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Melbourne Bach Choir's 2026 20th Anniversary Season

Concert 2: Rachmaninov's All Night Vigil (Opus 37), and Ukrainian Art Songs

Following their triumphant performance of J.S. Bach's St Matthew Passion on Good Friday at Melbourne Recital Centre, the Melbourne Bach Choir returns with Rachmaninov's All Night Vigil (Opus 37), plus Art Songs by Ukrainian composer Jul'ij Meitus. Proudly presented by the MBC Chamber Choir, the second of four celebratory 20th anniversary concerts is at St John's Church, Camberwell on 12 June 2026 at 7.30pm.

Regarded as a crowning achievement of the "Golden Age" of Russian Orthodox sacred choral music, Rachmaninov's All Night Vigil - a 15-movement collection of evening Vespers, night Matins and culminating in the dawn 'Prime' - is a significant inclusion in MBC's 2026 repertoire, with the choir having presented it for the first time in 2017.

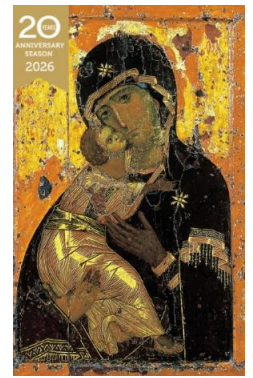
"The MBC Chamber Choir are sounding better than ever" says Artistic Director Rick Prakhoff, "and are absolutely ready for the enormous challenge presented by this music. Written for a choir divided into 12 parts, is enormously challenging, and calls for strong voices singing in extended ranges, such as basses singing as low as a B flat. Already in our first few rehearsals the choir has more than met the challenge of this work, and I come away from rehearsals totally invigorated and excited for what promises to be a wonderful performance".

Rachmaninov's All Night Vigil (Opus 37)

Melbourne Bach Chamber Choir's winter offering features soloists mezzo-soprano Belinda Paterson, tenor Michael Petrucelli and bass Aleksander Pokryshevsky, accompanied by Kathryn Pisani. Rachmaninov's All Night Vigil (also known as 'The Vespers') will be sung in Church Slavonic, the liturgical language for all non-Greek churches in the Orthodox tradition, and promises thrill, challenge, and personal significance as each soloist brings their own unique and individual perspective.

"I'm looking forward to the depth and richness of sound that comes from singing All-Night Vigil with the Melbourne Bach Choir", says Pokryshevsky. "Rachmaninov's writing in this piece is both profound and deeply expressive, and there's something very special about experiencing that collectively within the ensemble. As a bass, it's incredibly rewarding to be part of the harmonic foundation of the choir — those low lines have a unique power to shape the atmosphere of the entire work. It's a piece I love and performing it with such a dedicated group of musicians makes it all the more meaningful".

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“The Vespers is a piece I have wanted to sing for a long time. It’s great to have this opportunity to share my first performance of it with such an incredible lineup of artists”, says Paterson, “and the Melbourne Bach Choir has never been sounding better. It is always a joy to work with them. It’s going to be very beautiful, moving, thought-provoking and uplifting.”

For Petrucelli, this upcoming performance promises a deeply emotional response, for both audience and performer alike. “Rachmaninov’s Vespers contain some of the most hauntingly beautiful choral music that I have heard. I am also a sucker for a good melody, and the tenor soloist has been given an extremely beautiful one in the fifth item, so I am thrilled to be performing it for a live audience. In the Vespers, the audience will experience the visceral nature of a live choral sound. There is nothing quite like it. Several sections will have you listening on the edge of your seat, and a few moments later, in awe at the strength of a full choir singing fortissimo! They will also be extremely lucky to experience the sonorous low notes that Rachmaninov enjoyed writing for the basses in the cadences in many of the items”.

