

STRAVINSKY'S THE FIREBIRD

12 & 13 JUNE 2026

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



“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 enjoy 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

STRAVINSKY'S THE FIREBIRD

FAIRYTALES COME TO LIFE

Andrey Boreyko conductor

ANATOLY LIADOV (1855–1914)
Kikimora, Op.63 (1909)

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)
Cello Concerto No.1 in E flat, Op.107 (1959)

- I. Allegretto
- II. Moderato –
- III. Cadenza
- IV. Allegro non troppo

Maximilian Hornung cello

INTERVAL

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)

The Firebird (1910)

- I. *Introduction*

Tableau I:

- II. *Kashchei's Enchanted Garden*
- III. *The Firebird appears, pursued by the Tsarevich Prince Ivan*
- IV. *Dance of the Firebird*
- V. *Prince Ivan captures the Firebird*
- VI. *Supplication of the Firebird*
- VII. *The appearance of thirteen enchanted Princesses*
- VIII. *The Princesses play with the golden apples*
- IX. *Sudden appearance of Prince Ivan*
- X. *Round Dance of the Princesses*
- XI. *Daybreak – Prince Ivan enters the Palace of Kashchei*
- XII. *Fairy Carillon – Appearance of Kashchei's Guardian Monsters – The Capture of Prince Ivan*
- XIII. *The Arrival of the Demon King Kashchei – Dialogue of Kashchei and Prince Ivan – Intercession of the Princesses*
- XIV. *Appearance of the Firebird*
- XV. *Dance of Kashchei's Retinue under the magic spell of the Firebird*
- XVI. *Infernal Dance of the Subjects of Kashchei*
- XVII. *Berceuse of the Firebird*
- XVIII. *Kashchei awakens – Death of Kashchei – Profound Darkness*

Tableau II:

- XIX. *Disappearance of Kashchei's Palace and Sorcery – Reanimation of the Knights who had been turned to stone – General Rejoicing*

Friday 12 June, 7pm

Symphonic Fridays

Saturday 13 June, 2pm

Great Classics

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

Pre-concert talk

By Alice Morgan in the Northern Foyer at 6.15pm (Thurs) and 1.15pm (Sat)

Estimated durations

Liadov – 8 minutes
Shostakovich – 35 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Stravinsky – 50 minutes

The concert will run for approx. 2 hours

Cover image

Andrey Boreyko. Photo by Jakub Siemiaczko.

These performances have been generously supported by Paolo Hooke and Fan Guo.

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.

Emirates

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YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

ANATOLY LIADOV (1855–1914)
***Kikimora*, Op.63** (1909)

The seven-minute concert overture *Kikimora* is one of the few completed works of Liadov. It is a miniature tone-poem describing the miraculous childhood – complete with talking cat – and later life of Kikimora, a morally ambiguous spirit (and guardian of chickens) in Russian folklore.

It was completed in 1909, the year that saw the beatification of Joan of Arc, the foundation of the Anglo-Persian Oil company and NSW win the Sheffield Shield.

Contemporary music included Sergei Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto, Jean Sibelius's *Voces Intimae* and Richard Strauss's *Elektra*.



Portrait of the composer Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov (1902) by Ilya Repin (1844–1930). Source: Russian Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)
Cello Concerto No.1 in E flat, Op.107 (1959)

Both of Shostakovich's cello concertos were premiered by Mstislav Rostropovich, whose massive sound and brilliant technique are baked into the works.

Playing for about a half-hour, this first concerto is in three movements, though the second runs seamlessly into a virtuoso cadenza before the eruption of the finale.

It dates from 1959, the year that saw the discovery of *Australopithecus* fossils, the flight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet and the maiden voyage of the *Princess of Tasmania*.

Contemporary music included Pierre Boulez's *Improvisation sur Mallarmé III: A la nue accablante tu*, Benjamin Britten's *Missa brevis* and Peggy Glanville-Hicks's *The Glittering Gate*.



Shostakovich photographed at the Bach Celebration of 28 July 1950. Photo by Roger & Renate Rössing. Source: Deutsche Fotothek/Wikimedia Commons.

