

# BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

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17–20 JUNE 2026

Concert Hall,  
Sydney Opera House



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“SYMPHONY”  
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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 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

# BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

WITH SCHUMANN'S CELLO CONCERTO

**Anja Bihlmaier** conductor

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**MELODY EÖTVÖS** (born 1984)  
*The Saqqara Bird* (2016)

**ROBERT SCHUMANN** (1810–1856)  
**Cello Concerto in A minor, Op.129** (1850)  
i. Nicht zu schnell (Not too fast) –  
ii. Langsam (Slowly) –  
iii. Sehr lebhaft (Very lively)

**Ivan Karizna** cello

INTERVAL

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** (1770–1827)  
**Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.67** (1804–1808)  
i. Allegro con brio  
ii. Andante con moto  
iii. Allegro –  
iv. Allegro

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.

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**Wednesday 17 June, 8pm**  
**Friday 19 June, 8pm**  
**Saturday 20 June, 8pm**  
Emirates Masters Series

**Thursday 18 June, 1.30pm**  
Emirates Thursday Afternoons

Concert Hall,  
Sydney Opera House

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### Pre-concert talk

By Zoltán Szabó in the  
Northern Foyer at 7.15pm  
and on the Lounge Level at  
12.45pm (Thurs only)

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### Estimated durations

Eötvös – 9 minutes  
Schumann – 25 minutes  
Interval – 20 minutes  
Beethoven – 35 minutes

The concert will run for  
approx. 1 hour and 45 minutes

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### Cover image

Photo of Anja Bihlmaier  
By Nikolaj Lund

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### ABC Classic

Friday's concert will be  
recorded for broadcast  
on 17 July at 1pm, and  
streaming online.

**Emirates**

Principal Partner

# WELCOME

Welcome to **Beethoven's Fifth Symphony**, the fifth concert in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Emirates Masters Series for 2026.

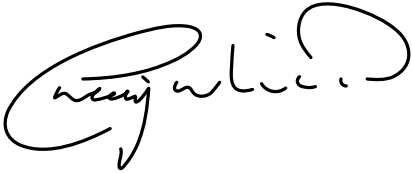
What more is there to say about Beethoven's Fifth? Perhaps the most famous four notes in all of music, it has captivated audiences since its very first performance over 200 years ago. But beyond those powerful opening moments is a vast and thrilling piece of music, a journey from darkness to light that will leave you exhilarated and inspired.

Exhilaration and inspiration are integral to the shared vision that underpins the Orchestra's relationship with our Principal Partner, Emirates. Together we aspire to create unforgettable journeys and remarkable experiences, with a commitment to excellence at the very highest level.

We are immensely proud of our partnership, one of the most significant and enduring relationships in Australia's performing arts and Emirates' longest-running collaboration with a non-sporting organisation. This partnership reflects our shared belief in the power of connection: bringing world-class artistry to the global stage and enabling music to transcend borders, cultures and audiences. We're proud to support artists who inspire, unite and connect with fans around the world.

As the Presenter of this Masters Series, Emirates proudly champions exceptional local and international talent, with a special focus on the Sydney Symphony's celebrated Chief Conductor, Simone Young AM.

We are delighted by the continuing success of our long-term partnership and trust you will enjoy this marvellous concert.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whitehead', with a large, stylized flourish on the left side.

**Craig Whitehead**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Sydney Symphony Orchestra**

# YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

## **MELODY EÖTVÖS** (born 1984) *The Saqqara Bird* (2016)

Eötvös's nine-minute piece is, as she puts it, 'a lyrical and thematically organised work' that takes its title from an enigmatic wooden 'model' of a bird, found at Saqqara in Egypt in 1898 and thought to date from the second century BC.

It was composed in 2016 and performed that year by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra conducted by Marko Letonja, a year that also saw the United Kingdom vote to 'Brexit' the European Union, the election of Donald Trump as US President and the release of the augmented reality mobile game *Pokémon Go*.

Contemporary music included Krzysztof Penderecki's String Quartet No.4, Kaija Saariaho's *Sense* and Carl Vine's *Five Hallucinations* for trombone and orchestra.

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## **ROBERT SCHUMANN** (1810–1856) *Cello Concerto in A minor, Op.129* (1850)

This 25-minute work is in three movements played without a break, and represents a concentrated example of classical form, largely free of formal padding, and lightly scored so as not to obscure the solo instrument.

