The Queen of Spades

Ashkenazy conducts Tchaikovsky

Sat 1 December 7pm
Mon 3 December 7pm
On behalf of Credit Suisse, Premier Partner of the Sydney Symphony, I am pleased to welcome you to this concert performance of Tchaikovsky’s opera *The Queen of Spades*, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

This opera was last presented in Sydney in 1979 in the opera theatre next door – an ambitious staging in what was still a relatively new Sydney Opera House.

Tonight’s concert presentation is a truly special event. It has emerged through Vladimir Ashkenazy’s affection for Tchaikovsky’s music and his longstanding enthusiasm for this compelling opera. We are delighted the Sydney Symphony was able to secure the much sought-after tenor, Stuart Skelton, for the leading role of Hermann. Stuart is joined by an impressive cast of Russian and Australian singers, and the vocal forces of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and the Sydney Children’s Choir.

The production of a Russian opera on this scale – even in concert – represents an ambitious undertaking. It requires tremendous artistic and administrative commitment, and calls heavily on an orchestra’s depth of talent and power.

Credit Suisse is proud to support the development of this concert presentation, bringing rarely heard operatic repertoire to Sydney audiences and a new generation of music lovers. We hope that you enjoy the last of our gala performances for 2012 and we look forward to welcoming you back to the Sydney Symphony in 2013.
The Queen of Spades
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Libretto: Modest Tchaikovsky after Pushkin
Concert performance, sung in Russian with English surtitles

Vladimir Ashkenazy CONDUCTOR

Hermann
Count Tomsky, his friend
Prince Yeletsky, Lisa’s fiancé
Countess ***
Lisa, her granddaughter
Pauline, Lisa’s confidante
Chekalinsky, an officer
Surin, an officer
Chaplitsky, owner of a casino
Narumov, an officer
Majordomo
The Governess
Masha, Lisa’s maid
Make-believe Commander

Stuart Skelton TENOR
José Carbó BARITONE
Andrei Bondarenko BARITONE
Irina Tchistjakova MEZZO-SOPRANO
Dina Kuznetsova SOPRANO
Deborah Humble MEZZO-SOPRANO
Angus Wood TENOR
Gennadi Dubinsky BASS
Joshua Oxley TENOR
William Stavert BASS
Philip Pratt TENOR
Victoria Lambourn MEZZO-SOPRANO
Amy Corkery SOPRANO
Nikita Zaika

Surtitles written and produced by Gunta Dreifelds for Canadian Opera Company.

Sydney Philharmonia Choirs
Brett Weymark, Music Director

Sydney Children’s Choir
Lyn Williams, Artistic Director
Tom Woods, musical assistant
Natalia Sheludiakova, Russian language coach and repetiteur

There will be one interval of 25 minutes and the performance will conclude at approximately 10.15pm.
Cover page for “Pikovaya Dama” – The Queen of Spades
INTRODUCTION

The Queen of Spades

*The Queen of Spades* is a story of obsession. As an opera, with the intensifying power of music added to Pushkin’s absorbing narrative, it becomes truly compelling.

The power of Pushkin’s tale lies partly in its aura of truth. Pushkin knew a man whose grandmother had lived in Paris as a young woman and told him of a winning combination of cards. This is the kernel of the story, the rest is fiction. Pushkin adds apparently authentic touches, such as the sinister epigraph, hinting at the Russian preoccupation with superstition and fate.

Transformed for the operatic stage, the dryly ironic, but also moralistic, tale of monomania becomes a story of overwhelming passion and bizarre, even surreal, obsessions. The Tchaikovsky brothers added plot elements to enhance the drama and make the work more richly symbolic. To the three cards of the Countess’s secret, for example, they added the idea that she will die when she reveals it a third time – both are echoed in the musical gestures.

The opera’s hero is a damaged soul – a seemingly rational young man who succumbs to a series of increasingly irrational obsessions: with an unknown girl, with the prospect of winning a fortune at cards, with the idea that his fate is somehow bound up in that of the old Countess. Its heroine, Lisa, abandons a brilliant match with a prince in favour of an enigmatic, and frightening, stranger – this is her own obsession. It cannot end well.

The result is a dark work, brooding and intense – ‘possibly the darkest Tchaikovsky ever composed,’ says Ashkenazy. And yet *The Queen of Spades* is eloquent and compelling, an opera that inspires obsessions of its own, from the commitment of its composer (who completed it in a whirlwind 44 days) to those of us who’ve lived and breathed this music during the past year and all this week. We hope you catch something of this obsession too.

‘The Queen of Spades means secret hostility. A New Book on Fortune-telling’

Epigraph to Pushkin’s *Queen of Spades*

*bravo!*

For profiles of Sydney Symphony musicians and news from behind the scenes, turn to *bravo!*, a regular feature at the back of the program books. Individual issues of *bravo!* can also be found at sydneysymphony.com/bravo
The Queen of Spades

An opera in three acts by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, to a libretto by his brother Modest, based on the story by Alexander Pushkin.

Act I: Scene 1 – The Summer Garden in St Petersburg, 1790s

Children and their nurses play in the sunshine. Chekalinsky and Surin are perplexed by their friend Hermann, who only ever wants to watch while others gamble.

Hermann arrives and admits to being in love with a girl whose name he does not know. Prince Yeletsky joins them and is congratulated on his recent engagement. When Lisa arrives with her grandmother, the Countess, Hermann discovers to his dismay that she is both his mysterious beloved and Yeletsky’s betrothed.

Tomsky tells the tale of how the Countess came to be known as ‘the Queen of Spades’, winning back her fortune through a secret combination of cards. Hermann becomes obsessed with the idea of winning a fortune and Lisa’s hand, and even more so with the belief that he is fated to be the third man to whom the Countess’s secret will be revealed.
Act I: Scene 2 – **Lisa’s room**
Lisa, her friend Pauline and their companions sing and dance until their staid governess orders them to bed. Lisa’s sad distraction turns to horror when Hermann enters her room through the balcony window and professes his love.

Act II: Scene 1 – **A grand ballroom**
At a masked ball, Yeletsky is troubled by Lisa’s remoteness. Hermann is increasingly obsessed with the secret of the cards and his plan to elope with Lisa.

*A ballet and pastoral entertainment is presented for the guests, with Pauline taking the pants role of Milovszor, and Tomsky that of his wealthier rival Zlatogor. Both swains are pursuing the shepherdess Prilepa, who remains faithful to her true love, Milovszor.*

Lisa gives Hermann a key so he can reach her bedroom, via the Countess’s chambers. The curtain falls on the scene with the announcement of the Empress.

**INTERVAL**

Act II: Scene 2 – **The Countess’s bedroom**
Hermann steals into the Countess’s bedroom, where there hangs a portrait from her youth as ‘the Venus of Moscow’.

