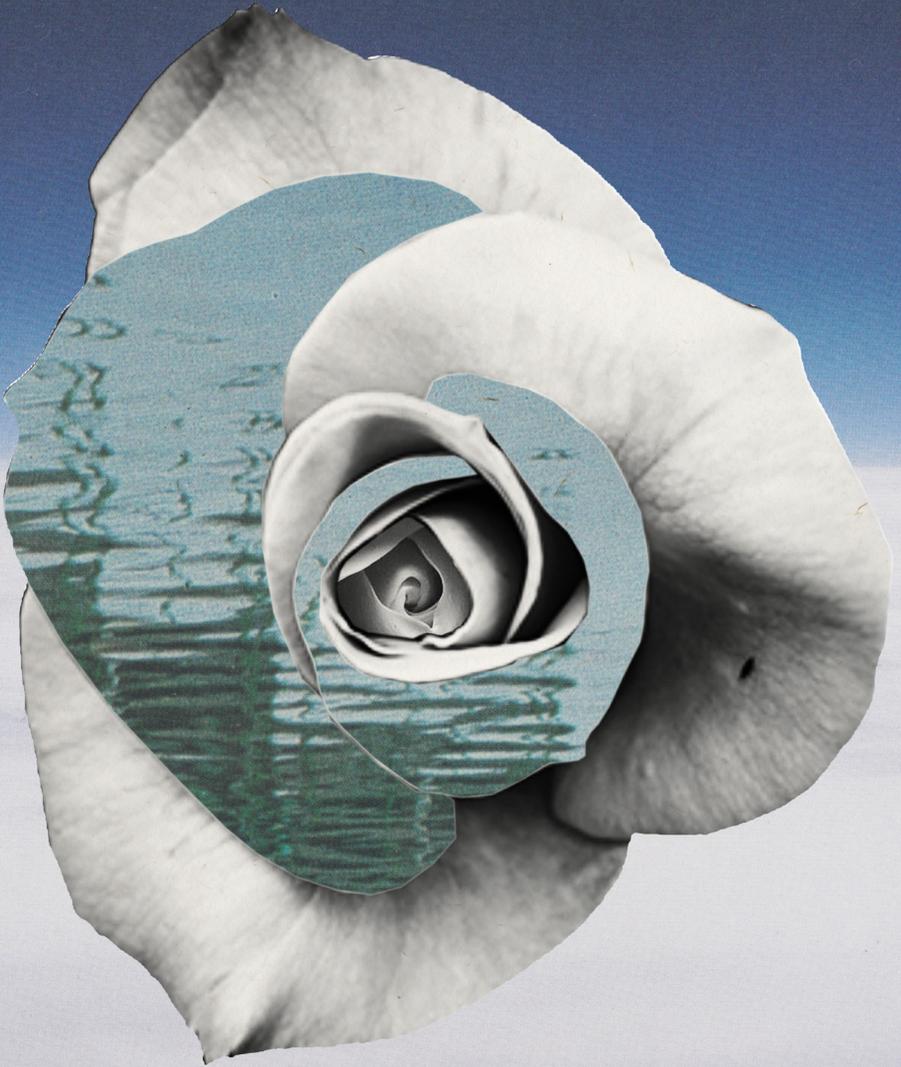


30 June  
Sydney Opera House

# SIMONE YOUNG & STEVEN ISSERLIS



SYDNEY  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

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 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 Fremaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdenek Macal, 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.

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.

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Associate  
Concertmaster

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Assistant  
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### **Fiona Ziegler**

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**TEA AND SYMPHONY**  
Friday 30 June, 11am

Concert Hall,  
Sydney Opera House

# **SIMONE YOUNG & STEVEN ISSERLIS**

POWERFUL & ROMANTIC

**SIMONE YOUNG** conductor  
**STEVEN ISSERLIS** cello

**WILLIAM WALTON (1902–1983)**  
**Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1957)**

- i. Moderato
- ii. Allegro appassionato
- iii. Lento

**ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)**  
**Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op.120 (1841)**

- i. Ziemlich langsam [Rather slow] – Lebhaft [Lively] –
- ii. Romanze (Ziemlich langsam) [Rather slow] –
- iii. Scherzo (Lebhaft) [Lively] –
- iii. Langsam [Slow] – Lebhaft [Lively]

