Symphonic Dances

Brahms, Dvořák, Rachmaninoff

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Sydney Opera House Concert Hall

Symphonic Dances

Jakub Hrůša CONDUCTOR
Nicholas Angelich PIANO

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Piano Concerto No.1 in D minor, Op.15
Maestoso
Adagio
Rondo (Allegro non troppo)

INTERVAL

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)
Carnival Overture, Op.92

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)
Symphonic Dances, Op.45
Non Allegro
Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)
Lento assai – Allegro vivace

Friday night’s performance will be recorded for later broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by Scott Davie at 7.15pm in the Northern Foyer. Visit bit.ly/SSOspeakerbios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations: 45 minutes, 20-minute interval, 10 minutes, 35 minutes
The concert will conclude at approximately 10pm.

We regret to advise that Tugan Sokhiev has had to withdraw from this week’s concerts with the orchestra for health reasons. We are grateful to Jakub Hrůša for agreeing to come to Australia at short notice and conduct the original program without change.
This portrait of Rachmaninoff was painted in 1929 by Boris Chaliapin, son of the great Russian opera singer Feodor Chaliapin. (State Central Museum of Musical Culture)


**Symphonic Dances**

This has been a year of Brahms concertos for the Sydney Symphony: Lisa Batiashvili played the violin concerto with us in February, Philippe Bianconi played the Olympian second piano concerto in June, and this week Nicholas Angelich performs the equally ambitious first piano concerto.

The well-known story surrounding Brahms is that, having been hailed the ‘messiah’ of symphonic music, he was plunged into such creativity insecurity that he took nearly 15 years to compose his first symphony. The first piano concerto is a part of that story. It began life in 1854 as a sonata for two pianos. Within a year the young composer had reconceived it as a symphony – if it had come to fruition, this would have been his ‘Symphony No.1’. But the piano origins of the music led him to complete it as a piano concerto, while his symphonic thinking remained in the scale of the concerto and in his orchestral writing.

Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances also shifted in purpose, but for a different reason. The choreographer Michel Fokine had turned his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini into a ballet, which met with much success in 1939. Rachmaninoff was inspired to compose something original for dance, and came up with a three-part concept of ‘Fantastic Dances’: Midday, Twilight and Midnight. Fokine liked the music but was unsure of its ballet potential; when the choreographer died soon after, Rachmaninoff dropped his titles and turned the music into the concert work that we know as the Symphonic Dances. But, as with Brahms, the origins of the music lingered.

Between these two substantial (and, in the case of Rachmaninoff, often dark) works, is a moment of exuberance. Dvořák’s *Carnival* overture belongs to a triptych not unlike Rachmaninoff’s dances: representing Nature, Life and Love. But these overtures are almost never performed together in the same concert. Perhaps this would be too much – like hearing both Brahms piano concertos in a single program!

Instead, a concert program seeks contrast and different perspectives. And so we have a mighty concerto from a young composer with the weight of expectation on his shoulders, noisy revels from a composer secure in his maturity and fame, and the fatalistic nostalgia of sinewy dances from a composer at the end of his career.
‘My Concerto has been a brilliant and decisive failure!', wrote Brahms, after his new work was premiered at the Leipzig Gewandhaus early in 1859. ‘At the end, three pairs of hands were brought together very slowly, whereupon quite distinct hissing from all sides stopped any further applause in its tracks.’

In all likelihood, Brahms was devastated. The first major orchestral work of his career, the concerto was also his first opportunity to test for himself, publicly, whether his late lamented mentor Robert Schumann had been right in suggesting: ‘If only he will dip his magic wand where the forces of the choral or orchestral realms will lend him their strength, then there will appear before us the most wonderful glimpses of the secrets of the spiritual world.’

Leipzig, however, refused to be spiritually enlightened. One critic, while recognising the young Brahms’s valiant attempts to come to grips with modernity, described the results in the first movement as giving an ‘impression of monstrosity’. A more conservative critic was far less generous: ‘This rooting and rummaging, this straining and tugging, this tearing and patching...not only must one drink this fermenting mass: for dessert there’s the shrillest discords and unpleasant sounds.’

Despite this, Brahms claimed that his first concerto’s failure had ‘not impressed me at all’. Even in his mid-20s he was possessed of the strong self-protective streak that would make him the prickly figure of later life. The Leipzig hissing he scornfully thought ‘rather too much’. ‘After all,’ he reasoned, ‘I am only experimenting and feeling my way’; a fair defence, perhaps, considering his score’s uncertain conception.

