Gala Concert
MPO 20th Anniversary

"Music That Moves You"

CONCERT PROGRAMME
ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL SEASON
The Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) gave its inaugural performance at Dewan Filharmonik PETRONAS (DFP) on 17 August 1998. With the initial search for outstanding musicians involving a worldwide audition tour, the result was a symphony orchestra made up of musicians from 25 nations, including 6 from Malaysia, a remarkable example of harmony among different cultures and nationalities.

A host of internationally-acclaimed musicians has performed with the MPO including Lorin Maazel, Sir Neville Marriner, Yehudi Menuhin, Joshua Bell, Harry Connick Jr., José Carreras, Andrea Bocelli, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Chris Botti and Branford Marsalis, many of whom have praised the MPO for its fine musical qualities and vitality.

With each new season, the MPO continues to present an exciting programme of orchestral music drawn from over three centuries, as well as the crowd-pleasing concert series. Its versatility transcends genres, from classical masterpieces to film music, pop, jazz, traditional, contemporary and commissioned works.


Its Education and Outreach Programme, ENCOUNTER, reaches beyond the concert platform to develop musical awareness and appreciation through dedicated activities at such diverse venues as schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages and other community centres.

The MPO’s commitment to furthering musical interest in the nation has been the creation of the Malaysian Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (MPYO); its inaugural concert at DFP on 25 August 2007 was followed by a tour in Peninsular Malaysia. It has performed in Sabah and Sarawak (2008), Singapore (2009 and 2017), Brisbane, Australia (2012), Kedah (2013) and Johor Baru (2014). The MPO has also released 21 commercial CDs.

As it celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2018, the MPO remains steadfast in its mission to share the depth, power and beauty of great music.

The MPO’s main benefactor is PETRONAS and its patron is YABhg. Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah Haji Mohd Ali.

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**PROGRAMME**

**SMETANA**

**Bartered Bride Overture** 7 mins

**DVOŘÁK**

**Carnival Overture** 9 mins

(to be conducted by Tengku Irfan)

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

**Piano Concerto No. 1** 35 mins

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

**Scheherazade** 47 mins

**INTERVAL** 20 mins

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To ensure an enjoyable performance for all, the following are prohibited within the confines of the concert hall: Smoking, Eating, Photography, Recording of performance, Talking during performance, Digital watch alarms, Mobile phones and pager alarms.

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TENGKU IRFAN
MPO Youth Brand Ambassador
conductor/piano

Praised by the New York Times as “eminently cultured” and possessing “sheer incisiveness and power”, Tengku Irfan, 20, began piano lessons at 7 and made his debut at 11, performing Beethoven’s Piano Concerto WoO4 and improvising his own cadenzas with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) at Dewan Filharmonik PETRONAS (DFP) in 2009. He has performed under Neeme Järvi, Robert Spano, George Stelluto, Nikolai Alexeev and Jeffrey Milarsky, among others. Previous performances include at the Montreal la Virée classique Festival (invitation from Kent Nagano), with AXIOM, Aspen Chamber Symphony, the Juilliard, Singapore Symphony, São Paulo State Youth, Estonian National Symphony, Pekoria Symphony and Aspen Philharmonic orchestras, among others.

He won the Aspen Music Festival 2013 Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 2 Competition, followed by performances of this concerto worldwide. He served his fourth consecutive year as resident pianist for the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble in 2017.

JAC VAN STEEN
conductor

Jac van Steen was born in The Netherlands and studied orchestra and choir conducting at the Brabants Conservatory of Music.

Since participating in the BBC Conductors Seminar in 1985, he enjoys a very busy career and conducts the best orchestras in Europe, which included the posts of Music Director and Chief Conductor of the National Ballet of The Netherlands, the orchestras of Bochum, Nürenberg, Staatskapelle Weimar, The Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra of Dortmund, Musikkollegium Winterthur and Principal Guest conductor at the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. At present, he is Principal Guest conductor of the Ulster Orchestra and Prague Symphony Orchestra.

He made his debut with Opera North in 2013 as well as with the Volksoper in Vienna. In 2015, he has made a very successful début at the Garsington Opera. He returned to Opera North with performances of Puccini’s Il Tabarro and Suor Angelica, the Volksoper Vienna with Korngold’s Das Wunder der Heliane and Garsington Opera in 2017 with Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande. He visits the UK regularly with the Britisorchestras such as the Philharmonia Orchestra, the CBSO, Royal Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra and made his debut in Tokyo with the New Japan Philharmonic. He participates in numerous recordings for the BBC, as well as ‘live’ broadcasts of his concerts. There are a substantial number of CD recordings of his work with various orchestras.

Besides his activities as conductor, he is dedicated to teaching and is Professor for Conducting at the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague. He also regularly works with the Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham’s School of Music (Manchester) as well as the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music (London). In May to June this year, he leads the Jette Park Young Artists showcase as organised by the Royal Opera House Covent Garden London.

In 2015, he made his conducting debut with the MusicaNova Orchestra with the premiere of his string orchestral piece Nocturne. He conducted the premiere of his Pengembaraan Minda dan Kenyataan at Lincoln Center, New York. He made his conducting debut at DFP and the Esplanade Singapore with the MPYO in 2017.

In conjunction with the MPO’s 20th Season Anniversary, Irfan was appointed as the MPO Youth Brand Ambassador to cultivate appreciation in classical music among the new generation and inspire young musicians.

