

WV  
SO

# Willoughby Symphony Orchestra 60 years

## 2026 Season

Chief Conductor & Artistic Director  
Dr Nicholas Milton AM



# Willoughby Symphony Orchestra 60 years

60 years of symphonic joy  
on the North Shore

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## FROM THE MAYOR

It's a great pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 season of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra (WSO), proudly managed by Willoughby City Council.

This year, we celebrate a remarkable milestone: the Willoughby Symphony's 60th anniversary. Since 1966, the orchestra has been a cornerstone of cultural life on Sydney's North Shore, entertaining and inspiring audiences while championing artistic excellence and community spirit.

From its first concert at Artarmon Public School to its home today in the world-class Concert Hall at The Concourse, the WSO's story is one of growth, dedication and creative ambition. It has played a vital role in making orchestral music accessible to all, and in doing so, has brought people together across generations and backgrounds.

The orchestra's influence extends far beyond the stage. Through its education programs, inclusive initiatives, and commitment to nurturing emerging artists, the WSO continues to create meaningful opportunities for connection, learning and celebration. Its reach spans communities well

beyond Willoughby, enriching the lives of audiences and participants from across the North Shore and beyond.

Led by the passionate and visionary Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Dr Nicholas Milton AM, alongside Associate Conductor Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, the WSO remains as vibrant and forward-looking as ever. This anniversary season promises to honour its proud history while looking ahead to an exciting future.

On behalf of Willoughby City Council, I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to the success of the WSO over the past six decades. I warmly invite you to be part of this historic season as we celebrate 60 years of musical brilliance, creativity and community.

**Cr Tanya Taylor**

Mayor of Willoughby City



## FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

In 2026, we joyfully celebrate an extraordinary milestone – 60 magnificent years since the founding of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra. Over six decades, this phenomenal ensemble

has blossomed into the most outstanding, brilliant, and unique community orchestra in the Australian orchestral landscape.

It is with immense pride and excitement that I invite you to join us on a thrilling musical odyssey in our 60th anniversary year. This season is a celebration of our past, present and future – a radiant tapestry of concerts featuring world-class soloists, unforgettable programs, and the astonishing energy of our remarkable musicians.

Our orchestra is unlike any other. Each performance is infused with passion, joy, and a profound commitment to artistic excellence. These phenomenal musicians don't just play music – they embody a bold vision for our city and cultural community. Their dedication nourishes our region and inspires all who experience their artistry.

With this strong cultural legacy at our heart, we are delighted to present the breathtaking concert offerings of our 2026 season. Every program has been crafted

with care, thought, and deep love of music. Our aim is to take you on a journey – not only through musical time and space, but through the emotions and ideas that connect us all. Each concert is an opportunity to witness the Willoughby Symphony at its best – dynamic, daring, and deeply moving – paired with sensational guest artists who elevate the experience to extraordinary heights.

You can expect to be blown away by the return of the spectacular Mary Carewe with dazzling silver screen hits; the exuberance of Matthew Hindson's flute extravaganza; timeless masterpieces like *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Tchaikovsky's blockbuster Piano Concerto; a soul-stirring season finale with didgeridoo virtuoso William Barton and the majestic 'Organ' Symphony; the triumphant return of the Last Night of the Proms, and so much more.

We can't wait to share this unforgettable anniversary year with you. Let the celebration begin!

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Artistic Director and Chief Conductor,  
Willoughby Symphony Orchestra



**Dr Nicholas Milton AM** is the Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, where his leadership has ushered in a period of exceptional artistic achievement and audience growth. Associated with the ensemble for nearly 40 years, he has played a transformative role in the orchestra's evolution into one of Australia's most respected community orchestras. Renowned for his charismatic stage presence, dynamic interpretations, and musical integrity, Nicholas continues to earn international acclaim as one of Australia's foremost conductors.