Brahms’s first thoughts had been to compose a sonata for two pianos that he and Clara Schumann could play together as a diversion from their shared troubles. This was in March 1854, when, shortly after Robert Schumann had tried to drown himself in the Rhine, Brahms arrived in Düsseldorf to help out in the older composer’s traumatised household. By July he had recast the sonata’s first movement for orchestra, and was thinking of the projected work as a symphony. However, its piano origins were not so easily erased, and by February 1855 he was considering a compromise solution. Abandoning sketches for the rest of the symphony, he recast the D minor first movement yet again, now for piano and orchestra.

The concerto gained a new middle movement during the
winter of 1856–57, and then a rondo finale. By March 1858 it was complete enough for Brahms to play it through at a private rehearsal with his friend and constant advisor during its composition, Joseph Joachim, conducting. Up to a year later, Brahms was still tinkering, especially with 'my unhappy first movement, so incapable of being brought to birth', and it was only through the constant pestering of Joachim and Clara that public performances were finally scheduled for Hanover and Leipzig in January 1859.

Joachim later claimed (and he should know) that the dramatic opening theme of the first movement reflects Brahms's shock on first hearing of Schumann's self-destructive dip in the Rhine. Stressed, scared, a mere stark sketch of a melody, it is underpinned by rumblings from the kettle drums and double basses that could easily be taken to represent the murky waters. Before the piano enters, there is a subdued interlude for strings and woodwinds, and a reprise of the opening in which the main theme is presented in canon, staggered between the violins, horns and orchestral basses. Finally the orchestral texture settles and fades to make way for the soloist. Of the piano's two main themes, the first (in D minor, espressivo) is restless and questing, despite its soft dynamic, and agitated by insistent quavers. The second, entirely without orchestral support, is assured and steady, and in a glowing major. It creates the maximum contrast with the music of the orchestral opening, which recurs at major points in the movement's design, including the bleak coda. Perhaps another critic, the song composer Hugo Wolf, had sensed correctly after all, when he judged the concerto: 'so icy, dank and foggy...you could catch a cold from it. Unhealthy stuff!'

Schumann died insane in July 1856, and if the first movement has a haunted quality, Brahms perhaps sought in
the middle Adagio, respectfully and reverently, to lay a ghost to rest. The texture of its opening is like a warm answer to the preceding chill, with the high strings again announcing a unison melody above a drone-like bass. There, however, the similarity ends: there are the added bassoons, and the strings are now muted, while the melody itself is of classical warmth and simplicity. Brahms inscribed the score with the words (in Latin): ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’, suggesting some sort of consolation. When the piano enters, it repeats and calmly develops the theme, proceeding with an almost improvisatory freedom through a series of increasingly rhapsodic episodes, whose tendency to fantasy is gently held in check only by the periodic reappearance in the orchestra of the theme in original form. Brahms left conflicting clues as to the sources of his consolation here, at various times describing aspects of the movement as portraits of Clara and (less credibly) Joseph Joachim.

A few years before they premiered the concerto, Joachim had described Brahms’s piano playing, approvingly, as being ‘so light and clear, so cold and indifferent to passion’ that it was second only to Liszt’s in his estimation. Clarity is to the fore from the outset of the last movement, which, true to Classical precedent for concerto rondos, begins with the piano alone. The movement offers a satisfying amalgam of simplicity and sophistication in the way its vigorous tuneful themes (sometimes described as alla zingarese or in gypsy style) recur or are transformed, via a central fugue-like episode, leading ultimately into the broad major-key reprise of the opening theme in the coda.

Graeme Skinner © 2012

Brahms’s Piano Concerto No.1 calls for an orchestra comprising pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns and two trumpets; timpani (kettledrums) and strings

The Sydney Symphony first performed the concerto in 1939 with conductor George Szell and soloist Artur Schnabel, and most recently in 2004, with soloist Barry Douglas and conductor Simone Young.

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Antonín Dvořák
Carnival Overture, Op.92

Nature inspired many 19th-century composers to imagine music that ranged from serene to terrifying. Dvořák – among the later Romantics – was no exception. His Carnival Overture, composed in 1891 when he was 50, evokes both the pure realm of nature and the concerns of its human inhabitants. It abounds in the Czech folk colour for which Dvořák was already renowned.

