



**ORCHESTRA
WELLINGTON**

Marc Taddei
Music Director

REVELATIONS

**SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER, 7.30PM
MICHAEL FOWLER CENTRE**

ORCHESTRA WELLINGTON

Marc Taddei
Music Director

Natalie Hunt

Nocturne in Black and Gold - The Falling Rocket

2026 SOUNZ COMMISSION FOR ORCHESTRA

AND SISTEMA YOUTH ORCHESTRA

WORLD PREMIERE

Claude Debussy

Nocturnes

Orpheus Choir Wellington, Sopranos and Altos

INTERVAL

Ferruccio Busoni

Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 39

Jian Liu, Piano

Orpheus Choir Wellington, Tenors and Basses

REVELATIONS

In keeping with our season's theme of COLLABORATIONS, REVELATIONS brings together organisations and musicians from across Wellington including Arohanui Strings+, Orpheus Choir Wellington, and pianist Jian Liu as well as SOUNZ Centre for New Zealand Music and composer of tonight's World Premiere, Natalie Hunt.

It is truly a pleasure bringing together world-class talent from across our Cultural Capital, in the spirit of collaboration, to perform for YOU!

This concert is being recorded by RNZ Concert. RNZ Concert champions New Zealand composition and performance by broadcasting local concerts of classical, contemporary, jazz, and folk music, as well as offering interviews and music recordings from around the world.

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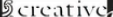
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Natalie Hunt (1985-)

Nocturne in Black and Gold - The Falling Rocket

2026 SOUNZ Commission for Orchestra
and Sistema Youth Orchestra
WORLD PREMIERE

"It has been a joy to be this year's
recipient of the SOUNZ Commission for
Orchestra and Sistema Youth Orchestra
| Te Tono Mahinga a SOUNZ mā te
Rāngai Puoro me te Rāngai Puoro Taiohi
a Sistema.

In composing this piece, I wanted to
not only reflect the considerable talent
of both Arohanui Strings+ and Orchestra
Wellington, but also write a work that
connects to the wider programme. I was
struck by Debussy's *Nocturnes* influence
and decided to write a work inspired by
the *Nocturne* paintings of James McNeill
Whistler too, specifically *Nocturne in
Black and Gold - The Falling Rocket*
(c. 1875). *Nocturne in Black and Gold -
The Falling Rocket* is a beautiful, edgy,
and evocative artwork that I have long
admired, with impressions of fireworks
and dark atmospheric tones.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we have so
many wonderful reasons to gather as
a diverse community and celebrate
our strengths. In Te Whanganui-a-Tara
however, where these celebrations
involve fireworks, it tends to also involve
wrapping up against our famous breeze.
I wanted this work to partly reflect the
local environment we know and am
grateful to be including a pūrerehua
in the colours of this piece. As a piece
inspired by an oil painting, I also
experimented with the concept of a
grisaille, mapping out the base layer of
this work with a particular section of the
orchestra.

This work is written with thanks to all
those who helped it come into fruition -

from those who let me use instruments
and venues to try out ideas, to of course
the wonderful performers themselves.

I am deeply grateful to Orchestra
Wellington, Arohanui Strings+, and
SOUNZ Centre for New Zealand Music
| Toi te Arapūoru for their unstinting
championing of music from Aotearoa.
Ngā mihi nui."

—Natalie Hunt

DURATION: 8 mins

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Nocturnes

Orpheus Choir Wellington

- I. Nuages
- II. Fêtes
- III. Sirènes

Debussy was inspired by the "Nocturne"
paintings of American artist James
McNeill Whistler, and also by poems
from symbolist poet Henri de Régnier.
Whistler called his *Nocturnes*, "...an
arrangement of line, form, and colour
first," — a description that equally suits
Debussy's delicate, magical music. For
these 1899 works, Debussy said he
wanted the first movement, *Nuages*, to
convey "thunderclouds swept along by
a stormy wind; a boat passing, with its
horn sounding." *Fêtes* was inspired by a
festival in Paris' huge park, the Bois du
Boulogne. There's the excited crowd,
there's the rhythms of folk dancing, and
interruptions from the Garde Nationale's
drum and bugle corps who come
marching along to a side-drum. *Sirènes*,
according to Debussy, "depicts the sea
and its countless rhythms, and presently,
amongst the waves silvered by the
moonlight, is heard the mysterious song
of the Sirens as they laugh and pass on."

