

**Omega Ensemble**



# **Maria Raspopova**

## **In Recital**

**2:30PM | Sunday | 02 December 2018**  
**Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House**

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# Maria Raspopova

## In Recital

**Sunday 2 December 2018**

2:30pm

Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

Presented as part of the 2018 Master Series

### **Sergei Prokofiev**

Visions fugitives, Op. 22 (Selections)

- |                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| I. Lentamente          | XII. Assai moderato              |
| II. Andante            | XIV. Feroce                      |
| III. Allegretto        | XV. Inquieto                     |
| IV. Animato            | XVI. Dolente                     |
| V. Molto giocoso       | XVII. Poetico                    |
| VI. Con eleganza       | XVIII. Con una dolce<br>lentezza |
| VII. Pittoresco (Arpa) | XX. Lento irrealmente            |
| VIII. Comodo           |                                  |
| X. Ridicolosamente     |                                  |
| XI. Con vivacita       |                                  |

### **Sergei Rachmaninoff**

Etudes-Tableaux Op.33 No. 8

### **Eric Satie**

Trois Gymnopédies

### **Claude Debussy**

Claire de Lune

### **Frédéric Chopin**

Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52

### **J.S. Bach**

Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826

- |      |                                   |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| I.   | Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826 |
| II.  | Sinfonia                          |
| III. | Allemande                         |
| IV.  | Courante                          |
| V.   | Sarabande                         |
| VI.  | Rondeau                           |
| VII. | Capriccio                         |

Omega Ensemble reserves the right to alter scheduled artists and programs as necessary.



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Please note that unauthorised recording or photography of this performance is not permitted.

This concert will last approximately 90 minutes without interval.

# About the music

In 1903, Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont (1867–1942) neatly distilled Romantic sensibility, writing

Mine is not a wisdom that would suit others,  
I only put the fleeting into verse.  
In every fleeting thing I see worlds  
Full of fickle, colourful play.  
  
Sages, curse me not. Why bother?  
I am a mere cloud, full of fire.  
I am a mere cloud. See me float.  
I call to dreamers...Not to you!

(from *From the Ends to the beginning: A Bilingual Anthology of Russian Verse*)

By Bal'mont's time, of course, Romanticism was largely spent, but the aesthetic principal that eschews 'wisdom', and by extension formal convention, had remained constant in music from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The group of composers born around 1810 – Schumann, Chopin, Mendelssohn – cultivated short, intensely evocative works that followed no predetermined formal model, at least in some of their piano music. This love of the immediate and fleeting moment would become increasingly important in later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century French music, especially in allusive works such as Erik Satie's *Gymnopédies*, Debussy's *Préludes* or Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and in pieces like Rachmaninoff's *Études-tableaux*.

Prokofiev took Bal'mont's image of 'fleeting things' in his set of 20 *Visions fugitives* (a French approximation of Bal'mont's word *mimolyotnost*) which he completed in 1917. As scholar David Nice has pointed out, the pieces were composed over three years and not chronologically – indeed Prokofiev himself would often play selections from the suite and out of order – but as Nice goes on to say, 'there is a musical logic to the set' when heard in one sitting.

Prokofiev performed them soon after arriving in the USA in 1917 and disappointed critics who expected, in the

words of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, a 'roaring lion' and got, instead, a 'tame lamb'. Certainly in some of the pieces Prokofiev displays a tender lyricism that is not always to be found in his more acerbic, ironic pieces – Nice quotes violinist David Oistrakh remembering, on hearing the eleventh of the *Visions fugitives*, at the age of 19, that the "tempestuous, defiant" Prokofiev could be "as touching as a child".

Certainly there is a great deal of delicacy in the music, in, for instance, the simplicity of the opening *Lentamente*, or the unruffled serenity of the *Pittoresco* eighth movement with its evocation of the harp. And, uncharacteristically, there is a lot of music at soft dynamics. But it is not far into the set – the fourth and fifth pieces, to be precise – that the more familiar Prokofiev emerges, with mechanistic rhythms and apparently random chord substitutions for ironic effect. As Nice argues, the mood of the set moves more towards the ironic and noisy from the mid-point (the tenth movement is the clownish *Ridicolosamente*, a reminder that *The Love of Three Oranges*, with its cast of commedia dell'arte characters, dates from this time). There are later movements marked *Feroce* and *Inquieto*; with creative hindsight, Prokofiev claimed that the 19th piece, *Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato*, reflected the excitement at seeing the revolutionary crowds in 1917. The final *Lento* returns to the quiet calm of the opening, though now infused with Prokofiev's characteristically uncanny approach to harmony.

