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Pink Martini
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Toby Thatcher conductor
Meet the Music
Thu 15 Sep 6.30pm
Kaledoscope
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Nelson Freire plays Schumann
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BEETHOVEN Coriolan Overture
SCHUMANN Piano Concerto
RACHMANINOFF Symphony No.2
Marcelo Lehninger conductor
Nelson Freire piano

David Drury in Recital
German Organ Music
JS BACH Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV 532
JG WALTHER Concerto in B minor, after Signor Meck
MENDELSSOHN Organ Sonata No.2
REGER Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op.135b
David Drury organ
Tea & Symphony
Fri 23 Sep 11am complimentary morning tea from 10am

Nelson Freire in Recital
Program to include music by Mozart, Chopin, Shostakovich and Rachmaninoff with a Bach-Busoni transcription and BEETHOVEN Sonata in A flat, Op.110
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DAVID DRURY IN RECITAL

German Organ Music

David Drury organ

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV 532

JOHANN GOTTFRIED WALThER (1684–1748)
Concerto del Signor Meck, appropriato all’ organo
after Vivaldi’s Violin Concerto in E minor, RV 275
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro

FELIX MENDELSOHN (1809–1847)
Organ Sonata in C minor, Op.65 No.2
Grave – Adagio
Allegro maestoso e vivace –
Fuga (Allegro moderato)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
‘Herzlich tut mich verlangen’ (2nd version)
No.10 from Eleven Chorale Preludes, Op.122

MAX REGER (1873–1916)
Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op.135b

Estimated durations:
11 minutes, 11 minutes,
12 minutes, 3 minutes, 18 minutes
The concert will conclude at
approximately 12.10pm.
Born in 1961, David Drury is well known to Australian audiences as an organist, choral conductor and composer. A graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium and the Royal Academy of Music, in 1987 he became the first and only Australian to win the Tournemire prize for improvisation at the St Alban’s International Organ Competition.

Since then he has toured England, France, Germany, Canada, USA and New Zealand as a recitalist, and appeared as a concerto soloist with the Sydney, Adelaide and West Australian symphony orchestras, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.

Recent performance highlights include performances of the Poulenc organ concerto with the HKPO and the SS0 (the latter in 2014 with conductor Jonathan Nott). He has performed solo recitals in Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart and Los Angeles, and appeared in the Ballarat Goldfields Festival and the New England Bach Festival.

In addition to performing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra when organ is required, he has also performed in concerts with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, Bel a cappella, Coro Innominata, Australian Baroque Brass and the early music ensemble Camerata Antica.

He has recorded four solo albums and appeared on recordings with the SS0, The Song Company, Cantillation and Australian Baroque Brass. He is also Director of Music at St Paul’s College at the University of Sydney. His choral music is published by Crescendo Music Publications.

David Drury’s most recent recital appearances for the SS0 were in 2013, when he was joined by members of VOX and violinist Rebecca Gill, and 2011, with guest soprano Sara Macliver and the SS0 Fellows.
German Organ Music

Today’s recital explores some of the greatest music of the German school of organ composition, from the Baroque to the late Romantic, and it is the far-reaching influence of Johann Sebastian Bach that provides the programmatic thread.

The program begins with Johann Sebastian Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV 532. The prelude and fugue genre, central to German organ music in the 17th and 18th centuries, reached a period of extraordinary refinement and virtuosity in the early 1700s, when Bach was court organist at Weimar. His preludes and fugues – increasingly adventurous and ambitious – reflect his first detailed explorations into Italian musical styles. His approach, influenced by the freer, more rhapsodic style of Dietrich Buxtehude, shifted to focus on balance, textural transparency, and clarity of structure.

Today’s Prelude and Fugue was most likely composed around 1710. The prelude is built around a distinct three-part structure, opening with a series of exuberantly upward-rising scales in both manuals and pedals. A contrapuntal ‘alla breve’ section follows, after which the prelude concludes dramatically with a return to the ascending gestures of the opening, a redolent nod to the rhetorical flourishes of Buxtehude.