DURATION: 24 mins

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 39

Jian Liu, piano

Orpheus Choir Wellington

- I. Prologo e Introito: Allegro,
dolce e solenne
- II. Pezzo giocoso: Vivacemente,
ma senza fretta
- III. Pezzo serio: Andante sostenuto,
pensoso
- IV. All' Italiana: Vivace
- V. Cantico: Largamente, più moderato

"...you have to be acutely aware of coordination with the conductor and the orchestra, despite the difficulties of the piano part. It is like chamber music on a gargantuan, truly maximalist scale. Sometimes you are going full throttle at the keyboard but are fully absorbed in the orchestral sound."

— Benjamin Grosvenor, pianist.

Busoni was born to a musical family near Florence and won Rubinstein prizes for composition and piano playing. Nowadays he's best known for his cadenzas for Beethoven's piano concertos and his piano transcriptions of Bach's organ works, which remain in the repertoire. Always restless, he held teaching posts in Moscow, Vienna, Boston, Helsinki, Berlin and Bologna. Both as composer and performer, he seemed to baffle audiences. In 1894 the *Journal de Liege* critic called Busoni "an enigmatic artist, an ironic lightning-flash hurled at all pianists and pianofortes, a swift meteor that vanishes as soon as it appears."

This mammoth concerto is a symphony-length work partially inspired by a Danish/German drama by Adam Oehlenschläger based on the story of Aladdin. Busoni first envisaged it as a staged drama including music, dance and magic. When he reworked it as

a concerto, he kept the men's chorus for the Cantico section of the last movement, capturing there the magical spirit of the original drama, with its lamp that symbolised intuitive inspiration. Premiered in 1904, Busoni later called it the culmination of his first mature period. The concerto blends Busoni's wide background and interests, his playful exploration of German forms and classicism and his Italian melodic ease.

In his mind, the concerto is literally a structure, a temple built with two weighty movements as the outer pillars, a long dreamy central movement as the capstone, flanked by two Italianate scherzo movements, fast and festive. He created a sketch for the score-cover illustrating this, telling his wife the concerto was "represented by architecture, landscape and symbolism. The three buildings are the first, third, and fifth movements. In between come the two "living" ones: Scherzo and Tarantella; the first, a nature-play, represented by a miraculous flower and bird; the second by Vesuvius and cypress trees. The sun rises over the entrance; a seal is fastened to the door of the end building. The winged being right at the end is taken from Oehlenschläger's chorus [from the Aladdin play] and represents mysticism in nature."

The concerto begins with relaxed understatement, sounding familiar even on a first-time hearing. A timpani beat picks up the pace and soon the melodies sweep along like an epic movie, Romantic in the style of Brahms and Liszt. The piano enters with big symphonic chords and leads the orchestra along, showing flashes of inspiration from Chopin, Beethoven, and Wagner. There's no massive climax here; more the outlining of a large, lush world.

The first of the Italianate Scherzo movements, Pezzo giocoso bounds and whirls along in a dotted rhythm, a tarantella complete with tambourine. The tempo pulls back with a clarinet solo in its rich lower register.

The third movement's surging themes introduce wilder, stranger territory. The piano and orchestra keep elaborating them in different ways during its 20-minute span: with heavy fistfuls of notes, with reverent brass chorales, with hushed string lines, with smashed-out pulsing rhythms, and finally peace.

The second Scherzo is motoric, relentless. This might be the explosion of Vesuvius Busoni drew for the score-cover. Yet much of it is a bright, festive storm of notes at impossible speed. A short, flashy cadenza precedes the final chords.

