

# AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

## March Events

Collegium Musicum Choir

Rehearsals commence

**Wednesday March 1, 2017**

**4.30-7.30pm**

**Sir John Clancy Auditorium**

Preparing Handel's *Coronation*

*Anthems* and Mozart's *Requiem*

Singers welcome - please see the website to register:

<http://www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral/collegium-musicum-choir>

or call 02 9385 4874

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour concert

**Tuesday March 7, 2017**

**1.10 - 2.00pm**

**Leighton Hall, Scientia Building**

Borodin: *Trio* in G minor

Glazunov: *Reverie Orientale* Op.14

Prokofiev: *Flute sonata* Op. 94

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Subscription Concert 1, 2017

**Saturday March 11, 2017 at 8pm**

**Sir John Clancy Auditorium**

***Russian Legends***

Stravinsky: *Soldier's Tale Suite*

Gubaidulina: *Allegro rustico* and

*Sounds of the forest*

Arensky: *Piano Trio*

Kats-Chernin: *Three rags*

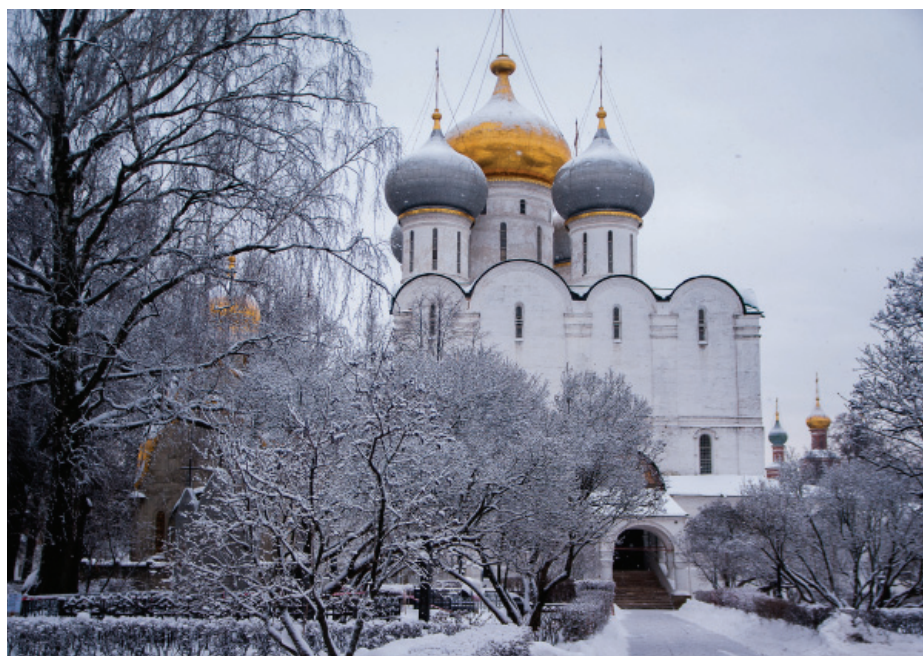
Borodin: *String quartet* no 2

[www.music.unsw.edu.au](http://www.music.unsw.edu.au)

## From Russia with love

GREG KEANE

*Sir Winston Churchill once described Russia as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." While Russian music doesn't pose quite the same problem, it's much more diverse than Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich, as The Australia Ensemble's first 2017 concert reveals.*



The Australia Ensemble's Irina Morozova is Russian, so who better to explain the thinking behind the program?

"Russian composers write wonderful tunes, often steeped in folk tunes or religious chants which resonate with everyone," Irina said.

"Most Russian chamber music is a joy to play and perform. They [composers] are also very adept at writing wonderfully for viola (and in view of our rather limited solo repertoire, violists everywhere are thankful for that!)

"There was a lot of Russian music around me as I was growing up. My mother was a pianist so my earliest memories are playing with my teddy bears as she practised Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and others.

"My sister and I sang in the Russian orthodox church choir and we both sang and danced in a folkloric group. Anything Russian was and is firmly in my soul and always moves me. Sometimes in rehearsals I can help with translation or know the meaning of a liturgical musical quote.

"The Russian theme evolved when Stravinsky and Borodin were put forward and then we decided on Gubaidulina (to showcase Geoffrey Collins' playing) and Arensky (both for Ian Munro to shine and to bolster the Russian Romantics in the programme)" Irina said.

The privations caused by the First World War dictated the modest scoring of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, a theatrical parable whose full version included



Australia Ensemble viola player Irina Morozova

a narrator, several actor and dancers and an septet consisting of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone and percussion. The “tale” is a variation of the Faustian legend of a naïve “everyman” being constantly duped, with the devil always coming out on top. The suite dispenses with the narrator, actors and dancers but still crackles with Stavinsky’s laconic musical wit. One of the highlights of the work is a seductive tango.