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)
The Firebird (1910)

The first of Stravinsky's three major scores for the Ballets Russes, *The Firebird* is based on a Russian fairytale of miraculous creatures like the firebird herself, the evil Kashchei, various monsters and a heroic Tsarevich, and unfolds in music of utter brilliance of sound.

It dates from 1910, the year that saw Halley's Comet, the accession of George V of Great Britain and the creation of the Royal Australian Navy.

Contemporary music included Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis*, Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony and Giacomo Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*.



Igor Stravinsky photographed by George Grantham Bain's news picture agency, c.1920-25. Source: United States Library of Congress.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ANDREY BOREYKO conductor

This 2025/26 season, Andrey Boreyko returns to Chicago Symphony and Boston Symphony with Evgeny Kissin. He also conducts the Mozarteum Orchestra at the Salzburg Grosses Festspielhaus. Other highlights include Spanish Radio Orchestra in Madrid, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, Stuttgart Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, Adelaide Symphony, Teatro Comunale di Bologna Orchestra, Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini and George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra.

Following his successful tenure as Music & Artistic Director of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, Boreyko joins forces with them again this season: they returned to the International Chopin Piano Competition, appearing at the opening concert, final rounds, and Laureates' concerts of the competition's 19th edition.

A popular guest of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Boreyko has conducted critically acclaimed subscription programs with them in recent years, with repertoire including Shostakovich's symphonies nos. 5 and 13, *Babi Yar*, and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.4.

Other highlights from recent seasons include Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony, Prague Symphony, Aarhus Symphony, Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra, Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony and New Japan Philharmonic. He has also worked with Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Gürzenich Orchester Köln, Montreal Symphony, Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, Sinfonica Nazionale RAI and Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, with whom he has appeared at Teatro all Scala and the Mahler Festival.

Prior to the conclusion of his successful tenure as Music & Artistic Director of Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir in 2024, Boreyko was Music Director of Artis—Naples in the US for eight seasons. Other previous appointments include Music Director positions of Hamburger Symphonies, Berner Sinfonieorchester, Düsseldorf Symphoniker, Winnipeg Symphony and Orchestre National de Belgique.



Photo by Michał Zagórny

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MAXIMILIAN HORNUNG cello

Maximilian Hornung is regarded as one of the most remarkable cellists on the international stage. Alongside his exceptional technical mastery and versatility, his playing is characterised by an extraordinary depth of tone, a boundless range of colours, and a natural sophistication. The sincerity of his performances allows him to channel the purest expression of the music he plays, connecting with audiences in a profound and meaningful way. In addition to much-loved core repertoire, Hornung carries an impressive and wide-ranging repertory, and devotes himself to lesser-known cello masterpieces.

In the 2025/26 season, Hornung makes his debut with the Berliner Philharmoniker, giving three performances of the Dutilleux Cello Concerto under the baton of Thomas Guggeis. He also makes debuts with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia and Zürcher Kammerorchester, and is Artist-in-Residence at the Staatstheater Nürnberg as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor for performances in and around Nürnberg. Recent orchestral highlights include engagements with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Wiener Symphoniker, Swedish Radio Symphony, London Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, Bamberger Symphoniker, Philharmonia Orchestra, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Dallas Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre National de France. Hornung is much in demand with many of today's leading conductors including Daniel Harding, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Paavo Järvi, Marie Jacquot, Esa-Pekka Salonen, David Zinman, Lorenzo Viotti, Pablo Heras-Casado, Semyon Bychkov, Manfred Honeck, Antonello Manacorda, John Storgårds, Michael Francis, Thomas Søndergård, Krzysztof Urbański and Robin Ticciati. In recent years, Hornung has also established himself as a soloist and conductor, and regularly directs projects, most recently with the Münchner Symphoniker.

