



QUEENSLAND SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA



RESPIGHI, HIGGINS & STRAUSS

SEASON 2026



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Welcome

As a trombonist, it's always very special to be part of a performance where my instrument gets to step out front. This concerto is particularly unique, drawing on a 16th-century manuscript filled with strange and vivid imagery – comets, eclipses, and all kinds of fantastical creatures. I'm really looking forward to getting into rehearsals and discovering how all of that translates into sound, and then bringing it to life in performance. The trombone is an incredibly versatile instrument, much more than you might expect from hearing it in a typical orchestral setting.

It's also a real privilege to share the stage with Helen Vollam – someone who I have heard so much about, but have never had the chance to hear live. She's been a genuine inspiration to trombonists around the world. Having her here for this Australian premiere, along with Riccardo Minasi, is something I've been looking forward to for a long time!



Nicolas Thomson
Principal Bass Trombone

RESPIGHI, HIGGINS & STRAUSS

Concert Hall, QPAC
Friday 17 April 2026, 11.30am

IN THIS CONCERT

Riccardo Minasi Conductor
Helen Vollam Trombone
Queensland Symphony Orchestra

PROGRAM

RESPIGHI
Trittico Botticelliano 18'
I. Spring
II. Adoration of the Magi
III. The Birth of Venus

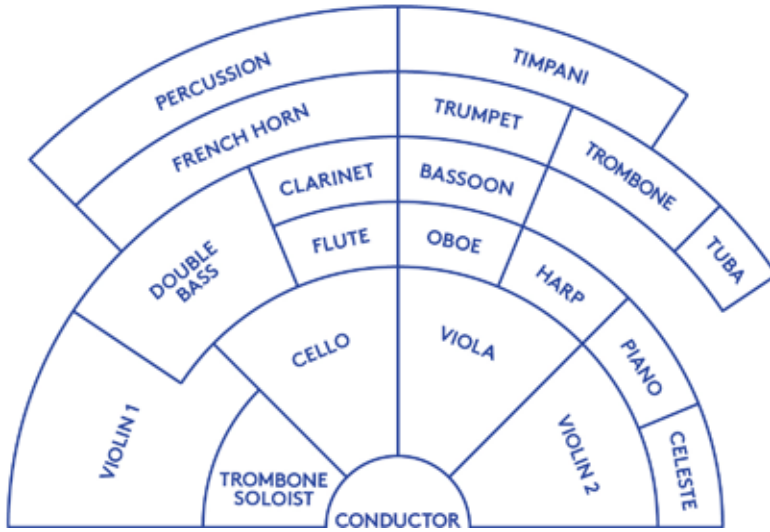
GAVIN HIGGINS
The Book of Miracles 25'
I. Comet
II. Parhelia
III. Eclipse (cadenza)
IV. Beasts

R. STRAUSS
Aus Italien 47'
I. In the Country
II. Amid the Ruins of Rome
III. On the Beach at Sorrento
IV. Neapolitan Life

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

All concert doors open at 11am
Please note, there is no interval
in this performance
This concert will end at approx. 1pm

Today's Orchestra Layout



Who's On Stage

Scan the QR code for the list of musicians playing in tonight's concert.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Queensland Symphony Orchestra provides a spoken Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of each concert to encourage awareness and to demonstrate our respect for First Nations cultures and traditions, as well as signalling our commitment to a more inclusive and equitable society. We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of Meanjin where we work, rehearse and perform: the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples, whose deep connection to this land reminds us to always protect and care for it.

Queensland Symphony Orchestra acknowledges the traditional custodians of Australia. We acknowledge the cultural diversity of Elders, both past and present, and the significant contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Queensland and Australia.



Artistic Summary

At first glance, you might think the three composers in today's program wouldn't have a lot in common. With over a century between them, hailing from Italy, the UK, and Germany, and using disparate musical forms, the thing that links these three pieces is a powerful evocation of visual and historical worlds.

As you'll read in the listening guide, we open tonight's concert with a piece inspired by three of Early Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli's most famous works of art. Composer Ottorino Respighi was a master orchestrator, and the shimmering textures of this piece blend period-inspired modes and textures with 20th-Century colour and radiance.

From there, we stay on the medieval theme in Gavin Higgins' trombone concerto *The Book of Miracles*. The piece uses a recently-discovered 16th-Century manuscript as its inspiration, which Higgins described in an interview for the British Trombone Society:

"It's an incredible book that depicts various supernatural phenomena, starting in the Old Testament and moving through historical events to the time when it was written. The last part is depictions of revelations. They are quite striking images, because they look incredibly modern – vivid, colourful and quite playful in a way. It's full of comets and eclipses, and things falling from the sky. When I first discovered the book, I knew I wanted to write a piece on it. I thought it was going to be a clarinet concerto, but the trombone being a declamatory instrument, I thought it would be the right thing to explore with this piece. It's in four movements: a substantial first movement that is nine or ten minutes long, a slow second movement going into the third which is full of extended cadenza, and a fast and furious finale."

