7 August 2025

LYRICAL WOODWINDS IN THE CITY

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra 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, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

The Orchestra'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. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

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Associate Principal

DOUBLE BASS
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Principal

FLUTES
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Acting Principal
Carolyn Harris

OBOES
Shefali Pryor
Principal
Callum Hogan

CLARINET
Francesco Celata
Associate Principal
Alexander Morris
Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS
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Principal Emeritus
Fiona McNamara
Noriko Shimada
Principal Contrabassoon

HORNS
Samuel Jacobs
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Euan Harvey
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Marnie Sebire
Rachel Silver
Lucy Smith*

Bold Principal
* Guest Musician
° Contract Musician
† Sydney Symphony Fellow

2025 CONCERT SEASON

CLASSICS IN THE CITY
Thursday 7 August, 7pm

City Recital Hall,
Angel Place

LYRICAL WOODWINDS IN THE CITY

CHARACTERFUL AND CONTRASTING

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)
Serenade for 13 wind instruments in E flat, Op.7 (1881)

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)
Suite in B flat, Op.4 (1884)
i. Praeludium
ii. Romanze
iii. Gavotte
iv. Introduction and Fugue

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Serenade in D minor, B77 (Op.44) (1878)
i. Moderato quasi marcia
ii. Menuetto (Tempo di minuetto – Presto)
iii. Andante con moto
iv. Finale (Allegro molto)

Pre-concert talk
By Paige Gullifer in the Function Room Level 1 at 6.15pm

Estimated durations
Serenade – 10 minutes
Suite – 24 minutes
Dvořák – 24 minutes

The concert will run for approximately 1 hour

Cover image
Principal Oboe Shefali Pryor
Photo by Craig Abercrombie

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Sydney Morning Herald

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Simone Young's tenure as Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra began in resounding style in July 2022, with unforgettable performances of Mahler's Symphony No.2, *Resurrection,* and *Song of the Earth* by First Nations composer William Barton.

Broadcast live around the world, this concert also marked the reopening of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall after two years of extensive renovations.

Now you can relive the magic of that landmark event in your own home, with its release on vinyl, CD and digital via Deutsche Grammophon – the first time an Australian orchestra has been released exclusively on the famous yellow label in its 127-year history.

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YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)
Serenade for 13 wind instruments in E flat, Op.7 (1881)

Strauss composed this single-movement piece for winds at the age of seventeen, while he was still very much under the influence of his father, a strict classicist. It has a certain Mozartian flavour, and Strauss liked it well enough to keep it in his conducting repertoire even late in life.

It was premiered to great acclaim in 1882, the year that saw the foundation of the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra, the British occupation of Egypt, and the inauguration of The Ashes after the Australian cricket team's first ever defeat of England in England.

Contemporary music included Smetana's String Quartet No.2, Gounod's *The Redemption* and Wagner's *Parsifal*.

A photo of Richard Strauss dated October 20 1886, when he was 22.

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)
Suite in B flat, Op.4 (1884)

Despite its lower opus number, the Suite was composed after the Serenade, which the conductor Hans von Bülow had begun performing and who asked Strauss for a companion piece. It is in conventional four-movement design, nodding to Brahms and farther back to the Baroque, but still points to the mature Strauss.

Strauss conducted the premiere in 1884, the year that saw the cornerstone of the Statue of Liberty laid, Greenwich meridian become the official prime meridian, and the first telephone connection between Sydney and Melbourne.

Contemporary music included Bruckner's *Te Deum*, Glazunov's String Quartet No.2 and Puccini's *Le villi*.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Serenade in D minor, B77 (Op.44) (1878)

Like Strauss', Dvořák's serenade harks back to the 18th century in its scoring for winds and its use of recognisable dance forms, but is cast in only four movements. Like a Mozart Serenade it begins with a march, before proceeding to a dance in triple time, a songlike slow movement, and then more dance rhythms in the finale.

It dates from 1878, the year that saw the death of Pope Pius IX after 31 years on the throne of St Peter, the erection of Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment in London, and the first Stawell Gift.

Contemporary music included Brahms' Violin Concerto, Bruckner's Fifth Symphony, and Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*.

Dvořák in 1870

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT RICHARD STRAUSS

In 1945, as the Nazi regime fell, American soldiers began commandeering villas in the Bavarian town of Garmisch. At one door, an elderly man greeted them with now famous words: 'I am Richard Strauss, composer of *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome*'. Fortunately for Strauss, the commanding officer knew him and his work, and the Strauss family was not evicted from its home.

Strauss was born in 1864 – Clara Schumann was still performing; Brahms and Wagner were contemporary composers. At 17, young Strauss heard, or as he put it, 'wolfed the score of *Tristan,* as if in a trance'. Wagner's highly expressive chromatic harmony was a decisive influence on Strauss, and one which he put to good use in the series of massive tone-poems such as *A Hero's Life* or *Death and Transfiguration*. These in turn equipped him with the ability to write opera on something like a Wagnerian scale.

