

Pianist and polymath Stephen Hough returns to Australia for his fourth Musica Viva tour in which he presents the Australian premiere of his third piano sonata

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“The most perfect piano playing conceivable”

The Guardian

A familiar face to Musica Viva audiences, the much-loved and **acclaimed British-Australian pianist Stephen Hough** is returning to Australian shores in April for his fourth Musica Viva tour. With him, Hough will bring a wonderful recital program offering a listening experience of great emotion and breathtaking virtuosity.

Over the course of his career, Stephen Hough has distinguished himself as a true polymath, not only securing a reputation as a **uniquely insightful concert pianist**, but also as a writer and composer. His artistic activities extend to painting, and he is a noted connoisseur of fine tea, perfume and hats. Hough’s upcoming recital program lightly references some of these extra-musical things.

Hough will open his Australian program with one of Schubert’s late sonatas, a ‘sonata of sighs’, thought to have been written just after the diagnosis of what was to be his final illness.

“In the Schubert there almost isn’t any light at all,” says Hough. “Even when it goes into the major, it’s more heartbreaking than it is in the minor – that’s of course something that Schubert does really well.”

Hough describes the whole of the first half as a big progression from darkness to light and continues, “In the Franck Prelude, Chorale and Fugue there is this incredible, deep-suffering piece that, at the end, has this amazing opening-out. So you really do come out of the darkness.”

Following the Schubert and Franck is **Hough’s latest piano work, the Sonata No. 3, ‘Trinitas’**, which will make its **Australian premiere** on this tour.

In the new sonata, commissioned jointly by the Catholic magazine *The Tablet* and the Barbican Centre, Hough – whose Catholic faith is a driving force in his creativity – has been inspired by the symbolism of the number three and what he sees as the parallel dogmas of the Trinity in the church and of 12-tone serialism in music.

“There’s a triptych idea behind this as well: the three movement Schubert, the Franck in three parts, and my sonata being the ‘Trinitas’,” says Hough.

Concluding the program, in the second half, are stunning pieces by Liszt: selections from the charming *Forgotten Waltzes*, and from the *Transcendental Studies*, which demand virtuosity with elegance.

“I feel a very strong connection with Liszt because I play so much of his music,” says Hough. “But I see other connections as well; connections between Liszt and Schubert because Liszt’s transcriptions brought Schubert’s song literature to a wider audience. Then Franck’s connection with Liszt: he was someone who lived in Paris in that Lisztian time and began his life writing Lisztian pieces with incredible virtuosity.”

Hough is also looking forward to returning to Australia, a country he holds dear to his heart because his father was born in Newcastle. He too holds Australian citizenship.

“I love going to Australia,” he says. “I love the quality of the light and space – not just geographical, but also artistic. The traditions there are much less lengthy and ‘stuck’. There is room to feel that you can bring this music and it’s fresh and new.”

Stephen Hough will tour to Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle, Hobart, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth and Coffs Harbour. For full tour information visit musicaviva.com.au/Hough