It premiered in 1860 but was composed at great speed in 1850, the year that saw California become the 31st state of the USA, the Punctuation of Olmütz and the foundation of the University of Sydney.

Contemporary music included Liszt's *Liebesträume*, Saint-Saens's Symphony in A minor and Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

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Robert Schumann in an 1850 daguerreotype.

## **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** (1770–1827) *Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.67* (1804–1808)

The fame of Beethoven's Fifth can make us forget what an extraordinary advance it was in musical language, harnessing the powerful dramatic sounds of French Revolutionary opera while spinning huge structures out of the tiniest of motifs. Its four movements trace a thrilling arc from the intensely motivic opening through the funereal and dance-like central movements to a final blaze of C major.

It appeared in 1808, the year that saw Russia take over Finland, the original Covent Garden Theatre burn down and the Rum Rebellion.

Contemporary music included Étienne Mehul's Symphony No.1, Antonio Salieri's *Cantata per le nozze di Francesco I* and Carl Maria von Weber's *Silvana*.



Detail from *Portrait of van Beethoven* (c.1804-05) by German artist Joseph Willibrord Mähler (1778 -1860). Source: Vienna Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### **ANJA BIHLMAIER** conductor

‘Bihlmaier is a conductor who trades flash for focus and puts a premium on clarity... wonderfully evocative with striking dramatic effect...’ *Washington Post*, May 2024.

Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic since September 2024, she has become a firm favourite at the BBC Proms where she appears annually.

In 2025/26, she conducts for the first time the London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Orchestre National de Lyon, returning to the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Madrid National, Helsinki Philharmonic, Berlin Konzerthausorchester, Hong Kong Philharmonic and Sydney and Melbourne symphonies. She continues her residency at the Bonn Beethovenfest conducting the DSO Berlin, with whom she will also open the Berlin Musikfest. Last season she debuted with the Seattle Symphony, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra and Munich Philharmonic, all of whom have reinvited.

Bihlmaier has a wide-ranging repertoire that includes Haydn, Mahler, Strauss and BA Zimmermann to Sibelius, Bartók, Dvořák, Shostakovich, Debussy, Britten, Galina Ustvolskaya and Unsuk Chin.

In the past two seasons Bihlmaier conducted new productions at the Berlin Staatsoper (*Cassandra*) and Glyndebourne Festival (*Carmen*) – both debuts, and both leading to immediate reinvitations. In Spring 2026 she conducts her first production at the Hamburg Staatsoper (*Elektra*). In her early career she held positions at the opera houses of Hanover, Chemnitz and Kassel, and went on to conduct at the Vienna Volksoper and across Scandinavia, notably in Malmö (*Midsummer Night’s Dream*), Tampere (*Fliegender Hollaender*) and Oslo (*La Traviata*).

Bihlmaier was Chief Conductor of the Residentie Orkest (Den Haag) 2021-2025 and Principal Guest of the Lahti Sinfonia 2020–2024, and in the past year both orchestras have released CDs with her conducting – Ravel with Residentie and Yeol Eum Son for Naïve, and Prokofiev with Christian Poltera for BIS.

Bihlmaier studied at the Freiburg Hochschule für Musik with Scott Sandmeier, was subsequently awarded a scholarship at the Salzburg Mozarteum and then went on to study with Dennis Russell Davies and Jorge Rotter. She was accepted into the Deutsche Dirigentenforum and received a scholarship from the Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden.



Photo by Phil Sharp

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### **IVAN KARIZNA** cello

Ivan Karizna is a profound musical storyteller and poet with a powerful stage presence.

Described by András Schiff as 'one of the best cellists of his generation', he has won numerous awards, including prizes at the Tchaikovsky and Queen Elisabeth Competitions.

In 2025–26 Karizna returns to Netherlands Philharmonic to give the Dutch premiere of Thomas Larcher's Cello Concerto under Dmitri Slobodeniouk at the Concertgebouw and makes his debut with Netherlands Radio Philharmonic to perform the Brahms Double Concerto. He tours Australia, performing with Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and West Australian Symphony Orchestras, whilst other appearances include Residentie Orkest, Kuopio Symphony and BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Recent highlights include a six-concert tour with Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and Vladimir Jurowski, performing Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.2; Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.1 with Rotterdam Philharmonic and Tarmo Peltokoski; Shostakovich with Dresden Philharmonic and Tabita Berglund; and Weinberg with Aarhus Symphony Orchestra and Dmitry Matvienko. Other collaborations include with Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Belgian National Orchestra and Montreal Symphony Orchestra, working with conductors including Christoph Eschenbach, Stéphane Denève, Valery Gergiev and Juraj Valčuha.

