



RICHARD STRAUSS 1864-1949

**Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op.40**

1	I. Der Held (The Hero)	4'08
2	II. Des Helden Widersacher (The Hero's enemies)	3'23
3	III. Des Helden Gefährtin (The Hero's companion)	12'43
4	IV. Des Helden Walstatt (The Hero's deeds of war)	7'10
5	V. Des Helden Friedenswerke (The Hero's works of peace)	6'04
6	VI. Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung (The Hero's retirement from the world)	11'49

RECORDED 24 FEBRUARY 1996 IN THE CONCERT HALL OF THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

**John Harding concertmaster**

**Edo de Waart conductor**

CLAUDE DEBUSSY 1862-1918

**La Mer (The Sea) – Three Symphonic Sketches**

7	I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From dawn to noon on the sea)	8'59
8	II. Jeux de vagues (Play of waves)	6'55
9	III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue of the wind and the sea)	7'55

RECORDED 8 OCTOBER 2005 IN THE CONCERT HALL OF THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

**Gianluigi Gelmetti conductor**

Total Playing Time 69'26

**Sydney Symphony**

RICHARD STRAUSS 1864-1949

**Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Op.40**

Strauss was a quintessentially and proudly German artist, whose symphonic poems attempt to bring together the philosophical and descriptive with the abstract ideals of the symphonic tradition. And he was blessed with a healthy ego. His friend, the French writer Romain Rolland, quotes him as saying, with specific reference to *Ein Heldenleben*, 'I don't see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.' Strauss was, however, given to self-conscious hyperbole, and we should take his gag about being 'as interesting as Napoleon' with a grain of salt, especially in light of his remark to his father that it was only partly true that Strauss himself was the 'hero' of *Ein Heldenleben*.

And as Norman Del Mar points out, Strauss had 'too much sense of humour to pompously proclaim himself a hero to the whole world'. It is Strauss's life as an artist which furnishes the 'autobiographical' elements of *Ein Heldenleben*, elements that can be seen as analogous to elements in the life of any creative individual.

The idea for *Ein Heldenleben* evidently came to Strauss while he was at work on the symphonic poem *Don Quixote*. In 1898 he wrote, slightly facetiously: 'Beethoven's *Eroica* is so little beloved of our conductors, and is on this account now only

rarely performed, that to fulfil a pressing need I am composing a largish tone poem entitled *Heldenleben*, admittedly without a funeral march, but yet in E flat, with lots of horns, which are always a yardstick of heroism.' The score uses eight horns, to be precise, not to mention five trumpets, two tubas, quadruple woodwind and two harps.

*The Hero* 'sings himself' in a long and, significantly, unaccompanied theme beginning low in the horns and strings and bounding up the arpeggio of E flat through two octaves in its first bar. The theme contains a number of strongly profiled motifs, which are subjected to development representing the 'primary unfolding of abilities'. After a fully scored climax, a new theme appears, described by Del Mar as the hero's 'ultimatum', which is stated six times and each time answered by silence. Finally, a magisterial chord of the dominant seventh leaves the hero waiting for the world's response.

In a masterly dramatic stroke, the answer comes from *The Hero's enemies*, or critics, in a complex of themes ranging from thin-lipped solos for flute and oboe to the trudging motif for tubas said to represent rhythmically the Munich critic Doktor Döhning. The hero responds with a long and beautiful melody, which serves only to provoke the critics to more hysterical attacks.

Ignoring the critics, the music now turns to *The Hero's companion*, by far the longest and most elaborate movement in the whole work. The burden

of representing the hero's companion falls largely to the solo violin – reminding us that Pauline Strauss was a singer, whose voice inspired so much of Richard's work. According to Rolland, Strauss said, 'It's my wife I wanted to portray. She is very complex, very much a woman, a little depraved, something of a flirt, never twice alike, every minute different from what she was the minute before.' Certainly, Strauss's portrait is of a complex character, and is not, as Del Mar notes, always flattering.

The love scene is interrupted by a call to battle, which Michael Kennedy takes pains to point out is about the battlefield of the soul, rather than crude militarism. *The Hero's deeds of war* are depicted with uncompromising violence, though the progression of the music leaves it in no doubt that the hero will prevail, and the pervasive waltz time suggests some ironic distance on the composer's part. When the tumult and the shouting dies, the music describes *The Hero's works of peace*, which Strauss depicts in 30 quotations from eight of his works. Who else's works would have been appropriate?

