

ORGAN CLASSICS AT TOWN HALL



melbourne symphony orchestra

2012 SEASON

Friday 22 June at 7.30pm
Monday 25 June at 6.30pm
Melbourne Town Hall

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Sir Andrew Davis conductor
Cameron Carpenter organ

Bach arr. Sir Andrew Davis
Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV 582

Poulenc
Organ Concerto

INTERVAL

Brahms
Symphony No.2

The pre-performance recital by Calvin Bowman on the Melbourne Town Hall organ, on Friday 22 June, commences at 6.30pm and concludes at 7pm.

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A GREETING FROM SIR ANDREW DAVIS

Standing in front of you, as I will be shortly, I have to say I am especially delighted to be conducting a concert featuring the mighty Melbourne Town Hall organ so soon after being appointed Chief Conductor Designate of your wonderful Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. I am also delighted to be working with organist Cameron Carpenter for the first time.

Many of you will not know that the organ is one of my passions. Before I became a full-time conductor, I was an organist and the organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge under the great Sir David Willcocks. Tonight's concert has a organ connection on another level too. In 2004, I was invited to arrange an orchestral version of the opening piece, Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor for organ. In its original version, it is an intricate and fascinating free-standing work.

I hope you will enjoy the possibilities and colours of my full orchestra version. There have been other orchestrations of this work – by Respighi, Stokowski and Ormandy – but this version feels apt for my first concert as the MSO's Chief Conductor Designate.

I look forward from today to our sharing many great concerts together.

Most sincerely,



Sir Andrew Davis

CONCERT INFORMATION



This concert has a duration of approximately two hours, including an interval of 20 minutes.

Friday evening's performance will be broadcast live around Australia on ABC Classic FM (on analogue and digital radio), and will be streamed on its website.

Please turn off your mobile phone and all other electronic devices before the performance commences.

If you do not need your printed program after the concert, we encourage you to return it to the program stands located in the foyer.

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra programs can be read on-line or downloaded up to a week before each concert, from www.mso.com.au.



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685–1750) arr Sir Andrew Davis

Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV582

In 1708 Bach entered the service of Wilhelm, Duke of Weimar, initially as Court Organist, though he was promoted to *Konzertmeister* in 1714. It is from the first part of this period (1708–12) that, most scholars agree, the bulk of Bach's organ music dates. That is certainly the consensus about the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, though some have argued that the piece may have been written for pedal harpsichord, rather than organ: Malcolm Boyd has noted that certain sections of the work 'seem more idiomatic to a stringed keyboard instrument than to the organ'.

Be that as it may, the piece remains one of the most intricate and fascinating of Bach's 'free-standing' works and has therefore, unsurprisingly, attracted the interest of conductor-arrangers such as Respighi, Stokowski and Ormandy.

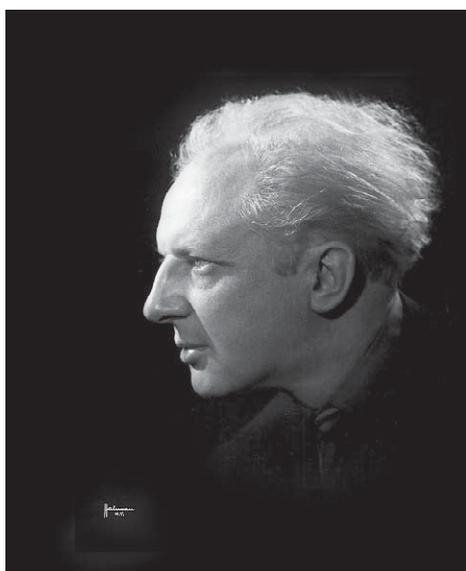
The passacaglia section is a substantial set of 20 variations over a repeating eight-bar pattern of notes stated first by the pedals alone. This pattern, or ground, appears in each of the subsequent variations, usually, though not always, in the bass. The organ (and for that matter, the harpsichord) can only increase volume by the addition of notes (unlike the piano, where the force of the player's attack determines the dynamics), so Bach moves from simple to more complex textures by the superimposition of ever more intricate lines and, we can assume, the addition of organ stops for extra weight and brightness. The particular power of Bach's climaxes tends to support the theory that the work was composed for organ. It is, moreover, likely that Bach was influenced to write such a work by certain chaconnes (pieces also based on a repeating ground) for organ by Dietrich Buxtehude. The Passacaglia's

trajectory is not, simply, from simple to complex music though; it reaches a climax at the end of the 12th and 15th variations, 'retreats' into relative simplicity and gathers strength again. Bach then outdoes himself by concluding with a double fugue, based on the notes of the first half of the passacaglia ground, a unique example of unity between companion pieces in the composer's output.

