Doctor of Musical Arts

Conducting
Final Recital

Steven Hillinger
North Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Sunday 4 August 2019, 2:30pm

Verbruggen Hall
Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Program

4 August 2019

Ferenc Erkel  
*Hunyadi László Overture*

Tibor Idrányi  
*Funeral Music* (World premiere)

Leó Weiner  
*Romance* (Australian premiere)
    Vincent Lo - Cello
    Georgia Lowe - Harp

INTERVAL

Tibor Idrányi  
*Symphonic Prelude*

Zoltán Kodály  
*Hárý János Suite*
Welcome Note

Good afternoon and welcome to ‘Hungarian Adventures’ – a concert of Hungarian music composed between the mid-19th and mid-20th century. The composition dates of these works span just under 100 years – the earliest being Hunyadi László from 1844 and the most recent, Symphonic Prelude from 1941. Although all the works being performed this afternoon are distinct and have their own unique ‘style’, it is possible to see and hear musical links between them – melodically, harmonically and rhythmically.

The purpose of my research has been to explore and discover information and materials relating to the life and music of the Hungarian composer, Tibor Idrányi (1896 - 1974).

Tibor Idrányi was, in the first half of the twentieth century, a well-known and much admired and respected Hungarian composer, performer and painter. Today, however, he is unknown within the fraternity of musicians and composers of his time and his music has been forgotten.

There are currently twenty complete works in my collection, composed between 1914 and 1968, ranging from sonatas to chamber music (including several string quartets, and a wind quintet) and orchestral works, with most of the compositions including both scores and parts.

Many of Idrányi’s compositions were dedicated to, and performed by, some of the best known Hungarian musicians and orchestras of the day including his oboe sonata (1959), which was dedicated to the oboist and teacher Tibor Szeszler, a wind quintet (1960) dedicated to the Budapest Wind Quintet, Four Pieces for Orchestra (1940), given its premiere by the Budapest Concert Orchestra conducted by Lajos Rajter in 1941, two string quartets (No.2, Op.17 in 1933 and a single movement Scherzo, Op.22 in 1936) dedicated to and performed by the Roth String Quartet and a third String Quartet (No.4, ca.1937) composed for the Pro Ideale String Quartet and given its premiere by the quartet in Princeton, New Jersey in November, 1938.

The pieces you will hear this afternoon are linked more than by the fact that they were all written by Hungarian composers. Ferenc Erkel, considered to be the originator of integrating folk-stories and folk-music into Hungarian operas, never actually used authentic folk-music of the Hungarian people, but rather a ‘folk-style’ of music that included the use of popular Hungarian song and dance music. In his research, Zoltán Kodály was drawn to discovering ‘true’ Hungarian folk-music and in so doing, both through his own compositions as well as through his teaching, ushered in a new method of composing, with the aim of introducing authentic Hungarian folk-music to the Hungarian people as well as to Western Europe. The composition style of Leó Weiner, a
contemporary of Kodály, was founded on the traditions of 19th century European composers, although there are numerous instances where he incorporated ‘folk-style’ elements in his music. It appears Idrányi, although a student of Kodály’s at the Royal National Academy of Music, was himself more influenced by Weiner’s style of composition. In a letter addressed to Weiner dated 16th April 1960 in honour of his 70th birthday, Idrányi, referring to his student days, writes “even though, in reality, I was not your student at that time, I have always been so sincerely attracted to you in spirit and to your great music - and because of that, I profess myself as your spiritual disciple”.

The significance of Idrányi’s music within the body of Hungarian composition, became an important factor in my efforts to introduce his works to the public and this afternoon’s performance represents the culmination of my research so far.

I hope you enjoy the concert.

Sincerely,

Steven Hillinger

Acknowledgments

Steven Hillinger would like to acknowledge and thank the following people and institutions:

Adrien Csabai, James D’Arcy, Maestro Eduardo Diazmuñoz, Klára Gulyás-Somogyi, Shuti Huang, Idrányi family, Dr. David Kim-Boyle, Felicity Knibbs, Rebecca Lagos, Guy McEwan, Associate Professor Neil McEwan, Dr. Stephen Mould, Associate Professor Kathleen Nelson, North Sydney Symphony Orchestra committee members, North Sydney Symphony Orchestra members and guest musicians, Daryl Pratt, Shefali Pryor, Katherine Rowell, Jacqui Smith, John Wu, Liszt Academy of Music, North Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.
Program Notes

Ferenc Erkel (1810 - 1893)

Hunyadi László Overture

Known as the father of Hungarian grand opera, Ferenc Erkel was the composer of the Hungarian National Anthem and is also remembered as a pianist, conductor and one of the founding members of the Philharmonic Society, the Royal National (Liszt) Academy of Music and the Hungarian State Opera House.

