2024. The album won the *Gramophone* Editor's Choice award and was named one of the Apple Music '10 Classical Albums You Must Hear This Month' of February 2024. 2021 saw the highly successful release of his first recital album for Alpha Classics based on a program of miniatures including Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In 2020 recordings included Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with Lucerne Symphony Orchestra under James Gaffigan, recorded on Rachmaninov's own piano from Villa Senar for Sony Classical and Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.3 with Concertgebouworkest, for the RCO Live

label. Both recordings were nominated for the 2020 Opus Klassik awards in multiple categories. A DVD of his BBC Proms debut in 2016 with Münchner Philharmoniker was released in 2018. His 2012 debut CD of Liszt, Saint-Saëns and Prokofiev for Decca won the Choc de Classica and Diapason Découverte, and his first concerto disc for the label featured Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3 and Tchaikovsky's Concerto No.1.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1990, Behzod began the piano aged five as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at Uspensky State Central Lyceum in Tashkent. In 2009, he won first prize at the London International Piano Competition with Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3. He studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch at the International Center for Music at Park University, Missouri, where he is Artist-in-Residence.



Behzod Abduraimov. Photo by Evgeny Eutykhov.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS MIKHAIL GLINKA?

Mikhail Glinka is the ‘father’ of Russian music. He was a friend of the great novelist Pushkin. Tchaikovsky admired him. Stravinsky dedicated his opera *Mavra* to those three men as representing the ‘cosmopolitan’ strand in Russian art. But he was an inspiration also to Mily Balakirev, the founder of the nationalist group ‘the Five’. Glinka blended folk and Italian influences, marrying the divergent trends in Russian music: the western outlook and Slavic folkloricism.

Glinka was born in Smolensk, where he was kept in grandmother’s room until he was six and exposed only to folksong, church chant and the bells of the region. These bells gave him a higher tolerance for dissonance than western musicians of that time. He went to St Petersburg, had three lessons from the pianist-composer John Field and favourably impressed Hummel. His life as an undersecretary in the Council of Communications and as a St Petersburg dilettante is recorded in his *Memoirs*. Early influences on his composing included Italian opera composers Bellini and Donizetti. In 1833 he travelled to Berlin for more concentrated study. His first opera *A Life for the Tsar* (or, *Ivan Susanin*, 1836) was a celebration of the Romanov dynasty, and was an immediate success. Blending Polish and Russian influences, it marked the first time both the music and the subject of an opera could really be called Russian. Glinka’s second opera *Ruslan and Ludmila* was based on the 1820 narrative poem of the same name by Pushkin. It is still occasionally heard, but the overture is more popular in the west.

Travel abroad inspired some of Glinka’s other orchestral pieces – *Jota aragonesa* and *Memory of a Summer Night in Madrid* refer to Spain. His *Kamarinskaya* was also highly influential. A single melody repeated with changing accompaniment (both in harmony and orchestral colour), *Kamarinskaya*’s form of musical development was favoured over thematic variation by many of Glinka’s followers among Russian composers, including Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, and most notably Tchaikovsky in his Second and Fourth Symphonies.

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Mikhail Glinka in the 1850s

ABOUT THE MUSIC

***Ruslan and Ludmila* (1837–1842)**

Overture

Glinka's music was, to borrow a phrase from Tchaikovsky, the 'acorn from which the oak of Russian music grew'. Born into a minor noble family, Glinka was able to cultivate his musical interests from a young age, at school in St Petersburg and conducting a 'serf orchestra' on an estate neighbouring his parents'. By 1820 he was back in St Petersburg, ostensibly working in the civil service but in fact devoting himself to composition and attending opera. The visit of an Italian company in 1828 confirmed his love of Rossini, and he travelled to Italy two years later where he got to know Donizetti and Bellini and their works. Before returning to Russia in 1834, he spent time in Berlin, studying the principles of counterpoint. Having absorbed Italian lyricism and German rigour, Glinka returned to his homeland and set about writing music based on Russian themes.

