

ARIOSO

10:00AM

SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 2023

REARDON THEATRE



Alex Raineri *Piano*

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 – 1791)

Overture from Le Nozze di Figaro (arr. Sean Chen)

Of the 22 operas that Mozart composed in his short lifetime, *Le nozze di Figaro* is undoubtedly one of the most highly cherished and regularly performed. A comic, and musical masterpiece, *The Marriage of Figaro* is one of three operas written in collaboration between Mozart and librettist Lorenzo da Ponte (followed by *Don Giovanni* and *Così van Tutte*). The Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* is regularly performed as an independent concert piece. While it fundamentally sets the tone of the comic flavour and dramatic jostle of the opera, the Overture has a notable succinct brevity. Its wealth of sunny melodies and energetic virtuosity makes for a small musical offering that feels complete in and of itself. The arrangement by Sean Chen pays utmost respect to Mozart's original, while also providing the pianist with considerable virtuoso challenges at every corner. © Alex Raineri, 2023

Alex RAINERI

...after Dido...

Younger Alex used to compose quite a lot. It's a creative dimension of my practice that I've shelved for quite some time while I focus on other things. Now, I am very slowly starting to pick it up again. This work is more of a re-composition rather than an original work. It takes one of my absolute favourite pieces of music, Dido's heartbreaking lament from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and subjects it to a twisty timbral and harmonic re-rendering. I like Purcell's 'Dido' so much that it almost feels like a guilty pleasure. In writing *...after Dido...*, I aim to conquer that silly sentiment. It is a work for live + absent pianist, meaning, it is for live performer and pre-recorded fixed electronics. Every wondrous and strange sound you hear in the tape part has been created on the piano, by using fishing wire, metal chopsticks and plucking the strings like a harp. This piece does not have illusions of grandeur, it serves as a vehicle for my re-entry into the world of composition, and I hope you enjoy it." © Alex Raineri, 2023

*The commission of *...after Dido...* has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its arts funding and advisory body.

Charles GOUNOD (1818 – 1893)

Valse de Faust (arr. Franz Liszt)

Gounod's *Faust* was produced in 1859 and the ubiquitous and prolific transcriber Franz Liszt was impressed by the work, not least because he had a peculiar attraction to the demonic side in any music. He made his "concert paraphrase" here from the waltz scene that closes the first act and also from the second-act love duet between Faust and Marguerite, *O nuit d'amour*. Liszt's method of transcription typically involves a mixture of literal quotations with his own takeoffs on the music.

The piece begins with the waltz music from the end of the first act. The theme is a rollicking, celebratory waltz that seems to have little sinister about it. But Liszt manages to inject dark mischief into it with a subtle variant in the upper register. The middle section is based on the aforementioned second-act duet, where Liszt deftly enacts the love music. But here there is not a hint of anything demonic in the passionate theme. Instead, the music sours sweetly, the ending of this section recalling some of the glittering quiet passages on the upper register in his *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Suddenly the tempo of the theme picks up and the waltz theme returns. Many sonic effects, such as glissandos, and other pianistic fireworks are heard as the piece races to its dramatic, virtuosic ending.

There are those who have charged that Liszt used Gounod's score as a vehicle to showcase his considerable pianistic skills. Yet, his concert career had ended years before, and though he could still exhibit bouts of virtuosity for its own sake, here his music never actually strays from the moods and expressive range in Gounod's score. The piece is flashy, to be sure, but Liszt manages to make the results pianistic while rendering artistic justice to the source music. © Richard Cummings, 2023

Richard WAGNER (1813 – 1883)

Prelude from Tristan und Isolde (arr. Zoltán Kocsis)

Richard WAGNER (1813 – 1883)

Isolde's Liebestod (arr. Franz Liszt)

In Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner found an artistic soulmate of the greatest sensitivity and imagination, and one whose generosity was a constant source of strength. Liszt had the measure of Wagner's achievements as few others did, and at one time he envisaged a new artistic age in which he and Wagner would be the leading spirits, as Goethe and Schiller had been in theirs. In 1860, Liszt told the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein: 'Among our art-comrades of the day there is one name which has already become glorious, and which will increasingly become so - Richard Wagner. His genius has been to me a light which I have followed - and my friendship for Wagner has always been of the character of a noble passion.'

