

Symphony *Series*

2 – Horizons

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Adelaide Town Hall



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Symphony *Series*

2

Horizons

Shiyeon Sung
Conductor

Emily Sun
Violin

ASO Artist in Association:
Supported by Sally Gordon

—

Duration
1 hr 45 min (incl. interval)

Fri 22 & Sat 23 March
Adelaide Town Hall

Acknowledgement of Country

Buckskin & Goldsmith arr./orch. Ferguson

[2']

Pudnanthi Padninthi

Mendelssohn

[12']

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27

Bruch

[24']

Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor, Op.26

I. Prelude: Allegro moderato

II. Adagio

III. Finale: Allegro energico

Interval

Sofia Gubaidulina

[12']

Märchenpoem (Fairytale Poem)

Debussy

[23']

La mer

I. From Dawn to Noon on the Sea

II. Play of the Waves

III. Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea

Listen Later ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again at 1pm on Sunday 21 April.

Classical Conversation Join us in the Adelaide Town Hall auditorium one hour before each concert for our free *Classical Conversations* as violinist and ASO Artist in Association Emily Sun and violinist Elizabeth Layton discuss the music.



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Welcome



Kate Suthers
Concertmaster

Good evening one and all. It's my pleasure to welcome you to this evening's performance, and transport you towards a stunning musical horizon.

We come together following a bustling few weeks at the Adelaide Festival, where the Orchestra took part in a diverse range of projects including a captivating production of Igor Stravinsky's *The Nightingale and Other Fables* and a dynamic concert with electro-pop duo Electric Fields. It's wonderful to return to the Adelaide Town Hall stage, and I'm delighted to introduce three women who take starring roles tonight.

Firstly, I hope you'll join me in welcoming conductor Shiyeon Sung as she takes the helm in her first performances with the orchestra. The bond between conductors and orchestras is a kind of alchemy, and it's always a fascinating opportunity to experience this relationship from its earliest moments. I look forward to hearing and sharing the results of our collaboration with Shiyeon.

Speaking of alchemy, we also present the music of Sofia Gubaidulina whose eerie *Fairytale Poem* leaps from the menacing to the hazily beautiful. It's a work I've been thrilled to discover as part of the ASO's proud

commitment to performing music by women composers. It's an excellent companion piece to *La mer*, Debussy's musical triptych depicting aspects of the sea.

It's always a pleasure to welcome back our friend and Artist in Association, Emily Sun. Emily's warmth and easy virtuosity will shine through the beautiful score of Bruch's first Violin Concerto – a work that's so familiar to many of us, yet it retains such magic in live performance.

Before we set sail on our journey tonight with Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, I'd like to thank you for being here with us. I hope you enjoy this performance, and I look forward to seeing you again in our 2024 season.

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Shiyeon Sung
Conductor

Shiyeon Sung is a real trailblazer of her profession. She is the first female conductor from South Korea to make the leap to the podium of internationally renowned orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra.

When she was appointed assistant conductor at the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2007, her reputation as one of the most exciting emerging talents on the international music circuit was already secure: shortly before, she had won the International Conductors' Competition Sir Georg Solti and the Gustav Mahler Conductors' Competition. Since 2023, she has been the Auckland Philharmonia's Principal Guest Conductor.

In 2024, Shiyeon Sung returns to London to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and makes her debuts with the Detroit Symphony, the Vancouver Symphony, the Pacific Symphony and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestras. In Asia, she appears with the KBS Symphony Orchestra, Kanagawa Philharmonic Orchestra, and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra.

Born in Pusan, Shiyeon Sung has won various prizes as a pianist. From 2001 to 2006, she studied orchestral conducting at the Hanns Eisler School of Music in Berlin and continued her education with advanced conducting studies at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm.



Emily Sun
Violin

Emily Sun's powerful sound and compelling interpretations have earned her international renown, winning the Royal Overseas League Competition (UK), ABC Young Performers Award (Australia), and performing in Europe, the UK, and Asia with conductors such as Vasily Petrenko, Tan Dun, and Howard Griffiths.

As the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra 2023 Artist-in-Association, Emily presented the critically acclaimed world premiere of Elena Kats-Chernin's violin concerto *Fantasie im Wintergarten*. She continues this role in 2024, performing with conductors Andrew Litton and Shiyeon Sung. The soloist has recently played with the Sydney, Melbourne, and West Australian symphony orchestras with conductors Asher Fisch, Mark Wigglesworth, Jaime Martín, and Benjamin Northey; the Australian Festival of Classical Music, Musica Viva Tasmania, and more. As a guest soloist, she has been welcomed by the London Mozart Players, European Union Chamber Orchestra, Qingdao Symphony Orchestra, and alongside Maxim Vengerov at Buckingham Palace.

Emily's album *Nocturnes* (ABC Classics) was nominated for a 2021 ARIA Award. She has also recorded with Ensemble Émigré (Rubicon Classics), and featured in the Classic 100 concert broadcast on ABC iview.

Emily is a Violin Professor at the Royal College of Music, and performs on a 1753 G.B. Guadagnini 'The Adelaide' violin, generously loaned by the UKARIA Cultural Trust.