The fugue, concerto-like in style, features a brilliant and virtuosic pedal part, including a breathtaking final cadenza. Derived from the opening semi-quaver motif, and played in a rising sequence from the lowest to the highest Ds of the pedal board, it’s Bach at his most high octane.

Johann Gottfried Walther’s Concerto in B minor ‘after Signor Meck’ is the one imposter on this program: the original concerto is not by the south German composer Joseph Meck at all but by Antonio Vivaldi. It was not until 1974, when Breitkopf & Härtel editor Klaus Beckmann undertook an extensive examination of primary sources, that the Italian composer was confirmed as author of the original piece: a violin concerto in E minor (RV275). For the sake of our program, at least the transcriber is German!

The practice of borrowing from other composers was widespread during the 17th and 18th centuries. The question of attribution was not deemed relevant and the autographs of Bach’s transcriptions of works by Vivaldi, for example, feature his own name rather than that of original composer. In fact, nowhere in the scores or parts is there any mention of Vivaldi. To our modern sensibilities this might seem odd, but in the 18th century it would have been considered a vote of confidence. Certainly, this convention has provided some challenging areas of research for musicologists in recent decades.
Bach produced arrangements for five organ and 16 harpsichord concertos in the Italian style when he was court organist for prince Johann Ernst in Weimar. The young prince was a catalyst for these endeavours: in 1713 he brought back from Amsterdam - then an important centre of music publishing - a number of Vivaldi’s wildly popular concertos and sonatas. Bach studied them intently, as did his cousin Walther, who acted as music tutor to the prince. Walther, greatly inspired by these Italian originals, wrote 78 transcriptions, although unfortunately of these only 14 are extant. The Concerto in B minor - like the majority of his arrangements - is faithful for the most part to the original text. A bravura work in three movements, it is easily comparable in brilliance to concerto transcriptions of Bach.

For centuries the organ on mainland Europe had remained unrivalled as the most important of all keyboard instruments. Yet, shortly after the death of Bach in 1750, it began to suffer its steepest decline in popularity since its earliest history and construction. Two factors were at play. Forces external to music – the far-reaching social, theological, political and military upheavals and turbulence of the late-18th century that culminated in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars – left many instruments badly damaged or in a state of disrepair. And, while musical styles continued to develop, the technological limitations of the organ meant that composers looked instead to the fortepiano, a new instrument that afforded both power and great expressivity: players were able to control a wide range of dynamics simply with strength of touch.

Nevertheless, **Felix Mendelssohn** – a prodigy who wrote his first organ piece, a little Prelude in D minor, in 1820 at the age of 11 – composed for the instrument throughout his short yet enormously prolific life, writing a number of standalone works and two particularly important collections: the Three Preludes and Fugues, Op.37 (1834–37) and, the most significant compositions for the instrument since those of Bach himself, the Six Sonatas, Op.65 (1844–45). These collections form the backbone of Mendelssohn’s output for organ, a crucial bridge between organ music of the 18th century and the works of the late Romantic German organ school.

In fact, Mendelssohn’s influence on organ music and organ playing during the 19th century was incalculable. As one of the most famous composers in Europe – his violin concerto was from the outset a huge hit throughout Europe and the oratorio *Elijah* repeatedly wowed British choral societies – he was also widely known as one of the greatest pianists of his era and easily without peer as an organist.
It was in 1829, during the first of many concert tours to England, that a number of factors coalesced to form an incalculable influence on the 20 year old’s development as a composer of organ music.

From a young age he had been deeply influenced by Bach (his counterpoint teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter was a Bach fanatic), and earlier that year he had revived Bach’s Matthew Passion, organising and conducting the first performance since 1750. While in England, Mendelssohn met and became friends with another organist-composer, Samuel Wesley, also a leading advocate for the rediscovery of Bach’s music during the 19th century. In England Mendelssohn encountered a national school of organ composition still under the influence of Handel: ‘voluntaries’ that for the most part were written only for the manuals, and which juxtaposed two movements; a slow and expressive introduction followed by a lively fugal allegro. Accordingly, his performances of Bach’s ‘pedal fugues’ astounded the English audiences, and his virtuosic contrapuntal improvisations elicited much delight. Interestingly, we have no record of Mendelssohn playing any other works other than those by Bach or himself.