Ruslan and Ludmila, which premiered in 1847, is his second completed opera, and is based on a fairy tale given literary currency by the great poet Alexander Pushkin. (Glinka and Pushkin had discussed a collaboration on the work, but the poet was fatally wounded in a duel before work began).



Portrait of Alexander Pushkin (1827) by Vasily Andreevich Tropinin (1776–1857).

Ludmila is the daughter of Svetozar, the Grand Prince of Kyiv. She is betrothed to Ruslan, but abducted from her father's palace by the evil sorcerer Chernomor. Ignoring the betrothal, Svetozar offers his daughter and half his kingdom to whomever brings Ludmila back. Ruslan and his two rivals, Farlaf and Ratmir, set off on the quest, encountering wizards, giants and other magical beings. Ruslan, having won Chernomor's own sword from the sorcerer's giant brother, cuts off his beard (rendering him powerless) only to discover that Ludmila, who has been cast into a magic sleep, has been abducted again, this time by Farlaf, who takes her to the hall of her father in Kyiv. The good sorcerer Finn gives Ruslan a ring which will awaken Ludmila. He returns to Svetozar's palace, removes the spell and marries Ludmila, to the joy of the people of Kiev.

Like many an opera composer, Glinka left writing the overture to *Ruslan and Ludmila* until last, but drew on themes from the body of the work. The overture begins with music derived from the general rejoicing at the end of the opera, which is contrasted with a melody associated with Ruslan's love for Ludmila. Chernomor makes an appearance in Glinka's pathbreaking use of the whole-tone scale (heard in the trombones), but is banished by a return to the rejoicing mood of the opening.

Ruslan and Ludmila is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, two trumpets and three trombones; timpani and strings.

The opera was premiered on 27 November 1842 at the Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

The earliest recorded Sydney Symphony performance of the work was in January 1942, with Percy Code conducting for radio broadcast; the first public performance came in July 1946 under Bernard Heinze. Other notable performances include those conducted by Eugene Goossens (1953), John Hopkins (1967 Proms), Louis Frémaux (1979) and as part of a Family Concert by Richard Gill (1991). The Orchestra most recently performed the work in 2018, at Symphony Under the Stars in Parramatta Park, conducted by Benjamin Northey.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS SERGEI PROKOFIEV?

In 1953 Sergei Prokofiev died in Moscow on the same day and less than an hour before his nemesis, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. The story goes that the streets of Moscow were so packed with citizens wanting to pay their last respects to the Great Leader that Prokofiev's few mourners couldn't make it to the funeral. And they couldn't buy flowers for the composer's grave, because every cut flower in the capital was bought to be placed on Stalin's casket.

The curious thing, though, is why Prokofiev ended his days in Russia at all. Even at first glance he seems the sort of person liable to be suspect under a communist regime. Born to the Russian manager of a Ukrainian estate, and losing two siblings in infancy, Prokofiev grew up as the indulged only child of parents at the top of their local social hierarchy.

He left Russia in 1918 (probably not for political reasons) and it was not until 1936 that he was back in the USSR permanently, despite being culturally at home in the theatres, clothes-shops and restaurants of New York or Paris.

Prokofiev himself always claimed that he was ultimately homesick for 'the air, the soil' of Russia and, from the outside at least, life seemed good to state-approved composers: orchestras and opera companies and ballet troupes at their disposal.

But Prokofiev didn't do it as hard in the US and Europe as he later made out. He had some work in the US as a pianist and composer, scored a hit with his Third Piano Concerto, and in Chicago received the commission for the opera *The Love of Three Oranges* from which he drew an ever-popular orchestral suite. When he lived in France the Parisian public put Prokofiev on a pedestal only slightly lower than Stravinsky's. As British journalist James Meek recently put it:

he had his portrait painted by Matisse, saw Picasso attend his premieres, hung out with Charlie Chaplin and Fyodor Shalyapin in Biarritz, jammed with Gershwin in his flat, and entertained the visiting poet and admirer Mayakovsky.

