SPOOKY CLASSICS WITH THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY

13 FEBRUARY 2026

Summer Concerts at Sydney Town Hall

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

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.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS CONCERT

Expect to enjoy yourself! Maybe your heart will beat a little faster. Maybe your hair will stand on end. It's hard to predict or describe how the vast sound of a symphony orchestra will affect each of us. Just bring an open mind and engage with the music – close your eyes, watch the conductor and the musicians, or just sit back and let the music take you away.

When do I clap?

Good question. Most pieces of music are broken up into different movements – usually, people only clap at the end of a piece, so there will be silent pauses between movements. On the next page you will see how many movements the pieces in this concert have, and the duration of each piece. But the simplest thing is to wait until the conductor turns around – or when everyone else starts applauding.

The conductor may leave the stage and come back on a few times, and acknowledge the different sections of the orchestra. You can keep clapping as long as you want to – and feel free to cheer and stomp your feet if you really enjoyed the concert!

Can I take photos or videos?

You can take photos and videos on your phone during the applause at the end of a piece of music. **Please switch your phone to silent, make sure the flash is off and dim the brightness of your screen so you don't distract other audience members**. And if you share it to your socials, tag us in your posts! We love seeing what people have captured.

Please leave professional and semi-professional camera gear at home and limit yourself to a phone camera inside the venue.

What happens at interval?

The interval will begin when the conductor leaves the stage and the lights go to their full brightness. You can choose to stay in your seat and wait, go to the bathroom, walk around or purchase food or drink from one of the foyer bars.

An announcement will play through the speaker system 10 minutes, 5 minutes and 1 minute before the concert resumes.

2026 CONCERT SEASON

SPOOKY CLASSICS WITH THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY

HAIR-RAISING ORCHESTRAL FAVOURITES

Vanessa Hughes presenter
James Judd conductor

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839–1881)
orchestrated by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Night on Bald Mountain (post.)

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)
***Danse macabre*, Op.40** (1874)

BERNARD HERRMANN (1911–1975)
Psycho: A Short Suite for String Orchestra (1960)
I. Prelude
II. The Murder
III. Finale

PAUL DUKAS (1865–1935)
The Sorcerer's Apprentice (1897)

INTERVAL

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
orchestrated by Joseph Twist
Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565
I. Toccata: Adagio (Improvisato) – Allegro
II. Fugue: Moderato

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)
***Valse triste* (Sad Waltz), Op.44 No.1** (1903)

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)
***Romeo and Juliet*, Op.64** (1935)
Montagues and Capulets

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803–1869)
***Symphonie Fantastique*, Op.14** (1830)
V. *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*

Friday 13 February, 7pm

Summer Concerts at Sydney Town Hall

Estimated durations

Mussorgsky – 12 minutes
Saint-Saëns – 8 minutes
Herrmann – 7 minutes
Dukas – 12 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Bach – 10 minutes
Sibelius – 7 minutes
Prokofiev – 5 minutes
Berlioz – 10 minutes

The concert will run for approx. 2 hours

Cover image

By Cassandra Hannagan

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land and water on which we work and perform. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Vanessa Hughes presenter

Vanessa Hughes is a broadcaster, presenting *ABC Classic Drive* on Australia's national classical music network.

She was raised on the music of the Czech masters, thanks to her grandmother's excellent record collection and fell in love with choral music after a visit to the local library resulted in her borrowing a rather exotic-looking disc of Palestrina masses. She has been a choir nerd ever since.

Having acquired a law degree, Vanessa decided it was useless and went into radio instead, where she has advocated for ethnic and gender diverse composers and a better funded Australian arts industry.

Vanessa sees a creatively bright and even commercially viable future for composers of all kinds. This philosophy underpins all her work at ABC Classic, where besides broadcasting established, hallowed music-makers, she believes it's her job to allow audiences to fall head over heels for composers they've never heard before.

In the last year, Vanessa has put to air the work of 1,138 composers who identify as women – many creating music right now and some of them composing a thousand years ago.

Before moving to ABC Classic, Vanessa worked at ABC Radio Sydney, producing the likes of Tony Delroy, Christine Anu and Sarah Macdonald.

In her spare time, Vanessa sings when she can in Inner West Voices, a strictly non-auditioned community choir based in Sydney and volunteers for the print-impaired at the Radio Reading Network of Australia.

