

TCHAIKOVSKY'S VIOLIN

7.30PM, Thursday 25 September
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Shiyeon Sung
Violin Chloe Chua*

Programme Notes

Franz von Suppé (1819-1895)

Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna: Overture

DURATION: c.8'30"

This knockabout stage production played in Vienna's Leopoldstadt Theatre in 1844, and was one of many currently fashionable 'revue' concoctions of spoken dialogue, stage action, and songs and dances — new and old — with very little concern for a coherent story.

Many of the items were semi-impromptu, but overtures were often notated and so have mostly survived. The sparkling overture *Morning, Noon, and Night in Vienna* was one of over 20 scores that Franz von Suppé wrote for the theatre, and remains today the only vestige of the show.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Violin Concerto (1878)

THREE MOVEMENTS, OF WHICH THE SECOND AND THIRD ARE JOINED:

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Canzonetta*
- III. *Allegro vivacissimo*

DURATION: c.38'

Tchaikovsky's only concerto for violin met strong opposition from the beginning. Its first performers, critics and audiences all reacted with different degrees of violence. Austro-German critics — especially the Viennese guru Eduard Hanslick — viewed it as Russian 'barbarism', while Russian critics scolded the composer for being too Western.

Leopold Auer, Tchaikovsky's preferred soloist, pronounced the work 'unplayable', and in a late switch, the premiere performance was given by Adolf Brodsky and the Vienna Philharmonic at the end of 1881, to an audience whose boos were much louder than its bravos.

So much for the public life of the concerto; its private life was even more turbulent. In July 1877 Tchaikovsky had married a young female fan, but the marriage was an unhappy one and after months of storm and stress, the distraught composer fled to Saint Petersburg. Family friends arranged for him to recuperate in Italy and Switzerland. It was there that an earlier friend, student and possibly lover, Yosif Kotek, an emerging violinist of promise, caught up with Tchaikovsky, and persuaded him to work on a new violin concerto.

Inspiration followed freely. The concerto's reworked first movement was completed in two weeks, and the rest of the work came a fortnight later, by which time the original slow movement had been replaced by a *Canzonetta*. Throughout the work the concentration on soloistic virtuosity is balanced by powerful and imaginative orchestral writing, and many of Tchaikovsky's melodies have an obvious Russian flavour, especially the second main theme in the long first movement, and the fast *Trepak* dance rhythms of the finale.

INTERVAL

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Symphony No.93 (1791)

- I. *Adagio-Allegro assai*
- II. *Largo cantabile*
- III. *Menuetto. Allegro*
- IV. *Finale: Presto ma non troppo*

DURATION: c.22'

This D-major symphony was completed in London early in 1791 — not long after the composer had arrived in the country, though its first public performance did not happen until a year later. According to the delighted audience reaction in the Hanover Square Assembly Room, it had been worth waiting for. The press was full of praise too, with *The Times* falling over itself to list its virtues:

Novelty of idea, agreeable caprice, and whim combined with all Haydn's sublime and wonten [sic] grandeur, gave additional consequence to the soul and feelings of every individual present...

The symphony follows the four-movement structure that Haydn himself had done so much to standardise, with an imposing introduction giving way to a dance-like Allegro-assai that regularly features drums plus wind instruments sporting against a delightfully busy string section.

After a slow movement, a muscular minuet and an almost military trio, the finale is full of harmonic tricks and rhythmic upsets, leading to a jubilant final cadence.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss* (1928)

- I. *Sinfonia*
- II. *Danses suisses*
- III. *Scherzo*
- IV. *Pas de deux*

DURATION: c.25'

Stravinsky's one-act ballet *Le Baiser de la fée* (*The Fairy's Kiss*) was composed in 1928, the year that saw the 35th anniversary of Tchaikovsky's birth. The ballet was Stravinsky's adaptation of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale *The Ice Maiden*, and Stravinsky decided to include a personal homage to Tchaikovsky, a composer whose Russian roots he shared and whose music he much admired, despite his often-stated dislike of 'Romantic music'.

Alas, the ballet didn't click with the public, leading to revisions and adaptations over the years, and the suite that will be performed this evening.

The opening *Sinfonia* 'Storm' uses music from one of Tchaikovsky's *Sixteen Songs for Children*. A mother carrying her baby son is chased by spirits. They capture the infant and bring him to the Fairy Queen, who blesses him with a kiss and then leaves him to be discovered by local Swiss villagers, whose celebration dances are accompanied by Stravinsky's take on Tchaikovsky's piano piece *Humoresque*.

Programme Notes cont.

In the following scene (Scherzo), the boy is now a young man, happily mixing with guests at his wedding. This culminates in a *pas de deux* for the newly-marrieds while a solo cello sings out Tchaikovsky's haunting song *None but the Lonely Heart*. But the Fairy Queen enters at the last moment and claims him through death for herself.

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**Change of Artist Chloe Chua replaces the previously announced Clara-Jumi Kang*