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THE RING

Acknowledgement of Country
Goldsmith arr./orch. Ferguson
Pudnanthi Padninthi II – Wadna

[2']

Adelaide Town Hall

FRI 29 & SAT 30 MAY

Richard Strauss
Four Last Songs

[24']

Mark Wigglesworth
Conductor

- 1. Frühling (Spring)*
- 2. September*
- 3. Beim Schlafengehen (Upon Going to Sleep)*
- 4. Im Abendrot (At Sunset)*

Helena Dix
Soprano



Interval

Duration
2hr 5min (inc. interval)

Wagner (arr. de Vlieger)
The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure

[70']

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|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>1. Vorspiel</i> | <i>8. Siegfried's Heldenat</i> |
| <i>2. Das Rheingold</i> | <i>9. Brünnhilde's Erwachen</i> |
| <i>3. Nibelheim</i> | <i>10. Siegfried und Brünnhilde</i> |
| <i>4. Walhall</i> | <i>11. Siegfried's Rheinfahrt</i> |
| <i>5. Die Walküren</i> | <i>12. Siegfried's Tod</i> |
| <i>6. Feuerzauber</i> | <i>13. Trauermusik</i> |
| <i>7. Waldweben</i> | <i>14. Brünnhilde's Opfertat</i> |



Listen Later

ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast on Saturday 20 June 2026 at 12:00pm.

Pre-Concert Talk

Join us in the Adelaide Town Hall auditorium one hour before each concert for our free *Classical Conversations* as Chief Conductor Mark Wigglesworth discusses the music in tonight's program with Director of Artistic Planning Simon Lord.

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MARK WIGGLESWORTH *CHIEF CONDUCTOR*

WELCOME

I am delighted to be back in Adelaide for our orchestra's 90th birthday season. It doesn't feel long ago that I was last performing with the wonderful musicians of the ASO, and the quality of their artistry, along with the eagerness of our audiences, has stayed with me vividly. It is a joy to be reunited with both.

To say our concerts together are getting off to a flying start is rather an understatement. Tonight, we will perform an orchestra-only version of Wagner's *The Ring*. For me, Wagner is one of the greatest composers – a true revolutionary who changed not only the course of opera, but of music itself. And despite the scale of his work (and the rather questionable nature of his personality!), this is music that is profoundly human and beautifully poetic.

When people think of Wagner in Australia, they think of Adelaide. This is where the

first Australian Ring cycle was performed – a significance that still resonates within the orchestra. Wagner needs musicians to understand the nature of drama and to know what it means to make their instruments sing. The ASO does both brilliantly, and to begin my season here with *The Ring*, distilled into a single hour, is an enormous privilege. It is a timeless tale of the battle between love and power – and as love wins through, we need to hear this story now more than ever. This music shows that those who seek power by dividing us through hate will never triumph. To hear it is an uplifting and transformational experience.

Music offers us a shared space – a space to breathe as well as a space to connect. That's why it matters so much. Thank you for being here and for being part of the connection it creates. ●



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●
Mark Wigglesworth
Conductor

Mark Wigglesworth is recognised internationally for his masterly interpretations both in the opera house and in the concert hall, highly detailed performances that combine a finely considered architectural structure with great sophistication and rare beauty.

Highlights have included performances with the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, London Symphony, Boston Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Recording highlights include a critically acclaimed cycle of the *Shostakovich Symphonies* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Britten's *Peter Grimes* with Glyndebourne, and the *Brahms Piano Concertos* with Sir Stephen Hough.

In opera, Wigglesworth has enjoyed long relationships with The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, English National Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, New York, The Bavarian State Opera, Opéra National de Paris, and The Vienna State Opera. In 2017 he received the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera.

He has written articles for *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and made a six-part TV series for the BBC entitled *Everything to Play For*. His book *The Silent Musician: Why Conducting Matters* is published by Faber & Faber and has been translated into Spanish and Chinese. He currently holds the position of Chief Conductor with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.