Salome was a turning point. Oscar Wilde's play is a self-consciously 'artificial' piece of work. Strauss, however brings all he had learned from Wagner to make it a gripping document of psycho-pathology. *Salome* and its companion piece, *Elektra* – likewise essays madness in an ancient mythic setting – are the extreme points of Strauss at his most post-Wagnerian. As time went on, Strauss turned, or returned, to the example of Mozart, who had been the inspiration for some of his earliest compositions. *Der Rosenkavalier,* the greatest result of Strauss' collaboration with playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal is set in a highly Romanticised, late-18th-century Vienna. In works like *Ariadne auf Naxos* or *Capriccio* he moved even closer to a neo-classical manner; at the end of his life, in instrumental works like the Oboe Concerto, Strauss took great solace from the example of Mozart in the face of the horror of World War II.

Strauss, like Mozart, loved the human voice. Strauss and Mozart were married to singers, and some of their greatest works celebrate just that. Strauss was an inveterate composer of song, and even the opulence of the Four Last Songs never obscures his intense sensitivity to the beauty of the voice.

Richard Strauss in 1886

ABOUT STRAUSS' SERENADE

Late in life Richard Strauss would occasionally conduct his Op.7 Serenade, muttering that it wasn't 'too bad for a music student'. He was only seventeen at the time he composed this work, but he had been a music student of one sort or another for well over a decade: he began piano lessons at the age of 4 and violin at 8. He began composing at the age of 6 and when he was 11 began taking formal lessons. And of course he had grown up in the household of one of Germany's most eminent musicians, his father Franz Strauss.

Franz had overcome the social stigma of illegitimacy to become the leading horn player in the German-speaking world, and had married into a wealthy brewing family in Munich, where he was principal horn in the Court Orchestra. He was, therefore, well connected both socially and musically, a situation which was of undeniable help to the career of his son. Like Leopold Mozart, perhaps, Franz sought to influence Richard's musical development, and in particular to keep him from being contaminated by the music of Wagner. As Richard later wrote,

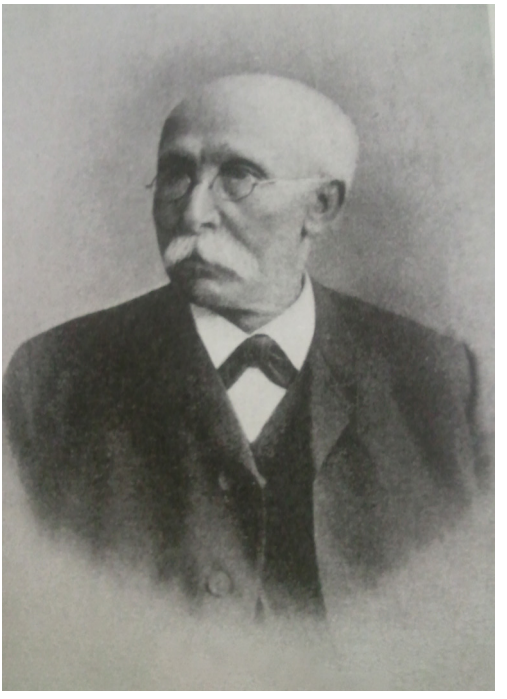
ABOUT THE MUSIC

Franz's 'musical trinity was Mozart (above all), Haydn and Beethoven. To these were added Schubert, as a song-writer, Weber and, at some distance, Mendelssohn and Spohr.' In other words Franz was an unapologetic classicist and Wagner's music was anathema to him. But not Wagner's money; Franz was a frequent member of the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra, playing in the premiere performances of such works as *Parsifal* and losing no opportunity to bag Wagner's music in public. Wagner, for his part, was uncharacteristically tolerant, knowing that it was one way to have a great virtuoso playing music in which the horn is indispensable.

Franz's aesthetic influence is clear in the early Serenade Op.7, though the work is by no means faux-Mozart. The scoring for winds is in accordance with the classical serenade; it was after all, a form developed for outdoor performance. Here Strauss uses two flutes, oboes and clarinets, four horns, two bassoons, with the bass provided by contrabassoon or bass tuba (there is an optional double bass part in the last two bars!). Unlike the classical serenade – always a multi-movement work – this is in a single movement, though it might be likened to the Andante movements of some of Mozart's. Like Mozart's, Strauss's sonata design doesn't spend much time developing themes in the symphonic sense, but rather takes great pleasure in generating beautiful melodies.