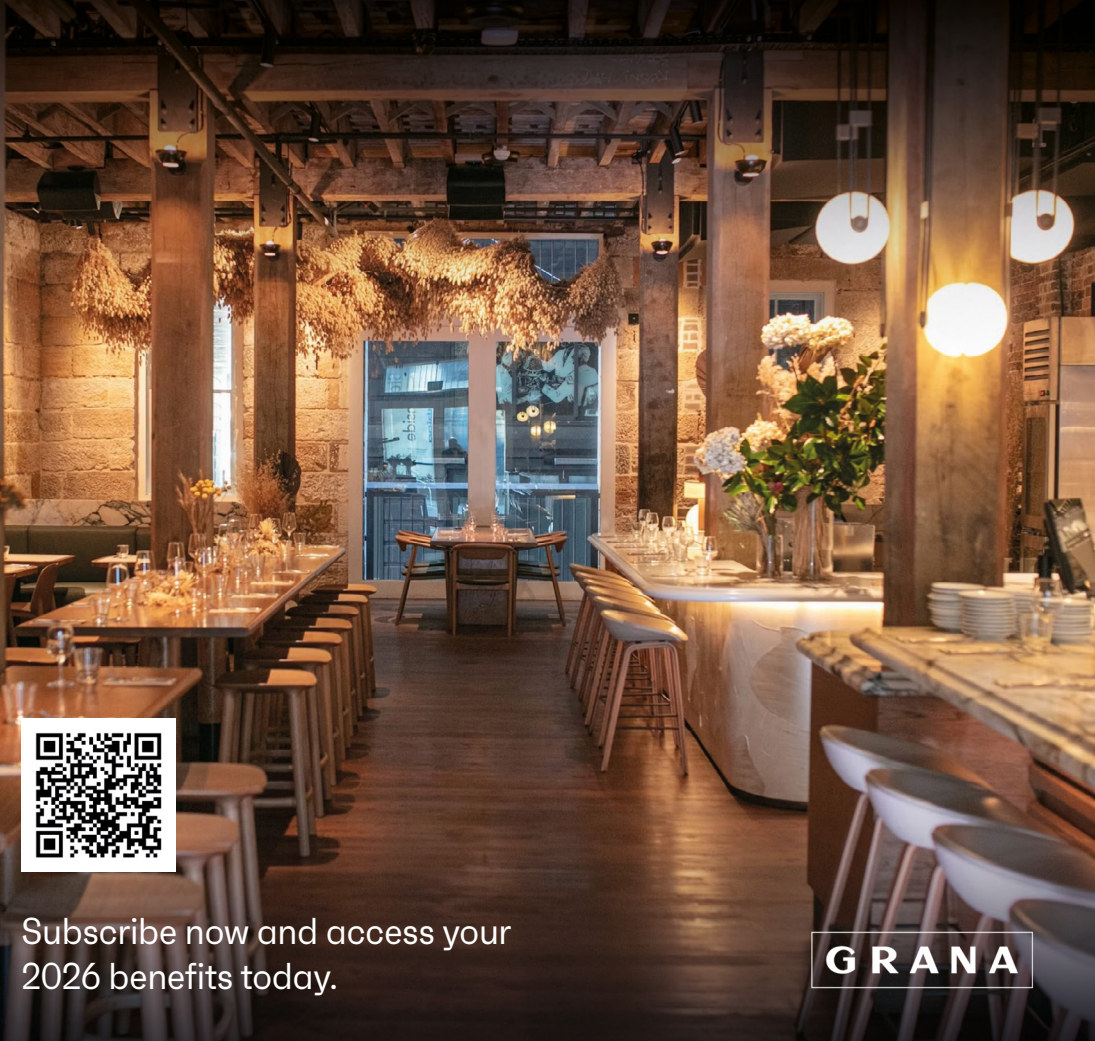
Karizna is an avid chamber musician and has collaborated with numerous distinguished artists, including Joseph Swensen and Alan Gilbert as part of La Jolla Chamber Music Festival. This season he joins colleagues in Amsterdam's Muziekgebouw and Utrecht's TivoliVredenburg, as well as at UKARIA in the Adelaide Hills and returns to Elena Bashkirova's Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival. Past chamber collaborations include with Gidon Kremer, András Schiff, Renaud Capuçon and Christian Tetzlaff.