Hornung's extensive discography spans solo performances and collaborations with prominent chamber musicians. He received an ECHO Klassik Prize in both 2011 for his debut album *Jump!* (Sony, 2010) and again in 2012

for his recording of Dvořák's Cello Concerto with the Bamberger Symphoniker under the direction of Sebastian Tewinkel (Sony, 2012). Further recordings include Richard Strauss' major cello works with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks under Bernard Haitink (Sony, 2014) and Joseph Haydn's cello concerti with the Kammerakademie Potsdam under Antonello Manacorda (Sony, 2015). In 2017, Deutsche Grammophon released a highly acclaimed recording of Schubert's *Trout* Quintet in which Hornung performed together with Anne-Sophie Mutter and Daniil Trifonov, among others. In 2018, myrios classics released his recording of Dmitri Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.2 and Sulkhan Tsintsadze's Cello Concerto No.2 with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Andris Poga. Further recordings have been released on Genuin, Linn Records, NEOS, Bridge Records, and CPO.

Born in Augsburg in 1986, Hornung began his cello studies at the age of 8, receiving considerable training from Eldar Issakadze, Thomas Grossenbacher and David Geringas. Until 2011, he served as cellist of the Tecchler Trio, winning First Prize at the ARD International Music Competition in 2007. At the age of only 23, he was appointed first principal cellist of the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, a position that he held until 2013. Hornung has been supported and sponsored by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust in London and his mentor Anne-Sophie Mutter. Since 2022, he has been Artistic Director of the Traunsteiner Sommerkonzerte.



Photo by Julia Wesely

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT ANATOLY LIADOV

Phillip Sametz writes:

‘Nature had bestowed upon him every conceivable gift except energy and perseverance,’ musicologist Michael Calvocoressi said of Liadov, and it is symptomatic of the composer’s reputation that he is better remembered for *not* writing *The Firebird* than for the music he did complete.

Liadov was one of the second wave of Russian composers, the generation of Glazunov and Arensky, who were beneficiaries of the pioneering work done by Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin in establishing a language of Russian music. Yet the music of these composers can seem less urgent, more self-consciously cultivated, than that of their immediate predecessors. Liadov’s laziness is perhaps emblematic of the richness and decadence that informed his musical language and that of his contemporaries.

Unlike many composers for whom the establishment of a musical life was a struggle against parental will, Liadov seemed to be born to a musical career. His father, a conductor at the Mariinsky Theatre, was his first music teacher, and his career at the St Petersburg Conservatory was brilliant, if erratic. Once expelled for poor attendance and inattention, he later became a member of staff! He was, by all accounts, a fine teacher, and Rimsky-Korsakov’s textbook on harmony (1886) draws heavily on Liadov’s ideas.

Everything in Liadov’s output is small – not in the forces deployed, but in time-scale. There are many piano pieces, songs, some choral music and a dozen orchestral pieces, but the lengthiest work would be about 20 minutes long. This is not because he was tidy-minded, or agonised over every note, as Ravel did. He had grand musical ambitions, but lacked the energy or will to carry them out.



Portrait of the composer Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov (1902) by Ilya Repin (1844–1930). Source: Russian Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT KIKIMORA

Perhaps the greatest of Liadov’s unfinished dreams was the opera *Zoriushka*, and it is of interest because some of its music finally touched the ground in two of the composer’s best-known works, the orchestral pictures *The Enchanted Lake* and *Kikimora*.

Liadov began to compose *Zoriushka* fitfully in 1879 and was still toying with it in 1909, three librettists and many scenario changes later. The story concerns a princess who falls under the spell of some water nymphs and is rescued by her betrothed, who, while hacking his way through dense forest, sets the dry woods on fire with his sword. Initially Liadov was going to treat the story in the tableaux-like manner of Rimsky-Korsakov’s epic fairytale operas, but had a change of heart after seeing the first St Petersburg production of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* in 1889. In the end, his ‘ingenious indolence’ (as Gerald Abraham calls it) meant that Liadov completed nothing of any significance, except for the ideas that he expanded into independent orchestral pieces.

And it is in *Zoriushka* that we originally find the haunting cor anglais solo which opens *Kikimora*: it was to have been a lullaby sung by a friendly Spirit in Act III of the opera, sending to sleep Prince Visheslav, his courtiers and attendants.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

But *Kikimora* is based on a Russian legend that bears no relation to the *Zoriushka* story. According to the résumé at the front of the published score:

Kikimora is brought up by a sorcerer in the stony mountains. In her youth she is beguiled, from early morn to late at night, by the tales of foreign lands told by the sorcerer's Magic Cat. From night to dawn Kikimora is rocked in a crystal cradle.