*She reminisces on her life in Paris and sings an aria (by Grétry) that Madame de Pompadour once heard her sing. After the Countess has dismissed her servants, Hermann emerges from hiding, first pleading with her to tell him the three cards, then threatening her. The Countess dies of fright without revealing her secret. Lisa, on discovering the scene, fears that Hermann’s obsession is now solely concerned with the secret of the cards.*

Act III: Scene 1 – **Hermann’s room**
Hermann reads a letter from Lisa, requesting a meeting by the canal. The Countess’s ghost appears and tells him the three cards: ‘Troika, semerka, tuz’ (three, seven, ace).

Act III: Scene 2 – **The Winter Canal, at midnight**
Lisa waits for Hermann. When he finally arrives, he tells her that the secret has been revealed to him and that he intends to go at once to try his fortune. Lisa – convinced that he murdered the Countess and realising that the secret of the cards now means more to him than his love for her – throws herself into the canal.

Act III: Scene 3 – **A gambling house**
Hermann arrives to play at faro. He wagers forty thousand on the first card, a three. He leaves his winnings on the table to win again, this time with a seven. On the third bet, Hermann declares he has an ace. But it’s the Queen of Spades he holds and he has lost everything to his opponent Yeletsky. The Queen on the card appears to wink at him – or is it the Countess? Faced with this malevolently smiling ghost, he stabs himself.
ABOUT THE OPERA

Pushkin’s Story: Reality and Illusion

Pushkin makes his readers guess whether *The Queen of Spades* (1833–4) is based on reality or not, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. But he told a friend there was a true story behind the plot. His prototype for the Countess was Princess Natalia Petrovna Golitsyna (1741–1837). In her youth she had been a maid of honour to Catherine the Great, and had indeed lived in Paris in the 1780s. It was her grandson who told Pushkin about the time he’d lost money in gambling and had asked his grandmother to help. She didn’t give him money, but told him about three winning cards. ‘Do try,’ said the grandmother. The grandson did try and did win. The rest of the story, said Pushkin, is all fiction. The real ‘countess’, far from being a ‘Muscovite Venus’ celebrated for her beauty, was nicknamed ‘Princess Moustache’.

The epigraph Pushkin used as a preface to the story reads: ‘The Queen of Spades stands for secret hostility.’ He gives the source for this maxim as ‘The Latest Fortune-telling Manual’, poking fun at the public’s fondness for thrillers, ghost stories and the like. Yet there is something sinister in his acknowledgment of Russian superstition and belief in the occult. The casual reference to the fortune-telling manual adds to the idea that the whole story could be a piece of conversational gossip.

Pushkin himself was no stranger to the card table, where he had staked and lost the copyright to more than one of his works. He commented to a friend, ‘the passion for playing is the strongest of passions.’ Another of the epigraphs Pushkin put in the story, a poem about gamblers, is quoted verbatim in the final scene of the opera:

On a cold winter day  
They would gather and play,  
Smoking.  
And many a stake  
Those youngsters would make,  
Joking.  
Of the stakes that they won  
They chalked up every one  
Paying.  
And so, many a day  
They would squander away,  
Playing.

The immediate acclaim for Pushkin’s story outside Russia had something to do with its blend of the natural
and supernatural, the suggestion of demonic forces and the portrayal of obsession. Pushkin’s evasive way of telling the story leaves us guessing. What is the secret hostility? Is it obsession that brings undone the anti-hero, or is it fate? There is a pervasive irony in Pushkin, beginning with the odd fact that Hermann is fascinated with gambling, yet never plays himself. Tomsky explains that Hermann is prudent because he is German, and therefore economical—a stereotype familiar to Russians of Pushkin’s time. Tomsky is prompted to tell the story of his grandmother, who likewise never gambles. But she did—once—and Hermann, overhearing her story, has his imagination stirred. A chance event leads him to obsession and ultimate madness.

Pushkin is deliberately mystifying about when Hermann’s madness begins, and whether it is reality or hallucinations that determine his actions and fate. Was the story true of Tomsky’s grandmother and was she really in possession of the secret of the cards, given her by the Count St Germain? (This Count is a real historical figure, linked to mysticism, occultism, and secret societies.)

Although based on Pushkin’s story, the opera makes many departures from it. The greatest differences concern Lisa. As Lizavyeta Ivanova, in Pushkin’s story, she is not the Countess’s granddaughter but her orphan ward, eager to find in Hermann a possible escape from humiliating dependence. Hermann’s interest in her is feigned, and is entirely a way to gain the old lady’s secret. But in the opera Lisa throws away a brilliant engagement with Prince Yeletsky (the librettist’s invention) in a sudden passion for an enigmatic stranger.

At the climax of Pushkin’s story, Hermann finds that the ‘ace’ he has played bears the image of the Queen of Spades. She seems to him to be winking at him and grinning. ‘The extraordinary likeness stunned him….“The old woman!” he cried out in horror.’
The romantic intrigue ends in a double suicide. Lisa jumps into the Winter Canal when she realises Hermann’s obsession is with the three cards not her. The ‘canal scene’ is an invention of the brothers Tchaikovsky, as is Hermann’s suicide. Pushkin ends his story by telling us that Lizavyeta has married ‘a very pleasant young man’, while Hermann, out of his mind, is in an asylum, repeating endlessly: ‘Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, queen!’

There can be little doubt that the idea of his characters acting out their suicidal tendencies struck a deep chord in Tchaikovsky’s own persona. The canal scene was his own idea, and for reasons more important than the need for a female voice in an otherwise all-male act. The tendency is towards melodrama more Romantic in character than Pushkin’s tale, but what is opera but melodrama?

Memorable musical ideas match Hermann’s obsession, notably the three-note motif for the three cards. Pushkin parodies Gothic spookiness, but Tchaikovsky plays it for all its operatic worth. Tomsky’s narrative, in the opera, adds to Pushkin’s version the idea that the third man who seeks from the Countess the secret of the cards will be fatal for her. If many people regard this as an essential feature of The Queen of Spades, that is a tribute to how much the story has become fixed in our minds by Tchaikovsky’s inspired opera.
A period piece, but whose?
Tchaikovsky’s, Pushkin’s or Catherine’s?

Pushkin’s story *The Queen of Spades* is set in his present – not long before 1833 – when he wrote it as a ‘real’ story, told to him by someone he knew. The setting of Tchaikovsky’s opera, however, is ‘St Petersburg at the close of the 18th century’, predating the death of Catherine the Great in 1796.