Still, he started making regular trips back from 1927 on and then, in 1936, when the position of leading Russian composer-in-Russia was temporarily vacated by Shostakovich, he moved back with his wife and family. His relations with officialdom were often difficult, his attempts to write in an officially acceptable style often so (and perhaps deliberately) ham-fisted as to be turned down; his own style written off as dilettantish. But many works from the 'Soviet period' – *Peter and the Wolf*, *Romeo and Juliet* or the Second Violin Concerto – have artistic integrity while genuinely striving for a language which the new, and vast, Soviet audience for classical music could understand. During World War II he composed some of his greatest piano sonatas and a symphonic masterpiece, the Fifth. But none of that would last. By 1948 it was time for a new set of denunciations and purges. Prokofiev, along with the usual suspects like Shostakovich, was denounced. Already in ill-health, Prokofiev thanked the Union of Composers for its reprimand and acknowledged his error in a public letter. Many of his works written before 1932 were banned, and Prokofiev spent his last years in financial hardship and illness.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Piano Concerto No.2, Op.16 (1912/1923)

In 1918, Prokofiev was in the United States. Performances of his Piano Concerto No.1 and *Scythian Suite* took places like Chicago by storm, and led to the commission for *The Love of Three Oranges*. Meanwhile, back home in Petrograd, the tenant in his flat somehow managed to burn the score of his Piano Concerto No.2, which required the composer to reconstruct the piece from memory. There are differing accounts – both emanating from Prokofiev – of the extent to which this required new composition: he wrote to a friend that the recomposition effectively made the piece a new concerto – his ‘fourth’; in his memoirs, however, he claimed merely to have ‘improved’ the overall form, orchestration and counterpoint.

In its original version, the concerto had enjoyed the sort of reception about which early twentieth century composers tended to dream. Premiered with the composer at the keyboard, in 1913 in Pavlovsk, the piece famously had the audience walking out with ‘their hair standing on end’, remarking loudly (a story that Prokofiev proudly retailed in his autobiography) about how the music would ‘send them crazy’ and that ‘the cats on the roof make better music!’ Most of those that stayed obligingly booed and hissed, though one critic predicted that ‘ten years from now [the audience] will atone for last night’s catcalls by unanimously applauding a new composer with a European reputation.’ In fact the response to the reconstructed version, which Prokofiev, as luck would have it, made ten years later, was rather more measured when he premiered in Paris in 1924; it may be that Prokofiev had ‘toned it down’, but equally, Stravinsky and the group known as Les Six had naturalized the sort of modernism that Prokofiev cultivates in this work and no longer shocked.

After making his professional debut (and simultaneously wowing his Conservatorium examiners) with his First Piano Concerto, Prokofiev had been accused of writing ‘superficial showiness and...keyboard acrobatics’. The 22 year-old had therefore resolved to ‘strive for greater depth in the Second’. Whether he achieved that is another question; certainly the work has far greater length than the first. The outer movements, for instance, each play for over ten minutes, and the work as a whole is almost twice the length of the earlier work.



Prokofiev in 1918.
Image courtesy United States Library of Congress.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The Andantino first movement is expansive, as signalled by the brief pizzicato theme answered by a section for piano (marked 'narratively') that suggests Prokofiev's older contemporary, Rachmaninov. The focal point of the movement is a breathtaking cadenza which ushers in a fortissimo statement of the opening pizzicato theme. Here the Rachmaninovian manner is even more pronounced, as the soloist sails through increasingly opulent orchestral textures.

The scherzo which follows is vintage Prokofiev, with its unrelenting stream of piano semiquavers glittering coldly throughout. So too is the Intermezzo, which has nothing autumnal or late-Brahmsian about it. Rather than using the term to denote an instrumental *entr'acte*, it is almost as if Prokofiev were conjuring the eighteenth century sense of the word to describe a miniature comic opera. This was, after all, written around the time of his *Love of Three Oranges*, with its cast of *commedia dell'arte* characters, giants and witches, and the Concerto's intermezzo is a grotesque and theatrical piece. The finale draws together a number of thematic threads from the previous three movements, and binds them into a fearsomely energetic structure: there are moments of dark introspection related to the opening movement and brief passages of nostalgic Russian melody. There is also much carnivalesque humour here and, after a 'false' ending, another brilliant solo passage which leads to the work's somewhat ironic conclusion.