The only Australian conductor ever nominated for a GRAMMY® Award, Nicholas also serves as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Göttingen Symphony Orchestra, one of Germany's most respected concert orchestras. As Chief Conductor of the State Opera House in Klagenfurt, Austria, he led a widely praised new production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* from 2021 through 2025 – an achievement that earned him a 'Best Conductor' nomination in the 2025 Austrian Music Theatre Prize.

Nicholas has conducted at leading opera houses including Deutsche Oper Berlin, Komische Oper

Berlin, Volksoper Vienna and Opera Australia in Sydney, as well as in Leipzig, Linz, and Innsbruck. His symphonic engagements span Europe and Asia, with appearances alongside renowned ensembles such as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, SWR Symphony Orchestra, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken, Stuttgart Philharmonic Orchestra, Bruckner Orchestra Linz, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Staatsorchester Wiesbaden, Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra, and Sinfonia Varsovia in Poland.

Before focusing exclusively on conducting, Nicholas enjoyed a distinguished career as a violinist. At the age of 19, he was appointed the youngest-ever concertmaster of a major Australian orchestra – the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra – while also performing for eight years as violinist with the acclaimed Macquarie Trio. His conducting career has included leadership roles with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, the Jena Philharmonic and the State Opera House in Saarbrücken, Germany.

Nicholas studied violin with Harry Curby at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music before pursuing further studies at Michigan State University and The Juilliard School. He holds four master's degrees and a doctorate in music from the City University of New York.

In 2016, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for significant service to the arts as a musician, conductor, and artistic director. A prolific recording artist, Nicholas has released over 60 albums, including the GRAMMY®-nominated recording that brought him international recognition. His Brahms symphony cycle with the Göttingen Symphony Orchestra was recently nominated as Record of the Year by the International Classical Music Awards.







A passionate advocate for music as a force for change, **Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith** is the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of River City Voices, and the Associate Conductor of Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

Sarah made her international debut at The Dallas Opera in 2018 through the Hart Institute for Women Conductors. She has conducted a number of operas with Sydney companies, as well as many Sydney orchestras. She also works extensively with choirs, including previous positions with Macquarie Singers, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir, and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs.

Sarah was one of The Cad Factory's inaugural CASE Incubator residents, a program for contemporary artists with a socially engaged practice, later joining projects in the regional communities of Pinnaroo, South Australia, and Narrandera, New South Wales.

Sarah and her wife Melanie Penicka-Smith are the founders of Penicka-Smith Arts & Event Management, running socially-engaged music projects including Pacific Pride Choir, a touring choir visiting regions where LGBTQIA+ rights are less accepted, and the Lifehouse Volunteer Orchestra, performing at the Chris O'Brien Lifehouse. They co-created and produced *OCDiva*, Dr Eve Klein's one-woman opera for mezzo-soprano and OCD advocate Yasmin Arkininstall.

In 2025, Sarah travelled to the USA and Europe after being awarded a Churchill Fellowship to research socially-engaged orchestral models, and directed the 71st Australian Intersity Choral Festival, held in Sydney.

**The Willoughby Symphony Orchestra (WSO)** is a world-class ensemble with deep roots in the community. Established in 1966, the WSO celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2026, and is one of Australia's oldest and most celebrated orchestras, enriching the life of Willoughby with exceptional music-making. A cultural landmark on Sydney's North Shore, the WSO has earned a reputation for supporting the careers of some of Australia's most exciting emerging musicians and composers.

Performing in its home in the acoustically excellent The Concourse Concert Hall in Chatswood, the WSO is renowned for its outstanding annual concert series. The series encompasses beloved orchestral classics, iconic film music, and family-oriented productions that engage and delight audiences of all ages. The WSO's prestigious Young Composer Award was established in 2004. For more than 20 years, it has been a springboard for a generation of composers, whose pieces are played by a full orchestra as part of a WSO subscription concert.