The change of period is usually explained as the pretext for the pastoral entertainment ‘à la Mozart’ interpolated in the ballroom scene of Act II. The age of Catherine the Great is the time of Mozart, and the music of this divertissement is, among other things, one of Tchaikovsky’s tributes to that composer. As he was composing *The Queen of Spades* Tchaikovsky wrote ‘at times I thought I was living in the 18th century, and that there was nothing beyond Mozart’.

But Tchaikovsky’s quotations from Mozart are probably coincidental. For example, the pastoral duet sometimes supposed to quote Mozart’s Piano Concerto K.503 is more obviously a variant on the song ‘Plaisir d’amour’ by J.P. ‘Padre’ Martini (1705–1784), who briefly taught Mozart in 1770. The real setting of Tchaikovsky’s opera, Richard Taruskin suggests, is the 19th-century fairyland known as ‘the 18th century’. This is fiction for the musical stage, and it is pedantic to subject it to historical investigation, which nevertheless reveals some interesting anachronisms.

In Pushkin’s tale, Tomsky, telling of the story of his grandmother, says she was in Paris ‘about sixty years ago’ – that is, in the 1770s. But if she was there 60 years before Catherine’s time, that takes us back to the 1730s. Thus in the opera the Countess mentions meeting the Marquise de Pompadour, Louis XV’s mistress, who died in 1764. The Count de St Germain, who gives the Countess the secret of the three cards, can just about sneak into either period, living from 1712 to 1784.

Recently Boris Gasparov has argued that the musical and dramatic anachronisms in Tchaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades*, whether deliberate or not, contribute to the artistic purpose and effect. He argues that the music in this opera does not merely provide the sonic background appropriate to the various temporal environments. Rather, thematic recurrence in various such environments gives the story ‘stereoscopic temporality, as if it were happening in different historical epochs and stylistic environments simultaneously’.

Maria Slavina, the first Countess, in the bedroom scene. Behind her is a portrait showing the Countess in her youth.
1784 is the year of Grétry’s *Richard Cœur-de-Lion*, and it’s an aria from this opera which the Countess remembers from her heyday in Paris, and sings as she prepares for sleep. This really is an anachronism, but as ‘old music’, Tchaikovsky’s inclusion of Grétry’s aria serves its purpose. Besides, its words can be heard as a premonition: the old lady’s song seems unknowingly to address the concealed Hermann, and the line ‘I fear to speak to him at night’ comes true (she is scared to death, and she says nothing).

On the other hand, the Polonaise by Josef Kozlowski (1757–1821), which Tchaikovsky used in the ballroom scene, is exactly right for the ‘new’ period setting of the opera, and the associated words salute Catherine the Great and date from a 1791 feast in her honour, much like the one in the opera.

### Playing Faro

The plot of *The Queen of Spades* hinges on faro, a card game played at the court of Louis XIV and popular in Europe until the early 19th century.

The faro table is set up with a complete spade suit pasted to the felt, and players place bets on any card in the layout. In faro, the suits are equivalent – only the ranks of the cards are considered. From a full deck of cards, the banker-dealer turns up the top card (which is discarded) and then a further two. The first of these is the losing card, the second wins.

In Hermann’s first turn at faro, he bets a three, as instructed by the Countess’s ghost. The banker turns up a nine, then a three. Three wins. (If Hermann had bet on a card other than a three or a nine, his bet would have remained on the table, unsettled.)

For his second turn, he bets a seven. The banker turns up a nine, then a seven. Seven wins. At this point, Hermann is 94 thousand roubles ahead.

For his third and final turn, Hermann selects an ace. The dealing begins: a queen and then an ace. ‘The ace wins,’ says Hermann, turning up his card without glancing at it. ‘Your queen is killed,’ says Chekalinsky quietly.

Hermann trembled; looking down, he saw, not the ace he had selected, but the queen of spades. …As he stared at the card it seemed to him that the queen winked one eye at him mockingly.
Did Tchaikovsky play his cards right?

Tchaikovsky’s music has endeared itself to non-Russian audiences, but selectively: mainly his ballets, symphonies and concertos. Russians know and love a Tchaikovsky with words, a composer of operas and songs.

The two Tchaikovsky operas most often staged, in Russia and elsewhere, are both based on words by Pushkin, by common consent Russia’s greatest poet. Reversing non-Russians’ order of preference, many Russians consider The Queen of Spades a greater achievement than Eugene Onegin. Certainly it is more ambitious. Whereas Onegin is a relatively intimate affair, originally for student, semi-professional performance, with modest staging demands, The Queen of Spades is grand opera, requiring hefty voices in the main roles, and complete with danced and sung divertissements, a ball and a gambling scene, with many choral opportunities. Above all, the story is tragic and full of telling coups de théâtre.

The differences between the two operas have something to do with their sources. The opera Eugene Onegin respects the tone and content of Pushkin’s long narrative poem, whereas the almost elliptical brevity of Pushkin’s storytelling in The Queen of Spades gave scope for the expansion necessary for an opera – ‘insofar,’ Richard Taruskin observes, ‘as a study in ugly monomania suggested operatic adaptation at all’.

Russians immediately took to The Queen of Spades, but the opera that has been slow to establish itself outside Russia. Its ‘dark’ subject matter, its phantasmal, even surreal romanticism, seems to appeal to the Russian temperament. Originally Tchaikovsky claimed that the subject did not excite him, but that may have been out of disappointment that his brother Modest was adapting it for another composer. When that fell through and Tchaikovsky himself received the commission for an opera on the subject, in late 1889 with a 12-month deadline, Tchaikovsky set to work with frenzied speed. To enable uninterrupted work, he went to Florence, where he composed the opera in 44 days. ‘For God’s sake do not waste time,’ he wrote to his brother, ‘otherwise I could run out of text.’ When his brother’s words couldn’t keep up with his manic composing, Tchaikovsky wrote his own.

At one point he wrote to his brother: ‘Either I am terribly mistaken, Modya, or the opera is a masterpiece.’ Tchaikovsky’s conviction is reflected in the certainty with which his music conveys the crucial dramatic elements of
the opera, and the flexibility and naturalness of the setting of speech and dialogue.

Some of the interpolations which interrupt the terse story-telling were required by the director of the Imperial Theatres, Vsevolozhky. Tchaikovsky enjoyed composing them, paying tribute to his 18th-century setting with inspired pastiche. But attractive though they be as spectacle and music, these are not the most original aspects of The Queen of Spades, and they have sometimes been criticised for distracting from the plot. Yet close examination of the texts of the interpolations, and their music as well, reveals they add in telling ways to the musical realisation of the drama.

Both the theatre director and the composer knew what they were doing. The opera premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre in December 1890, conducted by Eduard Nápravnik, with a mixture of public success and critical response positive enough to justify its creators’ judgment.

