22 May 2025

STIRRING STRINGS IN THE CITY

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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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.

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2025 CONCERT SEASON

CLASSICS IN THE CITY
Thursday 22 May, 7pm

City Recital Hall,
Angel Place

STIRRING STRINGS IN THE CITY

DRIVING AND INSPIRING

ANDREW HAVERON violin/director
MUSICIANS OF THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ (1909–1969)
Concerto for String Orchestra (1948)
i. Allegro
ii. Andante
iii. Vivo

JOSEF SUK (1874–1935)
Meditation on the Old Czech Chorale *St Wenceslas*, Op.35a (1914)

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Serenade for Strings in E major, Op.22 (1875)
i. Moderato
ii. Tempo di valse
iii. Scherzo: Vivace
iv. Larghetto
v. Finale: Allegro vivace

Pre-concert talk
By Douglas Emery in the Function Room Level 1 at 6.15pm

Estimated durations
Bacewicz – 15 minutes
Suk – 7 minutes
Dvořák – 27 minutes

The concert will run for approximately one hour

Cover image
By Craig Abercrombie

YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ (1909–1969)
Concerto for String Orchestra (1948)

Bacewicz's three movement piece is neo-classical in manner and shape, dominated by powerful and constantly engaging rhythms contrasting with moments of luxurious stillness, especially in the central slow movement.

It dates from 1948, the year that saw the first Arab-Israeli War, the assassination of the Mahatma Gandhi, and HV (Doc) Evatt elected to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly.

Contemporary music included Stravinsky's Mass, Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915,* and Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*.

Grażyna Bacewicz.
Photo courtesy Polish Music Center.

JOSEF SUK (1874–1935)
Meditation on the Old Czech Chorale *St Wenceslas*, Op.35a (1914)

In this very short piece Suk used a traditional hymn associated with the 10th century St Václav (aka Good King Wenceslas, although he was actually a duke) who was martyred and is the patron saint of Bohemia. Originally a curtain-raiser for string quartet, Suk arranged it for string orchestra the same year as Europe descended into war.

Both versions date from 1914, the year that saw the United States occupy Vera Cruz, Mexico, the outbreak of World War I, and the first double dissolution of the Australian Parliament.

Contemporary music included Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor, Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto, and Vaughan Willliams' *A London Symphony.*

Josef Suk in 1906

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Serenade for Strings in E major, Op.22 (1875)

Like the serenades of classical composers such as Mozart, Dvořák's is more than four movements (in this case, five), but of course differs from the classical model by being for strings, not winds, and therefore not 'outdoor' music. It concentrates on dance rhythms (including the march-like opening) rather than formal elaboration.

It was composed in 1875, the year that saw the signing of the Treaty of the Metre, the establishment of what would become the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the All England Croquet Club replace a croquet lawn with a lawn tennis court at Wimbledon, London.

Contemporary music included Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1, Grieg's incidental music to *Peer Gynt,* and Bizet's *Carmen*.

Dvořák in 1889
Source: Wikimedia Commons

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ANDREW HAVERON violin/director
Sydney Symphony Concertmaster,
Vicki Olsson Chair

Concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra since 2013, Andrew Haveron has been described by *The Sunday Times* as '...a charismatic and brilliant soloist who needs fear no comparison.'

A laureate of some of the most prestigious international violin competitions, Andrew studied in London at the Purcell School and the Royal College of Music. Andrew is a highly respected soloist, chamber musician and concertmaster. As a soloist, Andrew has collaborated with conductors such as Jiří Bělohlávek, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Roger Norrington, David Robertson, Stanislaw Skrowachewski and John Wilson, performing a broad range of well-known and less familiar concertos with many of the UK's finest orchestras.

His performance of William Walton's Violin Concerto with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2015 was nominated for a Helpmann Award. Andrew's playing has also been featured on many film and video-game soundtracks, including Disney's *Fantasia* game, which includes his performance of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with the Academy of St. Martin-in-the Fields. Andrew has also appeared recently in recitals around Australia with pianists Anna Goldsworthy, Piers Lane and Simon Tedeschi.

In 1999 Andrew was appointed first violinist of the internationally acclaimed Brodsky Quartet. A busy schedule saw the quartet perform and broadcast in their unique style all over the world. Amassing a repertoire of almost 300 works, they enjoyed collaborations with outstanding artists and commissioned many new works from today's composers, and were famed for their barrier-breaking cross-genre projects. Andrew recorded more than fifteen albums with the quartet, receiving numerous industry awards. Andrew has also appeared with other chamber groups such as the Nash and Hebrides ensembles, the Logos Chamber Group, Kathy Selby and Ensemble Q.