Photo by Alex Vaughan

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

James Judd conductor

British conductor James Judd is internationally celebrated for his consummate musicianship, remarkable versatility and deep commitment to the orchestras and musicians with whom he shares the stage. Music Director of the Daejeon Philharmonic (South Korea) and Music Director Emeritus of the New Zealand Symphony, Judd's dynamic music making and exceptionally communicative style have made him a sought-after podium figure around the world, while return engagements attest to his gift for establishing inspiring and uniquely collaborative relationships.

Judd's partnership with the Daejeon Philharmonic has raised the orchestra's profile with a successful European tour in 2017 and critically acclaimed performances at the Seoul Art Center's Orchestra Festival.

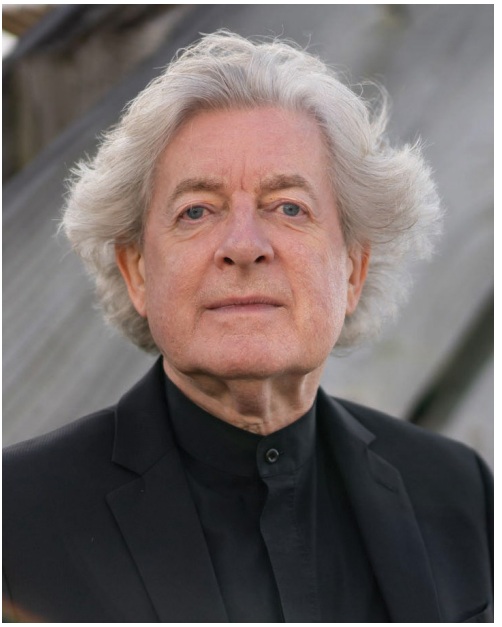
As Music Director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) Judd brought the orchestra to a new level of visibility and international acclaim through appearances at the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival, the Auckland International Arts Festival, and the Osaka Festival of International Orchestras. Judd led the NZSO in its first tour of the major concert halls of Europe, ending with a debut appearance at the BBC Proms.

Judd is the recipient of two honorary doctorates and is a graduate of London's Trinity College of Music. He came to international attention as the assistant conductor of The Cleveland Orchestra, a post he accepted at the invitation of Lorin Maazel. Four years later, he returned to Europe after being appointed Associate Music Director of the European Community Youth Orchestra by Claudio Abbado.

In addition to Daejeon and New Zealand, Judd has held artistic leadership positions with the Slovak Philharmonic, Israel Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille and Adelaide Symphony. His fourteen-year tenure as Music Director of the Florida Philharmonic culminated in international recognition for their recordings of William Walton, Leonard Bernstein and Gustav Mahler.

As an opera conductor Judd has been a regular guest on the stages of the English National Opera, Wexford Festival and Glyndebourne Opera Festival, with productions of *Il trovatore, La traviata, Rigoletto, The Barber of Seville, Le nozze di Figaro* and *La Cenerentola*. As Artistic Director of the Florida Grand Opera he conducted productions of *Don Giovanni, Un ballo in maschera, La bohème, Madame Butterfly* and *The Turn of the Screw* as well as concert performances of *Tannhäuser, Fidelio* and *La clemenza di Tito*.

Considered one of the preeminent interpreters of British orchestral music, Judd's recording of Edward Elgar's Symphony No.1 with the Hallé Orchestra remains a highly regarded reference standard. He has amassed an extensive discography on the Naxos label, including an unprecedented number in partnership with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Recordings of works by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Beethoven, Bernstein, Copland and Gershwin received critical acclaim. A champion of the works of Gustav Mahler, Judd's recording of Mahler's Symphony No.1 with the FPO was awarded the Gold Medal by France's Diapason as well as the Toblacher Komponierhauschen for the best Mahler recording of the year. His orchestral recordings are also featured on the Decca, EMI and Philips labels.



ABOUT THE MUSIC

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)
orchestrated by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Night on Bald Mountain (post.)

