

MOSMAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Andrew Del Riccio | musical director

Overtures

Debussy, Beethoven, Humperdinck,
Glinka, Rossini & Wagner



SAT NOV 19 2022 at 7.30 pm

SUN NOV 20 2022 at 2.30 pm

Mosman Art Gallery

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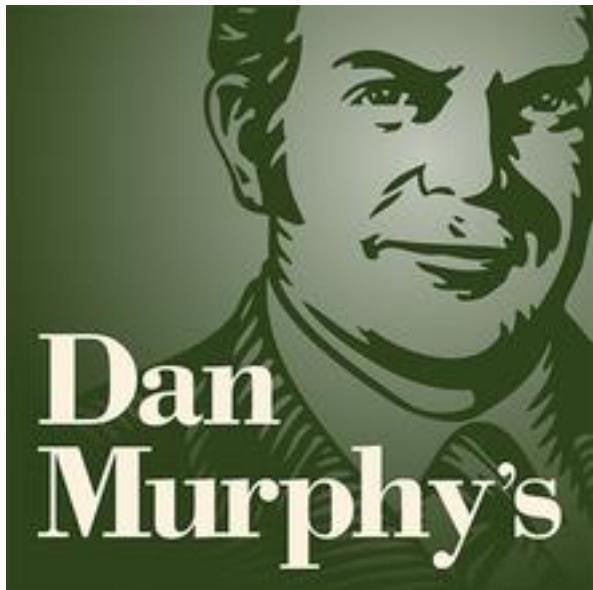
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Message from the Musical Director



Welcome to our final concert program for 2022! Having the title 'Overture' I'd love to make this program our overture to all our audience to come back in 2023, which promises (Covid willing) to have exciting music, terrific soloists and something for everyone!

Why a concert of starting pieces? Well, overtures are a way not only to start a concert, opera, ballet or show, but also a means to show off the orchestra. You'll hear our players with loads of soloist parts, and the entire ensemble weaving parts together to create interest and excitement in these shorter, rather intense and attention grabbing works.

There are a couple of different ways for overtures to go. Some are only loosely associated with the performance it precedes, while others are substantially based on the upcoming performance. Examples of this latter style of overture are the Meistersinger, Hansel & Gretel and Thievish Magpie works. The Egmont overture is less closely associated with its intended performance piece. Plus, of course our Debussy offering is a standalone prelude which is a ground-breaking work in its own right.

We hope you enjoy our performances and hope to see you again in 2023 - with luck, the nibble and bubbly will be back!

Andrew Del Riccio, November, 2022



MOSMAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PROGRAM

DEBUSSY Prelude à L'après-midi d'un faune

BEETHOVEN Overture to Egmont

HUMPERDINCK Overture to Hansel and Gretel

INTERVAL

GLINKA Overture to Ruslan and Ludmilla

ROSSINI Overture to The Thieving Magpie

WAGNER Overture to The Meistersingers of Nuremburg

Please consider our players & audience and ensure that mobile phones are switched off.

Notes on the Program

Prelude to L'après-midi d'un faune (Afternoon of a Faun): Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

This, one of Debussy's most famous orchestral works, is a symphonic poem. Composed in 1894, it is Debussy's response to a poem by the French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), in which a faun playing his pan-pipes alone in the woods becomes aroused by passing nymphs, pursues them unsuccessfully and eventually succumbs to sleep filled with erotic dreams.

About this work, Debussy wrote: 'The music of this prelude is a very free illustration of Mallarmé's beautiful poem. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of it. Rather there is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the timorous flight of nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature.' Debussy had intended it to be the first of three separate movements, but decided to concentrate all his musical ideas into this one ten-minute movement.

The work is scored for three flutes, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, harp and strings. It seems almost improvised, but in fact is a complex organization of musical motifs, carefully developed and changed around between different sections of the orchestra. The work is introduced by a beautiful solo for flute, and the main musical themes are introduced by the woodwinds, with the accompaniment of muted horns, strings and harp. Debussy's voicing and orchestration is sophisticated, so that the main melody moves from solo flute to oboe, back to solo flute, then to two unison flutes, and then to clarinet and to the strings.

