

17 & 18 October 2024



GEORGE GERSHWIN'S

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

“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 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

Harry Bennetts
Associate Concertmaster
Alexandra Osborne
Associate Concertmaster
Lerida Delbridge
Assistant Concertmaster
Fiona Ziegler
Assistant Concertmaster
Sophie Cole
Sercan Danis
Claire Herrick
Emily Long
Alexandra Mitchell
Alexander Norton
Léone Ziegler
Benjamin Tjødø
Rain Liu[†]

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton
Principal
Marina Marsden
Principal
Emma Jezek
Assistant Principal
Victoria Bihun
Acting Assistant Principal
Emma Hayes
Shuti Huang
Monique Irik
Wendy Kong
Benjamin Li
Nicole Masters
Marcus Michelsen^o
Riikka Sintonen^o

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider
Principal
Richard Waters^o
Principal
Justin Williams
Assistant Principal
Sandro Costantino
Rosemary Curtin
Jane Hazelwood
Stuart Johnson
Justine Marsden
Felicity Tsai

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill
Principal
Kaori Yamagami
Principal
Simon Cobcroft
Associate Principal
Leah Lynn
Assistant Principal
Kristy Conrau
Fenella Gill
Timothy Nankervis
Elizabeth Neville
Christopher Pidcock
Adrian Wallis

DOUBLE BASSES

Alex Henery
Principal
David Campbell
Dylan Holly
Richard Lynn
Jaan Pallandi
Benjamin Ward

FLUTES

Emma Sholl
Acting Principal
Carolyn Harris
Jérémie Abergel*
Guest Principal Piccolo

OBOES

Shefali Pryor
Acting Principal
Miriam Cooney^{o†}
Alexandre Oguey
Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Francesco Celata
Acting Principal
Alexander Morris
Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Matt Ockenden*
Guest Principal
Fiona McNamara
Noriko Shimada
Principal Contrabassoon

HORNS

Nicolas Fleury*
Guest Principal
Marnie Sebire
Rachel Silver
Emily Newham^o

TRUMPETS

Brent Grapes
Associate Principal
Cécile Glémot
Anthony Heinrichs

TROMBONES

Scott Kinmont
Acting Principal
Nick Byrne
Christopher Harris
Principal Bass Trombone

TUBA

Steve Rossé
Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré
Principal

PERCUSSION

Mark Robinson
Associate Principal Timpani
/ Section Percussion
Timothy Constable
Jack Peggie[†]

HARP

Louisic Dulbecco
Principal

KEYBOARDS / EXTRAS

Catherine Davis*
Guest Principal Piano
Christina Leonard*
Guest Principal
Alto Saxophone
James Nightingale^o
Tenor Saxophone
Nicholas Russiello^{*}
Baritone Saxophone
Bold Principal
* Guest Musician
o Contract Musician
† Sydney Symphony Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

Symphony Hour

Thursday 17 October, 7pm

Tea & Symphony

Friday 18 October, 11am

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

GEORGE GERSHWIN'S AN AMERICAN IN PARIS THE ROARING TWENTIES

UMBERTO CLERICI conductor & presenter

KONSTANTIN SHAMRAY piano

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Pulcinella – Suite (1922)

- i. Sinfonia
- ii. Serenata
- iii. Scherzino – Allegro – Andantino
- iv. Tarantella
- v. Toccata
- vi. Gavotta con due variazioni
- vii. Duetto
- viii. Menuetto – Finale

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 –1937)

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1930)

- i. Lento –
- ii. Andante –
- iii. Allegro –
- iv. Tempo primo

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)

An American in Paris (1928)

Pre-concert talk

By Miranda Ilchev in
the Northern Foyer at
6.15pm (Thursday)

Estimated durations

Stravinsky – 24 minutes

Ravel – 19 minutes

Gershwin – 16 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour

Cover image

Illustration by Rebecca Shaw

Principal Partner



YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Pulcinella – Suite (1922)

This suite is drawn from a slightly longer ballet-score that Stravinsky crafted from music thought to be by the Italian Baroque composer, Giovanni Pergolesi. Its short movements, suitable for character dances, represent the adventures of Pulcinella, aka Punchinello, aka Mr Punch, a character of some antiquity.

