

MSO

CONCERT PROGRAM

SHEKU KANNEH-MASON MID-SEASON GALA

Proudly presented by MSO Premier Partner Ryman Healthcare. In association with Andrew McKinnon Presentations

Our thanks to Mr Marc Besen AC for printing tonight's tribute and program in honour of his late wife, Mrs Eva Besen AC.

30 July / 7.30pm

Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall

Artists

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

Jaime Martín conductor

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello

Program

ANNE BOYD *At the Rising of the Sun*

SHOSTAKOVICH Cello Concerto No.2

DVOŘÁK Symphony No.9 *From the New World*

Duration: approx. Approximately 2 hours, inc. 20-min interval.

Our musical Acknowledgment of Country, *Long Time Living Here* by Deborah Cheetham AO, will be performed at this concert.

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

Established in 1906, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is Australia's pre-eminent orchestra and a cornerstone of Victoria's rich, cultural heritage.

Each year, the MSO engages with more than 5 million people, presenting in excess of 180 public events across live performances, TV, radio and online broadcasts, and via its online concert hall, MSO.LIVE, with audiences in 56 countries.

With a reputation for excellence, versatility and innovation, the MSO works with culturally diverse and First Nations leaders to build community and deliver music to people across Melbourne, the state of Victoria and around the world.

In 2022, the MSO's new Chief Conductor, Jaime Martín has ushered in an exciting new phase in the Orchestra's history. Maestro Martín joins an Artistic Family that includes Principal Guest Conductor Xian Zhang, Principal Conductor in Residence, Benjamin Northey, Conductor Laureate, Sir Andrew Davis CBE, Composer in Residence, Paul Grabowsky and Young Artist in Association, Christian Li.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra respectfully acknowledges the people of the Eastern Kulin Nations, on whose un-ceded lands we honour the continuation of the oldest music practice in the world.

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Jaime Martín conductor

Jaime Martín commenced his tenure as MSO Chief Conductor in 2022, investing the Orchestra with prodigious musical creativity and momentum.

In September 2019 Jaime Martín became Chief Conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

He has been Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of Gävle Symphony Orchestra since 2013. He was recently announced as the Principal Guest Conductor of the Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España (Spanish National Orchestra) for the 22/23 season.

Having spent many years as a highly regarded flautist, Jaime turned to conducting fulltime in 2013. In recent years Martín has conducted an impressive list of orchestras and has recorded various discs, both as a conductor and as a flautist.

Martín is the Artistic Advisor and previous Artistic Director of the Santander Festival. He was also a founding member of the Orquesta de Cadaqués, where he was Chief Conductor from 2012 to 2019. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Music, London, where he was a flute professor.

The MSO's Chief Conductor is supported by Mr Marc Besen AC and the late Mrs Eva Besen AO.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello

Sheku Kanneh-Mason became a household name in 2018 after performing at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle. Sheku initially garnered renown as the winner of the 2016 BBC Young Musician competition, the first Black musician to take the title. He has released two chart-topping albums on the Decca Classics label, *Inspiration* in 2018 and *Elgar* in 2020.

Sheku has made debuts with orchestras such as the Seattle Symphony, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Stockholm Philharmonic, the Atlanta Symphony, Japan Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, London Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and Baltimore Symphony orchestras. Forthcoming highlights include performances with the Cleveland Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Barcelona Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, and London Philharmonic orchestras, and on tour with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

He has performed at the BAFTA awards ceremony twice in 2017 and 2018, is the winner of Best Classical Artist at the Global Awards in 2020 and 2021 (the latter as part of the Kanneh-Mason family), and received the 2020 Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artists' Award.

Sheku was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year's Honours List. He plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700 which is on indefinite loan to him.

Program Notes

ANNE BOYD

(born 1946)

At the Rising of the Sun

"... at the rising of the sun..." are words drawn from Mark's gospel in the King James version of the Bible. The passage tells how at dawn, on the first Easter morning, the three women set out to anoint Christ's body only to discover his empty tomb. The music can be read as their dawning consciousness of the mystical fact of Christ's resurrection. The work is both a meditation and a prayer. Essentially it is about tuning – of ourselves to each other and to the natural world. The sun is perceived cosmologically as a symbol for the Son of God and for the coming

of light, of life (both natural and spiritual) and of knowledge.

Philosophically the music is based upon the intersection of Christian Love with Buddhist silence, a concept which lies at the heart of my creative activity. The work also represents the conjoining of past and present being largely based upon an earlier work *As I Crossed A Bridge of Dreams* from the narrative account of her spiritual journey by the deeply Buddhist Lady Sarashina of 14th century Japan. I see no contradiction in the coming together of Buddhism and Christianity in this context as a representation of Matthew Fox's idea of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* as the dawn of a new age

in spiritual consciousness – an outlook which has much in common with medieval Christian mysticism as represented in the life and work of Hildegard of Bingen, whose world embraced a deep reverence and awe for the earth conceived as a Mother – God's greatest gift to human kind.

