

18 & 19 May 2024

JOYCE YANG

PERFORMS GRIEG'S PIANO CONCERTO



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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The 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. 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.

PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate Concertmaster

Alexandra Osborne

Associate Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant Concertmaster

Jennifer Booth

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Robert Smith^o

Benjamin Tjoo^o

Rain Liu^{*}

Tamara Elias^{*}

SECOND VIOLINS

Marina Marsden

Principal

Alice Bartsch

Victoria Bihun

Emma Hayes

Shuti Huang

Monique Irik

Wendy Kong

Benjamin Li

Nicole Masters

Maja Verunica

Marcus Michelsen^o

Emily Qin^o

Riikka Sintonen^o

Dominic Azzi[†]

VIOLAS

Carrie Dennis

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Jane Hazelwood

Graham Hennings

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Felicity Tsai

Leonid Volovelsky

Stephen Wright^o

Dana Lee^{*}

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Kaori Yamagami

Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Timothy Nankervis

Elizabeth Neville

Christopher Pidcock

Adrian Wallis

Eliza Sdraulig^o

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

David Campbell

Dylan Holly

Richard Lynn

Alexandra Elvin[†]

Jennifer Druery^{*}

Jacques Emery^{*}

FLUTES

Emma Sholl

Acting Principal

Carolyn Harris

OBOES

Joshua Oates^{*}

Guest Principal

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Christian Stene^{*}

Guest Principal

Alexander Morris

Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Ben Hoadley^{*}

Guest Principal

Fiona McNamara

HORNS

Guillaume Tétu^{*}

Guest Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

TRUMPETS

David Elton

Principal

Cécile Glémost

TROMBONES

Joshua Davis^{*}

Guest Principal

Nick Byrne

Mitchell Nissen^{*}

Guest Principal

Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé

Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré

Principal

PERCUSSION

Timothy Constable

Jack Peggie[†]

Tim Brigden^{*}

HARP

Natalie Wong^o

Acting Principal Harp

Bold Principal

^{*} Guest Musician

^o Contract Musician

[†] Sydney Symphony

Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

GREAT CLASSICS

Saturday 18 May, 2pm

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Sunday 19 May, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

JOYCE YANG PERFORMS GRIEG'S PIANO CONCERTO EXPANSIVE LANDSCAPES

KEVIN JOHN EDUSEI conductor

JOYCE YANG piano

MISSY MAZZOLI (BORN 1980)

These Worlds In Us (2006)

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.16 (1868)

i. Allegro molto moderato

ii. Adagio –

iii. Allegro moderato molto e marcato

INTERVAL

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

Symphony No.9, Op.95, *From the New World* (1893)

i. Adagio – Allegro molto

ii. Largo

iii. Scherzo (Molto vivace)

iv. Allegro con fuoco

Pre-concert talk

By Paige Gullifer in the
Northern Foyer at 1.15pm.

Estimated durations

Mazzoli – 9 minutes

Grieg – 30 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes

Dvořák – 40 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour
and 50 minutes.

Cover image

Joyce Yang

Photo by KT Kim

Principal Partner



CONCERT DIARY

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or call our Box Office on (02) 8215 4600

MAY 2024

Classics in the City
Thursday 23 May, 7pm
City Recital Hall

NGAPA WILLIAM COOPER

A STORY OF COMPASSION

‘A work of both outstanding musical quality and extraordinary cultural significance’ (*Limelight*).

A rich new collaboration between composer Nigel Westlake, singer/songwriter Lior and language activist Lou Bennett, Ngapa William Cooper is a tribute to the life of Yorta Yorta activist William Cooper, combining Westlake’s signature rich musical palette with moving vocals from Lior and Bennett. Sung in English and Yorta Yorta language, this powerful story celebrates a man who left behind a legacy of resistance, solidarity and empathy.

