

# SIMONE YOUNG & SHEKU KANNEH-MASON

30 JULY – 1 AUGUST 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 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

## SIMONE YOUNG & SHEKU KANNEH-MASON

### ELGAR'S CELLO CONCERTO

**Simone Young** conductor

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**EDWARD ELGAR** (1857–1934)  
**Cello Concerto in E minor, Op.85** (1919)

- i. Adagio – Moderato –
  - ii. Lento – Allegro molto
  - iii. Adagio
  - iv. Allegro – Moderato – Allegro, ma non troppo
- Sheku Kanneh-Mason** cello

### INTERVAL

**RICHARD STRAUSS** (1864–1949)  
**An Alpine Symphony, Op.64** (1911–15)

- i. *Night* –
- ii. *Sunrise* –
- iii. *The ascent*
- iv. *Entry into the wood* –
- v. *Wandering by the side of the brook* –
- vi. *At the waterfall* –
- vii. *Apparition* –
- viii. *On flowering meadows* –
- ix. *On the alpine pasture* –
- x. *Through thicket and undergrowth on the wrong path* –
- xi. *On the glacier* –
- xii. *Dangerous moments* –
- xiii. *On the summit* –
- xiv. *Vision* –
- xxv. *Mists rise* –
- xvi. *The sun gradually becomes obscured* –
- xvii. *Elegy* –
- xviii. *Calm before the storm* –
- xix. *Thunder and tempest, descent* –
- xx. *Sunset* –
- xxi. *Conclusion* –
- xxii. *Night*

**Thursday 30 July, 7pm**  
**Friday 31 July, 7pm**  
**Saturday 1 August, 7pm**

Concert Hall,  
Sydney Opera House

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### Pre-concert talk

By Zoltán Szabó in the  
Northern Foyer at 6.15pm

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### Estimated durations

Elgar – 35 minutes  
Interval – 20 minutes  
Strauss – 60 minutes  
The concert will run for  
approx. 2 hours

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### Cover image

Sheku Kanneh-Mason  
Photo by Mahaneela

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

# WELCOME

Welcome to **Simone Young & Sheku Kanneh-Mason**, an exciting major event in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 2026 concert season.

As the Principal Partner, Emirates is proud to play a significant role in supporting this concert. Our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is considered Emirates' longest-running collaboration with a non-sporting organisation, reflecting our longstanding commitment to supporting arts, culture and world-class musical experiences.

Emirates proudly champions exceptional local and international talent, and there are few more exceptional talents than our celebrated Chief Conductor, Simone Young AM, and the young English cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason.

Sheku became an international celebrity when he played at the wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle in 2018, but his undeniable artistry and compelling musical vision has transcended the hype to secure his place among the top echelon of performers today. The Elgar Cello Concerto, one of the best-loved of all English classical works, has become one of his key works, and we are thrilled to welcome him to Sydney for the first time.

Though it is his Sydney Symphony debut, it is not the first time he has performed with Simone Young. They have collaborated on several occasions, including with the New York Philharmonic – a demonstration of the enormous benefit of having Simone Young as an ambassador for our Orchestra all around the world.

It is precisely this belief in the power of connection that underpins the relationship between Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra: 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.

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

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a unique monogram.

**Barry Brown**  
**Emirates DVP – Australasia**

# YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

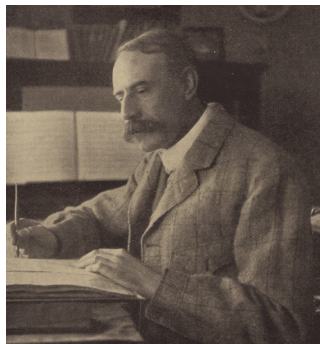
**EDWARD ELGAR** (1857–1934)

**Cello Concerto in E minor, Op.85** (1919)

Compared with the rich opulence of his Violin Concerto and Symphonies, Elgar's Cello Concerto is simple and economical, while being a deeply moving lament for a world, and life, utterly changed by war and age. It is four movements, each pair alternating slow with faster music, but even the fast sections are tinged with grief.

It appeared 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 Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird* Suite, Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata and Sergei Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*.



Photograph of Edward Elgar published in *Modern Musicians* by J Cuthbert Hadden (first published in 1913).

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**RICHARD STRAUSS** (1864–1949)

**An Alpine Symphony, Op.64** (1911–15)

Strauss's hour-long work (for 137 musicians, most of them horn players) depicts a day in the life of a mountain – as seen, in part, by the intrepid mountaineer, who sees night give way to a spectacular sunrise, and the various natural features as they change while gaining altitude. The summit is gained, the view spectacular, the weather sometimes terrifying before a descent and the return of night.