**ESTIMATED DURATION**

Walton – 30 minutes  
Schumann – 28 minutes

The concert will run for  
approximately 1 hour

**COVER IMAGE**

By Rebecca Shaw

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Principal Partner

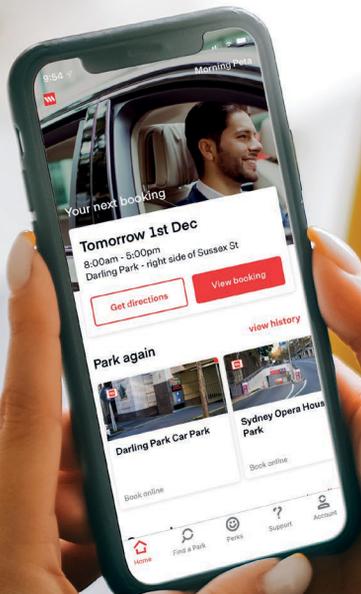




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# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## STEVEN ISSERLIS cello

British cellist Steven Isserlis CBE enjoys an international career as a soloist, chamber musician, author, educator, and broadcaster. Equally at home in music from baroque to the present day, he performs with the world's greatest orchestras, including period ensembles, and has given many world premieres, including Sir John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil*, Thomas Adès's *Lieux retrouvés*, four works for solo cello by György Kurtág, and pieces by Heinz Holliger, Jörg Widmann, Olli Mustonen, Mikhail Pletnev and many others.

His vast award-winning discography includes most of the cello repertoire, including the JS Bach suites (*Gramophone Instrumental Album of the Year*), Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano, and the Brahms double concerto with Joshua Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He has received two Grammy nominations, for his recordings of Haydn's cello concertos, and Martinů's cello sonatas with Olli Mustonen. Premiere recordings include late works by Sir John Tavener (*BBC Music Magazine Premiere Award*). His latest recording, *A Golden Cello Decade 1878 – 1888*, was released in November 2022.

As an author, his latest book is a critically-acclaimed companion to the Bach cello suites, while his two books for children about music are among the genre's most popular ever written and have been translated into many languages. He has also authored a commentary on Schumann's famous *Advice for Young Musicians*. As a broadcaster, he has written and presented two in-depth documentaries for BBC Radio, on Robert Schumann and Harpo Marx.

An insightful musical explorer and curator, he has programmed imaginative series for London's Wigmore Hall, New York's 92nd St Y, and the Salzburg Festival. Unusually, he also directs orchestras from the cello, including Luzerner Sinfonieorchester in 2019 with Radu Lupu in his final public performance.

He was awarded a CBE by Queen Elizabeth II in 1998, in recognition of his services to music. International recognition includes the Piatigorsky Prize (USA) and the Glashütte Original Music Festival Award (Germany). Since 1997, he has been Artistic Director of the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove, Cornwall.

He plays the 1726 'Marquis de Corberon' Stradivarius, on loan from the Royal Academy of Music.



Photo by Joanna Bergin



Simone Young AM  
Photo by Peter Brew-Bevan

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **SIMONE YOUNG** AM conductor

Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor, Simone Young, was General Manager and Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Music Director of the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg from 2005–2015. Her Hamburg recordings include The *Ring Cycle*, *Mathis der Maler* (Hindemith), and symphonies of Bruckner, Brahms and Mahler. An acknowledged interpreter of the operas of Wagner and Strauss, she has conducted complete cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Vienna Staatsoper, Berlin Staatsoper and in Hamburg.

This season she returns to the Berlin, Los Angeles, Oslo and Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestras, Orchestres National de France and Lyon, Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra, Madrid, Gothenburg, Dallas and Washington National Symphony Orchestras, and Orchestre Suisse Romande. Opera engagements will take her to La Scala Milan (*Peter Grimes*), the Metropolitan Opera New York (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Vienna State Opera (*Die Fledermaus* and *La Fanciulla del West*) and Berlin State Opera (*Khovanshchina*). She will also lead the ANAM orchestra in their co-production with Victorian Opera of Strauss' *Capriccio*.

Simone Young is regularly invited by the world's great orchestras and has led the New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Stockholm, New Japan, Helsinki and Dresden Philharmonic Orchestras; the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo; Orchestre de Paris; Staatskapelle Dresden; the BBC, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago, Dallas, and National Symphony Orchestra. In Australia she has conducted the West Australian, Adelaide, Melbourne and Queensland Symphony Orchestras and the Australian World Orchestra.

Highly sought-after by the world's leading opera houses, most recently Simone Young has appeared at the Vienna State Opera (*Peter Grimes*), Opera Nationale de Paris (*Parsifal* and *Salome*), Bavarian State Opera, Munich (*Tannhäuser*), Berlin State Opera (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and Zurich Opera (*Salome*).

