

THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY PERFORMS MUSIC THAT MOVES YOU

20 MAY 2026

The Glasshouse, Port Macquarie

22 MAY 2026

Lazenby Hall, Armidale



Presenting Partner



“SYDNEY”
“SYMPHONY”
“ORCHESTRA”

Emirates
Principal Partner

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

THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY PERFORMS MUSIC THAT MOVES YOU

MUSIC INSPIRED BY DANCE

Benjamin Northey conductor

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY (1882–1967)

Dances of Galánta (1933)

- i. Lento – Andante maestoso –
- ii. Allegretto moderato – Andante maestoso –
- iii. Allegro con moto, grazioso – Andante maestoso – Allegro –
- iv. Poco meno mosso –
- v. Allegro vivace – Andante maestoso – Allegro molto vivace

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

Dances for Harp and String Orchestra (1904)

- i. *Danse sacrée* (Sacred dance)
- ii. *Danse profane* (Profane dance)

Louisic Dulbecco harp

INTERVAL

HOLLY HARRISON (born 1988)

Hi-Vis (2021)

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)

The Firebird – Suite (1919)

- i. Introduction –
- ii. *The Firebird and her Dance* –
- iii. *Variation of the Firebird*
- iv. *The Princesses' Round (Khorovod)*
- v. *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei*
- vi. Berceuse
- vii. Finale

Wednesday 20 May, 7.30pm

The Glasshouse,
Port Macquarie

Friday 22 May, 7.30pm

Lazenby Hall, Armidale

Pre-concert talk

Noah Lawrence at 6.45pm in the Ross Family Studio (Port Macquarie) and Lazenby Hall (Armidale).

Estimated durations

This concert will run for approx. 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Cover image

Photo by Pia Johnson

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and water on which we work and perform. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past and present.

Presenting Partner



**ELECTRICAL
& DATA
SUPPLIERS**

Emirates

Principal Partner

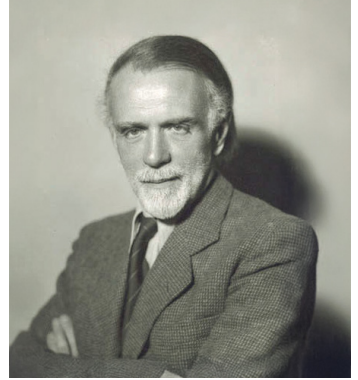
YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY (1882–1967) ***Dances of Galánta*** (1933)

Composed for the 80th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, the 15-minute *Dances of Galánta* takes its title from a village between Vienna and Budapest where Kodály grew up, but its seven linked dances take their melodies from Romani tunes, arranged in the alternating stately and energetic pieces used in recruiting dances in the 19th century.

It was composed in 1933, the year that saw Germany withdraw from the League of Nations, the International Court of Justice finding that Greenland was part of Denmark, and the establishment of the Australian Antarctic Territory.

Contemporary music included Florence Price's *Symphony in E minor*, Benjamin Britten's *A Boy was Born* and Richard Strauss's *Arabella*.



Zoltán Kodály, c.1930–1940.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918) ***Dances for Harp and String Orchestra*** (1904)

These two linked dances for harp and strings, lasting about ten minutes, were composed to show off the chromatic harp (one that didn't require the pedals that change the pitch of the strings from natural to sharp or flat; it didn't catch on.) The first dance might suggest an ancient religious procession with slow-moving melody and simple harmony; the second by complete contrast is fast and light.

They were commissioned in 1904, the year that saw Rolls meet Royce, the British invade Tibet, and women's suffrage introduced in Tasmania.

Contemporary music included Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, Alexander Scriabin's *Third Symphony* and Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa*.



Photo of Debussy by Atelier Nadar.

YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

HOLLY HARRISON (born 1988)

Hi-Vis (2021)

Hi-Vis is a nine-minute reimaging of the sound and light of city life, inspired in part by roadworks near the composer's house in Western Sydney.

It dates from 2021, a year that saw supporters of Donald Trump attempt to overthrow the results of the recent Presidential election, a container ship become trapped in the Suez Canal for six days, and the establishment of the AUKUS defence agreement.