The ballet premiered in 1920 (the suite came two years later), the year that Prohibition started in the USA, the German Workers Party changed its name to the National Socialists, and the airline later known as Qantas was founded.

Contemporary music included Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, Milhaud's *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, and Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*.



Stravinsky in the early 1920s.
Photo by Bain News Service.
Source: George Grantham Bain
Collection (United States Library
of Congress).

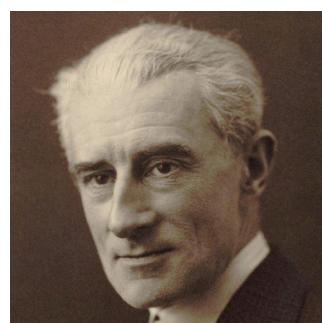
MAURICE RAVEL (1875 –1937)

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1930)

Composed for Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm in World War I, Ravel's concerto is in one movement that begins in the depths of the orchestra, passing through various (often jazz-inspired) episodes and, after a massive solo cadenza, reaches a shattering finale.

It premiered in 1932, the year that saw Germany's first *Autobahn*, the election of Franklin D Roosevelt, and the establishment of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Contemporary music included Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Schoenberg's *Moses and Aaron*, and Percy Grainger's *Handel in the Strand*.



Ravel in 1925. Source: Bibliothèque
nationale de France.

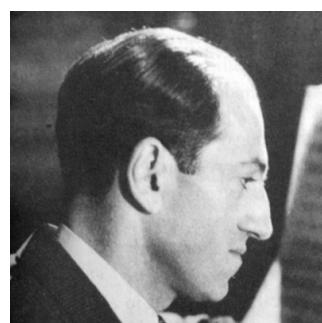
GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)

An American in Paris (1928)

Gershwin's single-movement 'rhapsodic ballet' was inspired by his own trip to Paris in 1928, and the work appeared in New York at the end of that year. It depicts the noise of Parisian traffic and the exuberance of its street life, moment of homesick introspection, and a resumption of energy to conclude.

In 1928 the Japanese Emperor Hirohito was enthroned, Opus Dei was founded, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service made its first official flight.

Contemporary music included Bartók's String Quartet No.4, Brecht and Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and Ravel's *Bolero*.



Gershwin at the piano, 1935.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

UMBERTO CLERICI conductor

After a career spanning more than 20 years as a gifted cello soloist and orchestral musician, Umberto Clerici is widely regarded for his seamless transition to the podium now as an acclaimed conductor. The 2024 season will mark Clerici's second as Chief Conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra in addition to being a frequent guest with several leading orchestras.

Umberto began his career as a virtuoso cellist making his solo debut at the age of 17 performing Haydn's D Major cello concerto in Japan. After years of performing on the stages of the world's most prestigious concert halls, Umberto took up the position as Principal Cello of the Teatro Regio di Torino following which he was Principal Cello of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra from 2014 to 2021.

It was in Sydney in 2018 that Umberto made his conducting debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the Sydney Opera House. Following a swift trajectory of prestigious conducting engagements, Umberto is now in high demand with the major symphony orchestras throughout Australia and New Zealand.

In addition to his role as Chief Conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Umberto's 2024 conducting engagements include returns to the podiums of the Melbourne and West Australian Symphony Orchestras, together with a three-concert series with the Sydney Symphony, *Symphony Hour*, that Umberto himself has expertly curated. Other recent highlights include his debut with the Tasmania Symphony and a hugely successful debut in opera conducting Verdi's *Macbeth* with Opera Queensland.

Upcoming European conducting engagements in early 2024 include Elgar's Cello Concerto with Steven Isserlis for the

Volksoper Vienna, Orchestra del Teatro Massimo in Palermo and Orchestra Regionale Toscana.

As a cellist, Umberto is beloved by audiences worldwide, having performed internationally as a soloist at New York's Carnegie Hall, Vienna's Musikverein, the great Shostakovich Hall of St Petersburg, Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome and at the Salzburg Festival, and is one of only two Italians to have ever won a prize for cello in the prestigious International Tchaikovsky Competition.