The last movement enters another dreamworld, or perhaps one of the temples from Busoni's explanatory sketch. Busoni was a spiritual and philosophical quester and this music reflects that. The male chorus enters and dominates most of the finale, expressing, according to Busoni, "some original inborn quality of a person which in the course of years comes out again in him purified and matured as he reaches the last phase of his transformations." The words are from Aladdin's "Hymn to Allah" in Oehlenschläger's play.

DURATION: 1 hour 10 mins

Hymn to Allah

Die Felsensäulen fangen an tief und leise zu ertönen:

Hebt zu der ewigen Kraft eure Herzen;
Fühlet euch Allah nah', schaut seine Tat!
Wechseln im Erdenlicht Freuden und Schmerzen;
Ruhig hier stehen die Pfeiler der Welt.
Tausend und Tausend und abermals tausende
Jahre so ruhig wie jetzt in der Kraft,
Blitzen gediegen mit Glanz und mit Festigkeit,
Die Unverwüstlichkeit stellen sie dar.

Herzen erglüheten, Herzen erkalteten,
Spielend umwechselten Leben und Tod.
Aber in ruhigen Harren sie dehnten sich
Herrlich, kräftiglich, früh so wie spät.
Hebt zu der ewigen Kraft eure Herzen
Fühlet euch Allah nah', schaut seine Tat!
Vollends belebet ist jetzo die tote Welt.
Preisend die Göttlichkeit, schweigt das Gedicht.

Deep and quiet, the pillars of rock begin to sound:

Lift up your hearts to the power eternal,
Feel Allah's presence, behold all his works!
Joy and pain interweave in the light of the world;
The world's [mighty] pillars stand peacefully here.
Thousands and thousands and once again thousands
Of years – serene in their power as now –
Flash by purely with glory and strength,
They display the indestructible.

Hearts glowed [so brightly],
hearts became colder.
Playfully interchanged life and death.
But in a peaceful awaiting they stretch out,
Gorgeous, powerfully, early and late.
Lift up your hearts to the power eternal,
Feel Allah's presence, behold all his works!
Thus the dead world comes completely to life.
Praising divinity, the poem falls quiet!



Jian Liu, Piano

As an internationally celebrated concert pianist, Dr. Jian Liu has performed throughout Europe, Asia and North America, appearing at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Steinway Hall in New York, Yale University's Sprague and Woolsey Halls, and Juilliard School's Paul Hall. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras including the China National Symphony Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Phoenix Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestra Wellington and Yale Philharmonia, among others. His recordings include Debussy Sonatas and Piano Trio, nominated for Best Classical Artist at the New Zealand Music Awards. A champion of New Zealand music, he has premiered and recorded numerous local compositions. In 2021, his New Zealand Piano Works publication project received a Creative New Zealand Arts Grant.

Dr. Liu has won prizes at international competitions, including the Horowitz International Piano Competition in Ukraine and the Missouri Southern International Competition in the USA.

He has appeared at festivals worldwide and adjudicated international music competitions. His performances have been broadcast by television and radio stations including CCTV, Suisse Romande Radio and Radio New Zealand.

A dedicated chamber musician, Dr. Liu regularly performs with New Zealand Symphony Orchestra musicians and at festivals throughout New Zealand. He is the founding pianist of Te Kōki Trio, the resident trio at the New Zealand School of Music, which has performed in chamber series across Singapore, China, Australia and New Zealand. His international collaborators include the Takács Quartet, violinist Anthony Marwood, cellist Jian Wang, clarinetist David Shifrin, flautist Ransom Wilson, and pianists Boris Berman, Claude Frank and Maria João Pires.

Dr. Liu is equally committed to education. After four years on the faculty of Yale's Department of Music, he became Deputy Head of School and Head of Piano Studies at the New Zealand School of Music, Victoria University of Wellington, where he has established a reputation as an outstanding pedagogue and overseen the development of the performance curriculum.