Contemporary music included Gordon Kerry's Sinfonia concertante, Paul Stanhope's *A New Requiem* and John Williams's Violin Concerto No.2.



Photo by Steve Broadbent

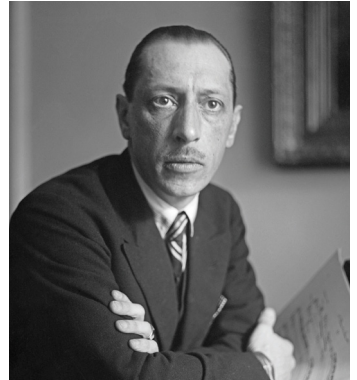
IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)

The Firebird – Suite (1919)

The Firebird is the first of the three 'Russian' ballets that Stravinsky's wrote for the Ballets russes in Paris. It is set in a fairy-tale world of the beautiful phoenix-like Firebird, a demon magician and various monsters, and a heroic young tsarevich.

Stravinsky made this suite of musical highlights in a slightly smaller and more portable orchestration in 1919, the year that saw the Treaty of Versailles, Mussolini's founding of the Fascist movement in Italy, and Keith and Ross Smith complete the first England to Australia flight.

Contemporary music included Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto, Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata, and Sergei Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*.



Stravinsky c. 1920-25. Source: George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (file no. LC-B2- 5464-2)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BENJAMIN NORTHEY conductor

Australian conductor Benjamin Northey is the Chief Conductor of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Conductor in Residence of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Principal Guest Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In 2025 he was appointed Professor of Conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and Director of the Australian Conducting Academy. He has previously held the posts of Associate Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (2010-2019), Resident Guest Conductor of the Australia Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra (2002-2006) and Principal Guest Conductor of the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra (2007-2010).

Northey studied conducting at Finland's Sibelius Academy with Professors Leif Segerstam and Atso Almila after being accepted as the highest placed applicant in 2002. He completed his studies at the Stockholm Royal College of Music with Jorma Panula in 2006.

He previously studied conducting with John Hopkins OBE at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (2000-2002).

Northey appears regularly as a guest conductor with all major Australian symphony orchestras, Opera Australia (*La bohème*, *Turandot*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *Carmen*), New Zealand Opera (*Sweeney Todd*), Victorian Opera (*Candide*, *Into the Woods*) and the State Opera South Australia (*La sonnambula*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*).

His international appearances include concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg, Hong Kong Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia, Malaysian Philharmonic and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Northey has collaborated with a broad range of leading artists including Lang Lang, Pinchas Zukerman, Wynton Marsalis, Maxim Vengerov, Anne-Sofie von Otter, Julian Rachlin, Karen Gomyo, Piers Lane, Alban Gerhardt, Johannes Moser, William Barton, Lu Siquing, Amy Dickson, Slava Grigoryan, Marc-André Hamelin, James Morrison,



Photo by Laura Manariti

Kurt Elling, Archie Roach, Ben Folds, Nick Cave & Warren Ellis, Paul Grabowsky, Tim Minchin, kd Lang, Patti Austin, Kate Miller-Heidke, Megan Washington, Barry Humphries, Meow Meow and Tori Amos.

Northey is highly active in the performance and recording of new Australian orchestral music, having premiered dozens of major new works by Australian composers. He has previously been a board member of the Australian Music Centre.

An ARIA Awards winner, he was voted *Limelight Magazine's* Australian Artist of the Year in 2018. Northey's many recordings can be found on ABC Classics. In 2026, he conducts the Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, West Australian, Tasmanian and Christchurch Symphony Orchestras, and will be working again with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Wynton Marsalis in his *All Rise* program, this time with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

LOUISIC DULBECCO

Principal Harp

Louisic started learning the harp and the piano in her hometown Bordeaux, France. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Hamburg in the class of Xavier de Maistre, and her Master's in Würzburg in the class of Andreas Mildner. She also holds a Master's degree in Chamber Music from the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg.

