SEASON 2008
TEA & SYMPHONY
PRESENTED BY KAMBLY

HOMELANDS

Friday 29 August | 11am
Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Tomas Netopil conductor
Arabella Steinbacher violin

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD (1897–1957)
Violin Concerto in D, Op.35
Allegro nobile
Romance (Andante)
Finale (Allegro assai vivace)

BEDŘICH SMETANA (1824–1884)
Má vlast (My Country):
Vyšehrad (The High Castle)
Vltava (The Moldau)
Šárka

Music from this concert has been recorded for broadcast across Australia on ABC Classic FM 92.9.

Estimated timings:
24 minutes, 33 minutes

The concert will conclude at approximately 12.05pm

Presenting Partner

Biscuits at Sydney Symphony Tea & Symphony concerts kindly supplied by Kambly
It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this concert in the 2008 Tea & Symphony series.

A biscuit in the finest Swiss tradition can evoke images or memories of Switzerland itself; music is even more powerful in its ability to stir feelings of belonging, pride and nostalgia. And so in this concert we celebrate ‘Homelands’.

For Smetana – the first of the Czech nationalist composers – that homeland was Czech-speaking Bohemia, and its sights and stories inspired the music we hear tonight (My Homeland). Korngold was one of the many composers who fled Europe in the 1930s and ended up in Hollywood, but he carried his Austrian heritage in his heart and it emerges in the romantic style of his music. As they say, ‘There’s no place like home.’

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Kambly is a way of life, dedicated to all those who appreciate the difference between the best and the merely good. In this way it is fitting that we partner with the internationally acclaimed Sydney Symphony, whose vision is to ignite and deepen people’s love of live symphonic music.

We hope you enjoy this morning’s rich and inspiring program, and look forward to welcoming you at the next concert in the Tea & Symphony series.

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KORNGOLD Violin Concerto

Between 1935 and 1938 Korgold and his family lived a transatlantic existence. While writing his opera Die Kathrin he adapted Mendelssohn’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream music for Max Reinhardt’s film production of the play for Warner Bros, and on back-and-forth visits to Hollywood composed the music for several other pictures, including Anthony Adverse, which won him his first Academy Award.

In January 1938, leaving most of his family behind, Korgold left Vienna for Hollywood to compose music for The Adventures of Robin Hood, expecting to return in a few months for the premiere of Die Kathrin. But Germany’s annexation of Austria in March made a return home impossible, and his family escaped Austria on the last unrestricted train. Korgold’s belongings and assets were confiscated by the Nazis. With his Vienna house already under German occupation, he could imagine his collection of music being consigned to the flames. With extraordinary courage, Korgold’s publishers broke into his house in the dead of night and smuggled his scores into the USA inside shipments of newly published music.

Films were now Korgold’s only source of income. When his father berated him for not writing absolute music, Korgold replied that if anyone in America wanted to perform his music they knew where to find him. His wife said later: ‘It was almost as if he had made a vow not to write any more until Hitler was defeated.’

The Violin Concerto was to be Korgold’s return to the concert hall. Ideas for this work seem first to have surfaced in 1937. A theme from the film Another Dawn, scored that year, is the principal melody of the concerto’s first movement; a transformation of the opening title theme for The Prince and the Pauper forms the basis for the concerto’s finale.

But Korgold did no serious work on the piece until the war in Europe was over. The violinist Bronislaw Huberman revived a joke that dated back to Korgold’s teenage years: ‘Erich, where’s my violin concerto?’ At dinner one night in 1945, Huberman asked the usual question, whereupon Korgold went to the piano and played the opening theme.

When the concerto was ready for performance, Huberman was vague about when he might perform it. When Jascha Heifetz expressed interest, Korgold didn’t
hesitate: ‘Huberman, I haven’t been unfaithful yet, I’m not engaged…but I have flirted.’ Huberman’s death a short time later brought this chapter in the concerto’s life to an end.

For Korngold, the concerto symbolised his re-emergence into a musical mainstream in which he no longer felt completely secure. He was particularly nervous about the critics’ response to his frankly emotional musical language. In the weeks before the premiere, he wrote: ‘I want a confirmation, an answer to a question of decisive importance for me: is there still a place and a chance for music with expression and feeling, with long melodic themes, formed and developed on the principles of the classic masters – music conceived in the heart and not constructed on paper?’