Born into a musical family in Minsk, Karizna's early training was in the Russian tradition, and at 17 he moved to the Paris Conservatoire, before completing his training at the Kronberg Academy with Frans Helmerson. He plays the 1760 Tassini cello previously owned by Paul Tortelier and on generous loan from a member of the Stretton Society. He is a French citizen, dividing his time between Paris and Amsterdam.



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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT MELODY EÖTVÖS

Melody Eötvös was born in the New South Wales Southern Highlands. Her work draws on both multi-media and traditional instrumental contexts, as well substantial extra-musical references to a broad range of philosophical, biological, environmental and ancient topics, as well as a sustained interest in late 19th-century life and literature.

Eötvös has studied with a variety of composers across the globe including Gerardo Dirie (Australia), Simon Bainbridge (UK) and most recently with Claude Baker, David Dzubay, PQ Phan and Aaron Travers (USA). She has also studied electronic music with Jeffrey Hass, John Gibson and Alicyn Warren.

Accolades include the APRA Professional Development Classical Award (2009), the Gallipoli Songs composition competition (2014), the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation Orchestral Commission administered by the League of American Orchestras and the EarShot Foundation, the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra International Composition Competition, the orchestral prize for the Red Note Music Festival, and was a finalist in the Orchestra Music category of the 2019 Art Music Awards (Australia).

Eötvös has had her music performed by the London Sinfonietta, BBC Singers, Australian String Quartet, Tasmanian, Melbourne and Sydney Symphony Orchestras, the American Composers Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and has participated in several electronic music festivals including SEAMUS 2011 (US), ACMC 2012 (Australia) and ICMC 2011 (New Zealand) and was a composer in residence with the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in Santa Cruz in 2019.

Eötvös is a Senior Lecturer in Music (Composition) and Director of the New Music Studio at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Australia. She holds a Doctor of Music (2014) from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music USA, and a Master of Music (2008) from the Royal Academy of Music, London.



### *The composer writes:*

There's something undeniably intriguing about events that happened, discoveries that were made and literature that was written at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1898 an expedition took place to Saqqara, Egypt, where a curious and confounding artefact was discovered: a bird-shaped relic made of sycamore wood. The function of the Saqqara Bird is completely unknown. Some hypothesize it is a ceremonial object, while others radically envision it is evidence that the Egyptians were dabbling in the principles of aviation. It has also been posited as a weathervane, an elite child's toy, some sort of boomerang and as a featured carving on the masthead of a sacred boat.

This work places the Saqqara Bird at the intersection of all these theories in an imagined tapestry of the mechanical, the living and the ancient becoming new again. By focusing on the 'engineered' side of this wooden carving as inspiration, I was able to invest a great deal more rhythmic and harmonic stability than usual into my music. A wonderful side effect of maintaining a clearly defined beat is that varied repetition more easily gives way to new, yet familiar, melodic ideas. This piece is a lyrical and thematically organised work which relies on motivic transformation to propel it forward, while aiming to capture something imaginative and fictional in its metamorphosis.

*The Saqqara Bird* is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, cor anglais, 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet) and 2 bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon); 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was commissioned by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and premiered by them in 2016, conducted by Marko Letonja.

This is its Sydney Symphony Orchestra premiere.



1839 portrait of Robert Schumann by Austrian painter Josef Kriehuber (1800–1876).

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT ROBERT SCHUMANN

Schumann was born in the Saxon city of Zwickau, where his father was a successful writer, translator (notably of English Romantic writers like Byron into German) and bookseller. Child Robert had access to a huge library, and began writing his own plays and poetry, as well as composing, in his teens. At 18 he went to Leipzig to study law, where he also began piano lessons with renowned pedagogue Friedrich Wieck, father of the then nine-year old virtuoso, Clara.

After a year the University of Heidelberg, Schumann returned to Leipzig in 1830, bent on becoming a musician. His first mature compositions include the *Abegg Variations*, with their theme that 'spells' the name of the work's fictional dedicatee, and *Papillons*, the first of many collections of musical miniatures grouped around a poetic theme. It is at this time, too, that Schumann came under the influence of two arch-Romantic writers: Jean Paul Richter and ETA Hoffmann. In his diaries he creates fictional pseudonyms for Wieck, Clara and himself, included the characters of Florestan (representing Schumann's virtuosic side) and Eusebius (his more introverted side). These characters would assume great importance in his music, particularly *Carnaval*, which dramatises Schumann's (and that of his fellow *Davidsbündler* – 'members of the league of David') battle against philistinism in the arts. He prosecuted this also in the serious music criticism which he practically invented, founding *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Journal of Music*) which began publication in 1834.