What they say about The Queen of Spades...

'I've always said that the best composition by Tchaikovsky is sung by Krutikova in The Queen of Spades – not one of us is in debt to that!'

Tchaikovsky is making a joke. The aria in question is ‘Je crains de lui parler la nuit’ from Grétry’s Richard Cœur-de-Lion, which Tchaikovsky borrowed for the Countess’s bedroom scene. Dostoyevsky called Pushkin’s novella The Queen of Spades a work of ‘cold fury’.

‘The subject is dark, and the general course of the action makes little appeal.’

New York Times (1910), reviewing the Metropolitan Opera production conducted by Mahler.

The Queen of Spades displays ‘Tchaikovsky’s extraordinary subtle gift of portraying…the inner conflict of a character in the grip of circumstance’.

The Record Guide (1950)

‘The first and possibly the greatest masterpiece of musical surrealism.’

Richard Taruskin (New Grove Opera, 1992)

‘It is hard to picture a young woman from the upper crust of nobility (as Lisa is in the opera) walking alone to the Winter Canal at that hour, even for the express purpose of throwing herself into it, in the Petersburg of Pushkin’s time, let alone of the 18th century. The circumstances of Lisa’s death could hardly look more anachronistic had she thrown herself under a train.’

Boris Gasparov (Lost in a Symbolist City, 2005)
MORE MUSIC

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

There are several recordings of the complete opera available on CD and for download. Among the most recent issues is Seiji Ozawa’s 1992 recording with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Tanglewood Festival Chorus and American Boychoir. Vladimir Atlantov sings Hermann and Mirella Freni sings Lisa in a cast that also includes Maureen Forrester and Dmitri Hvorostovsky.

SONY 752 7712

If hearing the opera in concert has made you eager to see it in a St Petersburg setting, look for Valery Gergiev’s recording with the Kirov Opera and Orchestra at the Mariinsky Theatre. Gegam Grigorian sings Hermann, Maria Gulegina is Lisa and Olga Borodina sings Pauline/Milovszor. (All regions)

PHILIPS 070 434-9

PUSHKIN INSPIRATION

Outside Russia, the best known of Tchaikovsky’s operas has long been Eugene Onegin, also based on Pushkin. Look for the Georg Solti recording from Covent Garden with Teresa Kubiak and Bernd Weikl as Tatiana and Onegin, and Julia Hamari and Stuart Burrows as Olga and Lensky. Available on CD and in a film version directed by Peter Weigl.

DECCA 478 4163 (CD)
DECCA 071 1249 (DVD)

An earlier opera by Tchaikovsky, Mazeppa, is based on Pushkin’s Poltava, which in turn draws on a historic battle from the beginning of the 18th century. (Mazeppa is a Ukrainian Cossack.) You can find it in a Kirov production conducted by Valery Gergiev.

PHILIPS 482 2062 (CD)
PHILIPS 074 1949 (DVD)

Like The Queen of Spades, Pushkin’s blank verse play The Stone Guest is steeped in the supernatural, and the setting by Alexander Dargomizhsky (1813–1869) makes virtually no changes to Pushkin’s text. The stone guest of the title can be recognised from Mozart’s Don Giovanni and other variations on the classic Don Juan tale. So it’s appropriate that the opera is paired with Rimsky-Korsakov’s one-act opera Mozart and Salieri, both in Bolshoi productions.

VIDEO ARTISTS INTERNATIONAL 4525

More Pushkin inspiration can be found in Rachmaninoff’s opera Aleko (based on The Gypsies), Glinka’s Ruslan and Ludmila and Rimsky-Korsakov’s Tale of Tsar Saltan (this story also provided the source for a Russian rock opera!). For Aleko, seek out Gianandrea Noseda’s recording with the BBC Philharmonic and Coro del Teatro Regio di Torino and an all-Russian cast.

CHANDOS 10583

ONLINE

In the original production of 1890, the roles of Hermann and Lisa were sung by the married couple Nikolai and Medea Figner. Both can be heard with remarkable clarity in excerpts on YouTube, her 1901 recording of the Act I solo being especially revealing.

bit.ly/MedeaFigner
bit.ly/NikolayFigner

If you’re keen to read Pushkin’s original story, head to Gutenberg.org to read onscreen or download in a variety of e-book formats. The English translation is by H. Twitchell (1901).

bit.ly/PushkinQueenOfSpades

Broadcast Diary

December

Friday 14 December, 9.15pm
MOZART MEETS COPLAND
Nicholas Carter conductor
David Elton trumpet
Alexandre Ogouey cor anglais
Mozart, Copland, Strauss

Tuesday 18 December, 1.05pm
SYMPHONY FOR THE COMMON MAN
Robert Spano conductor
Ian Cleworth, Timothy Constable, Rebecca Lagos, Colin Piper and Mark Robinson percussion
Debussy, Takemitsu, Copland

Friday 21 December, 8pm
BRASS EXHIBITION
Michael Mulcahy conductor
Sydney Symphony Brass Ensemble
Gabrieli, Kats-Chernin, Terracini, Mussorgsky, Wagner

Wednesday 26 December, 8pm
PIERS LANE IN RECITAL
Debussy, Bartók, Liszt, Chopin, Delibes

Fine Music 102.5
SYDNEY SYMPHONY 2012
Tuesday 11 December, 6pm
Musicians, staff and guest artists discuss what’s in store in our forthcoming concerts.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Vladimir Ashkenazy
PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC ADVISOR

In the years since Vladimir Ashkenazy first came to prominence on the world stage in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw he has built an extraordinary career, not only as one of the most renowned and revered pianists of our times, but as an inspiring artist whose creative life encompasses a vast range of activities.

Conducting has formed the largest part of his music-making for the past 20 years. He has been Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic (1998–2003), and Music Director of the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo (2004–2007). This is his fourth season as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Sydney Symphony.

Alongside these roles, Vladimir Ashkenazy is also Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, with whom he has developed landmark projects such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin (a project which he toured and later developed into a TV documentary) and Rachmaninoff Revisited at the Lincoln Center, New York.

He also holds the positions of Music Director of the European Union Youth Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. He maintains strong links with a number of other major orchestras, including the Cleveland Orchestra (where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor), San Francisco Symphony, and Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin (Chief Conductor and Music Director, 1988–96), as well as making guest appearances with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic.

Vladimir Ashkenazy continues to devote himself to the piano, building his comprehensive recording catalogue with releases such as the 1999 Grammy award-winning Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues, Rautavaara’s Piano Concerto No.3 (which he commissioned), Rachmaninoff transcriptions, Bach’s Wohltemperierte Klavier and Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations. In 2009 he released a disc of French piano duo works with Vovka Ashkenazy.

