

E-CONCERT PROGRAMME

Malaysian
Philharmonic
Orchestra



NEW YEAR'S CONCERT

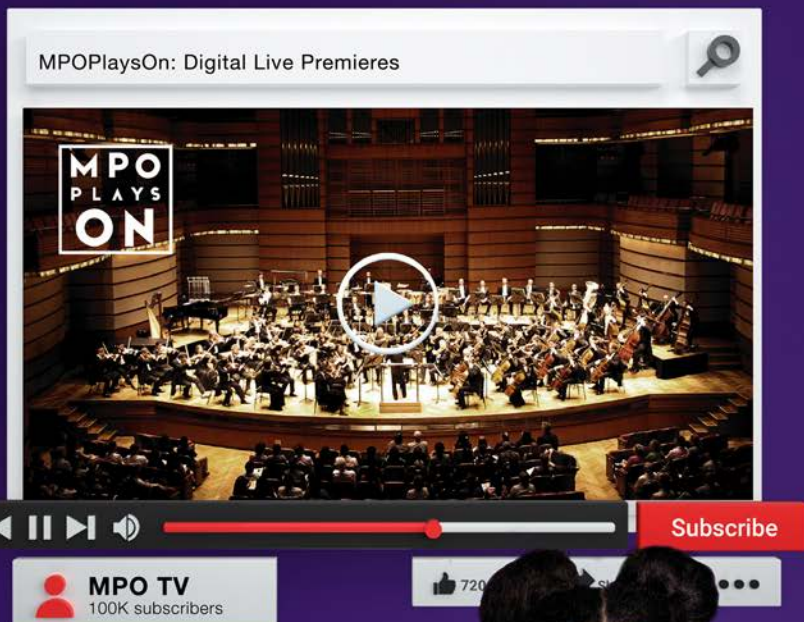
2025 SEASON

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MALAYSIAN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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 MPO today is made up of many talented Malaysian musicians and musicians from other nations, a beautiful example of harmony among different cultures and nationalities.

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.

Among renowned Malaysian artists who have mesmerized audiences with the MPO include SM Salim, Sheila Majid, M.Nasir, Siti Nurhaliza, Jamal Abdillah, Ella, Dayang Nurfaizah, Aishah, Jaclyn Victor and Aubrey Suwito.

A host of internationally acclaimed musicians have 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, Branford Marsalis and Judika, many of whom have praised the MPO for its fine musical qualities and vitality.

The MPO regularly performs in major cities of Malaysia such as in Alor Setar, George Town, Ipoh, Johor Bahru, Kuantan, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and many more. Internationally, it has toured Singapore (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2018), Japan (2001, 2009 and 2017), Korea (2001), Australia (2004), China (2006 and 2019), Taiwan (2007) and Vietnam (2013). The MPO has also released 21 CDs.

The MPO remains steadfast in its mission to be the premier Malaysian orchestra, providing the ultimate music experience through the power of live music that educates, entertains and inspires. Its main benefactor is PETRONAS, and its patron is YABhg. Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah Haji Mohd Ali.

New Year's Concert

Sat 18 Jan 2025, 8:00 pm

- 03 Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra
05 Gerard Salonga, conductor

PROGRAMME

Negaraku

Overture to *Die Fledermaus* 9 mins
Tales from the Vienna Woods, Waltz 12 mins
Tik-Tak Polka, from Die Fledermaus 3 mins
Champagne Polka 3 mins
Romance No. 2 in G minor (*Dolci Pianti*) 4 mins
Bitte schön!, Polka Française 4 mins
Voices of Spring, Waltz 6 mins

20-mins intermission

Libellen Waltz 8 mins
Eljjen a Magyar, Polka Schnell 3 mins
Thunder and Lightning, Polka 3 mins
Tritsch-Tratsch Polka 3 mins
Emperor Waltz 11 mins
Freikugeln, Polka Schnell 3 mins
The Blue Danube, Waltz 9 mins

All works are composed by Johann Strauss, Jr.

