SEASON 2008
TEA & SYMPHONY
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THE BOYS

Friday 24 October | 11am
Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Dene Olding violin-director
Matthew Wilkie bassoon

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)
String Symphony No.10 in B minor
Adagio – Allegro

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Bassoon Concerto in B flat, K191
Allegro
Andante ma adagio
Rondo (Tempo di menuetto)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)
Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op.10
Introduction and Theme (Lento maestoso – Allegretto poco lento)
Variation 1. Adagio
Variation 2. March (Presto alla marcia)
Variation 3. Romance (Allegretto grazioso)
Variation 4. Aria italiana (Allegro brillante)
Variation 5. Bourrée Classique (Allegro e pesante)
Variation 6. Wiener Walzer (Lento – Vivace)
Variation 7. Moto perpetuo (Allegro molto)
Variation 8. Funeral March (Andante ritmico)
Variation 9. Chant (Lento)
Variation 10. Fugue and Finale (Allegro molto vivace – Molto animato – Lento e solenne)

PRESENTING PARTNER

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this concert in the 2008 Tea & Symphony series.

The classical music that we love enjoys the finest of old traditions. So it can be easy to forget that music is still being written afresh every day, and it's all too easy to forget that even the ‘great masters’ of generations past were young once.

This program is a reminder of how tremendous talent simply can’t be hidden. Great music, and the promise of greater to come, can pour from the pens of children and adolescents, giving us the elegance of Mendelssohn’s baroque-inspired string symphony, Mozart’s masterly understanding of the bassoon, and Britten’s virtuoso variations in grateful tribute to his teacher.

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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 the youthful inspiration in this morning’s program, and look forward to welcoming you at the next concert in the Tea & Symphony series.

Oscar A. Kambly
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MENDELSSOHN

String Symphony No.10 in B minor

The young Mendelssohn did not waste his time in idle pursuits. At the age of ten, he was already pursuing a carefully mapped out timetable that included Latin, mathematics, history, geography and languages as well as musical studies. He was learning violin and piano – he had given his first public performance at the age of nine – and studying harmony and composition with Carl Zelter, the director of the Singakademie, regularly turning in exercises in ‘figured bass, chorale, invertible counterpoint, and two- and three-part canon and fugue’. But where a life of such discipline might have been expected to produce only dry, academic exercises and childish imitations of the old masters, Mendelssohn thrived. He was soon composing in his own right and within a single year produced over 50 pieces, including three light operas. His early compositions show a clear debt to the models of the past – J.S. Bach at first and then Mozart and Haydn – but they also reveal the originality and imagination of the young composer. Goethe, who remembered meeting the seven-year-old Mozart, had no hesitation in ranking Mendelssohn’s keyboard improvisations ahead of Mozart’s.

It was as an exercise that Zelter suggested to Mendelssohn a series of string symphonies modelled on the famous set composed by CPE Bach in 1773. Mendelssohn wrote 12 of these symphonies between 1821 and 1823; the first five favour solidly contrapuntal, Baroque-style textures in four parts, but Mendelssohn soon begins to experiment in structure and texture, and the later string symphonies explore more unusual groupings of instruments and show a fine understanding of the possibilities of drama inherent in sonata form.

String Symphony No.10 consists of a single movement with a slow introduction. The grave but elegant Adagio seems reluctant to move out of the minor mode, but once quietly and safely arrived in the relative major key of D, the gentle mood is punctuated by sudden unison outbursts, like drum rolls, until the first violins soothe the turbulence and the introduction floats away on delicate rising scale figures.

The Allegro plunges suddenly back into the depths with scurrying lower strings – two independent viola parts add a special richness to the texture – accompanying...
an agitated first subject set low in the violins’ register. The rising scale motif which ended the introduction so gently is now transformed into an aggressive unison ushering in the tempestuous transition to the second subject which is the eye of the movement’s storm: out of the urgency of the first subject Mendelssohn has derived a warm, relaxed theme, still stated first in the violins’ lower register but now reassuring and expansive. For his conclusion Mendelssohn makes a feature of his double violas by dropping out the violins altogether and the three lowest parts sigh themselves almost to nothing; then the busyness takes over again and the symphony rushes to a close with a flamboyant coda.