It appeared in 1915, the year that saw the first photograph of Pluto, women's suffrage in Denmark and the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli.

Contemporary music included Sergei Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* (The 'Vespers'), Jean Sibelius's Fifth Symphony and Manuel de Falla's *El amor brujo*.



1910 postcard of Richard Strauss.  
Source unknown/Wikimedia Commons.



Photo by Peter Brew-Bevan

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **SIMONE YOUNG** AM conductor

Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor, Simone Young has previously held the posts of General Manager and Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Music Director of the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg, Music Director of Opera Australia, Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of both the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Lisbon and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra. Her appointment as Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has recently been extended through until the end of 2029.

An acknowledged interpreter of the operas of Wagner and Strauss, she has conducted complete cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Bayreuth Festival, Vienna Staatsoper, Berlin Staatsoper, Hamburg Staatsoper and, in 2026, La Scala Milan.

Simone Young has an extensive and celebrated recording catalogue. Her first performance as Chief Conductor in Sydney, featuring Mahler's Symphony No.2 *Resurrection* and the world premiere of William Barton's *Of the Earth* was released worldwide on Deutsche Grammophon, and performances of Elgar & Vaughan Williams, *Das Rheingold* and *Gurrelieder* have been filmed for Sydney Symphony On Demand. Her Hamburg recordings include the *Ring Cycle*, *Mathis der Maler* (Hindemith), *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln* (Schmidt) and symphonies of Bruckner, Brahms and Mahler. She has also recorded Benjamin Britten Folk songs and songs of Richard Strauss with Steve Davislim, and songs by Wagner and Strauss with Lisa Gasteen.

Simone Young's return invitations to the great orchestras of the world in 2026 include the Suisse Romande, the Orchestre nationale de Lyon, West German Radio Orchestra Cologne, Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France Paris, National Symphony Orchestra Washington, Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Francisco and Montreal Symphony Orchestras, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester. She also returns to ANAM, Melbourne to lead their orchestra in a 30th birthday celebration Gala performance.

Firmly established as one of the world's leading opera conductors, this year Simone Young returns to the Berlin Staatsoper (*Lohengrin* and *Nabucco*), La Scala Milan (the Ring cycle) and conducts *Götterdämmerung* in concert, completing Sydney Symphony's *Ring Cycle*.

The presentation of Sydney Symphony Orchestra's *Ring Cycle* in concert, commencing in 2023, has played to sold out audiences, standing ovations and 5-star reviews. A second, feature-length documentary film, *Knowing the Score*, showcasing Simone Young and her career was also internationally released in 2023.

In 2025 Simone Young was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sydney. Her many accolades also include the 2024 Conductor of the year (British Opera magazine), Honorary Member (Ehrenmitglied) of the Vienna State Opera, the 2019 European Cultural Prize Vienna, a Professorship at the Musikhochschule in Hamburg, Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Western Australia and New South Wales, Griffith University and Monash University, the Sir Bernard Heinze Award, the Goethe Institute Medal, the 2013 Helpmann Award for Best Individual Classical Music Performance and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France.

# MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 3

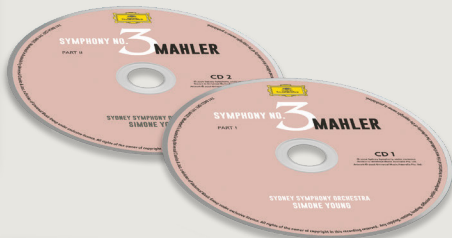


**SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
SIMONE YOUNG**



**“This was a  
gala performance  
to savour” *Limelight***

This recording of Mahler's Third Symphony signals a new partnership between the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Universal Music Australia on the Deutsche Grammophon label. An epic, six-movement work, the symphony traverses nature, humanity, spirituality and redemption across nearly 100 minutes. It features mezzo-soprano Noa Beinart, the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and The Sydney Children's Choir.



**ALSO AVAILABLE  
on CD, VINYL and DIGITAL**

**MAHLER: SYMPHONY NO. 2  
“RESURRECTION”**

**BARTON: OF THE EARTH**

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **SHEKU KANNEH-MASON** cello

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason's mission is to make music accessible to all, whether that's performing for children in a school hall, at an underground club, or in the world's leading concert venues. Highlights of the 25/26 season include the prestigious position as Artist in Residence at the New York Philharmonic, touring with the London Philharmonic, and appearances with the Orchestre de Paris, Orchestra of Santa Cecilia Rome, the Philharmonia Orchestra London, the Auckland Philharmonia, and the Baltimore, Vienna and Sydney symphony orchestras.