Erkel composed nine operas of which Hunyadi László (libretto by Béni Egressy) was his second. It was premiered in the National Theatre on 27th January 1844. The Overture was composed some months after the opera’s premiere and was given its first performance in 1845. In 1846, Liszt introduced the Overture to Vienna where it was such a success that it had to be repeated.

Four different editions of the Overture have been published. The first dates to 1848 and is from the piano arrangement of the opera but contains no words or vocal score. The second edition is also a piano arrangement from 1896. The orchestral score came out in 1902 and contains numerous errors and differs considerably from the previous two editions. The fourth edition (1956) being used in this performance, is based on alterations made on the orchestral parts which are kept in the Hungarian State Opera House and which were modified with Erkel’s approval.

The Overture is formed by the combination of the principal themes of the opera. In the opening Andante con moto section, a single trumpet begins by playing Hunyadi’s theme. The next theme (from the trio of Act IV) first appears in the horns and is passed along through the orchestra while being accompanied by continuous quaver passages. This theme is based on a verbunkos, a popular dance style from the second half of the 18th Century, in which the mood swings between the melancholy and the boisterous. This style of music was associated with the recruitment drives of the Imperial Army. Recruiters would get their prospective victims drunk and involve them in dances, as a gypsy band would elaborate wildly on Hungarian folk melodies. This is followed by a lyrical Piu mosso section which incorporates a part of the Intermezzo from Act III. In the last bars of this section the first clarinet introduces the triplets of the following Allegro section. The main theme, which reflects the influence of the Rákóczi March, is introduced by the first violins. In a connecting passage we hear a variation on the melody from the opening Andante con moto. The next section contains one of the opera’s most popular melodies – the final chorus from Act I. This is then developed in a passionate and dramatic section before the Intermezzo is introduced again, this time under arpeggios on the flute. The Allegro section and the final chorus melody are also repeated, before leading to an energetic and exciting finish.
Program Notes

Tibor Idrányi (1896 - 1974)
Funeral Music

Tibor Idrányi was born in the small Hungarian village of Legénd in 1896 and studied violin with his father, moving to Budapest with his family at a young age. Idrányi studied at the Royal National Academy of Music (Liszt Academy of Music) in Budapest where he undertook formal piano lessons and studied composition with Zoltán Kodály.

Funeral Music (Gyászhangok) was composed in 1914, when Idrányi was still a student. Idrányi wrote this piece after learning of the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, who were assassinated in Sarajevo – triggering the start of the First World War. At that time, Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the young Idrányi presented this piece to the Royal Hungarian Interior Ministry. The first page of the score contains the following dedication in Idrányi’s hand: “In memory of the deaths of His Imperial and Royal Majesty Ferenc Ferdinand beloved heir apparent, and his wife Duchess Sophie Hohenberg.” Idrányi received an official reply from the Minister, in which he passes on His Majesty’s “highest thanks” and “most gracious acceptance” of the composition.

Discovered in the archives of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, and receiving its world premiere this afternoon, this piece is a dark evocation of grief that seems filled with the foreboding of the war to come.

The work begins as a very slow and mournful march marked Lento con dolore (Slowly with sorrow), with the repetition of the tonic and fifth in the cellos, basses and tubular bells, giving the impression of tolling church bells. The timpani, meanwhile, repeats a short, dramatic, pulsating triplet rhythm, which will continue almost throughout the entirety of the piece. The triplet rhythm is picked up by the bassoons who begin its expansion, leading it into the woodwinds and violins and eventually to the brass. A very brief Molto vivo section, only two bars in length, is quickly subdued and brought back to the slow tempo by the woodwinds, before the contrabassoon ends the phrase with a slow descending scale. A short brass fanfare is then heard accompanied by the low, distant rumbling roll of the bass drum. The opening theme returns once again and everything that has been heard so far is repeated, but this time each of the ‘episodes’ are slightly extended and more fully orchestrated. As the piece leads to its conclusion, the music slows down and continues to get softer, the work ending with the contrabassoon playing a long, sustained note while the timpani states its final triplet rhythm after the strike of the bell’s final toll.
Leó Weiner studied composition at the National Academy of Music in Budapest with Hans (János) Koessler, who also taught Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók and Ernő Dohnányi. In 1908, one year after graduating, and with Koessler’s recommendation, Weiner was offered a position as Professor of Musicology at the Academy. In 1912, Weiner began to teach composition but soon gave up this position to focus on teaching chamber music. The long list of Weiner’s students includes such notable musicians as conductors Georg Solti and Fritz Reiner, composer Miklós Rózsa and cellist János Starker.

