

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL PREVIEW

Australian conductor **Carolyn Watson** writes from the UK where she is preparing for sleepless nights ahead...



YOU CAN SLEEP IN SEPTEMBER' is the advice offered by UK magazine *The Spectator* in describing Scotland's annual Edinburgh International Festival, one of the world's pre-eminent cultural and artistic events. And judging from this year's billing, which extends from 13 August to 5 September, it seems sage advice indeed.

Established in 1947, the Edinburgh International Festival was the brainchild of Rudolf Bing, then General Manager of Glyndebourne Opera, Henry Harvey Wood, Head of the British Council in Scotland, and a committee from within the Edinburgh arts community.

Rising from the ashes of the Second World War, the aim of these original founders was twofold – to stage a festival which would revitalise and enrich the cultural life of Europe, the United Kingdom and in particular Scotland, and to 'provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit'.

of New South Wales. A performance of Mozart's *Idomeneo* will also be led by an Australian conducting team – long time ex-pat Sir Charles Mackerras will be assisted by myself in this concert version of the opera with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

The 'new-world flavour' of Festival 2010 is by no means a coincidence. In the words of Festival Director Jonathan Mills, it constitutes a 'journey of discovery through the diverse contemporary cultures of North, Central and South America and Australasia'. Mills explains that his aim was to bring together these cultures, separated by vast oceans, in Edinburgh. Alongside Australian artists will be performers from the US, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Samoa, New Zealand, as well as Spain, Holland and the UK, giving Festival 2010 a unique feel as it explores the modern-day cultures of the 'New World'.

Australia's flagship orchestra, the Sydney Symphony make a welcome return to the Edinburgh Festival in two performances conducted by Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor, Vladimir Ashkenazy. Given that the Sydney Symphony's last appearance



Vladimir Ashkenazy, Photo: Ben Symons, Sydney Symphony, Photo: Keith Saunders, Carolyn Watson



Seeking also to rejuvenate the struggling Edinburgh economy, it was hoped the Festival would result in an injection of much-needed revenue to the city coffers. Given the global economic challenges of recent times, it seems this original consideration is no less pertinent some 60 years down the track.

The advantages, of course, are not confined to the economic domain. The Edinburgh International Festival is recognised as a world-class cultural event, one that unites artists and audiences from around the globe. With the Festival repeatedly ranked among the most important of international cultural celebrations, Festival Director Jonathan Mills has reason to be proud. It is also an event of great diversity encompassing opera, lieder, chamber and orchestral music alongside jazz, dance, theatre and a lecture series.

This year's Edinburgh International Festival will have an undeniably Australian flavour with two appearances by the Sydney Symphony, showings of Opera Australia's production of *Bliss*, a performance by Melbourne-based chamber ensemble Duo Sol and a lecture by Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir, Governor

at the Edinburgh Festival was some 35 years ago in 1974, this year's return is eagerly anticipated by Scottish audiences.

It is not only the Edinburgh public who will be treated to Sydney Symphony performances. Returning to Europe for the first time in 15 years, the orchestra's appearance at the Edinburgh Festival is part of a European tour that also takes in the BBC Proms in London and the Lucerne Festival. Sydney Symphony Managing Director Rory Jeffes elaborates, 'As Australia's premier orchestra, we are proud to be ambassadors for Australia and demonstrate the calibre of our performing arts companies in the European cultural cradle of our art form'.

Joining the Sydney Symphony at the Edinburgh Festival in an impressive international orchestral line-up will be the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Russian National Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra and Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Also performing will be Scotland's finest – the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

The Sydney Symphony will present two concerts, on Sep-

tember 1 and 2, featuring works by Australian composers Peter Sculthorpe, Matthew Hindson and Ross Edwards alongside music by Elgar, Sibelius and Richard Strauss. These programs were designed to reflect the versatility of the orchestra as well as to showcase the talents of Australian composers. Jeffes is confident that the Sydney Symphony's Festival appearances will reap enormous benefits:

'One of the aims of the Sydney Symphony's international touring program is to demonstrate Australian excellence overseas and focus attention on Sydney as a world-class cultural destination. We do this in two ways: showcasing the talents of our musicians – 104 of Australia's finest classical artists – and by performing works by outstanding Australian composers and giving them a voice internationally.'