Sheku will perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto with his pianist sister, Isata, and violinist Tai Murray and the Chineke! Orchestra on tour in Europe, and with Isata and their brother, Braimah, as violinist on a North American tour in Detroit, Ottawa, Naples (Florida) and Seattle. Sheku also gives the world premiere of Edmund Finnis's Cello Concerto, which was written for him, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Roberto Gonzalez Monjas, with further performances of the work with the Dresden Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, and London Symphony orchestras.

Sheku continues his collaboration with Isata for a European duo recital tour in February, taking in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Geneva, Turin, Amsterdam and London's Wigmore Hall, where later in the 25/26 season Sheku and Isata return to play chamber music with two more of their siblings, Braimah and Jeneba. In North America, the duo will resume their recital tour including Boston, Washington DC, Cleveland and New York's Lincoln Center. Sheku also returns to Antigua, where he has family connections, as an ambassador for the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra.

A Decca Classics recording artist, Sheku released *Shostakovich & Britten* in May 2025, featuring Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.2, performed with John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London, alongside the cello sonatas of Shostakovich and Britten, which he recorded with Isata Kanneh-Mason.

September 2025 sees the release of the second Kanneh-Mason family album, *River of Music*, also on Decca Classics. Sheku's 2022 album, *Song*, showcased his innately lyrical playing in a wide range of arrangements and collaborations, and his 2020 album *Elgar* reached No.8 in the overall Official UK Album Chart, making him the first ever cellist to reach the UK Top 10. Sheet music collections of his performance repertoire along with his own arrangements and compositions are published by Faber.

Sheku is a graduate of London's Royal Academy of Music where he studied with Hannah Roberts and in May 2022 he was appointed as the Academy's first Menuhin Visiting Professor of Performance Mentoring. In 2024 he accepted the role as patron of UK Music Masters and remains an ambassador for both Breakthrough T1D and Future Talent. Sheku was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year's Honours List. After winning the BBC Young Musician competition in 2016, Sheku's performance at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle in 2018 was watched by two billion people worldwide. He plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700 which is on indefinite loan to him.



Photo by Mahaneela



Photograph of Edward Elgar published in *Modern Musicians* by J Cuthbert Hadden (first published in 1913).

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT EDWARD ELGAR

Elgar in some respects rose without a trace, working for many years as a provincial teacher, violinist and organist while composing salon pieces (for which he is still justly admired), music for provincial bands (including one at a lunatic asylum) and that other staple of English concert life: choral music.

Elgar is often imagined as the quintessentially English composer. (The old *Oxford Companion to Music* has a truly awful engraved portrait complete with flannel suit, visor, cigarette holder, huge moustache and King Charles spaniel.) But apart from such things as the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, Elgar's music is less British Imperial than modern European. The Second Symphony of 1911 is dedicated 'to the late King Edward VII', but is in fact a much more personal essay on a line from Shelley, 'Rarely, rarely com'st thou, Spirit of Delight.'

His 'breakthrough' piece was the *Enigma Variations* which appeared in 1899 and which showed a mature (forty-something) composer with a masterly technique, a full awareness of current European musical thinking and a sense of humour. His innate talent, his experience of working as an orchestral musician and his interest in the legacy of Wagner's musical language created a style which enabled him to write symphonic works of a quality comparable to those of his continental contemporaries such as Mahler and Richard Strauss. Like them, he was often the 'hero' of his symphonic dramas.

In *The Dream of Gerontius* of 1900, a setting of the long poem of Cardinal Newman, Elgar was also able to re-imagine the oratorio as a cosmic drama of salvation rather than the reflection of the values of empire that it had arguably become. In it, Elgar brought together the large scale planning, the opulent orchestration and erotic chromatic harmony of Wagner's music-dramas. *Gerontius*, a kind of Catholic *Pilgrim's Progress*, was heard in Germany a year after the British premiere; on the strength of a performance there Richard Strauss proclaimed Elgar the 'first English progressivist' and remained a great fan.