Simone Young has been Music Director of Opera Australia, Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Lisbon and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra. Her many accolades include 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, Helpmann Award and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## **WILLIAM WALTON (1902–1983)** **Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1957)**

William Walton's was a Cinderella career. Born into a musical family of modest means in Lancashire in 1902, he became a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford at the age of ten, supported by a scholarship and the personal generosity of the Dean, Thomas Strong. Strong showed some of the teenage composer's choral works to Sir Hubert Parry, who said 'There's a lot in this chap, you must keep an eye on him!'

At Oxford Walton befriended Sacheverell Sitwell and his siblings, who supported the young composer while he devoted himself to his work. In *Façade* Edith Sitwell's poetry was famously declaimed through a megaphone (from behind a curtain) to the accompaniment of a whimsically satirical score; another important collaboration was with Osbert Sitwell, who arranged the biblical text for Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* (1930-1). The 1920s also saw a number of important instrumental works including the Viola Concerto, first performed by the composer/violist Paul Hindemith.

Walton began composing for film in the 1930s and the discipline required in some respects mitigated his lack of formal training and honed his technical skills, and made him a great deal of money very quickly. Walton spent the war years writing music for 'inspiring' films. He once said that 'film music is not good film music if it can be used for any other purpose', but never forbade the concert performances of such masterly music as that written for Laurence Olivier's 1944 film of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. After the war, Walton expected to step back into the position of pre-eminent composer, but despite receiving a knighthood in 1951 and the Order of Merit in 1967, the times had changed. The opera *Peter Grimes* established Benjamin Britten as the next big thing (and one who could successfully compose opera in English) and Walton's career and self-esteem took a further beating with the failure of his major opera *Troilus and Cressida*.



William Walton in 1963

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

The commission from Gregor Piatigorsky to compose a cello concerto must have been welcome. Some of Walton's greatest music, and certainly his finest craftsmanship, is to be heard in the concertos for violin and viola, and Walton himself believed the cello concerto to be the finest of the three.



Cellist Gregor Piatigorsky

Piatigorsky premiered the work in 1957 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Charles Munch. (Walton himself conducted the Australian premiere with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and James Whitehead at the 1964 Adelaide Festival.) The work is in three movements. The first is *moderato* with long breathed lines for the soloist and a repeated figure for plucked strings which will return almost obsessively in the last movement. The central movement is the only fast one of the three, as the final *Lento* is given over to a set of variations (or 'improvisations') on an original theme. Many commentators have remarked on the piece's bittersweet and occasionally Mediterranean sound-world. Byron Adams has noted that the end recalls Cressida's elegiac aria 'At the Haunted End of the Day'.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## **ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)** **Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op.120 (1841)**

By 1840 Robert Schumann had finally been able to marry his beloved Clara Wieck, and the couple had settled in Leipzig, where, inspired by the example of Schubert and supported by the musical environment fostered by Felix Mendelssohn, Robert's talent burgeoned. Having abandoned orchestral composition some years earlier, Schumann returned to it in 1841, composing his First Symphony (*Spring*) in a matter of weeks. The Overture, Scherzo and Finale – effectively a symphony in three movements, though Robert was diffident about calling it that – followed almost immediately, and soon after he composed a Phantasie for piano and orchestra, which Clara premiered that year, and which would ultimately become the first movement of his Piano Concerto in A minor.

Despite his training as a pianist, Robert seems not to have composed much at the piano beyond the kind of free improvisation which sometimes yields ideas that can be developed. So while Clara said that she heard 'D-minor sometimes sounding wildly in the distance' that summer, it was a surprise when Robert presented her, on her birthday, the score of a new Symphony that he had 'completed in secret'. Schumann, for whom composition was both compulsive and often distressing, would later note that:

I sketched it . . . when I was still suffering physically a great deal, I really may say that it was, so to speak, the resistance of the spirit which exercised a visible influence here and through which I sought to contend with my bodily state. The first movement is full of this struggle and its character is very moody and rebellious.

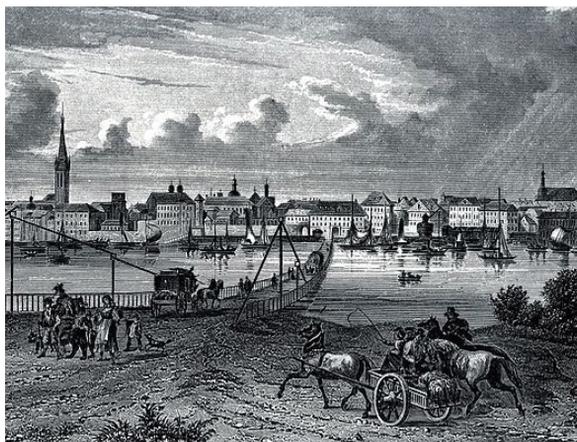


Robert Schumann

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

The work 'telescoped' the traditional four-movement design into one, and it was premiered in Leipzig in December 1841 at a concert to which Franz Liszt had come to perform. Sadly the performance was a failure and, as Virgil Thomson once put it, 'pieces have a way of withdrawing themselves,' so the symphony languished for ten years.