Andrew is also in great demand as a concertmaster and orchestra director, and has worked with all the major symphony orchestras in the UK and many further afield. In 2007 he became concertmaster of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, broadcasting frequently on BBC Radio and enjoying many appearances at the BBC Proms including the famous Last Night. Joining the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2012 Andrew also led the World Orchestra for Peace at the request of its conductor Valery Gergiev, and again in 2018 at the request of Donald Runnicles. In 2004 Andrew received an honorary Doctorate from the University of Kent for his services to music.

He plays on a violin made in 1757 by GB Guadagnini; a generous loan to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra by Vicki Olsson for Andrew's use.

Photo by Jez Smith

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ

Like those of her near contemporaries, Witold Lutosławski and Andrzej Panufnik, Grażyna Bacewicz's career was inevitably shaped by the occupation of her native Poland by the Nazis, and then, in the aftermath of World War II, her country's assimilation into the Soviet bloc. Born in Łódź, Bacewicz studied at the Warsaw Conservatory where she displayed considerable gifts as a composer, violinist and pianist, graduating in 1932. At the suggestion of Karol Szymanowski, she, like many young Polish musicians, travelled to Paris, where she studied violin with Carl Flesch and André Touret, and composition with Nadia Boulanger for a year. In 1935 she won the Wieniawski Competition for violin in Warsaw, and for the next two decades enjoyed a major career as a violinist – as soloist and ensemble player – until a car accident in 1954 confirmed her decision to concentrate on composition. Even during her concert career, Bacewicz had been prolific composer – this despite her protestations that she threw away lots of music as being inadequately crafted – and by the time of her death in 1969 her catalogue included some seven violin concertos, two for cello, one for viola as well as four symphonies, various other works and a host of solo and chamber works. She served on international competition juries, raised a family and wrote plays and novels.

The War and the descent of the Iron Curtain didn't completely isolate Bacewicz from western European music – especially after the death of Stalin and the thaw which allowed the first Warsaw Autumn Festival to go ahead in 1956 – but circumstances and temperament meant that her music tended more to explore the possibilities of diatonic, neoclassical musical language than, say, serialism.

Grażyna Bacewicz.
Photo courtesy Polish Music Center.

Bacewicz tended to avoid interviews and statements about her work, but did once say:

> The diversification of today's music and the tempo of its growth is inspiring. This is not only experimentation or an endeavour to find new forms as some are saying. In contemporary music there are some genuine and great composers.... I disagree with those who maintain that once a composer develops her own style, she should stick to it. I find such an opinion totally alien; it impedes further development and growth. Every composition completed today, will belong to the past tomorrow. A progressive composer should not repeat herself. A composer should not only deepen her creation and improve upon it, but should also expand its scope. I believe that in my music, even though I do not consider myself an innovator, a certain trend of progression is discernible.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE CONCERTO FOR STRING ORCHESTRA

The first half of the 20th century was arguably a golden age for string orchestra music, with masterpieces like Vaughan Williams' 'Tallis' Fantasia, the string orchestra version of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht,* Britten's *Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge* and Stravinsky's Concerto in D.

The latter is more or less a direct contemporary of Bacewicz's Concerto, composed in 1948, and the two both cultivate an idiosyncratic and energetic neo-classical manner.

Bacewicz's piece, unsurprisingly, shows an intimate knowledge of string technique, and of the many possibilities of massed-string timbres. While the piece is written without key-signature, it begins in the Dorian mode (a scale on the note D that uses only the white notes of the piano keyboard); this means that the motoric figures in the first violin that set the piece in motion keep hitting the open D string and exploiting its resonance.

The opening section of the piece uses layers of these repeated figures (ostinatos) with three strands moving at different speeds. Bacewicz doesn't stick with the whites, either, so the harmony is often quite dissonant but the chords spread across the orchestra to maintain clarity. A second section introduces a crisp six-note figure that will pervade the piece, as Bacewicz explores smaller groups within the band, and features solo instruments. The initial material returns, now centred on G – the violins' lowest note – for added heft, and dissolves into a luminous widely-spaced composite chord.

By contrast the slow movement moves away from open strings into 'flat' keys. The violins are divided into four lines, all muted, with the second of each group playing ponticello – a method of making a spooky shimmery sound. This night music develops slowly into a fully scored climax for the whole band; this leads to a new section, more lightly-scored and powered by gently pulsing triplets, that admits fragments of lyrical melody low in the violins.