Elgar always felt himself to be an outsider – a lower middle class Catholic from the provinces never entirely comfortable with fame or the honours lavished on him in later life. In his Cello Concerto of 1919, the aging composer created an economical, spare and genuinely tragic masterpiece that mourns the world swept away by World War I – even though that world had never fully accepted him.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT THE CELLO CONCERTO

*Graeme Skinner writes:*

Elgar's compositional career reached its last zenith with the appearance of his Violin Concerto in 1910 and Second Symphony in 1911, works into which he claimed, 'I have written out my soul...shewn myself'. Between them and this 1919 Cello Concerto – his last major work – Elgar faced steadily worsening prospects in almost every aspect of his life, from the personal challenges of aging, ill-health and bereavement, to the professional affronts of being elbowed aside as a conductor and composer by younger colleagues. And there was also the war. While the youth of Britain marched into France in August 1914 singing a music-hall hit, 'It's a long way to Tipperary', Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory* – which had originated a decade earlier during the second Boer War as the trio of his first *Pomp and Circumstance* March (1901) – was mobilised again by their parents as a patriotic anthem. Rendered superfluous by his own old tune at home, and his music having little appeal to the average soldier at the front, Elgar, at 57, struggled to find a new wartime voice in works like *Carillon*, a musically slight but sentimentally eloquent response to the tragedy in Belgium, which he recorded for gramophone in 1915, and which here in Australia became his next-most-popular contribution to the war effort. His artistically and emotionally more substantial choral score *The Spirit of England*, settings of war poems by Laurence Binyon first heard in 1916 and 1917 in a Britain still deep in the hostilities, had more hopeful first performances in Melbourne and Sydney in July-August 1918, just as public confidence in an Allied victory exploded. But it was Binyon's lines commemorating the millions fallen ('They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn') – not Elgar's music for them – that everyone remembered.

Binyon, who wrote these lines in the war's first month, worked at the British Museum under Elgar's close friend Sidney Colvin, the keeper of prints and drawings, and it was Colvin who first suggested Elgar turn them into 'a wonderful Requiem for the slain'. Too old to fight, but having meanwhile volunteered as a hospital orderly in France, Binyon himself approached Elgar immediately the Armistice was declared with a request to set his new ode, 'Peace'. But by letter on 18 November, Elgar demurred: 'I do not feel drawn to write peace music somehow...the whole atmosphere is too full of complexities for me to feel music to it.' Moreover, he found Binyon's invocations of happy dead and healing spirits 'cruelly obtuse to the individual sorrow and sacrifice – a cruelty I resent bitterly & disappointedly'. He had anyway, as his wife, Alice, privately recorded in her diary two months earlier, already conceived another 'lament which should be in a war symphony', music which evolved over the spring and summer of 1919 into 'a real large work & I think good and alive', as he described the 'nearly completed' Cello Concerto in a letter to Sidney Colvin and his wife, Frances, on 26 June, asking permission to dedicate it to them. On 27 October Elgar himself, out of duty to soloist Felix Salmond, reluctantly proceeded to direct the premiere, well knowing it was destined for near disaster after his co-conductor, Albert Coates, used up most of the London Symphony's available rehearsal time preparing Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*, which to add insult to injury was greeted by a storming ovation. As to the work itself, even some of his warmest admirers were at a loss what to make of a work that, as one wrote to *The Musical Times* in 1923, 'anyhow, in my opinion...does not represent Elgar at his greatest'. And it was not until Elgar and Beatrice Harrison made their still-available 1928 recording that a new public, many of them unfamiliar with his earlier successes, began to appreciate the work as a masterpiece in its own right.

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

The work is laid out on paper in four movements, though listeners tend to hear the first and second movements, played without break, as a single span. Whereas his Violin Concerto opened into a conventionally spacious orchestral introduction, pending the princely arrival of its soloist, Elgar sets his cello soloist in a more intimate frame. Denied welcoming brass or upper strings, the brief opening cello recitative (*Adagio*) sets its own unusually pared-back terms – hereinafter will be lyricism, light orchestration, simple layouts. The violas, completely unaccompanied, announce the dreamy, modal, much-loved main theme (*Moderato*), its rocking rhythm Elgar's characteristic pastoral lilt. The winds introduce the airy, major-tending contrasting theme, which the cello then sets about varying, before the main theme simply returns. A longer, second cello recitative (*Lento*) inducts into faster, lighter, scherzo-like *Allegro molto*, the cello driving the music forward with its scrubbing semiquavers.

Elgar anticipated that the *Adagio*, despite its anticipatory half-close, would often be played without the rest of the concerto, and scored it with just strings and wind sextet. The cello melody gives the uncanny impression of being an internal dialogue between two separate voices, higher and lower, each merging in and out of the counter melodies of the supporting strings.

The finale opens, exceptionally, announcing its fragmentary theme (*Allegro*) without the cello. The cello then reworks it in a parenthetical recitative and short cadenza (*Moderato*), before it takes over fully (*Allegro, ma non troppo*). The soloist sweetly but firmly pulls the music up introducing its arcing subsidiary idea, then carried on by flowing semiquavers into the extensive development. There's a heady reprise of the fast theme, echoes of earlier quiet asides, and a penultimate throwback to the concerto's opening gesture, caught up into a rapid, surging close.