ARVO PÄRT Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten
NIGEL WESTLAKE Psyche, Concerto for Trumpet and Chamber Orchestra
NIGEL WESTLAKE, LIOR, LOU BENNETT, SARAH GORY Ngapa William Cooper

NIGEL WESTLAKE conductor
LIOR vocals
LOU BENNETT vocals
ANDREA LAM piano
BRENT GRAPES trumpet



JUNE 2024

Emirates Thursday Afternoon
Symphony
Thursday 6 June, 1.30pm
Royal Caribbean
Classics Under the Sails
Friday 7 June, 7pm
Saturday 8 June, 7pm
Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

THE SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA WITH THE AUSTRALIAN STRING QUARTET

A MESMERISING EVOLUTION OF SOUND

In a unique presentation, the superb Australian String Quartet will join the Sydney Symphony to perform the mesmerising *Absolute Jest* by American composer John Adams, a work that takes small fragments of Beethoven’s music and develops them into something new, and newly inspiring.

RAVEL Le Tombeau de Couperin
John ADAMS Absolute Jest
BRAHMS orch. Schoenberg Piano Quartet No.1

ANJA BIHLMAIER conductor
AUSTRALIAN STRING QUARTET
DALE BARLTROP violin
FRANCESCA HIEW violin
CHRISTOPHER CARTLIDGE viola
MICHAEL DAHLENBURG cello



YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

MISSY MAZZOLI (BORN 1980)

These Worlds In Us (2006)

These Worlds in Us is an eight-minute exploration of ‘worlds of intense memory’, beginning with a long sighing violin melody that sometimes swims in a shimmering texture, and breaks into moments of playfulness and contrastingly powerful emotion.

It was composed in 2006, the year the Human Genome Project published the final chromosome sequence, Yogyakarta was hit by a huge earthquake, Pluto demoted from the ranks of the planets.

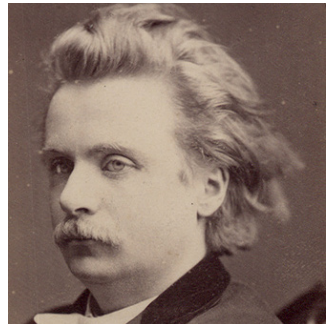


Missy Mazzoli
Photo by Marylene Mey

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.16 (1868)

A three-movement concerto loved by everyone from Tchaikovsky to Schoenberg, Grieg’s piece was composed in 1869. In the same year, the ‘Welcome Stranger’ gold-nugget is discovered in Victoria, the Suez Canal is inaugurated, Tolstoy publishes, Ludwig II of Bavaria begins his great homage to the operas of Wagner, Neuschwanstein Castle.



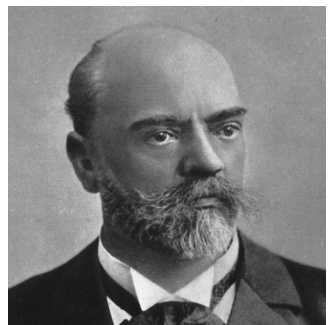
Edvard Grieg as a young man

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

Symphony No.9, Op.95, *From the New World* (1893)

Dvořák’s most popular symphony (and justly so) is entirely original in its material, but puts into practice much of what he believed should come of the cultural melting-pot that was late-19th century America. While not quoting any extant sources he creates a sense of his own Czech heritage, the vastness of the American prairie, and the music of Native- and African-Americans.

Composed in 1893, the year of Verdi’s last opera *Falstaff*, Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé*, Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, works by Toulouse-Lautrec and Cézanne.



Antonín Dvořák

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

KEVIN JOHN EDUSEI conductor

German conductor Kevin John Edusei is sought-after the world over. He is praised repeatedly for the drama and tension that he brings to his music-making, for his attention to detail, sense of architecture, and the fluidity, warmth and insight that he brings to his performances. He is deeply committed to the creative elements of performance, presenting classical music in new formats, cultivating audiences, introducing music by under-represented composers and conducting an eclectic range of repertoire.