By Mendelssohn’s eighth visit, in 1844, and at the request of a number of England’s leading organists, he was commissioned by the publishing firm Coventry and Hollier to write a ‘set of voluntaries’. Mendelssohn set to work, composing a series – 19 in all – of small pieces. A disparate collection in a variety of keys, there was no clear relationship between them, and certainly no sense of the formal structure of a ‘sonata’. By December 1844 he began to collate the pieces according to tonality and motifs and the Six Sonatas began to take shape.

The works were published simultaneously across Europe, with Mendelssohn making a practical decision to use ‘sonata’ rather than the term ‘voluntary’, meaningless outside England. It was a clever choice as the set almost immediately became an integral part of the standard organ repertoire. In the process, and without intent, he had created an entirely new genre for the organ, a synthesis of old and new forms, which rapidly became the model for composers in Germany and abroad.

The two-part structure of the English organ voluntary can be recognised in many of these works, and the presence of Bach looms ever strong. Yet by also assimilating Romantic style and sentiment, Mendelssohn’s innovations heralded a new era of organ composition. These pieces were the first to be published with a fully phrased pedal part, and are notable for their highly pianistic writing.

Mendelssohn’s Sonata No.2, although technically in four movements, is best viewed structurally as having only two.
It opens with a stately yet harmonically urgent Grave which, by account of its ending on the dominant, effectively works as an introduction to the following Adagio, a gentle song-without-words. An infectiously joyous movement in C major follows, and the instruction ‘attacca la Fuga’ suggests this section was envisioned as a prelude to the final fugue. With athletic pedal lines, two countersubjects, a magnificent pedal point on G, and an invigorating hymn tune at the end, this is Mendelssohn at his most rousing.

The final output of any artist often carries an element of mystique. Johannes Brahms’s last pieces, his Eleven Chorale Preludes, are without doubt a series of small masterpieces. Written during the summer of 1896, the year before his death, they are – for the most part – introspective and deeply intimate works. Whether consciously or not, he imbued the miniatures with a sense of contemplative finality, always keeping an eye on the eternal, with the last two in particular inviting us to meditate on the notions of death, grief, and sublimation from the mundanity of our world. None of this seems surprising: Clara Schumann, Brahms’s closest friend and confidante for almost four decades, had died only days earlier, and his own sense of impending death was greatly heightened. Battling advanced liver cancer, his prognosis was grim.
The autograph of all 11 pieces was found neatly placed on Brahms’s desk after his death in April 1897. Although he had only played them privately for friends, it is clear he intended their discovery and universal release. It was not until 1902, however, that Eusebius Mandyczewski edited and published the set as Opus 122 – Brahms’s last, posthumous opus number – and the pieces received their public premiere.

For a composer best known for his symphonic and piano works, it is remarkable that Brahms ended his musical life writing for the organ. Although he had learnt to play in his youth, his relationship to the instrument was sporadic. He occasionally employed it in an accompanying role, for example in the three early choral works, Opp.12, 27 and 30, and later the Requiem (Op.45), but notably composed solo pieces only during two short periods: four novice preludes and fugues during 1856–57, and, after an extraordinary 40-year hiatus, the set of chorale preludes.

Why return to the organ? Some scholars believe these chorales were written as quasi-devotional companion pieces to his late song cycle for baritone and piano, *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op.121. Like these songs, the chorales are elaborations, albeit wordless, upon the lines of pre-existing Lutheran chorale melodies. Yet, it is also important to recognise that Brahms’s musical life had been rife with tension between the conservative and the progressive. Convinced that the great tradition of classical music had somehow become lost, he believed it was his duty to establish it again, through a conscious fusion of the old and the new. The chorale prelude, forever associated with Bach, was therefore for Brahms a means of paying homage to his musical heritage.

