EAST MEETS WEST
CHINESE NEW YEAR
CONCERT

SATURDAY 24 FEBRUARY | 7.30PM
Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall

PROGRAM
WELCOME

It is my great pleasure to extend my best wishes to those celebrating the Year of the Dog at the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra’s Chinese New Year Concert in Melbourne.

Australia and China share strong and diverse connections. China is one of our key strategic partners in Asia and our largest trading partner. Last year, we celebrated 45 years of diplomatic relations.

Chinese Australians are a vital part of multi-cultural Australian society. Australia is home to over one million people of Chinese ancestry, one of our earliest migrant communities. People-to-people ties between our countries continue to grow through education, science and tourism. Events such as this reflect the social and cultural dividends of Australia-China engagements.

In welcoming the Year of the Dog, I wish you a year full of happiness, health and prosperity.

The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs

As proud patron of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra’s East Meets West concert celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year in 2018, I have the great pleasure to welcome you to one of the major cultural events of the Happy Chinese New Year celebrations across Australia.

The concert will shine the spotlight on China and Australia’s shared love of musical traditions, through a beautiful blend of Chinese melodies and western masterworks. Some of China’s brightest stars, including maestro Lu Jia, violinist Lu Siqing and erhu player Ma Xiaohui, will join the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in this beautiful evening.

I believe you will enjoy this concert which conveys the joy and harmony of the Chinese New Year and demonstrates the friendship between our peoples and two countries.

I wish you all the best in the Year of the Dog.

His Excellency Mr Jingye Cheng
Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to the Commonwealth of Australia

非常荣幸能够赞助墨尔本交响乐团《东西文化交响之夜》音乐会。庆祝2018年中国农历新年，也非常高兴在此欢迎各位参加今天的音乐会。这也是澳大利亚庆祝中国新年的文化盛事之一。

此次音乐会将会演奏中西名作，体现中澳两国人民对于音乐共同的热爱。中国首席指挥家和澳大利亚著名钢琴家将与墨尔本交响乐团一道为大家带来美妙的夜晚。

希望大家一定会喜欢这场音乐会，它传达了中国新年的欢乐和团圆，同时体现了两国人民的友谊。

祝各位新年大吉！

成龙
中国驻澳大利亚大使

很荣幸在此向墨尔本交响乐团新春音乐会的观众致以诚挚的祝福，祝大家狗年快乐。

中澳关系源远流长，并涉及方方面面，中国是我们亚洲国家的战略合作伙伴之一，也是中澳两国位于两国建交45周年。

澳大利亚华人是澳大利亚多元文化社会至关重要的一部分。澳大利亚华人数量超过10万华人定居；而且华人社区也是澳大利亚历史最悠久的移民社区之一。中澳两国在教育、科学及旅游等方面的人员往来也将继续增长。澳中交流所带来的社会效益和后果也是很好的体现在新春音乐会这样的活动中。

值此新春佳节之际，祝各位阖家幸福，万事如意。

朱莉·毕晓普
澳大利亚外交部长
WELCOME

I am delighted to welcome you to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra’s fifth Chinese New Year Concert, where we join with the rest of Melbourne to celebrate the Year of the Dog.

Chinese New Year has been an intrinsic part of Melbourne’s cultural tradition for many years, with celebrations across the city. This concert is part of the MSO’s engagement with Melbourne’s Chinese community, reflecting a shared appreciation for each other’s cultural traditions.

Brilliant Chinese violinist Lu Siqing joins us to celebrate this special evening. The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto is one of the most well-known pieces of classical music, and I look forward to hearing his rendition of the piece. 2018 will be a big year for the MSO and Lu Siqing; our CD collaboration has just been released, and we are delighted that he will join us on tour in his home country, when we visit China in May.

We also warmly welcome conductor Lü Jia and the world-renowned erhu player who tonight makes her Melbourne debut, Ma Xiaohui, and of course our magnificent MSO musicians.

Tonight we present an exciting and culturally diverse program, and one I know you will enjoy. Special thanks must go to all our MSO supporters and in particular to the Li Family Trust and Arts Centre Melbourne for supporting this concert.

