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Devotion
April 4 & 5
2025

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2

DEVOTION

Brahms

Concerto for Violin in D Op.77

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Allegro giocoso; ma non troppo vivace

Interval

Wennäkoski

Hava

Elgar

Enigma Variations Op.36

Theme. Andante

Variation I "C.A.E". L'istesso tempo

Variation II "H.D.S-P". Allegro

Variation III "R.B.T". Allegretto

Variation IV "W.M.B". Allegro di molto

Variation V "R.P.A". Moderato

Variation VI "Ysobel". Andantino

Variation VII "Troyte". Presto

Variation VIII "W.N". Allegretto

Variation IX "Nimrod". Moderato

Variation X "Dorabella - Intermezzo". Allegretto

Variation XI "G.R.S". Allegro di molto

Variation XII "B.G.N". Andante

*Variation XIII "****" - Romanza. Moderato*

Variation XIV "E.D.U". Finale

[38']

[10']

[31']

APRIL

Fri 4 & Sat 5

Adelaide Town Hall

Elena Schwarz

Conductor

James Ehnes

Violin

Duration

1 hr 50 min (incl. interval)

Listen Later

ABC Classic

Tuesday 22 April

12:30pm

Pre-Concert Talk

Adelaide Town Hall

auditorium, one hour before each concert. Free *Classical Conversations* with conductor Elena Schwarz, discussing the music in tonight's program with Emma Gregan.

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WELCOME

In February, the incredible sounds of Respighi's *Pines of Rome* filled the Adelaide Town Hall, setting the stage for a season of extraordinary music-making. Welcome to the second program in this series, in which we have the opportunity to hear something new alongside two of the most memorable musical experiences of all time.

As we embark on our first season with Mark Wigglesworth as Chief Conductor, anticipation is high for the two-week journey through the complete symphonies of Brahms in May. Paired with exceptional works for piano and orchestra, these concerts will feature the incomparable Sir Stephen Hough – one of Adelaide's most cherished pianists. With only a handful of tickets remaining, Brahms: The Symphonies, generously supported by Normus Homes, promises to be a defining musical event of the season.

Many people first experience the power of a symphony orchestra through their favourite films. With this in mind, we've expanded our 2025 film concert season to not one, not two, but three blockbusters – with *Star Wars: A New Hope* now joining *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* and *Back to the Future*. These concerts are not just a nostalgic thrill; they are a feat

of precision, as the Orchestra performs these intricate scores in perfect sync with the action on screen at the Adelaide Entertainment Centre.

This year's Adelaide Festival reaffirmed our commitment to championing the music of women composers. The Orchestra was lauded for its role in *Innocence* by Kaija Saariaho – the major operatic project of this year's festival – and for *Light-Song*, a collaboration with composer and curator Cathy Milliken celebrating women composers from around the world. That spirit of discovery continues tonight with Lotta Wennäkoski's energetic and whirling *Hava*.

Leading this performance is the exceptional conductor Elena Schwarz, making a highly anticipated return to the ASO, thanks to the generous support of the Miriam Hyde Circle. She will lead the Orchestra through Elgar's *Enigma Variations* – an expressive and evocative work. Brahms' Violin Concerto is a personal favourite of mine, and I can't wait to hear James Ehnes bring this beautiful piece to life.

Colin Cornish AM
Chief Executive Officer



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Elena Schwarz
Conductor

Admired for her incisive knowledge of scores, Elena Schwarz brings textural clarity and luminosity to music from all eras, inspiring confidence and drawing the best from musicians across symphony orchestras, contemporary ensembles, and opera productions.

In 2024–25, her guest engagements include debuts with Vienna Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, Barcelona Symphony, and Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonikoa, alongside returns to BBC Philharmonic, WDR Sinfonieorchester, San Diego Symphony, Adelaide Symphony, Bremen Philharmoniker, and Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège.

Appointed Resident Conductor of Klangforum Wien from 2024, she is a passionate advocate of new music, regularly collaborating with ensembles like MusikFabrik, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and Ensemble Modern, championing composers such as Clara Iannotta, Lisa Streich, and Liza Lim.

Since winning the Trondheim Competition in 2014 and becoming a Dudamel Fellow in 2018–19, Schwarz has conducted leading orchestras worldwide, including Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, DSO Berlin, LA Philharmonic, and Netherlands Radio Philharmonic at Concertgebouw.