The piece is the second in a trio of overtures entitled Nature, Life, and Love. Although independent compositions, the overtures are linked by a Nature theme that recurs in all three. In Carnival it is introduced by the clarinet in the music’s first tranquil aside.

It’s clear from his manuscript sketches that Dvořák was far from sure what to call each of the overtures. He considered three possibilities for the first one: In Nature’s Realm, and A Summer Night, with the possible subtitle of Solitude. The second he called Life, adding Carnival as a subtitle, and the third had two names: Love, and – suggesting that it was a troubled, tragic love he had in mind – Othello.

Coming in the middle of the series, the title of the Carnival (that is, Mardi Gras) overture conjures up images of the boisterous circus-like atmosphere as rural communities, each year in late winter, celebrated their farewell to meat-eating, as they entered the fasting season of Lent. It is this sort of atmosphere – Dvořák seems to be arguing – that draws solitary people (people like shepherds and farmhands, who work alone in the fields) ‘out of themselves’, and into the community.

The overture begins with a frenzied theme, which then returns several times later. Rhythmic and melodic fragments of this theme are also scattered throughout the overture. Though played without a break, it falls into three quite distinct sections. The characteristically boisterous opening and closing sections frame a contrasting inner episode, a quiet return to nature and a pastoral mood, a reflective moment away from the surrounding party, and quite likely, too, anticipating the possibility of love.

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The Carnival Overture calls for what the original score calls a ‘large’ orchestra: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets and two bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and percussion (cymbals, tambourine, triangle); harp and strings.

The Sydney Symphony first performed this overture in 1938, conducted by Percy Code, and most recently in 2010, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.
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Conductor, pianist and composer, Rachmaninoff often complained that he could never maintain all three activities simultaneously. His adult career as a concert pianist left him little time for composition, and for years he wrote next to nothing. Then, much to his surprise, the urge to compose began to reassert itself. A procession of ‘Indian summer’ pieces emerged between 1926 and 1940, many of which are now regarded as among his finest compositions.

‘I don’t know how it happened. It must have been my last spark,’ is how Rachmaninoff described the origins of the Symphonic Dances. Yet when Michel Fokine successfully choreographed the Rhapsody for a ballet called Paganini in 1939, the opportunity to compose an original ballet appealed to Rachmaninoff’s imagination again. He wrote the Dances the following year, 1940, giving the three movements the titles Midday, Twilight, and Midnight. At this point the work was called ‘Fantastic Dances’.

Rachmaninoff played it over on the piano for Fokine, who was enthusiastic about the music but non-committal about its balletic possibilities. In any case, Fokine’s death a short time later cooled Rachmaninoff’s interest in the ballet idea altogether. He deleted his descriptive movement names and substituted ‘Symphonic’ for ‘Fantastic’ in the title. In its new guise he dedicated the triptych to his favourite orchestra, the Philadelphia, and its chief conductor Eugene Ormandy.

It is a work full of enigmas, which Rachmaninoff, surely one of the most secretive of composers, does nothing to clarify. In the first movement, there is a transformation from minor to major of a prominent theme from his first symphony, which at that time Rachmaninoff thought was irretrievably lost. (The score was lost, but the symphony was re-constructed from the orchestral parts after his death.) The premiere of that work in 1897 had been such a fiasco that Rachmaninoff could not compose at all for another three years. But the reference to the symphony in this new piece has a meaning that remains entirely private.

There is also the curious paradox that the word ‘dance’ – with its suggestion of life-enhancing, joyous activity – is here put at the service of a work that – for all its vigour and sinew – is essentially concerned with endings. Chromaticism darkens the colour of every musical step.
The sense of foreboding and finality is particularly strong in the second movement, with its evocations of a spectral ballroom, and in the bell-tolling and chant-intoning that pervade what was to be not only the last dance of the set, but the last new movement he would ever compose.

The first movement, with its unusual tempo marking Non Allegro (‘Not fast’ – what could he have meant?) begins hesitantly, before a bold, staccato statement of a theme that sounds very much like the plainchant for the dead, ‘Dies irae’, in disguise. It will reappear in different guises throughout the work. This leads to the main part of the movement. From this point on, most of the major musical ideas are introduced by the woodwinds, including the leaping main theme, given to flutes, oboes and clarinets. The major lyrical theme is then given to that infrequent orchestral visitor, the alto saxophone, making its solo appearance with delicately scored accompaniment for winds only. (The saxophone has no other music to play in the work.) Rachmaninoff also employs orchestral piano, and when the lyrical theme is given its second statement by the strings, in an impassioned unison, the piano traces a filigree accompaniment, creating an overall effect of shining brightness. In the coda of this movement, harp and piano trace the accompaniment, creating an overall effect of shining brightness.

