

# Soirées Musicales



**Old Government House, George Street Brisbane**

**5pm Sunday 25 October and 7.30pm Friday 30 October 2015**

**At home with Lady Chelmsford's Piano - romantic partsongs in a gracious colonial drawing room**

## Program

### Two partsongs

*Der Tanz* (The Dance), D 826

*Des Tages Weihe* (The Day's Consecration), D 763

**Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

### Spanisches Liederspiel (Spanish Song-Play), Op.74

*Erste Begegnung* (First encounter) – duet

*Intermezzo* – duet

*Liebesgram* (Gram of love) – duet

*In der Nacht* (At night) – duet

*Es ist verraten* (It has been revealed) – quartet

*Melancholie* (Melancholy) – soprano solo

*Geständnis* (Confession) – tenor solo

*Botschaft* (Message) – duet

*Der Contrabandiste* (The smuggler) – baritone solo

*Ich bin geliebt* (I am beloved) – quartet

**Robert Schumann (1810-56)**

### Widmung (Dedication), S 566 – piano solo

**Schumann arranged Franz Liszt (1811-86)**

### Duets for two sopranos from Op.63

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)**

*Ich wollt' meine Lieb' ergösse sich* (I wish my love would flow)

*Abschiedslied der Zugvögel* (The bird flock's farewell song)

*Herbstlied* (Autumn song)

### Zigeunerlieder (Gypsy Songs) Op.103

**Johannes Brahms (1833-97)**

*He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein* (Hey, gypsy, strike the strings!)

*Hochgetürmte Rimaflut* (Towering waters of the Rima)

*Wißt ihr, wann mein Kindchen am allerschönsten ist?* (Do you know when my darling is loveliest of all?)

*Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab* (Dear God, you know how often I have rued)

*Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze sein blauäugig schönes Kind* (The dark lad leads his blue-eyed girl to dance)

*Röslein drei in der Reihe blühn so rot* (Three little roses, all in a row bloom so red)

*Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn, mein süßes Lieb* (Does it sometimes cross your mind, my sweet love)

*Horch, der Wind klagt in den Zweigen traurig sacht* (Hark, the wind moans softly in the branches, softly sad)

*Weit und breit schaut Niemand mich an* (Far and wide no one looks at me)

*Mond verhüllt sein Angesicht* (The moon veils its face)

*Rote Abendwolken ziehn am Firmament* (Crimson clouds of evening reach across the sky)

## About the program

The nineteenth century saw a flourishing of domestic music-making, particularly in German-speaking states. All cultured families owned a piano, around which social entertainments focussed, either for sole delight of participants, or in the presence of small audiences. For this burgeoning market a huge amount of repertoire was composed for solo piano with or without voice(s). Countless musical settings appeared, either as a collection which pieces could be selected, or just as commonly, as a suite or 'cycle' intended as an integrated whole. While solo music of composers such as Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms is quite well known, the rich repertoire for vocal ensemble with piano accompaniment is largely neglected. Some partsongs remain popular with choirs, but their true essence is fully revealed when presented by skilled chamber ensembles whose members can take a soloist role when required.

Each of the major German romantic composers created a large body of song. Skilful text setting is displayed in musical interpretations of contemporary poetry, equally evident in repertoire for solo quartet and piano. Stunning harmonies are created by the interplay of well-matched voices in four-part ensembles, in juxtaposition to solo, duet and trio combinations. Just as a solo song cycle traces a narrative thread, some vocal quartet sets are also a throughcomposed entity. This program endeavours to recreate the ambience of the refined salons of the romantic era by featuring some highlights of this repertoire. While the texts are in German, the emotions and moods speak to universal truths and common experiences across centuries. Aspects of love and relationships, also life's pleasures and challenges, are brought to life through a medium which is both artistically satisfying for the performers, and appealing to audiences.

**Franz Schubert** needs no introduction as a song composer, but his partsongs are less often performed. **Der Tanz** conjures the atmosphere of a party of friends, where singing, dancing and drinking would be enjoyed as a relief from daily cares. Composed in early 1828 to a text by Karl Kolumban Schnitzer von Meerau, it belies the challenges that beset Schubert in the last year of his short life. In contrast, **Des Tages Weihe**, probably composed in 1822 to the text of an unknown poet, has religious overtones that are set with broad expressive melodies and rich harmonies.

**Robert Schumann** celebrated his marriage in 1840 to Clara Wieck with a 'Year of Song', of which the cycle *Myrthen* Op.25 (myrtles) is symbolic of their marital vows. The first of the set, **Widmung**, is well known in its original vocal setting, and also as a solo piano arrangement by Liszt, the version which we hear today. Of particular interest is that this particular piece opened the Old Government House program, in November 1906, in which Lady Chelmsford's piano was heard for the first time.

After composing several song cycles, Schumann explored the 'song-play' medium, where a loose plot connects a series of solos, duets and quartets. The **Spanisches Liederspiel** is based on translations of Spanish poetry by Emanuel Giebel, the Iberian culture being evident in the bolero rhythm of the central quartet number and also the final duet. Otherwise, an extreme range of hot-blooded emotions is on display, from the exuberance of first love, through tender serenades, to a melancholy monologue. A single couple is involved in the scene, but the female-male dichotomy is highlighted through duets and also solos, where different aspects of their respective personalities come to the fore. Schumann originally composed 12 songs, of which three were later dropped, including 'Der Contrabandiste' which was published instead as an appendix. We have chosen to include this rousing baritone solo, as it provides a possible motivation for the finale's mood of resignation and resolution in response to 'vicious village gossip'. Perhaps the male lover was after all someone of ill repute, but the female partner can only see his better side.

**Felix Mendelssohn** is less well known than his contemporaries as a song composer, but he devoted just as much attention to the genre with settings of great character and charm. His **Duets Op.63** are models of equal voice duet writing, and in typical romantic vein, images of nature are given a subtext of human emotions. Created variously between 1836 and 1844, the composer's characteristic effervescence is seen in the combination of fast compound time rhythms in keys with several sharps, while his melodic skill is evident in slower tempo of the second duet.

**Johannes Brahms** as a chamber music composer *par excellence* was naturally attracted to the vocal quartet and duet medium, and so created a large body of ensemble repertoire. His **Zigeunerlieder Op.103** were written in 1887 and premiered the following year in Vienna with the composer at the piano. Having already scored a huge hit with his various sets of Hungarian Dances, these vocal settings continue in a similar idiom, dominated by strong *Csárdás* rhythms. The texts were supposedly Hungarian Gypsy songs, freely translated by Hugo Conrat - their short lines and stanzas give Brahms great scope for his kaleidoscopic anthology of captivating miniatures and energetic piano writing.