Elgar's Cello Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani, strings and cello soloist.

It was premiered on 27 October 1919, with soloist Felix Salmond and the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Eric Coates.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed the work in August 1944, with Lauri Kennedy the soloist conducted by Percy Code.

An enduringly popular piece, it has been a regular feature of our concert seasons. That popularity was in large part due to a recording by British cellist Jacqueline du Pré, who performed it with her husband Daniel Barenboim in Sydney in 1970.

Other notable performances include those by Edmund Kurtz conducted by Eugene Goossens (1946), John Kennedy/Rafael Kubelik (1949), Kurtz/Josef Krips (1958), John Painter/Nicolai Malko (Canberra 1960), Lois Simpson/Moshe Atzmon (Canberra and Newcastle 1968), Henrich Schiff/Franz-Paul Decker (1978), Schiff/Zdeněk Mácal (1986), Ofra Harnoy/Christopher Hogwood (1989), Ralph Kirshbaum/Edo de Waart (1996), Catherine Hewgill/Muhai Tang (1999), Steven Isserlis/Osmo Vänskä (2001), Truls Mørk/Jeffrey Tate (2005), Jian Wang/Vladimir Ashkenazy (2008 Elgar Festival), Mørk/Jakub Hrůša (2014), Harriet Krijgh/Robert Spano (2017) and Andreas Brantelid/Ashkenazy (2019).

Our most recent performances were in 2023, with Nicolas Altstaedt conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles.



1910 postcard of Richard Strauss. Source unknown/Wikimedia Commons.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT RICHARD STRAUSS

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

Strauss was born in 1864 – Clara Schumann was still performing, Brahms and Wagner were contemporary composers. His father, Franz, was one of the finest horn players of his day. Richard Wagner regarded the elder Strauss as an 'intolerable blighter, but when he plays his horn one cannot stay cross with him'. Strauss senior loathed most of Wagner's music and said so often, yet regularly went to Bayreuth to play in Wagner's festival orchestra. Nevertheless, the older Strauss tried to ensure that his gifted son would never be seduced by Wagner's work, and Richard's earliest pieces include a very Mozartean wind Serenade.

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

*Salome* was a turning point. Oscar Wilde's play is a self-consciously 'artificial' piece of work. Strauss, however brings all he had learned from Wagner to make it a gripping document of psycho-pathology. Its companion piece, *Elektra* likewise essays madness in an ancient mythic setting are the extreme points of Strauss at his most post-Wagnerian.

As time went on, Strauss turned, or returned, to the example of Mozart, who had been the inspiration for some of his earliest compositions. *Der Rosenkavalier*, the greatest result of Strauss's collaboration with playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal is set in a highly Romanticised, late eighteenth century Vienna. In works like *Ariadne auf Naxos* or *Capriccio* he moved even closer to a neo-classical manner; at the end of his life, in instrumental works like the Oboe Concerto, Strauss took great solace from the example of Mozart in the face of the horror of World War II.

Strauss, like Mozart, loved the human voice. Strauss and Mozart were married to singers, and some of their greatest works celebrate just that. Strauss was an inveterate composer of song, and even the opulence of the Four Last Songs never obscures his intense sensitivity to the beauty of the voice. The apparent differences between *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome* are largely superficial.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## ABOUT AN ALPINE SYMPHONY

*Gordon Kalton Williams writes:*

Around the time Strauss wrote *An Alpine Symphony*, he boasted that his powers of expression were such that he could, if necessary, describe a knife and fork in music. Indeed *An Alpine Symphony* finally marks the limit in Strauss's nearly three-decades-long quest to extend music's capacity for illustration and representation – an effort which began with *Don Juan* in 1888 and reached another, earlier, highpoint with *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, a work which, astonishingly enough, attempted to express in music the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Strauss turned to *An Alpine Symphony* after writing *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In one of history's ironies, critics had just remarked on the Mozartean turn in his music, referring to the chamber forces required for *Ariadne*, when he produced this piece of orchestral gigantism. The orchestra needs 137 players, but what would you expect? Strauss is attempting nothing less than a portrait of a mountain.

Strauss composed this work at his workroom in Garmisch, where he could look out over the Zugspitze and the Wettersteingebirge. The orchestration was completed in 100 days during the winter of 1914-15, but the work had been long in gestation. As an idea, it had occurred to Strauss as a boy, after he and a party of climbers got lost during a mountain hike and were overtaken by a storm on their return. Back then, impressed by the experience, Strauss had sat at the piano on arrival home and, as he said, 'conjured up a lot of nonsense and giant Wagnerian tonepainting.'

