



Adelaide
Symphony
Orchestra

3

Romance
Wed 24 Sep
2025

MATINÉE SÉRIES

3

ROMANCE

Vaughan Williams

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

[15']

Dvořák

Romance for Violin & Orchestra in F Minor, Op. 11

[12']

Bacewicz

Concerto for String Orchestra

[15']

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Vivo

SEPTEMBER

Wed 24

Elder Hall

Elizabeth Layton

Director/Violin

Duration

60 mins (no interval)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The ASO acknowledges that the land we make music on is the traditional country of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains. We pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land. We acknowledge that this is of continuing importance to the Kaurna people living today. We extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are with us for this performance today.

MATINÉE SERIES

Listen Later

on ABC Classic:

Friday 17 October, 1pm

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The violin has been associated with concepts of romance for centuries. Perhaps because it can soar like the human voice and tremble with emotion, from fiery anger to mournful heartbreak.

Today's program utilises the emotional versatility of stringed instruments. The sweeping, romantic quality is on full display in Ralph Vaughan Williams' heart-wrenching *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and Antonín Dvořák's bucolic *Romance in F minor, Op.11*. The program ends with emotions on the other end of the spectrum: the heightened anxiety woven into *Concerto for String Orchestra* by Grażyna Bacewicz.

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis is one of Vaughan Williams' most famous pieces – which seems appropriate, given the composer's enduring love of English music and history. Williams encountered the titular theme after being commissioned to create the 1906 edition of the definitive religious songbook, the English Hymnal. The theme is in Phrygian mode – the mysterious sequence heard when you play the white notes from 'e' to 'e' on a piano.

The piece was written shortly after Vaughan Williams studied orchestration with Maurice Ravel in Paris. Williams expertly crafts a push and pull with overlapping textures. The full orchestra is split into two string orchestras, one of which also contains a string quartet which emerges out of the forces. The main melody can be divided into two large sections, with the first containing two very similar phrases and the second following a question-answer structure.

The premiere took place in Gloucester Cathedral in 1910. Vaughan Williams conducted the performance, raising the curtain for Edward Elgar to conduct his own piece *The Dream of Gerontius*. This was truly a

star-studded performance: one of the organ scholars was future composer Herbert Howells, who later said, "For a music-bewildered youth of 17, it was an overwhelming evening, so disturbing and moving that I even asked RVW for his autograph – and got it!"

Audiences seemed initially unsure where to place the piece, surely due to its unique flavour. Despite some underwhelmed critics, many were complimentary. A writer from the *Manchester Guardian* said: "The melody is modal and antique in flavour, while the harmonies are as exotic as those of Debussy." A reviewer from *The Times* seems to sum it up best: "...one is never quite sure whether one is listening to something very old or very new. The work is wonderful because it seems to lift one into some unknown regions of musical thought and feeling."

Dvořák's *Romance in F minor, Op.11* started life as a movement within his String Quartet in F minor, Op.9, which only had one performance in 1873. The piece was not well received and Dvořák decided to shelve it. Later, upon reflection, he decided there was something worth saving in the slow second movement. His publishers agreed.

Sometime between 1873 and 1877, the *Romance* was born. Dvořák didn't pluck the movement straight from the quartet – he expanded the theme and added a second melodic idea. The result is a peaceful, dreamy piece which conjures up images of clouds lazily drifting across a periwinkle sky, or a meadow filled with wildflowers dancing in the breeze.

Dvořák scholar Otakar Sourek succinctly describes the *Romance's* charm: "The *Romance* begins with a delicate orchestral introduction developed canonically from the principal theme of the quartet movement... There follows the movement proper, which reproduces the opening bars of the quartet

movement. After a short transitional passage, an altogether new and beautifully vocal theme makes its entry in the key of E major, recalling... at least in its scheme of modulations, the composer's Wagnerian fever of a phase successfully outgrown. The whole exposition concludes with a new, softly insinuating final theme, as delicate as it is charming."

Grażyna Bacewicz was dubbed 'The First Lady of Polish Music', and managed to carve out a successful musical career despite living under an oppressive Stalinist regime in Poland. She also worked as the principal violinist of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra for two years.

Her Concerto for String Orchestra is her best-known piece. Listening with a 21st century ear, it still sounds utterly fresh and engaging. Written in turbulent surroundings in 1948 and premiered in 1950, it has been described as 'neo-classical' due to Bacewicz's use of the baroque *concerto grosso* form, but many consider this an insufficient label. Across three energetic movements which follow the typical fast-slow-fast structure, Bacewicz writes interesting and meaty parts for all four string instrument groups.

A sense of unease permeates the unrelenting *allegro* movement. Marching rhythms which seem strangely cheerful sit at odds with the dissonant harmony. The second *andante* movement is quiet and restrained, but no less impactful, with sustained notes twisting through an angular melody. The piece comes to a fiery finish with the final movement, marked *vivo*, filled with virtuosic trilling and chirping from all the string players.

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Elizabeth Layton
Director/Violin

Described as 'one of the most outstanding performers of her generation' (*The Strad*), UK born violinist Elizabeth Layton has appeared as soloist with major international orchestras, also touring chamber music worldwide with the Nash Ensemble. She is a regular participant at festivals including the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and Music by the Springs.

CD recordings include the complete Beethoven piano trios (nominated for a Gramophone Award), violin and piano works by Schubert (Daily Telegraph 'CD Choice') and chamber music recordings for DG, Naxos, BIS, Chandos, Hyperion and Artaria. CD releases in 2024 include Boccherini's chamber music with flautist Sally Walker (Avie), and a 3 CD set of complete string chamber music by the 18th Century English composer, William Shield (Naxos). Concerts in the current season include performances in New Zealand and Thailand, Sydney Opera House and Melbourne Recital Centre. A former Associate Leader of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and Concertmaster of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Elizabeth also appears as guest concertmaster with orchestras throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Elizabeth is Head of Classical Performance at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide where she was awarded a doctorate in 2019.

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Mark Wigglesworth
Chief Conductor

Violins

Elizabeth Layton**
Guest Concertmaster
Cameron Hill**
Associate Concertmaster
Holly Piccoli*
Principal 1st Violin
Lachlan Bramble**
Acting Principal 2nd Violin
Ambra Nesa~
Acting Associate Principal
2nd Violin
Janet Anderson
Minas Berberyan
Gillian Braithwaite
Julia Brittain
Nadia Buck
Zoe Freisberg
Belinda Gehlert
Danielle Jaquillard
Julie Newman
Liam Osborne
Emma Perkins
Alexander Permezal
Alison Rayner

Violas

Curtis Lau**
Acting Section Principal
Linda Garrett~
Acting Associate Principal
Martin Alexander
Lesley Cockram
Rosi McGowran
Michael Robertson

Cellos

Sharon Grigoryan**
Acting Section Principal
David Sharp~
Acting Associate Principal
Shuhei Lawson
Andrew Leask
Gemma Phillips

Double Basses

David Schilling**
Acting Section Principal
Alexandra Thompson~
Guest Associate Principal
Jacky Chang
Gustavo Quintino

Flutes

Kim Falconer**
Lisa Gill

Oboes

Joshua Oates**
Renae Stavely~

Clarinets

Dean Newcomb**
Darren Skelton

Bassoon

Mark Gaydon**

Contrabassoon

Jackie Newcomb*

Horns

Philip Paine**
Acting Section Principal
Emma Gregan~
Acting Associate Principal

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