



Orchestra 21
Presents

THE EDGE OF
sleep

**4pm Saturday
24 October 2026**



Artists

Orchestra 21

Sarah Curro Director, Violin

Program

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Andante funebre
from String Quartet No. 3

EDVARD GRIEG

The Death of Åse from *Peer Gynt*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Chamber Symphony Op. 110a

ELLA MACENS

The Lake

ERIC WHITACRE

Sleep

Duration (*approximate*)

10', 5', 22', 7', 6'

Sarah Curro Director, Violin



Sarah Curro graduated in 1994 from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, where she was awarded the Conservatorium Medal for Excellence. In 1997, she won the Dorcas McLean Travelling Scholarship for Violinists, which led her to study and later teach at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. From 1999 to 2002, she was a member of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.

In Australia, Sarah has performed with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Queensland Philharmonic and Symphony orchestras, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra Victoria, and she is currently a full-time member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

Beyond traditional violinist roles as a performer and educator, Sarah's ventures focus on the discovery, purchase and promotion of new, mostly local, creations across various art forms, particularly music. In recent years she has commissioned a series of 40 solo violin pieces, *VOLUME*, intended to showcase the unique semi-acoustic instruments of Melbourne's Spur Violins. In addition to her own performances of these pieces, presenting them in modern venues to an ever-widening audience, their publication as *The VOLUME Collection*—a COVID project—has enabled more adventurous violinists to explore the exciting sound worlds of contemporary music.

Program Notes

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Andante funebre from *String Quartet No. 3*

String Quartet No. 3 in E-flat minor, Op. 30 is the last of Tchaikovsky's string quartets. It was composed in 1876 as a memorial to Ferdinand Laub, a Czech violinist and composer who Tchaikovsky considered "the best violinist of our time" and a colleague of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory.

The third movement, *Andante funebre e doloroso*, is a funeral march, which explicitly commemorates Laub. Opening with funereal rhythms, it has sections which correspond to a church funeral service with its chorales and the priest's intoning. The first violin is given soaring melodies, the first theme is passionate and declamatory while the second theme is more elegiac. In the final bars the music ascends to the heavens.

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907)

Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46: *II. The Death of Åse*

Edvard Hagerup Grieg was a Norwegian composer and pianist who is widely considered to be one of the leading composers from the Romantic Period. Born in Bergen, Grieg was raised in a musical environment. His mother was a music teacher who began teaching Edvard piano at the age of six. At the age of fifteen Grieg met the famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, who recognised Grieg's talent, and persuaded his parents to enrol him at Leipzig Conservatory where he focused on piano performance. Grieg made his debut as a concert pianist at the age of eighteen in Karlshamn, Sweden.

The Death of Åse is the mournful second movement from Suite No. 1 Op. 46 of Grieg's incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's 1867 play *Peer Gynt*. Grieg extracted two suites of four pieces each from the incidental music which became popular as concert music. *Peer Gynt* was given its premiere with the incidental music by Grieg in Oslo in 1876.

The movement is scored exclusively for string orchestra and is composed in the key of B minor, establishing a sombre atmosphere from the outset. It portrays the poignant scene where the protagonist, Peer Gynt, visits his dying mother Åse. Marked *Andante doloroso* (at a walking pace, sadly) the slow tempo simulates a heavy, dragging physical trudge, akin to someone carrying profound grief. The deep, unmuted double basses anchor the texture with dark, resonant pedal tones that evoke finality and despair.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

Chamber Symphony, Op. 110a

- I. Largo
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Allegretto
- IV. Largo
- V. Largo

Dmitri Shostakovich was one of the Soviet Union's most important composers, and his music often reflects the tensions and contradictions of life under the Soviet regime. The Eighth String Quartet, composed in 1960, is among his most performed works. Shostakovich wrote it during a visit to East Germany, where he was working on the film *Five Days—Five Nights*, about the destruction of Dresden during the Second World War. The quartet took him just three days to compose.

The quartet was dedicated "In Remembrance of the Victims of Fascism and War", and its five interconnected movements are all in minor keys. Shostakovich's visit to the devastated city of Dresden clearly affected the work. At the same time, he was under considerable personal pressure, having recently lost his first wife and facing pressure to join the Communist Party. He was also dealing with increasing weakness in his right hand due to a neurological condition. Shostakovich later said that he could never hear the Eighth Quartet without breaking into tears. Although he described it as a memorial to the victims of war and fascism, the work is also intensely personal.

Program Notes

The quartet opens quietly, with the cello, viola and violins entering one after another in a canon. They introduce Shostakovich's four-note musical signature, D-S-C-H: the notes D, E-flat, C and B, derived from the German spelling of his name. This motif appears in every movement, giving the work a strongly autobiographical character. The opening quickly passes through all twelve semitones, creating a sense of uncertainty and instability.

