

Stonnington Symphony presents

The Rite of Spring

40th Anniversary Gala

Saturday 18 November 2023 | 7:30pm

Malvern Town Hall



Program

LAWSON *An Atlas of Joy World Premiere*
STRAUSS *Four Last Songs*
STRAVINSKY *The Rite of Spring*

Conductor

Roy Theaker *Artistic Director*

Soloist

Lee Abrahmsen *Soprano*



Stonnington Symphony 40th Anniversary

A Tribute by Helen Henzell

Stonnington Symphony was officially formed in 1983 as the Malvern Symphony Orchestra under the guidance of cellist Janis Laurs. It has always stood out as a community orchestra with exceptionally high standards of music making. This is reflected in the prestigious artistic directors that have been keenly associated with the orchestra – Benjamin Northey, when he was starting out on the conducting stage, Barry Tuckwell in his retirement from professional playing, and Roy Theaker, who has been with the orchestra for 10 successful years. The orchestra has enjoyed playing under other conductors of global standing and local renown, such as Simon Thew, Christopher Martin, Warwick Stengards, Jeffrey Crellin and John Hopkins, who kindly agreed to become our patron. How many young conductors might we boast in the future had Stonnington Symphony under their baton in their career? The orchestra has also accompanied soloists of international renown over its history, including Amy Dixon (Saxophone), Erica Kennedy (violin), Zoe Knighton (Cello), Charles Tingwell (actor), Alan Zavod (piano), Jacqueline Dark (voice) and Merlyn Quaife.

The majority of concerts by the Stonnington Symphony have taken place in the magnificent Malvern Town Hall which the council makes available to the orchestra on generous terms. We are very fortunate to be able to rehearse and perform in the same venue. In these congenial surroundings the SSO has performed a vast array of symphonic works to appreciative audiences, of which the program tonight is an excellent example. Naturally the symphony has been the mainstay of regular concerts, and the orchestra has played a wide selection of works by every major symphonic composer: Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Dvorak, Brahms, Sibelius, and Tchaikovsky with pickings from Mahler, Shostakovich and Prokofiev and many other composers. The concerto has been a popular component of many concerts, which have mainly drawn on the talents of younger local artists as soloists who welcome the opportunity to play a concerto with an orchestra. Occasionally the program includes one of the ever popular quasi-symphonic crowd thrillers, like Scheherazade, The Planets, Enigma Variations, Appalachian Spring, the Ride of the Valkyrie, or The Firebird which is receiving its first performance by the Stonnington Symphony today.

'Symphony under the Stars', now called 'The Classics', has been a very popular event in the Malvern Gardens at the end of February each year, regularly attended by over a thousand people with their families and picnic hampers. Playing a program of lighter classical music and including popular singers, the evening has something for everyone. Who can forget the privilege of playing in 'Symphony Under the Stars' with artists Lior, Archie Roach or Deborah Conway? Even when soaked by the rain the audience lasted to the end.

Stonnington Symphony holds the 'Symphony in a Day' each September to encourage aspiring players of all ages to join the regular players in an instant performance of a classical work. Beethoven's 8th Symphony was a great success in 2023. The SSO also holds an annual concert for children in which the informal presentation and a suitable commentary help them to enjoy a popular work. Encouraged to dress up, 'The Nutcracker' inspired all kinds of varied costumes for the performance last March.

The orchestra visited Castlemaine under Barry Tuckwell to give a second performance of the November concert in 2011. This proved a successful and enjoyable experience for the members of the orchestra and the denizens of Castlemaine, and was repeated the following year. The orchestra successfully visited Castlemaine again this year and this will hopefully become an annual fixture.

In addition to concerts, the orchestra has been sought after for some amazing projects over the years. Long standing members won't forget the 1998 Melbourne Comedy Festival performances with the Scared Weird Little Guys, the Stonnington council LAAP pool project at Prahran swimming pool or recording A-ha's 'Take on Me' and three other songs for broadcasting in local parks during lockdown.