This devotion was sorely tested and indeed almost lost in the mid-1860s when Wagner began an affair with Liszt's daughter Cosima, then married to Hans von Bülow. For eleven years Liszt broke off all correspondence. Wagner's muse during the composition of *Tristan und Isolde* had not been Cosima but Mathilde Wesendonck. Nevertheless, it was the effect of his feelings for Mathilde and then for Cosima that enabled him to become more truly himself and create his greatest works. The ambiguous 'Tristan chord', first heard in the opening bars of the prelude, begins a process crucial to the opera - one of harmonic suspension, as one dissonant chord resolves onto another, and that onto another and so on, only achieving ultimate resolution in the closing bars of the entire work. Thus, the listener is taken on a journey of desire and expectation.

In 1872, when plans were being made for laying the foundation stone of the Bayreuth theatre, Wagner wrote to Liszt one of the most human and moving letters that any man could write to another: 'My great and dear friend, Cosima maintains that you would not come even if I were to invite you. We should have to endure that, as we have had to endure so many things! But I cannot forbear to invite you. And what is it I cry to you when I say "come"? ... You live before me and within me in perfect beauty, and we are as one beyond the grave itself. You were the first man to ennoble me through his love; I am now wedded to a second higher life through her and can achieve what I could never have achieved alone. If I now say to you "come", what I mean is: "Come to yourself!" for you will find yourself here. Whatever your decision, you have my blessing and my love!'

You live before me and within me in perfect beauty, and we are as one beyond the grave itself. What is this if not the sentiment that lies at the heart of *Tristan und Isolde*? © Peter Bassett, 2023

Richard STRAUSS (1864 – 1949)

Dance of the Seven Veils from Salome (arr. Alex Raineri)

Salome is a one-act opera composed by Richard Strauss in 1905 based on the play of the same name by Oscar Wilde. A synopsis (courtesy of Royal Shakespeare Company) is as follows.

Salomé is the princess of Judaea, daughter of Queen Herodias, step-daughter to King Herod. Judaea was a province of Ancient Rome during the reign of Julius Caesar. King Herod and Queen Herodias are hosting a wild, drunken banquet. Salomé sneaks away from this banquet out to the terrace to escape the leery eyes of Herod and his entourage. On the terrace, Salomé meets a captured young Syrian prince who is totally and completely hypnotised by her beauty. But Salomé doesn't pay attention to him. She's more interested in the mysterious booming voice coming from a prison cell, the voice of Iokanaan, AKA John the Baptist. Salomé demands to meet this Iokanaan and, though it's against the rules, her wish is granted. She falls in love with him, but Iokanaan rejects her. Even so, Salomé assures him that she will kiss his mouth. No matter what, she WILL kiss his mouth. At just that moment, Herod and his guests burst onto the terrace looking for Salomé. He becomes increasingly fixated on her. Seeing this, Queen Herodias warns him, with more and more urgency, to stop looking at her. Despite these warnings, and a series of ominous events - Herod starts hearing the distant beating of wings and the moon turns red - he demands that Salomé dance for him. At first she resists his demands. But, after being promised anything she wishes in return, she agrees. Salomé will dance, the Dance of the Seven Veils. But at what price?

It has been proposed that Wilde's rendering of Salome's *Dance of the Seven Veils* is the origin of the strip-tease. Often within operatic productions of Strauss' work, the singer will have a dancer/body-double who will take over the performative role during this Dance - an orchestral interlude whereupon the singer is required to strip her seven-veiled costume. Despite the problematic historical gender imbalance of female performers showing skin in the name of art, this interlude is undeniably one of the most theatrically impactful and orchestrally lush moments of the operatic canon. © Alex Raineri, 2023