Night on Bald Mountain is easily Mussorgsky's best-known creation, entering popular culture via Disney's *Fantasia* in 1940. Chances are, your memory of this fantasy on a witches' sabbath is enhanced by the animators' powerful images: the winged demon silhouetted against the night sky, the sinuously cavorting witches. It's a vivid response to vivid music. In the final minutes, church bells interrupt the demonic orgy and the Black God flinches and cringes atop his mountain peak. Serene clarinet and flute solos welcome the dawn. But is this Mussorgsky? Yes, and no. Equal credit for the music most of us know as *Night on Bald Mountain* belongs with Rimsky-Korsakov. (And in the case of *Fantasia*, Leopold Stokowski too!) The first version of *Night on Bald Mountain* was also Mussorgsky's first major orchestral work, completed on St John's Night, 23 June 1867. He was immensely proud of the result, but his delight was shaken when his teacher, Balakirev, refused to program it without major changes. Mussorgsky stood his ground and so never got to hear his assembly of witches. But he couldn't get the subject out of his head. He drafted two operatic versions of the music, the second for *Sorochintsy Fair*, where he devised a nightmare scene to squeeze the music into Gogol's original tale. In his scenario, the peasant boy Gritzko wakes to the sound of bells and this became the source of the familiar 'Daybreak' ending. But, unlike the original, the scene existed only in draft form, the opera unfinished. The ideas in the draft survived, however, as the principal source for the version of *Night on Bald Mountain* that's performed most often – a radical recomposition made by Rimsky-Korsakov after Mussorgsky's death. Rimsky-Korsakov's intentions were good: he wanted his friend's music – so original and 'alive'– not to gather dust but to be performed. In preserving Mussorgsky's musical legacy, Rimsky-Korsakov defended the creation of playable editions over authenticity: 'Publication without a skilful hand to put them in order would have had no sense save a biographico-historical one. ...there was a need of an edition for performances, for practical artistic purposes, for making his colossal talent known, and not for the mere studying of his personality and artistic sins.' Mussorgsky's sins? With an army and civil service background, he'd developed an idiosyncratic and 'unschooled' musical style, at once admired by his peers and regarded as eccentric and in need of 'correction'. For *Night on Bald Mountain*, Rimsky-Korsakov took everything he 'considered the best and most appropriate' from the three surviving versions 'to give coherence and wholeness to this work'. That meant reorganising Mussorgsky's themes into a more conventional structure, quite different from the original, and changing the orchestral colours, including the addition of bells and harp to disperse the spirits of darkness at the end. In the process, Rimsky-Korsakov sacrificed some of the chaotic excitement and raw emotion of the original –the price we pay for a remarkable showpiece by a virtuoso of orchestration –but the vividness and originality of Mussorgsky's imagination cannot be quenched.

Yvonne Frindle © 2019

Mussorgsky c.1870.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)
***Danse macabre*, Op.40** (1874)

One of Saint-Saëns' legacies was the introduction into France of Liszt's innovation, the symphonic poem or tone poem. Saint-Saëns' tone poems *Le Rouet d'Omphale* (Omphale's Spinning Wheel), *Phaëton*, *Danse macabre* and *La Jeunesse d'Hercule* (Hercules' Youth) were written in the period 1871–77. *Samson et Dalila*, Saint-Saëns' great opera, was completed in this same decade, and the Organ Symphony, Saint-Saëns' single enduring contribution to the symphonic tradition, was yet to come.

The premieres of Saint-Saëns' tone poems often prompted the claim that program music was somehow inferior to the absolute forms (such as symphony, sonata and concerto). But Saint-Saëns, in his *Harmonie et mélodie*, wrote, 'Is the music good or bad in itself? That is everything. Whether, after that, it has a program or not will make it neither better nor worse.'

Saint-Saëns' tone poems do not make the pretensions found in the programs of German efforts in this field, with their weighty narratives or 'deep' studies of character and events. Their programs are more poetic and evocative than anecdotal, and the picturesque element is subordinated to the balance of musical development. This brings the advantage of keeping the content within musical proportions. Danse macabre is indeed concise, but in subject matter the darkest of the four. It hails from the same grisly world as the mediaeval woodcuts of Death.

The tone poem was originally composed as a song: a setting of a poem by Henri Cazalis about Death playing his fiddle in a wintry churchyard at midnight while skeletons dance to his tune. Augusta Holmès bowled over the young Vincent d'Indy with her rendering, but other singers claimed the song was too difficult and Saint-Saëns turned the work into a piece for orchestra.