Within Op.122, Brahms composed two settings of “*Herzlich tut mich verlangen*” (*My Heart is filled with longing*), a melody best known as the passion chorale ‘O Sacred Head now Wounded’ and repeatedly used by Bach throughout the Matthew Passion. In today’s program we will hear the second setting, No.10. A profoundly beautiful composition, gentle and consoling, the melody is played out by the pedals, with a semi-quaver line moving above, shared between the hands. A throbbing quaver pattern – surely the beating of a heart – is a constant pulse underneath. It continues – almost – to the end.

*My heart is filled with longing, Awaits the blessed end.*
*Of trials which are thronging, And sufferings which impend.*
*The world’s joys are infernal, My spirit they benumb; Heaven’s joys though are eternal, Come quickly Jesus, come!*

From the last decades of the 19th century, Europe began to experience unprecedented levels of socio-political turbulence. A time of great uncertainty, the Western world began unavoidably

**About the Organ**

The Grand Organ of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall is believed to be the world’s largest mechanical action pipe organ, with 10,154 pipes. It was built by Ronald Sharp, who is on record as saying: ‘I set out to build a musical instrument, not a piece of machinery.’ Despite its ambitious size (many doubted that such a huge organ, especially one with a mechanical action could be built), sound was Sharp’s main concern. When it was completed in 1979, he said ‘I hope music lovers will like it’. The organ’s mechanical tracker action contributes to something of a baroque character – articulated and sensitive – and the instrument has a warm but relatively gentle sound that most agree is extremely well-suited to earlier music by composers such as Bach. At the same time, says today’s organist David Drury, the organ holds some surprises and its distinctive sound is also very effective in French music.

Read more about the organ’s construction and specifications in the Sydney Opera House information sheet (PDF file) at bit.ly/GrandOrganSOH
to plummet headlong towards the end of an era. From the highly charged nature of this transition emerged concerns of a possible decline in cultural progress, and for many artists this was reflected in a typically fin-de-siècle anxiety over the loss of the past coupled with a longing for the new.

Max Reger, surely the greatest German composer of organ music since Bach, perfectly reflected this cultural focus in both his life and compositional output. He was born in Bavaria in 1873 (Brahms was three years away from completing his first symphony and the young Debussy had just entered the Paris Conservatoire); his life was cut short by a heart attack when he was 43. How much had changed in those four decades. By then Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire and Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring had received their premieres, and meanwhile in America Henry Cowell was making his first experiments with tone clusters.

Reger’s distinctive compositional voice is truly a direct descendant of Bach and Brahms. As a young man he studied both composers’ music to the point of obsession, and this all-consuming interest is reflected most strongly in his more than one hundred organ works. He revived baroque forms, and the Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op.135b (composed in 1915 and his final large-scale work for the instrument) is one such example, opening with a firm nod to the early 17th century with his use of stylus phantasticus – all rhapsodic, virtuosic and mercurial. Yet from the outset Reger transgresses the margins
of tonality and it’s as though these quick shifts between homophonic and contrapuntal textures somehow sublimate into spoken language, a kind of wordless prose. It’s this heightened command of counterpoint and complex harmony that makes this music so very modern, forming a bridge from Bach to Brahms, and arriving at Schoenberg. Of course, the fantasias form traditionally denotes a certain improvisatory impetuousness, yet Reger pushes to even further compositional extremes, as the movement reaches total ecstatic abandon towards the end.

There is an overwhelming sense of the subversive and revolutionary in his writing. He’s not afraid to play with our sensibilities as fragments of hymn-tunes occasionally emerge from the fecund chromatic harmonies. Characteristically extreme dynamics are used, too, from pppp (as soft as possible) to ffff (louder!), while the technical demands he places on the player are staggering, requiring a phenomenal fluency of hands and feet. This is music of raw urgency, of palpable romantic excess: a grand symphonic poem built around the scaffolding of the Baroque. Little wonder Reger’s contemporaries regarded him the equal of Richard Strauss: he was very much a child of his time.

JESSICA COTTIS © 2016

Before Jessica Cottis took up conducting she was an organist, studying with Marie-Claire Alain in Paris and performing in Westminster Cathedral in 2003. From 2012 to 2014 she was Assistant Conductor of the SSO.
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