The Romantic component of the program begins with the Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32, by Anton Arensky (1861-1906). The *Allegro moderato* unfolds gently and the entire movement is suffused with an almost Brahmsian autumnal glow. The *Scherzo* trips along cheerfully with a waltz-like trio section mainly in B-flat major. This movement is likely to create one of the best “ear worms” of 2017. The *Adagio* is elegiac and ends in a mood best described as gently but defiantly smiling through tears. The last movement opens dramatically and revisits numerous themes from the third and first movements, followed by a turbulent ending that restates the primary theme. This work is Arensky’s most frequently performed and could be said to occupy the outer reaches of the mainstream piano trio repertoire.

The Borodin Second String Quartet (despite the beloved tender *Nocturne* slow movement – known as *This is My Beloved* in the musical *Kismet*,

which was based on Borodin’s music) was once a pillar of the chamber music repertoire but is not performed as often today as you might expect and will provide a welcome reminder of how gorgeous and heart-tugging Borodin’s music is. Both this and the Arensky Trio radiate a uniquely Russian sense of yearning.

AE flautist Geoffrey Collins comes to the fore in an interlude by the doyenne of contemporary Russian composers, Sofia Gubaidulina, in two works for flute and piano, *Allegro rustico* and the hauntingly mystical *Sounds of the Forest*.

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## Young voices on campus



In January this year, a new partnership between UNSW and Gondwana Voices was realised with the Gondwana Voices National Choral School held on campus. 335 young musicians from across the country came to UNSW for an intensive residency program, living in UNSW’s colleges and rehearsing in different spaces around the campus. Leading conductors, educators, composers and performers worked with the students, presenting a series of concerts, several of which were held in the Clancy Auditorium. Australia Ensemble Artistic Chair, Dr Paul Stanhope, was program director for the Gondwana Composer School, working with a small group of emerging composers to write a piece in only five days to be performed by one of the choral ensembles at an in-house concert. Although very hot in Sydney this January, the entire experience was a very positive one and it is hoped that the partnership continues for many years.

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## The annual ticket-juggle

responsibility for a very manual process of managing bookings. Previously, the complex jigsaw puzzle of receiving subscriptions and attending to the individual wishes of subscribers who may want to move seats was best managed with a seating plan and coloured markers. The tickets themselves were pulled out of six separate piles of tickets (one for each concert), collated and posted, and data manually entered into a spreadsheet. In all, the process was extremely reliant on meticulous accuracy of one member of staff, which has fortunately proven successful over many years.

That said, in order to allow secure online purchasing, digital delivery of tickets, less reliance on one member of staff, and better management of our Operations Coordinator’s time, this year the Australia Ensemble (and indeed all of the Music Performance Unit’s performance activities) are being managed through the online ticketing system Eventbrite. For those not au fait with online purchasing, we still have the capability to manually process bookings and have this year received many subscriptions by post. We are aware that this new system may have less of the personal touch some are used to, but hope that it proves to be a more secure and speedy process in the longer term. And MPU staff are still on the other end of the phone to talk to should you prefer to book in person!







# Our own Russian legend

Elena Kats-Chernin is one of the great personalities of Australian music, with her kaleidoscopic musical language referring to a rich cultural heritage. Born in Uzbekistan and educated in Russia's Gnessin Musical College, she immigrated to Australia and studied further in Sydney. She was awarded a grant to study in Germany, where she remained for 13 years before returning to Australia where she has settled and made a name for herself internationally as a cosmopolitan and energetic composer.



Much of the vivid colour of her music stems from her interest in combining elements of ragtime, klezmer, jazz and cabaret with more traditional classical forms. Curiously, her *Russian Rag* has become one of the more recognised Australian works in the concert hall repertory, a work which is being arranged by the Australia Ensemble's associate artist and expert clarinetist, David Griffiths. David is arranging the *Russian Rag* with two other of Elena's favoured Rags, *Removalists Rag* and *Zee Rag* (all previously recorded in their original solo piano version by Australia Ensemble pianist Ian Munro), to combine piano with the two wind instruments of the Ensemble, flute and clarinet.

David Griffiths is arranging Rags of Elena Kats-Chernin (top) for flute, clarinet and piano

Elena was thrilled for David to be taking on the project of arranging the works: "I adore David and his playing, and trust he would do a great arrangement of all those pieces... This way it is going to be perfectly sitting in the colours and capabilities of the instruments, and in clarinet in particular." This trio version will be a uniquely Australian contribution to the otherwise Russian program of the opening concert of the 2017 season, entitled *Russian Legends*.

## Welcoming a familiar face

Many subscribers will have become accustomed to seeing the stage manager of the Australia Ensemble, Callum Bowles, quickly rearranging the stage between pieces and calmly managing the musicians backstage. The Music Performance Unit is pleased to welcome Callum into the office environment, where he has taken on the position of Operations and Communications Assistant for twelve months. Callum will be working the equivalent of three days per week, but with a schedule which allows him to continue his membership of UNSW's Burgundian Consort, in which he is a valuable member of the bass section. Callum has recently finished an Honours year which has drawn his undergraduate studies in Medical Science at UNSW to a close. He will be a great support to Operations and Artistic Coordinator Yvette Goodchild, who will be in the office Tuesday-Friday during 2017. Welcome to Callum, and we look forward to a productive and exciting year of concert-giving!