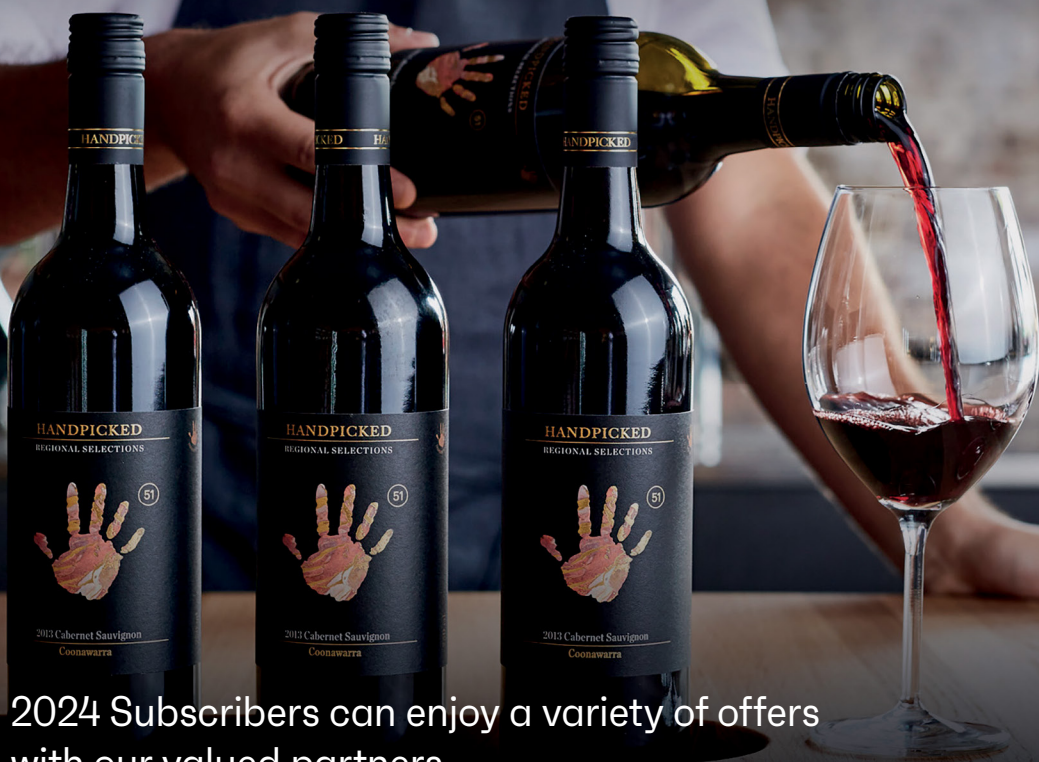
It is an extremely demanding work to play, and even Prokofiev neglected it in favour of the Third Concerto during his years as a virtuoso. Apart from a brief vogue in the Soviet Union at the time of Prokofiev's return in the 1930s, it remained a rarity until rescued from obscurity by pianists such as Vladimir Ashkenazy only in the 1960s.

Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and two percussionists; strings and piano soloist.

The original version of the concerto premiered on 5 September 1913 in the resort town of Pavlovsk, near Saint Petersburg, with Prokofiev as soloist. The revised version of the concerto was premiered in Paris on 8 May 1924, again with the composer as soloist conducted by Serge Koussevitzky.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed this concerto in the NSW State Final of the ABC Concerto Competition in June 1973, with Anthony Baldwin as soloist conducted by Wilfred Lehmann. Most notably it was performed in 2009 by Alexander Gavrylyuk conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, a performance which was recorded and is available on streaming platforms.

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Principal Partner





Tchaikovsky in 1891

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY?

Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, in the Urals, where his father was a mining engineer. His musical education began with the orchestrion, a mechanical contraption that played popular operatic excerpts. He also began piano lessons in 1845. The family moved to St Petersburg in 1852, where Tchaikovsky attended the School of Jurisprudence. On graduating in 1859 he was employed at the Ministry of Justice, but attended classes run by the Russian Musical Society. Under the leadership of Anton Rubinstein, the Society founded the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, and Tchaikovsky enrolled in its first class, with Rubinstein as his composition teacher. After three years there Tchaikovsky was invited by Rubinstein's equally illustrious brother, Nikolai, to teach harmony for the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society, which would soon become the Moscow Conservatory.

Around 1868 he became, briefly, quite friendly with the group of composers known as the *Kuchka* ('The Five' or 'Mighty Handful'), led by Mily Balakirev. Balakirev believed that Russian composers should create distinctly Russian music, unpolluted by the techniques of Western composition. But although Tchaikovsky had used some traditional melodies, he was an internationalist at heart, and by 1877 he had broken with the Five.

Despite being homosexual, Tchaikovsky became engaged to the Belgian soprano Désirée Artôt in 1868. It didn't last.

Tchaikovsky saw no reason not to marry, and in 1877 the hour produced the woman, in the form of Antonina Milyukova, from whom Tchaikovsky received a series of love letters. It didn't last either, with Tchaikovsky abandoning Antonina for his sister's estate at Kamenka in Ukraine. He did at least provide for her in her old age.

A year before the marriage, Tchaikovsky had received a letter from another woman, Nadezhda von Meck, who was a huge fan, but expressly did not want to meet Tchaikovsky. She did, however, want to use some of the considerable wealth her railway-tycoon husband had left her to commission new music, and for 14 years supported Tchaikovsky so that he could give up teaching and concentrate on composition. He and Meck corresponded frequently, offering us an insight into Tchaikovsky's aesthetics and methods.

As symphonist, and great composer for ballet, Tchaikovsky was fêted as far afield as the United States and Britain. In November 1893, days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony in St Petersburg, he became ill and was treated for cholera which was epidemic in the city. The treatment was successful, but Tchaikovsky died of complications. There is no evidence that he had intended suicide. His body lay in state, visited by hundreds, and the Tsar arranged a state funeral and burial.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Symphony No.5, Op.64 (1888)

Composers get themselves into terrible trouble talking about their works, and even worse if something casually written down – say in a diary or private letter – comes to public attention. Misinterpretation on the basis of such documents is an easy trap into which to fall; there are, for instance, numerous cases in the letters of Mozart where the composer is being economical with the truth or indulging in tactful white lies to set his father's mind at ease. Tchaikovsky, similarly, is frequently misinterpreted on the basis of written remarks, as his music seems so clearly to reflect the apparent turbulence of his emotional life. We can take at face value his comment that symphonies should express 'sincere feelings', but his remark to his patron Madame von Meck that 'anyone who believes that the creative person is capable of expressing what he feels out of a momentary effect aided by the means of art, is mistaken' should also give us pause.

So much of Tchaikovsky's work, and particularly the last three symphonies, is interpreted as a kind of diary of the emotional vicissitudes of a somewhat hysterical gay man in a repressive society. Recent scholarship has shown this – and indeed the idea that Tchaikovsky committed suicide – to be largely a myth. Tchaikovsky unwittingly did himself no favours by writing in his diary, shortly before beginning the composition of the Fifth Symphony in 1888:

Introduction. Complete resignation before Fate, or, which is the same, before the inscrutable predestination of Providence. Allegro (I) Murmurs, doubts, lamentations, reproaches against XXX. (II) Shall I throw myself into the embraces of Faith?

On such slender evidence the myth of this work being a testament to his tragic heroism in the face of his homosexuality (that must be what XXX means, mustn't it?) has been built and continues to stand.