Stonnington Symphony has been outstandingly served by its General Managers, who have painstakingly organised the multitude of practical requirements needed to maintain a full symphony orchestra, and achieved it with unfailing efficiency and good humour. Ester Benjamin, Julie Haskell, Wendy Lasica, Pip Grummet and Alex Morris have managed the affairs of the orchestra and its relationship with the Stonnington Council with unrivalled skill, courtesy and dedication, and the orchestra can safely say its many fine achievements would not have been possible without their Managers' devotion to its welfare.

Stonnington Symphony has always been committed to offering amateur and semi-professional instrumentalists the opportunity to play regularly in a full-size symphony orchestra of a very high standard. The orchestra has been generously supported by the City of Stonnington for many years, a very valuable contribution to community arts and culture for which we are all immensely grateful.



The Orchestra

Violin I

Ash Wood*
Edgar Kautzner
Ella Zak
Paul Boasman
Jennifer Cargill
David Chan
Heather Thompson
Justine Siedle
Alice Barke
Sally Banks
Igor Zakopaylo
Pam Scott
Sashini Fair

Violin II

Vincy U*
Lisette Bush
Alistair Legge
Lauren Lok
Caroline Morepeth
Simone Kux
Mark Pokryshevsky
Florence Thomson
Kerryn Curcio
Alice Watson

Viola

Daniel Neumann*
David Keuneman
Francis Parker
Hugh McMaster
Peter Neustupny
Kim Tucker
David Choate
Tiffany Duncan
David Woods

Cello

Joshua Jones*
Julia Cianci
Katelyn Woodyatt
Dennis Vaughan
Julia Choate
Phillipa Clements
Georg Ramm
Katherine Fazzolari

Double Bass

Alexandra Giller*
Mark Bowman
Ben Bates
Cameron Holland
Darren Steel

Flute

Aydin Abdullah*
Sam Cooke*
Barbara Kerr
Matthew Barker*
Kelly Williams*

Oboe

Emma Ridout*
Felicity Hardiman*
Bridie Mee
Michelle Forbes*
Stephen Moschner

Clarinet

David Laity*
Brendan Toohey*
Sarah Barlow*
Ryan Lynch*
Daniel Byrne

Bassoon

Megan Waugh*
Gennady Slavsky*
Linda Pearson*
Sara Rafferton*
Joanne Angus

Horn

Tracy Tulloch*
Henry Eames
Corey East-Bryans
Lyndelle Newey
Peter Marks
Celia Mason
Bruce Ikin*
Kevin Close

Trumpet

Trent Hopkinson*
Dan Heskett*
Catherine Brennan
Louise Martin
Christopher Healey
Jean McMullin*

Trombone

Hugh McKelvey*
Ken Tang
Jurie Swart*

Tuba

Jack Tzikas*
Alessio Russo

Timpani

Christine Flood*
Allison Summers

Percussion

John Rechter
David Tay
Christine Chan
Sebastian Beswick

Harp

Laura Tanata*

* denotes principal player



Committee of Management

Emma Ridout
David Woods
Francis Parker
Felicity Hardiman
David Laity
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Jack Tzikas
Alicia White

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Artistic Director

Roy Theaker

General Manager

Alex Morris

Roy Theaker

Roy Theaker has a diverse and well-travelled career as Conductor, Music Director, Concertmaster and Violin soloist. He has lit up the stage from the Sydney Opera House to Carnegie Hall New York, and London's West End to Santory Hall Japan, in both the highbrow classical world and the commercial theatre, rock and pop industry where he has shared the stage with the likes of Robbie Williams, Hugh Jackman and even the Three Tenors.