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conductor

Gerard Salonga

Gerard Salonga is currently Resident Conductor of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) in Kuala Lumpur, a position held since 2019. For two seasons, he served as Assistant Conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra from 2016 to 2018 where he was appointed by Jaap van Zweden, selected from a field of over 170 international applicants. He served as Music Director of the ABS-CBN Philharmonic Orchestra in Manila from 2012 to 2020. In 2021, he began his term as the Music Director of the Orchestra of the Filipino Youth (OFY).

He has assisted and covered distinguished conductors such as Jaap van Zweden, Jun Märkl, Hans Graf, Yu Long, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Mark Wigglesworth and Leonard Slatkin, and has conducted The Philippines and South Denmark Philharmonics, Shanghai Opera House Orchestra and Chorus, Kunming Nie-Er Symphony, Evergreen Symphony of Taiwan, the Bangkok and Singapore Symphonies, Queensland Camerata and Orchestra Victoria. He has also conducted in iconic venues including the Royal Albert Hall.

He has conducted a wide range of performances, covering symphony, ballet, opera, pops, family and film including the *Harry Potter*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Ratatouille* films in concert, and several Disney concerts. His orchestral arrangements were performed by orchestras such as the BBC, Indianapolis, Guangzhou, Winnipeg and Singapore Symphonies, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, New York Pops, Cincinnati Pops and Royal Philharmonic. He has collaborated as arranger or conductor across different styles with artists such as Lea Salonga, Regine Velasquez, Wang Leehom, Wu Tong, Tengku Irfan, Paul Archibald, Hacken Lee, Anthony Lun, Elisa Chan, Ivana Wong, Michael Ball, Blake, Il Divo, Danielle de Niese, TaikOz, Ksenija Sidorova, Shen Yang, LiYr Williams, James Ehnes, Jing Wang, Jan Lisiecki and The Beach Boys.

In 2018, he conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and TaikOz in the world premiere of Australian composer Skipworth's *Breath of Thunder* (concerto for Taiko and orchestra) at the Sydney Opera House which earned an APRA AMCOS (Australian art music) nomination for Performance of The Year. In 2019, he collaborated with pianist Cecile Licad and the Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester (Denmark) on a new recording of the works of Gershwin for piano and orchestra released on the Danacord label. In 2020 and 2021, he served as music producer for the MPO's recordings of classical and new works for its YouTube channel MPO TV and was the Artistic Advisor for the MPO's collaborations with Malaysian Composers Collective, conducting new works by Malaysian composers. In 2023, he conducted the world premiere of Leung's *Metaverse Symphony* with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, a recording released by Sony Classical. That same year, he made a debut with the Thailand Philharmonic and soprano Sumi Jo.

As a conductor of musical theatre, he has led orchestras for the stagings of *Carousel*, *They're Playing Our Song*, *Dreamgirls*, *Baby*, *West Side Story* and *Little Women*, all in Manila. In 2019, he conducted *Sweeney Todd* for Atlantis Theatrical in Manila, and in Singapore for Singapore Repertory Theatre. He is a four-time recipient of the Aliw Award for Best Musical Director and twice winner of the Gawad Buhay Philstage Award.

He has served as a jury member of competitions including the National Music Competition for Young Artists (The Philippines), the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory (Singapore) concerto competition, and the first Malaysian National Concerto Competition. In 2020, he was one of the panelists for the San Francisco Conservatory conducting seminar. In Malaysia, he has given lectures on conducting through MPO's education and outreach programme at the Association of International Schools Malaysia, Taylor's University, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

In 2012, he was honoured as one of The Outstanding Young Men (TOYM), The Philippines' highest civilian award to achievers under the age of 40. In 2021, he was named one of the recipients of the SUDI National Music Awards by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

In 2024, apart from his commitments with the MPO and OFY, he will once again conduct the Hong Kong Philharmonic and Singapore Symphony Orchestra, as well as perform in Australia and the UK.