If you've never heard a trombone concerto before, you're not alone – it's an instrument that rarely gets its place in the spotlight, and this is only the second performance of the piece (and its Australian premiere). At its premiere in London in 2019, critics praised Higgins' orchestral writing, with Roy Westbrook writing in *Bachtrack*: "Higgins never forgets that the concerto form has a playful element, at least some of the time in a fascinating work which has plenty of variety within its sense of unity. The orchestral writing is often striking, literally so in the use of ringing metallic percussion. The solo part, often stentorian and declamatory as we expect from a trombone, was also lyrical, and virtuosic in its frequent demands for flexibility and fun (lip trills, glissandi)."

Finally, we move to Richard Strauss' youthful travelogue *Aus Italien* (From Italy). Imagine unlit landscapes, bustling street scenes, and a finale controversially quoting "Neapolitan" music that turned out to be a popular song of the time (and got him into copyright trouble).

So sit back, close your eyes, and let today's program take you on a journey through time and space.

Listening Guide

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

(1879-1936)

TRITTICO BOTTICELLIANO, P.151

- I. La Primavera (Spring)
- II. L'adorazione dei Magi (The Adoration of the Magi)
- III. La nascita di Venere (The Birth of Venus)

Born in Italy at a time when opera had been the dominant musical force for several centuries, Respighi was unusually interested in instrumental composition. Through his professional success and teaching, he encouraged other Italian composers to look beyond the operatic stage.

The effect of two trips to Russia to study with Rimsky-Korsakov can be found in any of Respighi's works, but perhaps most famously in the 'Roman' trilogy. Among Respighi's other popular pieces are the unusual *Ancient Airs and Dances*. This adaptation of early Italian melodies was far from scholarly, but it brought them into public notice once again.

Respighi's preoccupations with the visual and the antique are woven into his triptych of works inspired by some of Botticelli's most famous paintings. The *Allegro vivace* of *La Primavera* captures the movement of the Three Graces and their supernatural companions. While the graphic musical depiction of trilling birds brings Vivaldi to mind, the harmonic and textural richness could only belong to Respighi.

Ancient ecclesiastical modes and the famous tune *Veni, veni Emmanuel* are used to create an atmosphere of purposeful reverence for the scene of Christ's Nativity depicted in *L'adorazione dei Magi*. It is tempting to look for some clever self-portrait of Respighi in the music, to match Botticelli's positioning of himself in the painting. Perhaps the originality of the instrumentation and tasteful touch of harp, celeste and piano is enough of an individual statement.

The Virgin Mary appears again in *La nascita di Venere*, disguised in a mystic allegory of all that is good and beautiful. Respighi's orchestration is suitably gentle and radiant, with another Vivaldi-like string figure indicating the rippling waves. The tension and volume gradually increase until Venus is fully and luminously present. Zephyrs blow her softly towards the shore as the music suggests water streaming from the opened shell.

Katherine Kemp
Symphony Australia © 1999

Writing at a time in Italy when opera was the dominant art form, **Respighi's** orchestral and instrumental scores have been criminally underappreciated. He studied with Rimsky-Korsakov in St Petersburg, before returning to the city which inspired his most famous works, the *Roman Trilogy*. A champion of early music, he is remembered for the vivid colour and orchestration of his works.

THE BOOK OF MIRACLES

- I. Comet
- II. Parhelia
- III. Eclipse (cadenza)
- IV. Beasts

The Book of Miracles is a recently discovered 16th-Century German manuscript, showcasing miraculous signs, natural catastrophes, and Christian myths. Bookended with imagery from the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation, the core of the manuscript is overflowing with vivid illustrations of comets, fantastical creatures, celestial apparitions, and other astronomical phenomena. The manuscript is steeped in European folklore, where inextricably linked events are depicted with chimerical and wondrous clarity. The imagery feels simultaneously modern, existing outside of time, while grounded in a world of myth, superstition, and Christian mythology.

Three types of celestial apparitions recur throughout: comets, portrayed as ominous omens; parhelia, atmospheric phenomena caused by light refraction through ice crystals; and both solar and lunar eclipses. Together, these form some of the most evocative and powerful images within the manuscript.

Biblical tales aside, the remainder of the plates are dedicated to images of fantastical creatures – sea serpents seven headed monsters, strange half-human creatures with snakes for tails – all playfully rendered in vivid detail.