*The Hero's retirement from the world* formally recapitulates material and synthesises it. Memories of battle are dissipated, memories of love are comforting. Strauss (aged 34 when he composed the work) can't have been thinking of retirement, but convincingly describes a state in which the hero's soul has been refined by experience. The work originally ended with the ecstatically beautiful

passage for horn and violin (again representing the love of his life) which we hear before the final brass apotheosis. Strauss was stung by a friend's criticism that he could only ever compose quiet endings (so much for his egotism). In old age he derided the work's final chords as 'The Hero's State Funeral'.

**Gordon Kerry**

CLAUDE DEBUSSY 1862-1918

### **La Mer – Three Symphonic Sketches**

*Never before had that marvellous music La Mer appeared so seductive and yet mysterious at the same time, so imbued with the enigmatic life of the Cosmos, than on that evening when her great creator, with a gentle hand, was ruling over her waves.*

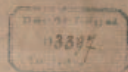
So wrote a young Russian composer, Lazare Saminsky, on hearing Debussy conduct *La Mer* in St Petersburg in 1913. But the work's greatness had by no means seemed self evident when it first appeared in 1905. Debussy himself was weathering a personal scandal, having left his wife, and part of the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Parisian public may stem from its disapproval. The first performance, too, was by all accounts under-rehearsed and the conductor Camille Chevillard unsympathetic to Debussy's style. The composer and conductor Lalo complained that he could neither hear, see nor feel the sea, and a reviewer in Boston wrote that 'we clung like a drowning man to a few fragments of the tonal wreck, a bit of

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Cover of the first-edition score for Debussy's *La Mer*, showing a detail from Hokusai's *The Great Wave at Kanagawa* (A. Durand & fils, 1905). Photo: akg-images

## LA MER



theme here, a comprehensible figure there, but finally this muted-horn sea overwhelmed us.'

The point missed by the authors of such remarks, however, is that Debussy's music (both generally speaking and in regard to this work) is not intended as visual imagery, or the soundtrack to some imaginary film. (This is what Debussy's colleague Satie was burlesquing when he praised the first movement, *From Dawn to Noon on the Sea*, by saying he particularly liked the bit 'around a quarter to eleven'.) The composer may have invited such misinterpretations: in subtitled the work 'Three Symphonic Sketches' he of course evokes the media of visual art; moreover, he often used terms like 'colour' and 'shading' when discussing his music. But in 1903, when he began work on *La Mer*, Debussy wrote to a friend from the Burgundian countryside:

*You may not know that I was destined for a sailor's life, and that only chance led me in another direction... You will say that the ocean does not exactly bathe the hills of Burgundy, and my seascapes may be studio landscapes, but I have an endless store of memories, and in my mind they are worth more than reality, whose beauty often weighs heavily on the imagination.*

The work, then, is about the *idea* of the sea rather than being a representation of it.

Debussy's genius for orchestration and subtle rhythmic organisation certainly make for an

evocative work where it is possible to imagine the crash of waves, the call of seagulls and the protean movement of light on water. The final climactic moments of the first movement, for instance, somehow create a sense of emerging from the deep into the light.

Other masterly touches abound: the unusual timbre of cellos divided into four parts; the use of muted horns (which Debussy admitted to taking from the music of Weber) to evoke space; the soloistic use of wind instruments and harp.

But *La Mer* is as much 'symphonic' as it is 'sketch'. Its three movements are by no means simply rhapsodic, but rather show Debussy's subtle and attentive approach to form. In the first movement his careful development of short motifs is perfectly symphonic; the second movement, *Play of Waves*, is, among other things, a symphonic scherzo; and the third movement – which has one of the rare 'big finishes' of any work by this composer – is a symphonic finale. (This movement, with its references back to the first, also shows Debussy's adherence to the notion of cyclical form that he learned from César Franck.)

The pianist and Debussy expert Roy Howat has also shown how Debussy's structure corresponds to the ancient Greek idea of the Golden Section, where a line is divided so that the ratio of the shorter portion to the longer portion forms the same ratio as the longer portion does to the whole

length. (The façade of many a Classical temple is built such that the ratio between its height and width corresponds to these divisions.) By applying this formula to time, a composer can plot where significant events (changes of speed, colour, moods or metre) will have the greatest dramatic effect. Howat has argued persuasively that the moment in the last movement of *La Mer* where the violins play a soft, impossibly high harmonic represents the Golden Section of the piece.

By a nice paradox, Debussy's marvellous musical reflection on the constant flux of the sea is achieved by the most painstaking and careful calculation. Not for nothing did the published score carry the intricately designed woodcut *The Hollow Wave* by the Japanese artist Hokusai.

**Gordon Kerry**

**Edo de Waart** b. 1941

Renowned as an 'orchestra builder' with the ability to transform his orchestras into world-class ensembles, Edo de Waart was Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony from 1994 until 2003. He is Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and he appears regularly with the world's leading orchestras and musicians and in the major concert halls and opera houses. Other posts have included Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and the Netherlands Opera, and Music Directorships of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra.