Debussy's harmonic innovations in this piece have made many critics consider it a turning point in musical history. Pierre Boulez considered it the beginning of modern music, commenting that 'the flute of the faun brought new breath to the art of music'.

Mallarmé was originally unhappy for his poem to be the basis for a musical work, believing that the music of his words was sufficient. However, after he accepted Debussy's invitation to attend the premiere in December 1894, he wrote to the composer: 'I have just come out of the concert deeply moved. The marvel! Your illustration ... presents no dissonance with my text but goes much further, really, into nostalgia and into light, with finesse, with sensuality, with richness. I press your hand admiringly.'

This work provided the basis for a famous ballet choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky in 1912, with costumes and sets by Léon Bakst, and a later version by American choreographer Jerome Robbins.

Overture to Egmont: Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

This overture is the prelude to nine pieces Beethoven composed in 1809-10 for soprano, narrator and orchestra; the work was based on a 1787 play by Goethe. The subject of the drama and the music was the heroism of the sixteenth-century nobleman Lamoral, Count of Egmont from the Low Countries, who sacrificed his life in his stand against Napoleon. Beethoven had already expressed his outrage over Napoleon's imperial ambitions by scratching out the Emperor's name in the dedication to the 'Eroica' symphony. Nowadays, the overture is performed much more frequently than the incidental music it originally introduced.

The overture, which is powerful and expressive, is one of the last works of Beethoven's middle period, and is similar in style to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, composed two years earlier. Goethe himself said that Beethoven had expressed his intentions with 'a remarkable genius'. The Egmont overture became the unofficial anthem of the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

Overture to Hansel and Gretel: Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Hansel and Gretel – 'my fairytale opera' – is by far the most popular work by this composer. Based on the famous story by the Brothers Grimm, its libretto was written by Humperdinck's sister Adelheid, with a few musical sketches by Humperdinck. However, it soon became a full-scale opera, which was

premiered in Weimar in December 1893. The premiere was conducted by Richard Strauss, and before long the opera was taken up by other conductors and became part of the repertoire, where it remains today.

The overture, which is justly famous in its own right, sets the tone for the story. It begins with a serene brass chorale led by the French horns, with texture gradually built up with the addition of other sections of the orchestra. This chorale is the central motif of the whole overture, and it comes back more than once: the distinctive quality of the melody played by the horns and the strings can create a feeling of nostalgia, and this theme is aligned with the 'dreams and prayers' section of the opera. The opening section finished with the entry of the upper winds, playing an intertwining polyphonic motif.

The next section changes abruptly, with a brass fanfare led by the trumpets. After a brief general pause from the orchestra – the cue for the curtain to be raised when the complete opera is being performed - the main themes come into play. There are several motifs in play here: the tranquil theme is banished by various ominous figures from the winds, indicating the presence of the fearsome witch who captures the children, as well as a rather candid dance melody. Humperdinck used the upper winds to segue the orchestra into the next section of the work, and the role of the piccolo is crucial here, its high register making its presence heard throughout the overture.

Repeated phrases and emphasis from the percussion lead into the final passages of the overture; the horn motif returns, with a countermelody from the oboe, flute and upper strings. The most prominent instruments at the end of the work are the horns and piccolo, which play opposing themes and then unite at the end to magical effect.

Humperdinck has often been regarded as a lesser Wagner, and it is true that he was not the musical innovator of his more famous contemporary. (One critic suggested that his popularity has always been 'encased by a Wagner-shaped glass ceiling'). However, he was a consummately skilled musician, who understood how to work with orchestral complexities to create the desired musical atmosphere. A few weeks after his death in 1921, the Berlin State Opera performed Hansel and Gretel in his memory.

INTERVAL

Overture to Ruslan and Ludmilla: Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

The music for this five-act opera was composed by Glinka between 1837 and 1842, and is based on an 1820 poem by Alexander Pushkin. (Pushkin himself had intended to write the libretto, but was killed in a famous duel before he could get to it.) Based on Russian folktales, the opera tells the story of the abduction of Ludmilla, the daughter of Prince Vladimir by an evil wizard, and the attempts by the brave knight Ruslan to find and rescue her.