Irfan is a double major in piano and composition under Yoheved Kaplinsky and Robert Beaser respectively at Juilliard, and studies conducting with George Stelluto and Jeffrey Milarsky. He studied composition with Ira Taxin in Juilliard Pre-College. Irfan served as a Teaching Artist Intern in the New York Philharmonic Composer’s Bridge Program, and is a recipient of a Kovner Fellowship at Juilliard.
PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, Op.23 (1874)

On Christmas Eve 1874, Tchaikovsky sat before his friend, the conductor and pianist Nicolai Rubinstein, at the Moscow Conservatory to play for him the piano concerto he had almost completed. “I played the first movement. Not a single remark! … Then a torrent poured forth from Nicolai, gentle at first, then growing more and more into the sound of Jupiter … my concerto was worthless and unplayable.” Tchaikovsky’s description goes on at great length. Obviously, he was insulted and deeply hurt, but resolved to publish the concerto anyway. As a result of the bad feelings between Rubinstein and the composer, the dedication was changed to Hans von Bülow.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)
Carnival Overture, Op.92 (1891)

Dvořák conceived his work on this subject as the central part of a triptych of overtures portraying feelings aroused in him by “three great creative forces of the universe - Nature, Life and Love. The sounds of merrymaking, laughter and revelry (or, if you will, the hurly-burly of life) are instantly conjured up in the arresting opening bars. When the bustle and noise subside, the violins then sing a passionate, lyrical theme in E minor, followed by still another idea presented first by violins, then by woodwinds. Suddenly the mood is shattered by the upward sweepings of an instrument hitherto unheard, the harp, which leads into the central slow section. The melodic material of the Allegro section is then developed, followed by a return to the whirl of gaiety with which the overture opened. Dvořák himself was apparently carried away by the exuberance of the coda, which several times seems to be on the verge of ending, only to rush on with even more wild abandon.

BEDŘICH SMETANA (1824-1884)
Overture to The Bartered Bride (1866)

“The Bartered Bride is generally regarded as one of the half dozen or so best comic operas in the repertory. Strong musical characterizations, exuberant dances, earthy evocations of rural life in nineteenth-century Bohemia, humour, melodic invention, brilliant orchestration … this opera has it all. Not only that; it serves as a symbol of the Czech nation and its people, while its composer has been hailed as “one of the chief builders of modern Czech civilization, one of the chief creators of Czech history” (Vladimir Helfert). Walter Ducloux’s description of the merry overture sets the tone for an evening of pure delight:

“An offbeat leap upward, a precarious teetering as if of a boy on a swaying tightrope, a riotous tumble earthward, amid the high-spirited crowd of Bohemian peasants. It is the day of the spring fair, when the circus is coming to town. A lusty fugue describes the joyous hubbub, absorbing one group after another in happy anticipation. Some moments of respite from the merry turmoil lead to a spell of tender lyricism, like a camera zooming in on two young lovers among a carefree crowd. Soon the lively noise resumes to close the overture brilliantly”.

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, Op.23 (1874)

I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso - Allegro con spirito
II. Andante semplice - Prestissimo - Andante semplice
III. Allegro con fuoco

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NICOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

Scheherazade, Op.35 (1888)

I. The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship (Largo e maestoso - Allegro non troppo)
II. The Story of the Kalander Prince (Lento - Andantino - Allegro molto - Vivace scherzando)
III. The Young Prince and the Princess (Andantino quasi allegretto)
IV. Festival at Baghdad; The Sea; The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock Surmounted by a Bronze Warrior; Conclusion (Allegro molto - Vivo - Allegro non troppo e maestoso - Tempo come I)

The two hundred or so dramatically linked stories that constitute the Thousand and One Nights (or Arabian Nights) originated in Eastern lands centuries ago. The stories were handed down over the years and embroidered by each storyteller in his or her own fashion. A raconteuse named Scheherazade provided a convenient framework on which to drape a rich and colourful tapestry of these stories, folk tales, poems and dramatic narratives. In the form she related them, we are indebted to the misogynistic Persian king Shahriar.

Having been outraged by his faithless wife, Shahriar resolved to avenge himself on the entire female population of his city. Each night he would marry a beautiful young woman, only to kill her the following day. After some time, a girl of exceptional charm, wit and intelligence came forward with a plan to end this reign of terror. She offered herself to the King as his next bride, and the King gladly accepted, though he warned her that she would die on the following day. When bedtime approached, the girl began to relate an enthralling story to the King, but broke off just at the most exciting part, with a promise to continue the next day. The King postponed her execution so as to hear the outcome of this story, but the girl repeated her tactic the following night, and the night after that to a total of a thousand nights. By this time, she had borne him a son, the King had come to love her, and he finally renounced his categorical hatred of women. The Queen had in the meantime won the love and gratitude of the people as well, and they named her Scheherazade, which means “Savior of the City”.

Wondrous to hear were Scheherazade’s marvelous tales of intrigue and adventure set in exotic lands. Rimsky-Korsakov, with his masterful ability to exploit dazzling orchestral colours and sonorities, was just the composer to set these tales to music. Scheherazade, his four-movement “narrative” of scenes from the Arabian Nights, was written during the summer of 1888. It was first performed in St. Petersburg on 22 October 1888 with the composer conducting. A lengthy description of each movement would serve little purpose; the individual imagination must be free to roam. Nevertheless, one cannot miss the recurring “voice” of the lovely, seductive, mysterious Scheherazade, represented by a sinuous theme played by the solo violin, just one of the many tantalizing touches of orchestration found in the splendidly tinted score.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Formerly a horn player in the Montreal Symphony, Robert Markow now writes programme notes for that orchestra and for many other musical organizations in North America and Asia. He taught at Montreal’s McGill University for many years, has led music tours abroad, and writes for many leading classical music journals, including American Record Guide, Fanfare, Opera, Opera News, The Strad and Symphony. He travels regularly to Europe, Asia and Australia in search of musical stimulation.
MALAYSIAN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Note: Sectional string players are rotated within their sections. *Extra musician.
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