●
Helena Dix
Soprano

Australian-born Helena Dix has secured her name on opera and concert stages around the world. Recent triumphs include *Maria Nostalgia* at la Monnaie, the title-role *Norma* at the Metropolitan Opera and State Opera of South Australia, the title-role *La Straniera* with Chelsea Opera Group and *Helmwige Die Walküre* with the Sydney Symphony. Upcoming engagements include Verdi *Requiem* with the Canberra Symphony, Szymanowsky *Stabat Mater* & Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with the Melbourne Bach Choir, *Leonora Il Trovatore* with Melbourne Opera and the title-role *Aida* with the Sydney Philharmonia.

Other engagements include Countess *Le Nozze Di Figaro* at Seattle Opera, Miss Jessel *The Turn Of The Screw* for Garsington, the title role *Cristina Regina Di Svezia* for Wexford Festival Opera, *Elisabetta Roberto Devereux* in Karlsruhe, the title role *Ariadne Auf Naxos* for Longborough Festival Opera, and her Metropolitan Opera debut as Alice Ford *Falstaff*.

Australian engagements include *Vitellia La Clemenza Di Tito* with National Opera, Canberra and *Musetta La Boheme*, *Lady Macbeth Macbeth* and the title roles *Suor Angelica*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Norma* and *Maria Stuarda* for Melbourne Opera.

Helena has recorded the Verdi *Requiem* and *Missa Sabrinensis* by Howells with the Bach Choir (UK) and in 2022 was awarded a Fellowship by the Royal Academy of Music.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The works in tonight's program are both concerned with lofty themes of mortality and finding meaning in life, but take very different approaches. Richard Strauss' ***Four Last Songs*** is a gentle meditation on the passing of time and the eternal beauty of nature. The characters in Richard Wagner's epic operatic tetralogy *The Ring Cycle* are driven by many forces, such as power, love and the idea of destiny. The cycle will be heard in the form of Henk de Vlieger's one-hour orchestral arrangement ***The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure***.

Four Last Songs beautifully encapsulates the best of Strauss: lush and colourful orchestration, winding vocal lines and evocative text. The songs were completed in 1948 in the surrounds of a traumatised Europe post-World War II. By this time, the composer was in his eighties and had been passionately writing to government officials advocating for the revitalisation of German culture.

While Strauss was undoubtedly shielded from some of the worst horrors of the war, in 1948 he was feeling pessimistic and artistically bereft. He wrote to his biographer: "The burning of the Munich Hoftheater, as it was called during the Imperial era, consecrated to the first performances of *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, where 73 years ago I heard *Freischütz* for the first time, where my good father sat for 49 years in the orchestra as first horn, where... I experienced the keenest sense of fulfillment as the composer of ten operas produced there – this was the great catastrophe of my life. For that there can be no consolation in my old age, no hope."

Strauss' son Franz suggested he distract himself by returning to lieder composition. It was a well-timed idea, as Strauss had been revisiting the German poetry he had grown up with. He first sketched an outline to *Im Abendrot* (*At Sunset*) by Josef von Eichendorff. In this poem the speaker reflects peacefully on a full life with their partner: "through pain and joy/ we've travelled hand in hand/ let's rest from wandering, now/above the quiet land." This poem may have struck a chord with Strauss as he had also experienced a full and loving life with his wife and muse of nearly 60 years, soprano Pauline de Ahna.

Strauss then completed the songs *Frühling* (*Spring*), *Beim Schlafengehen* (*Upon Going to Sleep*), and *September*, from poems by Hermann Hesse. The speaker of the poems seems to truly be at peace with the life they have lived, observing the beauty of nature with a contemplative sense of wonder. Music critic Herbert Glass describes the song cycle eloquently: "It is music so bewitchingly sensuous, so achingly nostalgic, so subtle in its interweaving of vocal and instrumental textures as to defy description."