By 1849 Schumann, like many a middle-aged composer, found himself much esteemed but in need of a steady income. Sadly, hoped-for positions in Dresden (where he was living), Leipzig and Berlin either failed to fall vacant when expected, or were not offered to the composer; only later that year would his friend Ferdinand Hiller announce that he was taking up a position in Cologne, and would thus be leaving his job as director of the General Musical and Choral Societies in nearby Düsseldorf.



Düsseldorf in 1850

For various reasons it was not an entirely attractive proposition for Schumann: the lower Rhineland was two days' journey away by train, and had a very different culture from Lutheran Saxony where he had grown up and felt at home. Düsseldorf's recent musical directors, moreover, had included his colleagues Julius Rietz and Felix Mendelssohn, and the latter had a distinctly jaundiced view of musical standards in the city. Schumann was a good choral conductor but had never been in charge of an

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

orchestra – this was bound to cause problems, as eventually did his unwavering support of new music and his undiplomatic parachuting of a new concertmaster into the orchestra.

Nevertheless, once finally settled in Düsseldorf in 1850, his tenure started well enough, and as 1851 drew on he decided to revisit the D-minor symphony abandoned a decade earlier. It would be premiered – to ‘great enthusiasm’ – in May 1853 at the Lower-Rhine Music Festival, by an orchestra of 160 players, professional and amateur, from the region.

Knowing Mendelssohn’s view of local orchestral standards, and the prospect of an influx of amateur players may have guided Schumann in his ‘re-instrumenting’ the symphony, (though we can assume that he expected it to be played by the normal smaller-sized band on subsequent occasions). In addition to making some structural changes, he effectively fool-proofed the piece by doubling lines (notably strings) with other instruments to make sure they were heard, and to cover any possible missed entries. The musicologist Donald Tovey once suggested that ‘that way safety lies, and the same could be said for proclaiming Martial law’. He also notes that the 1841 version, as edited and published after the composer’s death by Brahms, shows that Schumann’s ‘original and inexperienced talent for orchestration was by no means contemptible’. Schumann’s reinforcement of the orchestration in the 1851 version has, as John Worthen puts it, ‘led generations of musicians to complain that Schumann did not know how to orchestrate.’ Worthen goes on to say that

period instrument performance with an orchestra of the right size has, however, disposed of that criticism: the subtleties in the part-writing are an element of Schumann’s very characteristic orchestral sound; while the use of the pedal which people heard in his piano playing (with its creation of ‘waves of sound’) was something he wanted his orchestra to create, too, in its own way. He was certainly

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

demanding a lot of the orchestra and of his listeners, but he was ‘intuitively able and imaginative’ and, like any innovative composer, developed new sound worlds.

Now that the insights of period instrument practice have been assimilated by players of modern ones, we can readily hear Schumann’s intended sound. Joachim Draheim’s edition follows Schumann’s final draft of the 1851 version closely.

The work is formally fascinating, unifying the four different movements in a web of thematic cross-referencing that owes something to Beethoven’s Ninth and something to the conventions – flashback, reminiscence – of literary narrative.

Like Beethoven in the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies, Schumann begins with a slow, but metrically ambiguous introduction, and by means of rhythmic insistence pushes gradually into the Allegro section, which contrasts a driving, busy first theme with a more lyrical second one. Well into the movement we hear a motif based on an emphatic three-note rhythm that recurs, transformed, in the scherzo and again in the finale.

The slow movement is a *Romanze*, or song – a genre in which Schumann excelled – and features a long ornate violin solo, and transparent woodwind writing. The scherzo, as mentioned, is derived from the three-note motif in the opening movement, and the contrasting trio section is in turn derived from the violin solo in the *Romanze*. The scherzo dies away, yielding to a shimmering hush in which we hear a reminiscence of the first movement, and fanfares from seemingly approaching brass. The tension breaks, with a joyful D major finale that reviews other motifs from early in the work, often in counterpoint, building with rhythmic and rhetorical insistence that drives the music ever faster into a final presto coda.



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# STEVEN ISSERLIS ON WILLIAM WALTON

*The acclaimed English cellist discusses William Walton's Cello Concerto – which he counts among the greatest ever written – ahead of his performances with the Sydney Symphony and Chief Conductor Simone Young in June.*

*By Hugh Robertson*

---

Sir William Walton is a fascinating figure in the history of English music.