‘I don’t know how it happened. It must have been my last spark’

RACHMANINOFF DESCRIBES THE ORIGIN OF THE SYMPHONIC DANCES.
together create a glistening, shimmering counterpoint to the plush, chorale-like statement of the motif plucked from the first symphony.

The *waltz movement* begins with muted trumpet fanfares that have a sinister fairy-tale quality to them. Woodwind arabesques swirl around them, until a solo violin passage gives way to the main waltz theme, introduced by the oboe and cor anglais before being taken up by the strings. The ghostly woodwind arabesques continue to decorate this theme until the winds themselves announce the livelier second melody. Although the atmosphere becomes warmer and more passionate at times, it does not lighten, and sometimes becomes quite macabre. It is as if we are experiencing a memory of a ballroom rather than a ball itself.

The *finale* is the work’s most complex movement. The extensive use of the ‘Dies irae’ (a regular source of material for Rachmaninoff) and the curious inscription ‘Alliluya’, written in the score above the last motif in the work to be derived from Orthodox chant, suggest the most final of endings mingled with a sense of thanksgiving. The tolling of the midnight bell that prefaces the movement’s vigorous main section reinforces the view that the work might, after all, be a parable on the three ages of man.

Much of the main *Allegro vivace* material here is derived from chant, as is the motif that eventually drives away the ‘Dies irae’ and dominates the work’s forthright conclusion. But this is also the movement in which Rachmaninoff takes time out from the dance, in an extensive central section in which morbidity, regret, passion and tears commingle in a complex and beautifully scored musical design.

**DANCE OF DEATH**

Rachmaninoff’s choice of the ‘Dies irae’ chant in the third piece suggests a ‘dance of death’. The 12 chimes of midnight in the introduction enhance the macabre effect. But Rachmaninoff moves well beyond a *danse macabre*, transforming the sinister tune into music serenely reminiscent of his beloved Russian Orthodox chant. This is the spiritual and musical heritage he celebrated in his great choral masterpiece, the *All-Night Vigil*. The orchestra actually quotes music from the *Vigil* at the point where he marked the score ‘Alliluya’. Choosing his own final dance partner, Rachmaninoff abandons Death, for Life.

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**ADAPTED FROM A NOTE BY PHILLIP SAMETZ © 1999**

Though completed as a concert work, Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances adopts a smaller, theatrically scaled orchestra of piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and percussion (triangle, tambourine, side drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam tam, xylophone, glockenspiel, tubular bells); harp, piano and strings.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the Symphonic Dances in 1977 with Denis Vaughan, and most recently during the 2007 Rachmaninoff festival, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.
GOOSSENS DOES CARNIVAL
In 1928, two decades before he came to the Sydney Symphony, Eugene Goossens conducted Dvořák’s Carnival in a program of orchestral fireworks (Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Glinka, Stravinsky, Falla...) at the famous Hollywood Bowl.

In his memoirs, Goossens recalled: ‘These, I believe, were the first open-air recordings ever made by a symphony orchestra, and turned out amazingly well. The faint sound of a high-flying aeroplane may be discerned by experts in the slow section of Dvořák’s Carnival Overture; this novel effect...I did not consider too much of an anachronistic blemish to warrant condemning the record.’ Hear it for yourself, on a mid-price CD reissue.

CAMBRIA CD 1147

THE SSO PLAYS RACHMANINOFF
Our performance of Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances with Vladimir Ashkenazy is included in the 5-CD set of his complete symphonies and orchestral works, recorded during and around our Rachmaninoff Festival in 2007.

EXTON 18

ORMANDY ON THE SYMPHONIC DANCES
An excellent Penn Library online exhibition Eugene Ormandy: A Centennial Celebration includes a fascinating audio interview with the conductor, recorded in 1973, in which he recollects working with Rachmaninoff on the world premiere of the Symphonic Dances: www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/ormandy/sergei.html

JAKUB HRŮŠA
Jakub Hrůša has released six discs on the Czech label Supraphon, five with the Prague Philharmonia. These include an acclaimed concert recording of Smetana’s Má Vlast, taken from the opening of the Prague Spring Festival in 2010.