The title *Four Last Songs* was not devised by Strauss. The songs were published posthumously under that name by Ernst Roth from Boosey & Hawkes, who also decided the order of the songs in the cycle. The translations of the four poems show the nuanced beauty of the text.



RICHARD WAGNER



RICHARD STRAUSS

Spring

In dusk-dim vaults
I've long dreamed
of your trees and blue skies,
of your fragrance and bird-song.
Now you are revealed,
glittering, adorned,
bathed in light
like a miracle before me.
You know me once again,
you beckon to me tenderly,
your blessed presence
sets all my limbs trembling!

September

The garden mourns,
the cooling rain falls upon the flowers.
The summer shudders,
silently facing his end.
Leaf after golden leaf drops down
from the high acacia tree.
Summer, surprised and weak,
smiles at the fading garden-dream.
Yet he lingers still,
among the roses, yearning for rest.
Slowly he closes
his wearied eyes.

Upon Going to Sleep

Now the day has made me weary:
let the starry night gather up
my ardent longings, lovingly,
as it would a tired child.
Hands, leave off all your toil,
mind, put aside all your thoughts:
all my senses long
to settle, now, into slumber.
And the soul, unencumbered,
wants to soar in free flight
into night's magic realm,
to live deeply, a thousandfold.

At Sunset

Through pain and joy
we've travelled hand in hand;
let's rest from wandering, now,
above the quiet land.
Around us the valleys are waning,
already the sky is darkening,
yet, still, two larks, dream-seeking,
soar upward into the air.
Step close and let them fly,
it's nearly time for sleep:
lest we lose our way
in this solitude.
O spacious, silent peace,
so deep in evening's glow!
How travel-weary we are—
Could this perhaps be death?

Richard Wagner is a historical figure who tends to inspire emotional extremes. Some fans are fanatical, spending large fortunes following performances of his work around the world. Others find the sheer length and scale of his operas difficult to consume. Famously, the composer's antisemitic beliefs earned him some notoriety. But wherever you stand on the scale, it cannot be denied that Wagner's musical work was creatively groundbreaking.

Of all his compositions, his most famous is *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, or *The Ring Cycle*. It is a colossal piece of work in every sense of the word. It is made up of four operas: *Das Rheingold* (*The Rhine Gold*), *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*). A sprawling epic runs continuously through the four operas, inspired by both Nordic myths and Germanic fairytales. The cycle is designed to be seen over four consecutive nights, no small commitment when it accounts for nearly 16 hours of music. It is sonically supersized with a 100-piece orchestra with an expanded horn section and a chorus of 70 singers.

Wagner was responsible for writing both the libretto and the music. *The Ring Cycle* was truly his life's work: it took him 26 years to finish all four operas. Wagner wrote all four librettos first, working from the last opera to the first. He then wrote the music for the operas in the order they are performed.

The plot of *The Ring* may stretch over decades, but it distils down to various players desperately trying to cling to power or glory, with a notable few being motivated instead by love. The cursed Ring of Power is the impetus for this struggle, with giants, dwarves, gods, and humans alike attempting to seize it. Wotan, King of the gods, tries to maintain the cosmic order and the existence of the gods' kingdom Valhalla. Siegfried attempts to live up to his destiny as the fearless hero and falls in love with Valkyrie,

Brünnhilde. Brünnhilde endeavours to balance her connections to the world of the gods and father Wotan, with her love for Siegfried. Ultimately, Siegfried is killed, Brünnhilde chooses to join him on his funeral pyre, and the reign of the gods comes to an end with the ring of power finally returning to the bottom of the Rhine.

Henk de Vlieger's *The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure* was commissioned by the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra for a 1992 concert tour. De Vlieger dedicated the piece to the orchestra's chief conductor Edo de Waart.

The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure moves through highlights of the four operas chronologically. To distil 16 hours of music into just over one hour is a mammoth task. Even though this piece does not feature any vocals, a true sense of the opera can still be gleaned due to Wagner's distinctive use of leitmotifs. A leitmotif is a recurring musical idea used to represent a particular place, concept or character. Wagner did not invent the leitmotif but he did elevate its use to new heights. Throughout *The Ring Cycle* leitmotifs are incorporated into every part of the orchestral texture and interact with other in sophisticated ways.

