**Geelong Chamber Music Society**
presents

# Ian Munro

**Friday 8 September 2023**
7.30pm
McAuley Hall
Sacred Heart College

Geelong Chamber Music Society

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presents

## Ian Munro

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Austria
**Fantasy in C minor K 475**

*Adagio - Allegro*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Germany
**Sonata in C minor Op.13 *Pathétique***

I *Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio*
II *Adagio cantabile*
III *Rondo: Allegro*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Austria
**Moments Musicaux D.780**

I *Moderato*
II *Andantino*
III *Allegro moderato*
IV *Moderato*
V *Allegro vivace*
VI *Allegretto*

*Interval*

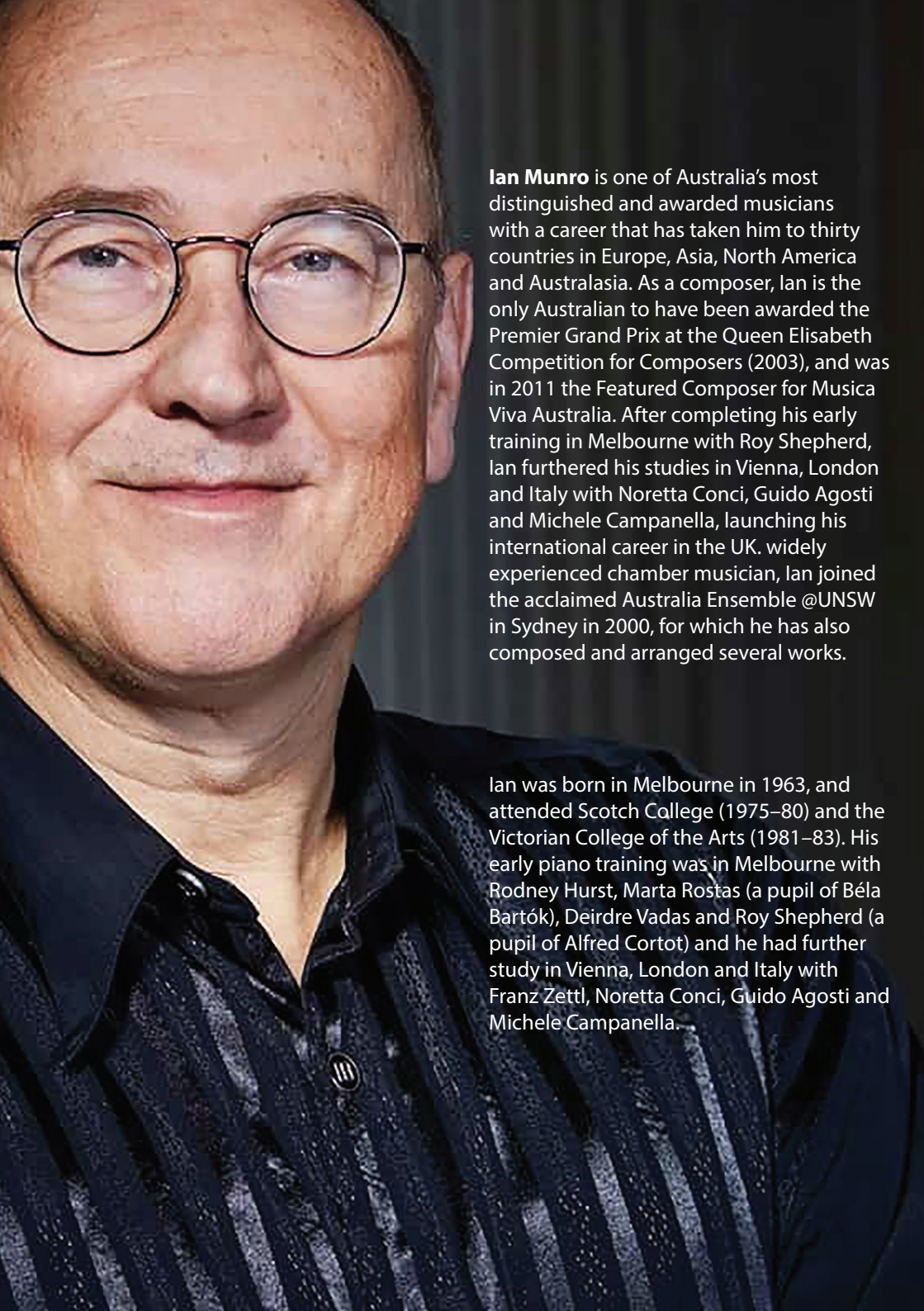
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Germany
**Klavierstücke Op.119**

I *Intermezzo in B minor*
II *Intermezzo in E minor*
III *Intermezzo in C major*
IV *Rhapsody in E flat major*

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) France
**Valses Nobles et Sentimentales**