A contemporary of Kodály and Bartók, both of whom started teaching at the Academy in 1907, Weiner, although sympathetic to the movement of incorporating folk music into classical music, was not drawn to the same folk music influences that would permeate the works of his two colleagues. Weiner felt much more at home composing in the more traditional style of 19th century European composers, and completely rejected new and modern trends such as atonality and serialism.

Weiner’s Romance, composed in 1949, is one of Weiner’s most lyrical and expressive compositions. Originally composed in 1912 for cello and piano as Op.14, Weiner reorchestrated the work for cello, harp and string orchestra. Considering it to be a separate work, Weiner also gave the work a new opus number – Op.29.

The Moderato con moto opening of Romance begins with a soft pizzicato in the cellos and basses and sustained notes in the upper strings. The harp also enters, with a steadily flowing and repetitive ostinato. The solo cello enters in the second bar with a warm and somewhat nostalgic melody with gently falling intervals. The orchestral strings begin to intertwine fragments of the melody with the solo cello. This leads into the next section, in which the strings and solo voices alternate statements as if in dialogue – the solo cello and harp simultaneously play ascending and descending quaver scales and triplet arpeggios respectively, the strings replying with chant-like statements, while the first violins play gentle trills interrupted by small scalic embellishments. The solo cello introduces cascading scale passages which are soon taken over by the orchestra, while being accompanied by broken harp chords. Several harp glissandos lead into a strong orchestral statement of a new theme, which is quickly interrupted by the solo cello relegating the strings back to their accompaniment role. The main theme returns in the solo cello and is developed upon both rhythmically as well as through a rising of pitch and an increase in dynamics and tempo, which leads into the Allegro section. Marked with the terms risoluto and agitato, this section is strong and loud but does not last long and rapidly calms. The solo cello briefly restates the second theme, originally played by the orchestral strings, which is then
Program Notes

reiterated by the first violins followed by the cellos. The original tempo (*Moderato con moto*) returns, and the violins, violas and cellos restate the chant-like theme in unison. In the closing section of the work, the solo cello plays through the first and second themes, accompanied by arpeggiated harp runs and beautifully harmonised string chords.

It is believed that today’s performance is the Australian premiere of *Romance* Op.29

**Tibor Idrányi (1896 - 1974)**

**Symphonic Prelude, Op.32**

Composed in 1941, *Symphonic Prelude* was one of the compositions from the original collection of music Hillinger had brought back to Sydney in 1992. The handwritten set contained all the instrumental parts but no conductor’s score. As part of his DMA research, through editing the instrumental parts, Hillinger has produced a scholarly critical edition of the full orchestral score, as well as a performance edition of the orchestral parts of this work.

The opening *Andante con moto* of Idrányi’s *Symphonic Prelude* begins with a soft and gentle pulsating rhythm in the flutes, before the oboe introduces a fragment of the first theme, which is quickly taken over by the clarinet and followed by the cor anglais, which expands the theme. This leads into a slower, broader *Allargando* section in which a second theme is introduced by the flute and oboe in octaves before being joined by the violins. It is interesting to note that these two themes are not only melodically important, but also rhythmically significant, with the alternation between long and short notes playing a crucial role in the structure of the work. The piece begins to build in both volume and orchestration leading to the first climax with the full force of the orchestra, including cymbal crash, before quickly returning to its calmer state. We are then introduced to an *Allegro vivace* section which once again presents two themes. The woodwinds introduce the first, playing quick and light quavers while the second, more grounded and steadier theme, is played by the lower strings. These are once again extended, while the flute and clarinet flutter along with light embellishments. The speed then relaxes a little and leads into the central section where a new folk-style melody is introduced by the oboes before being taken over by other woodwind and brass instruments, leading into a charming wind serenade. A short *Lento* section led by the violins, returns us to the *Allegro vivace* section which is based on the first one but with some slight rhythmic and melodic variations. Another *Lento* section introduces a new theme, first stated in the clarinet, oboe and first violins. This quickly leads back to the *Allargando* section and the second climax, which was heard in the opening half of the work. The music begins to calm and slow down as it briefly revisits some of its past themes, concluding with a return to the opening pulsating rhythm from the flutes and a final distant call of the oboe, stating the original theme.
Program Notes