In seven years Kikimora grows up. Thin and dark, her head is as small as a thimble, and her body like a straw. She knocks and rattles from morning to evening, and whistles and hisses from evening to midnight. Then she sits till daylight at a spinning wheel, winding yarn and snipping silk at the loom. And in her mind she spins up evil against all mankind...

The cor anglais solo we hear after the deep, ominous opening chords is the Magic Cat's lullaby, and, in the section which follows, the Cat's tales (no pun intended) are punctuated by gurgles and shrieks from the high woodwind, while the bass clarinet utters mysterious pronouncements. Kikimora suddenly appears to us in grown form, and the brass and xylophone come to the fore. As she takes leave of us, this malevolent sprite contemplates her wicked ways in a mood of cackling mischievousness.

Kikimora is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet and 2 bassoons; 4 horns and 2 trumpets; timpani, percussion, celeste and strings.

According to most sources, Alexander Siloti conducted the premiere in the Hall of the Nobility in St. Petersburg with the Imperial Court Orchestra in December 1910.

This is just the second time the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has performed this work; the first time was in 2012, conducted by Thomas Sanderling.

ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH

Shostakovich was an adolescent at the time of the 1917 revolution. Unlike his near contemporary Prokofiev, or the slightly older Stravinsky, Shostakovich saw no need to travel abroad, let alone emigrate. The 21-year-old composer's First Symphony premiered in his home town of Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1928; its introduction to the West by Bruno Walter assured Shostakovich of world celebrity, but was also an announcement of the optimistic, outward looking Russia of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. That Shostakovich was broadly in sympathy with the ideals of early revolutionary Russia is suggested by his Second and Third Symphonies, subtitled 'To October' and 'The First of May' respectively. It should be noted, however, that these works pre-date the official promulgation of the concept of 'socialist realism'; in them, Shostakovich displays an exuberant interest in the techniques of Western art music, such as dissonance and irony.

The political backdrop to Shostakovich's early career was the power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin that began with the death of Lenin in 1922. By the early Thirties the ascendancy of Stalin was complete and in 1934 the purges, or Great Terror, began. Within that period (1934-38) were two particularly bloody years where NI Yezhov, chief of the NKVD (later the KGB) oversaw the imprisonment and murder of Stalin's principal remaining Party rivals as well as leading scientists, writers and musicians. The effect of the purges was to rob the USSR of millions of its citizens, especially leading figures in most fields, so that by the end of the 1930s the country's intellectual infrastructure was almost fatally weakened.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Shostakovich photographed at the Bach Celebration of 28 July 1950. Photo by Roger & Renate Rössing. Source: Deutsche Fotothek/Wikimedia Commons.

Despite having enjoyed a spectacularly successful two-year run, Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was attacked in the pages of *Pravda* in 1936 as 'chaos instead of music' and its composer warned that 'this could all end very badly'. Shostakovich, or the orchestral management in Leningrad, immediately withdrew his demanding Fourth Symphony, a powerfully disturbing behemoth of dissonance and irony. The composer, like many of his generation, is said to have slept for a time in the hallway of his apartment so that the seemingly inevitable arrest wouldn't traumatise his young family. (Shostakovich suffered several reversals of fortune: he was denounced in 1936, rehabilitated with the premiere of the Fifth Symphony but denounced again in 1948, despite having been awarded the Stalin Prize in 1940 and the Order of Lenin in 1946.)

ABOUT SHOSTAKOVICH'S CELLO CONCERTO NO.1

Drew Crawford writes:

Mstislav Rostropovich was faced with a dilemma. He was keen for Shostakovich to compose a cello concerto but, perhaps all too aware of his friend's sensitive nature, he had first asked the composer's wife what it would take to make Dmitri write one. She advised him that one should never ask (and certainly not beg) her husband to write anything.

