October Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday October 14, 2014
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Rubinstein: Salon pieces Op.11
Cui: Cinq petites duos Op.56
Tchaikovsky: Movements from The Seasons Op.37
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour workshop
Thursday October 16, 2014
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Dr Scott Davie and the Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Rubinstein: Quintet in F for piano and winds
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 6, 2014
Saturday October 18, 2014
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Rubinstein: Quintet in F for piano and winds
Schubert: String Quintet in C followed by 2015 season launch
australia.ensemble@unsw.edu.au

Sparking delight

At the final subscription concert in October, there will be celebration of the year past and the launch of the 2015 season, the first series of programs under the artistic leadership of Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope. Paul offers a brief taste of what to expect in the year ahead from the Australia Ensemble @UNSW.

Picture this: pitch black. From a distance, a glimmer – a flicker of light. A spark that illuminates. Looking closer, it is a warm glow, a fire that catches, spreads. Such images inform the Australia Ensemble’s 2015 season named Raising Sparks after the title of a major work for mezzo soprano and ensemble by Scottish composer James MacMillan that will be featured in the first subscription concert next year.

Other delights include Schubert’s much-loved Trout Quintet, Beethoven’s Third Razumovsky Quartet, Dvorak’s Piano Quartet in E and the Piano Quintet by Edward Elgar.

As the ensemble’s new Artistic Chair – stepping into the very big shoes of my predecessor, Roger Covell – I have been meeting with the members of the ensemble throughout the year to craft the 2015 program. We are delighted with the direction that we are taking, which is a mix very characteristic of the Australia Ensemble that includes great masterworks, lesser-known gems plus premieres of new works not yet heard on these shores.

We will also introduce some modern performative elements which I am particularly excited about: a unique music-dance collaboration; music composed around video excerpts and, of course, a range of guest artists including mezzo soprano Fiona Campbell, harpist Alice Giles, guitar virtuoso Karin Schaupp and Sydney’s own percussion marvel, Claire Edwardes.

I am looking forward to a delightful 2015 season and can’t wait to share the details with you at the launch directly following our final subscription concert in October. Hope to see you then!

Paul Stanhope, Artistic Chair
While the music of Tchaikovsky is perhaps the most well-known, Rubinstein and Cui are equally important as they each made a significant impact on the history and development of Russian art music and culture. Rubinstein, especially, changed the direction of tertiary music education in Russia as he initiated the establishment of the now famous elite Conservatoires in St Petersburg and Moscow.

Anton Rubinstein was a virtuoso pianist, composer and educator. He commenced piano lessons with his mother and after showing great promise, moved on to study with respected Moscow piano teacher Aleksandr Ivanovich Villuan. With Villuan, he made rapid progress and earned celebrity status on the European circuit as a child prodigy pianist. Rubinstein’s mother fervently promoted his musical talent by introducing him to leading musicians of the day such as Mendelssohn and Liszt. In his late teens Rubinstein moved to Vienna with the intention to study with Liszt, who was unfortunately not immediately interested in taking him on. Rubinstein, then considered too old to be a prodigy, found it very hard to earn a living as a concert pianist, so turned to teaching to earn an income while in Vienna. Composition became a focus in Rubinstein’s musical endeavours, but he eventually repatriated to his home country to take on a project that was to become one of his greatest achievements – changing the music education system in Russia. In his book Virtuoso, Sachs writes: The lowly position occupied by music and musicians in Russia bothered Rubinstein, and he was determined to take upon himself fundamental responsibility for the transformation of the country’s musical life. The Russian Musical Society was soon established in St Petersburg; and not long afterwards, at the Michael Palace, ‘those classes were formed which may be regarded as the nucleus of the St Petersburg Conservatory.’ In order to raise funds for the establishment, we used to give concerts nearly every day’, wrote Rubinstein, ‘and the excitement and competition were widespread.’

Rubinstein initiated the establishment of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 and took on the role as its founding Director. He believed that it was time for professional musicians to train emerging or young musicians, and appointed staff including celebrated artists Theodor Leschitzky as Professor of Piano and Henri Wieniawski as Professor of Violin. He implemented a wide range of courses with a European focus, with students studying and performing repertoire of both German and French composers. Importantly, Rubinstein had a global view of music and how it should be taught, and he tirelessly toured Europe and eventually America to raise funds, recruit students and promote the conservatory.

In Rubinstein’s first composition class was a young man eager to study musical constructs and explore his own compositional sound world - and the name of this composer? Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

The young Tchaikovsky thrived under Rubinstein’s instruction, being encouraged to write countless exercises for an array of orchestral instruments that proved to be very useful in his later years as a composer. In a letter to the German critic Eugen Zabel in 1892, Tchaikovsky wrote of Rubinstein, ‘he was a great pianist and a great composer but also a man of rare nobility, sincere, honest, magnanimous, alien to any baseness or vulgarity, with a clear, straightforward mind and infinite kindness - in short, a man superior to all other mortals. As a teacher he was incomparable. He got down to business without bombast or lengthy perorations, but always with a very serious attitude toward the business at hand.’

Tchaikovsky’s association with Rubinstein was lifelong, and he was close friends with Rubinstein’s brother Nikolai as they worked together at the newly established Moscow Conservatory. Nikolai conducted several premieres of Tchaikovsky’s major orchestral works, the most famous being the premiere of the fantasy overture Romeo and Juliet.