Zoltán Kodály (1882 - 1967)
Háry János Suite

I. Prelude. The Fairy Tale Begins
II. Viennese Musical Clock
III. Song
IV. The Battle and Defeat of Napoleon
V. Intermezzo
VI. Entrance of the Emperor and His Court

Throughout his life, Zoltán Kodály was greatly preoccupied with developing the musical identity of his country. He not only worked as a composer but also as an educator and ethnomusicologist and was one of the first to undertake a serious study of folksongs and ethnomusicology, visiting many remote villages with his friend and fellow composer Béla Bartók, collecting, recording and transcribing these songs, many of which he used in his compositions.

Kodály intended his opera Háry János (John Háry) to help establish a popular Hungarian operatic tradition. The opera was subtitled a “Hungarian Folk Opera”, meaning that there were spoken interludes between songs. With a libretto by Béla Paulini and Zsolt Harsányi, the plot was based on the comic epic The Veteran (Az obsitos) by János Garay. The story is comic and patriotic, the musical style straight-forward and largely folk-based.

The story revolves around a veteran of the Imperial army, who fought in the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th Century, and who sits in the village inn regaling his listeners with fantastic tales of his heroic deeds. Of course, these acts of heroism and fantastical adventures are perhaps slightly exaggerated for the entertainment of his audience. In his preface to the opera, Kodály describes Háry as ‘a veteran soldier, who day after day sits in the tavern spinning yarns about his heroic exploits and, being a peasant, the stories produced by his fantastic imagination are an inextricable mixture of realism and naïveté, of comic humour and pathos. Yet he is by no means just a Hungarian Munchausen. Though superficially he appears to be merely a braggart, essentially, he is a national visionary and poet. That his stories are not true is irrelevant, for they are the fruit of a lively imagination seeking to create, for himself and for others, a beautiful dream world.’

The six movements that make up the Suite are based on these extravagant stories and were assembled by Kodály in 1927, after the great success of the opera’s premiere in Budapest in the previous year.
I. Prelude. The Fairy Tale Begins – The Prelude begins with an enormous ‘orchestral sneeze’. Kodály wrote, “According to a Hungarian superstition, if a statement is followed by a sneeze of one of the hearers, it is regarded as confirmation of the truth of the assertion. The Háry János Suite begins with a sneeze of this kind.” The setting up of the fairy-tale is then illustrated through a typical Hungarian melody which grows into an impassioned climax.

II. Viennese Musical Clock – The scene is set in the Imperial Palace in Vienna, where the Hungarian peasant is amazed and enraptured by the famous Musical Clock with its little soldier figures in their brave uniforms appearing and disappearing at every rotation of the wonderful mechanical display.

III. Song – The Song (based on an ancient Hungarian melody) is a love duet between Háry (played by a solo viola and solo cello) and his sweetheart Őrzse (represented by the solo oboe). It is in this movement that we first hear the unique sounds of the cimbalom, a hammered dulcimer-like instrument. The entire movement is full of gypsy-like and rhapsodic solos for viola, cello, flute, clarinet, oboe, and cimbalom.

IV. The Battle and Defeat of Napoleon – Háry confronts the French army and, brandishing his sword, the French begin to fall before him like tin soldiers until there are no more left and Napoleon is forced to engage the invincible Háry, himself – falling to his knees and pleading for mercy. The percussion, brass and three piccolos carry the listener into battle (a grotesque and almost unrecognisable version of the Marseillaise can be heard), as Háry tells of single-handedly defeating Napoleon’s entire army. The part of Napoleon is played by the alto saxophone. At first, the saxophone and brass have exchanges, with the brass always showing their power. The real humour comes halfway through the movement, though, when the bass trombone and tuba show Háry’s muscle with a victorious, slow march. Napoleon slinks away in defeat as the saxophone plays a funeral march, fading into the distance.

V. Intermezzo – This is perhaps the most ‘Hungarian’ of all the movements and is simply a fun and energetic folk dance in the form of a Hungarian verbunkos (recruiting dance). The main theme, dating from about 1800, is coloured with Hungarian rhythms and harmonies and once again features the unique sound and colour of the cimbalom.