The finale is an athletic dance (mainly) in 6/8 that uses angular melodic patterns and rhythmic displacement (both syncopation and the unexpected use of, say, 5/8 bars) to create excitement. There are dramatic moments of stasis, where long-held trills provide a backdrop for brief solo introspections, and passages where again Bacewicz creates three-strand textures. After a further briefly nostalgic section the pace builds up, with interpolations of a terse cadential motif (the notes A and D in octaves) that suggests the end is nigh. And so it is, revealing the music's inevitable return to the resonance of open D strings in all instruments.

The Concerto had its American premiere in 1952, where well-meaning but patronising critic Milton Berliner reported that 'actually, there was nothing feminine about Miss Bacewicz's piece. It was vigorous, even virile, with (in the first movement) a pulsing, throbbing rhythm and bold thematic material. It was either conservatively modern or radically classical. In any case it was worth listening to...'

The piece featured at the first Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1956, and at several since.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT JOSEF SUK

Returning home from New York for his summer vacation in May 1894, Antonín Dvorák was welcomed at the main railway station in Prague by a group of Bohemian musicians who wanted to persuade him to stay in Prague that night for a gala performance of his work. (He refused, desperate to get to his summer house and drink beer in the local village.) Among the well-wishers was the young violinist and composer Josef Suk, who had been Dvorák's student at the Prague Conservatorium three years earlier. In fact, Dvorák had been so impressed with the talents of the then seventeen-year-old Suk that he employed him and Oskar Nedbal to make piano duo versions of his trilogy of concert overtures, *Nature, Life and Love* (now known as *In Nature's realm, Carnival* and *Othello*). Suk and Nedbal were also founding members of what became the Czech String Quartet in 1893, in which Suk played until his retirement in 1933 and in which capacity he frequently played Dvorák's chamber music.

Suk may, however, have had another motive for meeting Dvorák's train that day in 1894. As Dvorák's favourite student, he had spent time with the composer and his family at his summer house outside Prague, and had become very fond of Dvorák's daughter Otilie (Otilka). By the time the family returned permanently to Europe in 1895, Otilka was an attractive young woman of eighteen, and she and Suk soon fell in love. Dvorák himself was so focussed on Suk's professional development that, it is said, he was the one person unaware of the romance. But he certainly sanctioned the match, and on 17 November 1898 – also the date of Dvorák's silver wedding anniversary – Suk and Otilka were married in great style.

Josef Suk in 1906

ABOUT THE MEDITATION ON THE OLD CZECH CHORALE *ST WENCESLAS*

Anthony Cane writes:

In exploring the *St Wenceslas* Chorale, Josef Suk turns to one of the earliest, most hallowed monuments of Czech music to invoke a prayer for survival in the first global conflict of the 20th century and to seek a message of hope.

Embroiled in 1914 in a war which was not of their making, and in which they found themselves forced into battle against Russians and other fellow Slavs, the Czech people's attitude to the military ambitions of their Imperial rulers in Vienna was fundamentally subversive rather than supportive. Indeed, they would seize on the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 to win independence in the new state of Czechoslovakia.

Suk's Meditation on the *St Wenceslas* Chorale was first performed in string quartet form in September 1914, in the anxious days following the outbreak of the First World War. Throughout the war it would be used to introduce performances by the renowned Bohemian (or Czech) Quartet, of which Suk, its second violinist for 40 years, was effectively artistic principal. A version of the Meditation for string orchestra followed two months later, in November 1914.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Bohemian Quartet – Karel Hoffmann (1st violin), Josef Suk (2nd violin), Hanuš Wihan (cello), Oskar Nedbal (viola).

The chorale had long been a popular prayer of intercession to the patron saint of Bohemia, the 10th-century Duke Václav (or Wenceslas), martyred by fratricide while still in his 20s, who was himself the grandson of a martyred Christian saint, Duchess Ludmila. To the citizens of Prague he remains the saint whose equestrian statue dominates the city's central Wenceslas Square, while English-speakers venerate him as the 'good king' of the Christmas carol. Since the 12th century, the hymn to St Wenceslas has encouraged a sense of patriotic identity among the Czech people, both in its original plea to 'have mercy upon us, comfort the sad, and ward off evil' and in further stanzas added over the centuries as the original, severely simple melody was itself extended and elaborated.

Josef Suk focused his contemplation of the noble chorale on words which he actually wrote into his score, 'Let us not perish, nor the generations to come.'

From this verbal motto, and after some exploratory contemplation of the chorale in its later, extended form, he arrives at a sturdy five-note phrase representing the essence of the original prayer, first hinted at by the cellos, then established by the violins and affirmed solemnly over *pizzicato* support in the bass. Then, out of a clear sky, comes turbulence from afar. The chorale motif defends itself with grim intensity and steadfastly weathers the storm. In the end the threat recedes.