Michael Ullmer
Chairman
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

This concert has a duration of approximately 2 hours, including a 20-minute interval.

This concert will be recorded for video broadcast into China and on Foxtel Arts, as well as audio broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

ARTISTS

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Lü Jia conductor
Lu Siqing violin
Ma Xiaohui erhu

Bao Yuankai
Chinese Sights and Sounds: Dialogue on Flowers

Yang Liqing
Shepherdess of the Tianshan Mountains

Chen Gang / He Zanhao
The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto

INTERVAL

Schumann
Symphony No.1 Spring

I am delighted to once again send my best wishes to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra as it prepares for its 2018 Chinese New Year Concert.

As the only annual Chinese New Year program of its kind in Australia, this concert is recognised as an outstanding showcase of the MSO and one of the leading New Year celebrations outside of China.

This year’s concert features the renowned Chinese conductor Lü Jia, and a stellar cast of guest artists including violinist Lu Siqing, and Erhu player Ma Xiaohui.

The Chinese New Year Concert also shows, yet again, that Melbourne is the cultural capital of Australia.

I wish the performers the very best of luck, our special guests an enjoyable time during their stay in Melbourne, and all attendees a wonderful evening.

To everyone celebrating this Year of the Dog, I hope it brings you and your loved ones one good luck and good health.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
Established in 1906, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is an arts leader and Australia’s oldest professional orchestra. Chief Conductor Sir Andrew Davis has been at the helm of MSO since 2013. Engaging more than 3 million people each year, the MSO reaches a variety of audiences through live performances, recordings, TV and radio broadcasts and live streaming. As a truly global orchestra, the MSO collaborates with guest artists and arts organisations from across the world. Its international audiences include China, where MSO has performed in 2012, 2016 and again in 2018, Europe (2014) and Indonesia, where in 2017 it performed at the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Prambanan Temple.

The MSO performs a variety of concerts ranging from core classical performances at its home, Hamer Hall at Arts Centre Melbourne, to its annual free concerts at Melbourne’s largest outdoor venue, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl. The MSO also delivers innovative and engaging programs and digital tools to audiences of all ages through its Education and Outreach initiatives.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is funded principally by the Australian Government through the Australian Cultural Diplomacy program, and is generously supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. The MSO is also funded by the City of Melbourne, its Principal Partner, Emirates, corporate sponsors and individual donors, trusts and foundations.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Land on which we perform – The Kulin Nation – and would like to pay our respects to their Elders and Community both past and present.

LÜ JIA
CONDUCTOR
Born in Shanghai, Lü Jia studied in Beijing and Berlin, and at the age of 26 became Chief Conductor of the Teatro Verdi, Trieste, the youngest chief conductor of an Italian opera house. He has conducted nearly 3,000 opera and concert performances in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia and appeared with many of the world’s leading orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

In addition to his tenure at Teatro Verdi, he has been Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Toscana Orchestra of Florence, Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, Rome Chamber Orchestra, Tenerife Symphony Orchestra and Verona Opera.

He is currently Artistic Director of Beijing’s National Centre for the Performing Arts, the Macau Orchestra and the World Chinese Orchestra.

LU SIQING
VIOLIN
Lu Siqing came to international prominence when he became the first Asian violinist to win the Paganini Competition in 1987. He has since performed to acclaim in some of the world’s most prestigious concert halls in more than forty countries and territories worldwide. Lu Siqing has collaborated with many of the world’s leading orchestras and musicians and he appears regularly at many of the top music festivals and prestigious music events around the world.

Lu Siqing was invited to perform in the first ever Chinese New Year Concert in 2014 with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In September 2017, he recorded the Violin Concerto Album with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In May 2018, he will join the China tour with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and its chief conductor Sir Andrew Davis.

In this concert, Lu Siqing plays the “Miss Crespi” 1699 Stradivari violin, generously loaned by Mr. David Li, a Chinese-Australian Arts Philanthropist.

MA XIAOHUI
ERHU
Perhaps best known for her performance alongside Yo-Yo Ma on the Oscar-winning soundtrack for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), Ma Xiaohui is one of the few traditional classical Chinese musicians to have achieved an international career. A leading cross-cultural artist, she was concertmaster of the Shanghai Traditional Orchestra for many years, and now appears with many of the world’s most distinguished orchestras in prominent venues.