Featuring up to 80 of Sydney's finest musicians on stage, the orchestra delivers a spectacular subscription series encompassing a remarkable spectrum of symphonic repertoire, coupled with Australia's most outstanding

guest artists, as well as popular classics that inspire and uplift the community. The WSO also presents captivating family concerts – fun and inclusive programs designed to introduce young people to the joy of classical music.

The WSO has been led since 2001 by internationally celebrated orchestral icon and local legend, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, Dr Nicholas Milton AM. Renowned for his charismatic stage presence, powerful interpretations and compelling musical integrity, Nicholas continues to attract international attention as one of the most outstanding Australian conductors working today.

Nicholas is currently Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Göttingen Symphony Orchestra in Germany and has also served for the last four years as Chief Conductor of the State Opera House in Klagenfurt, Austria. Despite a vibrant international schedule, the GRAMMY®-nominated conductor remains passionately committed to the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, an orchestral family with whom he has been associated for nearly 40 joyful years.

Proudly managed by Willoughby City Council.







From the moment you arrive, attending a concert at The Concourse, Chatswood, is an unforgettable experience. An award-winning venue located in the heart of Chatswood, The Concourse is easily accessible by public transport and surrounded by exciting shops to explore and plenty of cafés and restaurants to enjoy before or after every performance. The Concourse also offers convenient onsite parking with direct lift access to the venue.

Arrive early to enjoy a drink at the bar, which opens one hour before the concert, and take in the views over Chatswood. When you hear the bell ring, make your way into the stunning Concert Hall and find your seat.

The Concourse Concert Hall boasts world-class acoustics and a sensational atmosphere. Inspired by traditional European designs, it creates an intimate space with the high ceiling maintaining a sense of grandeur and opulence. Honoured with five awards from the Master Builders Association and a finalist in the Sydney Design Awards, The Concourse, Chatswood, is the premier performance venue on Sydney's North Shore.

Visit [theconcourse.com.au](http://theconcourse.com.au) for more information.







# YOUR PLATINUM SUBSCRIPTION

## More than a seat.

Celebrate the orchestra's 60th anniversary with our music family.  
Be involved.

### Your Platinum Subscription will include:

- ◆ All 5 Main Season Concerts
- ◆ 2 Special Concerts:
  - Last Night of the Proms
  - Spirit of Christmas
- ◆ An exclusive platinum reception hosted by Dr Nicholas Milton AM followed by a closed rehearsal at The Concourse with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra

Type	Adult	Concession	Youth
Platinum Subscription	\$508	\$428	\$235



IMAGE: Rosa Doric



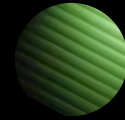


IMAGE: Keith McInnes



1. **HOLLYWOOD**

14-15 FEBRUARY



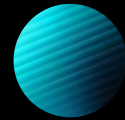
2. **MAGIC FLUTE**

23-24 MAY



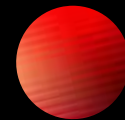
3. **PICTURES AT  
AN EXHIBITION**

4-5 JULY



4. **HYMN OF PRAISE**

27 SEPTEMBER



5. **ORGAN SYMPHONY** 7-8 NOVEMBER



# HOLLYWOOD

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

**Mary Carewe**

Vocals



1.

Saturday **14 February** 7pm

Sunday **15 February** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

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Repertoire includes music from:

*Star Wars*

*Cabaret*

*An American in Paris*

*Breakfast at Tiffany's*

*The Godfather*

*The Spy Who Loved Me*

*Pirates of the Caribbean*

*Frozen*

*The Wizard of Oz*

*Superman*

*Skyfall*

Lights, camera, action! Revel in the glitz and glam of Hollywood when the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra opens its 2026 season with a sparkling tribute to Tinsel Town. Dazzling British concert and recording star Mary Carewe returns to The Concourse to join Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Dr Nicholas Milton AM and the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra in this breathtaking showcase of hits from the silver screen. Experience showstopping numbers from classics like *Cabaret*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The Wizard of Oz* alongside modern anthems like *Skyfall* from the thrilling James Bond film and *Let it Go* from the Disney phenomenon *Frozen*. Marvel at the power of a live orchestra in full flight as the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra brings to life music from *Star Wars*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *The Godfather* and much more.