Conductor Daniel Barenboim describes Wagner's unique approach: "The music is always made up of many layers which may be individually simple, but which constitute a complex construction when taken together. When he transforms a theme or adds something to it, it is always in the sense of multidimensionality; the individual transformations are sometimes simple but never primitive. In other words, his complexity is always a means and never a goal in itself; it is also always paradoxical, since its effect can be so emotional, even staggeringly so."

Henk de Vlieger describes his intention as "to unite the most important orchestral parts of the *Ring* in order to create a solid one-part symphonic work" and to make "the main plot

lines, as in a symphonic poem, are clearly recognisable". While he strove to preserve the fragments as they were composed by Wagner, the need to smoothly lead into one section after another meant that De Vlieger had to make "slight alterations in the transitional interludes" where "different modulations have been applied" at certain places "or a more fitting orchestration".

De Vlieger begins with four passages from *Das Rheingold*. We open with the opera's prelude. It is the musical equivalent of a golden sunrise, calling to mind images of golden rays gradually appearing over a mountainside with a gradual crescendo and overlapping held notes in the brass section.

Next is the section representing the Rhine gold itself, a joyous and sprightly theme with a fuller orchestral texture featuring rapidly undulating lines in the strings. This gold at the bottom of the river is stolen by the dwarf Alberich, in order to melt down the gold and forge the Ring of Power.

This is followed by the music of *Nibelheim*, the home of the Nibelung dwarves. At this point in the opera, Alberich has enslaved his fellow dwarves, forcing them to mine for more gold. This theme has an unsettling beginning and incorporates the sound of percussive hammers to transport us to the depths of the mines.

The final section from *Das Rheingold* is the Valhalla theme. The music takes on a dreamy, hypnotic quality as the gods ascend the rainbow bridge to their new home in the sky.

De Vlieger features two sections from *Die Walküre*. Undoubtedly the most famous musical fragment from the entire cycle is the Ride of the Valkyries theme, which vividly represents the flying warriors with rollicking scales and boisterous brass.

Things take a mystical turn with *Feuerzauber* (Magic Fire) section – taken from the moment the Valkyrie Brünnhilde is punished by Wotan for

her defiance and placed in an enchanted sleep, encircled by a ring of fire that only the bravest of heroes can pass through. This is a tumultuous musical landscape which also features a gently descending motif played over and over, symbolising Brünnhilde's slumber.

We enter the world of *Siegfried*, the first opera to introduce the hero. *Waldweben* (Forest Murmurs) is an impressionistic passage in which Wagner uses melismatic solo flute lines to represent a chirping bird.

Siegfrieds Heldentat (Siegfried's Heroic Deed) utilises the full heroic power of brass instruments. The composer creates a sense of suspense and excitement in *Brünnhildes Erwachen* (Brünnhilde's Awakening) with varying dynamics and long notes in the strings played with very little vibrato, as Siegfried rouses Brünnhilde from her slumber.

De Vlieger finishes his orchestral adventure with five sections from the last opera in the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*. *Siegfried und Brünnhilde* is a lushly romantic passage of music underscoring the cosmic pull between the two characters. *Siegfrieds Rheinfahrt* (Siegfried's Rhine Journey) has an air of adventure, the final moment of optimism in the cycle before things take a very dark turn. The tension is built in *Siegfrieds Tod* (Siegfried's Death), as it works up to the shocking moment the seemingly untouchable hero is killed. *Trauermusik* (Funeral Music) moves between darkly roiling passages and awe-inspiring crescendos. *Brünnhildes Opfertat* (Brünnhilde's Sacrificial Act) finally brings this musical adventure to its dramatic conclusion with crashing waves of orchestral colour.