The premiere, in St Louis with Heifetz, was a success. But in New York, Irving Kolodin’s cheap jibe: ‘More corn than gold,’ hurt the composer deeply. Posterity’s answer to Korngold’s question has been mixed: the work languished on the fringes of the repertoire until the 1980s. It is now the most performed of all Korngold’s concert works.

Listening Guide

By 1945 Korngold was concerned that some of his best musical ideas were disappearing as each film was taken out of circulation. He had no hesitation in re-casting film themes in his concert music.

The first movement (Allegro nobile) is primarily lyrical. The violin joins the orchestra from the opening bars, with the theme adapted from the one Korngold first wrote for Another Dawn. The gentle second subject was first used in Juarez (1938). The vibrant coda offers one of the few opportunities for overtly virtuosic display in this movement.

The Romance is almost a love scene between soloist and orchestra. For the Romance’s lavish outpouring of melodic ideas, Korngold drew on his Anthony Adverse score, but created anew the haunting misterioso episode at the movement’s core, which recurs at the end. In a similar manner to the last movement of Samuel Barber’s violin concerto, Korngold establishes a decisive change of mood in the Finale, a set of variations on the Prince and the Pauper theme.

ABRIDGED FROM A NOTE BY PHILLIP SAMETZ ©2000
SMETANA Three tone poems from My Country

The first seed of a monumental symphonic cycle in honour of his homeland seems to have come to Smetana one day in 1867. Visiting the forests in southern Bohemia, he came upon the spot where two small rivulets merge to become the fledgling River Otava, and he mentally followed the course of the Otava until it flowed into the Vltava, and onwards to become the greatest river of Bohemia.

Serious work on a pair of symphonic poems, Vyšehrad and Vltava, began in September 1874, but by this time Smetana was within a few weeks of facing a musician's greatest tragedy, total deafness. The disaster seemed to spur on his work. When Vyšehrad was first performed, in March 1875, it had to be repeated, and at the premiere of Vltava a month later, a youthful Leoš Janáček was standing near the orchestra: ‘At the end a tumultuous roar fused into the name Smetana!’

When the six poems of My Country were performed as a complete cycle for the first time in 1882 the occasion was one ‘which the Czech musical world counts among its greatest celebrations...never has there been such an exalted mood in any Czech assembly...’ Today, My Country is no longer the exclusive property of the Czechs. Exploring universal wellsprings of national sentiment, it transcends the narrow limits of a particular patriotism and becomes an archetypal hymn of love for country.

Listening Guide

Vyšehrad. As the River Vltava (Moldau in German) approaches Prague, the huge and venerable rock Vyšehrad rises sheer from the water's edge, dominating the entrance to the city. This was once the proud home of Bohemia's legendary first dynasty, the Přemyslid kings and princes. The opening harp motif, which evokes the remote and glorious past of Vyšehrad, is also the central theme uniting the cycle. Recurring towards the end of Vltava, it stands not only for the physical manifestation of the ancient rock, or high castle, but also as a symbol of the pride and glory of the nation.

Vltava. The sources of the Vltava – two springs, one cold and one warm – are represented by flutes and clarinets respectively; strings introduce the Vltava theme, which recurs throughout the piece in the manner of a rondo.
Horns and trumpets suggest a forest hunt; from a village festival come the strains of a polka; against delicately shimmering orchestration, water nymphs dance in the moonlight. The Vltava theme returns, before plunging into the rapids of St John. The stream emerges a powerful river, striking out proudly and powerfully to meet its destiny – Vyšehrad and Prague, and then dying away into the distance.

ˇSárka. Smetana writes: This poem depicts not the countryside, but action – the legend of the maiden Šárka. It opens with a portrayal of the enraged girl swearing vengeance on the whole male race because of her lover’s infidelity. From afar can be heard the approach of Ctirad and his armed men, coming to punish Šárka and her rebel maidens. As he draws near Ctirad hears feigned cries for help from a maiden bound to a tree. On seeing the maiden, Šárka, Ctirad is so struck by her beauty that he falls passionately in love with her and sets her free. She gives him and his men a potion, which makes them merry and intoxicates them, so that they fall asleep. At a signal from Šárka’s horn the rebel maidens pour forth from their hiding places to commit their bloody deed. The horror of mass slaughter, and the passion and fury of Šárka in fulfilling her revenge, bring the poem to an end.

