

BEETHOVEN & TCHAIKOVSKY

14–17 OCTOBER 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

BEETHOVEN & TCHAIKOVSKY

DONALD RUNNICLES & BOMSORI KIM

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

DOBRINKA TABAKOVA (born 1980)

Orpheus' Comet (2017)

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Violin Concerto in D, Op.35 (1881)

- i. Allegro moderato – Moderato assai
- ii. Canzonetta (Andante)
- iii. Finale (Allegro vivacissimo)

BOMSORI KIM violin

INTERVAL

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Symphony No.7 in A major, Op.92 (1813)

- i. Poco sostenuto – vivace
- ii. Allegretto
- iii. Presto
- iv. Allegro con brio

Wednesday 14 October, 8pm

Friday 16 October, 8pm

Saturday 17 October, 8pm

Emirates Masters Series

Thursday 15 October, 1.30pm

Emirates Thursday

Afternoon Symphony

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

Pre-concert talk

By Genevieve Lang, at 7.15pm
in the Northern Foyer and
12.45pm on the Lounge Level
(Thursday).

Estimated durations

Tabakova – 5 minutes
Tchaikovsky – 35 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Beethoven – 38 minutes

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

ABC Classic

Friday's concert will be
recorded for broadcast on 16
October, and streaming online.

Cover image

Bomsori Kim
Photo by Bartek Barczek

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.

Emirates

Principal Partner

WELCOME

Welcome to **Beethoven & Tchaikovsky**, the ninth and final concert in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Emirates Masters Series for 2026.

For many years Emirates has been the Presenting Partner of this flagship series, supporting hundreds of unforgettable performances featuring some of the biggest stars in the classical world. And what better way to bring the curtain down on another big year than with two of the best-loved works in the entire repertoire, brought to life by the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor Sir Donald Runnicles.

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto is one of the most famous in the violin repertoire, breath-taking whether you're hearing it for the first time or the hundredth. We are excited to welcome violinist Bomsori Kim to Sydney for the first time to perform this wonderful work.

The popular image of Beethoven is of a serious, scowling, intense artist – but in his Seventh Symphony he shows us a glimpse of a man full of joy and life. There are so many great tunes in this work and so much thrilling energy – I have to sit on my hands to stop from applauding at the end of the third movement!

That spirit of energy and joy runs through the relationship between Emirates and the Orchestra as well. 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 'Barry Brown', with a stylized, flowing script.

Barry Brown
Emirates DVP – Australasia

YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

DOBRINKA TABAKOVA (born 1980)

Orpheus' Comet (2017)

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

Orpheus' Comet is an orchestral celebration of European music broadcasting, in which a murmuring of bees is transformed into the movement of stars, crowned by a quotation from Monteverdi.

It was composed in 2017, the year that saw the Cassini-Huygens spacecraft plunge into Saturn, the discovery of a new species of orangutan and archaeological evidence of more than 50,000 years of Indigenous occupation of Australia.

Contemporary music included Anna Clyne's *Beltane*, Sofia Gubaidulina's Triple Concerto and Brett Dean's *Hamlet*.



Dobrinka Tabakova. Photo by Benjamin Ealovega, courtesy Schott Music.

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Violin Concerto in D, Op.35 (1881)

One of the peaks of the Romantic concerto tradition, Tchaikovsky's piece is in three substantive movements: a large scale elaboration of contrasting themes, a deceptively simple, song-like slow movement and a bravura 'Slavic' finale.

It premiered in Vienna in 1881, the year that saw the world's first electric tram service (in Berlin), the end of the Boer War and the opening of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Contemporary music included Bruckner's Sixth Symphony, Brahms's Second Piano Concerto and Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*.



A portrait of Tchaikovsky c.1880. Source: United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division, digital ID ppmc.01502.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Symphony No.7 in A major, Op.92 (1813)

The composer Richard Wagner called the Seventh the 'apotheosis of the dance', a work in which Beethoven leaves behind the titanic battles of the Fifth Symphony and even the meteorological drama of the Sixth in favour of a four-movement work that explores the joys of metre and rhythm – after all a funeral march is a dance of sorts...

It premiered in 1813, the year Austria declared war on France, the (later to be Royal) Philharmonic Society was founded in London and Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson crossed the Blue Mountains.