Away from the concert stage, she is the founder of the Shanghai International Ma Xiaohui Art Center, and acts as artistic adviser for many organisations. She has served as visiting professor on the faculties of leading educational institutions in Shanghai and the US, and has given performances and lectures at high-profile world events in her capacity as one of China’s international cultural ambassadors.
ABOUT THE MUSIC

BAO YUANKAI
(born 1944)
Chinese Sights and Sounds: Dialogue on Flowers from Suite No.1, Hebei Folk Songs

Bao Yuan Kai is one of the most eminent contemporary Chinese composers and music educators, whose body of works is as varied as it is large, and whose influence on younger generations runs into the decades. His 1991 Symphony No.1, Chinese Sights and Sounds, comprises six suites, each of which is devoted to the folk music of a particular province. Bao’s score uses the techniques of Western music as a prism through which to explore and exalt the sublime vistas and ancient history of his homeland.

The first suite, Hebei Folk Songs, depicts ‘Stories on the Lands of Ancient Yan and Zhao’. The final movement, Dialogue on Flowers, is based on two folk songs: the first, from Cangzhou, bookends the movement and presents the flute and oboe in conversation in a lively Allegro vivace. The contrasting middle section, featuring a folk song called ‘Flying the Kite’, ranges through several keys before returning to the lively opening music.

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)
Spring Symphony No.1 in B flat, Op.38, Spring Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace

Schumann’s own version for solo erhu and traditional Chinese instruments is that its sound box is covered in python skin, giving the instrument its characteristic timbre; and that the bow never loses contact with the instrument’s two strings, always running in a straight line between them, rather than passing over the top of them in an arc, as with the violin.

The erhu (two-string), perhaps the best-known Chinese instrument, has remained largely unchanged over the last millennium. Besides its shape, the main differences between the erhu and Western string instruments are that its sound box is covered in python skin, giving the instrument its characteristic timbre; and that the bow never loses contact with the instrument’s two strings, always running in a straight line between them, rather than passing over the top of them in an arc, as with the violin.

The erhu is often associated with contemplative reflection and wistful melancholy, but in Shepherdsess of the Tianshan Mountain (1997), a haunting rhapsody written by Yang Liqing for soloist Ma Xiaohui, a more impassioned and virtuosic side to the instrument is revealed. The music is based on a melody from Xinjiang province at the westernmost edge of China, and evokes a benevolent shepherdess tending her flock at the foot of the mountains.

Shepherdess of the Tianshan Mountain
Ma Xiaohui erhu

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CHEN GANG
HE ZANHAO
(1933)
The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto
Adagio cantabile – Allegro – Adagio assai dolcissimo – Allegro molto resoluto – Larghetto – Allegro animato e grazioso

The well-known legend of the Butterfly Lovers, which dates from the Jin dynasty (265-420), concerns Zhu Yingtai, the daughter of a rich landowner, who disguises herself as a boy and sets off from her home village to study in Hangzhou. There she meets fellow student Liang Shanbo and, over the next three years, their friendship deepens. On completion of her studies Zhu returns home where she is promised in marriage to the son of a wealthy family. When Liang visits Zhu and discovers her true identity and that she is betrothed to another, the two part and Liang later dies of a broken heart.

Before her wedding, Zhu visits Liang’s tomb and as a storm erupts, she leaps into Liang’s open grave. When the storm subsides the lovers emerge from the grave as butterflies, never to be parted.

The tale has seen many dramatic and musical adaptations. Chen Gang and He Zhanhao wrote this orchestral representation in 1958 when they were both students at the Shanghai Conservatory. The concerto is structured in a single movement and closely follows the story’s narrative, with melodic references to Shanghai opera and the solo violin drawing on erhu technique (versions also exist for solo erhu and traditional Chinese orchestra).

The concert was premiered to great success in Shanghai on 27 May 1959 and made stars of its composers and its soloist, violinist Yu Lina. The work – and the artists – fell out of favour in the late 1960s; however in recent decades it has regained popularity and is now a staple of the repertoire for Chinese and, increasingly, Western orchestras.