For a number of years he was a conductor on Walt Disney's hit musical *The Lion King* in both the West End and later in Melbourne, and since 2013 is Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Stonnington Symphony - performing with a host of Australian artists such as Archie Roach, Lior, Ella Hooper, Patrice Tipoki, Dave Grainy, Rebecca Barnard, and Vika & Linda Bull, plus Classical names including Siobhan Stagg, Caroline Almonte, Jacqueline Porter, Kalina Krusteva and Liane Keegan. Other recent conducting highlights include return visits with Monash Academy Orchestra and overseas with the RTE Concert Orchestra in Dublin, plus the Bulgarian National Radio Orchestra, Sofia.

An acclaimed violinist, known for his musical diversity, engaging stage presence and blistering technical ability Roy was a Concertmaster with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and has guest led the Sydney & West Australian Symphony Orchestras, plus the Singapore Symphony and Hong Kong Philharmonic. Now happily freelancing, his solo playing is regularly appreciated by Melbourne theatregoers in shows from *The Book of Mormon*, to *Evita*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Kiss of the Spider Women*, and *Opera Australia's* recent productions of both *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cinderella*. He also has his own 'Spectacular Violin Shows' and performs as a Guest Entertainer on board a vast array of super luxury Cruise ships.

A graduate of the Yehudi Menuhin School, the Vienna Conservatoire and the Royal Academy, London, he was a violinist in the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, until moving to Portugal in 2003 to take up the role of Concertmaster and Associate Conductor of the Orquestra do Algarve. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2012, holds a Masters in Business Administration (MBA), runs marathons, and plays lots of tennis when given the chance.



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Lee Abrahmsen

Recently described by critics as ‘Melbourne’s favourite soprano’, Australian soprano Lee Abrahmsen is a multi-award-winning soprano both on the operatic stage and concert platform.

She has performed as soloist in Australia with Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, Melbourne Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Queensland Symphony, Omega Ensemble, Melbourne Opera, Victorian Opera, and internationally at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in London, and in China and Japan.

Principal roles performed include: Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*, Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*, Senta in *Flying Dutchman*, Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Leonora in *Fidelio*, Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, CioCioSan in *Butterfly* (for Melbourne Opera), Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Opera Australia), Tosca (Australian Discovery Orchestra), Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* (Opera Queensland) and Violetta in *La Traviata* (CoOpera).

Lee is a recipient of numerous opera awards in Australia including the prestigious Herald Sun Aria, Opera Awards Royal Overseas League Award, Acclaim Awards first prize, received the Opera Chaser’s Outstanding Performer for Isolde in 2018 and most recently received a Greenroom Awards nomination for Brünnhilde in 2023. She appeared at the Sydney Opera House singing Richard Strauss Four Last Songs with Omega Ensemble and sang the National Anthem at the Ashes Cricket Tests in Sydney and Melbourne.

‘The Sieglinde of Lee Abrahmsen was both lustrous and powerful. Abrahmsen should consider Brünnhilde.’ Opera Magazine | Michael Shmith |2023 |Die Walküre Melbourne Opera



Evan Lawson

Evan J Lawson is one of Australia's leading queer artists, working at the forefront of contemporary culture as composer, writer, curator, and conductor, chiefly as artistic director of interdisciplinary company Forest Collective.

Hailed by Bridget Davies in *The Age*, Lawson's innovative musical imaginations...are striking... Evan has been composing music since the age of ten, is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, and of developing artist programs with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Malthouse Theatre and Grafenegg Festival. In Australia, he has studied with Benjamin Northey, Richard Gill, Kevin March and Johanna Selleck, and internationally with David Aronson and Matthias Pintscher who has said that his music is serene, deep, and even breathing the heritage of Mahler.

Evan is the composer of 4 operas: *Calypso* (2013, Forest Collective), *Orpheus* (2019, Forest Collective), *Density512*, (Prismatx Ensemble), *Vois* (2021, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence) and *The Sea* (2023, BK Opera, Forest Collective) which has its world premiere season next month.

Since 2020 Evan has been the resident conductor of BK Opera, conducting the Melbourne premiere of Peter Maxwell Davies *The Lighthouse* last year. Other acclaimed productions as musical director include Benjamin Britten's *Curlw River*, Georges Bizet's *Carmen* and Claudio Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea*.