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MOZART
Bassoon Concerto in B flat, K191

Allegro
Andante ma adagio
Rondo (Tempo di menuetto)

Mozart completed his Bassoon Concerto K191 on 4 June 1774, when he was 18 years old. This was one of his earliest concertos, and his first for a woodwind instrument. Although he had received a commission from an amateur bassoonist, Baron Thaddäus von Dürnitz of Munich, modern scholars are doubtful that this, the only authenticated Mozart bassoon concerto, was written for him. The concerto’s solo writing certainly makes no concessions to amateurism. One of its leading modern interpreters, Milan Turkovic, observes that it must have seemed a bold composition, and it exploits all the notes available on the instrument at that time – a five-keyed bassoon requiring complicated fingering. Mozart’s concerto remains satisfying to modern players with more user-friendly instruments, and is still the most often played bassoon concerto.

The bassoon has acquired a reputation for jocularity, and there is indeed something humorous in its wide leaps between registers, and the plaintiveness of tone in its higher reaches. Mozart does not miss the possibilities this offers, but he is also fully awake to the expressiveness of the bassoon, liberated for once from
having to reinforce the bass line in the orchestra, and makes it sing eloquently.

Writing for solo bassoon and orchestra presents some challenges, because the bassoon’s natural register lies in the middle range, so that the orchestral accompaniment must confine itself to the bass and treble parts, leaving the middle as clear as possible. Here Mozart employs only strings, oboes and horns, and he reserves the use of the full orchestra for those moments when the bassoon is silent. F major is the most natural key for the bassoon, and Mozart resorts to it in the slow movement. The key of the flanking movements, however, B flat, brings into play the highest and the lowest notes available on the bassoon of the time, and Mozart goes to both extremes, though he always approaches the top B flat with a rising scale rather than a leap. The key of B flat, as will be heard at the very beginning, puts the orchestral horns very high in their range, keeping them out of the bassoon territory.

The first movement is the most ambitious: the orchestra providing a powerful framework for the bassoon’s leaps and runs. The second movement makes the most of the soloist’s capacity for singing cantabile, with phrases prophetic of the Countess’ aria ‘Porgi amor’ from *The Marriage of Figaro*. The finale is a rondo minuet. The bassoon provides the episodes between the main statements of the rondo theme, varying the theme, but only once, towards the end, playing the theme itself.

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**BRITTEN**

**Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge**

Britten’s Bridge Variations were among the first of his works to draw wide attention to a new voice in English music, a fresh gift not just of remarkable technical facility, but of a creative imagination unlike anything previously heard in 20th-century English music; independent both of the folk-song revival and of Elgarian Romanticism. It was written as an urgent commission when Boyd Neel and his orchestra were asked to play a new English work as a condition of giving a concert at the Salzburg Festival of 1937. Britten sketched the Variations in ten days, and the full score was ready in four weeks. The composer thus gave early notice of an ability which would endear him to artistic managements – he fulfilled his commissions on time. The assurance,
indeed the technical brilliance, of the work cannot be underestimated, but was not unexpected to those familiar with the young Britten’s previous achievement, both in writing for strings (Simple Symphony, 1934) and in variation form. Variation form came naturally to Britten, and he preferred it to sonata structures.

The choice of theme and the dedication ‘To F.B. A tribute with affection and admiration’ acknowledged Britten’s debt of gratitude to the composer Frank Bridge (1879–1941), who had noticed Britten’s talent even before the boy entered Gresham’s School, Norfolk, and continued to encourage and help him during his studies at the Royal College of Music. The Theme of the Variations comes from Bridge’s Idyll No.2 for string quartet. It is first heard played by a solo violin after the Introduction, where fanfare-like figures give an intimation of the harmonic world of the Variations as a whole, and is immediately developed by the full strings. Thereafter, the relationship of the variation to the theme is rarely obvious, though the characteristic melodic pattern of two falling fifths is often prominent.