Her operatic highlights include Saariaho's *Innocence* at Dutch National Opera, *Katya Kabanova* at Opéra de Lyon, and debuts at Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Norwegian Opera, and Staatsoper Stuttgart.

Of Swiss and Australian parentage, she studied at the Geneva Conservatoire and Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana, followed by further studies with Peter Eötvös and Matthias Pintscher and masterclasses with Bernard Haitink and Neeme Järvi.



James Ehnes
Violin

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after musicians on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls. Recent orchestral highlights include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, London Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra. Throughout the 24/25 season, Ehnes will be Artist in Residence with Melbourne Symphony and will tour to Asia, where he will perform the complete Beethoven sonatas at Kioi Hall, Tokyo, as well as concerts with Hong Kong Philharmonic and Singapore Symphony.

Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule. He performs regularly at Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Symphony Center Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and major festivals including Ravinia, Verbier, and Aix. A devoted chamber musician, he is the leader of the Ehnes Quartet and Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society.

Ehnes has won two Grammy Awards, three Gramophone Awards, and twelve Juno Awards. He is a Member of the Order of Canada, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music. As of summer 2024, he is appointed as Professor of Violin at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Ehnes plays the "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Within the world of classical music, there are many different ways by which one can devote themselves – or be devoted to somebody else. More so than film, literature, or oil on canvas, music is the artform which upholds the most rigorous expression of this practice.

Films and paintings are so literal in their form that they can be interpreted as many different things. Think of the film student watching something like *Citizen Kane* and then asking, 'Yeah, but what does it *really* mean?'

Music, meanwhile, can be interpreted purely by feeling. This is what fashions the world of music as the most active marketplace of artistic gift-giving, where composers can devote entire works to an individual recipient and their specific, obliterating influence.

The toil, labour, and love that goes into each musical work – in some cases, a years-long process – personify the act of devotion in a way that no 'In memory of...' postscript can achieve in the end credits of a film.

Tonight's programme presents a global showcase of composers and the places, people, and passions that inspired their respective works. From the ephemeral to the personal, the three works selected for our **Devotion** concert symbolise the various artistic flint-strikes that ignite the composer's imagination at the point of putting pencil to paper.

Johannes Brahms's Violin Concerto (1879); Lotta Wennäkoski's mysterious *Hava* (2007); and the work that has long held court as the musical embodiment of British cultural pride, Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations* (1899), all hold at their creative centres a devotion to many different sources and recipients.

While the major "variations" here may be those of scope and scale – indeed, sandwiched between the two totemic works of western canon, we find a sparse, mysterious soundscape in the Wennäkoski piece – they all owe their conception to the influence of an entity beyond that of the composer's own imagination.

We begin with perhaps the most literal application of "devotion", with Brahms's **Violin Concerto** and his friend Joseph Joachim, to whom this work is – you guessed it – devoted.

Recognised as a child prodigy from an early age, Johannes Brahms followed in the footsteps of Beethoven to become a working musician in his teenaged years. Notably, it was Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* which a 17-year-old Joseph Joachim performed the first time Brahms, just two years younger, came into the orbit of the virtuoso who would inspire perhaps the most famous violin concerto in the world.

It was five years later, in 1853, that the two prodigies would finally meet in Hanover, where Joachim stood as concertmaster of the city's court orchestra. Brahms, meanwhile, was touring as accompanying pianist for Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi.

Kinship was swiftly established between the two men. As Joachim enthusiastically confided,

His playing shows an intense fire and the energy and precision which bodes well for the artist, and his compositions already bespeak such power as I have seen in no other musician of his age.

Twenty-five years of correspondence and friendship followed until Brahms began writing his Violin Concerto for Joachim, in 1878. Taking influence from Beethoven's Violin Concerto, Brahms set his own in the same key of D major.



Yet the resulting work is unique in how specifically its composition would be guided by the influence of its devotee.

Brahms opted to leave the thrilling third movement – and arguably the passage for which this work is most famous – largely up to the discretion of the solo violinist. Indeed, the creative process behind Brahms's Violin Concerto allowed for significant creative input from his virtuosic friend.

In correspondences shared between the two of them, Brahms actively encouraged Joachim to mark on his score "those parts which are difficult, awkward or impossible to play." The alterations were minimal, Brahms again taking inspiration from Beethoven's Violin Concerto, for both works allow a violinist to shape their performance of the piece around their own personal dexterity and athleticism.