In the 2023/24 season Edusei makes his debut with the Los Angeles Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Detroit Symphony and Antwerp Symphony orchestras conducting a range of repertoire including Beethoven, Widmann, Strauss, Mazzoli, Zemlinsky, Moussa, Ravel and a world premiere by Arlene Sierra. He will also return to the Indianapolis Symphony for the opening concert of the season, Cincinnati Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony where he holds the position of Principal Guest Conductor, City of Birmingham Symphony and to the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington DC in a program which includes a world premiere by Adolphus Hailstork and John Adams' *Harmonielehre*.

In recent seasons Edusei has conducted many of the major orchestras across Europe and the United States including the Munich Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, London Symphony, BBC Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Baltimore Symphony and Minnesota orchestras amongst others. He has a long-standing relationship with the Chineke! Orchestra with whom he has appeared several times at London's Royal Festival Hall, and in 2022 he conducted them on a major European Summer festivals tour which included the

closing concert of the Lucerne Festival, performances at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Snape Maltings, Helsinki Festival, and a return to the BBC Proms for a televised performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Edusei is the former Chief Conductor of the Munich Symphony Orchestra and the Bern Opera House.

In Autumn 2022, Edusei made his debut with the Royal Opera House conducting *La bohème*, which was streamed across cinemas world-wide, and he will return in 2023/24 for a production of *Madama Butterfly*. Previously he has conducted at the Semperoper Dresden, English National Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Volksoper Wien and Komische Oper Berlin. During his time as Chief Conductor of Bern Opera House, he led many highly acclaimed new productions including *Peter Grimes*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Salome*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Kátya Kábanová* and a cycle of the Mozart Da-Ponte operas.



Kevin John Edusei
Photo by Marco Borggreve

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JOYCE YANG piano

Blessed with ‘poetic and sensitive pianism’ (*The Washington Post*) and a ‘wondrous sense of color’ (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), Grammy-nominated pianist Joyce Yang captivates audiences with her virtuosity, lyricism, and interpretive sensitivity.

She first came to international attention in 2005 when she won the silver medal at the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The youngest contestant at 19 years old, she took home two additional awards: Best Performance of Chamber Music (with the Takács Quartet), and Best Performance of a New Work.

In the last decade, Yang has blossomed into an ‘astonishing artist’ (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), showcasing her colourful musical personality in solo recitals and collaborations with the world’s top orchestras and chamber musicians through more than 1,000 debuts and re-engagements. She received the 2010 Avery Fisher Career Grant and earned her first Grammy nomination (Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance) for her recording of Franck, Kurtág, Previn & Schumann with violinist Augustin Hadelich ‘One can only sit in misty-eyed amazement at their insightful flair and spontaneity.’ (*The Strad*).

In recent years, Yang has focused on promoting creative ways to introduce classical music to new audiences. She served as the Guest Artistic Director for Laguna Beach Music Festival in California, curating concerts that explore the ‘art-inspires-art’ concept – highlighting the relationship between music and dance while simultaneously curating outreach activities to young students.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Yang received her first piano lesson from her aunt at the age of four. Over the next few years she won several national piano competitions in her native country. By the age of ten, she had entered the School of Music at the Korea National University of Arts, and went on to make a number of concerto and recital appearances in Seoul and Daejeon. In 1997, Yang moved to the United States to begin studies at the pre-college division of The Juilliard School with Dr Yoheved Kaplinsky. During her first year at Juilliard, Yang won the pre-college division Concerto Competition. After winning The Philadelphia Orchestra’s Greenfield Student Competition, she performed Prokofiev’s Third Piano Concerto with that orchestra at just twelve years old. She graduated from Juilliard with special honor as the recipient of the school’s 2010 Arthur Rubinstein Prize, and in 2011 she won its 30th Annual William A Petschek Piano Recital Award. She is a Steinway artist.