A former organist and now preeminent conductor, Sir Andrew Davis was well placed to make his orchestral version of the piece in 2004. The score requires triple winds (with doubling such as piccolo and alto flute, cor anglais, E flat and bass clarinets and contrabassoon, standard brass and string sections, and both piano and harp joining the percussion). The piano is used to striking effect in the opening announcement of the ground, where it gives a terse attack to each note, which is then sustained softly, as if resonating in a large space, by the cellos. Davis never overscores, moving gradually through wind and brass textures – the latter often used in exuberant heraldic counterpoint – and, as the piece unfolds, displaying a wide range of instrumental doubling that places different lines in relative relief in passages of intensely complex polyphony. The full tutti makes for thrilling, dramatic climaxes that also articulate the work's structure.

Gordon Kerry © 2012

The only previous orchestral performance of this work by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra took place on 8 December 1974, when conductor Robert Rosen directed the orchestra's performance of Leopold Stokowski's arrangement. Organist Pierre Cochereau performed the work in Melbourne during his 1959 Australian tour, and on 21 May 2004 Calvin Bowman performed it during a pre-concert recital at the Melbourne Town Hall.



LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI, WHO CREATED AN EARLIER ORCHESTRAL VERSION OF THIS WORK



FRANCIS POULENC

FRANCIS POULENC

(1899–1963)

Concerto in G minor for organ, strings and timpani

Andante – Allegro giocoso – subito Andante moderato – Allegro (Molto agitato) – Très calme (Lent) – Tempo de l'Allegro initial – Tempo Introduction (Largo)

Cameron Carpenter organ

'Forget Handel...' This was Poulenc's advice to organist E. Power Biggs, on interpreting his Concerto for organ. Poulenc might easily have added 'Forget Poulenc,' for in many ways the concerto undermined the popular perception of the French composer – the 'charming Monsieur Poulenc'.

Poulenc's other concertos exemplify the ease, facility and bright charm of his music. The Concerto in G minor for organ, strings and timpani stands apart. Poulenc said: 'If one wishes to have an exact idea of the serious side of my music, one must look here, as well as in my religious works.'

Poulenc was a complex individual: a man of deep emotions and faith, but also fashionable, engaging and sociable. His privileged background gave him access to influential private salons and vital commissions, and one of the 'princesses useful to my career', as Poulenc described his patron-friends, Winnaretta Singer. Heiress to the sewing machine fortune, she had become, through marriage, the Princesse Edmond de Polignac.

Poulenc's first commission from her resulted in the Concerto for Two Pianos (1932). Two years later he proposed a work for organ, and a second commission was offered: a concerto to feature the Cavaillé Coll organ installed in the Princesse's Paris residence.

The concerto was 'almost completed' in April 1936, when Poulenc confessed to the Princesse's niece, 'It is not the amusing Poulenc of the Concerto for two pianos but more like a Poulenc en route for the cloister...'

The description was prophetic: in a few months the violent death of a friend in a car accident led him to contemplate the 'frailty of the human condition' and he was 'once again attracted to the spiritual life'. *The Litanies à la Vierge Noire* (Litanies to the Black Virgin) stemmed directly from the experience, and the emotional depth and austere simplicity of this music surely spilled over into the concerto-in-progress.

Until its completion in 1938, the concerto cost Poulenc 'a great many tears'. He writes of constructing the music from 'new materials', of retrieving 'botched' sections, and finally: 'Never...have I had so much trouble finding my means of expression, but nevertheless hope that it now flows freely *without giving the impression of too much effort*.' Even at his most serious, Poulenc sought to mask the effort and discipline that underpinned his music.

The opening bars of the Concerto resemble Bach's Fantasia in G minor (BWV542) – which Poulenc had wanted played at his own funeral – although the punctuating dissonance of the added-note chords is entirely 1930s Poulenc. Moving still further back in the lineage of great organists, Buxtehude is evoked in the structure of the music. Departing from his customary short-winded forms, Poulenc embarks on a fantasia or toccata – a single movement divided into seven contrasting but organically connected sections.

But despite the references to the past the concerto is very much of its time, from the inadvertent reference to the harmonies of Fauré, which follows almost immediately the 'Bach' opening, to Poulenc's dissonances – not the playful 'wrong notes' of his lighter music, but powerful and pensive. And Poulenc was not blind to the capabilities of the modern French instrument, with its massive sonorities, sensual lyricism and unprecedented flexibility.