I *Modéré – très franc*
II *Assez lent – avec une expression intense*
III *Modéré*
IV *Assez animé*
V *Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime*
VI *Vif*
VII *Moins vif*
VIII *Épilogue: lent*

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) Austria / Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) Lithuania
**Wein, Weib und Gesang**



**Ian Munro** is one of Australia's most distinguished and awarded musicians with a career that has taken him to thirty countries in Europe, Asia, North America and Australasia. As a composer, Ian is the only Australian to have been awarded the Premier Grand Prix at the Queen Elisabeth Competition for Composers (2003), and was in 2011 the Featured Composer for Musica Viva Australia. After completing his early training in Melbourne with Roy Shepherd, Ian furthered his studies in Vienna, London and Italy with Noretta Conci, Guido Agosti and Michele Campanella, launching his international career in the UK. widely experienced chamber musician, Ian joined the acclaimed Australia Ensemble @UNSW in Sydney in 2000, for which he has also composed and arranged several works.

Ian was born in Melbourne in 1963, and attended Scotch College (1975–80) and the Victorian College of the Arts (1981–83). His early piano training was in Melbourne with Rodney Hurst, Marta Rostas (a pupil of Béla Bartók), Deirdre Vadas and Roy Shepherd (a pupil of Alfred Cortot) and he had further study in Vienna, London and Italy with Franz Zettl, Noretta Conci, Guido Agosti and Michele Campanella.

## The Notion of Romantic

The pianist and the piano recital conjure up the romantic. Something mystical still happens when the lights dim and a sole figure takes the seat facing 88 black and white keys. The audience is transformed. Some performers could not face the challenge. Martha Argerich confessed early in her career that the waiting keyboard viewed from side stage appeared as a grinning set of teeth ready to devour her. She all but abandoned solo recitals. Other performers relish in this very solitary performance world.

Most agree it all began with Liszt, who is credited with giving the first 'recital' - a term previously used to describe dramatic readings of prose or verse. Paganini performed solo and stunned the audience with never before seen (or heard) feats on the violin. This impressed Liszt very much, and it was whilst in London to help raise money for an incomplete statue of Beethoven, that Liszt announced a series of 'piano recitals' of his own works and transcriptions of others. Previously known as 'musical soliloquies', the piano recital was born and with it came all the romance and mystique that remains today. But this is just the vehicle for a musical style which began way before Liszt was born.

It was the industrial revolution and a middle class had appeared with disposable cash. Music in most of its forms had only been available to the rich, in courts and palaces, but now, as the classical era merged into the romantic, music was for everyone. Instruments improved, particularly the piano, and exponents took advantage of this new technology. So did composers.

No longer reliant on the court, composers were 'freelance', often supported by generous patrons, composing at leisure, where Bach and Handel had to churn out pieces (often recycling older ones) to meet demand. It became 'taboo' to recycle; Haydn wrote 109 symphonies, Beethoven wrote 9. Classical forms were not discarded completely but became building blocks for new expressions. Bach has beautiful themes, but no lush romantic melodies like Brahms wove over entire movements. Romantic meant 'freedom'; freedom to edge in dissonances, blurred lines of development and in some cases complete avoidance of classical rules, all within the fading classical guidelines. Sadly, composers of this era are often seen as other worldly creatures possessed by a burdening talent, angst, illness and an ever present struggle against the real world. Nothing could be further from the truth...?

In programming Mozart's **Fantasy in C minor K.475**, Ian Munro may be suggesting to us that this notion of the romantic began early than we thought. From the opening bars, this is not the Mozart we're accustomed to, it's more like Chopin. The piece was written in 1785 (specifically, on May 20) when Mozart was a well established composer, though just 29 years old. It sails through 7 key signatures (unheard of) though the listener is never aware of any jarring shifts of pitch. What seems a fantasy is a carefully constructed set of six 'episodes' planned to have a dramatic effect. The piece resembles the drama of Beethoven's **Sonata in C minor Op.13**. Mozart could not have known the famous *Pathétique*, but was Beethoven aware of Mozart's *Fantasia*?

Beethoven wrote this much loved sonata in 1798 and the subtitle was added by his publisher, to Beethoven's approval. Formally titled the 'Grande sonate pathétique' there are unmistakable similarities to Mozart and Bach, not simply the choice of key, though C minor was a favourite of Beethoven's. Grieg's A minor piano concerto is sometimes cited as 'the perfect concerto', everything in exactly the right place. The same could be said of the

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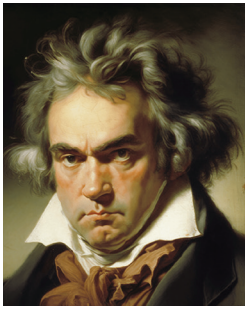


*Pathétique*. We have a dramatic introduction, an engaging Allegro, a sublime Adagio (so very Romantic) and a dazzling Rondo to finish. There seems nothing missing and nothing left to add. It's perfect!