As guest conductor Evan has worked with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Tonkünstler Orchestra, Moravska Filharmonie, ANAM Orchestra, Performance Space, Ranters Theatre, the Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music and SoundSCAPE New Music Festival.



An Atlas of Joy

Evan Lawson (1989 -)

My main inspiration for this work came from the program of this evening's concert. When I found out that Stravinsky's monumental Rite of Spring and Strauss' Four Last Songs were programmed, I was not only super excited to hear these two works, as they are some of my absolute favourites, but I was immediately taken with the idea of life. The Rite is of course about birth and the regeneration of the earth; Strauss' work is about looking back at a great career and life and anticipating death, so I thought it would be interesting to explore the idea of how good the middle bit is – life and the joys it entails. The work follows a sequence of moments that explore the idea of joy and what joy means. Sometimes it is loud and boisterous, sometimes more intimate and personal.

The work is scored for a large orchestra and is structured as an Overture, in the vein of Shostakovich or Dvorak. I have attempted to give every section a moment to shine, with a particular focus on the soloistic capabilities of the wind section.

I aim for my music to be colourful, intriguing, and perhaps a little surprising.

Program note prepared by Composer Evan Lawson



Four Last Songs

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

1 *Frühling* (Spring)

2 *September*

3 *Beim Schlafengehen* (When Falling Asleep)

4 *Im Abendrot* (At Sunset)

Richard Strauss' reputation as a popular composer largely rests on his steady production of orchestral blockbusters such as *Ein Heldenleben*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Don Quixote* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and gripping operas such as *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier*. However, in a far more intimate style, the Four Last Songs are probably his best known work and certainly amongst his finest.

Richard Strauss, like Rachmaninov, was a composer who outlived his era. Elgar and Sibelius ceased composing shortly after World War One, perhaps realising that the spirit of the age contradicted their personal artistic visions. But their contemporaries, Strauss and Rachmaninov enjoyed a late Romantic Indian Summer, oblivious to stylistic change.

Strauss's father, Franz Strauss, was the principal horn player in the Munich court orchestra and his mother came from an affluent family of brewers. Strauss showed musical aptitude early, producing his first piano piece and his first songs at the age of six. His musical education was informal, his principal teachers being players in his father's orchestra. His father's contacts also ensured that Strauss's early works reached a broad public, while financial assistance from his mother's family enabled several scores to be published. These early works show classical bias fostered by his father, who was inherently reactionary and fiercely anti-Wagnerian. The influence of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann, of whom Strauss's father approved, is strongly apparent. In the end the music of Wagner was also a powerful influence.

The Four Last Songs were Strauss's last composition, setting poems of Joseph van Eichendorf (4) and Hermann Hesse (1-3). They were written separately and were completed in 1948. Strauss died in 1949 and the songs were published in 1951 by Strauss's friend Ernst Roth, in the order and under the title by which they are now known. They were inspired by his abiding love for his wife. Sad and serene, the songs suggest a journey from spring to winter, from morning to evening, and from youth to old age. We hear of the joy of spring, the passing of summer, the onset of weariness and finally the gentle approach to the end of life.

Sadly, Strauss never heard a performance of the Four Last Songs. Wilhelm Furtwangler conducted the first performance in the Royal Albert Hall in 1950 with soprano Kirsten Flagstad.

Fun Fact: *Also Sprach Zarathustra* – tone poem; its sunrise theme became hugely popular after its use in the 1968 Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*

The Rite of Spring

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Part One: The Adoration of the Earth

*Introduction – Augurs of Spring – Ritual of Abduction – Spring Rounds –
Ritual of the Rival Tribes – Procession of the Sage – Dance of the Earth*

Part Two: The Sacrifice

*Introduction – Mystic Circles of Young Girls – Glorification of the Chosen One –
Evocation of the Ancestors – Ritual Action of the Ancestors – Sacrificial Dance*

The Rite of Spring is a ballet depicting scenes of Pagan Russia, to a scenario by Nicholas Roerich. It was choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky for the production by Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in Paris in 1913. It depicts various primitive rituals celebrating the advent of spring, after which a young girl is chosen as a sacrificial victim and dances herself to death.