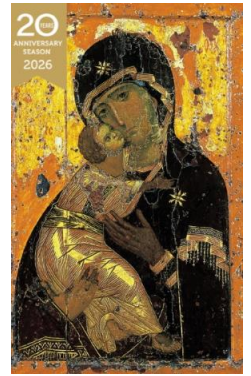
Ukrainian Art Songs

For the first time in its 20 years of year-round concerts, Melbourne Bach Chamber Choir’s June concert also includes a specifically curated selection of six Art Songs by Ukrainian composer Jul’ij Mejtus. The inclusion of the Ukrainian Art songs is particularly meaningful for Prakhoff who celebrates his Ukrainian heritage, for Pokryshevsky, also celebrating Ukrainian heritage and who has a long-standing association with Mejtus, and for Melbourne Bach Choir, who are proud to support The Ukrainian Art Song Project.

The Ukrainian Art Song Project is a ground-breaking initiative that aims to record and publish over 1,000 art songs by 30 of Ukraine’s greatest composers for global distribution” says Prakhoff. “Mejtus alone composed 168 art songs, none of which have been recorded. When Alex Pokryshevsky put me in touch with the Ukrainian Art Song Project, this was a perfect way for us to represent the glories of both Russian and Ukrainian music, and to point out that art transcends war, always. We are proud to provide our contribution to this global effort to create this important musical legacy”.

In performing Ukrainian art song, owning the musical narrative is paramount for Pokryshevsky. “The challenge shifts quite differently as a soloist”, he says. “Capturing the language, style, and nuance in a more exposed setting. They demand a direct, intimate form of expression, so it’s about communicating that authenticity while carrying the line independently”.





The entire evening promises a rich, educational and enlightening experience for the audience, and one which Pokryshevsky is very much looking forward to offering.

“I hope the audience experiences a sense of stillness and reflection in hearing the All-Night Vigil he says. “It has a unique ability to create a deeply immersive, almost meditative atmosphere. The richness of the choral sound is incredibly moving. With the Ukrainian art songs, I hope the audience will connect with the more personal, expressive side of the program — the intimacy of storytelling through music. Altogether, I’d love the audience to leave feeling both uplifted and deeply touched by the experience”.

Performance details

The **Rachmaninov All Night Vigil** (Vespers Op 37) and Ukrainian Art Songs is the second of 4 celebratory concerts to be presented by Melbourne Bach Choir in celebration of bringing 20 years of choral music to Melbourne audiences.

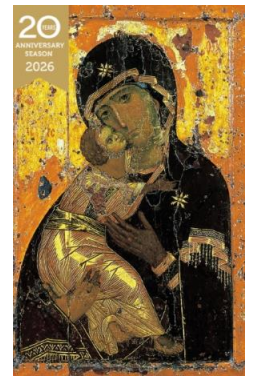
Their performances are accompanied by some of Melbourne’s best Baroque and contemporary Orchestras, Organ and brass ensembles. For the remainder of 2026, MBC is proud to present:

- Rachmaninov’s *All Night Vigil* and Mejtus’ Ukrainian Art Songs, St John’s Anglican Church Camberwell, June 12th
- Brahms *German Requiem* and Szymanowski’s *Stabat Mater*, Melbourne Recital Centre, September 11th, with Zelman Symphony
- Christmas Fanfare, St John’s Anglican Church Camberwell, December 5th.

Details about this concert: <https://www.mbc.asn.au/concerts/rachmaninov-all-night-vigil/>

To schedule **interviews** with Rick Prakhoff and featured principal soloists, to arrange **review tickets** and for **more information**, contact Bron Burton, MBC media and promotions, via bronburton99@gmail.com or phone 0417321406





Rachmaninov All Night Vigil/Ukrainian Art Songs

Featured Soloists

Belinda Paterson



Melbourne-based mezzo-soprano Belinda Paterson has appeared with Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, State Opera South Australia, Melbourne Opera, Ozopera Schools Company, the Australian Contemporary Opera Company, and the Dramatic Voices Program, Berlin. Principal roles performed include Klytaemnestra (Elektra), Siegrune (Die Walküre), Ježibaba (Rusalka), Madame Haughty (Cendrillon), Suzuki (Madama Butterfly), Third Lady (The Magic Flute), Secretary (The Consul), and Lucretia (The Rape of Lucretia).

