

4pm, Saturday 10 August Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi with The New Zealand Opera Chorus

Tristan und Isolde is a searing portrait of agonised, unstoppable, uncontrollable desire that can end only in death. From its very first notes, Wagner reshaped music for ever. This is a performance not to be missed.

Duration: Approx. 5½ hours – three acts with one 30min interval and a 60min dinner break.



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To The Detw Zealand Gerald Premier Series

Passion & Mystery

() 7.30PM, THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY







CONDUCTOR Giordano Bellincampi **CELLO** Julian Steckel

GEMMA PEACOCKE White Horses
SHOSTAKOVICH Cello Concerto No.2
TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No.6 'Pathétique'



For artist biographies, please visit our website

Programme Notes

Gemma Peacocke (b.1984)

White Horses (2022)

DURATION: c.12'

Currently studying for a PhD at Princeton (focussing on the music of Julia Wolfe), New Zealand composer Gemma Peacocke has composed for a wide variety of ensembles; White Horses was co-commissioned and premiered by the Auckland Philharmonia in 2022. Peacocke was inspired to write this piece by the mysterious death over Cook Strait of First World War nurse and pilot Viva Waud Farmar in 1937. Farmar leaped without warning from her biplane; her copilot said that he could not retrieve her body due to the rough sea, which looked like "white horses everywhere." Low pedal tones develop upwards to create sound fields that Peacocke says are imaginings of Farmar's frame of mind upon seeing the sea.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Cello Concerto No.2 (1966)

- l. Largo
- II. Allegretto
- III. Allegretto

DURATION: c.35'

Shostakovich dedicated this concerto to his friend the great Russian cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich (for whom he had also written his First Cello Concerto). The lamenting first movement may have been inspired by the death of Anna Akhmatova, another friend of Shostakovich's whom he called 'the queen of Russian poetry'. Composer and poet had both gone through many ups and downs with the Soviet regime, but by the 1960s both were generally accepted as great Soviet artists (not quite so much Rostropovich, whose problems with the regime continued and who eventually defected in 1974).

The short second movement, a scherzo in Shostakovich's favourite darkly mischievous

manner, incorporates a folk song from Odessa about bubliki (bagel-like bread rolls). Shostakovich's musical monogram also appears there: DSCH. Shostakovich in the German spelling translates into the notes D–Es (E flat)–C–H (B).

Influences of earlier music can be heard in the concerto, especially in the third movement, notably the folk-adjacent style of Mussorgsky and the grand lyricism of Mahler. There is even a direct quote from the beginning of Mussorgsky's opera Boris Godunov in the middle of the third movement, which Shostakovich uses for a short set of variations. In terms of its form, the concerto is quite new. It mostly eschews the sonata form expected of concertos in favour of a freer play of ideas and motivic contrasts, and it is typical of Shostakovich's late period in its austere but transparent orchestral counterpoint.

INTERVAL

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 6 'Pathétique' (1893)

- I. Adagio Allegro non troppo
- II. Allegro con grazia
- III. Allegro molto vivace
- IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

DURATION: c.45'

The popular view of Tchaikovsky's final symphony is that the composer, depressed because of his homosexual urges, composed it as a cri de cœur and committed suicide shortly after its premiere. Just about every element of this story is probably false. In a famous New Republic article, musicologist Richard Taruskin busted many of these myths: there is little evidence that Tchaikovsky's homosexuality

made him miserable and less evidence that he committed suicide. That Tchaikovsky died of cholera nine days after the symphony's premiere was certainly tragic, but there is no evidence that he had any premonition of his death. Because we cannot go back and ask Tchaikovsky (and even if we could we can't guarantee he would tell us the truth), all we can do is examine the symphony against what we can tell about the manner in which Tchaikovsky composed it, and place it against other music of the time to explore its innovations.

The symphony is a musically experimental work. Among other things, it was unusual to end with a slow movement and write a minuet in five. The first movement alone has more musical material and goes through more moods than many entire symphonies that went before; while unusual in a symphony, however, this peripatetic style is normal in Tchaikovsky's writing for opera and narrative ballet, so at times the symphony calls out for dramatic interpretation.

The surviving sketch material shows that the symphony was the result of months of planning and trying out ideas, not a cry for help written in a burst of despair. On the contrary: the composer wrote to the symphony's dedicatee, his nephew Vladimir Davydov, of the 'excellent state of mind' he was in and the fun he was having composing the symphony. Yes, he wrote of the 'secret programme' and its sorrowful aspects, hinting that it was some kind of narrative about homosexualitu, but as befits a composer of dramatic music we mustn't second guess Tchaikovsky's ability to put on various musical personae as he was writing. The symphony is certainly about something, but that isn't necessarily the composer himself.

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