The work, as completed in 1915, was composed for the Dresden Hofkapelle, and we can imagine that it was intended as a virtuoso showpiece for the orchestra, which had premiered several of Strauss's prior works. This 'Strauss orchestra' premiered the work, though not in Dresden, but at the Philharmonie in Berlin on 28 October 1915, with Strauss conducting.

The form of *An Alpine Symphony* is spectacularly simple. The listener is drawn into the idea of ascending and descending a mountain. The timeframe is a 24-hour period. This format guarantees Strauss certain musical highlights: yet another opportunity to depict an opening sunrise (as impressive in its own way as *Zarathustra's*), and a sunset sequence, eminently suited to Strauss in one of his 'autumnal moods'. Strauss ingeniously avoids the obvious at 'the summit' (which could have been one of the pitfalls in such an explicit form), where, after the predictable big statement of one of the earlier themes he shifts focus to a halting oboe, as if we are suddenly made aware of the impact of the stupendous view on an awestruck human, and the predictability of the descent is offset by one of the most graphic storms in musical literature.

The work is less a symphony even than the *Sinfonia domestica* (Strauss's 1904 musical portrait of domestic life, with its 22 continuous sections, some only seconds long). However, the sections can be grouped to suggest a huge Lisztian single-movement sonata form with delayed recapitulation à la *Heldenleben*, if such an academic exercise is felt necessary.

'At last I have learnt to orchestrate,' Strauss said at the general rehearsal in October 1915. Some of the more obvious orchestral highlights include the exhilarating depiction of spray at the waterfall (listen for a theme highly reminiscent of a famous sighing phrase from Max Bruch's Violin Concerto). Strauss uses cowbells in *On the alpine pasture*, an idea taken from Mahler's Sixth Symphony, but, as Strauss authority Norman del Mar says, here they are 'so apt...that one might think this to be their first employment in the symphony orchestra'. Then there is the strange colouring of the 'Sun theme' mixed with organ reeds to depict rising mists

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

(‘perhaps the most brilliantly clever section of the work’, according to Del Mar), and the aggravating high D flats on the oboe getting one’s nerves on edge in the still before the storm, not to mention the subtle use of the organ during the waning moments.

The work has often been dismissed as just a piece of ‘orchestriana’, but is it more than a shallow display? Del Mar points to Strauss’s ‘curiously detached attitude to the Nature subject...giving it a de-humanised majestic quality reminiscent, in a unique way, of Bruckner.’ The sense of the great mass of the mountain, barely discernible in the gloom, at the very end of the work, certainly has a Brucknerian scale and aspect. Yet Del Mar also says: ‘It is thus not hard to understand how Strauss [for whom composing came as easily as a cow gives milk] came...idly to sketch out an orchestral fantasy on the subject of the beautiful mountains amongst which he had so recently built the luxurious villa which was to be his home for the rest of his life.’

The work should also be seen, however, in the context of the mystical importance which mountains held for Germans in the 19th century. As Timothy Calnin has said, ‘the lofty altitudes possess a sense of mystery and spiritual rejuvenation which were an inspiration...to German Romantics.’ And it is probable that Strauss would have understood the remarks of his philosophical model Nietzsche when he said:

He who knows how to breathe the air of my writings knows that it is an air of the heights, a robust air...The ice is near, the solitude is terrible – but how peacefully all things lie in the light!...Philosophy as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary living in ice and high mountains – a seeking after everything that is strange and questionable in existence, all that has hitherto been excommunicated by morality.

Unlike his philosophical model, Strauss could lapse into banality when he attempted to express Eternal and Absolute Truths. But whether he did so here or not, he never risked another tone poem. After *An Alpine Symphony*, he turned decisively to the stage, where his skills in musical depiction were a decided asset.

**Notes by Graeme Skinner © 2014 (Elgar), Gordon Kalton Williams/Symphony Australia © 1998 (Strauss), Gordon Kerry © 2026 (composer biographies).**

Strauss’s *An Alpine Symphony* is scored for 4 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling cor anglais), heckelphone, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), E flat clarinet and 4 bassoons (4th doubling contrabassoon); 8 horns (5th to 8th doubling Wagner tubas), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas and 2 alphorns; timpani, percussion, 2 harps, celeste, organ and strings; and an offstage band of 12 horns, 2 trumpets and 2 trombones; and two optional alphorns.