SUPRAPHON FL 4032

Also among his recordings with the Prague Philharmonia are several discs of Dvořák’s lighter music, including the charming combination of his Serenade for strings and Serenade for winds with Josef Suk’s Meditation on the Czech hymn ‘St Wenceslas’.

SUPRAPHON 3932

ANGELICH PLAYS BRAHMS
In 2008, Nicholas Angelich recorded Brahms’s First Piano Concerto with Paavo Järvi and the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra. The disc is rounded out with Brahms’s Hungarian Dances for piano four hands, in which Angelich is joined by Frank Braley.

VIRGIN CLASSICS 18998

Two years later, with the same partnership, he recorded the second concerto – a piece that he’d begun studying at the age of 14. This time the disc is supplemented by solo piano music: Brahms’s Eight Pieces, Op.76.

VIRGIN CLASSICS 66349

Broadcast Diary
August

Saturday 11 August, 2pm
WAGNER UNDER THE SAILS
Simone Young conductor
Christine Brewer soprano
A re-creation of the all-Wagner program from the official opening concert of the Sydney Opera House in 1973.

Monday 20 August, 1.05pm
THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS
Vladimir Ashkenazy conductor
Lilli Paasikivi mezzo-soprano
Mark Tucker tenor
David Wilson-Johnson baritone
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs
Elgar

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Tuesday 14 August, 6pm
Musicians, staff and guest artists discuss what’s in store in our forthcoming concerts.

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Alexander Lazarev conducts a thrilling performance of Shostakovich 9 and Glazunov’s Seasons. SSO 2

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Gianluigi Gelmetti conducts Schubert’s *Unfinished* and R Strauss’s *Four Last Songs* with Ricarda Merbeth. SSO 200803

**Sir Charles Mackerras**
A 2CD set featuring Sir Charles’s final performances with the orchestra, in October 2007. SSO 200705

**Brett Dean**
Brett Dean performs his own viola concerto, conducted by Simone Young, in this all-Dean release. SSO 200702

**Ravel**
Gelmetti conducts music by one of his favourite composers: Maurice Ravel. Includes *Bolero*. SSO 200801

**Rare Rachmaninoff**
Rachmaninoff chamber music with Dene Olding, the Goldner Quartet, soprano Joan Rodgers and Vladimir Ashkenazy at the piano. SSO 200901

### MAHLER ODYSSEY ON CD

During the 2010 and 2011 concert seasons, the Sydney Symphony and Vladimir Ashkenazy set out to perform all the Mahler symphonies, together with some of the song cycles. These concerts were recorded for CD, with nine releases so far and more to come.

**Mahler 9** OUT NOW
In March, Mahler’s Ninth, his last completed symphony, was released. SSO 201201

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**Song of the Earth**
SSO 201004

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**Mahler 4**
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**Mahler 6**
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Jakub Hrůša CONDUCTOR

Named by Gramophone magazine as one of ten young conductors ‘on the verge of greatness’ (2011), Jakub Hrůša is Music Director and Chief Conductor of the Prague Philharmonia, Music Director of Glyndebourne on Tour, and Principal Guest Conductor of Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra.

In 2010, with the Prague Philharmonia, he became the youngest conductor since 1949 to lead the opening concert of the Prague Spring Festival. In recent seasons he has appeared with many of Europe’s leading orchestras, and he made his American debut in 2009. He is also a regular visitor to Asia, and last year toured Japan with the Prague Philharmonia.

Highlights of the 2011–12 season included concerts with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic and Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, as well as debuts with the Dallas Symphony, Houston Symphony, National Arts Center Orchestra Ottawa, Netherlands Philharmonic, Barcelona Symphony, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Orchestre National de Lyon. He also returned to the Prague Spring Festival to conduct a concert performance of Beethoven’s Fidelio with the Prague Philharmonia.

As an opera conductor, he made his Glyndebourne Festival and Tour debuts in 2008, conducting Carmen. He has also conducted for Royal Danish Opera, Prague National Theatre and Opera Hong Kong.

His recordings include five releases with the Prague Philharmonia – most recently Smetana’s Má Vlast taken from the opening of the Prague Spring Festival in 2010. He has also recorded the Tchaikovsky and Bruch violin concertos with Nicola Benedetti and the Czech Philharmonic.