# MAGIC FLUTE

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

**Meret Louisa Vogel**

Flute

2.

Saturday **23 May** 7pm

Sunday **24 May** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

**Mozart**

Overture to *The Magic Flute*

**Matthew Hindson**

House Music

**Brahms**

Symphony No.2 in D, Op.73

Join Dr Nicholas Milton AM and the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra on an electrifying musical adventure. Mozart's spectacular Overture to *The Magic Flute* captures the excitement and grandeur of the composer's final opera, which tells the story of a prince who overcomes fearsome challenges to marry a princess – with a little help from a magic flute. More than two centuries later, Australian composer Matthew Hindson's energetic flute concerto *House Music* redefines what is possible on the instrument. Hear young German flute superstar Meret Louisa Vogel produce extraordinary effects in a virtuosic masterpiece that will astonish and delight. The concert comes to a serene close with Brahms' gorgeous Second Symphony, written during a lake-side summer holiday in Pörttschach, just outside Klagenfurt in Austria – where Nicholas has spent the past four years as Chief Conductor at the State Opera House.



# PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

**Avan Yu**

Piano

3.

Saturday **4 July** 7pm

Sunday **5 July** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

**Mussorgsky, arr. Rimsky-Korsakov**

Night on Bald Mountain

**Tchaikovsky**

Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat  
minor, Op.23

**Mussorgsky, arr. Ravel**

Pictures at an Exhibition

Stroll through Mussorgsky's musical art gallery with Dr Nicholas Milton AM and the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra in an unforgettable concert of Russian classics. Ravel's colourful orchestration of Mussorgsky's piano masterpiece *Pictures at an Exhibition* breathes magic into the composer's musical depictions of artworks from the majestic *Old Castle* to Baba Yaga's quirky *Hut on Hen's Legs*. Star pianist Avan Yu returns to The Concourse to perform Tchaikovsky's formidable Piano Concerto No.1, one of the undisputed masterpieces of the Romantic piano repertoire. The concert opens with Mussorgsky's thrilling *Night on Bald Mountain*, which many will remember from Disney's iconic 1940 animation *Fantasia*.

*This concert is made possible thanks to a generous donation by Dr Keith and Eileen Ong.*





# HYMN OF PRAISE

**Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith**  
Associate Conductor

**Willoughby Symphony Choir**



4.

Sunday **27 September** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

**Ella Macens**  
Flight

**Miloslav Pěnička**  
Gemini Suite

**Winner of the  
2026 Young Composer Award**

**Mendelssohn**  
Lobgesang (Hymn of Praise)

Celebrate the boldness and energy of youth when Associate Conductor Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith leads the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra in Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* (*Hymn of Praise*), alongside a trio of exuberant Australian works. Hear musical history in the making as the orchestra unveils the winner of the 2026 Young Composer Award, paired with a joyous work, *Flight*, by the 2017 award-winner and rising star composer Ella Macens. The wistful third movement from Miloslav Pěnička's *Gemini Suite*, *Up in the Fluffy Clouds*, delighted audiences at The Concourse in 2025. This year, by popular demand, the orchestra performs the world premiere of the *Gemini Suite* in full, before the Willoughby Symphony Choir joins the orchestra to bring this concert to an uplifting close with Mendelssohn's stunning *Lobgesang*, written in 1840 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the invention of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press. Don't miss this vibrant showcase of youth and innovation.

*The Young Composer Award is generously supported by Mark Wakely in memory of Steven Alward.*

# ORGAN SYMPHONY

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**  
Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

**William Barton**  
Didgeridoo



5.

