

MENDELSSOHN'S VIOLIN

7.30PM, Thursday 16 July
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Overture in the Italian Style in D (1817)

DURATION: c.8'

In the latter half of 1817 while composing his Sixth Symphony, Schubert also wrote two overtures in the style of Rossini, whose operas had captivated Viennese audiences. The first of these overtures begins with a slow introduction on a melody reminiscent of an Italian aria. The effervescent *Allegro giusto* which follows shows that Schubert had fully absorbed Rossinian style. Three years later Schubert reworked the introduction and coda in the overture to the melodrama *Die Zauberharfe* – better known to us as the overture to *Rosamunde*.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Violin Concerto (1844; rev. 1845)

Three movements, played without pause

- I. *Allegro molto appassionato*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace*

DURATION: c.27'

When Felix Mendelssohn was appointed conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig in 1835, he immediately invited violinist Ferdinand David to be its concertmaster. Three years later he told David that he wanted to write a concerto for him, and that a certain melody in E minor refused to give him any peace. It wasn't until 1844 that he was able to focus his energies on the concerto, which would prove to be the last orchestral work he completed.

Mendelssohn took an original approach to this concerto in several respects. The established convention was to begin with an orchestral introduction presenting the main themes of the first movement. In Mendelssohn's concerto the soloist enters in the second bar with the principal theme of the movement, then shares with the orchestra the exposition of the main themes.

Instead of placing the first movement cadenza in its traditional position at the end of the movement, Mendelssohn introduces it at the end of the development section, so that it leads directly into the recapitulation. The soloist's arpeggios continue as accompaniment to the orchestra as it brings back the main theme.

Another innovation was to have the three movements of the work play continuously, partly to avoid the intrusion of audience applause between movements. At the end of the first movement, when the orchestra relinquishes its final E minor chord, a single bassoon holds its B natural for two bars, then moves up a semitone to C, thus heralding a new key for the second movement. The

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi

Violin Benjamin Beilman

bridge from the slow movement to the finale is 14 bars for the solo violin and the orchestral strings, the soloist apparently thinking aloud, trying to decide where to go next. But the dancing, virtuosic character of the finale is announced decisively by trumpets, horns, bassoons and timpani and the violin quickly agrees.

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No.2 (1801-02)

- I. *Adagio molto – Allegro con brio*
- II. *Larghetto*
- III. *Scherzo: Allegro*
- IV. *Allegro molto*

DURATION: c.32'

In April 1802, on the advice of his doctor, Beethoven moved for an intended stay of six months to Heiligenstadt, a quiet and beautiful village on the outskirts of Vienna. He hoped in these rural surroundings that his health and hearing might be restored, but it was here too that he composed most of his Second Symphony. In October, just before returning to Vienna, he wrote the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' in which he expressed thoughts of suicide.

Despite Beethoven's despair over the loss of his hearing, there is little in this symphony that conveys gloom. The slow introduction to the first movement does have its moments of shadow, but with an almost theatrical quality. Beethoven's ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* had been written during the previous year, when he was already collecting material for the symphony, and he would begin working on his opera *Fidelio* in the year to come. The *Allegro con brio* bursts forth in high spirits with the dramatically contrasting dynamics and harmonic surprises that would become increasingly familiar as part of Beethoven's musical personality.

The *Larghetto* begins in a mood of serenity reflecting Beethoven's walks in the woods of Heiligenstadt. Some darkness intrudes in the middle section, but it certainly doesn't amount to an expression of anguish. The Scherzo is high spirited, with a suitably lyrical trio.

The finale opens with a musical raspberry which is soon revealed to be an integral part of the rondo theme. The mood throughout is one of comedy with sudden contrasts between loud and soft. Some critics of the time, however, were not amused. One review in the cultural magazine *Zeitung für ein Elegante Welt* reads: 'The Second Symphony is a monstrous beast, a wounded, writhing dragon that refuses to die and, even as it bleeds to death in the finale, still lashes out furiously with its tail raised high.'

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