20 & 21 June 2025

RAVEL & DEBUSSY

Presenting Partner







rincipal Partner

WELCOME

Welcome to **Ravel & Debussy**, a beautiful soirée in the intimate surroundings of the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House.

Handpicked Wines is delighted to be a Series Presenting Partner of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's *Cocktail Hour with Handpicked Wines* series, now in its second year.

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

We draw on both technical skill and creative inspiration to craft wines that elevate and enhance experiences; just as the superb artists of the Orchestra invite you to embrace their performances.

The music of this concert showcases the work of two of the great Impressionist composers, Ravel and Debussy, alongside the lesserknown Turina. Shimmering musical landscapes provide a wonderful opportunity to experience a rare combination of instruments.

The carefully chosen wines and closeness to the outstanding musicians of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra create a uniquely wonderful experience. Our shared values of creativity and technical excellence are the signature of everything we do, and it has been a great pleasure to see our partnership unfold.

I do hope you enjoy the **Ravel & Debussy** concert and the wines that have been selected to enhance this exquisite performance.

William Dong Managing Director Handpicked Wines



2025 CONCERT SEASON

COCKTAIL HOUR WITH HANDPICKED WINES Friday 20 June. 6pm

Saturday 21 June, 6pm

RAVEL & DEBUSSY

EXQUISITE COLOURS

GENEVIEVE LANG presenter

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937) Introduction and Allegro for flute, clarinet, harp and string quartet (1905)

EMMA SHOLL flute FRANCESCO CELATA clarinet EMMA JEZEK violin SERCAN DANIS violin TOBIAS BREIDER viola KRISTY CONRAU cello LOUISIC DULBECCO harp

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918) **Sonata for flute, viola and harp, L137** (1915) i. Pastorale (Lento, dolce rubato) ii. Interlude (Tempo di minuetto) iii. Finale (Allegro moderato ma risoluto)

EMMA SHOLL flute SANDRO COSTANTINO viola LOUISIC DULBECCO harp

JOAQUÍN TURINA (1882-1949) *La Oración del torero* (The Bullfighter's Prayer), Op.33 (1925)

EMMA JEZEK violin SERCAN DANIS violin TOBIAS BREIDER viola KRISTY CONRAU cello Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

Estimated durations

Ravel – 12 minutes Debussy – 18 minutes Turina – 9 minutes

The concert will run for approximately 1 hour

Cover image Wendy Kong and Monique Irik Photo by Craig Abercrombie

Presenting Partner



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ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT MAURICE RAVEL

In some exasperation, Ravel once asked a friend, 'Doesn't it ever occur to those people that I can be "artificial" by nature?' 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 areat 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 areat Piano Trio, written during the War, puts paid to any idea that Ravel's music lacks an emotional heart.

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 in 1905

Ravel's works are frequently, exquisite simulacra of existing styles and forms. In *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, he pays homage to the style of the French Baroque master. In *Gaspard de la nuit* he 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'.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE INTRODUCTION AND ALLEGRO

Davd Garrett writes:

Ravel almost missed the deadline for the Introduction and Allegro with harp, composed in 1905 amidst the strain and flurry following his fourth (and last) attempt to win the Prix de Rome. Ravel was disaualified, and the scandal was one of those 'affaires' which the informed French public passionately enjoy. Ravel's chief champion in the press. the millionaire newspaper owner Alfred Edwards, invited the composer to recover cruising on his yacht. In the haste to equip himself with new clothes for the trip Ravel left the manuscript of the harp composition on the counter at the hatter's. He wrote to a friend that 'a week of continuous work and three sleepless nights' had enabled him to finish the piece 'for better or for worse'.

The harp was caught up at the time in a marketing battle between the rival firms of Pleyel and Erard. Pleyel had commissioned Debussy's *Danse sacrée et danse profane* (1904) to demonstrate the virtues of their new invention, the 'chromatic harp'. This was an attempted improvement on the double-action harp invented by the French piano builder Sébastien Erard in 1810. The Erard firm commissioned Ravel's work (the Pleyel 'chromatic' harp, which created more problems than it solved, was shortlived, and both works are now played on descendants of the Erard-type harp). Ravel's work shows off the harp, which no doubt suited his sponsor, but also came naturally to a composer who admitted having set out to compose the most difficult-to-execute piano piece ever written ('Scarbo' in Gaspard de la Nuit). The Introduction and Allegro. though often called Ravel's Septet, is really a miniature concerto or concert-piece for harp 'accompanied by string quartet. flute and clarinet'. The Introduction itself has been described as 'a preface without an ending', but in it are stated the two main ideas on which the whole rhapsodic work is based: a succession of intervals of fifths and fourths, then a rising and falling scale sounded by the strings. Once the Allegro begins Ravel displays almost all the feats of virtuosity of which the harp is capable. He answers the technical challenge with beauty, and the piece delights the ear by the sheen, transparency, and unexpected richness of its sonority.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT CLAUDE DEBUSSY