Its most remarkable feature is perhaps its orchestration. A solo violin tunes the E string down a semitone to set the ghostly scene; a xylophone clacks away in imitation of the rattling of bones. A parody of the Dies irae melody, from the Latin mass for the dead, reinforces the gloom amidst the grotesquerie.

Saint-Saëns' reputation has been eclipsed in recent years. Those who consider him irrelevant to the mainstream of music remember that he lived into the era of Debussy, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, but forget he had his musical grounding in the days of Gounod. He was on visiting terms with Berlioz (who recognised his precocious gifts). Saint-Saëns' originality may not be shouted from the rooftops, but his symphonic poems are nevertheless a unique achievement within the French orchestral tradition. The music is exceptionally well-crafted and proportioned, and the scoring earned Saint-Saëns the praise of a peer: having completed a piano transcription, Liszt said to the composer: '… please forgive my inability to reproduce on the piano its marvellous orchestral colour.'

Gordon Kalton Williams
Symphony Australia © 1994

Photograph of Camille Saint-Saëns circa 1880 by Charles Reutlinger (1816–81). Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

BERNARD HERRMANN (1911-1975)
Psycho: A Short Suite for String Orchestra (1960)

By the time he was asked to supply music for *Psycho,* Bernard Herrmann was already known as 'Hitch's composer'. And yet that association was based only on a handful of films, beginning with *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) and continuing through to the glossy *Vertigo* (1958) and *North by Northwest* (1959). Although Herrmann had produced music for a string of notable directors – Orson Welles, Robert Wise and Henry King, and, post-Hitch, François Truffaut, Brian de Palma and Martin Scorcese – he will doubtless forever be remembered as the composer of five of the film masterpieces of Alfred Hitchcock, his 'house-composer' from 1955 to 1966.

What sets Herrmann's music for *Psycho* apart from their other collaborations is a single, almost revolutionary concept: in choosing to write for strings alone, Herrmann dispensed with the composer's conventional massive arsenal for scoring horror films, and frustrated audiences expecting string music to produce romance. In an interview given in 1971, Herrmann explained that he felt he could better complement Hitchcock's black-and-white photography by creating 'a black-and-white sound'.

For his subsequent concert piece, which he called *Psycho: A Short Suite for String Orchestra,* Herrmann compressed his 47 minutes of 60 cues into a seven-minute suite of three sections, highlighting the construction of the music along almost Schoenbergian lines of fragments of melodies and hints of harmony that are recycled throughout.

With *Psycho's* nightmarish themes of corruptibility, voyeurism, transvestism, implied incest and necrophilia, Hitchcock created a cornucopia of horror techniques, emulated and spoofed by countless directors over the ensuing half-century. There is even a Bugs Bunny cartoon, *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* (2003) wherein Bugs empties a can of chocolate syrup down the drain. With *Psycho,* Hitchcock had produced his first real horror film, and would be viewed as the master of the genre for posterity.

At early screenings of *Psycho,* Hitchcock insisted that the theatre doors be locked, a Barnum-esque decree enforced by uniformed security guards. The audience was led to expect unspeakable horror in the film's first few minutes. In fact, *Psycho* contains violence in only two of its 109 minutes; the audience itself creates the expectation of violence and horror.

The most stunning moment occurs about one-third of the way through, when Janet Leigh's character is dispatched in the (in) famous 'shower scene'. Hitchcock had originally intended to film this scene without music, but Bernard Herrmann urged him to utilize the 'bird-shriek' sounds produced by rapid upward string glissandi, a technique created by Penderecki in his 'Study of String Sonorities' subsequently re-titled *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960). It is unlikely that Herrmann was aware of Penderecki's new musical language; the crusty American had invented a moment of 'terror' – to use his pithy description – that is now part of film history.

Again, the master composer had prevailed. 'Hitchcock finishes a picture 60%,' Bernard Herrmann once said. 'I have to finish it for him.'

Psycho was nominated – unsuccessfully - for four Academy Awards, but Herrmann's score was not among these nominations. The Academy Award for a Musical Score in a Motion Picture for the year 1960 went to Ernest Gold for *Exodus*.