The opera did not find favour with its audience when it was first performed at the Bolshoi Theatre in St Petersburg in 1842, perhaps because the audience was really more interested in Italian opera at the time: the use of Russian legendary tales in opera and music generally had to wait for another twenty years or so. Indeed, Glinka's opera served as a model for Russian operatic fairy tales, especially by Rimsky-Korsakov. However, the opera has been a mainstay of the Bolshoi, with more than 700 performances staged in the past 160 years. And there are several well-known recordings, although comparatively few.

Outside Russia, the best-known music from the opera is its overture. Even though the plot of the opera depends on various elements of myth – wizards, the casting of spells and so on – there is nothing mysterious or enchanting about the overture, which is fast, brisk and rousing.

Overture to La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie): Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Like other operas with overtures featured in this concert, Rossini's two-act melodrama was based on a literary work – in this case a story, *La Pie Voleuse* by two French writers, Théodore Baudouin d'Aubigny and Louis-Charles Caigniez. It is the story of a maid who is accused of stealing the household silver, and is nearly sent to the gallows. The culprit, of course, turns out to be

a magpie hiding in the tower. Given the work's title, it is unlikely that audiences found the big reveal at the end to be very surprising: perhaps because of this, the opera has not survived.

Except for the overture, of course, which is among Rossini's most beguiling and frequently performed. It is most notable musically for its beginning, which features several consecutive snare drum rolls.



There is a famous story about this overture. Rossini frequently left his overtures to the last minute, and *La Gazza Ladra* was no exception. Rossini apparently told a nineteenth-century biographer that the conductor of the premiere performance in May 1817 locked him in a room the day before the premiere with orders to finish writing the overture. Rossini was guarded by four stagehands whose job it was to throw each completed page out of the window to the copyists below who would write out the full orchestral parts.

This overture has made several guest appearances since its composition, especially in TV and radio ads. It was probably most notably used in Stanley Kubrick's movie *A Clockwork Orange*, in which it has a somewhat sinister role, being used to announce an episode of 'ultra-violence'.

Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*: Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Wagner first contemplated the subject of the Mastersingers of Nuremberg as early as 1845; the story of the historical mastersingers and their singing contests seemed a good idea to follow *Tannhäuser*, which also featured another song contest from medieval German legend. However, Wagner's other projects took precedence, and he did not revisit *Die Meistersinger* until 1861. He described in his memoir *My Life* what happened when his friend and fervent supporter Otto Wesendonck took him to a gallery in Venice.

‘Wesendonck, who always went about armed with huge field-glasses, and was ever ready for sight-seeing, only once took me with him to see the Academy of Arts, a building which on my former visit to Venice I had only known from the outside. In spite of all my indifference, I must confess that the ‘Assumption of the Virgin’ by Titian exercised a most sublime influence over me so that, as soon as I realised its conception, my old powers revived within me, as though by a sudden flash of inspiration. I determined at once on the composition of *Die Meistersinger*.’

By the time he was ready to begin work on *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner had become an international celebrity. And the story of the opera is much more light-hearted and optimistic than most others Wagner wrote. It revolves around the struggle between the forces of musical conservatism and musical change, with the main characters based on historical figures. The hero, Walther, with the help of mastersinger Hans Sachs ultimately triumphs with the song he presents to the guild of mastersingers, who have never heard such a work before. And as one critic comments, Walther not only wins the competition, but he gets the girl too – and nobody has to hurl themselves into the ocean, ride into a funeral pyre, or die in each other’s arms in order to bring about the symbolic fulfilment of the German soul.