Contemporary music included Schubert's First Symphony, Ferdinand Ries's Fifth Symphony and Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*.



An 1815 portrait of Beethoven by Joseph Willibrod Mähler. Source: Vienna Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

Over a career spanning 45 years, Sir Donald Runnicles has built his reputation on enduring relationships with several of the world's most significant opera companies and orchestras. He is especially celebrated for his interpretations of the Romantic and post-Romantic repertoire which are core to his musical identity.

The 2025–2026 season is one of transition: it marks both his final season as Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin as well as his first season as Chief Conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic. He also continues to serve as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Sir Donald concludes his tenure with the Deutsche Oper Berlin with Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*, new productions of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* by Michael Thalheimer and Korngold's *Violanta* by David Hermann, all culminating in two cycles of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in a Stefan Herheim production that he premiered with the company. Over the course of his sixteen-year tenure, Sir Donald cemented himself as one of the central figures in the German cultural scene.

In Sir Donald's inaugural season as Chief Conductor with the Dresden Philharmonic in 25/26, he leads ten weeks of programs including a concertante version of Strauss's *Elektra*, highlights his British heritage with performances of William Walton's Viola Concerto with British violist Timothy Ridout, and Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan's Symphony No.4 (originally composed to celebrate Sir Donald's 60th birthday), and concludes the season with a ten-city Asia tour of Japan and Korea.

He returns to conduct four weeks as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony with performances of Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 and Violin Concerto No.1 with violinist Leonidas Kavakos, as well as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.5. Guest engagements for the 25/26 season include performances with San Francisco Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony and his debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

Sir Donald spends his summers as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival. This eight-week festival of symphonic and chamber music, five of which are conducted by Runnicles, takes place amid the breathtaking beauty of Grand Teton National Park.

Past chief artistic leadership roles include the San Francisco Opera (1992–2008), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (2009–2016), and the Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001–2007). Sir Donald was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for more than two decades (2001–2023).

A regular guest conductor with the Chicago Symphony, Runnicles's performance history with the orchestra dates back to 1997. Over a decade-long relationship with the Vienna State Opera, he led new productions of *Parsifal*, Britten's *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, as well as pieces from the core repertoire. He's conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Orchestre de Paris, among many of the world's leading orchestras.

Donald Runnicles was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was appointed OBE in 2004, and was made a Knight Bachelor in 2020. He holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.



Photo by Simon Pauly

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BOMSORI KIM violin

‘This violinist is ready for anything: with virtuosity, presence, clarity and a warm, rich tone, Bomsori is adept at making each moment her own.’ *Crescendo Magazine*

Highlights of Bomsori’s current season include tours with the Bamberg Symphony and Jakub Hrůša in Germany and Asia, returns to Carnegie Hall and the Concertgebouw Amsterdam with the Seoul Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden, and a return to Vienna with the Vienna Symphony. She will also make her debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and return to the Concertgebouw as Artist-in-Residence with the Residentie Orkest Den Haag.

Recent highlights include her debuts at the BBC Proms with the BBC Philharmonic and at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She toured with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Paavo Järvi, and made debuts with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Bomsori is a regular guest at major festivals such as the Rheingau Musik Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, and Verbier Festival. In 2021, she was named Focus Artist of the Rheingau Musik Festival and began a five-year residency at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival as Menuhin’s Heritage Artist.

She has performed with leading orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Montreal Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with renowned conductors such as Fabio Luisi, Paavo Järvi, Marin Alsop, Jakub Hrůša, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, and Jaap van Zweden.

She is a prizewinner of the ARD International Music Competition, the International Tchaikovsky Competition, the Queen Elisabeth Competition, and the Jean Sibelius

International Violin Competition, and is a recipient of the Young Artist Award from the Korean Ministry of Culture.

Her discography for Deutsche Grammophon includes the Korngold and Bruch Violin Concertos with the Bamberg Symphony and Jakub Hrůša, *Violin on Stage* with the NFM Wrocław Philharmonic, and a duo album with Rafał Blechacz featuring works by Fauré, Debussy, Szymanowski and Chopin, which received the Fryderyk Award for Best Polish Album Abroad. Her recording of Nielsen’s Violin Concerto with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and Fabio Luisi received the 2024 *BBC Music Magazine* Award.