Umberto plays cellos by Matteo Goffriller (made in 1722, Venezia) and Carlo Antonio Testore (made in 1758, Milano).



Photo by Queensland Symphony Orchestra/David Kelly.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

KONSTANTIN SHAMRAY piano

Described as an exhilarating performer with faultless technique and fearless command of the piano, Australian based pianist Konstantin Shamray enjoys performing on an international level with the world's leading orchestras and concert presenters.

In 2008, Konstantin burst onto the concert scene when he won First Prize at the Sydney International Piano Competition. He is the first and only competitor in the 40 years of the competition to win both First and People's Choice Prizes, in addition to six other prizes. He then went on to win First Prize at the 2011 Klavier Olympiade in Bad Kissingen, Germany, and was awarded the festival's coveted Luitpold Prize for 'outstanding musical achievements'.

Since then, Konstantin has performed extensively throughout the world. In Australia recent and future highlights include engagements with the Sydney Symphony (with Umberto Clerici) West Australia Symphony (with Dmitry Matvienko) Dunedin Symphony (with Umberto Clerici) and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (with Andrew Litton), the latter of which he enjoys a special relationship with. Konstantin has also enjoyed highly successful consecutive season national tours with Musica Viva with players of ANAM directed by Sophie Rowell, and most recently with Avi Avital. Outside of Australia he has performed with the Russian National Philharmonic, the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Moscow Virtuosi, Orchestre National de Lyon, Prague Philharmonia, Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra and the Calgary Philharmonic.

Chamber music plays a strong role in Konstantin's musical career and collaborations include engagements with the Australian String Quartet, Richard Tognetti, Satu Vanska, Li-Wei Qin,

Kristian Winther, Jeroens Berwaerts, Kristof Barati and Andreas Brantelid to name a few. He is a firm favourite at the UKARIA Cultural Centre appearing frequently each season. Konstantin is also a regular guest artist at the Adelaide Festival, the International Piano Series, the Melbourne Recital Centre and with Piano+.

Konstantin was recently appointed Senior Lecturer in Piano at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.



Photo by Claudio Raschella.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS IGOR STRAVINSKY?

Stravinsky was born into a St Petersburg family in 1882. In 1909 he met the Ballet Russes' impresario Sergei Diaghilev, who commissioned *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. Stravinsky commuted between Russia and the French capital until 1914, but from then until 1920 lived in exile in Switzerland.

This early 'Russian' period concludes more or less around 1917-18, when the composer reached a creative impasse. With the end of the First World War, Diaghilev was keen to resume performances in Paris, and asked Stravinsky to compose a new ballet based on works (somewhat inaccurately) attributed to 18th-century composer, Giovanni Pergolesi.

Pulcinella ushers in the 30-year period that produced those works generally labelled 'neoclassical'. Stravinsky stayed in Paris until the late 1930s.

He paid homage to the Greek god most associated with 'classicism' in the 1928 ballet *Apollon musagète*, and explored the world of 'classical' mythology in the opera/oratorio *Oedipus Rex* the previous year. His revived Christian faith contributes to the *Symphony of Psalms*, written in 1930.

The mid-1930s saw the composition of his Violin Concerto and the ballet *Jeu de cartes*, and at this time Stravinsky made an increasing number of visits to the United States for concerts and lectures. A new life in the United States beckoned, and the last work he completed in Europe was the American Baroque *Dumbarton Oaks*.



Stravinsky in the early 1920s. Photo by Bain News Service. Source: George Grantham Bain Collection (United States Library of Congress).

Stravinsky spent much time conducting his own work on tour, increasingly aided by Robert Craft, who would become an indispensable assistant. The largest, and concluding, work of the neo-classical period, written with librettists WH Auden and Chester Kallman, was *The Rake's Progress* (completed in 1951), a neo-Mozartian opera set in the hell of 18th century London as seen in the paintings of William Hogarth. His 1928 ballet *The Fairy's Kiss* is a love affair with the music of Tchaikovsky, where the identity of the two composers fuses so perfectly that it is often hard to tell who is arranging whom.