Joyce Yang
Photo by KT Kim

ABOUT THE MUSIC

MISSY MAZZOLI (BORN 1980) ***These Worlds In Us* (2006)**

Recently deemed ‘one of the more consistently inventive, surprising composers now working in New York’ (*New York Times*), ‘Brooklyn’s post-millennial Mozart’ (*Time Out New York*), and praised for her ‘apocalyptic imagination’ (Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*), Missy Mazzoli has had her music performed by the Kronos Quartet, LA Opera, eighth blackbird, the BBC Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, Scottish Opera and many others. In 2018 she became, along with Jeanine Tesori, one of the first women to receive a main stage commission from the Metropolitan Opera, and was nominated for a Grammy award in the category of ‘Best Classical Composition’. She is currently the Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and from 2012–2015 was Composer-in-Residence with Opera Philadelphia. Her 2018 opera *Proving Up*, created with long-time collaborator

librettist Royce Vavrek and based on a short story by Karen Russell, is a surreal commentary on the American dream. It was commissioned and premiered by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and Miller Theatre, and was deemed ‘harrowing... a true opera for its time’ by the *Washington Post*. Her 2016 opera *Breaking the Waves*, commissioned by Opera Philadelphia and Beth Morrison Projects, was called ‘one of the best 21st-century American operas yet’ by *Opera News*. *Breaking the Waves* received its European premiere at the 2019 Edinburgh Festival; future performances are planned at LA Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and the Adelaide Festival. Her next opera, *The Listeners*, premiered in 2021 at the Norwegian National Opera and Opera Philadelphia. In 2016, Missy and composer Ellen Reid founded Luna Lab, a mentorship program for young female composers created in partnership with the Kaufman Music Center. Her works are published by G. Schirmer.



Missy Mazzoli
Photo by Marylene Mey

ABOUT THE MUSIC



The poet James Tate, photographed by Elsa Dorfman in 1965.

The composer writes:

The title *These Worlds In Us* comes from James Tate's 1967 poem *The Lost Pilot*, a meditation on his father's death in World War II:

(excerpt)

My head cocked towards the sky,
I cannot get off the ground,
and you, passing over again,

fast, perfect and unwilling
to tell me that you are doing
well, or that it was a mistake

that placed you in that world,
and me in this; or that misfortune
placed these worlds in us.

This piece is dedicated to my father, who was a soldier during the Vietnam War. In talking to him it occurred to me that, as we grow older, we accumulate worlds of intense memory within us, and that grief is often not far from joy. I like the idea that music can reflect painful and blissful sentiments in a single note or gesture, and sought to create a sound palette that I hope is at once completely new and strangely familiar to the listener. The theme of this work, a mournful line first played by the violins, collapses into glissandos almost immediately after it appears, giving the impression that the piece has been submerged under water or played on a turntable that is grinding to a halt. The melodicas (mouth organs) played by the percussionists in the opening and final gestures mimic the wheeze of a broken accordion, lending a particular vulnerability to the bookends of the work. The rhythmic structures and cyclical nature of the piece are inspired by the unique tension and logic of Balinese music, and the march-like figures in the percussion bring to mind the militaristic inspiration for the work as well as the relentless energy of electronic drum beats.

These Worlds In Us is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, two trombones and tuba; three percussionists, harp and strings.

It was premiered by the Yale Philharmonia on 1 March 2006, with its first professional performance on 1 December of that year, with Osmo Vänskä conducting the Minnesota Orchestra.

This is the first time that the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has performed this work.

