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EARS WIDE OPEN: *SIEGFRIED IDYLL*

30 JULY 2018

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Graham Abbott conductor / presenter

Wagner *Siegfried Idyll*

GRAHAM ABBOTT CONDUCTOR / PRESENTER

Graham Abbott has been Conductor in Residence at the Elder Conservatorium of Music Adelaide, Musical Director of Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus, Associate Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Musical Director of Melbourne Chorale, and in 1997 was Guest Chorus Master of the Chorus of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

He is a frequent guest conductor with all of the major Australian orchestras and opera companies, leading choral societies and numerous new and early music ensembles. Graham is also a respected speaker and broadcaster and has been producer and presenter of *Keys To Music* on ABC Classic FM since 2003.

Most recently Graham conducted *The Pearlfishers* and *St Matthew Passion* for Opera Queensland, *Don Giovanni* for State Opera of South Australia, *Messiah* for the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Canberra Choral Society, *Beethoven Symphony No 3* for Camerata of St John's and the Melbourne Chamber

Orchestra, *Israel in Egypt* for the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, as well as concerts with the Adelaide, Melbourne and Canberra Symphony Orchestras. International highlights have included presenting and conducting Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra's *Unwrap the Music* series, *Messiah* with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, *Dvořák's Stabat Mater* with the Prague Chamber Orchestra, concerts with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and with the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland.

2017 will also see Graham return to the Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus for Handel's *Belshazzar*.

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WAGNER

(1813–1883)

Siegfried Idyll

The *Siegfried Idyll* reveals a touchingly gentle and domestic side of a composer who often displayed the opposite.

Wagner's full title for the piece was *Tribschen Idyll, with Fidi's Birdsong and Orange Sunrise, as a Symphonic Birthday Greeting from Richard to Cosima*.

Tribschen is the villa near the Swiss town of Lucerne where Wagner was living with his wife, Cosima, whom he had recently married when her divorce from Hans von Bülow was finalised. She already had two daughters by Wagner, and in 1869 a son was born, Siegfried, known in the family circle as Fidi. On Christmas Day 1870, which was also Cosima's birthday, she awoke to the strains of music. As the music died away, Richard came into the room and offered Cosima the score of the 'symphonic birthday poem'. The 13 musicians stood on various levels of the staircase of Tribschen. They were rehearsed secretly by the young Hans Richter (later to become famous as a conductor), who played horn, and also the brief trumpet part.

The *Siegfried Idyll* is a kind of pendant to the music drama *Siegfried*, on which Wagner had been working, and many of its themes are to be found in the opera. The peaceful melody with which it begins is associated in the opera's last act with Brünnhilde's yielding, her giving up of memories of immortality for love of Siegfried. Another theme, appearing in counterpoint with it, is that of Brünnhilde's sleep. There is a second theme, not from the opera, based on an old German lullaby, and later the wind instruments present the theme associated with the words 'Siegfried, Treasure of the World', from the opera's

love duet. We hear the horn melody associated with the young Siegfried as hero, and the theme of the woodbird who leads Siegfried to Brünnhilde's fire-surrounded rock.

Although it began as private chamber music, the *Siegfried Idyll* is really an early example of the symphonic poem, a genre invented by Liszt and developed by Richard Strauss. Wagner here depends less on an extraneous program than either of these composers. The first theme, in fact, comes from a planned string quartet Richard had promised to Cosima in the days of their first love. Only later was it incorporated into the opera *Siegfried*. Cosima recalled Richard telling her that 'all that he had set out to do was to work the theme which had come to him in Starnberg (where we were living together), and which he had promised me as a quartet, into a morning serenade, and then he had unconsciously woven our whole life into it – Fidi's birth, my recuperation, Fidi's bird, etc. As Schopenhauer said, this is the way a musician works – he expresses life in a language which reason does not understand.'

Abridged from a note © David Garrett

See Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* performed as part of *Die Walküre*, Act 1 – Opera in Concert on 25 August at Melbourne Town Hall.