After the 1951 death of Arnold Schoenberg, Stravinsky began to explore the musical system of what had always seemed the rival camp. Twelve-note serial techniques emerge in parts of such works as the completely abstract ballet *Agon* and the *Canticum sacrum*, written for St Mark's, Venice; from *Threni* of 1958, serial method underpins whole works.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT PULCINELLA

With World War I over, Sergei Diaghilev reassembled the Ballets Russes in London and tried to entice back Stravinsky who had composed their Paris hits *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. But Diaghilev was not interested in the works Stravinsky had written in Switzerland during the war – *The Soldier's Tale* or *Renard*. Nor could he yet stage *Les Noces* (The Wedding) because Stravinsky was still struggling to find the right instrumentation.

Diaghilev and his choreographer Léonid Massine had been toying with the idea of a Pergolesi ballet for some time. They knew of the recent success of Italian composer Vincenzo Tommasini with *The Good-Humoured Ladies*, based on music of Scarlatti, and they had in mind Manuel de Falla as a possible composer. One day in Paris in 1919, Diaghilev took Stravinsky for a walk.

'I have an idea that I think will amuse you more than anything [your Alpine] colleagues can propose,' he said. He proposed that Stravinsky orchestrate the music of Pergolesi.

Stravinsky thought he must be 'deranged'. He knew little of Pergolesi's music except the *Stabat mater* and the opera buffa *La serva padrona*, neither of which interested him.

But Diaghilev made available to Stravinsky copies of 18th-century works found in Italian conservatories and the British Museum.

Not all the music was actually by Pergolesi. There were trio sonatas by Domenico Gallo and keyboard suites by Ignazio Monza among the sources. But Stravinsky fell in love with the material almost straightaway. Diaghilev had won his agreement.

Diaghilev suggested an old plot which involved Pulcinella, the hero of the Neapolitan *commedia dell'arte*:

All the girls love Pulcinella. Their jealous fiancés plot to kill him. They think they've succeeded and, disguising themselves in Pulcinella costumes, present themselves to their girlfriends. But Pulcinella had only swapped places with his friend Fourbo, who pretended to succumb to the boys' blows. Now the real Pulcinella pretends to be a magician and resuscitates Fourbo. When the four young men come to claim their sweethearts, Pulcinella appears and arranges marriages for them. He himself weds Pimpinella, receiving the blessing of Fourbo, who has now assumed the disguise of the magician.



A 19th-century drawing of Pulcinella

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Stravinsky realised that this plot would require careful selection from the original sources in order to come up with suitable dance numbers. At first he looked for rhythmic music, but later realised that 18th-century music made little distinction between rhythmic and melodic numbers. It also made sense for him to write for a small orchestra, reminiscent of those in the Classical era. The strings were divided into a *concertino* (solo) and *ripieno* (orchestral) group. And critic Eric Walter White observes that, 'In the absence of percussion, brilliant effects are obtained by using dry instrumental timbres to point and emphasise the metrical structure.' Stravinsky's scoring was particularly skilful and varied; each movement composed for a different set of instrumental colours. The numbers from Pergolesi's operas *Flaminio*, *Lo frate 'nnamorato* and *Adriano in Siria* required singers, but they were not to be identified with any character on stage, and are not heard in the suite.

But was this a case of arrangement or re-orchestration? The advertisements for the first performance, 15 May 1920, billed the work as 'Pulcinella. Music of Pergolesi, arranged and orchestrated by Igor Strawinsky'. According to Stravinsky, he 'recomposed' the 18th-century material so that it became his. He began, he said, by writing on the manuscripts as if correcting a work of his own. While retaining the original melodies and bass contours, he broke up their formal symmetry, and gave the harmony a sparer, Stravinskian quality, though not the dissonant level of *The Rite of Spring*. He used ostinatos and prolonged harmonies to alter the 18th-century harmonic rhythm.

The score for the ballet consists of nineteen numbers. For the concert suite (1922) Stravinsky selected eleven of these and made eight movements out of them.

Stravinsky later admitted that working on *Pulcinella* gave him a new appreciation of 18th-century Western music. Unable to return to Russia now that the Bolsheviks had taken over, he found a new melos within Western roots. *Pulcinella* was the looking glass through which the composer of *The Rite of Spring* stepped into a new world of neo-classicism.