Britten’s variation technique is daringly free, and his parody technique surveys widely contrasting musical outlooks – a guide to the elements, many of them European in origin, which were contributing to his new style of English music. Variation 1, a violin recitative, shows the influence of Mahler. In the March of the second variation there is a suggestion of goose-stepping: Britten and many of his artistic contemporaries were preoccupied with the shadow of fascism falling across Europe in the late 1930s. The pizzicato bass which accompanies the neoclassical melody of the Romance is closely related to Bridge’s theme. Britten’s parody of the coloratura runs and trills of Rossinian opera in Variation 4 is an affectionate one. The Vivaldian sequences of Variation 5 jibe at the neo-Baroque compositions of the inter-war years; certainly Variation 6 guys the Viennese Waltz. After a virtuosic Moto perpetuo, comes a Funeral March whose evocative sonorities, of muffled drums for example, show what surprising sounds can be extracted from the string band. The influence of Mahler is felt here, and in the Chant, while the Fugue most strongly reveals the influence of Frank Bridge’s craftsmanship. Finally Bridge’s theme is heard in a fully harmonised setting, imposing a note of serious and meditative intensity which counterbalances the wit and brilliance of much that has gone before.

© DAVID GARRETT
Dene Olding is recognised as one of Australia’s most outstanding instrumentalists and has achieved a distinguished career in many aspects of musical life.

As a soloist, he appears regularly with all the major Australian orchestras and has worked with conductors such as Edo de Waart, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Stuart Challender, Sir Charles Mackerras, Jorge Mester, Gunther Herbig, Werner Andreas Albert and David Porcelijn. He has given the Australian premieres of Lutoslawski’s *Chain 2* (with the composer conducting), Elliott Carter’s Violin Concerto, and the Violin Concerto of Philip Glass, as well as violin concertos by Ross Edwards and Bozidar Kos, and Richard Mills’ Double Concerto for violin and viola, written for him and his wife, Irina Morozova.

A graduate of the Juilliard School in New York – where he studied with Ivan Galamian and Margaret Pardee – he also took masterclasses with Nathan Milstein and lessons with Herman Krebbers and György Pauk. In 1985 he was awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship and was a Laureate of the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium International Violin Competition.

Dene Olding rejoined the Sydney Symphony as Co-Concertmaster in 2002, having previously held the position from 1987 to 1994. Other concertmaster positions have included leadership of the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He is also first violinist for the Australia Ensemble, a founding member of the Goldner String Quartet, and has been Artistic Director of the Mostly Mozart Festival at the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Festival Chamber Music Concerts.

Conducting has become an increasingly important part of his musical life, with appearances with the Sydney Symphony and Auckland Philharmonia, and invitations as soloist/conductor with chamber orchestras in Australia and the USA.

Dene Olding’s recordings include Brahms, Beethoven and Mozart violin sonatas (with his father, Max Olding), violin concertos by Frank Martin and Darius Milhaud, the Hindemith concertos, the Samuel Barber Violin Concerto, and the premiere recording of the Ross Edwards violin concerto, *Maninyas*, which won the 1994 ARIA award for Best Classical Recording and the prestigious Cannes award.

Dene Olding plays a 1720 Joseph Guarnerius violin.
Matthew Wilkie was born in Orange. After studying at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, during which time he made many solo appearances with the Queensland Youth Orchestra, he settled in Hannover to continue his studies with Professor Klaus Thunemann. In Germany he appeared as soloist with a number of orchestras including the South West Germany Chamber Orchestra and the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra. In Geneva he won second prize in the International Music Competition, performing Mozart’s Bassoon Concerto with the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande. He joined the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in 1986 as Principal Bassoon and has made a number of solo performances and recordings with them, including the Mozart concerto, Vivaldi’s Bassoon Concerto in F, RV487, and the Richard Strauss Duet Concertino. With the Wind Soloists of the COE his recordings include Mozart’s Wind Serenades and Wind Divertimenti. In 1995, together with members of the COE, he recorded the trio sonatas of Jan Dismas Zelenka. Matthew Wilkie was appointed Principal Bassoon with the Sydney Symphony in 2000, and in recent years he has performed both the Mozart concerto and the Strauss Duet Concertino with the Orchestra. He lives with his Japanese-born wife, Noriko Shimada (Principal Contrabassoon with the Sydney Symphony), and two young children.

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Founded in 1932, the Sydney Symphony has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the Sydney Opera House, the Orchestra also performs throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and has toured internationally. Critical to the Orchestra’s success has been the leadership given by its former Chief Conductors, including Sir Eugene Goossens, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Edo de Waart, as well as collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky. Maestro Gianluigi Gelmetti is now in his fifth year as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, a position he holds in tandem with that of Music Director at Rome Opera.

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