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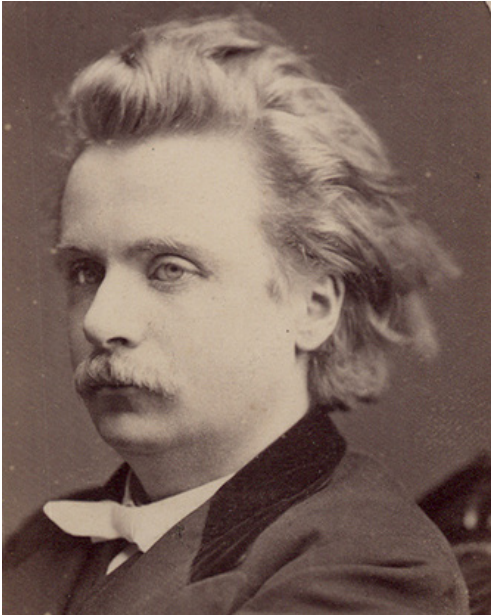
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ABOUT THE MUSIC

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.16 (1868)



The young Edvard Grieg

After hearing a performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto, Arnold Schoenberg is supposed to have remarked: 'That's the kind of music I'd really like to write'. It wouldn't have been the first time that Schoenberg's facetious humour was apparent, but one can't help but feel that there was a wistful sincerity buried in the remark. Schoenberg, after all, believed that his experiments, first in atonality and later the twelve-note serial method were forced upon him by historical destiny rather than being the result of his own wishes. He also remarked that there was 'still plenty of good music to be written in C major' and his last word was according to legend, 'Harmony!' Grieg's concerto, while not in C major, is in its close relative A minor, and is certainly full of good music. And it is, with good reason, popular – a fate not enjoyed by Schoenberg's music.

Grieg himself was not so sure however. He composed the concerto at the age of 25 while on holiday in Denmark with his wife and young child, and he was at that stage relatively inexperienced in orchestral writing. In fact the only orchestral works dating from his early life are an 'Ouverture' which has been lost, and a Symphony in C minor which is hardly ever heard. Grieg tinkered endlessly with the orchestration of his concerto between the time of the work's (triumphant) premiere and his death in 1907.

Grieg had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory from the age of 15 with the initial intent of becoming a concert pianist. Dissatisfied with his first teacher, Grieg began lessons with EF Wenzel, a friend and supporter of Robert Schumann's; under his tutelage Grieg began writing piano music for his own performances and wrote passionate articles in defence of Schumann's music.

The influence of Schumann's Piano Concerto, also in A minor, on Grieg's work has been remarked on frequently, but apart from their similar three-movement design and opening gesture (in both works a full tutti chord of A minor releases a florid response from the keyboard soloist) the style of each is markedly different. Both composers were, however, primarily lyricists, and Grieg's Concerto is certainly replete with exquisite tunes. Many of these echo some of the shapes of Norwegian folk music with which Grieg had become deeply familiar in 1864, when he had become active in a society for the support of Scandinavian music. The piano's opening gesture, for instance, recalls folk music in its use of a 'gapped' scale, and the origins of the finale in folk dance are clear.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Grieg was unable to attend the premiere of his concerto in Copenhagen in 1869, but it was an outstanding success, no doubt in part because Grieg's cultivation of folk music struck a chord with the increasingly nationalist Scandinavian audiences. But in large part it was because the concerto was recognised as a youthful masterpiece. No less an artist than Anton Rubinstein, who attended the performance, described it as a 'work of genius'. A year later Grieg and his wife travelled to Italy where Grieg met Liszt for the second time. Liszt had been encouraging of Grieg's work some time before; now he allegedly sight-read Grieg's concerto and said 'you have the real stuff in you. And don't ever let them frighten you!'

Grieg didn't let them frighten him, and the Piano Concerto went on to establish his reputation throughout the musical world. Audiences responded, as they still do, to the charm of Grieg's melodies, the balance of (it must be said) Lisztian virtuosity and Grieg's own distinctive lyricism, and what Tchaikovsky, who adored the work, described as the work's 'fascinating melancholy which seems to reflect in itself all the beauty of Norwegian scenery'.



