

## BEETHOVEN 5

7.30PM, Thursday 26 June  
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Giordano Bellincampi  
Violin Arabella Steinbacher

## Programme Notes

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### Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

*La Cenerentola*: Overture (1817)

DURATION: c.8'

Of all the speedy operas that Rossini composed, *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*) must have been the speediest. He was given the libretto on Christmas Day, 1816, and turned the complete score over to the theatre director in Rome three weeks later. His previous opera (*The Barber of Seville* no less) had been almost as fast, and many others came miraculously close to these high-speed records.

When he retired from the theatre in 1828, in his mid-30s, Rossini had chalked up a staggering total of nearly 40 operas, about six of which are regularly produced today, all over the world.

Of course, he had a system, and a hand-picked team of helpers who were all seasoned composers for the theatre. Most of the recitatives in *La Cenerentola* had been 'sub-contracted' to these backroom composers, and some of the famous solos and duets might well have been the work of unknown names rather than Rossini himself. He also borrowed regularly from his own previous works, in this case particularly *La Gazzetta*, a hit at the time in Naples, but as yet unknown in Rome.

He also made frequent use of a well-known device now called the 'Rossini crescendo' — a short phrase constantly repeated, becoming slightly louder each time and eventually landing joyfully on the desired key — a tantalising and thrilling experience that still causes excitement today.

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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Concerto No.5 'Turkish' (1775)

- I. *Allegro aperto*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Rondeau (Tempo di Menuetto)*

DURATION: c.31'

To our minds, Mozart was a great composer, but his own age saw him primarily as a performer, and not just at the piano. In his earliest years, his dazzling reputation also came from his skill as a violinist. Indeed, his father Leopold Mozart — himself an outstanding player — often claimed that the boy could be 'the finest violinist in Europe' were he to devote himself to the instrument.

As it turned out, the reality was very different. In 1773, the family returned to Salzburg from the last of those toilsome journeys that were designed to show off the children's prodigious gifts to the rich and titled. But there were no takers. The only job Mozart could get was as court musician to the Archbishop of Salzburg, so he decided on a programme of self-promotion to remind people of his skill as a performer, and for that he turned back to the violin, dashing off at least five concertos for the instrument in the single year of 1775.

The Fifth Concerto is headed *Allegro aperto* (open). Perhaps this indicates the breezy, open-air effect of the orchestra's light, upward arpeggios at the start. But then the solo violin breaks all the rules by entering with an *Adagio* that smooths the notes out to form an

expressive episode. The opening music returns, but this time as an accompaniment to the soloist, who sets the movement in full train.

Following a beautifully ornate slow movement, the expected Rondo-finale arrives. Instead of the usual, flighty *opera buffa* kind of piece, Mozart serves up a stately minuet, punctuated by episodes. For the third of these, he catapults us into the popular Viennese dance fad of a 'Turkish' section with a duple-time stomping tread, and some banging with the bows to give the 'drums and cymbals' effect. To restore order, the soloist launches herself into an impressive cadenza, and the movement ends with its Mozartian charm fully restored.

## INTERVAL

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### Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No.5 (1808)

*Four movements, with the third and fourth played continuously*

- I. *Allegro con brio*
- II. *Andante con moto*
- III. *Scherzo: Allegro*
- IV. *Allegro*

DURATION: c.31'

Nowadays many people are so familiar with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that they consider it the model for all symphonies. It also seems to set the standard for a tightly crafted, 'organic' symphony, since its famous four-note opening 'Fate' motif saturates the first *Allegro*, and re-appears in the other movements.

Knowing this symphony so well, we might assume that it was all one broad sweep of inspiration. Yet Beethoven didn't conceive the work in a single take. Far from it. He took half a dozen years to complete it, with much of the composition being done during 1807 and 1808. Moreover, he was frequently interrupted by other works that he felt impelled to write — amazingly, these were also masterpieces: the Fourth Symphony, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto, three 'Razumovsky' string quartets and the draft of his opera *Fidelio*.

At the start of this symphony, the famous four-note 'Fate' motif generates rhythmic urgency throughout the movement. Then, for the second movement, Beethoven writes a half-dramatic, half-lyrical piece that alternates two themes in loose variation. A vigorous *Scherzo* and *Trio* follows, ended by a stroke of dramatic genius when Beethoven reduces the sound to nothing except for soft, throbbing timpani strokes that swell powerfully towards the opening of the finale — made majestic by the entry of trombones, kept in reserve until this splendid moment of victory.

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