The suite that Stravinsky extracted from his ballet *Pulcinella* is scored for two flutes (the second doubling piccolo), two oboes and two bassoons; two horns, one trumpet, one trombone and strings, including a solo string quintet.

The suite was premiered on 22 December 1922 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pierre Monteux.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the suite in September 1952, led by Chief Conductor Sir Eugene Goossens, though our most notable performance of the work was in November 1961, when the nearly 80 year-old Stravinsky visited Australia for a number of concerts – though much of the conducting was done by his assistant, American conductor Robert Craft.

Other performances include those led by Willem van Otterloo (1972); Elyakum Shapirra (1976); Louis Frémaux (1984); Stuart Challender (1985); Richard Gill (2002 & 2010 *Discovery* concerts); Bruno Weil (2002) and Dene Olding (2005).

Our most recent performance was on our 2013 Regional Tour to Canberra and Albury, led by Jessica Cottis.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Robert Craft and Igor Stravinsky rehearse with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in the ABC's Kings Cross studio, November 1961. Source: ABC Archives.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

1961 – STRAVINSKY IN SYDNEY

In November 1961, Igor Stravinsky – widely considered the greatest-living composer at the time – travelled to Australia with his wife Vera and his personal assistant and musical collaborator, the conductor Robert Craft. The then 80-year-old composer presented two concerts: one with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at Sydney Town Hall, and one with the Victorian Symphony Orchestra (as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra was then called) at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda.

The photo above captures a scene at rehearsal, with Craft conducting and Stravinsky supervising and providing some pointed feedback. The *Sydney Morning Herald* at the time quoted the Orchestra's Concertmaster Ernest Llewellyn, who said, 'This is the most testing experience any of us have had. But Mr Stravinsky has been most kind, and very helpful to us.'

In the Sydney concert, Stravinsky conducted *Pulcinella*, his Symphony in Three Movements and *The Firebird*. In his review of the performance, the great Roger Covell observed that the musicians were 'obviously suffering to some extent from nervous tension', but that Stravinsky's presence elevated the concert beyond a routine performance and into something greater.



Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft meeting the locals on their 1961 tour of Australia. Source: ABC Archives.

The tremendous applause that greeted his small, entirely unostentatious figure as [Stravinsky] made his way onto the platform was not merely the homage paid to any person of enormous celebrity. It was for many people an opportunity to express their thanks to a man who has permanently altered and enlarged the horizons of music.

Roger Covell, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November, 1961

Many years later, the *Herald* interviewed our former Concertmaster Donald Hazelwood, who performed as a member of the violin section – you can see him on the far right of the rehearsal photo. He told Harriet Cunningham, 'It was a tremendous occasion. For someone of that stature as a composer, and as a musical identity in the world, to come to Australia was really special. He was a frail person but he emanated something special.'

Don't miss the Sydney Symphony performing Stravinsky's iconic *The Rite of Spring* this November 27-30, conducted by Vasily Petrenko, the celebrated music director of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Tickets from sydneysymphony.com, or call our box office on 8215 4600.



ABOUT THE MUSIC

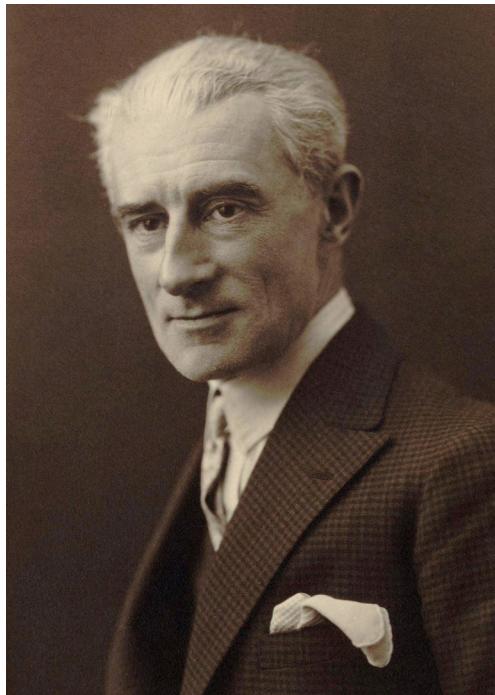
WHO WAS MAURICE RAVEL?

