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EMPEROR CONCERTO

FRIDAY 2 MARCH 2018

CONCERT PROGRAM

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra



Principal Partner

ARTISTS

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Sir Andrew Davis conductor
Nelson Freire piano

Wagner *Götterdämmerung:*
Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey

Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 *Emperor*

Running time 1 hour, no interval

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Melbourne
Symphony
Orchestra



MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Established in 1906, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is an arts leader and Australia's longest-running professional orchestra. Engaging more than three 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 will tour in May 2018 and Europe, where the MSO toured in 2014.

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 to audiences of all ages through its Education and Outreach initiatives. The MSO has also collaborated with non-classical musicians including Burt Bacharach, Nick Cave, Sting, Tim Minchin, Ben Folds and DJ Armand Van Helden.

MEET THE CONDUCTOR



SIR ANDREW DAVIS

Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Sir Andrew Davis is also Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Lyric Opera of Chicago. He is Conductor Laureate of both the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony, where he has also been named interim Artistic Director until 2020.

In a career spanning more than 40 years he has conducted virtually all the world's major orchestras and opera companies, and at the major festivals. Recent highlights have included *Die Walküre* in a new production at Chicago Lyric.

Sir Andrew's many CDs include a *Messiah* nominated for a 2018 Grammy, Bliss's *The Beatitudes*, and a recording with the Bergen Philharmonic of Vaughan Williams' *Job/Symphony No.9* nominated for a 2018 BBC Music Magazine Award. With the MSO he has just released a third recording in the ongoing Richard Strauss series, featuring the *Alpine Symphony* and *Till Eulenspiegel*.

MEET THE ARTIST



NELSON FREIRE

PIANO

Nelson Freire was born in Boa Esperança, Brazil. A finalist at the first International Piano Competition of Rio de Janeiro, Nelson Freire received a grant from Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek and went to study in Vienna under Bruno Seidlhofer.

At 19, he was awarded the Dinu Lipatti Medal. He has performed in over 70 countries, and his recordings have won awards such as the Diapason d'Or, Grand Prix du Disque, and a Latin Grammy for *Nelson Freire: Brasileiro*. Nelson Freire has performed with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Nelson recorded the Beethoven *Emperor* Concerto with the Gewandhaus Orchestra and Riccardo Chailly. His most recent recording is of Brahms's Piano Sonata No.3 and a selection of shorter works. He is a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

PROGRAM NOTES

RICHARD WAGNER

(1813-1883)

Götterdämmerung: Act I: Dawn Music and Siegfried's Rhine Journey

On completing one of Western civilization's greatest works of art, Wagner could no longer refer to it simply as opera.

He subtitled his mighty 15-hour *Der Ring des Nibelungen* 'a stage festival play for three days and a preliminary evening'.

Rejecting established operatic conventions, Wagner employed 'leitmotifs' – literally leading or guiding motifs – as building blocks to shape the form of the work as a whole, bringing an essential cohesion to his expansive musico-dramatic vision. Wagner refused to name the leitmotifs individually, trusting them to create their effect subliminally. However, a number of musicologists have identified between 70 and 90 leitmotifs since *The Ring's* premiere at Bayreuth in 1876.

The orchestra is as important a character in *The Ring* as any of its gods, giants, dwarfs or humans. Its contribution goes far beyond mere accompaniment, enriching the dramatic complexity via the leitmotifs. All four music-dramas of *The Ring* include orchestral interludes that are pivotal to the development of the epic's unfolding plot. Although *Dawn Music* and *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* are often dovetailed together in concert, in the opera they bookend the great scene of the Prelude to Act 1 of *Götterdämmerung* in which Brünnhilde farewells Siegfried before he sets out to fulfil his hero's destiny.

As dawn breaks quietly, we hear part of the motif labelled by Robert Donington as 'Siegfried's heroic deeds'. A hint of the motif relating to the love between Siegfried's parents, half-brother and sister, Siegmund and Sieglinde, leads to a full statement of 'heroic deeds' followed by increasingly ecstatic repetitions of the motif 'Brünnhilde as loving woman'. An embedded reference in major mode to the *Ride of the Valkyries* indicates that Brünnhilde's horse, Grane, is present. It is now broad daylight, and the music conjures the image of Siegfried resplendent in his glittering hero's armour.

