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7:30PM THURSDAY  
27 JUNE

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AUCKLAND  
TOWN HALL

KBB Music & The Trusts Community Foundation present

# Matariki

with **Ché-Fu & The Kratez**



**Mānawatia a Matariki**

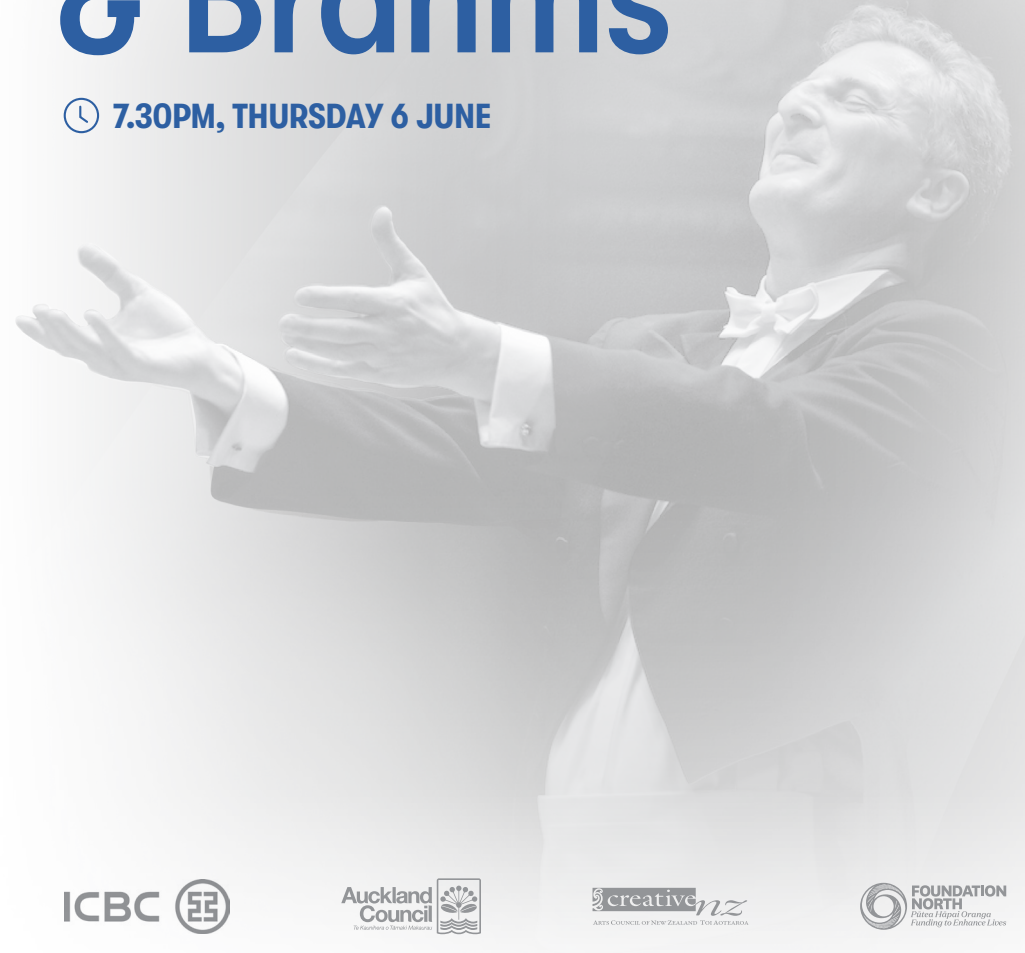


**BAYLEYS**

Great Classics

# Bellini & Brahms

🕒 7.30PM, THURSDAY 6 JUNE



Auckland  
Philharmonia



**CONDUCTOR** Giordano Bellincampi

**PIANO** Alexander Melnikov

**BRAHMS** Piano Concerto No.1

**BRAHMS** Symphony No.2



For artist biographies,  
please visit our website

# Programme Notes

**Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)

Piano Concerto No.1 (1859)

- I. *Maestoso*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Rondo: Allegro non troppo*

DURATION: c.50'

"A new power in music seems to announce itself... Sitting at the piano he began to disclose wonderful regions to us... Should he direct his magic wand where the powers of the masses in chorus and orchestra may lend him their forces, we can look forward to even more wondrous glimpses of the secret world of spirits."