After discussion with Festival Director Jonathan Mills, it was decided that the Sydney Symphony would perform Ross Edwards's violin concerto *Maninyas*, with Dene Olding as soloist. Olding, for whom the concerto was written, is concertmaster of the orchestra and a well-known figure in Australia and internationally. Edwards's 'maninya style' is instantly recognisable as typifying the sound of the Australian bush. Another of Australia's most eminent composers, Peter Sculthorpe, will also feature. Inspired by a visit to Easter Island, Sculthorpe's darkly-titled *Memento Mori* ('Remember you must die') is a commentary on the influence of human settlement on the island. The younger generation of Australian composers is represented by Matthew Hindson, whose work *Energy*, composed as part of the ballet *e=mc2*, will receive its concert premiere in Edinburgh.

tival's lecture series entitled *Explorations*. Armfield will also sit on the panel for the event *Reflecting silenced narratives*, which will discuss how lost narratives surface in artistic expression.

Opera Australia's Edinburgh production will be supported by the BBC Symphony Orchestra eliminating the added logistical challenge of touring an orchestra from Australia. Legge admits that it is nonetheless a massive operation to tour at such a distance, but has confidence in his very experienced team.

The logistics and operations crew at the Sydney Symphony however, are not afforded a similar luxury. The orchestra will move over 100 musicians through eight European cities in two weeks. In short, that means instruments valued at \$6.2 million, taking up 50 cubic metres, travelling as air freight – the equivalent of a 48 foot semi-trailer ... give or take! Or, put another way – too much to fit in the cargo hold of a Boeing 747!

Travelling lighter will be Melbourne-based chamber ensemble, Duo Sol. Violin and piano partners Miki Tsunoda and Caroline Almonte make their Edinburgh Festival debut in a program that incorporates compositions of Ross Edwards and Matthew Hindson alongside Argentinian tango master Astor Piazzolla and the more traditional fare of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*.

By the end of the Festival, Edinburgh audiences will be well versed in the music of Hindson and, particularly, Edwards, whose work also features in a concert by acclaimed choral ensemble Ars Nova Copenhagen, directed by Paul Hillier. Edwards's *Sacred Kingfisher Psalms* was a co-commission for the Festival in association with the Canberra International Music Festival and Ars Nova Copenhagen.



Brett Dean and Amanda Holden at Bliss workshop
Photo: Bridget Elliott,
Sir Charles Mackerras,
Photo: Z Chrapek,
Dene Olding



European audiences are no strangers to the music of Australian composer Brett Dean, and Opera Australia's production of *Bliss* is proving a big drawcard for Edinburgh audiences. Dean's opera, based on the Peter Carey novel of the same title, will make its European premiere at the Festival on September 2. The production will be the world premiere one seen in Sydney and Melbourne earlier in the year. 'Opera Australia is very proud and excited to have the opportunity of "exporting" our national treasure to one of the most famous European International Festivals. Australian voices are already famous internationally, so to combine an all Australian cast with a truly Australian contemporary opera will be a thrill,' enthuses Assistant Music Director of Opera Australia, Tony Legge.

Perhaps somewhat cheekily, Legge wonders just how much of librettist Amanda Holden's 'Aussie lingo' audiences will grasp and to what extent they will resonate with the unfolding drama. Director of the production Neil Armfield may be in a position to share his thoughts when he appears as part of the Festival's

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, Governor of New South Wales, is a further addition to the impressive Australian lineup at this year's Festival. In the *Explorations* series, Professor Bashir will present a lecture entitled *A Scotsman's legacy to Australasia*, which details Scotsman Lachlan Macquarie's contribution to Australia.

Having also made a significant contribution to the musical life of this country is conductor Sir Charles Mackerras. Long established in the UK and oft associated with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Sir Charles will direct a concert version of Mozart's early operatic masterpiece *Idomeneo*. Working with Sir Charles these last few months I have learnt with some surprise that many British musicians are unaware he is, in fact, Australian.

The Lonely Planet *Scotland* guide suggests that booking accommodation for the Edinburgh Festival a year in advance is advisable – with what's on offer in 2010, it's easy to see why. Further information can be found at: www.eif.co.uk

Good luck!