So, how did César Cui fit into the picture? Cui was part of an important movement in Russian music known as the ‘The Five’ or the ‘The Mighty Handful',
with compatriots Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Modest Mussorgsky. Led by Balakirev, they were opposed to Rubinstein’s plan to educate young musicians in the manner and culture of European conservatories, believing instead that Russian folk music should be the foundation of all Russian culture. As the musicians of ‘The Five’ were predominantly employed in professions outside of music, they were considered amateurs by both Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky.

As well as working as a composer, Cui held a position as Military Officer in the Russian Army and was a highly respected music critic. Writing for several major literary papers and magazines, he often reviewed the musical performances of many of his contemporaries. Cui’s role as a critic was a major influence on Russian musical tastes and artistic culture of the time, and his criticisms of Tchaikovsky’s music caused tension between the two composers. Of a performance of Tchaikovsky’s cantata based on the text of Schiller’s ode An die Freude, Cui wrote: “the composer Mr. Tchaikovsky is utterly weak... and if he had any talent, then somewhere at least it would have broken the chains of the conservatory.” However, upon hearing Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet Overture, Cui declared it was “an extraordinarily gifted work.” In response to Cui’s critiques, Tchaikovsky was known to make disparaging remarks against The Five, such as in a letter he wrote to his patron Madame Von Meck:

‘All the latest St Petersbourg composers are a very talented lot. But they are all infected to the marrow by the most terrible conceit and a purely dilettantish confidence in their superiority over the rest of the musical world...'”

Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky still admired some of Cui’s compositions, most notably his renowned opera William Ratcliffe.

The differing philosophies of Rubinstein/Tchaikovsky and The Five in the 1860s competed to pave the way for the future of Russian music. Despite tensions between the two opposing factions, Rubinstein recognised the gifts of The Five and often promoted and performed their music. According to Sachs, although Rubinstein ‘rejected the philosophy of The Five, he played and conducted those of their works which he judged worthwhile’.

Furthermore, it was Rubinstein who was able to forge a path allowing the two ideologies to unite by convincing Rimsky-Korsakov, a member of The Five, to join his staff at the St Petersburg Conservatory. Although never holding the position of Director, Rimsky-Korsakov had a profound influence as a teacher and with Rubinstein was able to create an institution that changed the face of elite music education and of classical music in Russia. Today Rubinstein’s school is known as The Rimsky-Korsakov St Petersburg State Conservatory.

Hear the music
Rubinstein: Salon pieces Op.11
Cui: Cinq petites duos Op.56
Tchaikovsky: Movements from The Seasons Op.37
Ian Munro, piano; Geoffrey Collins, flute; Dene Olding, Dimity Hall, violins; Irina Morozova, viola; Julian Smiles, cello
Free concert: Tuesday October 14, 1.10pm Leighton Hall

Rubinstein: Quintet for piano and winds Op.55
Ian Munro, piano; Geoffrey Collins, flute; David Griffiths, clarinet; Robert Johnson, horn; Andrew Barnes, bassoon
Free workshop: Thursday October 16, 1.10pm, Leighton Hall
Subscription concert: Saturday October 18, 8pm, Clancy Auditorium
p: +61 2 9385 4874
Dr Scott Davie, pianist and academic lecturing in Russian music history, joins the Australia Ensemble to present a public workshop on Anton Rubinstein’s Quintet Op.55 for piano and winds on October 16.

Dr Scott Davie is known to audiences as both a soloist and chamber musician and is an expert in the field of Russian music. He has given concerts throughout Australia, and his performances and recordings have been broadcast on radio and television. A recipient of numerous awards and prizes in Australia, Davie furthered his studies in London, where his teachers included Geoffrey Parsons and Leslie Howard.

In 2005, Davie collaborated with Graeme Murphy and the Sydney Dance Company in their production of Grand, giving highly acclaimed performances throughout Australia and overseas, and the recording released on the Melba label. He has recorded CDs for ABC Classics and Artworks which include Pictures from an Exhibition, and The Australian Album with violinist Asmira Woodward-Page.

In 2012, Davie gave the Australian premiere of the original version of Rachmaninoff’s Fourth Piano Concerto with Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He currently lectures Russian music history and piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

For the diary

2015 concert dates of the

Australia Ensemble @UNSW:
1: Saturday March 14, 2015
2: Saturday April 18, 2015
3: Saturday May 23, 2015
4: Saturday August 15, 2015
5: Saturday September 12, 2015
6: Saturday October 10, 2015

Please note that brochures and program information will be supplied at the 2015 season launch following the concert on Saturday October 18.

Collegium Musicum Choir:
1: Sunday May 31, 2015
2: Sunday October 25, 2015
3: Sunday November 29, 2015

Burgundian Consort recital:
Wednesday September 23, 2015

In Fine Voice

Following the recent success of the Burgundian Consort’s evening recital, Della Terra, UNSW’s chamber choir will return to perform Debussy’s exquisite Trois Chansons de Charles d’Orléans as part of the Collegium Musicum’s second concert of the year. In the same program on Sunday October 26, five young soloists will join with the Collegium Musicum Choir and organist Peter Ellis for the Oratorio de Noël of Camille Saint-Saëns, and Charles Gounod’s Messe Chorale, based on a plainchant theme.

Only five weeks later, the Collegium Musicum Choir and Burgundian Consort together with the Handbell Ensemble and the Australia Ensemble’s own Dene Olding will kick off the festive season with its annual Christmas Concert, A Festival of Carols. On Sunday November 30, the program offers great variety and warmth, including communal carols, homemade gingerbread, and a small gift for each member of the audience.

Australia Ensemble subscribers are offered a 15% discount on pre-booked tickets for all concerts of the Collegium Musicum - please call 02 9385 4874 during business hours to place your booking.