

MENDELSSOHN & DVOŘÁK

7.30PM, Thursday 26 February
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Maria Grenfell (b.1969)

Hinemoa (2007)

DURATION: c.13'

Maria Grenfell was born in Malaysia but grew up in Christchurch. After graduating from the University of Canterbury she undertook further studies in the United States of America before settling in Australia, where she lectures in music at the University of Tasmania.

Hinemoa was inspired by the famous Māori legend. The warrior Tūtānekai lived on Mokoia Island in the middle of Lake Rotorua and loved to play his flute. The beautiful Hinemoa was the daughter of a great chief. She and Tūtānekai had fallen in love, but Hinemoa's father forbade their marriage. Desperate to be with him, Hinemoa gathered some dried gourds for flotation and swam to the island, listening to her lover's flute. Grenfell's tone poem follows the story from the moment Hinemoa launches herself into the lake, guided by Tūtānekai's flute.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847)

Piano Concerto No.1 (1830-31)

Three movements, played without a break

- I. *Molto allegro con fuoco*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Presto – Molto allegro e vivace*

DURATION: c.21'

Mendelssohn's First Piano Concerto opens with an ominous orchestral introduction lasting just seven bars before the piano interrupts with an explosion of octaves and disconcertingly fast arpeggios. There is an expressive though harmonically unstable second theme, but the movement continues stormily and at breakneck speed. A brass fanfare and a piano interlude create a link to the second movement, which is in the lyrical style of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. The finale is even faster than the first movement and has the character of an operetta-style gallop, with the exception of a surprise reappearance of the second theme from the first movement. For a work of relatively modest length this concerto contains a bewildering quantity of notes for the soloist.

The concerto was a great success at its premiere, but it was a performance in Paris by Franz Liszt that cemented its reputation as the concerto that every pianist wanted to play. Berlioz, who didn't care for the piece, wrote a satirical story about an Erard piano on which the concerto has been played too many times. The instrument becomes possessed and starts to play the work by itself. The keys dance about madly, and eventually the mechanism has to be thrown onto the fire.

INTERVAL

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi

Piano Andrea Lam

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Symphony No.8 (1889)

- I. *Allegro con brio*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace*
- IV. *Allegro ma non troppo*

DURATION: c.36'

Dvořák's Eighth Symphony was mainly composed at his summer residence in Vysoká, then orchestrated after his return to Prague. In this beautiful rural environment Dvořák habitually rose very early each morning to go for a walk, after which he would spend the rest of the morning composing. Among later works composed there was Dvořák's most successful opera, *Rusalka*, which is so closely associated with Vysoká that the house has become known as the Villa Rusalka.

Dvořák wrote that his intention was to write a work 'different from my other symphonies, with individual ideas worked out in a new manner'. Of all his mature symphonies the Eighth is the freest in form, and its melodies show the influence of Bohemian folk music and birdsong.

The title page of the Symphony declares it to be in G major, but the lyrical opening bars are in G minor. G major arrives with a theme for the flute evoking birdsong. About halfway through the movement, after repeats of the minor key introduction and the G major flute theme, comes a passage which reveals a fascinating but purely coincidental kinship with the first movement of Mahler's First Symphony. Following this, the music returns to the minor key and becomes increasingly vigorous and dramatic, a surprisingly vehement climax results, after which the cor anglais makes its only appearance in the symphony to present the G major flute theme with more gravitas.

The second movement has an almost narrative quality, perhaps anticipating the cycle of five symphonic poems that Dvořák would compose after the *New World Symphony*. A gentle, ruminative theme is punctuated by birdsong. The theme becomes more insistent, and the birdsong motifs are transferred to the strings, becoming more questioning. The third movement is a thoughtful, somewhat melancholy waltz.

The finale opens with a fanfare from both trumpets in unison, then a noble melody derived from the flute theme in the first movement leads to a set of variations. The nobility of this theme soon erupts into rhythmic energy, more in keeping with Dvořák's Slavonic Dances. A Turkish march interrupts the variations, but after they resume the music is propelled to an explosive and exciting conclusion.

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