The New Zealand Herald
Premier Series.

MOZART & MISCHIEF

7.30PM, Thursday 2 October
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Shiyeon Sung
Piano Benjamin Grosvenor

Programme Notes

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)
after Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)
La boutique fantasque (1919)

I. *Overture*
II. *Tarantella*
III. *Mazurka*
IV. *Danse cosaque*
V. *Can-Can*
VI. *Valse lente*
VII. *Nocturne*
VIII. *Galop*

DURATION: c.6'

La boutique fantasque (*The Fantastic Toyshop*) was first presented in 1919 at London's Alhambra Theatre. The music was compiled by Respighi, who based it on recently discovered piano pieces by Rossini.

The scene of the ballet is a doll's shop in which the customers are cheekily representative of a range of familiar tourist types. After the shop closes, the sleeping dolls wake up to perform eight fantastic dances of their own.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Piano Concerto No.21 (1785)

I. *Allegro*
II. *Andante*
III. *Allegro vivace assai*

DURATION: c.29'

After a stormy exit from his hateful post in Salzburg, Mozart arrived in Vienna in 1781 as a freelance composer and a virtuoso performer. But he needed new repertoire with which to impress the new public, so in short order he composed three piano concertos for the Viennese to marvel over. In fact, during the period 1784 to 1786 he composed no fewer than twelve outstanding works, with tonight's concerto coming from 1785.

A gentle, march-like strain for unison strings appears at the start and is answered by the winds. Other themes make their appearance before the solo piano's entry, bringing the opening theme back to everyone's attention. Immediately, a dialogue between soloist and orchestra becomes an exchange of equals, with the orchestra's multi-coloured timbres mixing with the piano's rippling figurations.

No need to explain the enchanting Elvira Madigan movement that follows. Summoning up all his composerly gifts, Mozart transforms his concert hall into an opera-house with the piano as a prima donna, singing in long, perfectly arched phrases of love, longing and loss.

Earthy reality returns in the closing *Allegro vivace*, a rondo-finale that leaps and bounds with unalloyed gaiety and eventually rings down the curtain.

INTERVAL

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Symphony No.9 (1945)

FIVE MOVEMENTS, THE LAST THREE PLAYED WITHOUT BREAK:

I. *Allegro*
II. *Moderato*
III. *Presto*
IV. *Largo*
V. *Allegretto-Allegro*

DURATION: c.27'

Classical music has very few pieces that have survived the joining of a country's political events with its official propaganda. The life and music of Shostakovich provides a perfect example. In 1936, he had been attacked, insulted, even threatened in a Pravda article that shrieked official Soviet opposition to his recent music, particularly his *Lady Macbeth* opera.

Shostakovich was stunned. His choices were stark, and few. He could doggedly continue in the same vein; but artists who did this tended to disappear mysteriously. Alternatively, he could consider just giving up as a composer, but his musical gifts were too compelling for that. The only way ahead seemed to be one of compromise, meek apology, and occasional, politically correct statements (plus some quiet, back-door preparation that prompted him for years to keep a fully packed suitcase under his bed).

So, in public, Shostakovich withdrew his Fourth Symphony, which was then in rehearsal, and at high speed composed a Fifth Symphony, which he described as 'the creative reply of a Soviet artist to justified criticism'. From then on, if Solomon Volkov's book *Testimony* is to be believed, Shostakovich embarked on a cat-and-mouse game of concealing his personal loathing of Stalin and Soviet Party loyalists through satirically biting but camouflaged music that alternated with seemingly supportive public statements.

Ironically, the outbreak of war in 1939 made it easier for him. Work on the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies gave him an excuse to put his hostility to Stalin's regime to one side and appear to join in the adulation of the great leader, while privately detesting the job.

At the end of the war, the Russian public and its officialdom sought a glorious hymn to victory from the country's most prominent composer. A symphony was what was required, and everyone knew that Shostakovich was already on the brink of a Ninth Symphony.

Programme Notes cont.

But Shostakovich couldn't do it. "I was asked to provide the great apotheosis," he confided, "but, I couldn't write an apotheosis on Stalin, I just couldn't."

Instead, the Ninth Symphony, when it appeared, contained much that undercut what its composer was expected to exalt — inflated grandeur subsided quickly into limp posture, emotion that carried a hollow ring to it, great expectations that were rudely knocked over by slapstick, childish games, military glory subverted into nursery-rhyme pipes and drums... not much heroism there, and certainly nothing resembling triumph.

At its heart, the symphony was a very genuine, very honest sound-document that framed the exhausted and disillusioned mood of a country that needed to start again, to find a new song — and Shostakovich was destined to play a large part in that search. But not yet...

Notes Fund: Music for this concert has been supported by Sally Rich