Debussy was often at pains to explain that his music was not 'impressionistic'. While he admired the painters whose work had attracted that – initially pejorative – adjective, Debussy was not seeking simply to create visual images in sound. His work, he felt, was much closer to those poets who described themselves as Symbolistes. Among these was Paul Verlaine, whose *Fêtes galantes* contains the poem 'Clair de lune' that was the inspiration for the third movement of Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* for piano. Or so we think.

Composed in 1890, the suite was only published in 1905. Debussy might have revised the work in the interim, and pre-publicity in 1904 listed the third movement as a 'Promenade sentimentale' in D flat, the same key as 'Clair de lune'. It may or may not be the same piece.

'Promenade sentimentale' is also the title of a poem by Verlaine. Its setting is the shore of a lake at sunset, where water lilies rock gently (and this may be suggested in the lilting barcarolle rhythm of Debussy's piece), teals call to each other and the poet is in a state of loneliness and despair. The setting of 'Clair de lune', by contrast, is an imaginary garden at night, the song of maskers and revellers mingles with the moonlight, birds sit dreaming, and fountains sob with ecstasy among the marble statues.

Debussy, whose first piano teacher claimed to have studied with Chopin, regarded the Polish composer as 'the greatest' for 'using the piano alone he discovered everything.' Like Schumann, Chopin wrote highly charged miniatures, but he also created his own larger forms in works like the four ballades. Composed in 1842-3, the F minor work, like its predecessors, creates the effect of a narrative, not unlike those of the vernacular ballads that Romantic poets emulated. But it does so using certain classical principles: after a short introduction, there is a sinuous first theme that echoes aspects of the waltz, and which is contrasted with a second subject that recalls a barcarolle. These contend in the manner of a sonata, reaching a climax in which the material is restated, but varied in ever more exciting and brilliant figurations. A sudden hushed chorale breaks the momentum before an emphatic close.

Eccentric Parisian composer Erik Satie claimed to have persuaded Claude Debussy to give up his early love of Wagner and write music 'without Sauerkraut'. Satie's own music was resolutely anti-classical; he refused, or was unable, to write in classical forms. The title *Gymnopédies* suggest the Hyacinthia, an annual festival in ancient Sparta in which youths danced naked in honour of Apollo, though he said they were inspired by Flaubert's exotic novel, *Salammô*. Satie's three pieces, composed around 1888, all follow a similar model, where a simple

elegant melody sings in gentle 3/4 time, with mild dissonances sounded on the second beat.

First published in 1726, but later included in the compendious *Clavier-Übung* of 1731, Bach's C minor Partita conforms to his usual design of a substantial overture or sinfonia, followed by a series of contrasting dance movements, lined by certain motifs like a recurring upward perfect fourth. The *Sinfonia* here is tripartite: in the French manner it begins with a ceremonious *Grave adagio* of strong beat chords and dotted-note motifs that leads to an *andante* passage in ornate two-voice counterpoint and a final fast section in 3/4. The *Allemande* that follows is dominated by rhythms derived from its three-note upbeat, while the *Courante* creates intricate textures, initially over a 'walking bass'.

The *Sarabande* is appropriately stately (by Bach's time the dance was much transformed from its earthy and exotic roots), and a fast, rhythmic *Rondeau* might seem to do service as the final *gigue* which Bach's audience would expect. But Bach then gives us one of his most dizzying pieces – both in its technical demands and compositional wizardry. The *Capriccio* develops a hugely sophisticated texture, impelled by syncopations and occasion bass lines that leap rather than walk. Then, in the piece's second half, Bach breathtakingly flips the texture over.

In calling his Op.33 and 39 *Études-tableaux*, Rachmaninoff seemed to suggest a visual or programmatic element to the music. He did give Ottorino Respighi subtitles for five of the pieces when the latter orchestrated them, but most of the time insisted that listeners should 'paint for themselves what it most suggests.' The Op.11 set was composed in 1911, and the final piece, in G minor, suggests nothing more concrete than a state of simple and rarefied charm generated by the subtle transformation of its elegiac, falling motif, interrupted by a fleeting, impassioned outburst.

Notes by Gordon Kerry.

# Maria Raspopova

Maria Raspopova is an acclaimed and virtuosic chamber musician and recitalist. She is the resident pianist with one of Australia's foremost chamber groups, Omega Ensemble, and has performed with a number of acclaimed Australian and international musicians.

