

SCHUMANN CELLO CONCERTO

7.30PM, Thursday 13 November
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Rosamunde: Overture (1823)

DURATION: c.8'

Schubert's overture, which dates from 1820, was originally intended for *The Magic Harp* — a local Viennese play by Helmina von Chézy. In the event, the play was weak and didn't stay around for too long, but Schubert's overture received much comment, becoming quite a favourite in Vienna.

Three years later, von Chézy had another play on the Viennese theatre circuit, this one called *Rosamunde*, but again undistinguished. Schubert was given the task of writing the incidental music, but when the music was eventually published, the editor prefaced it with the *Magic Harp* overture, which then became known as the *Rosamunde* overture. The scoring is for a substantial orchestra, including full brass and woodwind sections, and even if its history is somewhat tortuous, its effect is charming and direct, melodic and effervescent — just like Rossini, the musical idol of the day.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Cello Concerto (1850)

THREE MOVEMENTS PLAYED WITHOUT BREAK:

- I. *Nicht Zu Schnell* (Not too fast)
- II. *Langsam* (Slowly)
- III. *Sehr Lebhaft* (Very lively)

DURATION: c.23'

The tragic story of Schumann's relatively short life ending in an asylum is well-known. If there were one piece of music to highlight the depth of this tragedy, it would be the *Cello Concerto*. In 1850, when he wrote it, Schumann was in the full flush of his composing career, and the whole work took him only two weeks from start to finish.

Earlier that year, Schumann had arrived to a triumphant welcome from the good people of Düsseldorf, who had just appointed him as the city's music director. On the day he completed his *Cello Concerto*, Schumann also conducted his first city concert, to rapturous applause, and a week later he began his most famous symphony — the 'Rhenish' symphony, to be completed in only a few months.

This exuberant success was to crumble into dust within a few years when Schumann's mental condition overtook him, and in less than 24 months, he was dead. How rapidly everything had changed! The *Cello Concerto* was never played in Schumann's short lifetime, so he himself never heard its wonderful, song-like effects, sometimes lyrically overflowing, sometimes wistfully elegiac. Likewise, he was not to hear his ultra-successful idea in the second movement, where the solo cello duets with the orchestra's principal cello.

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi
Cello Daniel Müller-Schott

The work is in three movements, played without a break, so the overall impression is more of a *Rhapsody* or *Konzertstück* for cello and orchestra. All three movements are linked together by a little bridge passage that uses the main theme, first heard at the opening after three soft woodwind chords. Towards the end of the last movement's vigorous rondo, the same material re-appears to form the concerto's only extended solo cadenza, and the work ends optimistically in the major key. Alas, for Schumann, this optimism was to be tragically overturned.

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

The Creatures of Prometheus: selections (1801)

Overture – Adagio – Allegro molto e con brio

No.2 Adagio – Allegro con brio

No.3 Allegro vivace

No.5 Adagio – Andante quasi Allegretto

No.9 Adagio – Allegro molto

No.10 Pastorale. Allegro

No.11 Andante

No.12 Maestoso – Adagio – Allegro

No.13 Allegro

No.14 Andante – Adagio – Allegro – Allegretto

No.15 Andantino – Adagio – Allegro

No.16 Finale. Allegretto – Allegro molto – Presto

DURATION: c.47'

In 1799, the Empress Maria Theresa appointed a famous Neapolitan dancer, Salvatore Viganò, as master of the court ballet in Vienna. His duties included the annual production of a new ballet for the Imperial Court. In 1801, he devised a ballet called *The Creatures of Prometheus* and he asked around for the name of a composer in Vienna who might provide the music. Beethoven had recently completed a fine Septet, which he had carefully dedicated to Maria Theresa. One thing led to another, and Beethoven got the job.

The scenario for the ballet is little more than an improvisation on classical themes. Prometheus creates a man and a woman from clay and water, and brings them to life with a firebrand taken from the sun. Alas, he fails to give them the power of reason and feeling. He wants to destroy his creatures, but Apollo rescues them and takes them to Parnassus, where they learn about the arts from the Muses, who teach them sorrow, laughter, music and dance. Bacchus introduces them to the pleasures of revelling... finally, the creatures appreciate all the joys and beauties of Nature. After one last solemn dance they embark on life's journey.

Programme Notes cont.

The ballet proved to be very successful and was performed 16 times in its first year — probably the longest run during his lifetime for any of Beethoven's works.

This evening's selection begins with the overture (No.1) and the ballet's opening Storm (No.2), during which the two clay figures of Prometheus attempt to escape (No.3) but are recaptured (No.5). Act II is set on Mount Parnassus, where Apollo and the nine Muses attempt to bring the figures to 'real' human life through music and dance — Euterpe with the flute, Amphion with the lyre, Apollo with the cello, Terpsichore with dances... and so on. Soon the figures gradually join in, as part of the parade (Nos.9-16) of players and dancers. After a number of star solos, the finale introduces the very familiar *Prometheus* theme, later to be used unforgettably in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony and *Eroica* Variations.

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