Poulenc's final words of advice draw attention to the contrasts of this concerto – the 'extreme violence' of the big chords, the rhythmic and

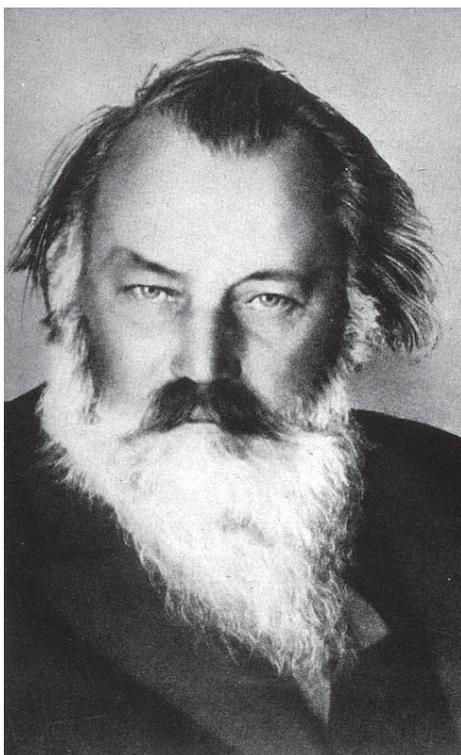
'sprightly' character of the *Allegro* sections, the 'serene and poetic conclusion'. These clear shifts in tempo and mood are the listener's landmarks in navigating the concerto's compelling architecture.

At the heart of the music is the *Andante Moderato*, with its extended dialogue between organ and strings, supported by an incessant timpani pulse and concluding with an ominous march in the basses that hints at the final, harrowing scene of Poulenc's opera *Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1953). And as the concerto draws to a close, Poulenc reveals his reflective side, suspending a chant-like melody in gossamer orchestral textures over oscillating harmonies and sustained pedal notes from the organ. Fittingly, this instrumental prayer is framed by Poulenc's opening gesture to Bach, that most devout of composers.

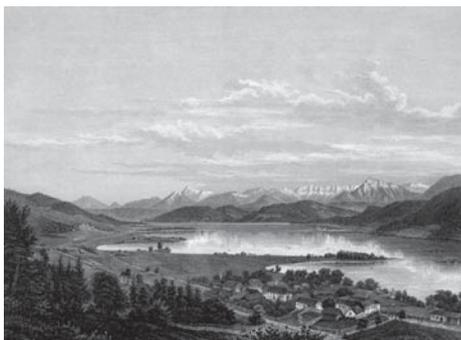
As more than one writer has observed, the Concerto for organ presents Poulenc at his most complex – not a religious work, yet tinged with devotion and austerity, not the amusing Monsieur Poulenc, yet suffused with elegance and sentiment. 'The sacred and the secular interact here,' wrote one critic, 'forming an alliance that corresponds to Poulenc's innermost nature.'

Abridged from a note by Yvonne Frindle © 2003

Pierre Cocheureau was the soloist in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's first performance of the Poulenc Organ Concerto, on 5-6 May 1959 under conductor Kurt Woess. The Orchestra most recently performed it on 26 July 2002 with Calvin Bowman and conductor Matthias Bamert.



JOHANNES BRAHMS



PÖRSCHACH, WHERE BRAHMS COMPOSED HIS SECOND SYMPHONY

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

Symphony No.2 in D, Op.73

- I *Allegro non troppo*
- II *Adagio non troppo*
- III *Allegretto grazioso (Quasi andantino) – Presto ma non assai*
- IV *Allegro con spirito*

Composed in the summer of 1877 at his favourite resort village of Pörschach, on the edge of Lake Wörth in the Austrian Alps, the Second Symphony is the sunniest of Brahms' symphonies. There, in solitude and in between dawn swims and long daily walks, Brahms composed this bucolically joyous work with rare swiftness. Four months is all it took, nothing like the tortuous, two-decades' struggle of the First Symphony.

A personal tone and easy lyrical warmth immediately sets the Second Symphony apart from the First. Brahms seems at last able to put the weighty symphonic inheritance of Beethoven behind him and arrive at a more individual position. Clara Schumann was one of the first to cast comment: on hearing Brahms play parts of the score on piano, she remarked that the new symphony was more original than its predecessor, and she predicted correctly that the public would prefer it. The premiere by the Vienna Philharmonic under conductor Hans Richter on 30 December was a resounding success, critics praising the work as 'attractive', 'understandable' and refreshingly un-Beethovenian.