He studied with Professor Jin Zhang in China and Dr. Caio Pagano in the USA, completing his Master of Music, Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Musical Arts degrees at Yale School of Music, where he studied and served as an assistant to Professor Claude Frank. Dr. Liu studied with Professor Jin Zhang in China and with Dr. Caio Pagano in the US. He completed his Master of Music, Doctor, and Master of Musical Arts degrees from Yale School of Music, where he was a student and assistant of Professor Claude Frank.



Orpheus Choir Wellington

The choir is often referred to as “the mighty Orpheus” because they bring the big choir experience – dramatic, spectacular, and emotionally charged performances of stunning choral music – to a wide variety of events. These include the Choir’s own sell-out events, often recorded by RNZ Concert, festivals and the occasional pop concert.

Formed in 1947 and amongst the best regarded choirs in New Zealand, Orpheus Choir Wellington are custodians of some of the greatest music ever written, and they love to make it come alive for contemporary audiences of all ages and stages. Their varied and sometimes surprising repertoire includes everything from the most loved works in the choral repertoire to some of the lesser-known and more challenging, as well as Māori waiata. In line with their role at the centre of performing arts in the Wellington Region, they are regularly seen at community events, most recently at the ANZAC memorial at Te Papa, where they performed excerpts from their newly commissioned work E Kiwi E.



Natalie Hunt

Natalie Hunt (she/her) holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science & International Relations from Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, a Bachelor of Music (first class Honours in Instrumental/ Vocal Composition) from Te Kōki New Zealand School of Music, and ATCL in clarinet. As a child, she also learned cello, piano, saxophone, and dance.

Hunt has a particular interest in writing for woodwinds and writing for young musicians. Her compositions are frequently inspired by Aotearoa New Zealand’s natural environment and culture. In 2009, she was named the NZSO National Youth Orchestra Composer-in-Residence with *Only to the Highest Mountain*, and winner of the NZSO/Todd Corporation Young Composer Award with *Rain II*.

Her more recent compositions include *Quartet*, commissioned for the Adam Chamber Music Festival, and a series of 16 clarinet studies for the New Zealand Music Examinations Board titled *Creatures of Aotearoa New Zealand*. When not working, she enjoys reading, exercising in nature, and talking to cats.





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Arohanui Strings+ delivers free, high-quality music education to tamariki and rangatahi facing barriers to access across Wellington and the Hutt Valley. Since 2010, more than 5,000 children and young people have accessed instruments, high-quality tuition and inspirational performance experiences that would otherwise be out of reach.

Through ensemble music-making, our tamariki develop confidence, resilience, teamwork and belonging. We believe every child deserves the opportunity to experience music's transformative power and therefore prioritise musical excellence, believing the strongest social outcomes come not from access alone, but from excellent teaching and inspiring performance opportunities.

In 2026, we provide 16 weekly after-school groups in strings, woodwind and brass, alongside in-school programmes and holiday courses. With participants representing more than 50 ethnicities, we are one of the country's most diverse youth music organisations.

Highlights this year include our advanced orchestra performing for at New Zealand Parliament in June; rangatahi performing alongside Sistema Aotearoa and Auckland Philharmonia musicians for Māori Queen Te Arikinui Kuini Ngā Wai Hono i te Pō at the 2026 Koroneihana celebrations at Tūrangawaewae Marae; and over 50 tamariki and rangatahi performing with Orchestra Wellington at Symphony in the Hutt in May.

Arohanui Strings+ will perform the following pieces on tonight's concert: *Carillion* from Bizet's *L'Arlesienne*, John Ryan's *Polka*, and *Tihei Mauriori*.

Everything we offer is free, sustained by grants and generous supporters. If you can, please help keep our programmes free and support the next generation through music and connection.

Your support helps make that possible. Find out more about Arohanui Strings+ www.arohanuistrings.org

“The violin is his relaxing zone. It’s the one time he can switch off from pressures and just enjoy. Arohanui Strings+ has introduced a European tradition across ethnicities – I never would have considered the violin for him otherwise. It’s helped keep him engaged at school and striving to succeed.”

Parent of Arohanui Strings+ scholarship student
[funded by Mike Todd]



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