The piece had great consequences for young Strauss. It was the first of his works which had its premiere outside of Munich, being launched by the Dresden Tonkünstlerverein under Franz Wüllner in 1882. Wüllner had conducting the world premieres of two Wagner operas, and would introduce several new works of Strauss' over the next few years. More importantly, the piece found its way into the repertoire of the Meiningen Orchestra, conducted by the legendary Hans von Bülow. A publisher who had brought out two of Strauss' early works had been fobbed off by Bülow who wrote that Strauss was 'not a genius, at best a talent, 60% calculated to shock'. As a one-time intimate of Wagner's, Bülow had himself come in for some tongue-lashings from Strauss' father so may have been understandably prejudiced, but he did like the Serenade and performed it widely. The Meiningen Orchestra included some extremely fine players: horn-player Gustav Leinhos must have enjoyed playing a part written with the expertise that Franz had taught his son; the principal clarinettist was Richard Mühlfeld for whom Brahms wrote his late clarinet-based masterpieces. Bülow also brought Strauss to a deeper understanding of contemporary music, notably that of Brahms. The Serenade, then, was a pivotal work in many ways for the young Strauss.

And as we've seen, it was a work that Strauss kept in his own repertoire. But the composer often felt that he had failed to get the balance of instrumental sounds quite right. In 1943 he wrote more wind ensemble music, this time for 16 players, producing the First Sonatina for winds, which like many of the works of his final years, hark back to the Mozartian world of the Serenade. It was performed as part of Strauss' 80th birthday celebrations by the Dresden Tonkünstlerverein, sixty-two years after the Serenade did so much to launch his career.



Strauss' father Franz, perhaps the greatest early influence on his son.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE SUITE, Op.4

Brahms was always careful when commenting on the work of young composers. According to Gustav Leinhos, however, who had shown him the score of Strauss' Suite, 'Herr Dr Brahms spoke very highly of your work, though he looked in vain for the spring of melody which ought to be overflowing at your age.'

The Suite was composed in September 1884 at the suggestion of Hans von Bülow. Bülow, one of the greatest conductors of his time, was director of the Meiningen Orchestra and, after falling out with Wagner (with whom Bülow's wife had run off) became a devotee of Brahms. As we have seen, he had been initially unimpressed by the young Strauss' music, but having performed the Serenade for Winds, Op.7, Bülow asked for a companion piece. When he brought the Meiningen Orchestra to Munich in October he told Strauss that he had programmed the Suite (which only gained its low opus number in 1911) for a matinee concert and that he expected Strauss to conduct it. Strauss explained that he had never held a baton, but felt sure that after rehearsals he would be fine; Bülow curtly informed him that there was no time for rehearsals on tour. Strauss later remembered only that he conducted in a 'haze' or 'slight coma' but that at least he made no errors. Bülow, meanwhile, chain-smoked cigarettes outside.

Conductor Hans von Bülow, who commissioned Strauss' Suite.

Strauss' subsequent career as a composer of symphonic poems (in the Lisztian tradition) and operas was not to Brahms' taste, but in the Suite he perhaps saw the work of an incipient neo-classicist like himself. It is in four movements, the first two being essentially, if not highly elaborate, sonata designs. Already, though there are distinctive Straussian manners, notably in striving themes that are characterised by dotted rhythms and triplets in the opening *Praeludium*. The *Romanze*, with the suggestion of song in the title, might at first evoke Brahms in the pastoral mode of his Second Symphony. In fact, something that Brahms also criticised was Strauss' tendency to create melodies out of arpeggios (Strauss' nature themes, like the opening of *Also sprach Zarathustra* would bear this out), but here it provides opportunities for ringing themes from the horn.

Bülow had 'suggested' using Baroque dance forms for the suite. Strauss obliged in the third movement by writing a gavotte rather than a minuet or scherzo, and here, too, the pungent sound of the wind band works hand in glove with the 18th century form.

Strauss continues his 'Baroque' essay in the finale. This begins with an Introduction, which recalls material from the *Romanze*; this gives way to a spirited fugue, though even Norman Del Mar, one of Strauss' greatest supporters in the Anglosphere, regards it as the weakest of the four movements, arguing that its academic counterpoint 'prevents Strauss from making the most of the medium of the wind ensemble'. Be that as it may, it is the work of a talented composer, showing imprints of the style that would soon produce his first mature pieces.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT DVOŘÁK

As an impecunious 30-something composer, recently married and living on the modest salary of a church organist and freelance string playing, Dvořák benefited immensely from a growing sense among those in political power of responsibility to the arts. The local government, the Diet of Bohemia, had begun allocating part of its budget to arts funding through the newly founded Conservatory in Prague when Dvořák was young, and in the 1870s the Imperial Government in Vienna, through its Ministry of Public Education, made sums of money available in the form of fellowships or *stipendia* for young artists. With the backing of critic Eduard Hanslick and Johannes Brahms, Dvořák received financial support.