Paradoxically, the Second's originality lies partly in its mild, backward-looking stance. Gentle pastoral imagery and a compressed, Haydnesque expressive scale seem to evoke a past world. The work's character is genial: all four movements are like companions, not dramatically set against one another – and all are in major keys.

INTERVAL

More than anything else, it is a melodic symphony. Brahms wrote to Eduard Hanslick about Pörschach: 'The melodies fly so thick here that you have to be careful not to step on one.' Indeed each movement abounds with lyricism. In the first movement a leisurely, lilting waltz serves as the main subject, followed by an equally lilting 'lullaby' second subject in the cellos. No doubt the birdsong later in the flute, decorating the main subject's return, helped this to become 'Brahms' Pastoral Symphony' – which label greatly annoyed the composer.

The flowing melodic vein continues in a noble, expansively romantic Adagio, one of Brahms' finest symphonic movements. Tuneful in a different way is the diminutive third movement, which consists of a suite of elegant Baroque-sounding dances. The finale is the only outrightly dramatic movement: it bursts out with resplendent melody as if proclaiming victory.

But a victory over what? If one listens with different ears to the Second Symphony, its radiantly lit landscape seems continually threatened. A brooding quality seems to grow out of the first movement's initial three-note motif, heard in the cellos, and it is emphasised by this motif's numerous reappearances not only in this movement but in the second as well. Even the third and fourth movements with their lighter mood have a shadowy side, in wistful major-minor inflections and moments of muted introspection.

So maybe all is not so sunny after all. One perceptive listener of the time, Vincenz Lachner, questioned Brahms about his intent in the symphony, in particular on why he introduces the gloomy sounds of tremolo timpani and low trombones so early in the first movement – just one minute in. Brahms' reply is extraordinary for what it reveals about himself and the work:

I would have to confess that I am...a severely melancholic person, that black wings are constantly flapping above us, and that in my output – perhaps not

entirely by chance – this symphony is followed by a little essay about the great 'Why'. If you don't know this [motet, Warum] I will send it to you. It casts the necessary shadow on the serene symphony and perhaps accounts for those timpani and trombones.

Thus it is a Janus-faced Brahms who found his idyll in the mountainous retreat of Pörschach: the sombre-sounding motet he mentions, *Warum ist das Licht gegeben*, Op.74, dates from his same summer there. All of which has led Malcolm MacDonald to suggest that the Second is 'one of the darkest of major-key symphonies'.

The Second does not easily disclose itself but is like the man himself, wrapped in ambiguity and internal contradictions. Friends loved him yet found him insufferable, fearing that, as Hermann Levi put it to Clara, the 'demon of abruptness, of coldness and of heartlessness' would finally snatch his 'better self' away. That cold-warmth, or warmth at a distance, is felt particularly in this work; but with granite-like creative strength Brahms turns his own frailties into human universalities.

The Second is too amiable to be revolutionary. But in its tone-painting without glory, its fatalism and its 'taint of the real', Brahms points the way toward the symphonies of Mahler. Reinhold Brinkmann calls the Second 'an emphatic questioning of the pastoral world, a firm denial of the possibility of pure serenity'. Its revelation is of a composer, a nature lover, for whom there was no joy without sadness, and no sadness without joy.

Graham Strahle © 2004

Georg Szell conducted the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's first performance of Brahms' Symphony No.2, on 17 May 1939. The Orchestra's most recent performance of the work took place on 5 December 2009, with Tadaaki Otaka.



© James Penlidis

FAREWELL PHILIP

With *Organ Classics at Town Hall*, we honour the career of one of our longest serving and most beloved musicians, violinist Philip Lajta, who will soon retire from the Orchestra. Philip joined the MSO in 1975 after studying with legendary Melbourne pedagogue, Mr. Nathan Gutman. In his 37 years of loyal service, he has performed in some 6,000 concerts, sharing the stage with more than 2,000 conductors and soloists. He has also toured overseas six times with the orchestra – twice each to Japan and Europe as well as China and Russia. These are impressive figures indeed, but they do little to tell the story of our Philip, a true gentleman, whose understated and affable nature make him an absolutely delightful colleague. He matches this perfectly with his warm, generous sound, so well matched to the 19th century Romantic repertoire that he loves. As the years have passed, I have come to relish his "left field" sense of humour as well as his propensity for quirky and sometimes hilarious adventures. It has been a privilege to work alongside Philip, one of only a handful of musicians remaining in the Orchestra who were playing when I attended my very first concert as a nine year old. I will miss him.