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STATE OPERA OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S 2004
PRODUCTION OF *THE RING CYCLE*
PHOTO: PETER HOLDERNESS

DIANA RAMSAY'S RING CYCLE LEGACY

As part of the ASO's 90th anniversary year, we are deeply grateful to the James & Diana Ramsay Foundation for its support of this evening's concert, presented in honour of the centenary of Diana Ramsay AO.

Diana Ramsay's contribution to South Australian cultural life was profound, and nowhere was this more evident than in the landmark 1998 Adelaide production of Wagner's four-opera *Ring Cycle*. It was one of the greatest artistic undertakings South Australia had ever attempted: an ambitious and internationally significant production involving a full orchestra of more than 100 musicians, brought to life at the Festival Theatre. Diana, a passionate devotee of opera, was instrumental in helping realise the vision for the production. Diana's continued support also helped enable the State Opera's return performances of *The Ring Cycle* in 2004, further cementing Adelaide's place in Australian operatic history.

Among the Ramsays' most important contributions was their support for the inclusion of surtitles – English translations

projected above the stage to allow audiences to follow the sung text in real time. Having experienced surtitles overseas, James and Diana recognised both their artistic and practical importance for Australian audiences. Their insight reflected a deep understanding that audiences connect more meaningfully when they can fully follow the drama unfolding before them, with its emotional nuance, shifting plots and casts of characters.

This commitment to accessibility helped open opera to broader audiences. It enabled patrons to feel immersed in the story being told, strengthened the connection between performer and audience, and helped build enduring engagement with the arts in South Australia.

As we revisit music from *The Ring* in this special centenary year, we honour Diana Ramsay's vision, generosity and lasting belief in the power of live performance to move, inspire and bring people together.

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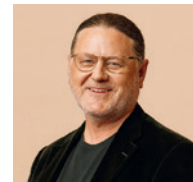


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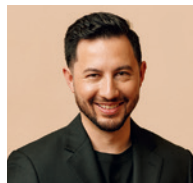
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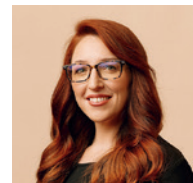
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Peter & Arrienne Wynen ♪

VIOLINS



Cameron Hill
Associate
Concertmaster
Graeme & Susan
Bethune ♪



Holly Piccoli
Principal 1st Violin
Bruce DeBelle AO KC ♪



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



Lachlan Bramble
Associate Principal
2nd Violin
In memory of
Deborah Pontifex ♪



Janet Anderson
In memory of
Gweneth Willing ♪



Minus Berberyan
Linda Sampson ♪



Gillian Braithwaite
Mary Dawes BEM ♪



Liam Osborne
Judy Sanders &
Jenny Pike ♪



Emma Perkins
Pamela & the late
Peter McKee ♪



Alexander Permezel



Alison Rayner



Kemer Spurr

CELLOS



Sharon Grigoryan
Acting Section
Principal
Sibby Sutherland ♪
John Turnidge AO
& Patricia Rayner ♪



Sherrilyn Handley
Peter Wells &
Celia Whittle ♪



Andrew Leask
John Sulan KC
& Ali Sulan ♪



Shuhei Lawson
Judy Hare &
Grant Whiteman ♪



Gemma Phillips
Acting Associate
Principal
Anonymous donor ♪



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Dr Aileen F Connon
AM ♪



Cameron Waters
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Peter McKee ♪

PICCOLO



Julia Grenfell
Principal
In memory of Father
Kevin McLennan &
Barbra McLennan ♪

OBOES



Joshua Oates
Section Principal
Caryl Lambourn
& Graham Norton ♪



Renae Stavelly
Associate Principal
Roderick Shire
& Judy Hargrave ♪

COR ANGLAIS



Peter Duggan
Principal
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Dean Newcomb
Section Principal
Ann Vanstone ♪

BASS CLARINET



Darren Skelton
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Amanda Tillett
Principal
In memory of Mary Angel ♪

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