Vincent Plush © 2005

Bernard Herrmann c.1970. Source: *Arlington Heights Herald,* Illinois/ Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

PAUL DUKAS (1865–1935)
The Sorcerer's Apprentice (1897)

Written in 1897, Dukas' scherzo is based on Goethe's ballad of the same name (in German, *Der Zauberlehrling*), which in turn is derived from a work of the ancient Greek satirist Lucian, *The Lie Fancier*, in which the character Eucrates relates some of his experiences as an apprentice to the magician Pancrates, who has lived in a cave for 23 years, all the while taking instructions in magic from the goddess Isis.

A précis of Goethe's version of the tale prefaces some editions of the score:

> *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* tells of a magician who can transform a broomstick into an animate being and have it perform all his menial tasks for him. The magician's apprentice one day overhears the magic formula with which the broomstick becomes alive and tries to apply it himself in his master's absence. The broom is ordered to bring water from the well. It performs this routine mechanically and efficiently. When the apprentice tires of this game, he wants to transform the water carrier back into a broomstick, but finds that he does not know the necessary formula. The enchanted stick continues to bring in bucket upon bucket of water until the room overflows. The apprentice passes from annoyance to despair. Fortunately, the sorcerer comes home, pronounces the magic words, the broom becomes inanimate, and all is quiet again.

In all his music Dukas is a composer who cares deeply about the integrity of structure, and in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* he manages to write a formal scherzo and still, with exactness, follow the story of Goethe's narrative. With the first theme we hear – announced softly by the violins – we seem to be present as the apprentice utters his incantations, while with the second (given to the clarinet, then oboe, then flute) we meet the dormant broom, before it begins its spooky activity. These two themes dominate the work, and in various ingenious guises chart our progress through the story. The true musical climax appears at the point where the desperate apprentice believes he has transformed the broom back to its inactive state once again, after which the 'broom' theme scampers about in an even more feverish manner than it has previously, until the sorcerer returns and summons an imperious calm.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice was already quite well known in the concert hall before Leopold Stokowski conducted it in Walt Disney's animated film *Fantasia* (1940), and after this it attained a popularity that could not (it seems) be divorced from the image of Mickey Mouse as the apprentice the Disney team had created. The work responded so well to such treatment because of its lucidity and thematic memorability. For all their many beauties, none of Dukas' other pieces seek the immediacy of appeal *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* attains, and in none does Dukas seek to be illustrative in so open-hearted a fashion.

Paul Dukas

ABOUT THE MUSIC

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)
orchestrated by Joe TWIST
Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565

'Of all the music of Bach this Toccata and Fugue…has a power and majesty that is cosmic…In the sequence of harmonies it is bold and path breaking…Its inspiration flows unendingly. In spirit it is universal so that it will always be contemporary and have a direct message for all men.'

Thus spoke the conductor Leopold Stokowski, who, in a time before the Early Music movement when few people outside of church music were aware of Bach, took it upon himself to popularise Bach's music in orchestral transcriptions, the most popular of which is the D minor Toccata. Stokowski's orchestration of the work revitalised Bach's music in the mid-20th century, especially after he – and his arrangement – featured in Disney's *Fantasia* in 1940.

The version you will hear today is arranged by Australian composer Joe Twist, who writes:

"This orchestral reimagining of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor is scored for a standard triple-wind symphony orchestra, transforming the iconic organ work into a vivid symphonic drama. Bright, incisive colours dominate the opening with mallet percussion, pizzicato strings and muted brass; adding rhythmic bite and theatrical impact.

Elsewhere the texture is deliberately pared back, particularly in the fugue, where solo winds present Bach's four voices with clarity and restraint. As the fugue unfolds, the texture gradually accumulates momentum through added trills, expressive swells and the progressive addition of brass and percussion as the fugue leads to its heroic interrupted cadence in the relative major.

An alternative version includes organ, with selected orchestral passages marked 'optional' and played instead by the organ, effectively recasting the work as an organ concerto in which the soloist alternates between accompaniment, dialogue and virtuoso display."

Adapted from a note by David Vivian Russell
Symphony Australia © 2000

Composer Joe Twist. Photo © Pascal Haim.