Rostropovich followed her advice and made no requests to the composer, but sometime later, in 1959, reading the *Soviet Art* newspaper he discovered that Shostakovich had indeed written a concerto. Soon the cellist was playing through the new work with pianist Alexander Dedyukhin in the presence of the composer, who asked insistently if they liked the music. Once Rostropovich was able to convince him how moved he had been from the first note, Shostakovich humbly asked permission to dedicate his first cello concerto to him. (Shostakovich's second cello concerto, overtly less virtuosic than the first, was also written specifically for the Russian master cellist, in 1966, and exploited Rostropovich's genius as an interpretive musician.)

In the E flat concerto, Shostakovich uses almost every sound the cello can make to overcome the difficulties posed by a form composers often avoid. Being a mid-range instrument, the cello is easily swamped when pitted against a full orchestra, and listening to how Shostakovich responds to this challenge affords almost as much pleasure as his passionate writing for the instrument.

For example, Shostakovich starts by turning down the orchestra, using only double woodwind with piccolo and contrabassoon, one horn, celeste, timpani and strings, and the way he writes for this ensemble is reminiscent of his chamber music. The opening has touches of Stravinsky's early Neoclassical works. The cello announces the four-note theme that will bind the entire concerto together, and is answered by the winds in a Baroque figure in the home key. The main cello motif (G – E – B – B flat) contains two notes (E and B) which are not in the key of E flat, thus reinforcing the feeling of Stravinskian 'wrong-note' harmony.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Shostakovich's own unmistakable musical personality, however, is soon in evidence. Allowing room for the soloist, the orchestral textures are widely spaced, with high woodwind and deep double basses and contrabassoon creating a dark and distinctly Russian feel. The absence of heavy brass highlights the lone horn whose solo roles throughout the concerto provide a beautiful timbral counterpoint to the cello, often reiterating the soloist's themes.

The second movement – an A minor *moderato* – begins with strings in a more Romantic, almost Mahlerian vein. This chromatic, smoothly contoured theme is heard only three times, virtually unchanged and acting as a hinge upon which the movement turns. Its initial exposition is halted by the horn, whose repeated melodic fragment turns out to be a gentle fanfare announcing the solo cello. The subsequent lyrical, drawn-out melody inevitably leads back to the string theme, transposed higher and this time reaching a kind of climax. It will return once more before we hear the movement's highlight: the soloist's stratospheric harmonics accompanied by quiet, shimmering strings and the celeste in its only appearance in the score. A solo clarinet takes over from the celeste in an ethereal duet with the cello over plucked bass notes leading straight into the cadenza.

Essentially a link between the slow movement and the finale, the cadenza appropriately has the feel of an improvisation. The soloist shows off a dazzling array of cello techniques in the midst of rapid runs and double stops punctuated by still pizzicato chords. From here, Shostakovich builds cleverly towards the finale, the orchestra entering suddenly with huge chords. They set the dramatic pace for the music ahead which gallops with a folk-like energy towards a final combination of the opening motif from the first movement with the finale's own two themes. The whole work comes to a crashing end with the timpani, repeating what was once the Baroque answering figure in the woodwinds, and transforming it into an emphatic full-stop.

Rostropovich's premiere of the work in October 1959 was an unqualified success, and he toured it in the following months to the UK, the US and Australia where it met with popular and critical success, despite its Soviet origins (this was still the Fifties, after all). Undaunted by the Russian cellist's reputation, other soloists have since taken it up eagerly, cementing its place in both the repertoire and in audiences' hearts.

Shostakovich's concerto is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon); horn, timpani, celeste, strings and cello soloist.

It was premiered by Mstislav Rostropovich on 4 October 1959, at the Large Hall of the Leningrad Conservatory with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Yevgeny Mravinsky.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the concerto in November 1976, with soloist János Starker conducted by Paavo Berglund.

Other notable performances include those by Paul Tortelier conducted by Franz-Paul Decker (1980); Antonio Meneses/Elgar Howard (1984); Valter Dešpalj/Vernon Handley (1986); Mischa Maisky/Lawrence Foster (1995); Truls Mork/Daniel Harding (2000); Jing Zhao/Hannu Lintu (2007) and Han-Na Chang/Yannick Nézet-Séguin (2009).