In some exasperation, Ravel once asked a friend, ‘Doesn’t it ever occur to those people that I can be “artificial” by nature?’ He was responding to the criticism that his music was more interested in technique than expression. There is some truth in the charge: Stravinsky described him – affectionately – as the ‘Swiss watchmaker of music’, and Ravel’s stated aim was indeed ‘technical perfection’. In fact, his love of mechanical intricacy led Ravel to collect various automata and other small machines, and he dreamed, as he put it in a 1933 article, of ‘Finding Tunes in Factories’.

His passion for precision and order was also in evidence in his fastidious, even dandyish, appearance, but he was a man of great courage. In the First World War, despite being 39 years old, short and underweight, he cared for the wounded and after some months became a military truck driver. With his truck, ‘Adelaïde’, he faced a number of dangers, and for the rest of his life suffered terrible insomnia. (This experience may also have contributed to the debilitating aphasia of his last years when he could no longer write his own name, let alone the music which still rang in his head). His great Piano Trio, written during the War, puts paid to any idea that Ravel’s music lacks an emotional heart.

Also during the war he stood against the chauvinistic Committee of the National League for the Defence of French Music, which proposed to ban performances of German and Austrian music. In 1909 he helped to found the Société Musicale Indépendante – independent, that is, of the Parisian musical and academic establishment – and its inaugural concert saw the premiere of the first version, for piano duo, of his *Mother Goose Suite*.

Ravel’s works are, frequently, exquisite simulacra of existing styles and forms. In his *Tombeau de Couperin*, twentieth



Ravel in 1925. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

century piano music pays a genuine homage to the baroque suite and keyboard style of the earlier French master. His *Shéhérazade* songs evoke a typical early-20th century view of Asia where orchestration and subject matter relate directly to Russian music, especially that of Rimsky-Korsakov. His most famous piano piece, the *Pavane for a dead Infanta*, resurfaces a gracious renaissance dance, tinged with his beloved Spanish idiom.

Ravel was born in south-western France to a Basque mother and Swiss father but spent his entire life in Paris. Like Tchaikovsky, he saw a strong connection between childhood and enchantment. In his opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* a destructive child learns the value of compassion when furniture, trees and animals in the garden all come magically to life. The evocation of ‘the poetry of childhood’ in the original piano duo version of *Mother Goose* led Ravel to ‘simplify my style and refine my means of expression’.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

THE CONCERTO FOR THE LEFT HAND

Having lost his right arm in combat during the First World War, pianist Paul Wittgenstein, with characteristic single-mindedness, set about commissioning concerto-style works for left hand alone. The composers who he commissioned include Richard Strauss, Benjamin Britten, Paul Hindemith and Sergei Prokofiev, but the most enduring is Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand.

Ravel worked on both of his piano concertos in 1930 and 1931, which he described as:

an interesting experience. The one on which I shall appear as the interpreter [the concerto in G major] is a concerto in the true sense of the word: I mean that it is written very much in the same spirit as those of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. The music of a concerto should, in my opinion, be light-hearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects...The concerto for left hand alone is very different. It contains many jazz effects, and the writing is not so light. In a work of this kind, it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands. For the same reason, I resorted to a style that is much nearer to that of the more solemn kind of traditional concerto.

The two works differ markedly: the G major is, as Ravel says, in three movements and behaves much like a classical – that is, Mozartian – concerto, with energetic and lightly scored outer movements framing a slow movement of restrained pathos. The D major Left Hand Concerto, by contrast, is in one movement, though it falls into two main sections, and is much more given to heroic brilliance and almost Romantic excess.