Johann Sebastian Bach (aged 61) in a portrait by Elias Gottlob Haussmann.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)
***Valse triste* (Sad Waltz)** (1903)

It's not quite enough to say that Sibelius lived at a time when many notable composers – Elgar, Fauré and Richard Strauss among them – wrote incidental music for the theatre. Many major theatres supported permanent orchestras in the decades around the turn of the 20th century; live incidental music on this scale became increasingly untenable as sound films and, later, television, took hold.

Yet Scandinavia was something of a special case in the years of Sibelius' working life, for the theatre was a particularly important forum for new ideas about the nature of drama; the play of emotions, the delineation of character and the structure of theatrical narrative were all undergoing significant change. The work of Ibsen, Strindberg and Bjørnson tell us something of this vitality, as does the pervasiveness of the symbolist movement. Maeterlinck's work was performed in translation, and such Finnish painters as Magnus Enckell and Axel Gallén were prominent symbolists.

A case in point, in theatrical terms, is *Kuolema* (Death) by Sibelius' brother-in-law Arvid Järnfeldt. It tells of the life of a virtuous man, Paavali, in episodes ranging from the death of his mother through to his marriage, his family life, his charitable deeds and, finally, his passing. Sibelius worked on the *Kuolema* music in the Northern autumn of 1903, and the play was staged for the first time in December of that year in the Finnish National Theatre, Helsinki.

He wrote six numbers in all and, when the play was revised for a 1911 staging, created two further pieces. But unlike his earlier music for the play *King Christian II*, or his later work for *Pelleas and Melisande* and *The Tempest*, he did not make a concert suite out of the *Kuolema* music.

He did, however, extract some music from the score for independent performance. In the play, a crane brings a baby to Paavali and his wife Elsa. Sibelius used the music from this section for his concert piece *Scene With Cranes*, which he created in 1906; but not long after *Kuolema* was first performed, he re-scored and re-shaped the play's very first number into a piece that would cross almost all the musical boundaries of the day, making its presence felt in concert halls, tea shops and dance palaces all over the Western world.

In *Kuolema's* first scene, Paavali is at the bedside of his dying mother. She tells him that she has dreamed she has gone to a ball. Then, as Paavali falls asleep during his vigil, death comes to his mother; she mistakes him for her late husband, and dances with him. When Paavali awakens, his mother is dead.

The music which accompanies this scene is marked simply 'Temp di valse lente'. In modifying it to become *Valse Triste*, Sibelius joined together the two sections which, in the play, are broken by the mother's leaning, exhausted, again the wall, while the other phantom dancers withdraw from the scene. He also created a new, gentler ending and streamlined the accompaniment to the main theme.

Along with two other works which originated as music to accompany theatrical performance, the *Karelia* Suite and *Finlandia*, *Valse Triste* is among Sibelius' most popular creations. Arguably, when cinemas had orchestras, and tea shops and radio stations had light music ensembles, it was his most widely played. *Valse Triste's* air of gentle melancholy seems resilient to the many instrumental combinations for which the piece has been scored.

Ironically, Sibelius sold the rights to *Valse Triste* outright to its publisher and was never paid any royalties for it. He would write many pieces of light music subsequently, but none that achieved its pervasive popularity.

A photo of Sibelius c. 1900, taken by Daniel Nyblin.
Source: Finnish Heritage Agency.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)
***Romeo and Juliet*, Op.64** (1935)
Montagues and Capulets

Shakespeare's tragedy of young love has formed the basis of many musical compositions, among them a dramatic symphony by Berlioz, an opera by Gounod, a musical by Bernstein and an overture by Tchaikovsky. It also captured the imagination of the Russian Sergei Prokofiev, who was approached by the Kirov Theatre of Leningrad in 1934 to compose music for a ballet on the story. Prokofiev had been the *enfant terrible* of Russian music in his student years; later in his career his music began to adopt a more 'romantic' attitude, perhaps partly in response to the dictates of Soviet artistic strictures, but also through natural mellowing in his later years as well as in response to commissions for theatre and cinema.

Of *Romeo and Juliet* Prokofiev said, 'I have taken special pains to achieve a simplicity which will, I hope, reach the heart of all listeners. If people find no melody and no emotion in this work of mine I shall feel very sorry, but I feel sure that they will sooner or later...'

