2026 CONCERT SERIES 1 AUTUMN

SHSO
Southern Highlands Symphony Orchestra

‘VARIATIONS’

Saturday 21st March, 2026 / 7.30pm
Sunday 22nd March, 2026 / 2.30pm

Bowral Memorial Hall,
Bendooley St, Bowral



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Andrew Ford OAM

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The SHSO reserves the right to amend the advertised repertoire and venue.

Welcome and opening remarks – Judith O'Brien OAM

Acknowledgment of Country – Anne Donaldson

Incidental music composed by John Corley

MIKHAIL GLINKA

Overture to the opera *Ruslan and Ludmila*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

***Violin Concerto in E Minor* Op. 64**

Soloist Bryn Wiseman

INTERVAL

EDWARD ELGAR

***Enigma Variations* Op. 36**

Variations on an Original Theme



photograph by Steven Foster

THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

In mid-2014 musicians, led by Allan Stiles and Roma Dix OAM, embarked on a mission to assemble the most dedicated and accomplished musicians in the region and surrounding districts to form a symphony orchestra.

The Southern Highlands Symphony Orchestra presented its first concert series in September 2014 and is now considered to be one of the finest regional orchestras in NSW and a significant feature of the cultural life of the Southern Highlands. Many of our musicians have been with the orchestra since its inception and have delighted the Highlands Community over the years.

ALLAN STILES

Artistic Director and Chief Conductor

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Commencing in his late teens, Allan has regularly directed orchestras, bands, choirs, and theatre productions. He formed the Western Youth Orchestra (now Sydney Northern Youth Orchestra) and The Beecroft Orchestra. He has conducted operas and musicals for several musical societies, including the Parramatta Musical Comedy Company, the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, and the Highlands Theatre Group. He has conducted bands including the City of Holroyd Brass Band. He has played in orchestras in Brisbane, Sydney, London, and the Highlands.

While teaching for the NSW Department of Education he pioneered primary school bands and formed the Secondary Schools Wind Ensemble. He later directed orchestras, bands, choirs and theatrical productions while teaching at The King's School Parramatta, Holy Cross College in Ryde, and Pymble Ladies' College, from which he made two European concert tours.

Conducting studies were with Robert Miller from the SSO and as part of his MMus at UNSW.

As a musicologist he catalogued the works of Colin Brumby, Graham Powning and Alfred Hill, the latter for his PhD thesis at Macquarie University. He has edited and published many previously unavailable works by Australian composers.

BRYN WISEMAN



Bryn Wiseman was born in Sydney in March 2008 into a musical family and has been immersed in music since his earliest years. He began violin lessons at the age of three and a half with Zhu Wen and continued his studies at the International Grammar School, Sydney, under Ursula Luxton while participating in the school's string program. After relocating to the Southern Highlands, Bryn commenced studies with Myee Clohessy. In 2025, as part of his preparation for HSC Music and tertiary auditions, he undertook additional lessons with Associate Professor Goetz Richter, Dr Wojciech Wisniewski, and Anton Koch (composition). His compositions received a nomination for Encore.

Bryn has performed in a wide range of ensembles, including the Young Mannheim Symphony (2024 & 2025), the HICES Festival Orchestra, the HICES Jazz Ensemble, and the Roma Strings. As a soloist he has performed as part of the 'Musica Floreat' concerts at St Jude's Bowral as part

of the Bowral Autumn Music Festival. Since 2024 he has been a member of the Southern Highlands Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to his classical violin studies, Bryn is an active jazz saxophonist, studying with Andrew Robertson and performing regularly alongside undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Sydney. His developing career reflects his love for both classical and jazz performance.

MIKHAIL IVANOVICH GLINKA (1804-1897)
Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmila*

Mikhail Glinka is considered to be the father of modern Russian music. In the early 19th century Western classical music held sway over Russian musical culture. There was no Russian style or school of composing that rivalled the Western style until Glinka created a uniquely Russian music, planting its roots firmly in the European tradition but fertilising it with music from Russian, Middle Eastern, Persian, and other Asian folk traditions.