The legend of the Bohemian Amazon and her band who sought retribution by slaughtering an army of men (according to tradition in a valley not far from Prague airport) is vividly depicted. The opening section portrays the intense, though controlled, rage of the heroine; a march heralds the approach of Ctirad’s army; against the march, in a slow-moving clarinet theme, Šárka feigns the anguish that will ensnare Ctirad. Love music ensues, followed by carousal in the camp which ends (in ‘wrong’ bassoon notes) with the troops falling into a drunken slumber. Šárka’s horn gives the signal, and is answered by another; then a brief clarinet figure suggests a repentance of her action – but too late. The slaughter is swift and brutal.

ABRIDGED FROM A NOTE © ANTHONY CANE
Tomas Netopil studied violin and conducting in his native Czech Republic as well as at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm with Jorma Panula, who has taught many prominent conductors as well as leading conductor training programs in Australia. In 2002 he won the first Sir Georg Solti Conductors Competition at the Alte Oper Frankfurt.

Just 33 years old, he has recently been appointed Music Director of the National Theatre in Prague (the institution that represented the fulfilment of Smetana’s vision for Czech music). In his first season there he will conduct productions of Idomeneo and La finta giardiniera as well as concert performances of Salome and a new production of Katya Kabanova. Elsewhere he will conduct Così fan tutte (Valencia), Samson et Dalila (Antwerp), the revival of Busoni’s Doktor Faust (Bavarian State Opera), which he recently conducted in Munich, and The Marriage of Figaro for Bavarian State Opera and the Semper Oper Dresden. He has also conducted opera for the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Sao Carlos Lisbon and the Salzburg Festival.

In Italy he has conducted opera and concerts at most of the major venues, appearing with the Filarmonica della Scala, Accademia Santa Cecilia Roma, Teatro Regio Parma, Teatro del Maggio Musicale (Florence), Teatro Communale Bologna, Teatro Lirico Cagliari and at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice.

He has also conducted many of the leading orchestras in Europe, including the Staatskapelle Dresden, Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Royal Flemish Philharmonic, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Orchestre National du Capitole Toulouse, Orchestre National de Lille, Orchestre National de Montpellier, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and Staatsorchester Stuttgart, and works regularly with the Prague Symphony Orchestra, Brno Philharmonic and the Tonhalle Orchester in Zurich, among others. He has also conducted the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, and recent highlights have included a concert debut with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

For his Australian debut, Tomas Netopil conducts concerts with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra as well as the Sydney Symphony.
Arabella Steinbacher violin

Since her extraordinary debut in Paris in 2004 – performing Beethoven’s Violin Concerto at short notice – German violinist Arabella Steinbacher has become a rising international star, appearing with leading orchestras throughout Europe, America and Japan. Her diverse concerto repertoire includes those by Barber, Berg, Glazunov, Khachaturian, Milhaud, Prokofiev, Schnittke, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Szymanowski and Hartmann.

Arabella Steinbacher was born in Munich in 1981 to a German father and a Japanese mother (both musicians), and began studying violin at the age of three. At nine she became the youngest violin student of Ana Chumachenko. She received further guidance from Ivry Gitlis and attended masterclasses with Dorothy Delay and Kurt Sassmanshaus in Aspen. In 2001 she won an Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation scholarship, and from Anne-Sophie Mutter herself she received a bow by master luthier Benoît Rolland.

In recent seasons she has made debuts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, National Orchestra of Belgium, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and the National Orchestra of Spain. She has also toured with Vladimir Ashkenazy and the European Youth Orchestra, performed recitals in New York and San Francisco, and opened the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, performing with the NDR Symphony Orchestra and Christoph von Dohnányi.

Later this year she makes her debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields. She also performs at the Florence Maggio Musicale and the Beethoven Easter Festival in Prague, and in December will make her recital debut at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. Next year she will tour with the Netherlands Philharmonic (Spain) and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (China), and will perform Gubaidulina’s Offertorium in Paris.

Arabella Steinbacher is an active chamber musician and her partners include cellists Alban Gerhardt and Daniel Müller-Schott. Her award-winning recordings include violin concertos by Shostakovich and Milhaud as well as a French recital disc and Violino Latino, a collection of Spanish and South American pieces.

Arabella Steinbacher plays the ‘Booth’ Stradivarius (1716), generously provided by the Nippon Music Foundation. She made her Sydney Symphony debut in 2005 performing the Brahms Violin Concerto.
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