During her studies she joined the association Live Music Now, founded by Yehudi Menuhin, through which she gave a lot of solo and duo concerts at diverse venues. She also received scholarships from the Oscar and Vera Stiftung and the Deutschland Stipendium.

Louisic was most recently Principal Harp of the Warsaw Philharmonic, and was for many years the academician at Hamburg State Opera under conductor Kent Nagano, where she played opera, ballet and symphony concerts.

Louisic has performed with orchestras across Europe, including Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (DSO) in Berlin, Tonkünstler Orchestra in Vienna, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Deutsches Nationaltheater, Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Bremer Philharmoniker in Bremen, the Sinfonieorchester St.Gallen (Switzerland) and the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra.

Alongside her experience as an orchestra musician, Louisic has also been teaching her instrument for many years. She loves playing chamber music and has played in a lot of different formations, including a number of ensembles dedicated to contemporary and experimental music.



Photo by Craig Abercrombie

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT KODÁLY'S *DANCES OF GALÁNTA*

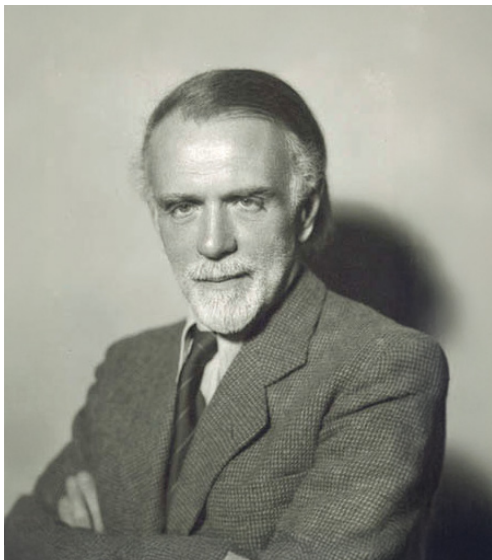
Lying to the east of the present-day Slovak capital Bratislava (known as Pressburg to the Austrians and Pozsony to Hungarians), Galánta was 'a small, Hungarian market town on the old railway line between Vienna and Budapest, where I spent seven years of my childhood.' The son of a railway employee, Kodály spent much of his childhood in small towns and villages, but Galánta was special as he explains:

At that time, there was a famous but now forgotten gipsy band there, who impressed me as a child because it was my first experience of an "orchestral sound". The ancestors of every gipsy had already been famous a hundred years before. Several volumes of Hungarian dances were published in Vienna around 1800, including one "by various gipsies from Galánta". They were handing down an old folk tradition.

Kodály, along with his friend and colleague Béla Bartók, was a pioneer in collecting, recording and notating the folk music of eastern Europe and beyond. In fact the two first met on a collecting expedition as they both sought for new sources of melodic inspiration; in the course of collecting they became more acutely aware of the imminent demise of folk music and resolved to preserve as much as they could.

Kodály also brought his considerable intellect to bear on the theory of music education, believing that it was the duty of all schools to expose young children to the 'life-giving stream of good music' and devising a method of teaching in use worldwide. Kodály was no less committed as a composer, using the resources of folk music and Gregorian chant to produce work that is beautiful, well-crafted and integrated.

In 1927, Kodály had established the publication *Hungarian Musical Essays* to document research in folk music, and a decade later produced his monograph *Hungarian Folk Music*. The same period saw his emergence as a major composer, beginning with the 'Singspiel', *Háry János* in 1926 and continuing through a series of



Zoltán Kodály, c.1930–1940.

substantial orchestral works inspired by the Hungarian music he so loved. But, like Bartók, Kodály was appalled by the rise of fascism in Europe generally and Hungary in particular, and in 1938 joined his friend in protesting against the state's growing obsession with racial 'purity'. Unlike Bartók, however, Kodály remained in Hungary during the war and after.

In 1933 Kodály composed a work for the 80th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, the *Dances of Galánta*. Interestingly, he turned to those melodies of the Romani people that had been published when Beethoven and Haydn were still at work, rather than any of the material he had collected in the field.