Born in South Korea, Bomsori studied at Seoul National University with Young Uck Kim and at The Juilliard School with Sylvia Rosenberg and Ronald Copes. She performs on the 1725 Guarneri del Gesù ‘ex-Moller’, generously loaned by the Samsung Foundation of Culture and the Stradivari Society of Chicago.



Photo by Bartek Barozek

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT DOBRINKA TABAKOVA

Dobrinka Tabakova is a composer of ‘exciting, deeply moving’ music (*Washington Times*), with ‘glowing tonal harmonies and grand, sweeping gestures [which] convey a huge emotional depth’ (*The Strad*). She has been commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, BBC Radio 3 and the European Broadcasting Union and was appointed composer in residence with the BBC Concert Orchestra in 2017 and the Halle Orchestra for the 2022/23 season. Her debut profile album *String Paths*, on ECM Records, was nominated for a Grammy in 2014. Her second album on ECM was released in September 2025 and received the 2026 *BBC Music Magazine* Premiere Award.

Born in the historic town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Tabakova has lived in London since 1991, graduating from the Guildhall School of Music, and obtaining a PhD from King’s College London. Her ‘riveting, piercingly beautiful and frequently radiant’ music (*Huffpost Arts & Culture*) has featured in films (Jean-Luc Godard’s *Adieu au langage*), dance (Sydney Dance Company, San Francisco Ballet, Theater St.Gallen) and has been programmed at festivals worldwide including: the Proms (UK), Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Bang on a Can and Grand Teton (USA), The Great Mountains International Music Festival (South Korea), World Sun Songs (Latvia) and Dark Music Days (Iceland). Tabakova has been resident composer at the Davos Summer Festival in Switzerland and Truro Cathedral, Cornwall (UK), as well as with the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Swan (Stratford, UK).

Among prizes for her work are the prize for an anthem for Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden Jubilee and First Prize and Medallion at the Sorel Choral Composition Contest in New York. Significant projects include *Immortal Shakespeare*, a cantata commemorating Shakespeare’s 400th anniversary in 2016, the multi-commissioned double piano concerto *Together Remember to Dance* and the choir and strings work *Centuries of Meditations* for the Three Choirs Festival. Tabakova’s second album, devoted to her choral music and performed by the



Dobrinka Tabakova. Photo by Benjamin Ealovega, courtesy Schott Music.

Truro Cathedral Choir with the BBCCO, was released by Regent Records, receiving a 2019 *Gramophone Magazine* Critics’ Choice. In 2021, Dobrinka Tabakova completed her orchestral *Earth Suite* for the BBC Concert Orchestra and the violin concerto *The Patience of Trees* for the Manchester International Festival. In 2022, she was named The Halle Orchestra’s artist in association. The orchestra released an album of her orchestral music in 2023, which was nominated for a *BBC Music Magazine* Award and her work for the Halle’s Youth Orchestra received the 2024 Ivor Composer Award in the Community and Participation Category.

Recent commissions include an Accordion Concerto for Ksenija Sidorova and choral works for ORA Singers and The Sixteen celebrating William Byrd’s 400th anniversary. Forthcoming projects include a major new work for the Three Choirs Festival 2027, chamber and orchestral works for BBC Radio 3 as well as a project for the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT ORPHEUS' COMET

The composer writes:

This began as a work about bees, inspired by Virgil's *Georgics*, but gradually the bees buzzing (heard in the opening brass) became cosmic particles and *Orpheus' Comet* was born.

The signature melody of Euroradio, the opening of Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*, becomes the culmination, which is reached through a series of nebula clusters. First the buzzing horns begin and are answered by low strings, while accents spark throughout the rest of the orchestra. This dialogue continues, until a solemn chorale appears out of the busy texture. The chorale is taken up by the strings and grows to include the buzzing ideas, which are transformed into almost hypnotic rhythmic loops. A soaring melody in the flute and clarinet hovers above as momentum starts to build. Trombones underpin this build-up and prepare for a spectacular finale.

The work was written in 2017 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the regular Music Exchanges and was commissioned by the BBC and European Broadcasting Union.