These combined notes are based on notes © Douglas Rutherford & Symphony-Australia.
Tonight is the first time MSO has performed these works.

YANG LIQING
(born 1942)
Shepherdess of the Tianshan Mountain

Shepherdess of the Tianshan Mountain
Ma Xiaohui erhu

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ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)
Spring Symphony No.1 in B flat, Op.38, Spring Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace

Schumann wrote his First Symphony with a quill pen he had found near Beethoven’s grave in Vienna. It was his first major orchestral composition, and began a brief but intensive creative spurt, in which he also composed the first version of what became Symphony No.4.

Although Schumann removed the title ‘Spring’ Symphony when the music was published, he wrote to a conductor of the work: Try to inspire the orchestra with some of the spring longing which chiefly possessed me when I wrote the symphony in February 1841. At the very beginning I should like the trumpets to sound as if from on high, like a call to awaken. In what follows of the introduction there might be a suggestion of the growing green of everything, even of a butterfly flying up, and in the following allegro of the gradual ascending of all that belongs to spring. But these are fancies that came to me after the completion of the work.

Schumann was inspired by the spring time in which he was composing, and by the overwhelming happiness of his marriage to Clara Wieck, which had finally happened after so many obstacles. He was ambitious for the esteem to be gained by composing a successful symphony. He sketched the whole work in four days, and had completed the orchestration within a month.

There was another musical stimulus, too. Schumann had just discovered Schubert’s lithero forgotten Great C major Symphony (No.9): even after Beethoven, he saw, a symphony could be written in a new way. The slow introduction to Schumann’s Symphony may be inspired by Schubert’s. The Schubert Symphony was first conducted by Felix Mendelssohn, who also conducted the premiere of Schumann’s own symphony in the Leipzig Gewandhaus on 31 March 1841. Mendelssohn also had a beneficial influence on Schumann’s orchestration. As a novice in matters orchestral, Schumann was happy to accept his colleague’s guidance. The Symphony was immediately successful, and has remained Schumann’s most-often performed.

The very opening of the Symphony, the ‘call of spring’ motif, probably spells out an underlying poetic text – its rhythm matches the first lines of a poem by Adolph Boettger:

O wende, wende deinen Lauf, im Thale blüht der Früling auf! (Oh turn, turn aside thy course, the valley blooms with spring!)

Schumann sent the first notes to the poet, with the words ‘Beginning of a symphony inspired by D. Adolph Boettger’. The opening motif dominates the first movement, and there is a lovely contrasting second theme led by the winds. At the point of climax which comes with the return of the main material, there is an expanded version of the opening fanfare motive, in long note values and with a broadening of the tempo – an effect of grandeur.

At the end of the graceful Larghetto slow movement the melody is gradually transformed, at the entrance of the trombones, so that after a half-close it becomes the theme of the third movement Scherzo, which follows without a break.

The finale begins with a loud outburst for full orchestra stating an upward scale. The tripping main theme made Schumann caution a conductor: ‘I like to think of it as the farewell of spring, so I wouldn’t want it played too frivolously.’ Soon, marked off by restatements of the opening scale, comes a quotation. This skipping theme also appears in Schumann’s cycle of piano pieces Kreisleriana, composed in 1838, and a favourite of its composer. Schumann liked riddles, but one clue to this is that the phrase is so close to one in Mendelssohn’s String Quartet Op.12 that it may be Schuman’s tribute to the conductor of his First Symphony. The rhythmic pattern of the Symphony’s opening plays its part in this movement, too. Schumann thought he was following Beethoven in thus unifying the work, and perhaps he was following Beethoven (the oboe solo in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony), in pausing just before the recapitulation for a flute solo cadenza. But the way this is ushered in by the horns, and its colouristic effect, is poetic and Romantic. ‘Beethoven’s’ quill pen in a fresh hand.

Adapted from a note by David Garrett © 2005

The MSO first performed this symphony on 5 July 1941 with Montagu Breaye conducting. The most recent performances were on 11, 12 and 14 August 2006 with Oleg Caetani.
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