PROGRAMME NOTES

JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.

**Born in Vienna, 25 October 1825;
died in Vienna, 3 June 1899**

Elegant ballrooms, glittering chandeliers, champagne, romantic strolls through the Prater, splendid buildings and infectious gaiety are the nostalgic images conjured up by Vienna of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Social dancing occupied a greater percentage of most people's time than anywhere else in the western world. It was almost an obsession. In the year 1832, for instance, 772 balls were held, attended by two hundred thousand people—half the population of the city. Refreshments were available throughout the evening until about midnight, when a supper was served. Dancing resumed until 3 or 4 a.m.

To satisfy the voracious appetite of this dance-crazed city, composers whipped up thousands of waltzes, marches, polkas, quadrilles, galops and other works. Into this world of fun and gaiety stepped Johann Strauss and his family. The member of this family who lives most proudly in the annals of immortality is of course Johann Strauss Jr., the “Waltz King.” Born in 1825 as the first of six children to Johann Sr., he inherited his father's thriving dance band business. When the older man died in 1849, their respective orchestras merged. The Strauss phenomenon became such a rage that there were eventually six different orchestras playing nightly in Vienna. Tonight's programme in Kuala Lumpur is devoted to music by this legend. It opens with an overture, but thereafter consists, with one exception (a melancholic little Romance featuring the solo cello) entirely of polkas and waltzes.

OVERTURE to *DIE FLEDERMAUS*

Strauss was already 45 and world-famous before he turned to operetta. *Die Fledermaus* (The Bat) was his third stage work, and became not only the most famous Viennese operetta ever written, but one of the most amazingly successful stage shows of all time. It is a joyous, bubbly, totally improbable concoction of mistaken identities, amorous intrigues, mischief and mirth. The plot has been criticized for being laden with improbabilities and chance occurrences, but no matter – the music is so full of irresistible tunes, sprightly orchestration, rhythmic verve and the irrepresible charm of Old Vienna that such criticism evaporates. The overture is a potpourri of the operetta's main themes, including (after an *Allegro vivace* introduction) Rosalinde's mock-serious farewell to her husband Eisenstein before he goes off to serve a jail term; Eisenstein's wrath when, disguised as the lawyer Blind, he learns how his wife has deceived him with Alfred; and the famous waltz.

A woman with long, flowing blonde hair is seen from the back, wearing a vibrant red, sleeveless, floor-length gown. She is captured in a dynamic pose, as if dancing, with her arms slightly out. The background is a deep, dark blue, speckled with numerous small, bright golden particles that resemble falling confetti or light trails, creating a festive and magical atmosphere. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the dress and the movement of her hair.

THE POLKAS


Polkas were composed in great abundance; Strauss alone wrote nearly two hundred of them. This lively folk dance in 2/4 meter originated in Bohemia around 1830. Many polkas take their name from programmatic or extra-musical associations. The **Champagne Polka** lives up to its title as a bubbly, frothy brew. Maybe someone in the orchestra will pop open a bottle or two. The brilliant **Thunder and Lightning** is appropriately named for the thunderous rolls and flashes of lightning emanating from the percussion section, as well as for the “lightning” speed at which it all flies by. **Éljen a Magyar** (Hungarian for “Hail to the Hungarians!”) was written two years after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, and was dedicated to the Hungarian nation. Its coda includes passing reference to Berlioz’ famous **Rákóczi March**. The title of **Tritsch-Tratsch** (Chit-Chat), has several possible derivations, according to Strauss specialist Peter Kemp: the name of a Viennese publication specializing in comics and gossip; a burlesque called *Der Tritsch-Tratsch* by the Austrian playwright and actor Johann Nestroy with music by Adolf Müller, Sr.; or the name of the poodle of Strauss’s first wife. The first option is the most likely, but take your pick!