Not enough for Wittgenstein, however, who complained about various things and took it upon himself to make



Paul Wittgenstein

wholesale changes to the score. Ravel as it happens was unable to attend the premiere in Vienna in January 1932 (he was touring the 'other' concerto with pianist Marguerite Long) so only heard Wittgenstein's 'amendments' at a private play-through at the French Embassy in Vienna later that month. Hearing Wittgenstein's additions, cuts and translations of material from orchestra to piano, Ravel was appalled, and the very public fight that ensued led to him demanding a contract that Wittgenstein would play the score only as written. Wittgenstein gave some ground, insisting that after long study he now realised what a 'great work...astounding' it was, but despite a public rapprochement, Ravel was happy to give the performing rights to another pianist minutes after his agreement with Wittgenstein expired. (Ravel was not alone: Strauss and Britten both had serious problems with the liberties Wittgenstein took with their work.)

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Where the G major Concerto starts with a glittering explosion, the D major work uses another gambit, where the music seems to form itself while slowly ascending out of quiet amorphous material. (Ravel does something similar to evoke sunrise in the ballet *Daphnis & Chloé*, and in *La Valse* dance fragments only gradually emerge from a musical mist.)

Here the low strings roil quietly in 3/4 as a contrabassoon spins out motifs based on the characteristic ceremonial dotted rhythms of the Baroque-era French overture. This is answered by a horn playing a plangent blues-inflected tune. By developing and combining these elements Ravel builds to the work's first climax; a thundering low A in the piano introduces a lengthy cadenza (Wittgenstein: 'If I had wanted to play without the orchestra I would not have commissioned a concerto!'). The orchestra returns with a fully-scored version of the 'dotted' music and amore lyrical section before speed and scoring increase in a tension realised by a new fast tempo. This central section alternates two main ideas: a jaunty march in 6/8 that is larded with 'jazz' gestures, passed between piano and solo winds, and a balletic lighter music, dominated by high woodwind chords, that might suggest French folk-song in Russian orchestration. This section features a faster version of the horn's opening theme, and moments of glassy string harmonics and music-box piano writing; it too gains in speed and urgency and reaches a massive climax as the tempo returns to the opening *lento*. This releases massive energy, which gradually dissipating to introduce a second cadenza based on now-familiar themes. As the piano becomes more and more frenetic the orchestra enters imperceptibly, with low string chords, the dotted rhythm gradually work its way upwards, the music gaining strength until a shattering final climax.

Ravel's concerto is scored for a large orchestra consisting of three flutes (the third doubling piccolo), two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, piccolo clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, harp, strings and piano soloist.

It was premiered by Paul Wittgenstein on 5 January 1932, with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra conducted by Robert Heger.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the work in August 1950, led by Charles Groves with György Sándor as soloist. Other notable performances include those led by Alexander Gibson with Alicia de Larrocha (1977); Louis Frémaux (1979 with Robert Silverman; 1984 with Michael Beroff; 1989 with Pascal Rogé); Vassily Sinaisky with Michael Kieran Harvey (1999); Gianluigi Gelmetti with Michele Campanella (2002); Charles Dutoit with Jean-Yves Thibaudet (2006); Vladimir Ashkenazy with Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (2013) and David Robertson with Kirill Gerstein, in our 2019 *Keys to the City* festival.

Our most recent performances were in 2022, with Simone Young leading Cédric Tiberghien.

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS GEORGE GERSHWIN?

Gershwin, born to Russian Jewish parents in Brooklyn, New York, in 1898, dropped out of school at 15. He made his living as a pianist, making piano rolls or 'song plugging' – demonstrating newly published songs in music shops, and playing in nightclubs. Inspired by the sophisticated work of composers such as Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern he began writing songs and published his first in 1916. When Al Jolson sang *Swanee* Gershwin's future was assured. Gershwin's heyday was the 1920s and 30s when he, often collaborating with his brother Ira, produced songs for shows that are still widely sung and one of the most important American operas – *Porgy and Bess*. It was an era of rapid technological and political change in the wake of World War I. Modern architecture by Le Corbusier and Gropius began to appear (the Empire State Building rose in 1930); the visual arts saw the rise of Surrealism, and major works by Man Ray, Kandinsky, Brancusi; the Soviet Union was formally established, while socialists rioted in Vienna, and workers went on strike in Britain. The Wall Street Crash on 1929 changed everything, with the succeeding decade seeing Depression, the rise of Fascism, the Spanish Civil War and finally World War II.