Robert had fallen in love with Clara when she was 15, and the years 1839–40 were dominated by a series of court battles between the composer and Wieck. Schumann prevailed, and the couple married in 1840, when Clara was 21. The next years saw Clara consolidate her fame as a pianist; Robert, owing to repetitive strain injury (not, as Wieck asserted, caused by using a device to increase his stretch) incurred in the mid-1830s, had given up hope of coming a virtuoso. From 1840, determined to 'master all the forms of music' he composed in various genres, spending roughly a year on each: song (1840), orchestral music (1841), chamber music (1842) and the oratorio (1843), producing several works in each genre in concentrated bursts. In 1844 he suffered a bad episode of the depression which had affected him since 1833, but emerged with new confidence in his craft.

This period saw the Schumanns move to Dresden where Robert turned his attention to the stage. In 1850 they moved to the Rhineland city of Düsseldorf where Robert became municipal music director. Musical standards were low, and Schumann's health poor. One bright spot was the arrival, in 1853, of young Johannes Brahms, whom Schumann immediately realised was a genius and welcomed into his home.

Sadly, Schumann's illness returned in 1854 with aural hallucinations, delusions and memory loss, and he attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine. He lived out his last two years in a strikingly benign asylum near Bonn; but on doctor's orders was forbidden to see Clara until two days before he died.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT THE CELLO CONCERTO

*Gordon Kalton Williams writes:*

The fluency and spontaneous grace of this work could be thought to reflect the single span of inspiration in which Schumann composed it. The work was composed by the 40-year-old, newly arrived in Düsseldorf from Dresden, in the space of fifteen days – from 10 to 24 October 1850.

Schumann at first considered calling this masterpiece a *Konzertstück*, to reflect its less than concerto-length dimensions (it runs to about 25 minutes). However, it is only the brevity of the slow movement which could in any way threaten its claim to the grander title.

In contrast with certain passages in the Violin Concerto of 1853, Schumann here composed solo music which is well-pitched for the instrument. Schumann, though remembered as a pianist, in fact possessed a reasonably deep first-hand knowledge of the cello, having taken it up briefly after the injury in 1832 which put an end to his piano career. He once explained that he was able to handle the bow despite the paralysis which affected one of the fingers of his right hand.

Though Schumann didn't study cello for long, this concerto is evidence that his time on the instrument paid off. As his wife, Clara, confided in her diary (16 November 1850): 'Last month [Robert] composed a concerto for violoncello ... It appears to be written in the true violoncello style.'

As always Clara was Schumann's most perceptive critic and keenest admirer, and she added in her diary, a year later:

I have played Robert's Violoncello Concerto again and thus procured for myself a truly musical and happy hour. The romantic quality, the flight, the freshness and the humour, and also the highly interesting interweaving of cello and orchestra are, indeed, wholly ravishing, and what euphony and what deep sentiment are in all the melodic passages.

One could forgive Clara for being partisan, but in this case, her summary is quite apt. For once, Schumann's habitually over-painted orchestration is under control. The cello is exploited for its eloquent tenor tone, and the work has a wonderful lyricism.



Illustration of Clara and Robert Schumann from *Famous Composers and their Works* (1906), based on an 1850 daguerrotype.

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

Schumann the musical poet is evident in the way each movement is linked to the next to allow for a continuity of thought unlikely to be broken by applause, and in the eschewal of virtuosity for its own sake. 'I cannot write a concerto for the virtuosos,' Schumann had commented early in his career. The cadenza is in fact shifted from the first movement to the last, so that an audience may first attend to the warmth and scope of the musical ideas. The triplets in the first movement are the only early concessions to virtuosity.

There is no orchestral introduction as was customary in the Classical concerto – just four bars of material which introduces a sweeping opening melody in the cello. The cello goes on for some time in its attractive tenor register, until a more vigorous orchestral passage takes over. Then a secondary, slightly more chromatic and more rhythmically pointed melody is heard, before triplets are introduced in the codetta, taking the listener almost imperceptibly into the development section, a passage notable for pert, light scoring for the orchestra and long, flowing responses in the solo cello. A recollection of the opening melody in more languorous mood, in the remote key of F sharp minor, marks the furthest point of the development, before a return to the material of the opening section, now slightly varied.