It was premiered on 28 October 1915 in Berlin, with Strauss himself conducting the orchestra of the Dresden Hofkapelle.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the Australian premiere of the work on 6 March 1951, conducted by Eugene Goossens.

Other notable performances include those led by Franz-Paul Decker, (1978), Kees Bakels (1991), Edo de Waart (1995), Donald Runnicles (2000), Lorin Maazel (2005), Charles Dutoit (2008) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (2012).

Our most recent performances were in 2017, conducted by Asher Fisch.

**Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson**

# AROUND THE (ALP) HORN

*Tonight's music is alive with the sound of the hills...*

**By Alastair McKean**

As you settle into your seat after interval this evening and allow your eye to wander idly over the stage, you may notice a couple of unexpected instruments. Now, it's true that before reaching them, your eye may wander over quite a few other instruments first. For his breathtaking picture of climbing and descending a mountain, Richard Strauss called upon an enormous orchestra: quadruple winds, a brace of harps, a huge brass section, and a wind-machine and thunder-machine for the storm scene, possibly the best in all of music. (That said, the 'Calm Before the Storm' section, when the bottom drops out of the world, is even more extraordinary. No other composer has so vividly shown the limitless *space* of wild places.) The instruments you're seeing for the first time, though, are two alphorns.

These curious instruments are traditionally made from a tree trunk, split lengthwise and hollowed out. To get the hockey-stick angle at the end, the tree must have grown outwards from a very steep slope, and then headed up to find the sun; the root end then becomes the bell of the instrument. Such trees aren't easy to find, and today alphorn makers carve the instruments from larger blocks of wood. There are more alphorn makers out there than you might think. The German firm Alphorn-Center, which made the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's instruments, offers 23 different models, including one which doubles as a walking stick. Another firm makes one from carbon fibre, which weighs a couple of kilos and telescopes to fit in your suitcase. Ours are three and a half metres long and break into sections for easy transport. Should you see someone leaving the Opera House lugging something resembling an overgrown cricket bag, check the logo. If it doesn't say Gray-Nicolls, it's possibly an alphornist.

Despite being constructed from a tree, the alphorn technically belongs to the brass

family. Taxonomy of musical instruments is based on how they produce sound, and alphorns are played by 'buzzing' one's lips into a mouthpiece, just like a trumpet. This produces the notes of the harmonic series, the naturally occurring scale which is the basis of all Western music. When playing alphorns, then, Samuel Jacobs and Nick Byrne are fundamentally doing the same thing as in their regular jobs as Principal Horn and Section Trombone. But the sound is completely different: it's a mellow, low, boomy hoot, which can carry an extraordinary distance. This is why, for centuries, they were used for signalling across the valleys and mountains, and for calling back the herds.

So when Strauss got to 'On the Alpine Pasture', the ninth of the 22 brief sections which make up *An Alpine Symphony*, he deftly sketched the scene. He wrote the chirrup of small birds on the piccolo. He wrote oboes and the little E flat clarinet flutertonguing (going 'rrrr' while playing), which sounds uncannily like sheep. He wrote for cowbells, covering the other livestock. And he wrote, in the woodwinds, a motif which is a classic alphorn call.

Here the picture shifts to the not remotely mountainous city of Philadelphia, where I travelled in 2022 to present at the 40th annual conference of one of the world's more niche communities, the Major Orchestra Librarians Association (MOLA). This fabulous organisation encompasses librarians of orchestras, opera houses, conservatoriums, and military bands around the globe. Every day – believe me! – a MOLA member puts out a desperate cry to the hivemind and is rescued from catastrophe within the hour. And before long, that same MOLA member will be doing the same for somebody else. And then, at the conference, they buy each other a beer.

# FEATURE ARTICLE

At Philadelphia, I found myself at the vendor table for the venerable German music publisher Breitkopf und Härtel, leafing covetously through their exceptionally beautiful scores. The chap minding the table, Nick Pfefferkorn, introduced himself (diffidently neglecting to say that as well as being a distinguished musicologist he is Breitkopf's managing director). He pointed out their new *An Alpine Symphony*, which he'd edited. 'We discovered', he said, 'that Strauss wrote in this piece for alphorns, and we now have included them.' I practically gibbered with excitement.