Belinda recently appeared with Victorian Opera as Fekluša in Katya Kabanova. A past member of State Opera South Australia's chorus, she is currently a member of the Opera Australia Melbourne chorus and the Victorian Opera chorus. Belinda is also an accomplished concert soloist, appearing with the Melbourne Bach Choir since its inception in works including the St Matthew Passion, St John Passion, Szymanowski Stabat Mater, and more recently (with the Zelman Symphony Orchestra) Mahler's Second Symphony and the Verdi Requiem.

Belinda has also appeared as a soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Geelong Symphony Orchestra (Beethoven 9), Camberwell Chorale, and the Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus. A Mahler specialist, her recital repertoire includes the Kindertotenlieder and Alma Mahler's 5 Songs, both performed in Berlin as part of the Dramatic Voices Program in 2023/24. Belinda holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Melbourne and a Master of Music Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts.



Michael Petrucelli



Returning home after several busy seasons with Opera Frankfurt, Australian tenor Michael Petrucelli is in demand for roles ranging from early music to contemporary Australian opera, alongside regular appearances with orchestras and festivals around the country. In recent seasons he starred in Jonathan Mills' new opera *Eucalyptus* for Victorian Opera (in Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne), appeared as Ticon (*Káťa Kabanová*), Pirelli (*Sweeney Todd*), Arturo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) and Beppe (*Pagliacci*) with Victorian Opera, and sang Septimus (*Theodora*) for Pinchgut Opera/Opera Australia. Other roles with the national company include Stephen Goldring (*The Eighth Wonder*), Pedro (*Two Weddings, One Bride*) and Goro in their touring production of *Madama Butterfly*; he returns in 2026 to sing Pang in *Turandot* and Goro on the main stage.

On the concert platform, Michael has taken the tenor solos in Schubert's *Missa Brevis* in G Major, Mozart's *Missa Brevis* in D Major and *Coronation Mass*, Saint-Saëns' *Oratorio de Noël*, Haydn's *Missa Sancti Nicolai* and *Creation*, Bach's *Magnificat* and *St. Matthew Passion*, and Verdi's *Requiem*. He has appeared with ensembles and organisations including the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, Melbourne Bach Choir and Festival of Voices Hobart.

Aleksander Pokryshevsky



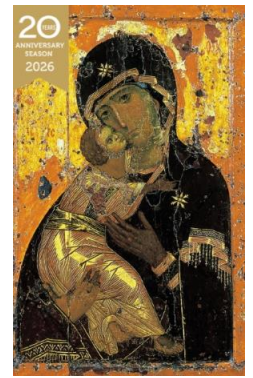
Ukrainian-born, Melbourne-based bass Alex Pokryshevsky has been a prominent presence on the Australian operatic stage for over two decades. A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), he has received numerous prizes and scholarships in recognition of his musical excellence. Since 1998, Alex has performed regularly with Australia's leading opera companies, establishing a reputation for his versatility and depth of artistry.

Recent highlights include the role of Banquo in Verdi's *Macbeth* with Gertrude Opera, Rafael in Haydn's *The Creation* with the Frankston Symphony Orchestra, and appearances with Melbourne Opera as Fafner in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, Bartolo in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Gazella in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*. He has also appeared in ensemble roles with Victorian Opera, including in Strauss's *Salome* and *Capriccio*.

In recent seasons, Alex has performed in a wide range of productions with Victorian Opera, Melbourne Opera, and Opera Australia, including *La Cenerentola*, *Idomeneo*, *Capriccio*, *Galileo*, Wagner's Ring Cycle, and *Tannhäuser*. Engagements from 2024 to 2026 include *Breaking the Waves*, *Carmen*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *La Rondine*, *La Traviata*, and Opera Australia's 70th anniversary gala.