The first movement's extended solo passage – *cadenza* – is also left to the soloist. This had traditionally been the result of in-the-moment improvisation during a performance, standard practice in Mozart's time, but by the era of Brahms it was common for the composer to pen their own *cadenza*.

Brahms instead paid homage to tradition and invited Joachim to write the *cadenza*. While other soloists have done so in successive performances, Joachim's remains the standard.

Yet it is the concerto's jubilant final movement which really has the room to breathe and flex within the ribcage of the orchestra. As it is, broadly open to the individual interpretation of each performer, the *Allegro giocoso* remains the premiere proving ground – and platform to really show off, should one wish – of the virtuoso soloist.

Within the repertoire of world-class violinists such as Itzhak Perlman and Anne-Sophie Mutter, the musical gymnastics required by this triumphant finale have allowed many performers to truly make the piece their own.

Taking a more emotional approach – ephemeral, even – to musical devotions, we travel from the concert halls of Hanover to the snowy forests of Hungary. Here we find Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski and her 2007 work *Hava*, whose inspirations serve as a continuation of the emotions roused by the finale of Brahms's Violin Concerto.

We remain on high alert throughout much of *Hava*'s brief ten-minute duration, a feeling of tension introduced in the opening minutes' anxious flute loops and squirrely violin lines.

The pervading sense of chilliness within Wennäkoski's piece is deliberate, its title taken from the Hungarian word for 'snow' as a devotion to her time studying in Budapest. Aged 19, the composer spent a year there at the Béla Bartók Conservatory to study violin.

Appropriately, echoes of Bartók himself can be detected in *Hava*, namely the high, shrill lines for strings and the fidgety tempo at which they're played. Aggressive rumbles of cello and frantic detonations of bass *pizzicato* complete the allusion, brining to the mind the frozen hellscape of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, whose soundtrack prominently samples Bartók.

Speaking in a 2017 interview ahead of the famed BBC Last Night of the Proms – where arguably her most high-profile piece, *Flounce*, received its world premiere – Wennäkoski frankly laid out the inspirations behind her music.

"A feeling of air, space and clarity are important," she said, "and I also hope my music is always somewhat emotional."

In approaching the piece, Wennäkoski sought to explore her memories of Budapest in the same way one might explore central ideas in a novel: "From different angles, always in new light, using its own language. The simple starting point for *Hava* is falling or descending; of course, sometimes you have to get up first to fall."

Indeed, the most immediate imagery that comes to mind here is that of snowfall. Much of the sonic landscape constructed by *Hava* places the listener within a cold, sparse environment. What we hear is characterised much more by a sensation than of colour: this is a very bright, icy grey piece.

Brief, sharp accents of percussion flicker at the perimeter of the soundscape, like gusts of cold winds which cause the flutes shiver and tremble. Breaths of sickly clarinet wade in, joined by plodding outbursts of bassoon and oboe, lending the piece a kind of dumbfounded quality as though lost in a blizzard.

The sense of isolation evoked by the piece is established quickly, the opening minutes presenting an imposing plume of brass and loose clarinet voices that seem to resemble distant cries for help.

From there we explore uneasy clusters of winds sections, bridged by extended, sharp lines of strings. Beneath that sonic plume, quizzical droplets of xylophone patter through the misty breaths of violin.

Wennäkoski has suggested, also, that *hava* evokes the Finnish word for "rustling" and "alert", a feeling of discomfort that can be detected in the closing

minutes of the piece. We hear fine, papery layers of strings and flute which float downward across the final bars, like sugar paper falling across the sun. An image of weak, delicate light, quietly smothered.

