PIANO SPECTACULAR

2 & 3 JUNE 2012
USQ ARTS THEATRE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND
USQ KEYBOARD TICKLERS

The USQ Keyboard Ticklers is the brainchild of USQ Adjunct Lecturer in Piano Dr Marilyn Meier-Kapavale. Made up principally of the students of the USQ Piano Studio, the ensemble has enjoyed great popularity since its inception in 2010. It is a unique venture in Australian tertiary music schools, and is a vehicle for student development in a variety of ways. Primarily, it develops ensemble skills for the piano students, providing an avenue for artistic expression that is generally unavailable to pianists; it also creates opportunity for students to apply and hone their skills in arranging orchestral works for a different medium; and of course, it provides a high quality, enjoyable musical experience for our audiences. This year we are also pleased to welcome back some of our alumni pianists to join us – we are grateful to them for giving our current students the benefit of their experience and to give practical expression to the School of Creative Arts’ mission to enable emerging artists.

Each year the program has explored a different theme: the novelty of the ensemble allowed for investigation of tonal and textural possibilities in a multiple piano setting in 2010; in 2011 the world of film and movie scores provided the extra-musical impetus; this year we showcase the depth, drama and distinctive emotional colour of Russian music.

PROGRAM

Schêherezade*  NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

I The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship
II The Kalendar Prince
III The Young Prince and the Young Princess
IV Festival at Baghdad; The Sea; The Ship Breaks against a Cliff surmounted by a Bronze Horseman

Selections from Nutcracker^  PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Le the • Dance of the Sugarplum Fairies • March • Trepak

 INTERVAL

Isle of the Dead*  SERGEI RACHMANINOV

Selections from Pictures at an Exhibition*  MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Promenade • Tuileries • Promenade • Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells
Argument at the Market • Speaking the Dead in a Dead Language
The Hut on Fowls’ Legs • The Great Gates of Kiev

Selections from Petrouchka^  IGOR STRAVINSKY

‘Slava’ from Six morceaux
Allegro moderato

1812 Overture*  PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

* Arranged Morgan Chalmers ©2012
^ Arranged Phillip Gearing ©2012
**Scheherazade**

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV  
(1844 – 1908)

Based on *One Thousand and One Nights*, sometimes known as *The Arabian Nights*, Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite *Scheherazade* was composed in 1888. Although based on Arabian tales, the composition, which is considered to be the composer's most popular work, is still firmly Russian in its sensibilities and its flavour of oriental sounds.

The suite is in four movements, with a single sinuous theme, originally written for violin, representing Scheherazade herself appearing throughout. The outer movements are concerned with the sea, with fine stormy writing in both. The inner movements include a battle scene in the second movement, and a seductive dance in the third. Rimsky-Korsakov himself wrote that the piece was not meant to be an exact depiction of Scheherazade's stories, and the titles of the movements are meant to “direct (only) slightly the hearer's fancy on the path which my own fancy had travelled”.

**Selections from Nutcracker**

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY  
(1840 – 1893)

The *Nutcracker* ballet, with the libretto adapted from ETA Hoffmann's story, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* and music composed by Tchaikovsky, premiered in 1892. Prior to its premiere, Tchaikovsky created a suite of eight numbers from the ballet intended for concert performance. The ballet had trouble gaining a foothold in the ballet repertory, but the suite, which presents a sampling of the memorable melodies and distinctive tone colours that characterise all of the music of the ballet, has enjoyed much success, and became one of Tchaikovsky's most famous compositions. Sergei Taneev made the original difficult piano arrangement of the *Nutcracker*, but Tchaikovsky then produced a simplified arrangement of the work in 1892.

**Isle of the Dead**

SERGEI RACHMANINOV  
(1873 – 1943)

Written in 1909, the deeply intense, brooding tone poem, *Isle of the Dead*, is Rachmaninov's creative response to Swiss artist, Arnold Böcklin's (1827–1901) painting by the same title which the composer saw in Paris in 1907. In the painting, a white figure appears to stand in a boat on the river. The figure is Charon, the boatman of the River Styx who rows bodies across the waters from the land of the living to the realm of the dead – a densely wooded island that meets the waters with steep imposing cliffs.