Wagner composed the Prelude to Act 1 during a train trip in 1862 before he began work on the rest of the opera. He scored it for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, cymbals, triangle, timpani, harp and strings. The prelude introduces thematic material associated with the mastersingers and their apprentices. The opening presents two broad, majestic themes that return in the opera, one accompanying the entrance of the mastersingers and the other the celebratory ending. A contrasting theme comes in later during Walther’s lyrical prize song. The central section of the prelude introduces busy music for the mastersingers’ apprentices, which Wagner uses as the basis of a fugue – a nod to the opera’s sixteenth-century setting. The two opening themes then return for a splendid finale. **J.K.**

Mosman Symphony Orchestra

Andrew Del Riccio – Musical Director



Educated in Australia, Switzerland and Canada, Sydney born Andrew Del Riccio is a highly accomplished teacher, conductor, trumpet player and instrumental teacher. Early career achievements include extensive performing with Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony and Australian Chamber Orchestras, creation of chamber ensembles (Blues Point Brass Quintet, St Peters Chamber Orchestra, The Unexpected orchestra) and free-lance work in genres ranging from baroque ensembles on original instruments, to music theatre and contemporary music groups. He started his private teaching practice in 1988, with excellent results in AMEB exams and many students successful in auditioning for placements in specialist music schools and other programs.

After studies in opera conducting and direction in Canada he taught at Sydney's Trinity Grammar School. Currently, he is the musical director of Mosman Symphony Orchestra, conducts in the Roseville Public School band program, directs the ensemble program at Burwood Girls High, plays with the Australian Brass Collective, Hourglass Ensemble, Australian Baroque Brass, and teaches brass at International Grammar and his private teaching practice.

Justin White – concertmaster



Justin began his musical studies as a teenager, learning both electric and classical guitar before taking up the violin after finishing high school. His tertiary music studies were at the University of New South Wales, where he studied both modern and baroque violin, and graduated with first class honours. He then undertook postgraduate research study in music theory and analysis.

He has been active and held principal positions in numerous community and privately run orchestras, and has worked in a freelance capacity for choirs and community theatre and opera groups. He also performs chamber music with his guitarist brother, focusing on romantic era chamber music involving the guitar.

Justin's primary occupation is as a musical instrument maker, handcrafting a variety of violins, violas, cellos, and guitars. He operates his own workshop and is also resident luthier at Vivaldi's violin shop in Epping.

Orchestra Musicians

First violin: Justin White (concertmaster*), Soojin Anna Choi, James Dong, Julian Dresser, Peter Lee, Peter Purches, Carol Tang, Yuting Jin, Hayden White

Second violin: John Philp (leader), Paul Bartels, Macarena Herbert, Ernie Hurst, Daniel McNamara, Shauna Moloney, Kate Robertson, Darrell Wood

Viola: Eda Talu (leader Sat), Alfred Yu (leader Sun), Mark Berriman, Zhiliang Chen, Bob Clampett, Anthony Dooley, Daniel Morris, Brett Richards, Hannah Shephard

Cello: Michal Wiczorek (leader Sat), Vanessa Chalker (leader Sun), Yvette Leonard, Rachel Terry, Jennifer Mast, Scott Rowe, Sarah Vale

Double bass: Tom Wu

Flute: Linda Entwistle, Jacqueline Kent, Jan Squire

Piccolo: Linda Entwistle

Oboe: Rachel Tolmie, Cate Trebeck

Cor Anglais: Cate Trebeck

Clarinet: Judy Hart, Allan Kirk

Bassoon: Bob Chen, Graham Cormack

French horn: Adrian Barnes, Bridget Darby, Cath Lukin, Lynelle Gullick

Trumpet: Brian McGuiness, Brook Ayrton

Trombone: Greg Hanna, Lauren Smith, Benjamin Walton

Tuba: Dominic Lukin

Percussion: Lisa Beins, Benjamin Kam, Lawrence Lau, Evangeline Marr, Robert Oetomo

Harp: Audrey Woo

* Chair of Concertmaster in memory of Carolyn Clampett

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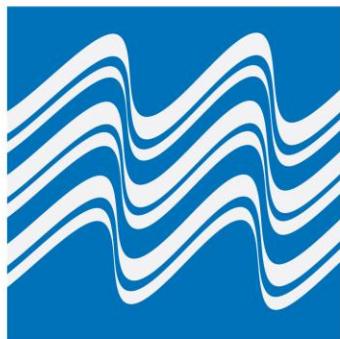
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