Thus was the 20-year-old Johannes Brahms introduced to the Austro-Germanic musical community by the pen of composer and critic Robert Schumann. With such monumental expectations on his first symphonic offering, it is little wonder that Brahms took many detours on his path to writing the long-anticipated symphony.

His first orchestral essay became instead a piano concerto in 1858. Although in the standard three-movement form of a concerto, it is symphonic in scope, lasting the better part of an hour (longer than any

of his later four symphonies) and treats the piano as a partner to the orchestra, rather than the main protagonist. The terrifying opening, featuring thunderous timpani rolls and menacing trills from the strings, is said by Brahms' intimate friends to portray Robert Schumann's suicidal leap into the Rhine a few years earlier. This sinister opening abruptly changes into a moment of stillness – but it's the eerie stillness of the lost. The piano entry, when it arrives, is almost serenade-like before the pianist also begins to reference the menacing trills.

The concerto score went multiple times to his close friends and artistic mentors, the pianist Clara Schumann and violinist Joseph Joachim, as Brahms refined the work. The introspective central movement, a 'gentle portrait' of Joachim, was well-received by them while the rondo finale, after exhortations to bring this up to the standard of the other two movements, eventually received the high praise: "It is full of character and imagination and tenderly executed."

The audience reaction at the premiere itself was less promising. Brahms wrote to his friends, "At the end, three hands attempted to fall slowly into one another,

whereupon, however, a quite distinct hissing from all sides forbade such demonstrations." Other published critiques found much to praise in Brahms' piano performance – "A great artist of piano playing" – while lamenting the "fatiguing" length of the work.

One of the harshest critiques highlighted the fact that Brahms' concerto was hardly alone in receiving this audience reaction. "It is sad but true that new works have had little or no success this season," wrote a Leipzig critic. At the turn of the century, concerts had contained about 80% new works but barely a couple of generations later, the proportions were inverted and new works formed only 20% of concert programmes in main European centres in 1870.

To gain and hold a place on concert programmes, composers of Brahms' time had to create a work that both conformed to the expectations of the symphony as it had been established while demonstrating the novelty and innovation that was lauded in the already established canon of works.

## INTERVAL

**Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)

Symphony No.2 (1877)

- I. *Allegro non troppo*
- II. *Adagio non troppo – L'istesso tempo, ma grazioso*
- III. *Allegretto grazioso (Quasi andantino) – presto ma non assai*
- IV. *Allegro con spirito*

DURATION: c.40'

Brahms' First Symphony, which finally made the stage over 20 years after Robert Schumann's prophecy, was moderately well-received. It was his Second Symphony,

performed in the winter of 1877 in the lavishly appointed new Viennese concert hall, that truly succeeded in both delighting audiences with its freshness and comforting them with its echoes of the familiar forms.

"Seldom has there been such a warm public expression of pleasure in a new composition," wrote Eduard Hanslick, the foremost Viennese critic. "Brahms' Second Symphony shines like the warming sun on connoisseurs and laymen alike and it belongs to all those who long for good music... There is much in it that is new, yet nothing of the unfortunate contemporary tendency to emphasize novelty in the sense of the unprecedented."

And indeed, the Second Symphony is all that is lush and warm, the first three movements all with moderate tempo indications. The Adagio, full of pathos, features a stunning solo for the cello section at the opening, demanding the richness of the upper voice of that instrument, while the Allegretto features pastoral wind solos over strumming string accompaniment, turning the string section into a giant harp. The presto of that third movement again embraces the vigour of a country dance and the finale the triumph and jubilation of successfully executing a challenge. The symphony could easily carry a title such as Summer Countryside Recollections, but Brahms preferred instead to leave the score completely open to the listener's imagination.

Just a couple of decades earlier, the symphony as a genre was felt to be a dead-end for most but in the words of Hanslick, Brahms' Second "provides irrefutable proof that one (though not everyone to be sure) can still write a symphony after Beethoven and moreover in the old forms and on the old foundations."

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