In addition to opera, Alex is in high demand across Melbourne and regional Victoria, performing a diverse repertoire spanning classical music, music theatre, art song, and folk traditions.





Melbourne Bach Choir Artistic Director Rick Prakhoff

Based in Melbourne for over 30 years, Rick Prakhoff grew up in Perth, where he began a career as a professional classical guitarist. After an extended period in London studying guitar and immersing himself in London's diverse classical music culture, he returned to Perth after realising that his future lay in conducting.

Following his BMus in Perth at WAAPA, majoring in conducting, and two years as a voice major, Rick's training continued in Melbourne when he was selected for Symphony Australia's Young Conductor programme, working for five years in intensive extended workshops with renowned conducting teachers

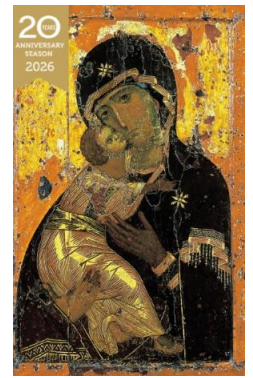


Jorma Panula, Gustav Meier, Noam Sherif, Vernon Handley and Johannes Fritsch, with the state orchestras WASO, OV, QSO, ASO and the AOBO. As a freelance conductor Rick has performed with orchestras, choirs and opera companies in Sydney, Canberra, Perth and Melbourne and has been the Artistic Director of the Melbourne Bach Choir since its inception in 2005 and Zelman Symphony since 2018.

Rick is committed to passing on his skills and the advanced conducting training that he was fortunate to receive to his many conducting students at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. He has also

created a conducting assistantship programme with both the MBC and Zelman Symphony to give opportunities where possible to emerging conducting talent.





Performance Perspectives

From our Artistic Director: Rick Prakhoff

Why did you choose the Rachmaninov Vespers as a feature piece for this concert?

When I first formed the MBC Chamber Choir in 2016 the principal aim was to create a large chamber choir capable of performing this amazing work, which has been an obsession of mine since I first sang the sixth song in the sequence, 'Bogoroditsye Dyevo' or Hail O Virgin Mary. One of the most beautifully simple of the 15 songs that comprise the All Night Vigil, previously known in English as the Vespers.

When I looked into this cycle beyond its most famous sixth song, I discovered an astonishing creation. Although I am a second generation Ukrainian, my family were not church-goers, so I had no exposure to the Orthodox church in my youth. Rachmaninov was also ambivalent about his commitment to Christianity, but he dearly loved the singing he went out of his way to experience in his youth.

By the time he wrote the All Night Vigil in 1915 he was well loved as a composer of works for piano and orchestra, yet this work, composed in just two weeks, became the greatest single composition in the vast history of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

For me it is right at the pinnacle of unaccompanied choral writing - an extraordinary work which never fails to astonish in its range, its originality despite coming from a very restrictive tradition, and its beautiful melodic writing. There is nothing like it in the entire choral repertoire.

How are the Ukrainian Art Songs meaningful for you as Artistic Director of MBC?

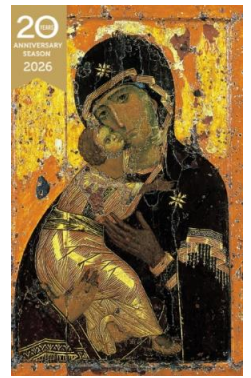
My father was born in Kyiv in 1938, and with his mother, my Babushka, and his 'old Auntie', escaped the Russian re-taking of Kyiv in 1943 by passing themselves off as Poles, and with their horse and cart, walking through Poland and into a Polish internment camp in northern Germany.