Tchaikovsky was at the height of his creative powers in 1888, and had come to a personal and artistic rapprochement with Brahms (whom he once described as a 'giftless bastard', but who was arguably the leading symphonist of the day). Tchaikovsky's Fifth (like his Fourth) is in some respects an attempt to contribute to the motto symphony, a genre associated with Brahms' mentor Schumann, and which Brahms himself used. In short, the work is unified by a 'motto' or theme stated in the introduction to the first movement. Again, Tchaikovsky has been taken at his word when he protested that the symphony 'has a mountain of padding; an experienced eye can detect the thread in my seams and I can do nothing about it'. In fact the experienced eye and ear of Brahms was highly impressed by the work's cohesion. The work too displays some of Tchaikovsky's most inspired orchestration. In fact, in addition to the use of the motto theme, Tchaikovsky gives his work its special sense of coherence through the use of a web of key relations, and 'subliminal' motifs which occur from movement to movement.

The first movement's introduction sets the tone with lugubrious scoring which features the low register of the clarinet, an instrument which also heralds the faster material of the main body of the movement. The energy gradually increases, with marvelous antiphonal writing for the winds against the passionate surges of the strings and

ABOUT THE MUSIC

the urgent punctuation from the brass. The 'second subject' group of themes forms a sharp contrast in its more lyrical, noble mood. The material forms the basis for dramatically contending music, but the movement ends quietly and in a sense inconclusively. The slow movement is justly famous for its long breathed horn theme, and its powerful climaxes (Tchaikovsky's directions for the second climax are 'with desire and passion'). The balletic *Valse* provides a relaxation in the intensity of the music (despite a late reminiscence of the motto) before the finale, in which the tension between tragedy and joy is decisively concluded in favour of joy.

The work does have moments of unarguably tragic tone, which, if biographical explanation is required, may relate to these specific events: the composer fell ill in 1886 and experienced poor health for the following year, to the point where he became convinced that this was his final illness. More importantly, a number of his closest friends died at this time, including Nikolai Kondratiev whose demise provided the inspiration for the symphony. Scholar Roland John Wiley argues that the rhythm of the motto theme corresponds to a Russian Easter chant which sets the words 'Christ is risen'. As Wiley says,

if that connection was intentional, various aspects of meaning in the Fifth Symphony would be clarified. The triumphal variant of the motto in the last movement would be more than a defeat-to-victory cliché, while the clash between the motto and the worldly intonations of the inner movements would make sense.

This is not say that the work is a 'program symphony', but that it contains a meaning more complex and important than is admitted in some common, glib accounts.

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is scored for three flutes (the third doubling piccolo) and pairs of oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and strings.

It was first performed on 17 November 1888 at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, with Tchaikovsky himself conducting.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra has a long history of performing this work. The earliest recorded performance was in March 1941, when Percy Code conducted it for radio broadcast; the first public performance came in May that same year under Bernard Heinze. The piece was a favourite of the Orchestra's first Chief Conductor Eugene Goossens, who conducted the work in 1948, 1949, 1950, on a NSW Regional Tour in 1951, and in 1952. Other notable performances include those conducted by then-Chiefs Nikolai Malko (1957), Dean Dixon (1967), Moshe Atzmon (1969 & 1970), Willem van Otterloo (1977), Louis Frémaux (1981) and Edo de Waart (2000). The Orchestra also performed the work under Chief Conductor Stuart Challender in 1988, both in Sydney and on its USA Tour. Notable guest conductors to have led performances include Lorin Maazel (1961), Walter Susskind (1973), Yuri Temirkanov (1996) and Daniel Harding (1998).

Our most recent performance was in 2017 under then-Chief David Robertson.

Notes by Gordon Kerry
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Instrumentation and history by
Hugh Robertson



Han-Na Chang. Photo by Kiran West

INTERVIEW

FROM BOW TO BATON: HAN-NA CHANG EXPLORES THE UNIVERSE OF MUSIC

When she won the Rostropovich Cello Competition at age 11, a long career as soloist beckoned. But after going as far as she felt she could with her instrument, Han-Na Chang made the switch to conducting, and has never looked back.

By Hugh Robertson

The list of people who have made the leap from a career as an instrumental soloist to a successful conductor is very short. At the absolute pinnacle are three great titans of 20th century music, stars immediately identifiable by their surname alone: Ashkenazy, Rostropovich, Barenboim.