Stravinsky's unleashing of a new rhythmic force in The Rite of Spring was one of the great musical revolutions of the years before World War One, but it was only the most striking innovation by a composer who never tired of setting himself new challenges. Often these took the form of making his own unmistakable imprint on matters and materials he drew from music of the past. He often rearranged previous compositions with his inventive disregard for former styles. Few composers since have escaped his influence.

The son of a renowned bass at the Imperial Opera, Stravinsky studied piano and composition from boyhood and from 1903 to 1906 he was a private pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov in composition. His early work shows the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov, but it showed too that the young composer was learning from Scriabin, Tchaikovsky, Debussy and Dukas. This period of eclectic preparation came to an end in 1910 when Stravinsky went to Paris with the ballet company of Sergei Diaghilev, who commissioned him to write a series of scores beginning with The Firebird, in 1910, and The Rite of Spring in 1913.

On the first night of the Rite of Spring the audience was enraged by the violent rhythms of Stravinsky's music and by the suggestive choreography. They booed, shouted, whistled and argued with each other. By means of syncopation and rapid changes of metre, Stravinsky did away with the regular pulse which had governed Western music since the Renaissance, and now made angular and propulsive rhythm the music's main motivating force. The music, scored for a vast orchestra, is the perfect complement to the scenes of pagan ritual in ancient Russia which the ballet depicts.

Fun Fact: Stravinsky made a four-hand piano reduction of the score.

Fun Fact: Can you hear the 2 'Wagner Tubas' in the Horn section?

Program notes prepared by David Woods and Justine Siedle

A Message from the General Manager

Alex Morris

It has been my absolute pleasure to be the General Manager at Stonnington Symphony for the last six years. Stonnington Symphony continue to produce professional standard, affordably priced concerts, attractive to a broad spectrum of the community, in readily accessible venues.

Stonnington Symphony prides itself on being of and for the community. I have truly never worked for an organisation more committed to cultivating its love of classical music within the local and wider community.

I would like to thank each and every member, player, volunteer, artist and audience member for making my six years at Stonnington Symphony such an incredibly rewarding experience. I am very proud of all that we have achieved in my time with the orchestra especially through some of the most unpredictable and extenuating circumstances in the organisation's history. I am excited to see Stonnington Symphony through our 40th anniversary and wish the orchestra all the very best for a bright and bold future.

The Stonnington Symphony Artistic Development Fund is a registered charity for the purpose of furthering the cultural growth of Stonnington Symphony's musicians, members and audiences. All donations over \$2.00 to this fund are tax-deductible. *An Atlas of Joy* was commissioned with support from the Artistic Development Fund and is the third new work that Stonnington Symphony have commissioned in the last five years.

We encourage you to consider making a contribution to the future of community music making in the City of Stonnington and beyond.

Stonnington Symphony invites you to join us for a post concert function in the balcony foyer immediately following the performance. We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to Stonnington Symphony long time member Peter Marks for his incredibly generous donation towards this post concert function. We do hope you can join us as we celebrate a rich history of community music making in the City of Stonnington.



Stonnington Symphony 2024 Season

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Sunday 24 March | 1:00pm

Malvern Town Hall

SUNDAY SERIES

Sunday 16 June | 2:30pm

Malvern Town Hall

Sunday 25 August | 2:30pm

Malvern Town Hall

Sunday 17 November | 2:30pm

Malvern Town Hall

Sunday 24 November | 2:30pm

Castlemaine Town Hall

SYMPHONY IN A DAY

Saturday 7 September

Workshop | 10:00am-4:00pm

Performance | 5:00pm



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