Strauss plucked dance numbers from every one of his stage works, numbers that could be performed separately. Each was published under its own opus number. **Tik-Tak** comes from *Die Fledermaus*, and **Bitte schön** (If you please) from *Cagliostro in Wien*.

THE WALTZES

More than any other kind of music, it is the waltz that conjures up visions of Vienna as a kind of romantic never-never land. Today we associate the waltz with splendid ballrooms and upper-class society, but it developed from the lowly *Ländler*, a slow-turning Austrian peasant dance in triple meter and whose origin can be traced back to at least the sixteenth century. The waltz became popular during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. As people whirled their way through waltzes, they forgot class distinctions, decorum, war, revolt, defeat, plague, and a thousand daily cares.

One of the most famous of Strauss’s many waltzes – more than 160, not counting those found in operettas – is **Tales from the Vienna Woods**. This magnificent tone piece is richly imbued with pastoral loveliness and references to rustic idylls. Strauss’s biographer Egon Gartenberg calls it a “love song” for his native city, but also points out that “the son was honoring his father in paraphrasing the elder Strauss’s waltz *Die Schwalben* (The Swallows).”



Gartenberg notes that *Voices of Spring* was “especially dear to Johann because it was a spirit-lifting return to the clear spring of melodic purity from the murky, wordy waters of operetta.” It was originally written for a coloratura soprano from the Imperial Court Opera, Bianca Bianchi. The waltz then dropped out of the vocal repertory while it became far better known in its purely orchestral and solo piano versions.

Libellen is German for dragonflies, but the word can also mean water sprites or even devices for measuring water level. It is almost certain that the title refers to dragonflies, a subject Johann’s brother Josef also turned to for his polka-mazurka Op. 204. Following an introduction, Johann’s dragonflies are portrayed in five waltzes plus a lengthy coda.

Kaiser-Walzer may well be the second most popular Strauss waltz after *The Blue Danube*. The title is certainly appropriate to the music’s aura of pomp and majesty, but it can be interpreted four different ways. Singular and plural of “waltz” in German is *Walzer*, and like many other works of its kind, *Kaiser-Walzer* is really a whole string of waltzes, not just one. Furthermore, there were two *Kaiser* (again, the German word remains unchanged in the plural) involved in the creation of Strauss’s music. The first was the popular Franz Josef of Austria, ever so much a symbol of Strauss’s Vienna and in the fortieth year of his reign when Strauss composed his tribute (1888). The other *Kaiser* was the newly-elected Wilhelm II of Prussia. Strauss wrote the *Kaiser-Walzer* for some concerts which formed part of the ceremonies surrounding the first state visit of Franz Josef to Berlin in 1889. “By not dedicating the music to either *Kaiser* specifically, Strauss could satisfy the vanity of both,” noted Peter Kemp. Hence, properly speaking, the English translation should be *Emperors’ Waltzes*.

What more satisfying way to end an evening of Viennese music than with Strauss’s immortal *Blue Danube Waltz*? Originally written in 1867 as a choral piece for the Vienna Men’s Choral Association, with a text by Josef Weyl, the words were soon discarded in favor of a purely instrumental version, the form in which it is familiar today. The Danube is not really “blue,” and “the” waltz is really five of them plus a lengthy introduction and an even lengthier coda, but “the” “blue” Danube Waltz never fails to sweep listeners into its magical flow, sending them home radiantly happy after a night in Vienna.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Formerly a horn player in the Montreal Symphony, Robert Markow has been writing programme notes for more than forty years for musical organizations in Canada, the USA, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. He taught at Montreal’s McGill University for many years, and as a Wagner specialist, has lectured at the Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner Society of New York. He writes regularly for the journals *Fanfare*, *Der neue Merker* (Vienna), *The Strad*, *Strings*, *Opera* (UK), and the website classicalvoiceamerica.org. Extra-musical interests include travel, film, literature and decadent desserts.