The score doesn't identify any particular tunes, and indeed Kodály's preface notes that it used 'motifs' – short ideas that could serve as seeds for his own invention. The overall form of the piece, which is in one multi-sectional movement, is that of the *verbunkos*. This dance, related to the *csárdás*, was used as a male-bonding exercise to recruit young men into the army in Hungarian-speaking parts of Europe in the 18th century (though the word itself is derived from the German *Werbung*). Such dances began with stately, grave passages in 4/4, usually in a minor key, known as

ABOUT THE MUSIC

lassan or *lassú*, danced by senior officers. Kodály gives us long-breathed, largely unaccompanied melodies for strings, then horn, the oboe at this point, before a long solo for clarinet evokes its folk-instrument ancestor, the *tarogáto*.

The *lassú* sections of the *verbunkos* contrasted with exciting fast sections called *friska* or *friss* in which the younger soldiers, and potential recruits, took part. Kodály introduces the first *friss* section with music dominated by a flute solo; wind instruments frequently lead in the faster sections of this piece.

The *verbunkos* became popular among Romani musicians who provided much of the urban popular music in 19th-century Hungary, and was thus appropriated as 'Hungarian' music by the likes of Liszt and Brahms.

Kodály's use of it has led to charges of exoticism, but his intent was loving and respectful, seeking to evoke a world that was already passing, and which, had he known it, would soon be all but swept away by the genocidal actions of the Nazis.

Kodály's *Dances of Galánta* is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns and 2 trumpets; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was premiered in Budapest on 23 October 1933, conducted by Ernő Dohnányi.



The Neo-Gothic Esterházy of Galánta Castle. Photo by Xmetov, used under CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born near Paris in 1862 to a family in modest circumstances, Debussy began learning music at the age of seven and by ten years old was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire where he spent, on and off, 12 years studying. In the 'off' periods during the early 1880s he served as in-house pianist to Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's patron; for Meck and himself to play, Debussy produced a number of two-piano reductions of works by Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns and others.

Like most of the canonical French composers Debussy applied for the Prix de Rome, failed on his first attempt, was runner-up on his second but, on his third, won. 'My heart sank,' he confessed. 'I had a sudden vision of boredom and of all the worries that inevitably go together with any kind of official recognition.' Nevertheless, in January 1885 he arrived in Rome where he would be accommodated in the Villa Medici, hated it, and spent the bare two-year minimum there. But while in Rome he did meet Liszt and Verdi, and it is from this time that his brief but consequential love of Wagner's music dates.

Debussy's near contemporary, Erik Satie, took credit for persuading Debussy to write music 'without sauerkraut' – in practice that meant abandoning several features of the Austro-German tradition including what we might call 'goal-directed structures' such as symphonic forms that move away from and back to a tonal centre, and the rich upholstery of late-Romantic orchestration.

Debussy's credo would become 'there is no theory; pleasure is the law', composing works that explored moments of sensual beauty with no – apparent – urgency to develop a musical argument, but we should be wary of simply assuming that his works are illustrative. And we should certainly avoid comparisons with 'what imbeciles call Impressionism' (as Debussy put it) in painting, which after all gained notoriety while the composer was still in short pants. Like Beethoven in the *Pastoral* Symphony, Debussy's musical response to the world was one of 'feeling rather than painting'.



Photo of Debussy by Atelier Nadar.

He was more drawn to the literary ideas of Symbolisme, and such works like Stéphane Mallarmé's dreamy 'Afternoon of a Faun' would inspire one of Debussy's most characteristic works of erotic languor. One of Debussy's objections to Wagner was that 'symphonic development and character development can never unfold at exactly the same rate'. In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy allows the text to dictate its own speed. The vocal lines are as simple and fluid as Gregorian chant. The harmony and orchestral writing, honed in such works as the *Prélude à 'L'après-midi d'un faune'* and the *Nocturnes*, responds with infinite subtlety to the emotional fluctuation of the texts.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT DEBUSSY'S *DANSES*

Debussy's *Deux Danses* were commissioned in 1904 by the instrument-building firm of Pleyel as an advertisement for its new chromatic harp (the rival firm Erard immediately commissioned Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* to feature the standard pedal harp!) While the chromatic harp sank without trace, Debussy's pair of dances did not.