A gradual retarding of the coda leads to the slow movement, where traditionally the soloist plays in duet with the leader of the orchestral cellos. It is only 34 bars long, but rises to a glorious climax with the cello in its tenor register. An accelerating coloratura leads to the last movement. Here the cello takes on a more playful character, while remaining essentially melodic.

Robert Schumann's Cello Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings and cello soloist.

It did not receive its premiere until 1860, four years after Schumann's death, when it was performed by Ludwig Ebert and the Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Julius Rietz, in a concert at the Leipzig Conservatory posthumously marking the composer's 50th birthday.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the work in June 1950, with soloist Edmund Kurtz conducted by Alceo Galliera.

Other notable performances include those featuring Mstislav Rostropovich conducted by Igor Markevitch (1960), Daniel Shafran/Michael Gielen (1966), Nelson Cooke/Moshe Atzmon (1967), Heinrich Schiff/Franz-Paul Decker (1978), János Starker/Stuart Challender (1988) and Lynn Harrell/Edo de Waart (1998).

Our most recent performances were in 2010, with Johannes Moser conducted by Alexander Vedernikov.



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*Portrait of van Beethoven* (c.1804-05) by German artist Joseph Willibrord Mähler (1778 -1860). Source: Vienna Museum/  
Wikimedia Commons.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT BEETHOVEN

In the late 18th century Germany was a loose grouping of small principalities. The city of Bonn was the seat of the Archbishop Elector of Cologne and Beethoven was born here in 1770. His grandfather was a chief musician in the Elector's household; his father Johann was also a musician employed there. Johann was a violent alcoholic, and family life was far from happy, but young Ludwig nonetheless showed early promise as a musician and soon joined the Archbishop's retinue.

Beethoven almost certainly met Mozart briefly in Vienna in 1787, but in 1792 returned to that city to study with Joseph Haydn. They didn't get on. Late in life, Haydn was suddenly enjoying superstar status throughout Europe. Beethoven could be extremely rude and arrogant and felt that Haydn wasn't paying him enough attention.

Beethoven's status in Vienna was helped by the relative ease with which he was accepted into aristocratic circles. This is partly because he allowed people to think that the 'van' in his name meant he himself was noble (in German, 'von' indicates nobility), and he allowed a rumour to circulate that he was the illegitimate son of the King of Prussia! But it was mostly about the music, and a group of Viennese nobles supported him for the rest of his life (despite appallingly bad behaviour on occasions).

From the later 1790s he had been aware of the deterioration of his hearing, and by the early years of the new century his deafness caused him gradually to retreat from society. His was also chronically unlucky in love. This, along with his deafness, led him to the point of suicide and the heroic resolution to carry on which is documented in a kind of will he wrote at Heiligenstadt, his favourite holiday village, in the summer of 1802. The crisis launched his middle or 'heroic' period.

In May 1809 Napoleon's armies attacked Vienna and bombarded it with considerable violence. Beethoven took shelter with his brother Caspar Carl and his wife Johanna and to protect what was left of his hearing hid with pillows over his ears in the cellar. He wrote to his publisher: 'What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me: nothing but drums, cannons and human misery in every form'. Despite his misery, Beethoven managed to work.

Beethoven's deafness was only part of the chronic ill-health which dogged him for most of his life, but it certainly made things worse. He retreated from society, became grumpy and paranoid (occasionally to the point of violence) and despite relative financial security often lived in squalor. His music, though, tells a completely different story. Beethoven's late works encompass a bewildering array of moods and styles.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

*Yvonne Frindle writes:*

The most famous four notes in all music are just the beginning. The striking motto that opens Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is but the first of two portentous phrases that launch a compelling emotional and musical journey. The journey is a familiar one now – this is the best-known symphony in the repertoire – but at its premiere Beethoven's contemporaries would have boarded the trusted vehicle of the Classical symphony only to discover new and noisy sounds, fresh sights along the way, and an unexpected destination.

Even the modern listener can sense the shock value of this music, responding to the no-longer startling but still powerful innovations. It's apparent from the start: the rapid repercussions and dramatic pauses of the opening theme might be surface features, musical rhetoric, but, in the words of musicologist Joseph Kerman, 'they release primal, unmediated emotional energies' that had previously been buried in the traditional Viennese Classical style.