To that exalted pantheon may soon be added Han-Na Chang.

Chang first came to international prominence in 1994 when she, as an 11-year old, sensationally won the Rostropovich Cello Competition. In the years following she had a career all cellists would dream of, studying with Mstislav Rostropovich, Mischa Maisky and Giuseppe Sinopoli, releasing award-winning recordings and performing with the world's greatest orchestras. Her three performances in Sydney as soloist are bucket list stuff: Tchaikovsky with Lorin Maazel and Saint-Saëns with Leonard Slatkin, both in July 2000, then another visit in August 2009, performing Shostakovich with a young Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

But when Chang returns to Sydney it won't be with bow in hand but rather baton, having changed disciplines to conductor and now rising through those ranks in much

the same way she blazed across the cello firmament 30 years ago.

That may seem like a radical shift, but for Chang it was the only decision that made any sense.

'The cello repertoire is very small, and what you get asked to play [as a soloist] is even smaller,' says Chang from her New York apartment. 'And having started so young, I felt like I needed to dig deeper into music, because there is this huge universe out there of symphonic music.'

Chang has been exploring all across that universe, and brings to Sydney a program of works that are close to her heart – with the centrepiece being Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. It is a remarkable work that demonstrates just why Tchaikovsky is held in such high regard, with melodies you will be whistling for days and orchestration that allows every instrument to shine.

'I love Tchaikovsky,' says Chang with a smile. 'Who doesn't, right? It's extraordinary that somebody who was so elegant and such a gentleman was always in turmoil inside, writing music of such drama. He is this poet of yearning and longing and *con desiderio* and *passione* – with desire and passion.'

Tchaikovsky is ultimately a tragic figure despite the exquisite beauty of so much of his music. All his life he struggled with depression, his personal life was punctuated by tragedy, and musically he was constantly being pulled back and forth between his formal, Western-oriented training and his innate Russianness; openly criticised by a cadre of Russian contemporaries known as the 'Mighty Five' for being too Western, and derided in the west for being too vulgar and Russian.

This struggle was raging when Tchaikovsky was writing his Fifth Symphony. In a letter from 1888 he wrote down some ideas for a possible narrative for the work: "Intr[oduction]. Complete resignation before Fate – or, what is the same thing, the inscrutable designs of Providence." Though he ultimately abandoned this narrative, it is hard not to hear this symphony as the fight against – and ultimate triumph over – fate: there is a musical theme (often interpreted as representing the composer himself) that is stated in the first movement, undergoes all manner of changes and alterations, before finally concluding in triumph in the final bars.

'This music is explosive, this Fifth Symphony,' observes Chang. 'It's a symphony of paradox. And it shows what a complex life he was living inside. It's music of anguish, and excitement, and hope, and despair, and more despair, and more despair, and trying to get out of despair and trying more and more. You get to that final movement and you can hear that he's got his claws in this supposed fate, and you see the struggle that he must have felt in his heart. And how wonderful for us that he was able to channel all of that into music and share that with us.'

Chang believes that it is Tchaikovsky's great sensitivity to his human weaknesses that makes him so beloved – and she hopes he understood at least a little of his impact while he was alive.

'I wonder if he even had an inkling of how much his music would actually move the hearts of people living in the 21st century,' she continues. 'It's so relevant, this personal feeling. We all have it – whatever the reason, everybody has it. And that is the power of great music, that it is able to touch what we

have in all of us and inspire us and move us. It's absolutely extraordinary what music can do.'

Tchaikovsky's triumph over fate extends far beyond this symphony: he also comprehensively won the argument about whether he was too Russian or too Western simply by being himself – and now is claimed by both schools of music with equal enthusiasm.

'Now you look at that Mighty Five and the real symphonic genius was Tchaikovsky. He became the national school of Russia,' says Chang, referencing the Soviet-era directives that all Russian composers should seek to emulate Tchaikovsky.

'What a legacy. What a man. What an artist. What a real human being.'