Born into a wealthy family, Glinka left his life as a government bureaucrat in his late twenties to pursue music. As a young man, he conducted the serf orchestra on his uncle's estate near Smolensk, consuming much of the mainstream European repertoire while assimilating the vital tradition of Russian folk music that thrived in peasant culture. A visit by an Italian opera company to St. Petersburg in 1828 gave Glinka an opportunity to immerse himself in Rossini's stage works, and the young composer went on to meet Donizetti and Bellini during a visit to Italy in the early 1830s. In 1834 he returned to Russia and rediscovered his Russian heritage, reading the works of Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol. From this, he was inspired to write his first important work, the opera *A Life for the Tsar* (1836). This met with immediate popular success, and the director of the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg suggested that Glinka adapt Pushkin’s epic poem, *Ruslan and Ludmila*, as his next opera.

The Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmila* has a uniquely Russian combination of earthy exuberance and heroic feeling. With an energy worthy of Rossini, it has two central musical themes. The first is bustling and celebratory. Its driving force calls on technical dexterity from all the strings to move up and down the fingerboard of their instruments with lightning speed and precision. The second theme is more lyrical and reminiscent of courtly dances. It has two manifestations: the lyrical and tender version in a major key, played by a bassoon, violas, and cellos; and the dark and powerful version in a minor key, with brass accompaniment. The development of these

themes gives way to a coda that brings the overture to a rousing conclusion.

The range of beauty and excitement that Glinka conjures reveals why he was such a seminal influence on all Russian composers who followed, from Rimsky-Korsakov to Tchaikovsky to Stravinsky.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)
Violin Concerto in E minor, op. 64

Allegro molto appassionato
Andante
Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace

The eminent violinist, Ferdinand David, was the inspiration for Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto*, one of the most famous and popular of all violin concertos. As early as 1838, David urged Mendelssohn to compose a concerto for him, but it was not written until 1844. It was then subjected to intensive revision following David's advice and criticism, and finally introduced in 1845 at a concert in Leipzig with David as soloist with the Gewandhaus Orchestra.

The concerto abounds with Mendelssohn's lyricism and maintains a consistent level of beauty. After an orchestral prelude of one bar, the solo violin announces a passionate and yearning theme, played wholly on the E string. The orchestra plays a subordinate role. Then the soloist launches into another idea mainly in triplets with intricate passage work in a show of technical capability. At last, the music calms and the second subject, marked *Tranquillo*, is introduced by the flutes and clarinets. In the development section, the soloist dramatically intones the first notes of the opening theme, which are now given a springing rhythmic impulse. The mood changes from agitation to tranquillity. Then a sudden crescendo sends the soloist spinning off into a cadenza, which would no doubt have pleased the ace virtuoso for whom it was written. It demands the utmost skill in its rapid ascents to the top register with perilous upward leaps and superlative bow control. While the soloist is engaged in a whirling series of arpeggios the orchestra steals back in with a soft restatement of the opening melody. Much of the recapitulation reshapes new and unexpected facets of the melodies. With a gradual increase in the tempo to *presto* the soloist dashes off rapid passage work and double-stops (the playing of two strings simultaneously) landing finally on a top E. Then a series of chords brings the movement to a decisive end.

From these chords one bassoon note is drawn out before rising a semitone to the tonic note of the second movement. This is one of Mendelssohn's masterstrokes, ensuring a smooth and natural progression from

one movement to the next by the simplest of means. A brief introduction brings the entry of the soloist in one of the most timeless and poignant of melodies. This sublime theme unfolds with serenity and calm with the orchestra offering discreet support. Some measure of contrast comes in the middle of the movement with a passage full of anguish and foreboding introduced by the orchestra. The end of the movement returns to the perfect tranquillity of the opening as the solo violin soars aloft and gently descends again.

After a short introduction, the Finale is announced by a fanfare on bassoons, brass and drums. This is answered by an upward flourish from the soloist. The pace is fast. The music is impetuous, full of dash and verve showcasing Mendelssohn's signature capricious vein.

EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)
Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op.36

In 1891, after a short and unhappy period in London, Elgar and his wife returned home to Malvern. They settled into a comfortable pattern of life among friends, and the next decade was one of Elgar's most creative periods, with lots of new compositions that culminated in the work commonly referred to as the *Enigma Variations*, written in 1898-1899. Perhaps his best-known large-scale composition, it takes the form of a theme and fourteen variations. Elgar wrote, in the original programme notes,

> The enigma I will not explain – its dark saying must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the variations and the theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set, another and larger theme "goes" but is not played.

Elgar never divulged the secret of the unplayed theme (the "enigma") but he did write descriptive notes for the variations. He dedicated the work to "my friends pictured within", each variation being an affectionate portrayal of one of his circle of close acquaintances and marked with their initials or allusions to their names.

The theme, on which all the variations are based, is a simple three-part design, in G minor with a central contrasting passage in the major, before a return of the opening. Elgar himself pointed out that the rhythm of the theme's first bar – two short notes followed by two long ones – is immediately reversed and 'references to this grouping are almost continuous.'

Variation I (C.A.E.) is a loving and dignified tribute to the Elgar's wife,

Caroline Alice, who was a constant source of encouragement. Her death in 1920 brought the composer's creative life to a halt for twelve years until he began work on his *Third Symphony* toward the end of 1932. In Elgar's words,

> The variation is really a prolongation of the theme with what I wished to be romantic and delicate additions; those who knew C.A.E. will understand this reference to one whose life was a romantic and delicate inspiration.

Variation II (H.D.S-P.) introduces Hew David Stewart-Powell, a pianist with whom Elgar, a violinist, played chamber music. His characteristic warm-up routines are gently parodied in a manner Elgar described as "chromatic beyond H. D. S-P.'s liking."

Variation III (R.B.T.) depicts Richard Baxter Townshend, a friend and amateur thespian with a gift for mimicry, whose low voice was apt to jump an octave unexpectedly. Townshend was a classicist at Oxford and rode through the town on his bicycle, constantly ringing its bell. The violins' plucked strings and the woodwind doublings represent the bicycle bell.

Variation IV (W.M.B.) immediately evokes William Meath Baker, described by Elgar as "a country squire, gentleman and scholar". In the days of horses and carriages it was more difficult than in these days of petrol to arrange the carriages for the day to suit a large number of guests. This variation was written after the host had, with a slip of paper in his hand, forcibly read out the arrangements for the day and hurriedly left the music room with an inadvertent bang of the door.

Variation V (R.P.A.) portrays Richard Penrose Arnold, son of the literary critic and poet Matthew Arnold. Elgar notes he was "a great lover of music which he played (on the pianoforte) in a self-taught manner, evading difficulties but suggesting in a mysterious way the real feeling. His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical and witty remarks." The strings, in one of Elgar's most expansive and inspired melodies, represent Arnold's nobility of mind and his deeply truthful way of playing music.

Variation VI (Ysobel) has the title that was Elgar's nickname for Isabel Fitton, who studied violin with him. She switched to viola – hence the prominence of that instrument in this variation. Elgar described the opening as "an 'exercise' for crossing the string – a difficulty for beginners." The composer was fully aware of Ysobel's charms and quite taken with her beauty, so the variation is "pensive and, for a moment, romantic.

Variation VII (Troyte) presents Arthur Troyte Griffith, an architect, and one of Elgar's most intimate friends:

> The uncouth rhythm of the drums and lower strings was really suggested by some maladroit essays to play the pianoforte; later the strong rhythm suggests the attempts of the instructor (E.E.) to make something like order out of chaos, and the final despairing 'slam' records that the effort proved to be in vain.

Variation VIII (W.N.) is named for Winifred Norbury, but is more a portrait of 'Sherridge', the eighteenth-century house where she lived with her sister, Florence, and where Elgar and friends enjoyed many musical gatherings. The gracious personalities of the ladies are sedately shown – especially Winifred's characteristic laugh. As the variation draws to a close, only the first violins hold their note until the other strings re-enter with a magical harmonic shift to slide into the most loved of the Variations.