Beethoven is said to have later described the opening: 'Thus Fate knocks at the door.' It's a dubious attribution, but one completely in character with Romantic sensibility and lasting perceptions of the symphony. 'Beethoven's music sets in motion the lever of fear, of horror, of suffering,' wrote ETA Hoffmann in his famous 1810 review of the symphony, 'and wakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of Romanticism. He is accordingly a completely Romantic composer...'

But in one respect, the opening of Beethoven's Fifth is perfectly classical. An assertive unison opening was a common way of commanding the attention of an audience – Mozart used the device to great effect in his *Paris* Symphony No.31. But where Mozart's opening assures the listener of a clarion D major, Beethoven undermines the very convention he is observing with deliberate ambiguity. Are we in E flat major or C minor? There is no way of knowing from the opening theme. Only seven bars into the music, when the cellos deign to offer the tonic note C, can we orient ourselves to the defiant and sometimes terrifying expression of C minor.

The choice of key was significant for Beethoven. Abandoning the languishing, *pathétique* sentiments of earlier C minor works such as the Op.13 piano sonata, the key had begun to surface again and again in music of a heroic or threatening nature: the *Eroica* funeral march, the *Coriolan* Overture, and now the Fifth Symphony. In this Beethoven is again the innovator: one of the first to take the idea of the 'heroic' manner – tempestuous and ridden with conflict – and fuse it with cool, Classical forms, transcending sheer aesthetic principles.

But despite the turbulent and disintegrative forces that dominate this heroic music, the Fifth Symphony conveys an unprecedented sense of unity. From the first it was recognised that Beethoven had transformed the multi-movement symphony into an organic whole. Hoffmann described his admiration for Beethoven's ability to 'relate all the secondary ideas and all transition passages through the rhythm of that simple [opening] motif'. It is the motif's very ambiguity (rhythmic as well as tonal) that provides the impetus for development – the motif becomes the protagonist, metamorphosing during the course of the symphony, to emerge in a noble and heroic guise.

It is in this evolutionary and transforming journey – beginning in one key (C minor) and ending in another (C major) – that the Fifth Symphony was truly innovative. It is as if the joy and triumph of the finale can be expressed only against the background of fear and awe that Beethoven creates in the first movement and in Tovey's 'dream of terror which we technically call the scherzo'. The Fifth Symphony enacts Schiller's laws of tragic art: the first to represent suffering nature, the second to represent the resistance of morality to suffering.

The expression of triumph over despair through a transition from minor to major is familiar today – the Ninth Symphony and subsequent symphonies by other composers ensure that we no longer assume a symphony will end in the key in which it began – but it would have astonished Beethoven's contemporaries. The struggle for supremacy between major and minor begins early in the symphony, with the tonal ambiguity of the

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

opening preparing the way for an appearance of C major in the recapitulation of the first movement. The *Andante* second movement – a double variation in which we hear Beethoven-student-of-Haydn – begins in a poised and lyrical A flat major, only to be interrupted by forceful C major fanfares with martial trumpets and drums. The provocative and gloomy scherzo with its ‘spectral’ double basses returns to the home key of C minor, but the struggle continues: its entire central trio section is a good-humoured but impatient C major.

Beethoven further emphasises the sense of unity in the Fifth Symphony with a seamless link between the scherzo and the finale. This stunning transition provides a moment of hushed suspense with menacing and insistent drum beats underneath sustained string writing. Berlioz recognised that such an unusual device, stark and arresting in its impact, provided a hard act to follow: ‘To *sustain* such a height of effect is,’ he wrote, ‘already a prodigious effort.’

Yet this is precisely what Beethoven does, releasing the accumulated tension in a blazing C major march, likened by Hoffmann to ‘radiant, blinding sunlight which suddenly illuminates the dark night’. But the gloom has not been entirely dispelled and Beethoven introduces a fragment of the scherzo in the middle of the finale – a ghost of scherzos past that must be swept away a second time by the march theme. (This was not a completely new idea; Haydn had done something similar nearly 40 years earlier with the minuet of his Symphony No.46. But where Haydn was almost certainly aiming for a witty surprise, Beethoven’s gesture intensifies the implied drama of the music in a new way.)