This work is commissioned by the Kuring-gai Symphony Orchestra for the centenary of Australia's Federation. It is dedicated to my beloved lifelong friend and teacher, Peter Sculthorpe.

© Anne Boyd

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(1906–1975)

Cello Concerto No.1 in E flat

I. *Largo*

II. *Allegretto*

III. *Allegretto*

Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello

The early 1960s were for the best of times and the worst of times for Shostakovich. Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's famous 'secret' speech of denunciation culminated in a thaw of sorts. He had been acclaimed as a 'People's Artist' in 1954 and from the late 1950s was appointed to high office in the official composers' unions. He was able to travel with some degree of freedom within and outside of the Soviet Union: he travelled to London in 1960 with the Leningrad Symphony Orchestra and there met Benjamin Britten with whom he developed a close friendship. On a trip to Edinburgh in 1962 he heard Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*; impressed at the British composer's fruitful marriage of twelve-note serial procedure with traditional tonal harmony, Shostakovich made his own experiments. The following year saw the triumphant premiere of *Katerina Ismailova*, the reworking of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* which had caused Shostakovich such difficulty 30 years earlier. Shostakovich's international eminence and stature at home were perhaps behind his decision in 1960 to finally join the Communist Party, a decision which was ratified in 1966.

On the debit side, Shostakovich is said to have threatened suicide, but was persuaded by friends not to kill himself in the wake of his embrace of and by the Communist Party. In reality there was little relief for the composer or his country. After embarrassing scenes in such forums as the United Nations, and the potential global disaster of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev was quietly removed from office in 1964 and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, whose regime was distinctly less liberal than that of his predecessor. Shostakovich's

health, which had been poor since the late 1950s continued to decline: in 1966 a chronic injury to his hand forced him to give up public performance as a pianist and on the night of his farewell concert he suffered a heart attack.

The works of Shostakovich's last decade then show an even more pervasive concern with mortality than his earlier music. In a sense the Cello Concerto No.2 ushers in this phase, coming as it did at the time when Shostakovich was forced to withdraw from the platform and confront his chronic illness. In addition he began to lose colleagues of his age cohort – to natural causes; in 1965 the second violinist, and foundation member of the Beethoven Quartet, Vassily Shirinsky died and Shostakovich dedicated his Eleventh Quartet to him.

The Concerto is likewise dedicated to a performer colleague. In 1960, when Shostakovich met Britten in London, the Leningrad Symphony Orchestra was performing his First Cello Concerto, and the soloist was Mstislav Rostropovich. The cellist, who died in April this year aged 80, was the inspiration, first interpreter and dedicatee of several major works by composers like Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Lutosławski, Dutilleux, Britten and of course Shostakovich who wrote both concertos for him. Rostropovich regarded Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Britten as his 'three musical gods'. In addition to being a brilliant cellist and fine conductor, Rostropovich became a political hero in the last days of the Cold War. In 1970 he had publicly condemned the Brezhnev administration's treatment of Alexander Solzhenitsin; repeating his remarks while in Paris in 1978 led to his effective banishment from the Soviet Union to which he didn't return until 1990. In 1991 he went back to show public support for Boris Yeltsin in the face of a hard-line coup in Moscow.

In 1964 Britten produced his Symphony for Cello and Orchestra for Rostropovich. As its title suggests, the composer was

careful not to call it a concerto, but rather to underline the importance of the overall thematic integration of the solo and orchestral parts. It is possible that Shostakovich was in some way influenced by this; it is said that he originally considered making this piece his Symphony No.14. As Britten and Prokofiev (whose Symphony-Concerto was written for Rostropovich) have shown, though this needn't mean any downgrading of the role of virtuosity in the solo part, and in the case of Shostakovich's Second Concerto the same is true.

Whatever the final designation of the work it is both thrillingly virtuosic and satisfyingly symphonic in its argument, as even the late solo sonatas of Shostakovich are as well. As David Fanning puts it:

The Second Cello Concerto, Second Violin Concerto and Violin and Viola Sonatas have much in common, in particular a sense of familiar territory being traversed but in a wan, alienated manner, as though experienced by a lost soul. Moments of tonal clarification register increasingly as out-of-body experiences, and they are surrounded by paroxysms of pain, inscrutable soliloquies and ghostly revisitings of the past.

The first movement is marked *Largo*, unusually slow for a concerto opening, and begins with deep solo ruminations gradually joined by the rest of the orchestra. The orchestration, typically for as astute a composer as this, calls for a wind section of double woodwinds (plus contrabassoon) and two horns. There is no other brass, but Shostakovich makes sure the band can make serious noise by including a fair amount of percussion and two harps.