Jakub Hrůša was born in the Czech Republic in 1981 and studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, where his teachers included Jiří Bělohlávek. Since his graduation in 2004, he has conducted all the major Czech orchestras, and his previous posts include Music Director of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic and Associate Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic.

He made his Australian debut in 2009 conducting the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, followed by his Melbourne Symphony debut in 2011. This is Jakub Hrůša’s first appearance with the Sydney Symphony.
Nicholas Angelich PIANO

Born in the United States in 1970, Nicholas Angelich began studying the piano with his mother at the age of five. Two years later, he gave his first concert, playing Mozart’s Piano Concerto K467. At 13, he entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied with Aldo Ciccolini, Yvonne Loriod, Michel Béroff and Marie-Françoise Bucquet, and won first prize for piano and chamber music. He also participated in masterclasses with Leon Fleisher, Dmitri Bashkirov and Maria João Pires.

He won second prize at the 1989 International Casadesus Piano Competition in Cleveland, and first prize in the 1994 International Gina Bachauer Piano Competition. In 1996 he was a resident of the International Piano Foundation of Cadennabia (Italy). In 2003 he was presented with the International Klavierfestival Ruhr Young Talent Award (Germany) by Leon Fleisher, and made his debut with the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur.

Since then he has appeared with the Russian National Orchestra in Moscow, opening their 2007–08 season at the invitation of Vladimir Jurowski, as well as performing with the Orchestre National de France (Marc Minkowski), Orchestre National de Lyon (David Robertson), St Petersbourg Symphony Orchestra (Alexandre Dimitriev), Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne (Christian Zacharias), Swiss-Italian Radio Orchestra (Charles Dutoit), Stuttgart Radio Orchestra (Roger Norrington), Seoul Philharmonic (Myung-whun Chung), London Philharmonic Orchestra (Kazuchi Ono and Jurowski), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (Gianandrea Noseda), Los Angeles Philharmonic (Stéphane Denève) and the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra (Valery Gergiev). In 2009 he made his BBC Proms debut with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Nézet-Séguin was also the conductor when he made his Philadelphica Orchestra debut performing the first Brahms concerto.

Nicholas Angelich is also a regular guest of the Verbier Festival and Martha Argerich’s festival in Lugano, and his chamber music partners have included violinist Joshua Bell, cellist Jian Wang, and Gautier and Renaud Capuçon. As a recitalist he has given complete cycles of the Beethoven sonatas and Liszt’s Years of Pilgrimage. He has also gained recognition for his interpretation of 20th-century repertoire, including music by composers such as Messiaen, Stockhausen, Boulez and Pierre Henry, who dedicated his ‘Concerto for piano without orchestra’ to him.

This is Nicholas Angelich’s Sydney Symphony debut.
# MUSICIANS

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY

Vladimir Ashkenazy, Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor

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Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 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 iconic Sydney Opera House, where it gives more than 100 performances each year, the Sydney Symphony also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence, most recently in the 2011 tour of Japan and Korea.

The Sydney Symphony’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. David Robertson will take up the post of Chief Conductor in 2014. The orchestra’s history also boasts collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky.

The Sydney Symphony’s award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program. Recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards, Liza Lim, Lee Bracegirdle, Gordon Kerry and Georges Lentz, and the orchestra’s recording of works by Brett Dean was released on both the BIS and Sydney Symphony Live labels.

Other releases on the Sydney Symphony Live label, established in 2006, include performances with Alexander Lazarev, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Sir Charles Mackerras and Vladimir Ashkenazy. The orchestra has recently completed recording the Mahler symphonies, and has also released recordings with Ashkenazy of Rachmaninoff and Elgar orchestral works on the Exton/Triton labels, as well as numerous recordings on the ABC Classics label.

This is the fourth year of Ashkenazy’s tenure as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.
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‘You don’t want to be questioning yourself on a soft high entry. They’re often much trickier than the big loud entries.’

Ben credits Dale Clevenger, Principal Horn of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as the teacher who had the greatest influence on him. ‘He gave me some excellent advice: “If something happens [in performance], you’ve got to forget about it immediately. Focus on the line and phrase. If you focus on what went wrong, it will just happen again.”’

Perhaps it’s a brass cliché, but Ben cites the big Romantics – Strauss and Mahler – as amongst his favourites to play. ‘It’s such heroic writing. They really let the horn sing and shine through all its registers. The older I get, though, the more I appreciate Brahms. I understand better the intricacy and genius of his writing.’