Philip, we all wish you a long, healthy and happy retirement. Thank you for the wonderful memories that add so much to our history and contribute to our future. Bravo, Philip!

Andrew Hall
Section Second Violin



SIR ANDREW DAVIS

conductor

Sir Andrew Davis is Chief Conductor Designate of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

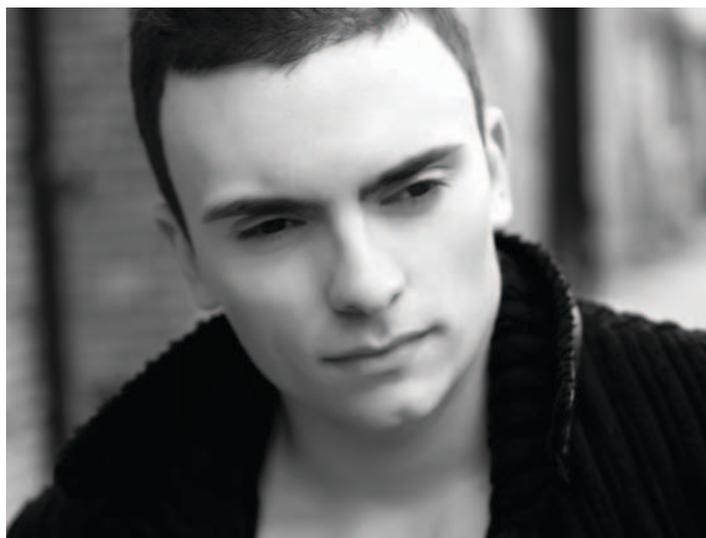
He has served as Music Director and Principal Conductor of Lyric Opera of Chicago since 2000. He is also Conductor Laureate of both the Toronto Symphony and BBC Symphony orchestras, and was previously Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

A former organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge, he has conducted all of the world's major orchestras as well as at leading opera houses and festivals. His tenure as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony, which he led at the Proms and on tour to Europe, the USA and Asia, was the longest since that of the Orchestra's founder Sir Adrian Boult. His repertoire is diverse, however he is a keen proponent of works by Elgar, Tippett, Britten, Boulez, Messiaen and Janáček.

In addition to performances in Toronto and Chicago, this season's operatic engagements have included the Metropolitan Opera (*Don Giovanni*), Santa Fe Opera (*Arabella*), and the Canadian Opera Company (*Gianni Schicchi*, *A Florentine Tragedy*). Symphonic engagements have included the Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic and the opening of the Edinburgh Festival.

The most recent additions to his award-winning discography include Holst's *The Planets*, *Beni Mora* and *Japanese Suite*; York Bowen's Symphonies Nos 1 and 2 (BBC Philharmonic); and Delius' *Appalachia*, *The Song of the High Hills* and Violin and Cello Concertos with Tasmin Little and Paul Watkins (BBCSO).

He was made a Commander of the British Empire in 1992, and a Knight Bachelor in 1999. He is also a recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society/Charles Heidsieck Music Award.



CAMERON CARPENTER

organ

With a prodigious technique and a seemingly boundless musical imagination, Cameron Carpenter is rapidly becoming one of the most original musicians of his generation, appealing to lovers of traditional organ repertoire and younger audiences alike.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1981, he performed Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* at the age of 11 before joining the American Boychoir School in 1992 as a boy soprano. Following high school, where he transcribed over 100 major works for the organ in addition to his studies in orchestration and composition, he moved to New York to attend The Juilliard School. He obtained a Master's degree from Juilliard in 2006, and that year began his worldwide organ concert tours and recorded his first commercial CDs. He performs at the world's most prestigious venues, most recently the Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Philharmonie, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Davies Hall (San Francisco), Alte Oper Frankfurt and the Tonhalle Zurich.

His unconventional approach challenges preconceptions about the organ and his repertoire encompasses original compositions, organ transcriptions of piano works, and film music, in addition to the major works of the organ repertoire. Regularly pushing instruments to their technical limits, he plans to build his own design of portable digital organ.

He became the first organist to receive a Grammy nomination, for his solo album *Revolutionary*, which features music by Bach, Chopin, Demessieux, Dupré, Liszt, Horowitz and Duke Ellington in addition to recordings of his own compositions *Love Song No.1* and *Homage to Klaus Kinski*. His most recent release is the live CD *Cameron Live!*



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