In 1877 Brahms wrote to his Berlin publisher, Simrock saying:

> I have been receiving a lot of pleasure for several years past from the work of Anton Dvořák of Prague…Dvořák has written all kinds of things, operas (Czech), symphonies, quartets, piano pieces. He is certainly a very talented fellow. And incidentally, poor! I beg you to consider that!

Simrock was duly impressed with the young composer's work and commissioned a set of Slavonic Dances for piano duo. These, as Simrock had expected, were an instant hit, and again in their orchestral version. Simrock made a huge profit, and Dvořák's reputation spread rapidly in Europe, such that by 1879 his 'Slavonic' String Quartet had been premiered by the ensemble led by the great Joseph Joachim, and Hans Richter had commissioned the work we now know as his Sixth Symphony for Berlin.

As Brahms' letter shows, Dvořák was already a prolific composer, and by the time he was fifty, Dvořák was at the height of his creativity and fame. In the late 1880s he had travelled to Russia and England, where In 1884 he conducted his works at the Albert Hall, St James's Hall and the Crystal Palace in London, (on the back of this his Requiem was composed for the Birmingham Festival);

Dvořák in 1870

he had been showered with Imperial honours and honorary doctorates, and was about to become the founding head of the new National Conservatory in New York. The works of this period in his life show his life-long love of a 'national' music, while making significant experiments in form and structure, particularly in chamber music. Always remaining, as he said, a 'humble Czech musician', Dvořák believed that

> nothing must be too low or insignificant for the musician. When he walks he should listen to every whistling boy, every street singer or blind organ grinder… it is a sign of barrenness which such characteristic bits of music exist and are not heeded by the learned musicians of the age.

In the USA, Dvořák argued passionately for a national music that included elements and Native American and Black cultures, saying 'undoubtedly the germs for the best in music lie hidden among all the races that are commingled in this great country.'

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT DVOŘÁK'S SERENADE

Anthony Cane writes:

January 1878 for Antonín Dvořák was more than the beginning of a new year: it was the beginning, in effect, of a new life. Now 36, he was a composer who had still not fully 'arrived'; and while his family now got by on an Austrian State Grant (for 'young, poor and talented artists'), that world had recently collapsed through the deaths within weeks of each other of his 11-month-old daughter Růžena and first-born son Otakar. He and his stalwart wife Anna had now lost all three of their children in a space of two years.

In January 1878, thanks to Anna's steadfast support, Dvořák was able to press on with his professional life. He completed a set of choral songs and then, within a fortnight, composed the entire D minor Serenade. Dvořák also made time to visit Vienna to meet Johannes Brahms, one of the adjudicators of the Austrian State Grant, who had just recommended him warmly to his own publisher in Berlin (which proved a passport to international recognition). Though Dvořák missed Brahms, who was giving concerts in Germany, he left manuscripts for the latter's perusal (which was enthusiastic); and he did have a cordial meeting with the powerful, and much feared, critic Eduard Hanslick.

Back in Prague, Dvořák's new opera, *The Cunning Peasant,* was deep in rehearsal for an opening on the 27th of the month. After previous operatic failures, this was to give Dvořák his first unequivocal theatrical success – and, subsequently, his first opera performances abroad.

Mozart (Dvořák would later drum into his students at the Prague Conservatory) was sunshine. Perhaps it was a little reflected Mozartian sunshine, in the *Figaro*-like comings and goings of *The Cunning Peasant* and his adoption of ostensibly Mozartian form for the new Wind Serenade in D minor, that sustained Dvořák through difficult times. While his serenade does not precisely emulate any of Mozart's in using ten wind instruments plus cello and double bass, nor was it intended for *al fresco* performance in the manner of 18th-century serenades, nevertheless this is a traditional bottle filled with young, new wine – and hearty Bohemian wine at that.

The rustic-sounding first movement evokes the march with which serenaders typically announced their arrival (and which returns at the end of the finale for their self-important exit). The so-called *Menuetto* is actually a Czech *sousedská* or neighbours' dance, with a *furiant (presto)* as the central trio section. The nocturnal slow movement grows out of a tender, drawn-out melody shared by oboe and clarinet and, like a lover, delays the moment of parting as long as possible. There are hints of the polka in the high-spirited *Finale* until, with great hilarity, the return of the opening march sends everyone packing.

Dvořák conducted the first performance of the serenade to open a concert of his own compositions on 17 November 1878. It was his fifth wedding anniversary. Can the serenade, with its beguiling *Andante,* then have seemed anything other (like Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*) than an affirmation of the composer's love for his Anna, who, but a few months previously, had borne him the daughter, Otilka, who would be the beginning of their new, and happier, family?

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