This piece won an Ivor Novello Award in 2019.

...On the fourth day of the month of May, a terrible comet was seen in the sky... with many fiery flames falling from it. And after this there followed some strange things.

© Gavin Higgins

Described as ‘boldly imaginative’ (The Times), ‘a talent to watch’ (New York Times) and ‘one of the most interesting voices of his generation’ (Limelight), **Gavin Higgins** is one of Britain’s most exciting and gifted talents. Winner of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, Sky Arts Award, Critics Circle Award, The Worshipful Company of Musicians Ille’s Medal, and two Ivor Novello Awards, Higgins was the inaugural Composer-in-Residence for the Rambert Dance Company in 2010 and is currently Composer-in-Association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the inaugural Associate Composer for the Three Choirs Festival.

Listening Guide

RICHARD STRAUSS

(1864-1949)

AUS ITALIEN, TRV 147, OP.16

IV. Neapolitanisches Volksleben (Neapolitan Life)

After the first performance of *Aus Italien* in March 1887, Franz Strauss went to comfort his son Richard. Not that he approved of the piece: Strauss senior, one of the finest horn players of his day, publicly execrated Wagnerian 'New German' music. But young Richard's new work was clearly pointing in that direction. With its frankly pictorial titles and effects, *Aus Italien* was the first step into the realm of the symphonic poem.

The twenty-one-year-old Strauss had been appointed assistant conductor to the legendary Hans von Bülow at the court of Meiningen in 1885. There he met composer Alexander Ritter who filled the gaps in Richard's repertoire knowledge and pointed him 'toward the poetic and expressive in music.' But it was Brahms who suggested that Strauss should visit Italy between his time at Meiningen and his next appointment in Munich in 1886.

Strauss enjoyed Italy immensely, seeing much of the country (including an erupting Vesuvius) and noting down the many musical ideas which came into his mind as he travelled.

There was nothing spiritual about the raucous world of Naples as rendered in

the Finale, but it was here that Strauss made a serious error. He believed that the ubiquitous song *Funiculi, Funiculà* was a folk-tune, when in fact it was composed to celebrate the opening of a tourist railway. It is a sadly missed opportunity that given the richness of genuine Neapolitan folk music Strauss chose this 'vulgar ditty'. Strauss puts it through the paces of a sonata movement, and further reintroduces themes from the earlier movements to unify the whole work.

The Munich public jeered; the Boston public in 1888 'marched out by platoons' during the performance. Even Strauss' mentor, Bülow, felt that the composer had 'gone to the utmost limits of what is musically possible (within the limits of beauty)'. Strauss was delighted at the time, saying that 'the opposition of the multitude...proves that it must be of some significance'. He later pronounced *Aus Italien* a 'timid experiment'. In fact the work is the first intimation of Strauss' genius as an orchestrator and conjurer of musical images.

Gordon Kerry © 2006

Modernist hero of the late Romantic, **Richard Strauss** harnessed the expressive power of the huge Wagnerian opera orchestra for the concert hall. Known for his opulent and programmatic tone poems, he experimented with and subsequently eschewed atonality. Following a struggle with Nazi censorship, he spent the last 38 years of his life refining and polishing his style.



Artist Biographies



RICCARDO MINASI

CONDUCTOR

Italian conductor Riccardo Minasi has been Principal Guest Conductor of Ensemble Resonanz and Artistic Director of Orchestra La Scintilla since 2022, and was previously co-founder and conductor of Il Pomo d'Oro (2011-16), Chief Conductor of the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra (2017-22), and Music Director of Teatro Carlo Felice (2022-25).

In 2025/26, Minasi conducts four programmes with Ensemble Resonanz as Artist-in-Residence at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, including Bellini's *Capuleti e i Montecchi* and Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. He performs in Hamburg with Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Beatrice Rana, and in South America.

In 2016, Minasi appeared on four Echo Klassik award-winning albums, and his Harmonia Mundi recordings with Ensemble Resonanz of Joseph Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross* (2018), C.P.E. Bach's Cello Concertos (2019), and Antonin Kraft's Cello Concerto with Jean-Guihen Queyras (2024) were awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'Année. His last album with Ensemble Resonanz, *Mozart: Haffner-Akademie*, was released in April 2025.

Minasi was historical advisor for the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and curator and editor with Maurizio Biondi of the 2016 Bärenreiter critical edition of Bellini's *Norma*, which he performed with Ensemble Resonanz in Hamburg, Köln, Teatro Carlo Felice, and at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in 2022.



HELEN VOLLAM

TROMBONE

Helen is Principal Trombone of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and enjoys a busy and varied career combining orchestral, solo playing, chamber music and teaching. She is also a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Septura and Bones Apart Trombone Quartet.