This concert is an all-Russian program that opens with the sparkling overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla* by Mikhail Glinka – 'like a glass of champagne' and 'the perfect opener,' says Chang – as well as the extraordinary, virtuosic Second Piano Concerto by Prokofiev, performed by star Uzbek pianist Behzod Abduraimov.

Chang has a particular affinity for Russian music thanks to her relationship with Mstislav Rostropovich: following her victory at the cello competition that bears his name, Chang spent many years studying privately with Rostropovich, and in 1995 made her debut recording with Rostropovich conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. Rostropovich was close with several Soviet-era Russian composers, most notably Shostakovich and Prokofiev, and also studied at the Moscow Conservatory, the institution at which Tchaikovsky himself was the founding Professor of Music.

That makes Chang a link in a chain of teaching, mentorship and friendship that stretches back directly to Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. But what would her old mentor – the man she affectionately calls 'Slava' – think of this program?

'I think he would have loved it. He loved championing Russian music,' says Chang with a smile. 'There are two things that he told me that I always remember:

apparently Shostakovich told Slava, ‘Never stop playing even if the people are throwing stones at you.’ And you hear all of that in the music of Shostakovich.

‘The second story is that Slava wanted to be a composer, so he brought a work to Prokofiev. Prokofiev looked at it and changed one note here, changed another note there – and suddenly the piece was different, and it became [a] Prokofiev [piece]. And that’s when Slava decided to stop composing,’ says Chang with a laugh.

‘And that’s just a wonderful link that I have through Slava to Russian music.’

Before we finish our conversation, I ask Chang what it is that ties the pieces in this concert together beyond the fact of the composers’ shared nationality – what is the idea that runs through the program?

She pauses a moment to consider.

‘Life is beautiful – no matter what. I think I would say that, actually.’

‘Because the circumstances of the main works...through it all, through Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky, there is so much beauty in life. And out of so much pain, out of so much suffering, such beauty can come.’

‘I think that’s probably what art is here for – great music, great paintings, great literary works. Nobody’s life is what it seems on the facade. Everybody has his or her own story.’

But whatever the circumstances, there’s always the other side of the coin. And that’s when art, music, poetry, beauty comes into life. And I think this music perfectly shows that what is beautiful about life is living it with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and giving everything you’ve got. *That is life.* And that is what makes life worth it and beautiful is that you give it all you have, that *you are life. You are your life.*

‘And Tchaikovsky for me is always so moving because he doesn’t shy away from his issues.’

‘He faces every issue head on in his music. And this shows not only his strength, but how fragile he was – and yet he tries again, and he builds again for the next climax, for the next climax. And he goes again and again and again. He never gives up to the last note. And I think this shows the resilience of his spirit – and not only his spirit, but our spirit, because he was just a human being like all of us. It’s a part of what we do every day in our lives.’

‘So life is beautiful, really.’

Beautiful also is the thought that, nearly 150 years after Tchaikovsky sat down to write a symphony inspired by victory over fate, his music demonstrates his ultimate victory. Through his music his spirit lives on, soaring up and filling the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, inspiring and touching other souls on the other side of the world from his homeland.



Mstislav Rostropovich at the piano with Sergei Prokofiev looking on, c.1952.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES



Behzod Abduraimov with Vladimir Ashkenazy on tour with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2009.

2009 – BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV: A STAR IS BORN

In 2009, aged just 18, Behzod Abduraimov won the London International Piano Competition with Sergei Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto – a performance *The Daily Telegraph* (UK) described as 'the most enthralling roller-coaster ride of a Prokofiev Third Concerto imaginable.'

That same year, Abduraimov joined Principal Conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on our Asian Tour, performing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1 in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Kuala Lumpur.

Soon after, Abduraimov signed with international artist management agency HarrisonParrott, and with the Decca Classics record label, and his star has continued to rise, and we have been delighted to perform with him again on our 2010 European Tour, in 2012, and most recently in 2019.

Welcome back to Sydney, Behzod!

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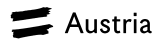


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