Maria began learning the piano at a young age in her home country of Russia. At seventeen she moved to Australia with her family and soon commenced studies at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where her teachers were Gerard Willems and Philip Shovk. Shortly after, Maria was awarded a scholarship to study with Philip Kawin (Professor of Piano at the Manhattan School of Music). Since returning to Australia, Maria has recorded and performed recitals in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. During the past few years she has recorded and premiered new Australian works and performed at both the Art Gallery of New South Wales and in the Government House Music series with acclaimed soprano Emma Matthews.

Maria has received wide acclaim for her performances with Omega Ensemble. Cut Common Magazine wrote "Raspopova's bass notes were booming and the upper register of the piano sparkled with a shimmering clarity. Raspopova played with confidence and zest. She shone like gold...here is a pianist who could play anything". Recently Maria performed Mahler's Piano Quintet in A Minor at City Recital Hall which also received positive press reviews from Limelight Magazine: "[with] Maria Raspopova's graceful piano, the piece traversed the hills and vales of Mahler's twilight world in a beautiful reading, finely crafted for maximum emotional impact."

Maria has performed in a number of world premieres of new Australian works commissioned by Omega Ensemble. This has seen her appear at the forefront of the chamber music scene in Sydney. Since 2014 Maria has performed with Omega Ensemble as Artist-in-Residence at the Mitchell Conservatorium, in annual tours of regional New South Wales with guest artists Paul Meyer and more recently, soprano Lee Abrahmsen.

In 2017 Maria was appointed Co-Artistic Director of Omega Ensemble where she has been assisting with programming and performing both in their Master and Virtuoso series throughout the year.

In November 2017 Maria toured to China with Omega Ensemble giving performances and masterclasses at the Beijing Central Conservatory, Chang Chun's JiLin College of Arts and Dalian University. In March this year, Maria returned to China with the Ensemble to perform in the Sanya International Festival of Arts in Haitang Bay.

# Omega Ensemble

## The Ensemble

Alexandra Osborne, violin  
Anna Da Silva Chen, violin  
Veronique Serret, violin  
Catalin Ungureanu, violin  
Airena Nakamura, violin  
Neil Thompson, viola  
David Wicks, viola  
Amanda Verner, viola  
Paul Stender, cello  
Howard Penny, cello †  
Alex Henery, double bass  
Sally Walker, flute  
David Rowden, clarinet  
Georgina Oakes, clarinet  
Lloyd Van't Hoff, clarinet †  
Nicola Bell, oboe  
Celia Craig, oboe  
Josh Oates, oboe  
Todd Gibson-Cornish, bassoon  
Michael Dixon, horn  
Clemens Leske, piano  
Maria Raspopova, piano  
Samuel Hogarth, piano †  
Lee Abrahmsen, soprano †

† = Guest Artist

Omega Ensemble is one of Australia's foremost professional chamber music groups. Founded in 2005 by clarinettist David Rowden, the Ensemble has fast become a powerful musical force in Sydney, hailed as 'first-rate musicians' (The Daily Telegraph) and 'one of the best chamber music outfits in town' (Sydney Morning Herald).

The Ensemble presents some of Australia's most outstanding talent, as well as international guest artists, in a powerful chamber music setting. In addition to their work with the Ensemble, many of Omega's core musicians also hold principal roles in professional orchestras, including Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Australia Opera and Ballet Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, USA.

The Ensemble's artistic programs are diverse and provocative, presenting music from the late-Baroque to the 20th century, as well as frequent World and Australian premieres. Omega have to date commissioned over 40 works from leading composers, including Elena Kats-Chernin, Andrew Ford, Matthew Hindson, George Palmer and most recently, American composer Nico Muhly.

Omega Ensemble performs regularly in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as frequent touring to regional areas and appearances at national music festivals. In addition to performances at home, Omega has also toured to China, with sell-out performances and masterclasses at the Beijing Central Conservatory, Chang Chun's JiLin College of Arts and Dalian University.

In addition to concert performances, the Ensemble also maintains a growing On Demand catalogue of live concert videos, available online as well as broadcast on Australia's national airline, Qantas, In-flight Entertainment. The Ensemble's live performances regularly air on radio, including ABC Classic FM and its debut studio album was released on ABC Classics in 2016. In 2018 the Ensemble launched the Omega Classics label for independent release of new studio recordings, and an expansive back catalogue of live recordings.

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Omega Ensemble acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we perform. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

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chamber music... played  
by first-rate musicians.

The Daily Telegraph

Neil Thompson  
Principal Viola

# 2019

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