A number of Debussy's works, such as the *Chanson de Bilitis* and the *Prélude à 'l'Après-midi d'un faune'*, cultivate a consciously antique atmosphere, often evoking a Romantic or Symbolist image of ancient Greece. Here the first, 'sacred' dance features a modal melody that, Erik Frederick Jensen notes, was in fact derived from the *Danse du voile* (Veil Dance) by Portuguese composer Francisco de Lacerda, who studied in Paris from 1895; Debussy acknowledged the debt and was, Jensen assures us, a 'generous supporter' of Lacerda's work.

To create what Debussy described as 'gravity', the slowly-paced processional tune is simply harmonised in parallel block chords by the harp, before the music veers briefly into a more insistent section based on repeated whole-tone motifs. (Despite the apparent simplicity, Debussy noted to Spanish composer Manuel de Falla, who performed a version of the piece for piano, that notation of rhythm would always fall short and suggesting 'be guided by how you feel'.)

Contrasting with the austere gravity of the first dance, the 'profane' one aims for 'grace'; it is faster and in triple time, beginning with muted strings and containing episodes of contrasting colour and speed before a glittering climax.

Debussy's *Danses* are scored for solo harp and strings.

The work was premiered on 6 November 1904 at the Châtelet Theatre in Paris, with Lucile Wurmser-Delcourt as soloist.



A cross-strung chromatic harp (Pleyel, Wolff, Lyon & Cie, early 20th century). Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT HOLLY HARRISON

Holly Harrison is an Australian composer from Western Sydney. Her music is driven by the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll, embracing stylistic juxtapositions, the visceral energy of rock, and whimsical humour.

She was Composer in Residence with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra from 2020-2022, and is lead mentor for Ensemble Offspring's 2025 Hatched Composer Intensive. This year sees the world premiere of *Hovercraft* by theremin virtuoso Carolina Eyck and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, along with performances from the Melbourne, Queensland, and Sydney Symphony Orchestras. Recent highlights include her saxophone concerto, *Superhighway* by Matt Styles and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra and a residency at the 2024 Canberra International Music Festival.

Her music has been performed by Australia's most celebrated orchestras and artists, and internationally by Oslo Philharmonic, Eighth Blackbird, Alarm Will Sound, Nu Deco Ensemble, Manchester Camerata, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Nurnberger Symphoniker, Riot Ensemble, Orkest de Ereprijs, Goldmund Quartet, Ensemble Garage, Spokane Symphony, and Catchfire Collective.

Holly Harrison has been recognised multiple times by the APRA AMCOS Art Music Awards. In 2022, she received the Western Sydney University Chancellor's Alumni of the Year Award for her contribution to the arts. Internationally, her wind ensemble work POUNCE was a finalist in the National Band Association's 2023 Revelli Composition Contest (USA). She was also the winner of the 2018 Nu Deco Ensemble Nu Works Initiative (USA), the 2017 Sue W Chamber Music Composition Prize (AUS), the 2014 Young Composers Meeting (NL), the 2014 Riot Ensemble Call for Scores (UK), and the 2013 Pyeongchon Arts Hall International Chamber Music Composition Competition (South Korea).



Photo by Steve Broadbent

She holds a Doctor of Creative Arts from Western Sydney University and is currently Composer in Residence at The King's School, North Parramatta. A committed mentor and educator, she leads workshops and seminars nationally, supporting emerging composers. In addition to composing, Holly plays drum kit and percussion in the improvised rock duo Tabua-Harrison with Joey Tabua (electric guitar).

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT *HI-VIS*

The composer writes:

Hi-Vis is inspired by night roadworks. For the majority of 2020 (and beyond!), major roadworks took place outside my Western Sydney home from 9pm to 4am each night: flickering lights, continuous drilling, humming, reversing, beeping, and grinding. Yet, amid lockdown times, I found the rhythms of machinery strangely comforting and exciting, and a gentle reminder of the existence of other people!

