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## Rach 2 | Sydney Symphony

Written by [Eliza Egger](#)

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Left - Bernd Glemser

Saturday evenings **Sydney Symphony** concert at the Opera House was an interesting program full of musical associations; a night of musical quotations and melodies that have inspired many derivative works in film, theatre and music.

It was a delight to see an orchestra of this magnitude assembled on the concert hall stage and the rows of double basses and cellos one after the other looked impressive. Under the baton of conductor **Mark Wigglesworth**, the orchestra captured the ironic nature and gloomy unsettling mood of repression in this piece. The juxtaposition of the 'William Tell' theme in the first movement, whilst being humorous, was also deeply unsettling and no doubt a call by the composer for freedom from oppression. The second movement opened with eerily somber chords in the brass section and included breathtaking solos from the first cello and violin. The haunting sound of these instruments floating through the hall added to the chilling and spooky atmosphere of the music. I was unable to fend off images of black and white horror films so creepy and morbid was the mood; it was almost a relief when a child in the audience let out a big sneeze and gave the audience a giggle!! Humorous moments aside, the balance between the different sections of the orchestra was excellent and the conductor managed to make all the instrumental groupings audible in the contrapuntal sections. This symphony, whilst being notable for many things, is a very gloomy, mood dampening work and only received a luke-warm reception from the audience, although there was heated applause for the two string soloists.

Following the Shostakovich was the 'Rach 2' as it's affectionately known and the piece on the program most likely responsible for attracting the majority of Saturday night's audience. Written by Rachmaninov between 1900 and 1901 after his recovery from a nervous breakdown, it is one of the composer's most enduringly popular pieces and the inspiration for many derivative works. Probably the best known of these would be Eric Carmen's song 'All by myself' based on the adagio sostenuto of the second movement.

Pianist **Bernd Glemser** opened the concerto with the famous bell-like tolls on the piano - a mesmerizing and passionate beginning leading to the introduction of the main theme. Made up of three movements, the pianist and orchestra take us on a musical journey of beautiful melodies and thrilling virtuosity and despite the obvious technical challenges, **Mr. Glemser** seemed completely at ease. His fingers danced effortlessly across the keyboard with absolute precision, clarity and warmth of tone. The orchestra also displayed great warmth of tone and the balance between the different instrumental sections was impressive; at no point was one section drowned out by another. **Mr. Glemser** and the **Sydney Symphony** made this work look deceptively simple and the audience showed their great appreciation with an enthusiastic outburst of applause.

The 'William Tell Overture', the gallop theme of which had already made a brief appearance in the Shostakovich Symphony, was the final piece on the program. It was quite interesting to see it at the tail end of a concert for a change and its energy and vitality worked well in this position. As with the 'Rach 2', this piece has also been a great inspiration to other artists and has resulted in many derivative works. The most well known of these to Australian audiences would have to be the Pizza Hut delivery advertisement with its 481 1111 jingle which, I'm sure most will agree, is almost impossible to get out of your head once it's in there. Other famous derivatives include Stanley Kubrik's massacred moog synthesizer version for 'A Clockwork Orange' and Victor Borge's upside down joke.

A select string ensemble began the piece beautifully with a slow string prelude and this led into the storm theme played by full orchestra. The 'Call to the Dairy Cows' captured perfectly the pastoral feel of this section, but of course what everyone was waiting for was the finale 'gallop' heralded by trumpets and full orchestra. Thanks to all the other derivative uses of this tune, it was hard to hear this music without many other associations coming to mind. This didn't really matter though as the orchestra played with such enthusiasm that the mood in the concert hall lifted and many a tired concert goer was well revived! And so ended Saturday night's Sydney Symphony concert - an evening of beautiful music and thoughtful programming that was well received by all.

Sydney Symphony presents  
**RACH 2**

**Conductor** Mark Wigglesworth  
**Piano** Bernd Glemser

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 15  
RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 2  
ROSSINI William Tell: Overture

**Venue:** Sydney Opera House, Concert Hall

**Dates/Times:** 22, 24, 25 September 8pm  
Thursday Afternoon Symphony  
23 September 1.30pm