We also performed it in Seoul, South Korea, on our 2011 Asian Tour, with Mischa Maisky conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Our most recent performances were in November 2017, with Daniel Müller-Schott conducted by Ashkenazy.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT STRAVINSKY

Born in St Petersburg in 1882, Stravinsky established his reputation with three ballet scores that he wrote for the Paris seasons of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes - *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913) - and which mine certain aspects of traditional Russian culture.

In 1909 Stravinsky met Diaghilev, who commissioned orchestrations of Chopin for a ballet by Mikhail Fokine; then, Diaghilev commissioned *The Firebird* and the two subsequent ballets. Stravinsky commuted between Russia and the French capital until 1914, but from then until 1920 lived in exile in Switzerland.

The early 'Russian' period concludes, more or less, around 1917, when the composer whom Debussy affectionately called 'my young savage' had reached a creative impasse and begun to look elsewhere for inspiration. With the end of the First World War, Diaghilev was keen to resume performances in Paris, and asked Stravinsky to compose a new ballet based on works (wrongly) attributed to 18th-century composer, Pergolesi. *Pulcinella* ushers in the 30-year period that produced those works generally labelled 'neoclassical'.

Stravinsky stayed in Paris until the late 1930s.

He paid homage to the Greek god most associated with 'classicism' in the 1928 ballet *Apollon musagète*, and explored the world of 'classical' mythology in the opera/oratorio *Oedipus Rex* the previous year. His revived Christian faith contributed to the *Symphony of Psalms*, written 'to the glory of God and for the Boston Symphony Orchestra' in 1930.

The mid-1930s saw the composition of his Violin Concerto and the ballet *Jeu de cartes*, and at this time Stravinsky made an increasing number of visits to the United States for concerts and lectures. A new life in the United States beckoned, and the last work he completed in Europe was the American Baroque *Dumbarton Oaks*.



Igor Stravinsky photographed by George Grantham Bain's news picture agency, c.1920-25. Source: United States Library of Congress.

Stravinsky spent much time conducting his own work on tour, increasingly aided by Robert Craft, who would become an indispensable assistant. The largest, and concluding, work of the neo-classical period, written with librettists WH Auden and Chester Kallman, was *The Rake's Progress* (completed in 1951), a neo-Mozartian opera set in the hell of 18th century London as seen in the paintings of William Hogarth. His 1928 ballet, *The Fairy's Kiss* is a love affair with the music of Tchaikovsky, where the identity of the two composers fuses so perfectly that it is often hard to tell who is arranging whom.

After the 1951 death of Arnold Schoenberg, Stravinsky began to explore the musical system of what had always seemed the rival camp. Twelve-note serial techniques emerge in parts of such works as the completely abstract ballet *Agon*, and the *Canticum sacrum*, written for St Mark's, Venice; from *Threni* of 1958, serial method underpins whole works.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

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 fairytale 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.

As we know, 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. After the triumphant 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. *The Firebird* also lays the foundations for the much greater radicalism of *The Rite of Spring*, while bringing to a radiant close the Russian Romantic tradition of 'The Five'.

Fokine's scenario 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 evil ogre attended by monsters, who abducts maidens and turns knights to stone, has cognates and avatars in many mythologies. Finally, there is Ivan Tsarevich, who, of course, personifies a nationalist, indeed imperial, heroism.

In two tableaux, the ballet score proceeds through a series of short linked sections. An introductory section begins in the sepulchral depths of the orchestra, rising to fluttering wind figurations and a fragmentary, plaintive oboe solo. The Enchanted Garden is characterised by glints of metal percussion, sinuous bassoon motives and shuddering strings. Harps and trilling woodwinds announce the apparition of the Firebird who is being pursued by Ivan Tsarevich. The Firebird's dance 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 whose main melody is first heard in the violas and bassoon. Ivan releases her, and in gratitude the Firebird gives him a plume from her tail, with the promise that she will return and come to his aid if called.