Siegfried now sets out on his Rhine Journey that will lead to the events that bring about a cataclysmic change in world order very different from that which he and Brünnhilde anticipate. Throughout the Journey the sequence of leitmotifs builds a wonderful sound picture beginning with 'heroic deeds' and, when Siegfried disappears from view, 'loving woman', which softens with each repetition to express Brünnhilde's solitude. The journey proper is announced by a simpler version of 'heroic deeds': 'Siegfried's horn call'. According to Donington, the related motifs of 'masculinity', 'Valhalla' and 'the Rhine' are heard during the journey, along with references to the 'Magic Fire', 'the Rhinegold' and finally, in a gesture of foreboding, 'grief and woe'.

Robert Mitchell © 2018

First performed by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra on 15 April 1939 with conductor Bernard Heinze, and most recently on 27 August 2009 with Sir Andrew Davis.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat,
Op.73 Emperor
Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso –
Rondo (Allegro)

Nelson Freire piano

In May 1809 Napoleon's armies occupied Vienna for the second time and with considerable violence. Beethoven took shelter with his brother Caspar Carl and his wife Johanna, and to protect his failing hearing spent the bombardment of 11 and 12 May with pillows over his ears in the cellar. Beethoven wrote to his publisher, 'What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me: nothing but drums, cannons and human misery in every form.'

By this time Beethoven's deafness made it impossible for him to perform with an orchestra, so the concerto's first performance in Leipzig in 1811 was given by a young organist, Friedrich Schneider. Given the political circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the concerto is, in Alfred Einstein's words, the 'apotheosis of the military concept' in Beethoven's music. Biographer Maynard Solomon quotes Einstein as saying that the audience 'expected a first movement in four-four time of a military character; and they reacted with unmixed pleasure when Beethoven not only fulfilled but far surpassed their expectations'.

In the Fifth Concerto, Beethoven solved the problem of how to exploit the soloist's virtuosity without downgrading the role of the orchestra, while constructing the kind of musical argument and drama which was so crucial to the Classical style.

This is achieved partly through masterstrokes like the very opening gesture: a single chord is sounded by the orchestra, to which the piano responds in such flamboyant style, creating a sense of uncertainty about how and when the orchestra will rejoin the music, and what form the actual thematic material will take.

A standard practice in much Classical music was to get louder and more agitated in the lead-up to a point of structural significance, but Beethoven made those moments even more dramatic. The overwhelming impression left by the first movement of the Fifth Concerto is of ceremonial grandeur and pomp – hence the nickname (not authorised by Beethoven) of *Emperor*. But the massive scale of the first movement is made possible by the frequent contrast of the ‘military’, with its characteristic march rhythms, and the reflective.

Moreover, Beethoven prepares the movement’s climactic moments with what scholar William Kinderman calls ‘the withdrawal of the music into a mysterious stillness’. The piano’s opening flourishes, for instance, seem for a moment to be about to wander off into realms of improvisation before the energetic first theme is announced impatiently by the band. To prepare the moment of recapitulation, where the opening material returns, Beethoven again allows the music to become rarified and serene: a passage of ever-quieter scales and trills gives way to a pastoral dialogue between the winds and the bell-tones of the piano.

The short, central Adagio movement, rightly described as ‘dreamlike’ by one writer, is in B major, which in terms of Classical tonal logic is a fair way away from the ‘home’ key of E flat. And its mood couldn’t be further from the military episodes, despite its material being dominated by the scales and trills that featured in the first movement.

A justly celebrated instance of ‘the withdrawal of the music into a mysterious stillness’ occurs at the transition from the slow movement into the finale. The transition is almost imperceptible – Beethoven changes a note here or there to subtly change the direction of the music as it seems to fade, and the piano begins ruminating on a common chord which will ultimately flower as the final movement’s bounding theme, which again is contrasted with moments of deep calm. Whatever the misery in which Beethoven wrote this work, or its immediate political context, it turns out to be another ode to joy.

Gordon Kerry © 2003
First performed by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra on 26 June 1943 with conductor E.J. Roberts and soloist Joyce Greer, and most recently in May 2017 with Benjamin Northey and Stefan Cassomenos.

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