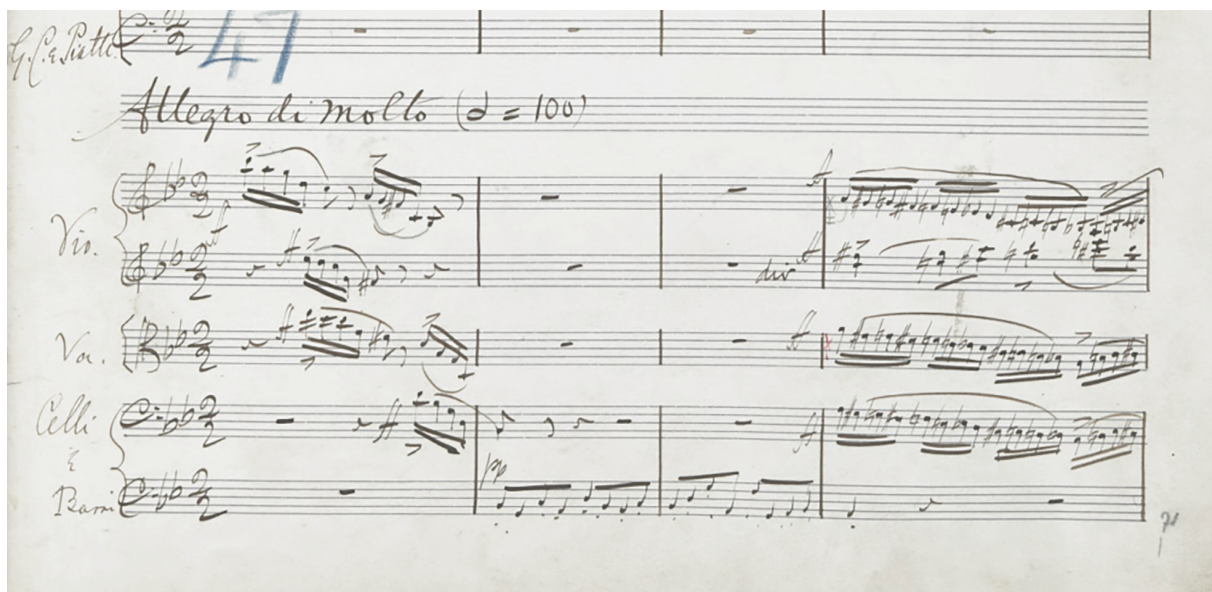
Hava stands as the most atmospheric work of tonight's programme, unique in that its devotion channels sense of place rather than a specific relationship or encounter. Of course, the concluding work of the night, Elgar's ***Enigma Variations***, is a grandiose counterpoint to this more avantgarde piece.

While best known for its ninth movement, "Nimrod" – the piece colloquially regarded as the sound of British pride, and one sampled as the opening of Australian producer Rob Dougan's 1995 club banger "Clubbed to Death" – there are many charming, even sassy mysteries scattered across Elgar's *Variations*.

Written as a series of musical sketches of his close friends, with each movement bearing the initials of the person he has symphonically illustrated, the *Variations* represent the most specific and personal devotions we will hear tonight.

It may be tempting to consider this a touching tribute to the people who impacted Elgar's life, but there is much cheek and play to be taken from all of this. Across many of his different variations, Elgar makes musical imitations of those within his close circle which aren't completely flattering.

Notably, the tenth *Variation*, "Dorabella", is a frolicsome, romantic piece that opens with a breathy staccato line for flute atop a quivering bed of strings. The eager, struggling breath for winds here is said to be an imitation of Dora Penny, who spoke with a stammer in her youth. That Elgar chose to highlight this specific characteristic underlines the affectionate



ribbing to which he subject his *Variations*' devotees, as much as a tribute to his friends as a well-meaning jab.

Notably, Dora is the niece of *Variation IV*'s devotee ("M.W.B."), as an indication of how closely interconnected all of these portraits are.

The eighth variation, meanwhile – subtitled "W.N." after Winifred Norbury, a secretary of the Philharmonic Society in Worcester, where Elgar lived for much of his later life – is more an impression of the house in which Norbury lived than a specific musical portrait.

Norbury's 18th century manor, Sherridge, was known to host many grand dames of the arts. It is these woman who Elgar imitates here, in his original score notes writing, "The gracious personalities of the ladies are sedately shown."

The lush strings and winds which open this movement give an impression of effortless grace, but one should listen for the for the wiggling, cheeky lines for flute here. They are actually imitating the highfalutin laughter of these cultured ladies, heard in a swift flurry of notes within the movement's first half.

The flutes seem to titter in this way, their light, high notes going *Huh! hah hah hah hah!* as though politely laughing at some fluffy witticism or brittle pun.

Each one of Elgar's *Variations* can be traced to a specific person or place, yet there is just one aspect of the work that can't be explained: the supposed Enigma from which its title derives.

