

MEDIA RELEASE

Experience the magic of three great Stravinsky ballets with David Robertson and the SSO

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– David Robertson



In what is set to be a major artistic highlight of the 2016 season, Sydney Symphony Orchestra Chief Conductor and Artistic Director David Robertson will conduct three great ballet scores Stravinsky composed for the world-famous Ballets Russes at the beginning of the 20th century. This will be a rare opportunity to hear three ballets – *The Firebird*, *The Rite of Spring* and *Petrushka* – performed by the SSO at the Sydney Opera House across two weeks this August.

“The Stravinsky ballets – the three that he wrote for Sergei Diaghilev, the then director of the Ballets Russes – are incredibly well-known and loved and yet we tend not to be able to compare them close on to one another,” Robertson says. “The idea of having all three in one season is something I find very appealing because it allows you to hear Stravinsky growing and exploring and at the same time appreciate the incredible qualities that these ballets share in common despite their surface differences.”

Across three exciting concert programs, Robertson will also present the world premiere of a new commission by Australian Elliott Gyger; *The Wolf*, a concerto by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* composer Tan Dun; *The Desert Music* by American composer Steve Reich and Szymanowski’s seminal first violin concerto with returning soloist Christian Tetzlaff.

“The orchestration of Reich’s *Desert Music* is just sensational. When you have a 90-piece orchestra on stage, man this piece is gorgeous! It is just out of this world,” Robertson says. “*Desert Music* and *The Rite of Spring* say some very fascinating things about people and how we work as a species.”

Stravinsky was commissioned in 1909 to write *The Firebird* and the ballet had its premiere with the Ballets Russes the following year. He was 27 years old and it was his first major commission. Diaghilev then commissioned Stravinsky to write *Petrushka* for the 1911 season and *The Rite of Spring*, which shocked audiences and sparked a riot at its 1913 premiere in Paris. This did more good than harm – it was

a *succès de scandale* – and Stravinsky’s explosive score was a game-changer for the world of music, propelling the 30-year-old composer’s career into the stratosphere.

Renowned for his intelligent programming, Robertson has paired the ballets with contemporary works that will take audiences on a journey through the themes of Stravinsky’s music. The first program matches *The Rite of Spring* with Reich’s *Desert Music*, which is the perfect contemporary companion due to its ritualistic character and interlocking rhythmic patterns.

The second program will see Christian Tetzlaff return to the SSO to perform Szymanowski’s first violin concerto, a work that shares the opulence and colour of *The Firebird* and is almost decadent in its luscious effects. This concert will also feature Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe’s first SSO commission from 1965, *Sun Music I*.

The third program opens with the world premiere of Elliott Gyger’s *Acquisition*, a title that comes from a scene in *The Rite of Spring*: ‘The Acquisition of the Earth by Dancing’. *Petrushka* also finds a companion in Tan Dun’s *The Wolf*, a double bass concerto to be performed by SSO principal Alex Henery.

“In a weird way the separation of the words, ‘music’ and ‘dance’ is one that a number of cultures see as artificial,” Robertson says. “Storytelling through mime, gesture, dance or music is very much part of the whole idea of *Petrushka*. In this ballet, a lifeless puppet suddenly has the Pinocchio-like ability to feel and we feel with him. It tells the story of us, as people, through something that is not us (the story of a puppet) in the same way the wolf totem in Tan Dun’s work tells the story about the people of the Mongolian plains and the importance that the wolf had within that culture.”

#ENDS#

THE RITE OF SPRING: PRIMAL

Thu 4 Aug, 1.30pm
Fri 5 Aug, 8pm
Sat 6 Aug, 2pm

Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House

REICH The Desert Music
STRAVINSKY The Rite of Spring

David Robertson conductor
Synergy Vocals

PETRUSHKA: IMMORTAL

Wed 17 Aug, 6.30pm
Thu 18 Aug, 1.30pm
Fri 19 Aug, 11am
Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House

GYGER Acquisition* [P]

TAN DUN The Wolf – Double Bass Concerto
STRAVINSKY *Petrushka* (1911)*
[P] Premiere

* These works will be performed on Fri 19 Aug
* Duration of Fri 19 Aug 11am performance
approx. 1hr 5mins (no interval)

David Robertson conductor
Alex Henery double bass

THE FIREBIRD: RAVISHING

Wed 10 Aug, 8pm
Fri 12 Aug, 8pm
Sat 13 Aug, 8pm

Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House

SCULTHORPE Sun Music I
SZYMANOWSKI Violin Concerto No.1
STRAVINSKY The Firebird – Ballet (1910)

David Robertson conductor
Christian Tetzlaff violin

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For interviews and photos contact:
Bridget Cormack
Head of Communications, Sydney Symphony
Orchestra
Tel: (02) 8215 4648 Mob: 0404 816 764
Email:
Bridget.Cormack@sydneysymphony.com