## Health improvement plan

Each year towards the end of February the UNSW campus comes alive with throngs of students returning to the campus for another academic year. It is a vibrant and exciting time to be on the campus, if a bit congested, and is the signal for the start of the annual program for ensembles of the Music Performance Unit.



The week of student orientation, or 'O Week' as it is known, includes auditions and registration for the UNSW Wind Symphony, UNSW Orchestra, Burgundian Consort and Collegium Musicum Choir. As community ensembles of the university, these groups include students from across the campus as well as staff, alumni and members of the local community. In semester 1 2016, only one-third of the 90 singers who registered for the Collegium Musicum Choir were participating as part of an undergraduate program. The remaining 60 singers were from across the campus and well beyond its bounds. Most singers have some degree of music literacy to cope with the twelve-week rehearsal timeframe, but the range of experience varies enormously across the group's membership.

This year, the Collegium Musicum Choir will begin rehearsals on Wednesday March 1 in Clancy Auditorium, maintaining the 4.30-7.30pm rehearsal pattern established by Dr Patricia Brown many years ago. UNSW Choral Director Sonia Maddock will work with the choir to prepare a rich program including Handel's *Coronation Anthems* (the most famous of which is *Zadok the Priest*, one of the grandest openings to a choral work in the repertory) and Mozart's *Requiem*, always a favourite with singers and audiences alike.

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New singers are always welcome – spread the word and perhaps dip your toe in the world of choir music by joining the Collegium Musicum Choir in 2017. The abundant evidence that singing improves health, happiness, memory and life expectancy is surely an indicator that this could be worth your while!

[www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral](http://www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral)

# Telling the Soldier's Tale

HILARY SHRUBB

Folk stories are a universal part of all cultures and the storylines are often startlingly similar. In fact they are often categorised into basic plot points: animal tales, everyday life events, wish fulfilment fantasies, etc. The similarities of the stories span all continents, and the reason is fairly obvious: they are, at their core, stories of common moral judgement: For instance, there are few if any places in the world where laziness is a virtue, which is why a hardworking Cinderella figure appears almost everywhere under various pseudonyms, of course. Greed is rarely rewarded, so any unearned success must meet with eventual disaster. 'Be content with what you have', and 'Count your blessings' are basic tenets of folklore.

And such stories are immensely satisfying and vastly enjoyable. Look no further than the Walt Disney Corporation and you will see that not only have folk stories been realised as fantastical pieces of cinematic brilliance, but they have been transformed into a multi-billion dollar entertainment industry.

One tale whose ubiquity is slightly harder to explain is the story of a person who has a supernatural encounter and is released, or 'wakes up', to find that far more time has gone past than they realised.

This is a common theme, re-told many different ways. Evil spirits are also found everywhere, and stories of clever or good characters outsmarting the Devil (or his culturally-relevant manifestation) in some way have a wide currency. There is a whole collection of tales based around the apparently historical character of Doctor Faustus, a German necromancer who sold his soul to the Devil in order to gain greater scientific knowledge and power.

Enter Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*.

His telling of *The Runaway Soldier and the Devil* (from Alexander Afanasyev's collection of Russian folk and fairytales) begins with a humble young soldier, an everyman type of person, returning home on leave. The Devil, ingeniously (or perhaps not so) disguised as an old man, senses an easy opportunity, and

offers him a magic book in exchange for the violin (which represents the soul). The simple soldier takes up the offer of spending three days with the old man to learn more.

Alas, when the soldier returns to his village three days later, he finds instead that three years have passed and his family and friends shun him as a ghost. And so the Devil appears once again, this time tempting the young soldier by explaining how the magic book can make him rich. And so his indolence begins... He no longer has to worry about anything because of his vast wealth.

Naturally he becomes bored of this extravagant lifestyle. An old woman (in some versions, a brothel madam or else a pedlar) offers him a range of goods including a familiar violin. But it will no longer play for him, and in despair he throws it away and destroys the book.

Penniless once again, the soldier comes to a town where the Princess lies dying and the King has promised

her hand in marriage to the man who cures her. The soldier, who is learning a thing or two by now, meets the Devil (with violin) and tricks him into returning the precious fiddle. The soldier finds he can play again, and his music restores the Princess. Their love and his music allow them to overcome the Devil.

This happy state of affairs cannot last because the soldier has one last lesson to learn. Despite the warnings, the couple, bolstered by overconfidence, return to the soldier's native land. But as soon as he crosses the border, all is lost and the Devil claims his soul as final payment.

Cautionary tales, such as this one, are not the stuff of Disney movies. But in 1917, when Stravinsky and Swiss author Ramuz conceived of *The Soldier's Tale*, it was perfect timing. The world was in turmoil and the two artists were in need of cash. They needed an idea that was not only strikingly original but also able to be put on with minimal cost.

*The Soldier's Tale* checked all of those boxes.

There have been many reimaginings of Stravinsky's *Tale*, and the Australia Ensemble contributes to this venerable collection by performing the composer's own arrangement for clarinet, violin and piano.