Hi-Vis is a musical re-imagining of these sights and sounds, but also a celebration of all things hi-vis, musical and otherwise. Think fluorescent, luminescent and neon colours, LED traffic batons, and, of course, workers in hi-vis vests. I began to imagine what road workers might be listening to, and how the contrast between the strobing lights and dark sky conjured up an almost nightclub-like environment. The piece loosely draws on 'hi-vis' elements of electronic dance music, brass fanfares, boot-scooting, and disco, all filtered through the constant on-and-off of earmuffs.

ABOUT *THE FIREBIRD*

Glinka's 1842 opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, with its heroic knight, abducted princess, evil magicians, malevolent gnomes, gigantic singing head and final wedding, influenced Russian works from Tchaikovsky's ballets to Prokofiev's *The Love of Three Oranges*, and was particularly important to the group known in English as 'The Five' or 'Mighty Handful' – Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov. The Russian fairy-tale world was also irresistibly exotic to audiences abroad, so for the 1910 Paris season of the Ballets Russes, artistic director Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Anatoly Liadov to compose a score to be choreographed by Mikhail Fokine. Diaghilev had already whetted the Parisian audience's appetite for Russian music in concerts presented as early as 1907; this new work would be 'the first Russian ballet' – Tchaikovsky's ballets, while exploiting the Russian love of fairy-tales, are largely based on non-Russian stories, but Fokine's scenario for *The Firebird* is drawn exclusively from Russian folklore.

Liadov failed to deliver and Diaghilev turned to the 28 year-old Stravinsky, with whose orchestral showpiece, *Fireworks*, Diaghilev had become acquainted in Russia in 1909, and whom he rightly regarded as 'on the eve of celebrity'. The ballet would be the largest single piece composed by Stravinsky to date, would require what the composer in retrospect derided as merely 'descriptive' music, composed to a scenario not of his choosing, and with a deadline that was frighteningly close. But such things concentrate the mind wonderfully, and in *The Firebird*, Stravinsky emerges as a major composer of the twentieth century, not least in his bold and inventive use of orchestral sound. *The Firebird* also lays the foundations for the much greater radicalism of *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, while bringing to a radiant close the Russian Romantic tradition of 'The Five'. After the first performance in June 1910 Stravinsky was praised in the press for the 'exquisite marvel of equilibrium...between sounds, movement and forms' and was suddenly immersed in the glamorous world of pre-War Paris.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Stravinsky remained a celebrity in Paris, though less so in his native Russia. Coincidentally, in 1914 his wife became ill with tuberculosis, and the family moved to Switzerland just as Europe descended into war. This, of course, curtailed Stravinsky's activities (though by no means completely), but the Russian revolution of 1917 had a much more profound effect: the family remained based in Switzerland until 1920. The music of these years is in many respects, and unsurprisingly, more austere than the three Paris ballets, and in 1919 Stravinsky revisited *The Firebird* to create a new suite for reduced orchestral forces.

Fokine's scenario for the ballet brings together three strands of Russian folklore. The Firebird herself is a kind of phoenix and, as Richard Taruskin notes, 'a thing of preternatural, elemental freedom, she personified the indifference of beauty to the desires and cares of mankind.' Kashchei the Deathless, a demon attended by monsters, abducts maidens and turns knights to stone and has cognates in many mythologies. Finally, there is Ivan Tsarevich, who, of course, personifies a nationalist, indeed imperial, heroism.

The story begins in the enchanted forest that surrounds Kashchei's castle. The **Introduction** begins in the sepulchral depths of the orchestra, rising to fluttering wind figurations and a fragmentary, plaintive oboe solo. **The Firebird's dance**, as she enters pursued by Ivan Tsarevich, is a spritely waltz clothed in brilliant orchestral colour, which dissolves into scurrying flute textures as Ivan captures her. The Firebird begs for her freedom in a slow dance (**Variation**) whose main melody is first heard in the violas and bassoon, and promises to come to his aid should he ever require it; as a token of her promise she gives him a plume from her tail. Moving deeper into the forest, Ivan finds himself in the garden of Kashchei's castle.