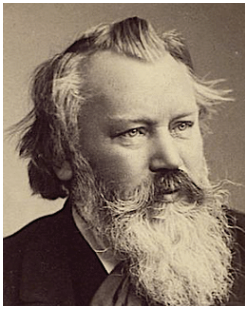
This sonata was very well received by the public. It's unknown if Beethoven performed it himself but other pianists of the day certainly did. Many immediately noticed a similarity to Mozart's earlier sonata in the same key, but this sonata marks the point where Beethoven really stepped into his own. He was a formidable pianist and used his technique to forever change the way a piano was played. The structure may be 'classical' but the outcome explodes with drama that had not been heard before. At this stage, Beethoven was probably playing a piano made by Anton Walter, not as robust as his next Erard piano, but enough to create the *Pathétique*. His deafness weas also beginning.

*Now, go back and have a listen to Mozart's Piano sonata in C minor K.457. Coincidence?*

**Franz Schubert** was a pall-bearer or torch-bearer at Beethoven's funeral. The two composers lived in the same small town of Vienna for 31 years. They allegedly met in 1822, but this is doubtful. Schubert's brother Ferdinand states they met many times, but again, no records confirm this. Schubert was shy, probably gay and a recluse, Beethoven was brash, impatient, intolerant and hopelessly romantic. It's unlikely they would have hit it off. Beethoven was presented with Schubert scores (on is death bed?) and declared them amazing. Schubert lived in Vienna during the height of Beethoven's popularity and there is no way he could have escaped Beethoven's music. They were worlds apart... in the same town and it was only late in his short life that Schubert openly idolised the great master.

By the time Schubert wrote **Moments Musicaux D.780** Beethoven had died, just a year earlier. The Viennese public were lovers of 'Albumblätter', short pieces accessible to the amateur pianist, and by now, many homes boasted a piano. Schubert's six pieces fitted the bill perfectly and remain as popular today. These 'musical moments' may appear at first to be slight, improvisatory in nature but they present Schubert's unique style in a nutshell. With a foot slightly still in the Classical world, Schubert uses daring harmonies and shifts of mood to keep the listener (and player) on their musical toes. They are surprisingly complex for such short pieces; the famous F minor is under 2 minutes, the longest just over 8. Yet there is a journey within each one, as if they were songs without words. "Moods without words' would not be out of place here.

From Schubert onwards, the largely European based Romantic movement was in full swing and really continues to this day. It's easy to forget that when Henry Ford was churning out Model T cars, Ravel was at his peak, churning out quavers. The Romantic era boasts more 'well known' composers than any other era and **Johannes Brahms** sits at the centre with a direct link back to the masters of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, as well as a style that embraced Romanticism and looked forward to the 20th Century. Brahms first big break came with his German Requiem Op.45 and his first symphony Op.68; solid works on a solid classical foundation. His many collections of shorter 'Klavierstücke' (piano works) link back to Schubert rather than classical masters. These 28 pieces, published in 5 groups continue



where Schubert's 'Moments' leave off. Largely later works, they are examples of beautifully crafted writing for piano, even though Brahms was not known as a pianist. The set of 4 pieces published as Op.119 in 1893 comprises wistful pieces which flow easily from mood to mood. Brahms' titles of 'Intermezzo' and 'Rhapsody' are almost irrelevant - Brahms often retitled these pieces before publication, indicating that he wasn't really fussed about labeling. They remain, 'piano pieces' but the music often points towards Chopin's later Ballades. Tenderness is nearly always pitched against drama.

No tribute is more glowing than naming pieces directly after a previous composer. Schubert wrote a multitude of dances, waltzes, scherzi - short 'albumblätter' for piano. Hidden among them is a set titled *Valses Nobles* and a another titled *Valses Sentimentales*. **Maurice Ravel** obviously loved the idea and in 1911 published his *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*. Ravel was probably more intrigued by the waltz than he was by Schubert, for these pieces have little in common with their namesake. Like his countryman Debussy, Ravel disliked the label 'impressionism' applied to his music. He would have thought himself a composer; maybe a 'modern' one if any label were to be applied. In the published score there is no dedication to Schubert (surely the title is enough); instead there is a quotation of Henri de Régnier: "…le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile" (the delicious and forever-new pleasure of a useless occupation). Definitely no creating 'impressions' here.