Dobrinka Tabakova © 2017

Orpheus' Comet is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon); 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was first performed on 27 November 2017 in London, with Johannes Wildner conducting the BBC Concert Orchestra.

This is its Australian premiere.

ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY

Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk, in the Urals, where his father was a mining engineer. His musical education began with the orchestrion, a mechanical contraption that played popular operatic excerpts. He also began piano lessons in 1845. The family moved to St Petersburg in 1852, where Tchaikovsky attended the School of Jurisprudence. On graduating in 1859 he was employed at the Ministry of Justice, but attended classes run by the Russian Musical Society. Under the leadership of Anton Rubinstein, the Society founded the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, and Tchaikovsky enrolled in its first class, with Rubinstein as his composition teacher. After three years there, Tchaikovsky was invited by Rubinstein's equally illustrious brother, Nikolai, to teach harmony for the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society, which would soon become the Moscow Conservatory.

Around 1868 he became, briefly, quite friendly with the group of composers known as the Kuchka ('The Five' or 'Mighty Handful'), led by Mily Balakirev. Balakirev believed that Russian composers should create distinctly Russian music, unpolluted by the techniques of Western composition. But although Tchaikovsky had used some traditional melodies, he was an internationalist at heart, and by 1877 he had broken with the Five.

Despite being homosexual, Tchaikovsky became engaged to the Belgian soprano Désirée Artôt in 1868. It didn't last.

But Tchaikovsky saw no reason not to marry, and in 1877 the hour produced the woman, in the form of Antonina Milyukova, from whom Tchaikovsky received a series of love letters. It didn't last either, with Tchaikovsky abandoning Antonina for his sister's estate at Kamenka in Ukraine. He did at least provide for her in her old age.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



A portrait of Tchaikovsky c.1880. Source: United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division, digital ID ppmssc.01502.

A year before the marriage, Tchaikovsky had received a letter from another woman, Nadezhda von Meck, who was a huge fan, but expressly did not want to – and never did – meet Tchaikovsky. She did, however, want to use some of the considerable wealth her railway-tycoon husband had left her to commission new music, and for fourteen years supported Tchaikovsky so that he could give up teaching and concentrate on composition. He and Meck corresponded frequently, offering us an insight into Tchaikovsky's aesthetics and methods.

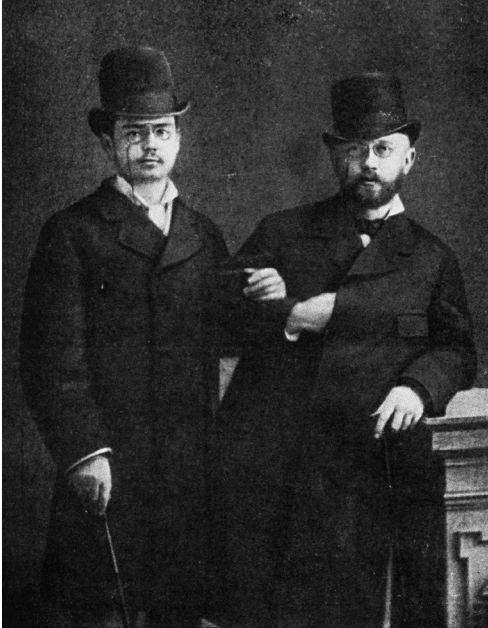
As symphonist, and great composer for ballet, Tchaikovsky was fêted as far afield as the United States and Britain. In November 1893, days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony in St Petersburg, he became ill and was treated for cholera which was epidemic in the city. The treatment was successful, but Tchaikovsky died of complications.

ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

It was the winter of 1877, and Tchaikovsky was in love. He wrote to his brother Modest about the 'unimaginable force' of the passion that had developed; its object was a young violinist and student at the Moscow Conservatorium, Iosif Kotek. Tchaikovsky had known 'this wonderful youth' for about six years. In 1876 Kotek had also acted as a go-between for Tchaikovsky and his new patron, Nadezhda von Meck who eschewed any face to face contact with the composer. Kotek was a devoted and affectionate but platonic friend to Tchaikovsky, but predictably enough, soon became besotted with a fellow (female) student. The composer's ardour cooled quickly, and within three weeks of discovering Kotek's new relationship, Tchaikovsky had made his fateful proposal to Antonina Milyukova, a former Conservatorium student who had fallen in love with him. They married two months later, and as the depth of their cultural and personal differences quickly became clear, Tchaikovsky left his wife two months after that. Milyukova, incidentally, was not the deranged harpy that histories (or myth) have made of her. Her mental health degenerated only many years after Tchaikovsky's death (and a subsequent happy relationship which produced children) and she never spoke ill of Tchaikovsky during his life or after his death. He for his part, realised that he had treated her abominably, and saw to it that she was financially secure for the rest of her life.

Kotek and Tchaikovsky remained friends, however, and the Violin Concerto seems to have grown out of a promise that the composer made to write a piece for one of Kotek's upcoming concerts. 'We spoke', Tchaikovsky told his brother, 'of the piece he *ordered* me to write...He repeated over and over that he would get angry if I didn't write this piece'. While Kotek was not, ultimately, the dedicatee or first performer of the work, he was of enormous help to Tchaikovsky in playing through sections of the piece as the composer finished them.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Iosif Koteik (left) and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, c.1877.

After leaving his wife, Tchaikovsky, accompanied by one or other of his brothers (and at one point Koteik himself), travelled extensively in western Europe. Tchaikovsky worked on the Violin Concerto in Switzerland in early 1878 not long after completing the Fourth Symphony and the opera *Eugene Onegin*. Commentators are generally agreed that both of those works reflect Tchaikovsky's emotional reactions to the traumatic events of his marriage, though the composer himself was careful, in a letter to von Meck, to point out that one could only depict such states in retrospect. In any event, it seems likely that, apart from honouring a promise to Koteik, Tchaikovsky found the conventions of the violin concerto offered a way of writing a large scale work without the personal investment of the opera and symphony.

Like the great concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Sibelius, Tchaikovsky's is in D major and in three substantial movements. The first develops two characteristic themes within a tracery of brilliant virtuoso writing for the violin, and like Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky places the solo cadenza before the recapitulation of the opening material. As in the slow movement of the Fourth Symphony, the central *Canzonetta* works its magic by the deceptively simple

repetition of its material. The work concludes with a bravura, 'Slavic' finale which is interrupted only by a motif for solo oboe which for one writer recalls, nostalgically, a moment in the 'Letter Scene' from *Onegin* (which itself parallels the relationship between Tchaikovsky and Antonina).

The work was initially dedicated to the virtuoso Leopold Auer, who thought it far too difficult and refused to play it. In 1881 Adolf Brodsky gave the premiere in Vienna, where that city's most feared critic, Eduard Hanslick, tore the piece to shreds:

The violin is no longer played; it is pulled, torn, drubbed...We see plainly the savage vulgar faces, we hear curses, we smell vodka...Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto gives us for the first time the notional that there can be music that stinks to the ear.

Hanslick, like many a music critic, made a bad call; Tchaikovsky had written one of the best loved works of the concerto repertoire.

Gordon Kerry © 2003

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 4 horns and 2 trumpets; timpani, strings and solo violin.

Its first performance was on 4 December 1881 in Vienna, with eventually Adolph Brodsky the soloist conducted by Hans Richter.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the concerto on 8 December 1938, with Guila Bustabo the soloist conducted by Percy Code.

There have been many notable performances over the years, including Szymon Goldberg conducted by Eugene Gossens (1946); Alfredo Campoli/Goossens (1950); Isaac Stern/Alceo Galliera (1954); Christian Ferras/Bernard Heinze (1956); David Oistrakh/Nicoli Malko (1958); Campoli/Heinze (1960); Ruggiero Ricci/Francesco Mander (1962); Charmian Gadd/Joseph Post (1963); Igor Oistrakh/Edgar Cosmo (1963); Campoli/Dean Dixon (1966); Ricci/Post (1969); Dene Olding/Jose Serebrier (1983); Olding/Georg Tintner (1984); Eugene Sarbu/Charles Mackerras (1984); Frank Peter Zimmermann/Gianluigi Gelmetti (1993); Natalie Chee/Edo de Waart (1996 Stuart Challender Trust Concert); Gil Shaham/De Waart (1996); Maxim Vengerov/David Zinman (1998); Salvatore Accardo/Gelmetti (2004); Boris Belkin/Gelmetti (2006); James Ehnes/Vladimir Ashkenazy (2010); Midori/David Robertson (2017 in Shanghai, Beijing and Sydney) and Daniel Röhn/Simone Young (2021).