Gershwin at the piano

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

Gershwin had gone to France in the spring of 1928, having crossed from England on 25 March. In Paris he began work on a 'rhapsodic ballet' which had first occurred to him on a previous visit. He was sufficiently advanced with the score in mid-1928 to offer it to the New York Philharmonic, who premiered it under Walter Damrosch at Carnegie Hall on 13 December that year.

An American in Paris is meant to reflect the impressions made by that city on a wide-eyed American visitor. There is local flavour, even down to the use in the first few minutes of klaxon horns, meant to represent Paris taxicabs. Gershwin described the piece in a program note:

My purpose here is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere.

The opening gay section is followed by a rich 'blues' with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simple than in the preceding pages.

This 'blues' rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has downed his spell of blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life.

At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

There was much cross-fertilisation between America and France in the musical scene in the 1920s, and *An American in Paris* could be considered a symbol of this fact. In Paris in 1928, the composer of *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F* met Ravel, Milhaud, Georges Auric and Poulenc, as well as Russian émigrés such as Stravinsky and Prokofiev. African-American musicians were performing in Parisian nightclubs (maybe this is where a ‘blues’ would actually be heard), and this was an exotic attraction for French composers. But Gershwin was increasingly concerned at this time to be recognised as a ‘serious’ composer.

‘Gee, it must be great to know so much,’ he said when Vernon Duke, composer of *April in Paris* and *Autumn in New York*, told him of lessons from Glière in counterpoint and orchestration. He had ideas of creating an opera out of the elemental Yiddish drama *The Dybbuk*. Apparently he even asked to study with Ravel. But he was still, as so often, writing for Broadway. *An American in Paris* premiered in New York during the run of Gershwin’s latest Broadway show *Treasure Girl*, containing hit songs such as ‘Feeling I’m Falling’ and ‘I’ve Got a Crush on You’, but revolving around a silly plot about buried treasure discovered by Gertrude Lawrence in the last act.

How successfully had Gershwin crossed over into the concert hall sphere with this ‘divertissement’? While its sequences may lack the ‘structural inevitability’ of much concert music, its combination of sophisticated orchestration with catchy melodies is the key to its charm. Significantly it was the first work Gershwin himself orchestrated, as if proving his mastery. Was this pianist’s eschewal of a piano part an assertion of seriousness? At the party after the New York premiere Otto Kahn made a speech in which he wished for Gershwin ‘an experience...of that driving storm and stress of the emotions... which are the most effective ingredients for the deepening and mellowing and complete development...of an artist’s inner

being and spiritual powers.’ Gershwin felt additional pulls. His father, Morris, checking his watch at the end of the first performance, pronounced – ‘Twenty minutes – a very important piece.’

But *An American in Paris* has attained classic status, in that other meaning of the term. It is quintessentially American, and not just because the ending is a Charleston ‘without a trace of Gallic flavour’ (Deems Taylor’s description), or because the lead trumpet must ‘swing’ like a native when it comes to the Charleston’s particular *notes inégales*. It’s American in the sense Leonard Bernstein meant when he said:

I don’t think there’s anyone in the country – or, in the world, for that matter – who wouldn’t know right away that Gershwin’s music – say, *An American in Paris* – is American music. It’s got ‘America’ written all over it – not just in the title, and not just because the composer was American. It’s in the music itself: it sounds American, smells American, makes you feel American when you hear it.

But perhaps the best compliment was paid to Gershwin in Ravel’s response when Gershwin supposedly asked to study with him: ‘You are already a first-rate Gershwin. Why do you want to become a second-rate Ravel?’

Gershwin’s *An American in Paris* is scored for three flutes (the third doubling piccolo), two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet and two bassoons; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani and percussion; celeste, three saxophones and strings.

It was premiered at Carnegie Hall on 13 December 1928, by Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Philharmonic.

The Sydney Symphony first performed this work in May 1950, led by Chief Conductor Sir Eugene Goossens. Other notable performances include those led by Charles Mackerras (1960), Dean Dixon (1964 & 1965), Stuart Challender (1987 & 1988) and Tommy Tycho (1999).

Our most recent performances were in 2010, led by Kristjan Järvi.

Notes by Gordon Kalton Williams
(Stravinsky) Symphony Australia © 1999;
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