Ravel's *Valses* are not titled to express which are 'noble' and which 'sentimental', leaving the listener to decide. They were premiered at a concert where critics did not know the composers of the pieces presented. Some wild guesses were delivered at the end of the evening but the *Valses* were spotted immediately as the work of Ravel. His style is unmistakable. Whether you prefer this the piano version or the later orchestrated version, the *Valses* captivate in a way only Ravel could achieve. Are they Romantic? Modern? Atonal? All of the above. We journey through 7 waltzes and end with an *Épilogue* which wraps up and refers to the preceding pieces. Opening with a fanfare marked 'très franc' (very frank, very outspoken) the listener who is familiar with *La Valse* will be immediately comfortable. We are taken on a waltzing journey of the mind which ends when the past dreamingly catches up and becomes the present. A device Ravel used many times.

What better way to end this romantic journey than with a piece by the waltz king himself, **Johann Strauss II**, as arranged by the 'Buddah of the Piano' **Leopold Godowsky**. Romance personified.

*Wein, Weib und Gesang* was originally a choral waltz commissioned by the Vienna Men's Choral Association. The title was taken from an old saying: "Who loves not wine, women and song remains a fool his whole life long." The original choral version, rarely heard today, is usually performed as an instrumental orchestral waltz. But a clever arrangement of the piece is heard maybe even more than any. Strauss knew exactly where his talents lay as did one of the most prodigious pianists of the 20th century. Godowsky was

born in Lithuania but is generally regarded as a product of the USA. He found fame not just as a soloist but also as composer and arranger. His formidable (boggling!) *53 Studies on Chopin's Études* are the prime example of piano technique taken to nth degree. Critics claim even Liszt may have shunned away from them. Music critic and writer Harold C. Schonberg called them "the most impossibly difficult things ever written for the piano." Leopold certainly had technique at his fingertips but luckily a mind that could visualize the possibilities of a piece. In his own words: "I would be very glad could I have stated with truth that I was a pupil of Liszt or any other great man, but I was not. I have not had three months lessons in my life." Now, that's scary!

In *Wein, Weib und Gesang* Godowsky gives us a piece of huge proportions... Lisztian! You could be excused for 'playing the wrong track' when this piece begins, but Strauss II is there. Once the piece gets into more familiar themes, listeners smile and relax a bit. But let's not forget that this piece comes from a set of 3 titled "Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes by Johann Strauss", so expect transformations! Godowsky readily supplies them.



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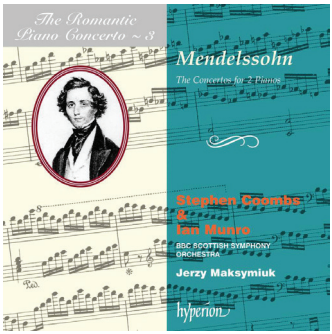



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Members receive discounted entry to selected **Geelong Gallery** events. A booking discount code will be provided to members who book Gallery events on line, or your Membership Receipt can be furnished upon entry.

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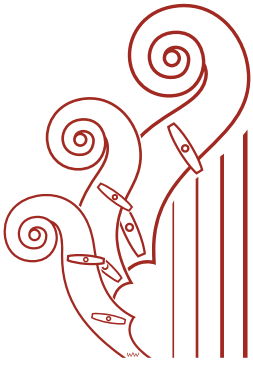


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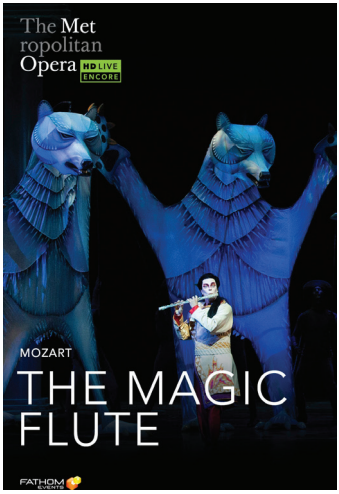



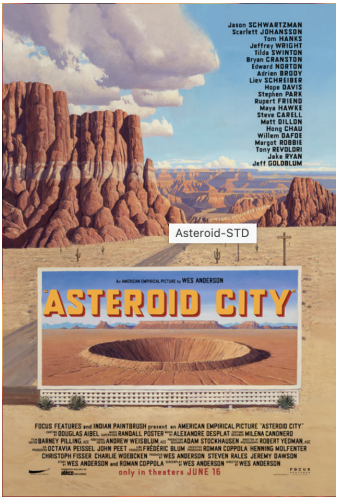



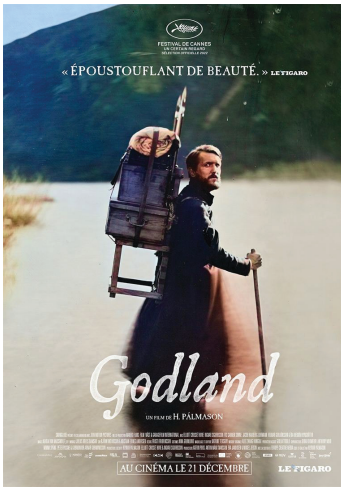


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