The music conjures the sound of Charon's oars and the progress of the boat in the dark water in an irregular 5/8 time and, as in several of Rachmaninov's works, quotes the first four notes of the *Dies Irae* plainchant, an allusion to death. A change of meter to 3/4 followed by a new theme cast in a higher register represents what Rachmaninov called a theme of life. The music becomes more impassioned but the theme of life is crushed at its climax with the return of the *Dies Irae*. There is a last, lingering backward look before the return to the dark, swaying movement of the opening.

**Selections from Pictures at an Exhibition**

MODEST MUSSORGSKY  
(1839 – 1881)

Occasioned by the death in 1873 of Mussorgsky's close friend and artist, Victor Hartmann, *Pictures at an Exhibition* comprises ten tonal portraits which the composer became inspired to write while strolling among the watercolours and drawings hung on the wall at a memorial exhibition of Hartmann's works in 1874. Mussorgsky became so engrossed in the project that he composed the work in just a few short weeks.

Portraying an imaginary tour of an art collection, the tonal portraits are linked with an interlude (*Promenade*) which also serves as a musical accompaniment for the observer as they progress through the exhibition.

Two *Promenade* movements stand as portals to the suite's main sections. Their irregular meter of alternating five and six beat measures, give the listener the impression of strolling through the gallery to view the next painting. Three untitled interludes present shorter statements of this theme, varying the mood, colour and key in each to suggest reflection on a work just seen or anticipation of a new work glimpsed.
Selections from *Petrouchka*  
**IGOR STRAVINSKY**  
(1882 – 1971)

A comic ballet in four scenes, *Petrouchka* tells the story of an eponymous Russian traditional puppet, who is made of straw and with a bag of sawdust as his body, who comes to life and develops emotions. Stravinsky composed the music for the ballet in 1910-11 and revised it in 1947. The music is characterised by the so-called *Petrouchka* chord, consisting of C major and F# major triads played together, heralding the appearance of the main character.

Although his keyboard music is not considered as important as his other works, *Trois Mouvements de Petrouchka*, the three vividly colourful scenes which the composer extracted from the celebrated ballet and paraphrased for piano in his 1921 is an exception, being viewed as a significant work for the piano literature.

'Slava' from *Six morceaux*  
**SERGEI RACHMANINOV**  
(1873 – 1943)

Rachmaninov's *Six morceaux* is a rarely heard collection of gems from the composer's earlier years, written in 1894. Although not necessarily intended to be played as a set, it can be done so with good effect. An imposing and epic conclusion to the set, *Slava* is an impressive work based on the same Old Russian liturgical chant as used by Mussorgsky in his opera, *Boris Godunov*. The chant is subjected to continuing variations as it builds in intensity to a thunderous climax.

1812 Overture  
**PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**  
(1840 – 1893)

More commonly known as the 1812 Overture, Tchaikovsky's *The Year 1812, Festival Overture in E flat major, Op 49* was written in 1880 to fulfil a commission to commemorate Russia's defense of Moscow against Napoleon's advancing Grande Armée at the Battle of Borodino in 1812.

Tchaikovsky, who disliked composing on commission, was somewhat embarrassed about his new work, writing to his patroness Madame von Meck in October 1880: "The Overture will be very loud and noisy, but I've written it without affection and enthusiasm, and therefore there will probably be no artistic merit in it".

Originally for chorus and orchestra, the overture is best known for its climactic volley of cannon fire, ringing chimes and explosive fireworks conclusion.

**MUSICAL DIRECTOR**  
Phillip Gearing

**ASSOCIATE MUSICAL DIRECTOR**  
Morgan Chalmers

**PIANO COACH**  
Alison Riethmuller

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**PERCUSSION**  
Breanna Eddiehausen, Jamie Nuss, Nick Williams

**CHOIR**  
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**LIGHTING**  
Bob Horstman

**BACKSTAGE ASSISTANTS**  
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**PROGRAM ANNOTATIONS**  
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