A regular visitor to Sydney over many years, he has conducted subscription concerts and composer festivals for the Sydney Symphony, with his five-program Rachmaninoff festival forming a highlight of the 75th Anniversary Season in 2007. In 2010–11 he conducted the Mahler Odyssey concerts and live recordings, and his artistic role with the orchestra also includes annual international touring.
Dina Kuznetsova  SOPRANO (LISA)

Russian-American soprano Dina Kuznetsova has performed in many of the great opera houses, from the Royal Opera House (Gianni Schicchi with Antonio Pappano) and the state opera houses of Berlin, Vienna and Munich, to San Francisco, Chicago Lyric Opera and the Metropolitan Opera.

A native of Moscow, she is a graduate of the Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and after successes in roles such as Gilda, Violetta and Juliette, she has embraced the Slavic and Russian repertoire. Her passionate portrayal of Tatiana (Eugene Onegin) has brought her huge success, most notably in her role debut opposite Dmitri Hvorostovsky for Lyric Opera of Chicago. Last season she made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Prilepa in The Queen of Spades.

In the 2012–13 season she will sing Desdemona (Otello) with the Gulbenkian Orchestra, and return to the Metropolitan Opera in Zandonai’s Francesca da Rimini. She will also sing Tatiana with the Russian National Orchestra and with Edmonton Opera.

Her concert appearances include the New York Festival of Song and Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. She also features in the Music@Menlo recordings, performing songs by Dvořák and Shostakovich.

This is Dina Kuznetsova’s Australian debut and her role debut as Lisa.

Stuart Skelton  TENOR (HERMANN)

Critically acclaimed for his beautiful voice, outstanding musicianship and intensely dramatic portrayals, Sydney-born Stuart Skelton is recognised as one of the finest heroic tenors of his generation, performing on the leading concert and operatic stages of the world in roles such as Lohengrin, Parsifal, Rienzi, Siegmund and Erik (Wagner); Kaiser and Bacchus (Richard Strauss), Laca (Jenůfa), Samson (Saint-Saëns), Florestan (Fidelio) and Peter Grimes.

Recent engagements have included Peter Grimes (Opera de Oviedo, English National Opera for the BBC Proms, New National Theatre of Tokyo), Das Lied von der Erde (Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago and Adelaide symphony orchestras), Die Walküre (Siegmund, Metropolitan Opera), The Flying Dutchman (Erik, English National Opera), Oedipus Rex (New Zealand International Arts Festival), Die Walküre Act I (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra) and Christ on the Mount of Olives (Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra).

Next year Stuart Skelton will perform the roles of Siegmund (Die Walküre) in Paris and Seattle and in Opera Australia’s Melbourne Ring cycle, Parsifal (Zurich), and Oedipus (Oedipus Rex on tour with John Eliot Gardiner and the London Symphony Orchestra). He will also perform in a gala concert with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs.

His most recent appearance with the Sydney Symphony was in 2010 in Mahler’s Das Lied von der Erde.
Irina Tchistjakova MEZZO-SOPRANO (COUNTESS)

Irina Tchistjakova graduated from the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music in Moscow in 1989. While still a student, she became a principal at the Theatre-Studio of the Gnesin Academy of Music and a leading mezzo-soprano of the Moscow Municipal Theatre ‘New Opera’ and the Bolshoi Theatre. In 1993 she won the Viñas Singing Competition in Barcelona.

The following year she made her American debut in Verdi’s Requiem at the Lincoln Center and appeared in Ruslan and Ludmila at Carnegie Hall and Boris Godunov (Marina) in Liège and Bern. In subsequent seasons she sang Marfa (Khovanshchina) at the Bolshoi and appeared in Eugene Onegin, The Queen of Spades and concerts of Alexander Nevsky.

Career highlights include Tchaikovsky’s Moscow Cantata (Bern), Rusalka (Munich), Larina in Eugene Onegin (Seville and Japan), Kindertotenlieder (Bergen), War and Peace and The Queen of Spades (Bastille) and Jeanne d’Arc (Montpellier). In addition to Nevsky, her concert repertoire includes Scriabin’s Symphony No.1, Mussorgsky’s Songs and Dances of Death and Brahms’ Alto Rhapsody, and she made her BBC Proms debut with Leonard Slatkin conducting Ivan the Terrible.

Recent engagements have included Larina (Cincinnati Opera) and Beethoven’s Ninth (Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra).

This is Irina Tchistjakova’s Australian debut.

José Carbó BARITONE (TOMSKY, ZLATOGOR)

José Carbó was born in Argentina of Spanish and Italian descent, and moved with his family to Australia at an early age. He studied under Thais Taras, Arax Mansourian and Margaret Baker-Genovesi in Rome, and won the Australian Singing Competition Opera Award in 2005.

He made his debut with Opera Australia in 2002 in Ariadne auf Naxos and was soon engaged for the title role in The Barber of Seville. Since then he has made his European debut (Rome Opera in the title role of The Marriage of Figaro), La Scala debut, and American debut.

Other roles include Enrico (Lucia di Lammermoor), Marcello (La Bohème), First Officer (Madeline Lee) and Don Giovanni, and his concert repertoire includes Carmina Burana, The Bells, Fauré’s Requiem and Brahms’ German Requiem.

This year he sang in The Barber of Seville and Die tote Stadt (Fritz) for Opera Australia, and released his debut album, My Latin Heart. Next year he will sing Anckarström in A Masked Ball and make his role debut as Germont in La Traviata (OA).

In 2006 José Carbó sang in the Sydney Symphony concert performance of La Rondine and toured to Japan with the orchestra. More recently he sang in Beethoven’s Ninth (2007).
Deborah Humble MEZZO-SOPRANO (PAULINE, MILOVSZOR)

Deborah Humble studied in Adelaide and Melbourne, and in 1995 she was a Young Artist with the Victoria State Opera. In 2002, she became a principal artist with Opera Australia, where her roles included Dido, Mercédès (Carmen), Clarissa (The Love for Three Oranges), Sonyetka (Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk) and Iolanthe, and in 2004 she received the Dame Joan Sutherland Scholarship.

In 2005 she became a principal with Hamburg State Opera. There she sang roles such as Zenobia (Radamisto), Bradamante (Alcina), Suzuki (Madama Butterfly), Olga (Eugene Onegin) and Malik (Henze’s L’Upupa). But it was her performances in Hamburg’s Ring cycle, conducted by Simone Young, that won her international acclaim.

Other engagements have included the Edinburgh Festival, Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, Salzburg Festival, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Singapore Lyric Opera, Seattle Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Stuttgart Philharmonic, London Mozart Players and the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, in works as diverse as Handel’s Messiah and Verdi’s Requiem.