Shostakovich composed the work largely in the Crimea, and the scherzo which follows quotes a cabaret song from the city of Odessa, *Bublik, kupite bublik* which translates as 'Buy my bread rolls' (or indeed, 'bagels!'). Gerard McBurney has pointed out that this is an in-joke between the composer and Rostropovich going

back to a New Year's Eve party some months before. The singer of the song is, of course, offering rather more than fresh bread.

The final movement – written in haste after Shostakovich destroyed the first effort – begins with a kind of cadenza where cellist echoes fanfares from the horns. The music tries several times to introduce a note of lyricism and calm, but before long Shostakovich unleashes the full force of the orchestra in a terrifyingly, frenetic outburst which seems for a time to crush the soloist. The cello re-emerges, bloodied but unbowed.

Rostropovich gave the first performance of the concerto in the Moscow Conservatory under Yevgeny Svetlanov in a concert to honour Shostakovich's 60th birthday.

Drew Crawford © 1998

ANTONÍN DVORÁK

(1841–1904)

Symphony No.9 in E minor
From the New World

- I. *Adagio – Allegro molto*
- II. *Largo*
- III. *Scherzo (Molto vivace)*
- IV. *Allegro con fuoco*

In his last and most celebrated symphony, Antonín Dvorák mingles excitement at the sights and sounds of America with downright homesickness for his native Bohemia. Dvorák had arrived in New York in September 1892 to become director of the National Conservatory of Music, and the symphony was composed between January and May of the following year. Apart from the diplomatic cantata, *The American Flag*, it was his first composition in the USA.

A Czech-American pupil, Josef Jan Kovarik, who travelled with Dvorák to New York, has recounted that when he was to take the score to Anton Seidl, conductor of the New York Philharmonic, for its first performance, the composer paused at the last moment to write on the title page '*Z Nového sveta*' (*From the New World*). Significantly, written in Czech rather than the German or English that Seidl or

his American audience would have understood, the inscription implied no suggestion that the new work was an 'American' symphony (Kovarik was adamant about this) but meant merely 'Impressions and greetings from the New World'.

The 'impressions' that crowded Dvorák's mind as he wrote the symphony were, of course, the frenetic bustle of New York, the seething cauldron of humanity in the metropolis, and the folk caught up in its impersonal whirl – the African-Americans and Native Americans. Above all, he developed a fascination for what he was able to hear of the music of these two races – the plantation songs of Stephen Foster; spirituals sung to him on several occasions by Harry T. Burleigh, a black student at the National Conservatory; transcriptions he was given of some Native American songs, and others he heard at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Dvorák claimed in a newspaper interview that the two musics were nearly identical and that their fondness for type of pentatonic scale made them remarkably similar to Scottish music. But it must be acknowledged that his acquaintance with the songs – those of the Native Americans in particular – was distinctly superficial.

Dvorák's fascination with these people stemmed from his reading, some thirty years earlier, Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* in a Czech translation. Although he did not persevere with ideas he had for writing an opera on the subject of America, the *Hiawatha* concept nevertheless surfaced to some extent in this symphony.

The great Dvorák scholar Otakar Sourek found the physical manifestations of America embodied mainly in the surging flow and swiftly changing moods of the first and last movements, soaring at times to heights of impressive grandeur. It is in the *Largo* and *Scherzo* that Dvorák is said to have admitted drawing on *The Song of Hiawatha* – Minnehaha's bleak forest funeral in the slow movement, and the wedding feast and Indians

dancing in the *Scherzo*. The music goes far beyond such flimsy poetic inspiration, however, for the *Largo* positively aches with the composer's nostalgia and homesickness, while the Trio of the third movement is an unmistakable Czech dance.

Ultimately, the symphony as a whole is far more Czech than American.

The very familiarity of the music to most listeners, the facility with which well-remembered tunes appear and reappear, is apt to blur the subtleties of Dvorák's writing and symphonic construction. Most notable is the way themes for each movement recur in succeeding movements, often skilfully woven into climaxes or codas. Unlike Beethoven, however, in whose Ninth Symphony the ideas of the first three movements are reviewed, only to be rejected and transcended in a towering finale, Dvorák uses his earlier thoughts as a force of structural and spiritual unity, so that in combination they transcend themselves and each other.

In the miraculous *Largo*, the famous and elegiac melody first stated by the solo cor anglais – the melody that later became 'Goin' home' – culminates grandly on trumpets against festive recollections of the two main themes from the first movement. Both first movement themes recur again in the coda of the *Scherzo*, the first of them (somewhat disguised) actually appearing three times earlier in the movement as well – at the end of the *Scherzo* section and twice in the transition of the Trio.

The development section of the finale contains allusions to the main themes of both *Largo* and *Scherzo*, and in the masterly coda the main themes of all three preceding movements are reviewed, that of the fast movement finally engaging in dialogue with the finale's main subject until cut off by an urgent rush of highly conventional chords. Unexpectedly these lead to a delicate pianissimo wind chord with which the symphony ultimately soars heavenward, freed from earthbound shackles.

Anthony Cane © 1994

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