Saturday **7 November** 7pm

Sunday **8 November** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

**Berlioz**

Roman Carnival Overture

**Sculthorpe**

Earth Cry

**William Barton**

Birdsong at Dusk

**Saint-Saëns**

Symphony No.3 in C minor,  
Op. 78, 'Organ'

Hear Dr Nicholas Milton AM and the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra pull out all the stops when they perform Saint-Saëns' monumental 'Organ' Symphony, one of the best-loved symphonies of all time, whose famous theme was used to great effect in the cherished Australian film *Babe*. World-renowned didgeridoo virtuoso and proud Kalkadunga man William Barton joins the WSO to perform the majestic *Earth Cry*, written by his long-time musical collaborator and distinguished Australian composer, Peter Sculthorpe. Experience this Australian classic, which depicts the vastness and beauty of the outback, alongside William's own *Birdsong at Dusk*, inspired by the sound of birds the composer heard from the verandah of a friend's beach house in far north-western Queensland. Berlioz's festive *Roman Carnival Overture* opens the concert with a party.





IMAGE: Keith McInnes

# MAIN SEASON CONCERT TICKETS

## Become a subscriber

Join the orchestra in this milestone year of exceptional music-making.  
Choose flexibly between 3, 4 or 5 concerts:

Type	Adult tickets	Concession tickets	Under 35 tickets
5 concerts	\$348	\$305	\$145
4 concerts	\$284	\$251	\$116
3 concerts	\$218	\$193	\$87

Get the most out of 2026 and book a Platinum Subscription (head to page 15 for more information)

## Single tickets

Type	Ticket price
Adult	\$88
Child u/ 16	\$19
Concession	\$78
Family (1 adult, 1 child u/16 free)	\$88
Youth u/35	\$35
Groups 10+	\$60
Groups 20+	\$58

To ensure an enjoyable experience for all patrons, we recommend children be aged 5 or older to attend.

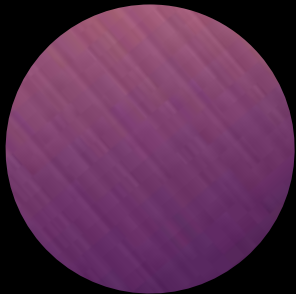
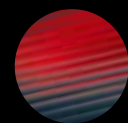




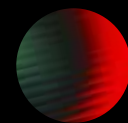


IMAGE: Tony Newby



LAST NIGHT  
OF THE PROMS

8-9 AUGUST



SPIRIT OF  
CHRISTMAS

13 DECEMBER



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

# LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

**Maria Lindsay**

Concertmaster and Soloist

**Willoughby Symphony Choir**

**Willoughby Band**



Saturday **8 August** 7pm

Sunday **9 August** 2pm

The Concourse Concert Hall

Get ready for a night of flag-waving fun as the Last Night of the Proms returns to The Concourse in 2026 in honour of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra's 60th anniversary season. Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Dr Nicholas Milton AM is Master of Ceremonies in this beloved tribute to the festive finale of the world's largest classical music festival, for which the orchestra is joined by the Willoughby Symphony Choir and Willoughby Band, presenting a program of vibrant favourites alongside popular classics – with plenty of opportunities to sing along. Experience stirring performances of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, Parry's glorious hymn *Jerusalem*, Handel's rousing 'Hallelujah' Chorus and Tchaikovsky's bombastic *1812 Overture* and much more in a concert extravaganza that will have you on your feet.



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

# SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

**Peter Ellis**  
Conductor

**Willoughby Symphony Choir**

Sunday **13 December** 2pm

The Concourse Concert Hall

Celebrate the festive season with joyful music as Peter Ellis leads the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Choir in filling The Concourse with holiday cheer. From cherished carols and timeless classics to delightful surprises and revelations, experience the enchantment of the season with family and friends in this heartwarming Christmas concert. Experience a breathtaking arrangement of *O Holy Night*, while the young and young at heart can expect a visit from a very special Christmas guest. Don't miss out on what promises to be our most uplifting performance of the year – it's our special Christmas gift to our wonderful audience, whose energy and enthusiasm delight and inspire us all year round.