Nick explained. In all his sketches, Strauss consistently wrote the word 'alphorn' at this passage. In 'On the Alpine Pasture', the full orchestral manuscript has two blank staves at the top of the score – and Strauss wrote the alphorn motif in the wind instruments in red ink. Nick deduced that Strauss had planned to write alphorn parts in the blank staves, and the red ink would be optional for performances without them. At a late stage, though, he changed his mind. It's not clear why, but one possible reason is that professional brass players in his day wouldn't have lowered themselves to play a peasant instrument. Moreover, when Nick recreated the part it turned out to be quite tricky: finding a shepherd who could play it would have been difficult, even had it been socially acceptable.

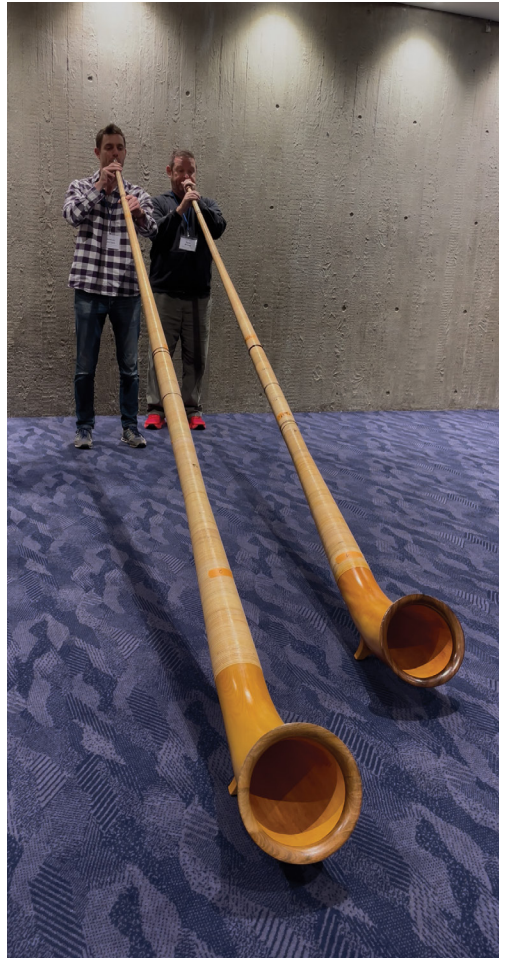
Well – I came back to Sydney and told absolutely everybody about it, including, of course, Simone Young, who was totally up for the adventure. And here we are. This edition has never been played with the alphorns, although the piece was done in the US a few years ago with the parts semi-improvised.

A few weeks ago, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra hosted the MOLA conference here in Sydney (the first outside North America or Europe). For one session, Nick Byrne, Samuel Jacobs, and Scott Kinmont played their collection of antique brass instruments, and Nick (Pfefferkorn) got to hear Nick and Samuel playing our alphorns. (He breathed, 'This level of artistry...') It was a lovely MOLA moment.

Larry Tarlow, Principal Librarian of the New York Philharmonic, says that before MOLA existed, orchestra librarians were 'independently inventing the wheel. And if the guy in the next valley has already invented the wheel...' And to signal to the guy in the next valley? You need an alphorn, of course!

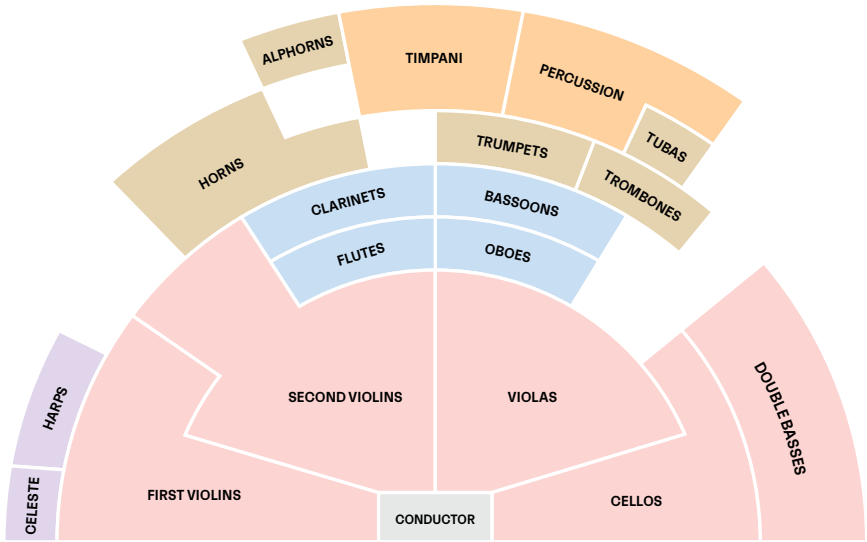
Alastair McKean is Head of Library at the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and was the 37th President of MOLA.

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Sam Jacobs and Nick Byrne test out the alphorns

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