

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 13, 2009

HENRY PURCELL – 350 YEARS YOUNG AND STILL GOING STRONG

A Purcell Gala at the Melbourne Recital Centre

Sunday 19 April is a red letter day in the history of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic and one of its favourite composers, the great English baroque composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695).

At 5 pm on that day, the RMP launches its 157th Melbourne season by celebrating the great composer's 350th birthday with *A PURCELL GALA*, in the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Hall at Melbourne's exciting new Recital Centre.

Featuring an outstanding cast of Australian and international soloists, the concert will include Purcell's much-loved works *Dido and Aeneas*, along with *Come Ye Sons of Art*, written as a birthday ode in honour of Queen Mary II of England.

A PURCELL GALA also features *Incidental Music* from Abdelazer 'The Moor's Revenge' Jehova, *quam multi sunt*, and *An Evening Hymn*.

Internationally acclaimed mezzo-soprano **SALLY-ANNE RUSSELL** heads an exciting program of established and emerging talent.

RMP Music Director and Chief Conductor **ANDREW WAILES** is thrilled to be celebrating the birthday of the father of English opera in this wonderful concert.

"Purcell's elegance in his treatment of the English word sets him apart from many of those who followed him. It is most fitting that we begin our 2009 season with a concert celebrating this great composer," **Wailes** commented.

Headlining the concert will be a complete concert performance of Purcell's chamber opera *DIDO AND AENEAS*, which forms a very important landmark in the history of English dramatic music. It is often considered the first genuine English opera, and is famous for the deeply moving "Dido's Lament", which comes at the opera's conclusion.

As Queen Dido will be one of Australia's leading opera singers, the internationally celebrated baroque specialist, mezzo soprano **SALLY-ANNE RUSSELL**. Well known throughout Australia, she has also performed in concerts, recitals and on the operatic stage in America, The Netherlands, Austria, the UK, Italy, Germany, New Zealand, Japan and Canada. Most recently Sally-Anne made her Washington DC debut as Ursula in *Beatrice et Benedict* for Washington Concert Opera at the Kennedy Centre and will return to America in July for her eighth season as resident mezzo soloists at the Carmel Bach Festival in California with Bruno Weil.

SALLY-ANNE RUSSELL will be joined by tenor **CHRISTOPHER SAUNDERS**, a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and a singer who has performed roles for leading companies such as the English National Opera, Glyndebourne Opera, and at the Covent Garden Festival. They head an outstanding cast which includes leading Australian countertenors **TOBIAS COLE** and **DANIEL GOODWIN**, along with exciting New Zealand baritone **HADLEIGH ADAMS** and two of Melbourne's finest young sopranos, **EMILY UHLRICH** and **SIOBHAN STAGG**. Sharing the concert platform are 150 members of the **Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra** and harpsichordist **JONATHAN BRADLEY**, all under the baton of RMP Chief Conductor **ANDREW WAILES**.

Wailes is excited about performing in this new addition to Melbourne's cultural scene.

"It's the perfect venue for this style of concert, and a magnificent new facility that will elevate audience comfort to a new level here in Melbourne".

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A PURCELL GALA at the Melbourne Recital Centre

Wailes promises a feast of Purcell's finest music.

"From his haunting March and Funeral sentences made famous in *A Clockwork Orange*, to his joyous and exuberant choruses, and the drama of his incidental music and operas, Purcell stands as a giant of his time. There will be something in this gala concert for all lovers of Purcell's music... music from the royal court, the church, the theatre and the concert hall."

Apart from being considered the finest composer of the English Baroque, Purcell also had a strong influence on the composers of the early twentieth century, most notably Benjamin Britten, who created and performed a realisation of *Dido and Aeneas*, and whose *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is based on a theme from Purcell's *Abdelazar*. At the request of director Peter Greenaway, composer Michael Nyman built the score of Greenaway's 1982 film, *The Draughtsman's Contract* on themes by Purcell from various sources, enabling him to credit Purcell as "music consultant"! Quite a feat for a composer who had been dead for more than 300 years...

For a 17th century composer, Purcell has had rather a lot of influence on contemporary 20th century music.

"There are not many others who have made it into the modern musical arena from over three centuries ago! Among those who quote Purcell as their influences are Pete Townshend of 'The Who', and British rock band "Queen", whose song "Procession" was inspired by the procession from Purcell's "Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary". And Purcell's music was also used in the main theme from the film *A Clockwork Orange*, via a rather ugly synthesizer! More recently, Purcell's music even made it into the film of *Pride & Prejudice*!" explained Wailes.

Henry Purcell is buried adjacent to the organ in Westminster Abbey in London. His epitaph reads, "Here lyes Henry Purcell Esq., who left this life and is gone to that blessed place where only his harmony can be exceeded."

A PURCELL GALA will be presented at 5pm on Sunday 19 April 2009 in the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, at the Melbourne Recital Centre.

Tickets are available from Ticketmaster agencies. Phone bookings: 136 100. Online bookings: www.ticketmaster.com.au

Tickets can be ordered directly from the Melbourne Recital Centre Box Office located on the ground floor of the Melbourne Recital Centre Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm. Payment by cash, EFTPOS, Visa, Mastercard, AMEX.

By email

We accept email bookings at: boxoffice@melbournerecital.com.au or www.rmp.org.au

By mail

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31 Sturt Street
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By phone:

+61 (0)9699 3333 (Melbourne Recital Centre Box Office)

Further interview opportunities with either **Andrew Wailes**, **Sally Anne Russell** or other members of the cast, can be arranged by calling Cavanagh PR - **Julie Houghton** on 0418 102 356 Email: juliehoughton1@hotmail.com. or **Julie Cavanagh**. on 9486 1299 or 0419 306 540 Email: julie@zip.com.au



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