

MOZART 39

7.30PM, Thursday 30 July
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Douglas Lilburn (1915-2001)

Drysdale Overture (1937; rev. 1940, 1986)

DURATION: c.10'

Douglas Lilburn grew up on Drysdale Station, an isolated pioneer farm in the upper Turakina Valley – owned and run by the Lilburn family to this day. The *Drysdale Overture* was composed in London when Lilburn was a 21-year-old student. Armed with meagre knowledge of classical forms, he wrote 'a solemn introduction, with motifs recalled later in various structural guises.' Wistful memories of youth are reflected in the lyrical oboe tune, 'with fitting Scottish inflections.' Developing these ideas instinctively, Lilburn produced what he later described as 'a sunlit rondo, nostalgic of childhood happiness.'

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Violin Concerto (1911)

- I. *Praeludium: Largo – Allegro Cavalleresco*
- II. *Poco adagio – Rondo: Allegro scherzando*

DURATION: c.30'

Carl Nielsen's childhood was spent on the island of Funen in Southern Denmark. Despite their poverty, Nielsen's parents recognised Carl's musical talent and encouraged him. At the age of sixteen, with some financial help from wealthy people in Odense (Funen's largest city), he was able to enrol at the Royal Danish Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen. In 1892 he produced the first of his six symphonies – a remarkable achievement for a composer in his mid-twenties with little experience of orchestral composition. But it was his third symphony, *Sinfonia Espansiva*, completed in 1911, that would prove to be his breakthrough in terms of international recognition.

In the middle of that same year Nielsen began to compose his Violin Concerto while staying with Grieg's widow Nina at Trolldhaugen in Norway. He had little interest in virtuosity for its own sake, so finding the right balance between instrumental brilliance and richness of musical invention was a task he found challenging.

The concerto has an unusual structure. There are just two large-scale movements, each of which is divided into slow and fast sections. The first movement opens with a cadenza-like passage for the soloist over a pedal for horns and bassoons. This resolves into a gently rocking, folk-like melody shared by the orchestra and the soloist, who then plays ornate arabesques over this melody to the end of the *Praeludium*. The second part of the movement has the unique marking *Allegro Cavalleresco*, the second word meaning 'chivalrous.' The contemplative *Adagio* that opens the second movement has an improvisatory quality. Nielsen described the rondo finale as 'a kind of half-sweet, half-merry, rickety movement... good and charming like a heartily smiling layabout at his best moments.'

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi
Violin Benjamin Beilman

The premieres of both the *Sinfonia Espansiva* and the Violin Concerto took place on February 28, 1912, with Nielsen himself conducting Copenhagen's Royal Danish Orchestra. The soloist was Danish violinist Peder Møller, but it was Nielsen's son-in-law, Hungarian violinist Emil Telmányi, who introduced the concerto more widely.

INTERVAL

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Symphony No.39 (1788)

- I. *Adagio – Allegro*
- II. *Andante con moto*
- III. *Menuetto e Trio*
- IV. *Allegro*

DURATION: c.29'

All three of Mozart's last symphonies were composed between June and August 1788. As there is no historical record of them being premiered in Mozart's lifetime it has often been assumed that they were not. However, Mozart was in desperate need of income and would hardly have devoted time to writing them if they were not intended to be performed. Although he cannot have known that these would be his last works in this form, they justly represent the pinnacle of his symphonic writing.

Each of the symphonies is scored differently. In Symphony No.39 Mozart omits the oboes, giving unusual importance to the clarinets, which were by no means standard in orchestras at that time. The first movement begins with a slow introduction – fairly common in the symphonies of Haydn, but not so in those of Mozart. When the *Allegro* begins, it initially seems no faster than the *Adagio* because Mozart writes the theme in long notes. As the notes are increasingly divided, an illusion is created that the pulse has increased.

The theme of the *Andante con moto* is initially stated by strings alone. Woodwinds and horns lead the contrasting second theme, then provide elaborate decorations of the first theme when it reappears. The stately *Minuet* is notable for a trio dominated by the clarinets. The finale is unusual for Mozart in that it is essentially monothematic – again, something frequently encountered in the symphonies of Haydn, but contrary to Mozart's usual practice. It's a particularly lively theme, and Mozart explores its potential very thoroughly. In the final bars he abandons the customary practice of concluding with emphatic chords and instead allows the cheeky theme to have the last word.

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