

HAYDN & SHOSTAKOVICH

7.30PM, Thursday 1 October
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Peer Gynt: Suite No.1 (1874-75; rev. 1885)

- I. *Morning Mood*
- II. *The Death of Ase*
- III. *Anitra's Dance*
- IV. *In the Hall of the Mountain King*

DURATION: c.15'

In 1874 Henrik Ibsen asked Grieg to compose incidental music for the first production of his verse drama *Peer Gynt*. The play deliberately flouted stagecraft rules of the time in its wild blend of fantasy and gritty realism and Grieg found the task a challenging one. For a production in Copenhagen in 1886 he extensively revised the score and the eight numbers published in the familiar suites reflect those changes.

Morning Mood imagines the rising sun breaking through clouds, while in the second movement Peer's mother anticipates her imminent death. The third movement is a seductive dance performed by the beautiful daughter of a Bedouin chieftain. *In the Hall of the Mountain King* is an exercise in varying a repeated phrase with orchestral colour and dynamics.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Cello Concerto No.1 (1959)

Four movements, last three played without pause

- I. *Allegretto*
- II. *Moderato*
- III. *Cadenza*
- IV. *Allegro con moto*

DURATION: c.30'

It was in June 1959 that Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich read with excitement that Shostakovich was currently working on a cello concerto. Receiving the score from the composer in early August he proceeded to learn the work in just four days, after which he and pianist Alexander Dedyukhin went to Shostakovich's dacha outside Leningrad to play the work to him. To the composer's astonishment Rostropovich played the solo part from memory.

The concerto is written for a small orchestra consisting of double woodwind, horn, timpani, celeste and strings. There is a prominent role for the horn, which acts as a secondary soloist. The concerto opens immediately with the solo cello playing a four-note motto which appears to be a variant of Shostakovich's four-note DSCH signature theme. The first movement is an agitated march dominated by this motto.

The second movement opens with a meditative theme for the strings, followed by a desolate song for the solo cello. A third element is a sweet, almost naïve melody for the cello, leading to an impassioned climax. The desolate song returns, played by the cello in ghostly harmonics in dialogue with the celeste.

Conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens
Cello Anastasia Kobekina

The cadenza is so extensive and far-reaching that it merits recognition as a movement in itself. The finale begins as a grotesque dance. The movement includes several elusive references to Stalin's favourite Georgian folksong, 'Suliko'. Shostakovich had previously quoted the tune mockingly in his secretly written cantata *Rayok*. This is a satire of conferences arising from the infamous 'Zhdanov' Decree of 1948, which had lambasted composers for the indefinable crime of 'formalism'.

Towards the end the motto theme from the first movement returns in the woodwind, soon thereafter taken up by the horn and finally – almost gleefully – by the solo cello. The concerto comes to an abrupt close with seven quick strokes on the timpani.

INTERVAL

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Symphony No.97 (1792)

- I. *Adagio – Vivace*
- II. *Adagio ma non troppo*
- III. *Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio*
- IV. *Finale: Presto assai*

DURATION: c.25'

Following the death of his patron Prince Nikolaus Esterházy in September 1790, Haydn found himself free to travel for the first time in thirty years. In December the violinist and impresario Johan Peter Salomon arrived in Vienna and presented Haydn with an appealing offer to compose and conduct a new series of symphonies in London with a large orchestra.

Haydn's music was already well known in London and he was greeted there as a celebrity, staying until June 1792. A second visit took place between February 1794 and August 1795, again at Salomon's invitation. These visits proved to be highly lucrative for Haydn and his last twelve symphonies were all composed for them.

In Symphony No.97 a slow introduction leads to a fast-paced first movement in martial style with a contrasting second subject in the style of a ländler. The second movement is a set of variations on an artless theme which becomes progressively less simple as the movement advances. In the third variation Haydn instructs the violins to play 'at the bridge', creating a glassy, metallic sound – an effect rarely used before the 20th century. Ironically a great many recordings of the symphony fail to honour Haydn's intentions because they use an earlier edition which chose to omit the instruction!

Unusually, the repeats in the minuet and trio are written out in full so that Haydn can vary the orchestration. At the end of the trio Haydn writes a discreet solo for Salomon, concertmaster of the orchestra, whose name is specified in the score. The finale is one of Haydn's fastest, a brilliant sonata-rondo with a contrapuntal episode.

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