Grieg at the piano

One of Grieg's greatest admirers described the 'concentrated greatness and all-lovingness of the little great man. Out of the toughest Norwegianness, out of the most narrow localness, he spreads out a welcoming and greedy mind for all the world's wares'. This was the Australian-born pianist/composer Percy Grainger who became one of the Grieg Concerto's most celebrated exponents and one of the dearest friend of Grieg's last years. Not only that – Grainger spent time with Grieg working on the concerto before the composer's death, at which time Grieg was making the final adjustments to the orchestration; with such 'inside knowledge' Grainger was able to publish his own edition of the work in later years. Sadly, a proposed tour with Grieg conducting and Grainger playing the Concerto never transpired.

Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets and three trombones; timpani, strings and piano soloist.

The work was premiered in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 3 April 1869, with Holger Simon Paulli conducting and Edmund Neupert as soloist.

The Sydney Symphony's first complete performance of the work occurred in July 1938, with Georg Szell conducting Raymond Lambert; Szell conducted the work again the following year, this time with Laurence G Smith as soloist. Other notable performances include those conducted by Eugene Goossens with Eileen Joyce (May 1948); a Schools Orchestral Concert with Bernard Henize conducting Richard Bonyngne in the first movement (Nov. 1948); Goossens with Raymond Fisher (1955 NSW Regional Tour); Charles Mackerras with Julius Katchen (January 1963); John Hopkins with Percy Grainger (June 1978); Adam Fischer with Peter Jablonski (March 1994); Emmanuel Villaume with Leif Ove Andsnes (March 2002); Manuel Lopez-Garcia with Lang Lang (June 2016) and David Robertson with Kirill Gerstein (August 2019). Also notable were performances with Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting Evgeny Kissin, both in Sydney and on tour to Japan (November 2011), and our current Chief Conductor Simone Young conducting Jon Kimura Parker in just her second appearance with the Orchestra in August 1996.

The Orchestra's most recent performance was in June 2021, with Nicholas Carter conducting Piers Lane.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Symphony No.9, Op.95,
***From the New World* (1893)**



Antonín Dvořák

Dvořák composed his ninth and last symphony in New York between January and May 1893. As his American-born secretary Josef Kovařík was about to deliver the score to the conductor of the first performance, Anton Seidl, Dvořák suddenly wrote on the title page, in Czech, ‘From the New World’. That expression had been used in a welcome speech following his arrival in New York the previous September, reflecting the Christopher Columbus quadricentenary: ‘The New World of Columbus and the New World of Music’. Kovařík said the inscription was just ‘the Master’s little joke’; but the ‘joke’ has, ever since, begged the question: how American is the *New World* Symphony?

Dvořák could have written his ‘New World’ inscription, as in the welcome speech, in English. By writing it in Czech he was seen to be addressing the work, like a picture postcard, to his compatriots back in Europe. At the same time he challenged listeners to identify depictions of America or elements of American music. Either way, the composer was seen to be meeting the desire of his employer, Mrs Jeannette Thurber, for music which might be identified as American.

Mrs Thurber had persuaded Dvořák to become director of her National Conservatory of Music in New York – the most eminent composer ever to take a teaching position in the USA. Besides teaching students from a wide spectrum of society, including women and people of colour, he found he was expected to show Americans how to create a national music. So, controversially and perhaps naively, in a country which had not forgotten the Civil War, the egalitarian Dvořák told Americans they would find their future music in their roots, whether native or immigrant, and in particular the songs of the African-Americans.

From his familiarity with gypsies in Europe, Dvořák had famously composed a set of *Gypsy Melodies* (including ‘Songs my mother taught me’), and was thus receptive when introduced soon after his arrival to the songs of the African-Americans – the sorrow songs and spiritual songs of the plantation. As a devout man of humble rural origins, he responded to the pathos and religious fervour of the poor.

He told the *New York Herald* that the two middle movements of his new symphony were inspired by Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, a work he had long ago read in Czech and which Mrs Thurber was now suggesting for an opera. The famous slow movement, he said, was inspired by Hiawatha’s wooing of Minnehaha and the *Scherzo* by dancing at the wedding feast. Without using Native American melodies, he claimed to have given the *Scherzo* ‘the local colour of Indian music’ – an effect probably limited to repetitive rhythms and primitive harmonies.