VI. Entrance of the Emperor and His Court – Háry is welcomed to Vienna as a hero amid great pomp and festive splendour where he describes the entrance of the Emperor and the Imperial court. The movement features two distinct and triumphant folk-like melodies, the first introduced by the winds and bells, the second by the trumpets and cornets. Both themes overlap in an all-out frenzy and race to the finish. Kodály brings his fantasy to a close with an appropriate comical ending – the bass drum getting the last word.

Program notes by Steven Hillinger
Biography

Steven Hillinger

Steven Hillinger has guest conducted many orchestras including the Willoughby, Penrith and Mosman Symphony Orchestras, the Ku-ring-gai and East-West Philharmonic Orchestras, the Cove Chamber Orchestra, The Occasional Performing Sinfonia, the Sydney Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra, the Sydney Conservatorium High School Symphony Orchestra and the NSW Youth Orchestra. Steven has worked with the Australian Youth Orchestra and in 1994 was shortlisted to audition for the position of Assistant Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He was also a finalist the 1997, 1998 and 2000 Westfield Young Conductor of the Year Awards with the Queensland, Adelaide and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras respectively.

Steven was the conductor of the Lane Cove Youth Orchestra (1998), Fisher’s Ghost Youth Orchestra (1998-2000), Sydney Youth Brass (2000), Shore School Symphony Orchestra (2005-2006), Burwood Girls High School Senior Concert Band (2010-2011), St. Aloysius College Senior Concert Band (2012), Ascham School Symphony Orchestra (1997-2014) and was Musical Director of the City of Sydney Wind Ensemble (2001-2006). Steven also worked extensively with the Sydney Youth Orchestra’s Association (2001-2007), conducting the Sydney Youth Orchestra, Philharmonic Orchestra and Symphonic Wind Orchestra and held the positions of Musical Director of the University of New South Wales Concert Band (2006-2012) and Associate Conductor of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music’s Wind Symphony (2013-2014). Steven has also worked as Assistant Conductor with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

As well as a large amount of guest conducting, at present, Steven currently conducts the North Sydney Girls High School Symphony Orchestra and Wind Orchestra and the North Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Steven is also Musical Director of the University of New South Wales Symphony Orchestra and from 2016 to 2018, held the position of Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Youth Orchestra. 2019 also marks Steven’s 20th anniversary as Chief Conductor and Musical Director of the North Sydney Symphony Orchestra.
The North Sydney Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1947 by the late Dr Alan Bellhouse M.A. who conducted it from its inaugural concert until shortly before his death in 1980. Dr Bellhouse and his wife Dulcie Holland’s aim was to form an orchestra which would enable student and amateur musicians to gain orchestral playing technique and experience and learn something of the vast repertoire of classical music. Dulcie Holland was an active member of the orchestra and wrote many frequently heard orchestral pieces. As a well-known music educator she was patron of the orchestra until her death in 1999. The NSSO was the first orchestra on Sydney’s North Shore and, for many years, the only one. Seventy years on it continues to provide opportunities for talented local soloists to perform with an orchestra and to further the appreciation of fine orchestral music within the community through performing concerts at affordable prices.

Donations: If you would like to make a donation in support of the orchestra, fund a specific project or tie your donation in some other way to the activities of the orchestra, you will be making a contribution to the orchestra’s ongoing success. Cheques/money orders should be made payable to 'NSSO Donations Fund' and sent to:

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Piano
Rachael Lin

Celeste
Paul Cheung
North Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Next Concert

SUNDAY 29 SEPTEMBER, 2.30pm
The Smith Auditorium, Shore School

ROSSINI Thieving Magpie Overture
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Lark Ascending
(Violin: Shuti Huang)
SIBELIUS Swan of Tuonela
BLACKFORD The Great Animal Orchestra Symphony (Australian Premiere)

Steven Hillinger - conductor

A concert inspired by the sounds of nature, and birds in particular. The concert opens with Rossini's rousing overture from The Thieving Magpie.

Then our concertmaster and celebrated SSO violinist, Shuti Huang, takes to the stage to perform Vaughan Williams' popular Lark Ascending. This wonderful work, inspired by the swooping dance of the lark, takes the violin into ever higher and more delicate registers - a work of both great beauty and virtuosity.

Sibelius' Swan of Tuonela is a tone poem that features a prominent cor anglais part; it is one of the best known and loved orchestral cor anglais solos in the repertoire.

Finally, we are proud to present an Australian premiere - Blackford's Great Animal Orchestra Symphony. Inspired by a range of recordings of natural habitats, this piece melds natural sounds with haunting music. This piece has been received with great acclaim all around the world since its premiere in 2014, and the NSSO are very excited to be able to bring this piece to Australia for the first time.