After the war, in 1920, Suk composed two further works which, though independent in themselves, were linked with the *St Wenceslas* Meditation under the same opus number as his 'War Triptych' and dedicated to the young Czechoslovak Republic. *The Legend of the Dead Victors*, Op 35b, commemorates the sacrifice of all who suffered to secure the future, and the march *Towards a New Life*, Op 35c, subsequently dubbed the Ceremonial Sokol March as winner of a competition for the physical training units of the Sokol organisation, won the highest musical award (albeit designated second prize) at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics.

A medieval icon of St Wenceslas

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

As an impecunious 30-something composer, recently married and living on the modest salary of a church organist and freelance string playing, Dvořák benefited immensely from a growing sense among those in political power of responsibility to the arts. The local government, the Diet of Bohemia, had begun allocating part of its budget to arts funding through the newly founded Conservatory in Prague when Dvořák was young, and in the 1870s the Imperial Government in Vienna, through its Ministry of Public Education, made sums of money available in the form of fellowships or *stipendia* for young artists. With the backing of critic Eduard Hanslick and Johannes Brahms, Dvořák received financial support.

In 1877 Brahms wrote to his Berlin publisher, Simrock saying:

> I have been receiving a lot of pleasure for several years past from the work of Anton Dvořák of Prague…Dvořák has written all kinds of things, operas (Czech), symphonies, quartets, piano pieces. He is certainly a very talented fellow. And incidentally, poor! I beg you to consider that!

Simrock was duly impressed with the young composer's work and commissioned a set of Slavonic Dances for piano duo. These, as Simrock had expected, were an instant hit, and again in their orchestral version. Simrock made a huge profit, and Dvořák's reputation spread rapidly in Europe, such that by 1879 his 'Slavonic' String Quartet had been premiered by the ensemble led by the great Joseph Joachim, and Hans Richter had commissioned the work we now know as his Sixth Symphony for Berlin.

Dvořák in 1882

As Brahms' letter shows, Dvořák was already a prolific composer, and by the time he was fifty, Dvořák was at the height of his creativity and fame. In the late 1880s he had travelled to Russia and England, where In 1884 he conducted his works at the Albert Hall, St James's Hall and the Crystal Palace in London, (on the back of this his Requiem was composed for the Birmingham Festival); he had been showered with Imperial honours and honorary doctorates, and was about to become the founding head of the new National Conservatory in New York. The works of this period in his life show his life-long love of a 'national' music, while making significant experiments in form and structure, particularly in chamber music. Always remaining, as he said, a 'humble Czech musician', Dvořák believed that

> nothing must be too low or insignificant for the musician. When he walks he should listen to every whistling boy, every street singer or blind organ grinder…it is a sign of barrenness which such characteristic bits of music exist and are not heeded by the learned musicians of the age.

In the USA, Dvořák argued passionately for a national music that included elements and Native American and Black cultures, saying 'undoubtedly the germs for the best in music lie hidden among all the races that are commingled in this great country.'

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE SERENADE

Among the works composed with the assistance of Brahms and Hanslick is Dvořák's five-movement Serenade for Strings, composed in a mere fortnight in May 1875 and first performed in Prague the following year. Dvořák's mastery of the technique and the available range of textures of the string band is extraordinary. Many of the movements are in relatively simple ternary forms where the main material is contrasted with music of a strongly different character, and the piece as a whole makes judicious use of motifs that appear in different guises.

The opening Moderato begins with a charmingly lyrical theme, such as a lover might sing beneath a window, which is passed from voice to voice. This contrasts with more emphatic dotted-rhythm melody in the movement's centre – a reference, perhaps to the march that would open and close a classical serenade. The minor key waltz with its gentle cross-rhythms, is tinged with nostalgia; even its major-key trio has a dying fall, beginning in rustic simplicity but traversing some turbulent waters.

The Scherzo (whose fleet-footed 2/4 metre reminds us that the polka was a Bohemian dance) has an slower, impassioned central section whose contrast is underlined by the shift from the movement's home key of F major to A major tonality. And in the *larghetto* – foreshadowing some of Dvořák's later *dumka*-style works – the lyrical introspection grows into a lovely duet for violin and viola before being interrupted by a passage in dance rhythm. Driving rhythms, using short, often-repeated motifs, dominate the energetic finale, which closes after an unexpected moment of quiet contemplation – based on the opening movement – is brusquely swept away.

Notes by Gordon Kerry, Anthony Cane (Suk ©2007)

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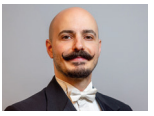

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