Polish was his sixth language, at the tender age of five, and one he had to learn perfectly so as not to raise the suspicions of the Germans. Old Auntie would hit him on the head with a metal spoon when he made mistakes!

The parallels between what is happening in Ukraine today, and back then, are all too familiar. But when Russia first invaded Ukraine there were calls to ban Russian art and music. My response has been to not criticise the artists and composers, but instead to present them in ways in which the Soviet system would never have allowed in the past, hence the repression of recognition of Ukrainian composers.

When Alexander Pokryshevsky put me in touch with the Ukrainian Art Song Project, this was a perfect way for us to represent the glories of both Russian and Ukrainian music, and to point out that art transcends war, always.





What are you looking most forward to in conducting the Rachmaninov Vespers with Melbourne Bach Choir?

The MBC Chamber Choir are sounding better than ever and are absolutely ready for the enormous challenge presented by this music. Written for a choir divided into 12 parts, is enormously challenging, and calls for strong voices singing in extended ranges, such as basses singing as low as a B flat - we are fortunate to have Alex Pokryshevsky join us to bolster our third basses, as well as assist with coaching both the Ukrainian and Church Slavonic singing.

Already in our first few rehearsals the choir has more than met the challenge of this work, and I come away from rehearsals totally invigorated and excited for what promises to be a wonderful performance.

What do you find challenging in conducting the Vespers?

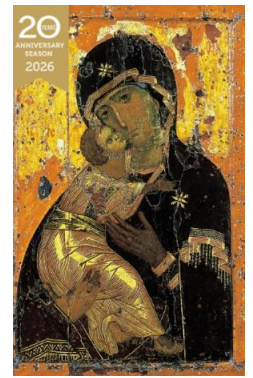
The All Night Vigil is an incredibly challenging work to sing for everyone, and it is the final movements which truly test any choir. The challenge for me is balancing how far I can push the choir without them 'breaking'. How long can I sustain final chords in some of the most emotional endings, and how loud I can ask them to sing without them producing a rough sound.

This work pushes us all to the limits, and it is only in live performance that we can discover exactly what those limits are. Perfection is boring, and this work must always be dramatic, exciting, and never, ever safe and boring. I do hope we can deliver that for our audience.

What are you hoping the audience will experience in coming to see and hear this concert?

I hope that those who have never heard this work before come away with a sense of awe and amazement at what Rachmaninov has been able to achieve here. A work, steeped in the dark arts of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which also speaks to all of us an astonishing work of art, and one of the single greatest unaccompanied choral compositions of all time.





From our soloists: Aleksander Pokryshevsky

What are you looking forward to in singing Rachmaninov's 'Vespers' with Melbourne Bach Chamber Choir?

I'm looking forward to the depth and richness of sound that comes from singing All-Night Vigil (Rachmaninov) with the Melbourne Bach Choir. As a bass, it's incredibly rewarding to be part of the harmonic foundation of the choir — those low lines have a unique power to shape the atmosphere of the entire work.

Rachmaninov's writing in this piece is both profound and deeply expressive, and there's something very special about experiencing that collectively within the ensemble. I'm particularly looking forward to supporting the bass section and contributing to that warm, resonant sound that gives the Vespers its distinctive character. It's a piece I love, and performing it with such a dedicated group of musicians makes it all the more meaningful.

What challenges you about performing this piece and/or the Ukrainian Art Songs?

One of the challenges of performing All-Night Vigil (Rachmaninov) is sustaining the depth of tone and blend across such a long, unaccompanied work — especially as a bass, where maintaining resonance and control in the lower register is essential to the overall sound. It requires real focus and close ensemble awareness throughout.

With the Ukrainian art songs, the challenge shifts quite differently as a soloist. It becomes about fully owning the musical and emotional narrative — capturing the language, style, and nuance in a more exposed setting. They demand a direct, intimate form of expression, so it's about communicating that authenticity while carrying the line independently.