Variation IX (Nimrod) is a tribute to Alfred Jaeger, who was Elgar's musical editor and closest friend. In German his name means 'hunter' and, in the Old Testament, Nimrod is the patriarch described in Genesis as "a mighty hunter before the Lord". Jaeger was a German-born musician of frail health and deep sensitivity who worked for the London music publishing house of Novello, and who, more than anyone apart from Alice Elgar, sustained the composer through his frequent and severe periods of depression. The music of this variation encapsulates the depth of human feeling and the strength of their bond. It is not so much a character study as the record of a discussion which Elgar describes as:

> …a long summer evening talk, when my friend discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven and said that no one could approach Beethoven at his best in this field, a view with which I cordially concurred. It will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the Eighth Sonata (Pathétique).

The shared love of Beethoven is enshrined in this profound Adagio, the most celebrated of all the Variations. Often programmed on its own, it has come to mean a great deal to many people, and is most notably used in funerals and memorial services. In England it is always played on Remembrance Sunday, a ceremony acknowledging the sacrifices of British servicemen and women in both World Wars and subsequent conflicts. In the United States, it has often been used for 9/11 tributes.

Variation X (Dorabella – Intermezzo) This variation refers to Dora Penny, a cheerful and music-loving woman whom Elgar was very close to. He took the nickname for her from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. The whimsical nature of this variation reflects their flirtatious relationship and the gently halting rhythm

alludes to her slight stutter.

Variation XI (G.R.S.) The initials belong to George Robertson Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral, but the music belongs to Dr. Sinclair's dog. In Elgar's words:

> The first few bars were suggested by [the] great bulldog Dan (a well-known character) falling down the steep bank into the River Wye (bar 1); his paddling up stream to find a landing place (bars 2 and 3); and his rejoicing bark on landing (second half of bar 5). G.R.S. said 'set that to music'. I did; here it is.

Variation XII (B.G.N.) refers to Basil G. Nevinson, a fine cellist who regularly joined Elgar and Hew David Stewart-Powell (Variation II) in chamber music. The soaring cello melody is:

> …a tribute to a very dear friend whose scientific and artistic attainments, and the whole-hearted way they were put at the disposal of his friends, particularly endeared him to the writer.

Variation XIII * * * (Romanza) The identity of the friend concealed behind the three asterisks remains the subject of speculation. Some think she was Lady Mary Lygon, a society lady who was on a voyage to Australia around the time the Variations were composed. Others identify her as Helen Jessie Weaver, Elgar's first love, to whom he was engaged as a young man. She later emigrated to New Zealand, where she died. The drums suggest the distant throb of the engines of a liner, over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. The subject's identity may be a mystery but the music is suitably poetic and conveys a poignant sense of longing for someone far away.

Variation XIV (Finale: E.D.U.) The initials attached to this variation when run together sound out 'Edoo' the nickname Alice Elgar gave her husband. Thus, the work ends with a self-portrait "bold and vigorous in general style". Elgar wrote to his biographer:

> This variation is mainly to show what 'E.D.U.', (a paraphrase of a fond name) intended to do. References made to the first variation (C.A.E.) and the ninth (Nimrod), two great influences on the life and art of the composer, are entirely fitting to the intention of the piece. The whole of the work is summed up in a triumphal, broad presentation of the theme in the major.

Notes by Elizabeth Dalton

BENEFACTORS

The Southern Highlands Symphony Orchestra wishes to acknowledge the following, who have made tax-deductible donations to ensure that the SHSO is able to maintain its artistic and community vision. Thank you. We also thank those music lovers who have donated anonymously.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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James Marko, Destination Southern Highlands, Luminous Entertainment,
Melanie Van Til, David McFarlane at Mittagong Print and Design,
Kennards Hire, Bowral Uniting Church and others that displayed flyers and
banners, volunteers who assisted with setting up the hall, front of house, and
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Players are listed alphabetically after principals






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