Wagner's

Tristan und Isolde

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.

Auckland Philharmonia Foundation.

AUCKLAND LIVE

Wagner Society of New Zealand

In the Italian Style

🕐 **7.30PM, THURSDAY 29 FEBRUARY**

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CONDUCTOR Giordano Bellincampi

VIOLA Robert Ashworth

SCHUBERT Overture in C 'In the Italian Style'

MENDELSSOHN Symphony No.4 'Italian'

BERLIOZ *Harold in Italy*

For artist biographies, please visit our website

Programme Notes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Overture in C 'In the Italian Style' (1817)
DURATION: c.7'

Confusingly, in 1817 Schubert wrote two concert overtures now referred to as 'Italian'. Tonight's concert includes the second one, in C major. Schubert's model was Rossini, whose operas were all the rage in Schubert's Vienna. Like Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* or *La gazza ladra* overtures, a slow introduction with a long melody leads into a fast allegro in a simple sonata form featuring a long crescendo to the climax. The overture's attitude is one of 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'; while many Viennese composers resented the Italian upstart and his deceptively simple style, Schubert embraced it and applied some of his own harmonic surprises to Rossini's form.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Symphony No.4 'Italian' (1833)
I.   *Allegro vivace*
II. *Andante con moto*
III. *Con moto moderato*
IV. *Saltarello. Presto*

DURATION: c.30'

Like any good young German Romantic in the early 19th century, Mendelssohn was enthralled by the supposed classical purity and love for life that could (at least according to northern Europeans) be found in Italy. When the London Philharmonic Society commissioned him to write a symphony in late 1832, Mendelssohn, feeling depressed since his return to Berlin from a trip to Italy, leapt at the opportunity: "This is the most agreeable I could ever have wished for and it has greatly contributed to deliver me from the bad state of health and of mind, in which I passed the greater part of last year." The symphony was met with great acclaim, especially the folksong-like second movement, which critics, unaware of any Italian connections, heard as Scottish-sounding.

Much as this might surprise us today, Mendelssohn himself was dissatisfied with the symphony, and he made extensive revisions in 1834, but his friends and family all preferred the first version and the second was never performed in his lifetime. His sister Fanny wrote to ask him to "bring along the old version when you come to visit so we can argue about it."

Mendelssohn was not an especially innovative symphony composer, but he consistently demonstrated how the conventions of his time could be followed in entertaining and thoughtful ways. It was somewhat unusual for a symphony to start in a major key and end in minor, although the minor finale is a cheerful saltarello, a style of dance the composer probably heard when he was in Italy. Also unusual is that while the first movement is in a typical large-scale sonata form, the other three are much shorter. The second movement has often been likened to a religious processional, the third is a standard minuet and trio, and the fourth is a fast dance.

INTERVAL

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)
Harold in Italy (1834)
I.   *Harold in the mountains: scenes of melancholy, happiness, and joy*
II. *March of the pilgrims, singing an evening prayer*
III. *Serenade by an Abruzzo mountaineer to his beloved*
IV. *Orgy of the brigands: memories of preceding scenes*

DURATION: c.40'

Berlioz was never one to be beholden to conventional musical forms, and *Harold in Italy* is a uniquely hybrid work, part symphony, part tone poem, part viola concerto. When violinist Niccolò Paganini heard Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* he was so impressed that he decided to commission Berlioz to write him a concerto, to be played on a Stradivarius viola Paganini had recently acquired. Berlioz eagerly took up the commission, deciding to write a new type of narrative concerto where the soloist would be first among equals in the orchestra.

The viola represents Harold, the protagonist of Lord Byron's epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, about a melancholic young man who travels around Europe in search of strong emotions. Each movement is a different scene witnessed by Harold in the countryside and mountains around Rome, where Berlioz himself had wandered in a very Harold-like way while he was studying there a few years previously.

By the 1830s the expectation of the classical concerto was that it would begin with a double exposition (i.e. the orchestra plays the exposition with two primary themes alone, then the soloist joins in for the repeat), followed by a development with alternating solo and tutti sections, then a recapitulation where the main themes return and with a major cadenza for the soloist at the climax. Berlioz subverts expectations by delaying the exposition until almost halfway through the movement, beginning instead with a double introduction: first the orchestra alone plays a darkly chromatic fugato, then the viola plays a sad lyrical melody that returns in the other movements. The exposition, development, and recapitulation then follow not the concerto form but rather the symphony form, without alternating solo and tutti sections but merely with the viola as the primary colour in the orchestra. Harold does not dominate the landscape; he is merely a part of it.

Paganini decided not to play the piece in the end because it was not virtuosic enough for his taste. But when he heard it four years later he was so impressed (and regretful that he hadn't played it) that he gifted Berlioz 20,000 francs.

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