She has performed for State Opera of South Australia, Opera Queensland, the Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland and Tasmanian symphony orchestras, and the Adelaide and Brisbane festivals, and earlier this year she sang Brigitte in Die tote Stadt (OA). Her most recent appearance with the Sydney Symphony was in 2007 (Beethoven Nine).

Andrei Bondarenko BARITONE (YELETSKY)

Andrei was born in 1987 in the Ukraine, and studied at the National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music (Kiev) and the Kiev Conservatory. Since 2007 he has been a soloist of the Mariinsky Academy of Young Singers in St Petersburg, where he has sung Guglielmo (Così fan tutte), Count Almaviva (The Marriage of Figaro), Papageno (The Magic Flute) and Harlequin (Ariadne auf Naxos). He has won prizes in several international singing competitions in the Ukraine and Russia, and taken part in the Salzburg Festival Young Singers Project, and in 2011 he won the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World song prize.

Career highlights include his North American recital debut at Carnegie Hall, and role debuts as Pelléas at the Mariinsky Theatre under Valery Gergiev, Marcello (La Bohème) for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Billy Budd at the Mikhailovsky Theatre St Petersburg, and Eugene Onegin at the Bolshoi Theatre Minsk. In 2010 he sang in Gounod’s Roméo et Juliette at the Salzburg Festival, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. And last year he appeared with the Sydney Symphony and conductor Martin Haselböck in the Sydney Festival presentation of The Giacomo Variations, starring John Malkovich.
Angus Wood  TENOR (CHEKALINSKY)
Born in Australia, Angus Wood studied at London’s Royal College of Music, the University of Melbourne and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He was a member of both the Victorian State Opera and the Opera Australia Young Artist programs.

His repertoire ranges from baroque operas such as Dido and Aeneas (OA) and Semele (Pinchgut Opera), through operetta and musical theatre (Die Fledermaus, Candide and Sweeney Todd), to Madama Butterfly (Pinkerton), La Traviata (Alfredo), Lucia di Lammermoor (Edgardo), The Flying Dutchman (Steersman), Otello (Cassio), Carmen (Don José), Aida (Radamès), A Masked Ball (Gustavo) and Pelléas et Mélisande.

Angus Wood appears regularly with many of the Australian orchestras and state opera companies. He has sung Messiah with the Melbourne and West Australian symphony orchestras, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and the Sydney Symphony (conducted by Antony Walker); Beethoven's Ninth with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Philharmonia; and Handel concerts with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra.

After winning the German Australian Opera Award in 2006, Angus Wood became a resident singer at the Hessisches Staatstheater in Wiesbaden (where he has sung Haydn’s Creation) and later at the Anhaltisches Theater Dessau. Since 2011 he has been a member of the Theater der Stadt, Heidelberg, and he recently returned to Australia to sing Pinkerton for West Australian Opera.

Gennadi Dubinsky  BASS (SURIN)
Gennadi Dubinsky was born and educated in Russia and, in the 1980s, was a soloist with the State Theatre of Operetta and Moscow State Concert organisation, performing major operetta roles as well as appearing in concerts and on radio and television.

In 1992 he moved to Australia, and since then has built up an impressive list of musical and acting credits. For many years he was a featured artist on Opera Afloat, and he was a member of the Showstoppers troupe starring Maggie Scott, which won the 1998 Mo Award for Best Show of the Year. He also performs a one-man show in the style of Ivan Rebroff, winning praise for his operatic arias and Russian songs.

In 2008 he sang Sarastro in The Magic Flute and Timur in Turandot for Opera Queensland and covered major roles in Rigoletto for State Opera of South Australia. The following year he was a full-time soloist with Opera Australia, singing Ramphis in Aida, Lorenzo in I Capuleti e i Montecchi and The Priest in Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. More recently he has appeared for OA in The Girl of the Golden West, The Marriage of Figaro, Macbeth and Rigoletto, and sung Bartolo in The Marriage of Figaro for New Zealand Opera.
Tabatha McFadyen SOPRANO (PRILEPA)
Tabatha McFadyen is currently completing an honours performance degree at the Queensland Conservatorium (Griffith University) as a pupil of Lisa Gasteen. She is a recipient of the Elizabeth Muir Memorial Undergraduate Award, a member of Griffith Honours College, and has been a recipient of the Griffith Award for Academic Excellence for each year of her study.

This year she competed as a semi-finalist in the McDonald’s Operatic Aria competition, and has been a finalist in the Opera & Arts Support Group Scholarship and the Italian Opera Foundation Award. As part of the Australian Singing Competition, she received the Mozart Opera Institute Award and the Nelly Apt Scholarship. In 2011 she won the South East Queensland Aria & Concerto Competition and the Margaret Nickson Prize (with pianist Alex Raineri), was a finalist in the 2011 Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonynge Vocal Scholarship, and performed in the New Music Network’s Generation Next project.

Her operatic roles have included Zerlina (Don Giovanni), Titania (The Fairy Queen) and Suor Genovieffa (Suor Angelica). This is her Sydney Symphony debut.

Victoria Lambourn MEZZO-SOPRANO (THE GOVERNESS)
Australian-born Victoria Lambourn completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, and her performance as Angelina in La Cenerentola for the RNCM led to an invitation to participate in the Accademia Rossiniana in Pesaro.

On returning to Australia, she was a Young Artist with Opera Queensland. Her operatic roles include Hänsel in Hänsel und Gretel (State Opera of South Australia), Suzuki in Madama Butterfly and Flora in La Traviata (OzOpera), Rosina in The Barber of Seville (Melbourne Opera), Florence Pike in Albert Herring (Victorian Opera) and La Badessa in Suor Angelica (Macau International Music Festival).

As a concert artist she has performed throughout the UK, including concerts with the Hallé Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic’s Ensemble 10/10, and in Australia with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (Messiah), Canberra Symphony Orchestra (Beethoven’s Ninth) and Canberra Choral Society (Brahms’ Alto Rhapsody), as well as Orchestra Victoria, and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs. She has performed in China and Japan.

This year she has sung Second Lady (The Magic Flute) for Opera Australia, Dorabella (Così fan tutte) for Melbourne Opera, and recorded the disc Lakmé – an album of arias and duets with soprano Milica Ilic. Next year she will appear with OA in Partenope and Orpheus in the Underworld.