‘As a professional, I suffer something of an affliction – I’m in search of the perfect instrument. I play four horns, have another on order and am considering a sixth… Is my wife going to read this?’
Q. What’s black and white and red all over?
A. The new Sydney Symphony website!

www.sydneysymphony.com

We’ve launched a revamped Sydney Symphony website – up and running since early July!

Your feedback and comments have helped our web agency Deepend design the new site for easy navigation and straightforward ticket purchase.

Our new What’s On calendar allows you to view concerts by month, searching is improved, and you can filter for your favourite category of music or for particular artists, making it easier to find exactly what you’re looking for.

We’ve also incorporated lots of fun features, including videos, a live Twitter feed and our annual tour blog. In coming weeks we’ll be reinstating audio samples and podcasts and launching a new historical timeline. Meanwhile, you can still download program books from this season and years past, and pdfs of these Bravo! newsletters.

If you still need an incentive to visit the new site, consider making your next subscription purchase online. After our 2013 season launches on Wednesday 8 August, those who subscribe online before 30 September will receive a free DVD of The Concert. (One DVD per household.)

Your Say

Thank you Sydney Symphony, for another wonderful Family Classics concert [May]. Special thanks to timpanist Mark Robinson for being so friendly, talking to my son and his friend about percussion instruments. Mark went out of his way to converse with my son. This means an awful lot to a 10 year old.

Angie Dalli

Did I really see Dene Olding playing in the back row of the violins at the concert on Saturday 12 May, or was I seeing things? If it was him, what had he done to be so demoted?

Jennifer Hotop

It was indeed Dene Olding, our Concertmaster, sitting at the back of the section for this concert. But rest assured, he hasn’t been demoted! Rather, as we’ve recently invited a number of guest musicians to try out for the role of Co-Concertmaster, Dene has been joining the section – albeit towards the back – so that he too can develop an informed opinion about the candidates.

I am very pleased and excited with the news that David Robertson has been engaged from 2014 onwards. My husband and I lived in St Louis for 11 years, and for 10 of those, we were season ticket holders to the St Louis Symphony. We remember the excitement when David Robertson was appointed there, and were pleased with the sense of renewed vitality he brought to the orchestra.

We heard many fantastic concerts with him on the podium. For me, one highlight was a performance of Messiaen’s Turangaîla Symphony. I really appreciate his commitment to modern music and hope it continues when he arrives in Sydney.

Jennifer Milne

A cigar on the piano was all that was missing from last night’s performance of A Gershwin Tribute. The wicked wit of Mr Bramwell Tovey, the mischievous grin of Mr David Jones, the great voice of Ms Tracey Dahl, and last but not least every member of the orchestra made the evening a most memorable experience.

Isabell St Leon

My wife and I have been very supportive of the SSO for many years. Last night’s Gershwin concert was out of this world… All we can say is that it demonstrates how world class your concerts are! Please keep up the unbelievably good performances.

Peter Kennewel

We like to hear from you.
Write to yoursay@sydneysymphony.com or Bravo! Reply Paid 4338, Sydney NSW 2001.
WEAVING MAGIC
An orchestra on tour fulfills cultural needs at night and sparks new interest by day.

A tree-change is not without its drawbacks. ‘I was a regular at SSO concerts in Sydney before moving to the mid-North coast 12 months ago,’ said Robyn Neasmith, ‘and had been feeling rather deprived of my “cultural fill.”’ When the Sydney Symphony visited Taree on its recent annual regional tour, Robyn was delighted. ‘I got my fill!’ By all reports, audiences were thrilled. ‘What was so wonderful was the joy and pleasure that the orchestra gave to so many in the local community who had never had the privilege of seeing them perform,’ said Robyn.

Conductor Benjamin Northey led the side-by-side forces of the Sydney Symphony and Sydney Sinfonia on a tour to Taree, Grafton and Newcastle, where in addition to giving performances by night, they also presented schools concerts during the day.

More than 2,000 children from regional NSW were enchanted by saxophonist Nicholas Russoniello (2011 ABC/Symphony Australia Young Performer of the Year) weaving his way through the audience as he performed Barry Cockcroft’s Black and Blue.

‘The kids loved it!’ said Ben, himself a former saxophonist. ‘The piece was really jazzy, lots of wailing, very clever stuff. You know, it was at a concert just like this that Leonard Bernstein decided he was going to be a musician. He heard Ravel’s Bolero at a New York Philharmonic schools concert and the rest is history.’