In 2019, Vollam gave the world premiere of Gavin Higgins' trombone concerto *The Book of Miracles*, written for her, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican in London. Vollam was appointed Principal Trombone of the BBCSO in 2004, and is the first woman to be principal trombone of a London orchestra.

She studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has given masterclasses at all the UK music colleges and adjudicated for numerous national and international competitions. She has played on many film soundtracks, including *Star Wars: The Attack of the Clones*, three *Harry Potter* films, *Inception* and *No Time to Die*. She has worked with conductors and artists such as Haitink, Boulez, Abbado, Nezet-Seguín, Oramo, Harnoncourt, Rattle, John Adams, John Williams and Monty Python.

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As one of the largest performing arts companies in Queensland and the state's only professional symphony orchestra, Queensland Symphony Orchestra (QSO) is renowned for its high quality, breathtaking performances of both classical and modern compositions that engage audiences of diverse musical tastes, interests, and ages.

We play a vital role in Queensland's cultural community: educating; mentoring aspiring performers; touring regional centres; broadcasting; and performing with state, national, and international ballet and opera companies.

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Powered by music, our passionate and talented team works hard on and off the stage to bring out the best in people, and share in a sense of wonderment and excitement that is truly for everyone to enjoy.

At our core, we believe we all have the power to enrich lives and this becomes true with every uplifting experience we deliver for our audiences, partners, and supporters.

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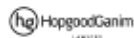


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QUEENSLAND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Honourable John-Paul Langbroek MP
Minister for Education and the Arts Sharon Schimming
Director-General, Department of Education
QPAC rests on the lands of the Yuggera and Turrbal peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this country and recognise their rich cultural heritage and enduring connection to the land, waters and skies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are this country's original storytellers, and it is our privilege to continue to share stories and be a place of gathering on this land that has been a meeting place for millennia.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

QPAC warmly thanks our key donors who help us engage broadly across the state and continue enriching lives through performing arts.

Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax AC, Dr Lee Coaldrake and Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, Leigh Tabrett PSM, Susan Rix AM, Julian Myers, Dr Sally Pitkin AO, Dare Power, Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, Sandi Hoskins, Ningana Trust, Leigh Wheeler, Alida Rae Mayze and John Mayze, Lance Hockridge and Suzanne Hockridge, Brendon Mann and Brendan Smith, Judith Musgrave Family Foundation, Queensland Community Foundation, de Groot's Charitable Fund, Professor Andrew Lister and Ms Kate Lister, Greg O'Meara and Wendy O'Meara, Virginia Bishop, Joachim Erpf and Paula Erpf, Dr Colin Kratzing and Mrs Noela Kratzing, Ian Gough AM and Ruth Gough, Barbara Snelling, Frank Alpert and Karen Alpert, Dr Ailbhe Cunningham and Dr Frank Cunningham, Ann Sherry AO, John White and Judith Hoey, Rodd Chignell and Wendy Chignell, Jacqueline Walters, Terri Butler, Jenny Morton, Alana Jensen, Klaus Beckmann and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.

We give heartfelt thanks to QPAC's Principal Partners Hyundai and MinterEllison.

Coming Up



Spirit of the Violin

SUN 3 MAY 11.30AM

Concert Hall, QPAC

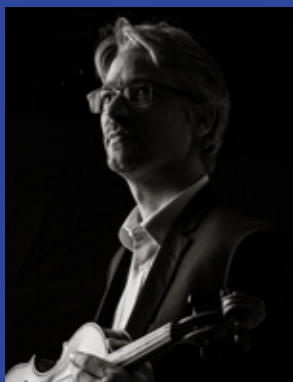
Jessica Gethin Conductor
Johnny van Gend Violin

TCHAIKOVSKY Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*
Valse-scherzo

WELLS Suite from *Butterfly Effect*
(Ballet Suite inspired by Puccini) *World Premiere*

WAXMAN *Carmen Fantasie*

GLAZUNOV *Scènes de ballet*



Rachmaninov & Shostakovich

SAT 23 MAY 7.30PM | LIMITED SEATS REMAIN

Concert Hall, QPAC

Umberto Clerici Conductor
Konstantin Shamray Piano

CATHY MILLIKEN Catalogue of Sky
RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No.2 in C minor
SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No.5



Ravel & MacMillan

FRI 17 JUL & SAT 18 JUL 7.30PM

Concert Hall, QPAC

Jaime Martín Conductor
Claire Edwardes Percussion
Voices of Birralea Choir

JAMES MACMILLAN Percussion Concerto
Veni, Veni, Emmanuel
Daphnis and Chloé

RAVEL



QUEENSLAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



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