Our most recent performances were in July 2023, with Ray Chen conducted by David Robertson.

LOVE BEETHOVEN?

JOIN THE BEETHOVEN LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

Come behind the scenes of the Sydney Symphony's 2027 Beethoven Festival as we celebrate one of the most influential composers of all time with a journey through his symphonies, led by our Chief Conductor Simone Young.

Your support will be instrumental in realising this landmark event, helping us deliver performances worthy of Beethoven's enduring legacy.

If you are interested in supporting the Festival and deepening your experience of this exciting artistic undertaking, please contact:

Rachel Shafran, Development Manager

(02) 8215 4671 or rachel.shafran@sydneyssymphony.com

Visit our website
to learn more



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.



An 1815 portrait of Beethoven by Joseph Willibrord Mähler.
Source: Vienna Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

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 SEVENTH SYMPHONY

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was completed in April 1812 and given its first performances in December 1813. One, a large charity concert in aid of Bavarian and Austrian soldiers drew an audience of 5,000 people. Performances to large audiences also took place at the Vienna Musikverein, though Beethoven himself complained that the orchestra there was too large for this music. The composer felt it was incapable of dealing with the subtle shadings of tempo and colour that he wrote, and stated that he preferred an orchestra of only sixty players. Unfortunately, the first audiences for the seventh symphony heard it in tandem with *Wellington's Victory* (a truly hideous piece of work – complete with a reference to 'For he's a jolly good fellow' to celebrate Wellington's defeat of Napoleon). As a result the audiences inferred certain militaristic and nationalistic messages from the music which are far removed from what Beethoven intended, and more importantly, from what the piece implies in itself.

The symphony has always provoked attempts to interpret it in visual terms. Maynard Solomon's biography lists some of the more inspired: 'a peasant dance'; 'a village wedding'; 'a Knight's Festival'; 'the upsurge of a powerful dionysiac impulse, a divine intoxication of the spirit'. Solomon goes on to point out that while these interpretations are all somewhat quaint there is a striking unanimity of imagery of large numbers of people having a festive time. Wagner famously described the symphony as the 'apotheosis of the dance', a reference to the way in which it deifies rhythm, but the references to dance also link the piece back to the baroque suite. Solomon, moreover, has also pointed out in a recent essay that the rhythms of the work may be derived from the metres of ancient Greek poetry. He argues that here 'a fully-realised neo-Antique style came into being – muscular, powerful, restless, imbued with unstoppable energy, saturated with ritual and ecstatic implications'.

Strangely enough, the Seventh Symphony puzzled some listeners, especially those who expected to hear the characteristic struggle and triumph of Beethoven's 'heroic' or middle period works. But Beethoven, in his music if not his life, successfully fought Fate to a standstill in the symphonic works beginning with the *Eroica*; in his *Pastoral* Symphony the Storm movement is the last gasp of that oppressive figure. In a work like the Seventh Symphony there is no adversarial program. In 1827 a reviewer of the work asked 'what had become of the good man in his later period? Had he not succumbed to a kind of insanity?' Another complained that 'the whole thing lasts at least three quarters of an hour and is a true mixture of tragic, comic, serious and trivial ideas, which spring from one level to another without any connection, repeat themselves to excess, and are almost wrecked by the immoderate noise of the timpani'. And Beethoven's first biographer, the never entirely reliable Anton Schindler, said that the composer Weber had suggested that Beethoven was 'ripe for the madhouse' on the basis of this work.