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 in short pants. Like Beethoven in the *Pastoral* Symphony, Debussy's musical response to the world was one of 'feeling rather than painting'.



Claude Debussy in 1913, drawn by Iovan Thièle

He was more drawn to the literary ideas of Symbolisme, and such 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.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ABOUT THE SONATA FOR FLUTE, VIOLA AND HARP

The Sonata for flute, viola and harp was one of a projected series of six works for different, often unusual chamber combinations of which Debussy only lived to complete three. He was at the time seriously ill with the cancer that killed him, and it was during the First World War. He described this work as being 'the music of a Debussy I no longer know ... I don't know whether one should laugh or cry or both.' The scoring of the piece is a stroke of genius in itself: there is no shortage of flute and harp duets, but adding the viola, which can sing like a wind instrument or be plucked like the harp adds a whole new dimension in sonority.

Each of the three movements is faster than its predecessor, which gives the piece an improvisatory sense of gradual unfolding. The opening movement is deliberately rhapsodic (Debussy makes a point of marking it *rubato*). The central *Minuetto* introduces more structured rhythmic ideas leading into the at times emphatic finale.

ABOUT JOAQUÍN TURINA

Turina was born in the Andalusian city of Seville into a family of Italian origin and had his first successes as composer and pianist in his native city. Like many Spanish musicians, he felt he needed to study abroad, so travelled to Paris in 1905 where he enrolled at the Schola Cantorum. In fact, however, he absorbed more of the influence of anti-academic composers like Debussy, and at the urging of his friends, composer Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albéniz, he began to explore traditional Spanish music as the basis for his own.

With Falla he returned to Spain with the outbreak of World War I in 1914 where he was highly regarded for chamber works as well as music for orchestra and the stage, and in 1930 he was appointed Professor of Composition at the Madrid Conservatorium.



Joaquín Turina

ABOUT THE BULLFIGHTER'S PRAYER

The Bullfighter's Prayer was composed in 1925, originally for a consort of four variously-sized lutes built and played by members of the Aguilar family of Murcia, who commissioned a number of works for their instruments from the 1920s to the 1940s. (The individual parts, though sadly not the score, of Turina's original version were recently rediscovered after 50 years.) Turina soon arranged the work for conventional string quartet and in 1927 made a version of string orchestra.

Its single movement is highly varied. It begins with a mysterious opening, out which emerges a passionate melody that reminds us of Turina's Andalusian heritage (Andalucía was the centre of Islamic culture from the eighth to the thirteenth century, and Arab influences can still be heard in the its traditional songs.) This is succeeded by a slower section whose rich harmony recalls Debussy or Delius. Faster, more febrile music leads to a climax, and the last minutes of the piece are calm and ethereal, with long-held pedal notes and a generally high-lying texture. Just what the Bullfighter was praying for, though, is a mystery.

David Garrett © 2004 (Ravel)

Gordon Kerry © 2015 (Debussy) © 2008 (Turina) ©2025 (composer biographies)

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Embark on a sensory journey with this Yarra Valley Chardonnay, boasting vibrant aromas of fresh citrus and stone fruit delicately mingled with hints of oak.

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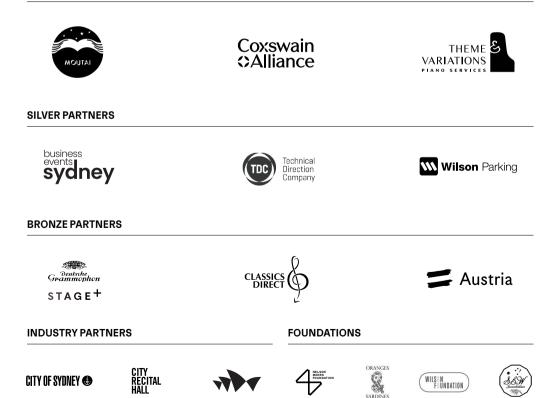


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