He was undoubtedly one of the most significant British composers of the 20th century, ranking alongside Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Britten for impact and influence. He won a scholarship to Christ Church Cathedral School in Oxford, one of the crucibles of English church music; he was acknowledged as one of Britain's leading composers for most of his life, commissioned to write music for two coronations; he was knighted in 1951 aged just 49.

Yet Walton's music exists somewhat outside the central English canon. When we think of English music it tends to be Vaughan Williams' larks ascending, or Elgar's pomp and circumstance, or the bleak coastline of Britten's *Peter Grimes*; Walton is always just off to the side.

Writing in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the music Bible, Byron Adams said of Walton that his music "has often been too neatly dismissed by a few descriptive tags: 'bittersweet', 'nostalgic' and, after World War II, 'same as before,'" which Adams argues ignores the variety and creativity of Walton's output.

English cellist Steven Isserlis agrees with that assessment.

"Walton was a truly great composer, I feel, who alas was labelled as 'unfashionable' as he grew older," says Isserlis. "It is entirely to his credit that he refused steadfastly to follow any trends, and continued to produce music in his own, unique voice."

# STEVEN ISSERLIS ON WILLIAM WALTON

Isserlis has been at the forefront of something of a Walton renaissance in recent years. He recorded the Cello Concerto that you hear today in 2016, a recording that won a slew of awards and received widespread acclaim.

"I love it," says Isserlis of the Cello Concerto. "I've often said that for me, the four absolute greatest cello concertos – although there are many other great ones as well – are those by Schumann, Dvořák, Elgar and Walton."

Walton wrote his Cello Concerto in 1957, when he was at the very peak of British music. He had been knighted in 1951, after writing music for the coronations of two separate English monarchs: his *Crown Imperial* march was heard at George VI's and his setting of the *Te Deum* was commissioned for Elizabeth II. Demonstrating his continued impact on British music, both pieces were performed at the coronation of Charles III earlier this year.

The premiere of the Cello Concerto was met with a positive if somewhat dismissive response. One reviewer thought it beautifully written but old-fashioned, describing it as "fine, warm and melodious" but also saying that "what dissonance there is would not alarm an elderly aunt". Another remarked that there was little in the work that would have startled an audience in the year that the Titanic met its iceberg (1912).

This criticism wasn't new for Walton, and in fact he had heard something very similar 20 years earlier upon the premiere of his Violin Concerto, written in 1939 for the great violinist Jascha Heifetz. Many critics wrote that it was overly traditional and too backwards-looking, leading Walton to say in an interview shortly afterwards, "These days it is very sad for a composer to grow old ... I seriously advise all sensitive composers to die at the age of 37. I've gone through the first halcyon period and am just about ripe for my critical damnation."

But Isserlis won't hear a word against the Cello Concerto.

# STEVEN ISSERLIS ON WILLIAM WALTON

“Walton’s concerto is poetic, dramatic, intensely lyrical, and unlike any other concerto – even his own ones for violin and viola,” he says. “It is a deeply romantic work, very accessible but also profound, and quite original.”

It is also a deeply personal work, evoking not only the people in Walton’s life but also the Italian island of Ischia, where he lived from the mid-1950s until his death in 1983.

“It is said that it was a portrait in sound of his relationship with his fiery wife Susanna – I can believe it,” says Isserlis with a smile. “And the opening really does bring to my mind the sound of the sea lapping on the shore of Ischia. Perhaps there is also some sense of the exotic beauty of the island – not least the garden that Susanna created there.”

The Sydney Symphony also has a long relationship with the work. The Orchestra gave the Australian premiere of the concerto at the Adelaide Festival in 1964, with James Whitehead as soloist and Walton himself conducting.

Since then the Orchestra has performed the work several times with a number of celebrated cellists, including Paul Tortelier (conducted by Werner Andreas Albert in 1984), Rafael Wallfisch (with Bryden Thomson, 1990) and Peter Wispelwey (with Jeffrey Tate, 2007); that performance was released on CD and given five stars by *BBC Music Magazine*.

“This performance... is alive at every point,” wrote their reviewer. But 2023 is the first time in more than 15 years that this work will be heard in Sydney.

And how has the passing of the years treated Walton’s concerto? Perhaps we should leave the last word to that same *BBC Music Magazine* reviewer:

“Walton’s Cello Concerto is like a bottle of vintage wine from the composer’s home on the Italian island of Ischia... its warmth, finesse and wry serenity are qualities that appeal all the more as time passes.”

Sounds like just the thing for winter in Sydney!

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**Harry Bennetts**

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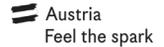
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