Now closer to the castle of Kashchei, high string chords and ornate wind solos announce the appearance of twelve enchanted princesses. At the end of this section a thirteenth princess appears; they then, to a glittering scherzo, play a game with golden apples as Ivan, unseen, watches them. He suddenly appears, and the princesses dance their stately *khоровод*, or 'round dance' (to a Russian folk-tune), where, again, solo woodwinds dominate.

Day breaks to a chorus of muted trumpet fanfares, and Kashchei's monsters appear accompanied by the vertiginous whirl of the 'fairy carillon'. To baleful low brass chords, Ivan is captured as Kashchei appears. Their dialogue depicts two strongly contrasting characters, before the monsters attempt to turn Ivan to stone in the face of the princesses' pleas for mercy.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ivan remembers the Firebird's promise and summons her; she appears and casts a spell on the monsters. Other subjects of Kashchei perform an exhilarating 'infernal dance' to acrobatic trumpet calls, woodwind trills and clattering xylophones.

The Firebird dances a *berceuse*, or lullaby, putting Kashchei 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 ogre and plunging his world into profound darkness lit only by quietly shimmering strings.

In the short, single-movement second tableau, 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 Phillip Sametz © 1998 (Liadov),
Drew Crawford © 1998 (Shostakovich)
and Gordon Kerry © 2009 (composer
biographies and Stravinsky note)**

The Firebird is scored for what Stravinsky described as a 'wastefully large' orchestra, consisting of 3 flutes (the 3rd doubling piccolo) and piccolo: 3 oboes and cor anglais: 3 clarinets (the 3rd doubling E flat clarinet) and bass clarinet: 3 bassoons (the 3rd doubling contrabassoon) and contrabassoon; 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, piano, celeste, 3 harps and strings; and an offstage band of four Wagner tubas and three trumpets.

The ballet premiered at the Palais Garnier in Paris on 25 June 1910.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the first recorded Australian performance of the complete ballet in April 1976, conducted by Willem van Otterloo.

Other notable performances include those led by Stanisław Skrowaczewski (1981), Edo de Waart (1997), Charles Dutoit (2001) and David Robertson (2008 and 2016).

Our most recent performances were in September 2023, conducted by Karen Kamensek.

We have also recorded it twice, both for ABC Classics: in 2000 with Edo de Waart and again in 2016 with David Robertson, both of which are available on CD and streaming.

Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson



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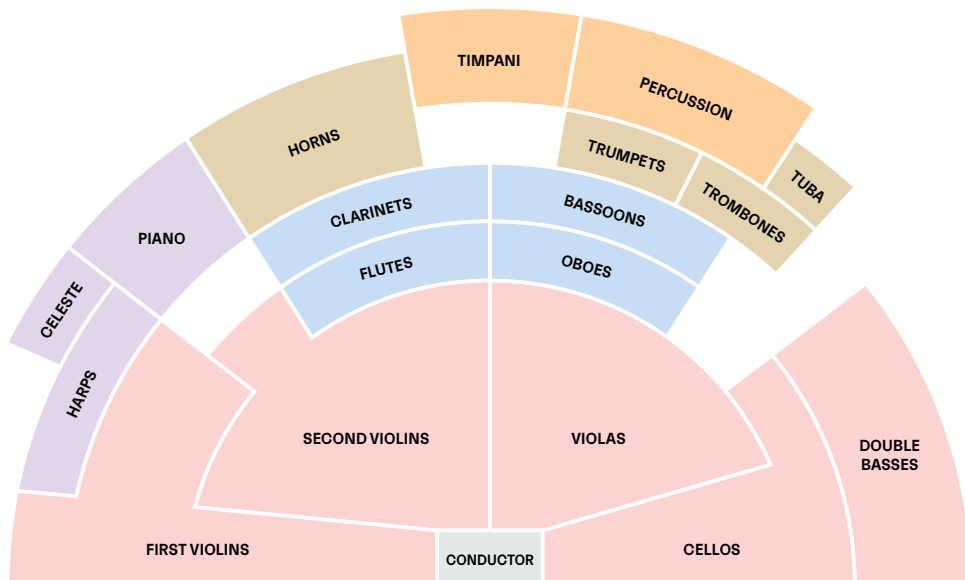
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