About the Program

Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27

Bruch (1838–1920)

Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor, Op.26

Sofia Gubaidulina (Born 1931)

Märchenpoem (Fairytale Poem)

Debussy (1862–1918)

La mer

Felix Mendelssohn wrote his *Hebrides Overture* after exploring the basalt sea caves of Scotland. But it wasn't a sightseeing trip that would move him to craft another work about the crashing waves. In *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, we steady ourselves on the deck of a wooden ship, primed to sail the waters described in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 18th-Century poetry.

Goethe – who was six decades Mendelssohn's senior – was a big believer in the composer. He found in Mendelssohn the same bright potential he saw in a young Mozart; he met each boy while they were child prodigies. Mendelssohn captures the spirit and chronology of Goethe's poems which, unlike many other tales of the sea, do not reach their peak in a whirlwind storm. On the contrary, it is the *stillness* of the breeze that signals a problem. To Goethe, this silence signifies the danger of becoming stranded at sea, without a gust to force the boat towards its destination!

Mendelssohn demonstrates Goethe's ominous calm with drawn-out string and clarinet notes; the cello opens with tied notes lasting 29 beats! Low-pitched tones pave the way for rising intensity, and the flute's cheerful whistle brings about a change of pace. Strings elevate the mood as they brave the swift rise and fall of their scales. Joyous and triumphant, we finally hear some wind in the sails – our ship is propelled across the sea! We spot land in the distance, brass playing a delightful fanfare, and timpani thrusting us towards the shore. Goethe's voyage is so picturesque, Beethoven and Schubert composed their own versions of the poems too.

Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina was also inspired by a story, but where Mendelssohn takes a literal approach to the dramatic gestures of nature, it would be impossible for Gubaidulina to do the same. Instead, she was tasked with conjuring a fantasy world in her *Fairytale Poem*. This imaginative work is based on a Czech tale about a piece of chalk doomed to spend its ever-shortening life on the blackboard. One day, the chalk is rescued by a child who whisks it away from the classroom, and uses it to draw magical palaces and seascapes under the sky.

Fairytale Poem was composed for radio in 1971. In the decades prior, Gubaidulina had studied composition in the Soviet Union and built a career in screen music. When she travelled to the West in the mid-'80s, audiences and artists started recognising her international appeal: her compositions crossed cultural boundaries, fusing styles she'd learnt in her homeland with musical languages of Asia and West, as well as a touch of her own spiritualism. In *Fairytale Poem*, she prioritises evocative textures above clear melodic themes. Strings clash, winds trill, and piano strikes over the gentle bloom of the harp – all shaping our impression of another world.

From Gubaidulina's embrace of Western classical styles to Mendelssohn's romantic visions of the sea, many artists have sourced inspiration in places far from their homes. Musicologists will use the ageing term 'exoticism' to describe this concept as it applies to music. French composer Claude Debussy turned to Asia to find different ways of creating mood and atmosphere in his



Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura), also known as The Great Wave, from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei) by Katsushika Hokusai. Credit: H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929

own works, favouring the pentatonic scale of five tones. (If you play only the black keys on the piano, it will sound similar to the centuries-old music of Japan. Debussy, who studied at the Paris Conservatory, would instead have been trained to memorise the seven tones of a typical Western scale.)

Debussy wrote *La mer* in 1905, just as the French had developed a fascination with Japanese artefacts, largely due to increased trade routes. Debussy's impressionistic piece was undoubtedly inspired by Hokusai's 1830s woodblock print *The Great Wave*; the composer had the artwork framed on his studio wall, and it appeared on the first edition of his published *La mer* score. As in the painting, Debussy shows us a sea with a soul of its own. At first, the water feels calm – but with an obvious grip of tension. (Might this portrayal have pleased Goethe?) Brass and winds seem to dance around the pentatonic scale as early as the first few minutes in, then with a blustery tremolo effect – watch the string players move their arms very quickly – we embark upon a playful journey; an enchanting impression of the sea.

Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No.1 in G minor may seem like a contrasting work on a such a poetic program. It's not a story of the sea – but beneath the surface, it shares fascinating ties with the music of our first *Horizons* composer: Mendelssohn.

Superstar violinist of the 19th Century Joseph Joachim helped Bruch tailor the concerto before giving a knock-out performance of this new-and-improved version. A couple of decades earlier,

he'd performed Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto – and Beethoven's Violin Concerto too, under Mendelssohn's baton!

Joachim believed these composers – Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Bruch – were responsible for some of the best violin concertos ever to come from Germany. And he reckoned Bruch's G minor was the "most seductive" of them all – even if he was a little biased, having helped perfect it.

After a few opening bars from the winds and timpani, the violin enters with a slinky solo. It never fully unites with its surrounding instruments: it clearly and unapologetically stakes its claim as the number one star of the show. So arresting is this virtuosic solo that it rouses the rest of the orchestra into a sensational response to the melody's call. The second movement starts in a swaying 3/8 time, string sections more generously supporting their soloist with a warmer bed of sound. The *Finale* bears a striking resemblance to the bright energy of Brahms' 1878 Violin Concerto in D Major. Perhaps it's no surprise: Joachim advised Brahms on that one, too!

Stephanie Eslake

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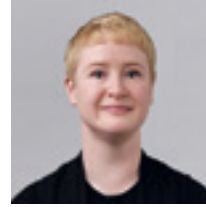
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