It is in the finale that the trombones – taken from the church and the theatre (think Mozart’s Requiem and *Don Giovanni*) – appear in a symphony for the first time in musical history. Together with the contrabassoon and a shrill piccolo, Beethoven counted on those trombones to ‘make more noise than six timpani, and better noise at that.’ The noise, of which Beethoven would have heard virtually nothing, contributes to a resplendent and festive march, all the more triumphant for the struggle that has gone before.

**Notes by Melody Eötvös (2016), Gordon Kalton Williams/Symphony Australia © 1997 (Schumann), Yvonne Frindle © 2002 (Beethoven)**

Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon; 2 horns, 2 trumpets and 3 trombones, timpani and strings.

It was first performed at a famous concert on 22 December 1808 at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, which also featured the premieres of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, Fourth Piano Concerto and Choral Fantasy.

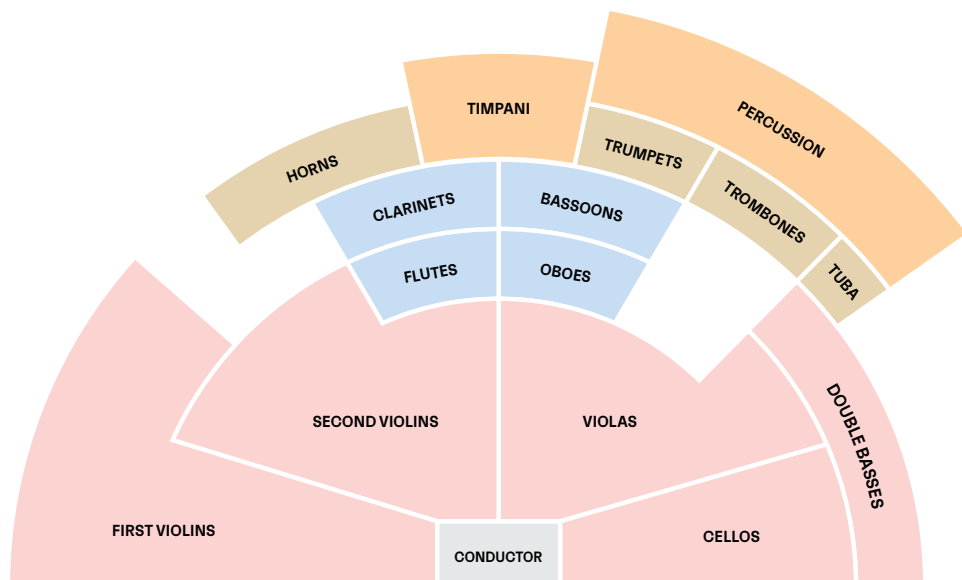
The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the work in September 1938, conducted by Malcolm Sargent.

Unsurprisingly we have performed it many times since, with notable performances including those led by Bernard Heinze (1943 Beethoven Festival), Eugene Ormandy (1944 concert to raise funds for the war effort), Eugene Goossens (1947 concert welcoming him as our inaugural Chief Conductor), Walter Susskind (1954), Charles Mackerras (1960), Nicolai Malko (1961), Dean Dixon (1965), Moshe Atzmon (1969, 1977), Georg Tintner (1974, 84), Kurt Sanderling (1976), Louis Frémaux (1980, 81), Zdeněk Mácal (1983), Stuart Challender (1984, 87, 89, 90), John Hopkins (1986), Yan Pascal Tortelier (1994), Lawrence Renes (1996), Edo de Waart (1998, 2001), Gianluigi Gelmetti (2003, 05, 07 Beethoven Festival), David Robertson (2010), Vladimir Ashkenazy (2016) and Simone Young (2022).

Our most recent performances were with Jaime Martín in 2024.

**Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson**

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Tom Farmer  
*Production Manager*  
Elissa Seed  
*Production Manager*  
Jacinta Dockrill  
*Production Administrator*  
Shanell Bielawa  
*Production Coordinator*  
Jordan Blackwell, Jess Hughes,  
Rory Knott, Matthew Landi,  
Harvey Lynn, Ella Tomkins  
*Production Assistants*

## ORCHESTRA MANAGEMENT

Aernout Kerbert  
*Director of Orchestra Management*  
Brighdie Chambers  
*Orchestra Manager*  
Emma Winestone  
*Deputy Orchestra Manager*

## PEOPLE & CULTURE

Daniel Bushe  
*Director of People & Culture*  
Rosie Marks-Smith  
*Head of Culture & Wellbeing*  
Keanna Mauch  
*People & Culture Advisor*  
Sue Burnet  
*Work Health & Safety Specialist*

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