The second movement is a violent contrast: fast, emphatic and almost aggressive. It incorporates Jewish musical material from the final movement of his Second Piano Trio. The slower third movement quotes the theme of his First Cello Concerto, while fragments of these quotations reappear and are transformed as the music progresses.

The fourth movement begins with three repeated notes against a low drone—evoking anti-aircraft fire and the distant whine of a bomber. It also quotes a Soviet revolutionary song, 'Exhausted by the Hardships of Prison', said to have been Lenin's favourite.

The final movement is a fugue, gradually building towards an intense emotional climax. The D-S-C-H motif appears in counterpoint in four different tonal forms, yet despite the work's chromatic complexity, its underlying C-minor tonality ultimately prevails.

The quartet was premiered in Leningrad in 1960 by the Beethoven Quartet. Rudolf Barshai subsequently arranged it for string orchestra, creating the *Chamber Symphony* in C minor, Op. 110a. This is the version being played by the orchestra today.

ELLA MACENS (b.1991)

The Lake

Ella Macens is a Sydney-based composer. She is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she now teaches. Her music draws inspiration from her Latvian heritage with its strong choral traditions as well as contemporary music. Her music is deeply evocative.

From the score:

This piece was originally composed for Genevieve Lacey (recorder), Danny Yeadon (baroque cello) and Neal Peres Da Costa (chamber organ) under commission by Jason Catlett for the Sydney Festival 2018.

Jason would like to dedicate this piece to Judith Foster—librarian at the Australian Music Centre—for her continued dedication and commitment to Australian music.

This revised version for string orchestra was commissioned by the Canberra Symphony Orchestra for the occasion of the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. The arrangement was premiered in Canberra on 22 October 2018 as part of the National Apology.

The work was born out of a personal longing for inner peace, strength and healing.

Program Notes

ERIC WHITACRE (b.1970)

Sleep

Eric Whitacre is an American composer and conductor whose distinctive musical language is characterised by luminous sonorities, rich harmonies and carefully blended textures. A graduate of the Juilliard School, Whitacre is particularly celebrated for his innovative “Virtual Choir” projects and contributions to contemporary choral repertoire.

Sleep began in 1999 as an *a cappella* choral setting when Julia Armstrong, a professional mezzo-soprano, commissioned Whitacre to compose a choral work in memory of her parents who had died within weeks of one another after more than fifty years of marriage. Armstrong requested a setting of music to the poem ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ by Robert Frost but when permission to use the poem was withdrawn, Whitacre’s long-time collaborator, poet Charles Anthony Silvestri, created a new text with the same metrical structure. The resulting *Sleep* was premiered by the Austin ProChorus, of which Armstrong was a member, in October 2000. The string orchestra version being played today was created by Whitacre in 2010 and first performed by the London Symphony Orchestra at London’s Barbican Hall on 24 October of that year.

The music unfolds as a gentle, continuous meditation. Long melodic phrases float over sustained, closely voiced harmonies, with suspensions, added notes and shifting tonal colours creating Whitacre’s signature cluster harmonies, stepwise dissonance, and gradual textural build. In the string version, long bow strokes, divided ensemble textures and carefully balanced registers recreate the warmth and blended sonority of the original voices. Gradually expanding textures lead to a luminous climax before the music gently recedes.

Sleep

by Charles Anthony Silvestri

*The evening hangs beneath the moon,
A silver thread on darkened dune.
With closing eyes and resting head
I know that sleep is coming soon.*

*Upon my pillow, safe in bed,
A thousand pictures fill my head.
I cannot sleep, my mind’s a-flight;
And yet my limbs seem made of lead.*

*If there are noises in the night,
A frightening shadow, flickering light,
Then I surrender unto sleep,
Where clouds of dream give second sight,*

*What dreams may come, both dark and deep,
Of flying wings and soaring leap
As I surrender unto sleep,
As I surrender unto sleep.*

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Musicians

VIOLIN I

Sarah Curro *^
Bronwyn Henderson
Therese McCoppin
Ciara McCoppin
Carmen Yeung
Karen Love
Owen Bradfield

VIOLIN II

Michaela Mee \$^
Owen Halliday
Mary Muirhead
Lisette Bush
Diana Greenslade
Caroline Matthews

VIOLA

Lalita Wright \$
Kate Walker ^
David Choate
Jane Standish

CELLI

Julia Cianci \$
Phillippa Clements ^
Julie Lokan
Barbara Manovel

DOUBLE BASS

Henry South \$
Darren Steel

* Concertmaster

\$ Section Leader

^ String Quartet

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