From the start the ballet caused controversy, and the project was eventually taken over by Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. The ending was initially changed to a happy one, because as Prokofiev remarked, 'living people can dance, the dying cannot'. (Later, the choreographers found a way to reinstate the Shakespearean tragic end.) The music was rejected at first by the dancers as being undanceable. The ballet was staged in Czechoslovakia in 1938, and the Russian premiere was in 1940, with choreography by Lavrovsky and the famous ballerina Ulanova as Juliet. Since then it has taken its place as a great work in the repertoire of the world's major ballet companies.

At two and a half hours, *Romeo and Juliet* is a full evening of ballet. So that the music would reach a wider audience, Prokofiev extracted three suites of orchestral music, from which we will hear the excerpt *The Montagues and the Capulets*.

This opens in a stormy atmosphere suggestive of the aggressive rivalry between the two families. The music includes that which accompanies the Duke's warning to the brawlers at the start of the ballet, and the so-called *Dance of the Knights at the Masked Ball*.

Adapted from a note © Bruce Brown

Prokofiev c.1918. Source: Bain News Service/Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803–1869)
***Symphonie Fantastique*, Op.14** (1830)
v. *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*

French Romanticism is said to have been born at the premiere of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique,* on 5 December 1830. Romanticism, yearning to experience higher, more spiritual things, had little time for established traditions, and it is not surprising that much of the musical establishment reacted with scorn to artists who seemed to think themselves above rules. But the audience loved the *Symphonie fantastique,* greeting it with shouts and the stamping of feet.

From Berlioz' point of view, the best 'review' came from Madame Moke, who finally granted him permission to marry her daughter Camille. The irony was that it was Camille who had passed on to Berlioz the gossip about his earlier idol, Irish actress Harriet Smithson, which had provoked the fit of jealous rage which inspired the whole symphony - and it was Harriet whom Berlioz married two years later.

Berlioz's passion for Smithson had consumed him for three years. It was an overpowering adoration – and entirely one-sided. When Berlioz heard the rumours about Smithson and her manager, he composed the *Symphonie fantastique* or 'Episode in the Life of an Artist' to exorcise his feelings of betrayal.

The program as originally printed tells of a young Musician, tossed on a sea of passions, who falls hopelessly in love with a woman who is everything he has ever dreamed of. He is obsessed by her image and by a melody which invariably accompanies any thoughts of her – a double *idée fixe* constantly intruding on his peace of mind. Convinced that his love is unappreciated, he poisons himself with opium, but the dose is not strong enough to kill him and in his drugged sleep he has nightmarish visions: he has killed his beloved and is led to the scaffold and beheaded; he sees himself in a hideous crowd of ghosts and monsters at his own funeral, which becomes a grotesque devilish orgy in which his beloved takes part.

Since the music was not rewritten to 'match' the altered story, it seems reasonable to wonder to what extent we should 'believe' the program. Clearly, it is linked to Berlioz's own experience – yet none of the events described in it had actually occurred in his own life. Berlioz however was quite adamant that his art was not intended to paint pictures. The program was meant to make it possible for the listener to live the same emotional experiences he himself had had, not judge the documentary accuracy of its events.

Berlioz did not invent the idea of a Satanic orgy in this final movement. But he added another layer of meaning by giving the place of honour to the ghost of the young Musician's beloved, whose *idée fixe* theme here appears encrusted with grace notes and trills of mocking laughter. His scorn for her is unmistakable. The movement opens with a soft tremolo from the upper strings, punctuated with sudden jabs of sound and mysterious 'calls' from around the orchestra. The *idée fixe* is now 'a common dance tune, trivial and grotesque'. Church bells sound and the plainsong *Dies irae* theme from the Requiem Mass is sounded solemnly by the brass before it is caught up in the demonic revelry. The dance theme becomes the subject of a fugue: when combined with the *Dies irae* theme the impression of sacrilegious revelry is complete.

'One must draw the line somewhere,' said the first edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1879). 'Bloodthirsty delirious passion such as is here depicted may have been excited by gladiator and wild beast shows in Roman arenas; but its rites...are surely more honoured in the breach than in the observance.' Popular taste seems to have ignored this advice, and we see more now on TV, but Berlioz's music still has the power to send a chill down our spines.