‘We found lots of ways of engaging the kids in the concert, by asking them to come up with words for the main theme of Dvořák’s Ninth Symphony, for instance. Here’s what they worked out: “Peanut butter fits on the table, with vegemite, with vegemite, with vegemite on toast.” They sang it so loud!’ laughed Ben. [Try it yourself – you’ll see the words fit beautifully!]

One special group of music lovers came from St Dominic’s Centre for Hearing Impaired Children. After the concert, Sinfonia cellists went out into the audience to give these children the chance to feel the instruments as they were being played.

‘These concerts aren’t just about potentially sparking the interest of a young musician,’ said Ben. ‘They’re also about fostering an audience who are interested and invested. Concert-goers who, down the track, we hope will really love music.’

Ribbons of Colour
Some music doesn’t just sound extraordinary – it’s also visually stunning. And Takemitsu’s From me flows what you call Time is one of those pieces. It’s scored for five percussionists and orchestra, but it’s no ordinary percussion section you’ll be seeing when we play this piece in September.

Most striking are the five coloured ribbons extending from bells above the stage, and manipulated by the soloists, who wear matching colours. These represent the five natural phenomena: water (blue), fire (red), earth (yellow), wind (green) and sky (white).

There’s also a huge array of world percussion – Japanese temple bowls placed on timpani drums, Indonesian wooden angklungs, and Pakistani Noah bells, to name a few.

‘There’s more than the usual amount of preparation,’ says Principal Percussion Rebecca Lagos. ‘We have to source some strange instruments, work out how we’re going to suspend five bells above the orchestra…’ And that’s before rehearsals have even begun!

A piece like this requires a special kind of mapping. ‘For percussionists, every piece has a different combination of instruments. We organise all those different elements into a single instrument. There’s a lot of choreography required, and it may take time before you have your set-up exactly right.’

The final effect is one of solemnity and ritual. ‘The music sounds incredibly impressionistic and romantic, delicate and beautiful. Anyone expecting a driving, rhythm-based piece will be surprised.’

Symphony for the Common Man
Thursday Afternoon Symphony
Thu 6 Sep | 1.30pm
Emirates Metro Series
Fri 7 Sep | 8pm
Great Classics
Sat 8 Sep | 2pm
SYDNEY SYMPHONY SPRINT!
Fifteen fearless Sydney Symphony musicians and staff are re-forming Team Sydney Symphony Sprint to take another tilt at the City2Surf on Sunday 12 August. First Violin Jennifer Hoy explains why they’ve chosen Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy as their charity: ‘All of us at the Sydney Symphony are fortunate enough to be able to perform, experience and share great music every day – we can’t imagine life without it! …We have chosen to run for Nordoff-Robbins because they provide the unique gift of music to people who are in need – including those with physical and intellectual disabilities, mental health problems, and learning and behavioural difficulties. Help us make music an everyday part of life for those in our community who need it most!’

If you want to support Sydney Symphony Sprint as they tackle Heartbreak Hill this year, visit their giving page at bit.ly/City2SurfSprint2012

PLAYERS LINKED
In June, 44 student musicians, aged between 11 and 60, took part in the Sydney Symphony Playerlink program in Albury. During three days of intensive workshops, the students worked closely with members of the Sydney Symphony, exploring ensemble playing, musical interpretation and technical skills. The weekend ended with a public concert that included Rossini’s William Tell Overture and the Trepak (Russian Dance) from Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker.

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GROWING OUR FAMILY JUST KEEPS GROWING
More info: bit.ly/JubileeSing

The Sydney Symphony contributed to the celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee by recording a song with Gary Barlow (front man with boy band Take That, and head judge on The X Factor in the UK). ‘Sing’ features musicians from throughout the Commonwealth – including the African Children’s Choir, the Slum Drummers from Kenya, and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu – accompanied by the Sydney Symphony. The track is part of a special Diamond Jubilee album, available from iTunes and music shops.

More info: bit.ly/JubileeSing

OUR FAMILY JUST KEEPS GROWING
Mark Robinson (Assistant Principal Timpani / Tutti Percussion) and his wife Lindsay welcomed Harris James on Thursday 14 June. Big sister Chloe has agreed to keep him. And double bassist Steve Larson, with partner Melissa Barnard (cellist in the Australian Chamber Orchestra) welcomed their daughter Maia. What are the chances she’s going to be a string player?