# SPECIAL PRESENTATION TICKETS

## Single tickets

Type	Ticket price
Adult	\$106
Child (under 16)	\$48
Concession	\$95
Family (2 adult, 2 child)	\$294
Youth u/35	\$85
Groups 10+	\$72
Groups 20+	\$69

Children aged under 2 years at the time of the performance may be seated on a parent's lap free of charge. All children occupying a seat or aged 2+ years must hold a valid ticket.



IMAGE: Keith McInnes

# MUSICAL PICTURES

**Dr Nicholas Milton AM**

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director



Saturday **4 July** 2pm

**The Concourse Concert Hall**

**All tickets: \$35**

Children aged under 2 years at the time of the performance may be seated on a parent's lap free of charge. All children occupying a seat or aged 2+ years must hold a valid ticket.

Running time: 60 minutes

Join the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra on a thrilling journey of musical discovery, featuring selections from two of Mussorgsky's best-loved works, in a delightful one-hour concert for the young and young at heart. Marvel at how the symphony orchestra uses incredible colours to produce chilling, electrifying, wondrous and exciting moments in Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*, one of the most popular short pieces for orchestra. Then take a tour of the art gallery with music from *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Dr Nicholas Milton AM will be your tour guide, introducing the 'promenade' music that takes you from picture to picture, pointing out the unique colours created by different instruments along the way, and revealing how the orchestra paints these dramatically different artworks in sound. Children in the audience will have the opportunity to create their very own artworks, inspired by Mussorgsky's magnificent music.



# 2026 SEASON CALENDAR

January	February	March	April
	<b>14-15</b> Hollywood		
May	June	July	August
<b>23-24</b> Magic Flute		<b>4</b> Musical Pictures <b>4-5</b> Pictures at an Exhibition	<b>8-9</b> Last Night of the Proms
September	October	November	December
<b>27</b> Hymn of Praise		<b>7-8</b> Organ Symphony	<b>13</b> Spirit of Christmas

# HOW TO BOOK

Bookings can be made online or via phone, email or in person at The Concourse Box Office.

Online bookings:  
[willoughbysymphony.com.au](http://willoughbysymphony.com.au)

**The Concourse Box Office**  
**02 8075 8111**  
**[concourse\\_boxoffice@century.com.au](mailto:concourse_boxoffice@century.com.au)**

Open Monday, Thursday and Friday, 9am – 4pm

The Concourse Box Office is also open one hour prior to each ticketed performance at The Concourse.

# DONATIONS

Your gift helps bring the beauty and vitality of orchestral music to the area and maintain its role as a vital part of the community.

With your assistance we can:

- Commission new works by emerging Australian composers
- Engage world class soloists for our concerts
- Support the development of musicians and foster emerging talent
- Build a library of music and purchase new instruments.

## BE PART OF THE MUSIC

Thank you to our 2025 donors for their financial contributions to the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, please contact the Arts & Culture team at [wso@willoughby.nsw.gov.au](mailto:wso@willoughby.nsw.gov.au) or call 0499 199 929.

**Maestro: \$20,000+**  
**Symphony: \$10,000+**  
**Oratorio: \$5,000+**  
**Concerto: \$2,000+**  
**Overture: \$1,000+**

## OUR DONORS

### ORATORIO

Mark Wakely  
Dick and Pip Smith  
Foundation

### CONCERTO

Judy Hunt  
Sylvia Klineberg  
Mark Parrish

### OVERTURE

Graeme Cruise



IMAGE: Keith McInnes



The Concourse Concert Hall  
Level 1, 409 Victoria Ave Chatswood

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[theconcourse.com.au](http://theconcourse.com.au)