What are you hoping the audience will experience in coming to and hear this concert?

I hope the audience experiences a sense of stillness and reflection in hearing All-Night Vigil (Rachmaninov) — it has a unique ability to create a deeply immersive, almost meditative atmosphere. The richness of the choral sound is incredibly moving.

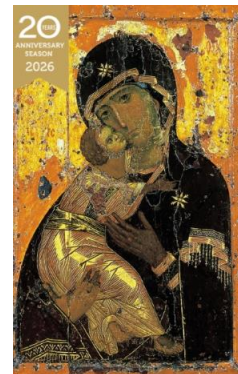
With the Ukrainian art songs, I hope the audience will connect with the more personal, expressive side of the program — the intimacy of storytelling through music. Altogether, I'd love the audience to leave feeling both uplifted and deeply touched by the experience.

From our soloists: Michael Petrucelli

What are you looking forward to in singing Rachmaninov's 'Vespers' with Melbourne Bach Chamber Choir?

Rachmaninov's Vespers contains some of the most hauntingly beautiful choral music that I have heard. I cannot wait to begin rehearsing with the choir and being surrounded by their sound and Rachmaninov's amazing choral music. I am also a sucker for a good melody, and the tenor soloist has been given an extremely beautiful one in the





fifth item, so I am thrilled to be performing it for a live audience! I have also never sung as a soloist with an a cappella choir in this style before, so it is all new and very exciting!

What challenges you about performing this piece and/or the Ukrainian Art Songs?

Primarily the language pronunciation is the most challenging component. I don't often sing in Russian, and I have never sung anything in Ukrainian. In saying this, I was lucky enough to work with a wonderful Slavic language coach during my time with Oper Frankfurt in Germany and have since sung Russian Art Song in recital. I feel I have a relatively good idea of the Russian in the Vespers. My major challenge now is to make the Ukrainian Art Songs sound convincingly Ukrainian!

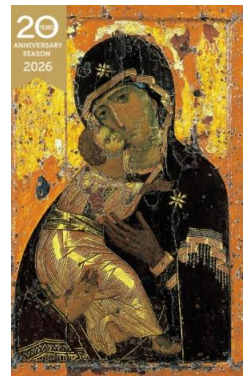
Apart from the language, I am currently working on trying to achieve a beautiful sound in the tenor solos in the Vespers. The solo lines are often written soft or moderately soft and so I am working on not bring too much of the operatic stridency to the sound. A very enjoyable challenge!

What are you hoping the audience will experience in coming to hear this concert?

In the Vespers, the audience will experience the visceral nature of a live choral sound. There is nothing quite like it! Several sections will have you listening on the edge of your seat, and a few moments later, in awe at the strength of a full choir singing fortissimo (very loudly)! They will also be extremely lucky to experience the sonorous low notes that Rachmaninov enjoyed writing for the basses in the cadences in many of the items.

The audience will also experience satisfaction in hearing (most likely for the first time in Australia) the folk like quality of the relatively unknown Ukrainian Art Songs! The distinctively Slavic harmonic progressions and the melodic direction that these songs take can be at times quite foreign to an ear used to Western music, but they are so aesthetically pleasing to listen to!





From our soloists: Belinda Paterson

What are you looking forward to in singing Rachmaninov's 'Vespers' with Melbourne Bach Chamber Choir?

The Vespers is a piece I have wanted to sing for a long time, so it's great to have this opportunity to share my first performance of it with such an incredible lineup of artists. The Bach Choir has never been sounding better, and it is always a joy to work with them.

What challenges you about performing this piece and/or the Ukrainian Art Songs?

I'm working very hard on perfecting my Church Slavonic. I'm also working on not getting too emotional - the piece really is that beautiful!

What are you hoping the audience will experience in coming to see and hear this concert?

It's going to be very beautiful, moving, thought-provoking and uplifting. Don't miss the chance to see a live performance of this astonishing piece!