The piece is, as we might expect, the work of a supremely gifted craftsman as well as a work of genius. The slow introduction acts as a reservoir for much of the material in all four movements. The key feature of this whole symphony is rhythm, and the slow introduction sets up and plays with the relationship between rhythmic phases, the descending chords on the winds as against the rising semiquaver scales of the strings. The transition into the buoyant first movement – via a chirruping woodwind motif – is ingenious. It is also an example of how, as so often, Beethoven is able to seemingly withdraw into silence, so much so that he has established the new fast tempo before we even realise it.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

What passes for the slow movement – *allegretto* is hardly a slow tempo – is not, of course, Beethoven's first 'funeral march' but this one differs from that of the *Eroica* in both its emotional restraint and the relative optimism of its middle section. Death, it seems, is no longer tragic. The scherzo and trio are inevitably upbeat in tone. The trio section's theme is said to refer to an Austrian pilgrims' song, more evidence of the sense of collective experience that the work presents. In the last movement, Beethoven's rhythmic manipulation is comparable to that of the Stravinsky of *Agon* or the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*: a rhythmic motive – compared by William Kinderman to a coiled spring – is passed from one voice to another and at one point is accompanied by an augmented (that is mathematically expanded) version of itself. In numerous such ways the Seventh shows how the intense concentration Beethoven learned in the *Eroica* and the Fifth Symphonies can be merged with the lyrical joy of the fourth and sixth symphonies.

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Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons; 2 horns and 2 trumpets; timpani and strings.

The work premiered in Vienna on 8 December 1813, with Beethoven himself conducting.

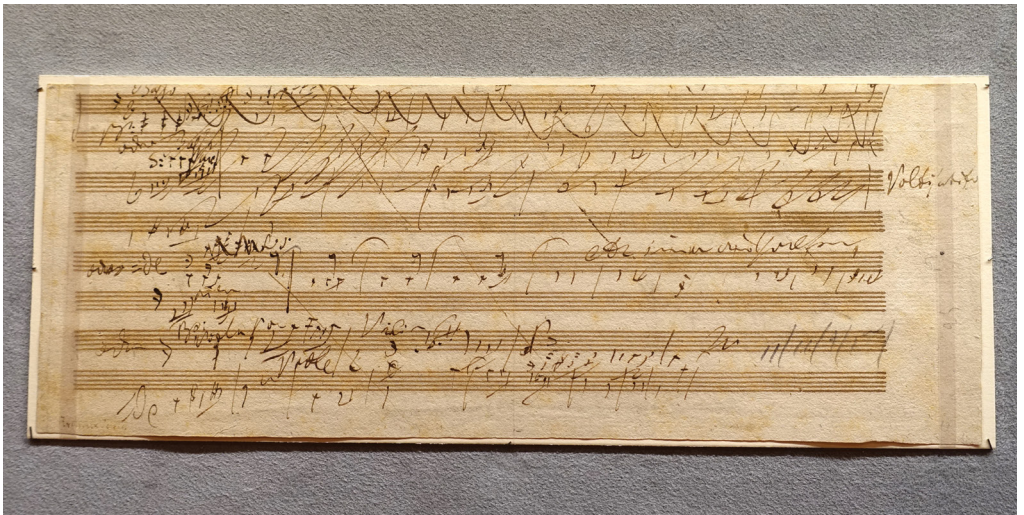
The Sydney Symphony first performed the work in October 1939, conducted by Malcolm Sargent.

There have been a great many performances since then, including those led by notable guest conductors Walter Susskind (1946), Rafael Kubelik (1949), Otto Klemperer (1950), Karel Ančerl (1961), Hiroyuki Iwaki (1973 & 89), Muhai Tang (1991) and Gilbert Varga (1994).

It was also a regular feature on programs led by our titled conductors through the years, including Eugene Goossens (1948, 51 & 55), Willem van Otterloo (1962, 74 & 75) Dean Dixon (1965 & 73), Moshe Atzmon (1970), Louis Frémaux (1980), Charles Mackerras (1984 & 95), Stuart Challender (1984), Zdeněk Mácal (1985), Edo de Waart (1998, 2001, 2003 & 2011), Gianluigi Gelmetti (2004, 2007 and in Siena and Modena on our 2008 International Tour), David Robertson (2014 & 20), Vladimir Ashkenazy (2016) and Simone Young (2021).

Our most recent performances were under Mark Wigglesworth in 2023.

Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson



Beethoven's sketches for the second movement, taken from the 'Petter Sketchbook', used by Beethoven c. 1811–12.
Source: Morgan Library & Museum, New York City/Wikimedia Commons.

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