Natalie Shea

1832 painting of Berlioz by Émile Signol (1804–1892).
Source: Villa Medici, Rome/Wikimedia Commons.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra performs at Sydney Town Hall in 1944, led by the great Hungarian-born American conductor Eugene Ormandy.

THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY AT THE TOWN HALL

Built in 1889, Sydney Town Hall was the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's main performance venue from its establishment in 1932 until the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1973.

As the centre of Sydney's cultural and civic life, it was only fitting that it should serve as the home for the city's orchestra, and over our first 40 years it saw countless performances by some of the world's greatest artists. The period immediately following World War II was especially memorable: with many great music cities in Europe damaged and recovering, a months-long tour of laid-back, sunny Australia was especially appealing.

Perhaps the best-known musical event to be held at Town Hall were the Promenade concerts – known as 'the Proms' – which ran from 1965-1977. The brain child of conductor and educator John Hopkins, the Proms were a revolution in Australian classical music; every ticket was the same price, the chairs were removed from the hall with audiences encouraged to bring bean bags, and the music presented was deliberately eclectic with traditional classical repertoire presented alongside brand-new contemporary works that pushed the envelope in many ways.

More than anything, the Proms democratized music in Sydney, and made classical concerts more welcoming and accessible than ever before, encouraging younger and more diverse audiences.

The spirit of the Proms lives on in today's concert: through the venue of course, and through the choice of music – short, fun, accessible works that we hope will inspire a love of orchestral music in everyone who hears them.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Daniel Barenboim (right) takes a bow with Chief Conductor Moshe Atzmon following a performance at the Town Hall (1969).

Eager audiences queue up outside the Town Hall before a Proms concert, 1970

Australian composer Richard Meale following the world premiere of *Incredible Floridas* in July 1972, with (L-R) Donald Hazelwood, conductor Vanco Cavdarski and Neville Amadio.

Vladimir Ashkenazy performing at Sydney Town Hall, 1977.

There were no seats at Proms concerts, so audiences took matters into their own hands – or hammocks! (1970)

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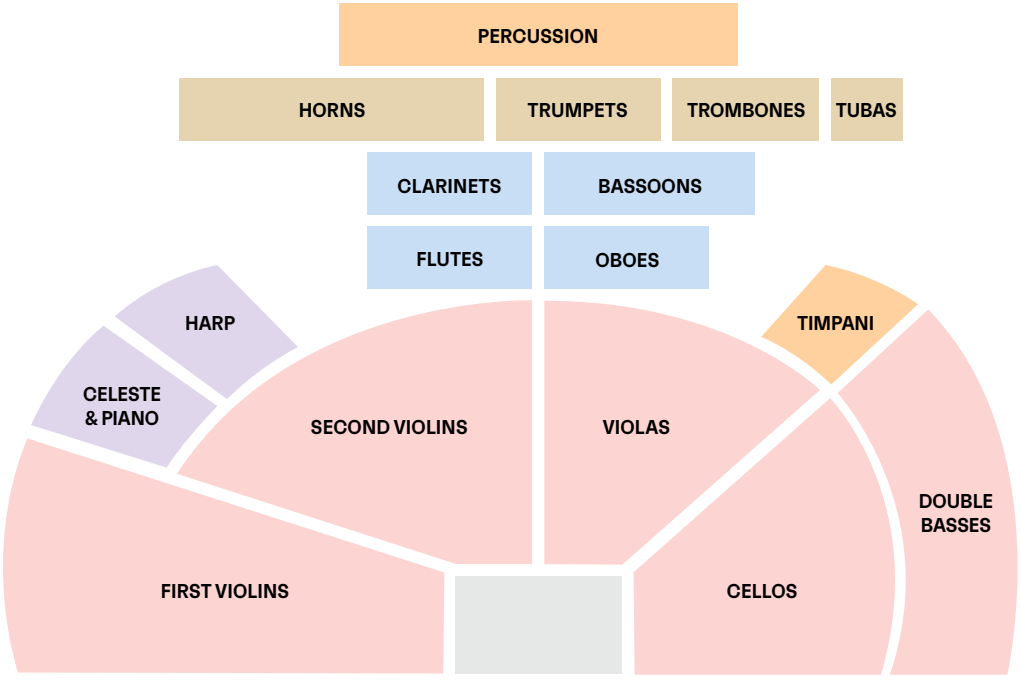

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