This is Victoria Lambourn’s Sydney Symphony debut.
Sydney Children’s Choir

The Sydney Children’s Choir has built a worldwide reputation for choral excellence, inspiring audiences with a distinctive Australian choral sound. Under the direction of founder Lyn Williams OAM, the choir has commissioned more than 100 new Australian works and performs a significant number of Australian compositions. The choir has toured extensively throughout Australia and Indonesia, Singapore, Finland, Estonia, France, the United Kingdom and Japan. In 2010, the choir celebrated its 21st birthday with a gala concert at the Sydney Opera House and a tour to China. In 2011 the choir performed in the YouTube Symphony Orchestra project conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, and recorded the Sydney New Year’s Eve Anthem. The choir regularly performs with the Sydney Symphony, most recently in Mahler’s Third and Eighth symphonies, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, and in The Fellowship of the Ring. The choir appears on the soundtracks of Moulin Rouge, Happy Feet and Australia, and on their CD Voices of Angels.

www.sydneychildrenschoir.com.au

Lyn Williams OAM
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & FOUNDER, GONDWANA CHOIRS

Lyn Williams is Australia’s leading director of choirs for young people, having founded the internationally renowned Gondwana Choirs. Since 1989, Gondwana Choirs has grown to include the Sydney Children’s Choir, Gondwana National Choirs and Gondwana National Indigenous Children’s Choir. Her exceptional skill in working with young people is recognised for its high artistic quality and ground-breaking innovation. She frequently directs and conducts for major events, tours internationally with her choirs, and has conducted the Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne symphony orchestras, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian Youth Orchestra and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs. In 2004 she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in recognition of her services to the Arts, and in 2006 the NSW State Award (Classical Music Awards) for her contribution to the advancement of Australian music. Lyn Williams is a Churchill Fellow and also a composer.

Sydney Children’s Choir

Lyn Williams OAM Artistic Director & Founder
Sally Whitwell Pianist
Aaron Curran General Manager (Interim)

Young Boys
Jacob Agoo
Neil Baker
Ihnteck Chung
Isaac Davis
Michael Donohue
Oscar Drew
Timothy Dutton
Oliver Golding
Dominic Grimshaw
Abel Hofflin
Reuben Langbein
Aeden MacNamara
Owen MacNamara
Lachlan Massey
Sebastian Pini
Timothy Sampson
Mackenzie Shaw
Callan Smith
James Thompson
Adam Travis
Piet Toms
Indiana Williams
Yilan Yu
Nikita Zaika (Make-believe Commander)

Young Girls
Stella Davy
Annelise Hall
Miranda Ilchef
Tabitha Lee
Gabi Powell-Thomas
Sofie Rejto
Jill Termaat
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Formed in 1920, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs is Australia’s largest choral organisation. The three principal choirs – the Chamber Singers, Symphony Chorus and the young adult choir VOX – perform a diverse repertoire each year, ranging from early a cappella works to challenging contemporary music. Sydney Philharmonia Choirs presents an annual concert series of choral masterpieces, and has premiered several commissioned works, most recently Andrew Ford’s Waiting for the Barbarians. In 2002, Sydney Philharmonia was the first Australian choir to sing at the BBC Proms (Mahler’s Eighth Symphony under Simon Rattle), returning again in 2010. Other highlights have included Beethoven’s Ninth for the Nagano Winter Olympics, concerts with Barbra Streisand and Britten’s War Requiem at the 2007 Perth Festival. Appearances with the Sydney Symphony have included Mahler’s Eighth for the Olympic Arts Festival (2000), Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex and Symphony of Psalms, ‘Midsummer Shakespeare’ (2011 Sydney Festival), the choral symphonies in Ashkenazy’s Mahler Odyssey (2010–11), and most recently Mozart’s Requiem.

Brett Weymark  Music Director

Brett Weymark studied singing at the University of Sydney and conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium. In 2003 he was appointed Musical Director of Sydney Philharmonia Choirs. He has conducted the choirs in premieres of works by composers such as Elena Kats-Chernin and Peter Sculthorpe, and has also prepared the choirs for concerts with conductors such as Charles Mackerras, Charles Dutoit and Simon Rattle. Most recently, he has conducted Die Fledermaus at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and Symphony in the Domain for the 2012 Sydney Festival, and this season he also conducted the OzOpera tour of Don Giovanni and returned to WAAPA to conduct Goetz’s Taming of the Shrew.
To find out about Sydney Philharmonia concerts or joining one of the choirs, visit www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au
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Sun Yi  
Associate Concertmaster  
Kirsten Williams  
Associate Concertmaster  
Fiona Ziegler  
Assistant Concertmaster  
Julie Battý  
Marianne Broadfoot  
Brielle Clapson  
Sophie Cole  
Amber Davis  
Jennifer Hoy  
Nicola Lewis  
Léone Ziegler  
Claire Herrick*  
Elizabeth Jones*  
Dene Olding  
Concertmaster  
Jennifer Booth  
Georges Lentz  
Alexandra Mitchell  
Alexander Norton  

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Marina Marsden  
Alexander Read*  
Emily Long  
Assistant Principal  
Susan Dobbie  
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Maria Durek  
Emma Hayes  
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Assistant Principal  
Robyn Brookfield  
Sandro Costantino  
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Leah Lynn  
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Kristy Conrau  
Timothy Nankervis  
Elizabeth Neville  
Christopher Piccock  
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Diana Doherty  
David Papp  
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Principal Cor Anglais  
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Craig Wernicke  
Principal Bass Clarinet  
Rowena Watts*  
Francesco Celata  
Christopher Tingay  

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Fiona McNamara  
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Noriko Shimada  
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Robert Johnson  
Geoffrey O’Reilly  
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Euan Harvey  
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To see photographs of the full roster of permanent musicians and find out more about the orchestra, visit our website: www.sydneysymphony.com/SSO_musicians  
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The men of the Sydney Symphony are proudly outfitted by Van Heusen.
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 2012 tour of China.

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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Principal Percussion Rebecca Lagos talks hurdles, radars and democracy.

If ever there were a section in an orchestra that needed a strong ‘sixth sense’ to play precisely together, it would have to be the percussion section. Timing unison entries, says principal percussionist Rebecca Lagos, calls for ‘a mystery radar thing. I can’t describe it any other way. We’ll all take a big breath in, and play, and it all comes together.’

Rebecca acknowledges that there can be many hurdles for an aspiring young percussionist. ‘You have to accumulate masses of gear, find somewhere to store it, possibly find somewhere else to practice. All this could be a real stumbling block to success.’

Her own path to becoming a professional musician was relatively straightforward. ‘I’ve been quite blessed in terms of falling into jobs early.’ Twenty-five years ago, when she first joined the Sydney Symphony, Rebecca also joined the percussion ensemble Synergy. ‘It was the perfect foil for all the orchestral stuff.’

Some people have a feel for metal. Some people have a feel for skin.
Our recent tour to China offered ample opportunity for reflection on the year. And what a year it’s been. In the orchestra’s 80th year, some of our anniversary programs have highlighted historical visits by Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland. We’ve also recognised important musical events in the orchestra’s history, including our re-creation of the official opening concert of the Sydney Opera House. It’s been a significant year also with the appointment of our next Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, David Robertson, who takes over from Vladimir Ashkenazy in 2014.