The work's official name, *Variations on an original theme*, never originally made mention of its famed 'enigma', with this only being extracted from scribbles in the margin of Elgar's original score.

There have been many attempts in the past one-and-a-quarter centuries to determine its meaning, but it remains a mystery to which we can never gain closure. Elgar himself neglected to explain the decision behind his devilishly intriguing title, but he did at least give one clue as to what it could mean.

"The Enigma I will not explain," he wrote in the programme notes of the work's premiere performance in London, under the baton of conductor Hans Richter in June 1899.

...its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the connexion between the *Variations* and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played... So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas – eg Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *Les sept Princesses* – the chief character is never on the stage.

There, but never onstage. As beguiling and bewildering an image that may be, it remains a delicious headscratcher for audiences to ponder on the journey home – and, as has been the case since the dawn of the twentieth century, for many further years into the future.

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Get to know ASO Tutti Violin Ambra Nesa

Ambra is one of our newest orchestra members, becoming a full-time player in April 2024. We asked her about her journey to a life as a professional musician.

When did you start playing your instrument, and what inspired you to pursue it as a career?

I started learning the violin at the age of 3, and I was inspired to pursue a professional orchestral career when I went to my first Swiss National Orchestra music camp. From then on, I found a new love for playing beautiful repertoire with lots of other incredible musicians, and I did everything I could to make orchestral life be part of my career in the future.

Can you describe the audition process for joining the orchestra?

My audition process for joining the ASO has been the result of months of preparation. Getting up early mornings before my toddler got up, practicing in every window of opportunity throughout the day, and playing in front of lots of different musicians. I could never have done it without the important help of my partner Heath, also a professional orchestral musician.

What keeps you passionate about music?

Having held a violin for almost my entire life, I don't really know life without music. What keeps it going is the intertwined balance between the constant work I put into it, and the regular opportunities I

encounter to play and work with other musicians. Additionally, teaching children and young adults keeps my passion alive. As long as those elements never stop growing, there will always be inspiration to keep paddling.

What has been your favourite ASO experience so far?

My favourite experience has been getting to know all of the different colleagues in the orchestra, as well as Adelaide and South Australia. It's something I have always loved in my musical career, having had the opportunity to travel all around the world and play with so many different orchestras. It's been the most enriching path I could ever wish for. The colleagues and the culture are what define each orchestra and what sets them apart. ASO and Adelaide have been a wonderful experience in that regard, and I look forward to continue growing those relationships over the years.

Ambra's chair can be supported through our Musical Chairs program. If you would like to get to know her better, and get closer to the music, please contact Lucy Eckermann, Head of Development on (08) 8233 6263 or EckermannL@aso.com.au

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Associate Principal
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Minas Berberyan

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Danielle Jaquillard

Zsuzsa Leon

Lucy Macourt

Alexis Milton

Michael Milton

Ambra Nesa

Julie Newman

Liam Osborne

Emma Perkins

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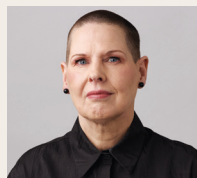
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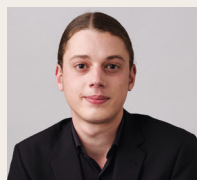


Michael Milton
Judy Birze
& Ruth Bloch ♪



Ambra Nesa

Violas



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Section Principal
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Principal
In memory of Father
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Barbra McLennan ♪

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Piccolo

Bassoons



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Section Principal
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Leah Stephenson
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Horns

Tuba



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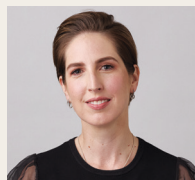
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Cello chair is
supported in
memory of Rodney
Crewther.

* Deceased



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Principal 1st Violin
Bruce DeBelle AO KC ♪



Alison Heike
Principal 2nd Violin
FASO in memory of
Ann Belmont OAM ♪



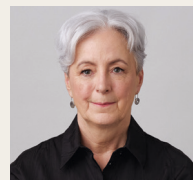
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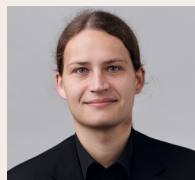
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In memory of
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Acting Section
Principal
John Turnidge AO
& Patricia Rayner ♪



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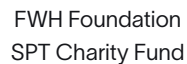
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