Born in Amsterdam, Edo de Waart studied oboe, piano and conducting at the Music Lyceum in Amsterdam and, upon graduation, was appointed Associate Principal Oboe of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Two years later he won the Dimitri Mitropoulos Conducting Competition in New York, subsequently serving as Assistant Conductor to Leonard Bernstein at the New York Philharmonic. Returning to the Netherlands, he was appointed Assistant Conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra under Bernard Haitink, and in 1967, Conductor of both the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Netherlands Wind Ensemble.

His discography includes an acclaimed Mahler cycle with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, the



Edo de Waart

complete orchestral works of Rachmaninov, and recordings of orchestral works by Wagner.

Edo de Waart is a Knight in the Order of the Dutch Lion and an Honorary Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia – a reflection of his invaluable contribution to Australian cultural life during his decade with the Sydney Symphony.

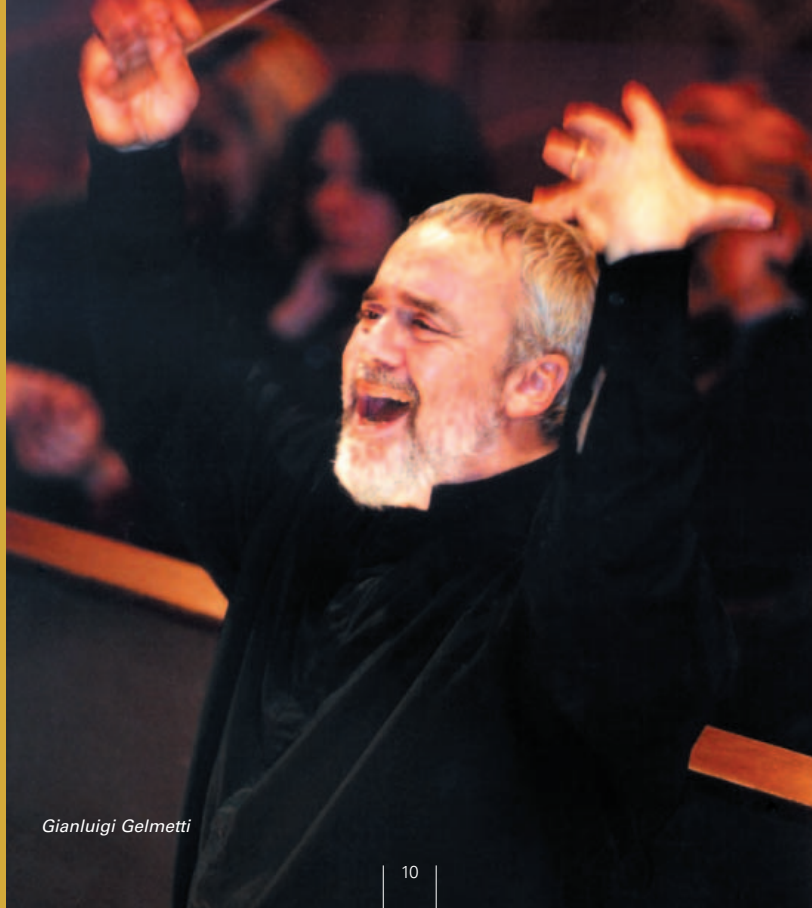
**Gianluigi Gelmetti** b. 1945

Gianluigi Gelmetti, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony, studied with Sergiu Celibidache, Franco Ferrara and Hans Swarowsky, and for ten years he conducted the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted many of the leading orchestras in the world and appears regularly at international festivals.

He has been Music Director of the Rome Opera Theatre since 2000. He has also worked regularly at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and conducted *William Tell* at the Rossini Opera Festival. His interpretation of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* earned him the title Best Conductor of the Year from *Opernwelt*. In 1997 he won the Tokyo critics' prize for the best performance of the year of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and in 1999 he was awarded the Rossini d'Oro Prize. He has been honoured as Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France and Grande Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana in Italy.

Gianluigi Gelmetti's discography includes operas by Salieri, Rossini, Puccini and Mozart, the complete orchestral music of Ravel, the late symphonies of Mozart and works by many 20th-century composers, including Stravinsky, Berg, Webern, Varèse and Rota. Among his recordings are *William Tell*, *Iris*, *La fiamma*, Bruckner's Sixth Symphony and Rossini's *Stabat mater*.

Gianluigi Gelmetti is also a composer; his works include *In Paradisum Deducant Te Angeli*, written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Franco Ferrara's death, *Algos*, and *Prasanta Atma*, in memory of Sergiu Celibidache. He has taught at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena since summer 1997.



Gianluigi Gelmetti

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