Thirteen princesses appear and play a game with golden apples; Ivan, enchanted by the thirteenth princess's beauty, reveals himself and they all perform a stately round-dance (**Khorovod**) to a Russian folk-tune. Kashchei's monsters appear, capturing Ivan as Kashchei arrives. The monsters attempt to turn Ivan to stone in the face of the princesses' pleas for mercy. Ivan summons the Firebird; she appears and casts a spell on the monsters. An exhilarating **Infernal dance** to acrobatic trumpet calls, woodwind trills and clattering xylophones follows.

The Firebird dances a **berceuse**, or lullaby, putting Kashchei and the monsters into a magic sleep and telling Ivan that he must destroy the egg in which Kashchei keeps his soul. As Kashchei awakes, Ivan does so, thus destroying the evil demon and plunging his world into profound darkness.

In the single-movement **Finale**, a long-breathed melody passed from solo horn through the full orchestra announces the destruction of evil and the reawakening of the knights who Kashchei had turned to stone. Ivan, naturally, marries the thirteenth princess in music of great ecstasy.

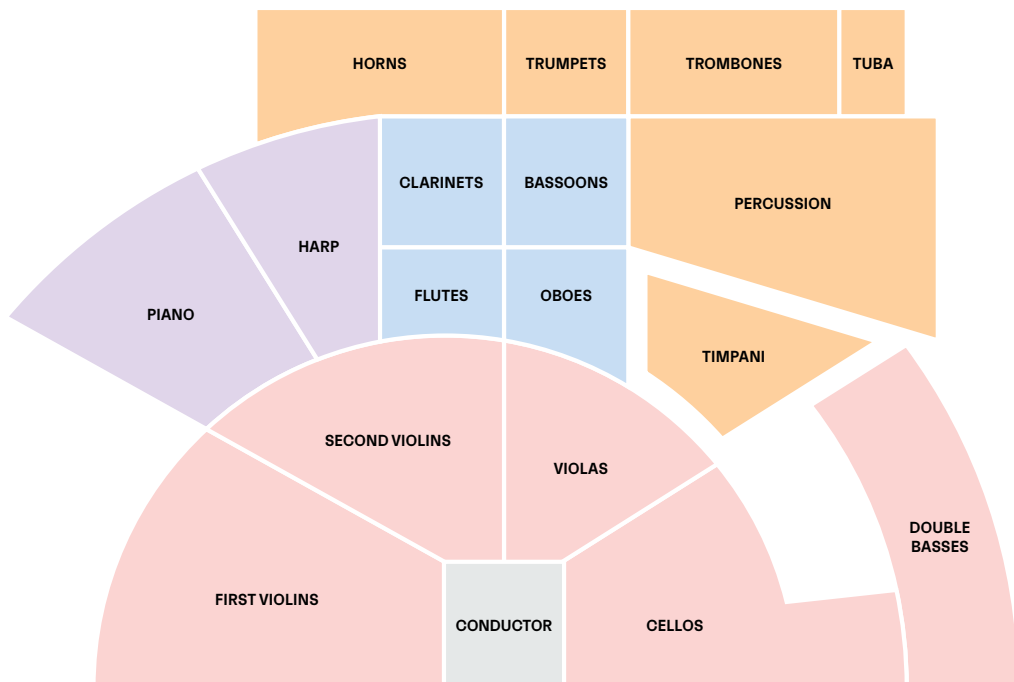
Notes by Gordon Kerry © 2023, 2022, 2009, and Holly Harrison © 2020.

Stravinsky's 1919 suite of *The Firebird* is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling cor anglais), 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, harp, keyboard and strings.



Tamara Karsavina and Michel Fokine as the Firebird and Prince Ivan in the 1910 Ballets Russes production of *L'Oiseau de Feu*. Source: United States Library of Congress/Wikimedia Commons.

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Harry Bennetts
Associate Concertmaster
Jennifer Booth
Sophie Cole
Georges Lentz
Alex Mitchell
Liam Pilgrim
Benjamin Tjoa
Brian Hong^o
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