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PETRONAS TWIN TOWERS

Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra
Junichi Hirokami, conductor
Santiago Cañón Valencia, cello

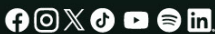
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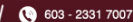
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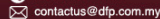
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SLAM

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Ahmad Muriz Che Rose, conductor
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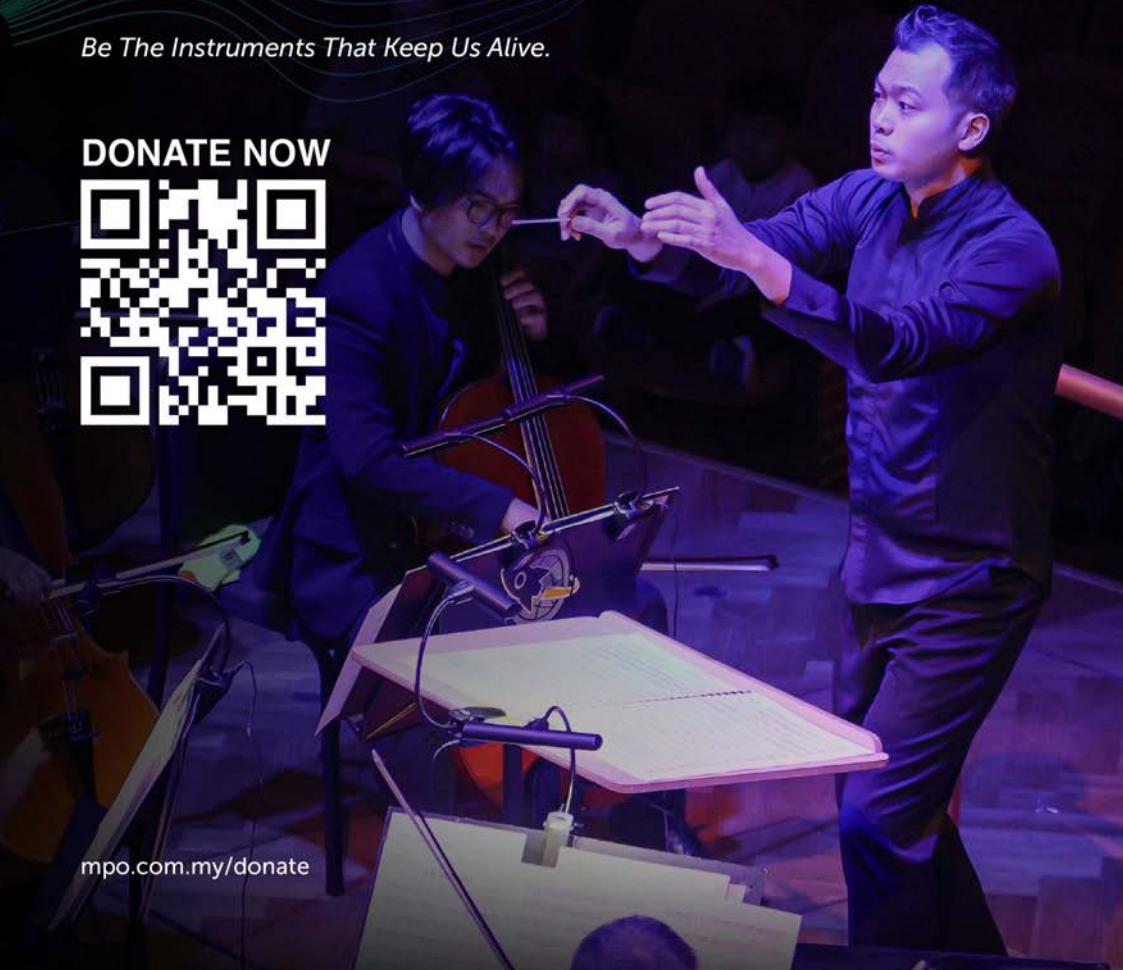
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