At the same time, *The New York Daily Tribune*, reporting an extensive interview with the composer, declared that America’s ‘most characteristic, most beautiful and most vital’ folksong came ‘from the negro slaves of the South’,



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ABOUT THE MUSIC

adding that ‘if there is anything Indian about Dr Dvořák’s symphony it is only in the mood...of Indian legend and romance.’

On superficial acquaintance, Dvořák found that ‘the music of the Negroes and of the Indians was practically identical.’ But he took care to speak only in generalities as the debate, with all its good publicity, flourished.

As music, the *New World* Symphony is entirely characteristic of its composer (the ‘simple Czech musician’ he liked to style himself) and owes nothing to any specific ‘borrowings’ from the indigenous or African-American musics Dvořák encountered in the New World. The *ersatz*-spiritual *Goin’ home* was actually arranged from Dvořák’s *Largo* movement by one of his students, not the other way around.

There were strong non-musical impressions of America which doubtless crowded the composer’s mind as he worked on the symphony: the frenetic bustle of New York, the seething cauldron of humanity in the metropolis, and the simple folk caught up in the impersonal whirl – the African-Americans, the indigenous Americans, the immigrant poor. The surging flow and swiftly changing moods of the outer movements perhaps reflect these images. The vast, desolate prairies Dvořák found ‘sad unto despair’, and this may be felt to underpin the deep yearning of the *Largo* (together with the composer’s own homesickness for his native Bohemia). As if to emphasise his personal longing for home, Dvořák uses a Czech dance as the central trio section of the third movement.

Musical ideas recur in the *New World* Symphony, like familiar faces in a crowd, to link the symphonic structure. The two main themes of the first movement are

recalled in festive mood in the *Largo*, at the brassy climax of the famous melody first stated by the cor anglais. They figure again in the coda of the *Scherzo*, the first theme (somewhat disguised) also making three appearances earlier in the movement. The main themes of both middle movements recur in the development section of the finale, and the main themes of all three preceding movements are reviewed in the final coda. There, a brief dialogue between the themes of the first and last movements is cut short by a conventional cadence, spiced by unexpected wind colouring in the last chord of all.

Antonin Dvorak’s *New World* Symphony is scored for two flutes (the second doubling piccolo), two oboes (the second doubling cor anglais), two clarinets and two bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion and strings.

It was premiered at Carnegie Hall on 16 December 1893, with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Anton Seidl.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s first performance of this work was under conductor Georg Szell in June 1938. Other notable performances include those led by Bernard Heinze (May 1943); Henry Krips (Nov 1946); Rafael Kubelik (June 1949, Aug 1964); Alceo Galliera (June 1950); Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt (Aug 1956); János Ferencsik (Nov 1974); Jose Serebrier (Jan 1983); Jiří Bělohlávek (Feb 1991); Jorge Mester (Sept 1992); Adam Fischer (March 1994); Sir Charles Mackerras (Oct 2003); Mark Wigglesworth (Oct 2011) and Jessica Cottis (Nov 2013), as well as those led by then-Chief Conductors Eugene Gossens (April 1948, and the 1952 & 1953 NSW Regional Tours); Nicolai Malko (Nov. 1958, April 1959, May 1961); Moshe Atzmon (April 1969); Dean Dixon (Sept. 1975); Willem van Otterloo (April 1978); Louis Fremaux (July 1980 and June 1984); Challender (July 1987) and Gianluigi Gelmetti (April 2005).

The Orchestra’s most recent performances were in February 2021, conducted by then-Chief Conductor Designate Simone Young.

Notes by Missy Mazzoli © 2006, Gordon Kerry (Grieg © 2006), Anthony Cane (Dvořák © 1980/2003). Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson 2024.

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support from Brian Abel*



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Dylan Holly



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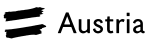


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