As 2012 draws to a close, we have one celebration left up our sleeve. Ashkenazy will conduct a three-week mini festival of Russian masters. The centrepiece is a concert performance of Tchaikovsky’s opera *The Queen of Spades*. And we present the Australian premiere of Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No.4 in its original version. I hope you’ll agree it’s been an amazing year of music-making. Thank you for your support in coming to our concerts. After all, as Confucius says, ‘If an orchestra plays, and no one’s there to hear it, did it ever really happen?’

RORY JEFFES

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RORY JEFFES

The short answer is yes, Tobias’s viola is bigger than most. But why? Of all the orchestral instruments, the viola poses the greatest design challenges. In order to match the acoustic properties of its cousin the violin, the lower-pitched viola would have to be about 51 cm long, making it almost impossible to play. A compromise must be reached. Over the centuries, viola makers have experimented with sizes and shapes of the instrument, adjusting proportional relationships between the length of the neck and position of the bridge, and the dimensions of the body, all the while seeking to maintain that signature sound of the viola. Naturally, violists come in all shapes and sizes too. Tobias, standing at 6-foot-and-quite-a-bit, has a longer reach than many of his colleagues, and can thus play on an instrument closer to the theoretical ideal. ‘I guess I’m just one of the lucky ones!’ he says.

Ask a Musician

The National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing – known as ‘The Egg’ – dwarfs our musicians in this group shot. Beijing was the second stop on the orchestra’s tour of China, which also took in Tianjin, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Shanghai and Qingdao. Our thanks to tour partner Tianda for their support of this cultural exchange.

Our Development Manager Amelia Morgan-Hunn has her own Ask a Musician question: Is Tobias Breider’s viola bigger than everyone else’s?

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Ashkenazy’s Sibelius

At the end of the our Sibelius festival in 2004, conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy turned to the audience and declared that he had ‘never heard Sibelius played better!’ Now, celebrating five years at the orchestra’s helm, Ashkenazy still feels a ‘great affinity with Sibelius’s Nordic nature’. He will begin 2013 with two of the composer’s earliest orchestral works: Kullervo and the Lemminkäinen Suite. These tone poems mark the beginning of the Sibelius’s uniquely Finnish style of composition, drawing on his country’s rich folklore to create music of great individuality and beauty.

Both works are shaped by a narrative, each focusing on the story of a hero from the Finnish epic poem, the Kalevala. The tale of Kullervo, a wandering magician, is told through the human voice, calling for a bass-baritone (Kullervo), a soprano (his sister) and chorus in two of its five movements. The sound world of Lemminkäinen is purely instrumental, and the popular third movement, The Swan of Tuonela, features an expansive, song-like solo for the cor anglais. This is the creation of a young composer still working to master the orchestral form, but elements of the snow-covered Finnish landscape are already audible. Ashkenazy, who nominates Sibelius as one of his favourites, says this is some of the composer’s best music. NJ

Legends by the Sea (Lemminkäinen)
Wed 6 Feb | 8pm
Fri 8 Feb | 8pm
Sat 9 Feb | 8pm

A Finnish Epic (Kullervo)
Fri 15 Feb | 8pm
Sat 16 Feb | 2pm

Your Say

What an inspired piece of programming! [Symphony for the Common Man, September] L’après-midi d’un faune, so sensitively played, was a perfect prelude to the Takemitsu, which seemed to take us into a new sort of orchestral idiom in the same way Debussy did in 1894. As for the Copland symphony, it won in the decibel stakes, but the phrase came to mind: ‘full of sound and fury, signifying...’

Frank Langley

It was one of the most pleasurable evenings I am sure to experience [Ravel’s Bolero, October]. Amy Dickson was fabulous and the orchestra were, as always, brilliant. The percussion section put in a lot of work and they deserved the appreciation that was displayed. The SSO Night Lounge seemed like a big hit. The chamber music was awesome. The mingling felt a bit awkward but I’d do it again if the orchestra was planning another!

Timothy Borge
HAS BEEN RECOGNISED IN THIS WAY.

WITH PETER, AND ARE DELIGHTED THAT HE IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE A LONG RELATIONSHIP WITH PETER, AND ARE DELIGHTED THAT HE HAS BEEN RECOGNISED IN THIS WAY.

BRAVO BEN

CONGRATULATIONS TO DOUBLE BASSIST BENJAMIN WARD WHO HAS BEEN SELECTED AS A 2012 CHURCHILL FELLOW. HIS PROJECT IS A COMPARISON OF THE DIVERSE APPROACHES TO THE DOUBLE BASS IN THE MAJOR ORCHESTRAS OF EUROPE AND BRITAIN. BEN SAYS: ‘IT’S A CHANCE FOR ME TO INFORM MY OWN PLAYING, AND BRING THAT LEARNING HOME TO THEN HELP STUDENTS THROUGH THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND IN PRIVATE TEACHING.’ BRAVO BEN!

RICHARD GILL – ANNIVERSARIES

2012 IS RICHARD GILL’S 20TH YEAR AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF OUR EDUCATION PROGRAM. TO CELEBRATE, WE COMMISSIONED A NEW WORK BY BARRY CONYNGHAM – SYMPHONY – WHICH RICHARD IS CONDUCTING IN THE MEET THE MUSIC SERIES IN NOVEMBER. IT’S ALSO 50 YEARS SINCE RICHARD BEGAN TEACHING AND TO MARK THIS AUSPICIOUS EVENT HE RECENTLY PUBLISHED A MEMOIR, GIVE ME EXCESS OF IT.

Did you know?

Our Education program has built up an impressive reach. Here are just a few of its vital statistics:

- Each year we perform approximately 50 schools concerts, for an audience of 30,000 school-aged students.
- The education team present accredited professional learning workshops annually to approximately 400 teachers and 100 student teachers.
- We help teachers teach by producing six books of lesson resources which are then purchased by teachers all over Australia, and even as far away as Egypt!
- This year, we presented teacher workshops in five states.

And advice from the coalface: You gotta be quick! This year’s series of schools concerts at the ABC sold out in 2011, before the season had even begun.

BRAVO EDITOR: Genevieve Lang
CONTRIBUTOR: Naomi Johnson

CODA

HONOURS

Philanthropist Peter Weiss was recently honoured by the University of Sydney with an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (HonLDitt). The conferring ceremony was an intimate affair in the Vice Chancellor’s office conducted by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO. We’ve been fortunate to have a long relationship with Peter, and are delighted that he has been recognised in this way.

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