

## TCHAIKOVSKY 5

7.30PM, Thursday 15 May  
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Shiyoon Sung  
Piano Alexander Gavrylyuk

# Programme Notes

**Kenneth Young** (1955-)

*Douce Tristesse* (2012)

DURATION: c.11'

Kenneth Young, well-known New Zealand composer, conductor and music educator now lives in Sawyers Bay, Port Chalmers, Dunedin. He writes: "*Douce Tristesse* was commissioned in 2012 by Peter van Drimmelen and the Wellington Chamber Orchestra with the help of Creative New Zealand.

"The impetus for the work came following our family's final visit to a particular spot in the Bay of Plenty near Tauranga where we had holidayed every summer for 13 years. We just loved it there; the view from the deck over Tauranga Harbour towards the Kaimai Ranges is one of the most ravishing scenes I can think of. However, the elderly owners of the cottage had to sell it and move on, so that was that.

"The title means 'sweet sadness'. The piece itself is about looking at a familiar and fond vista for the very last time. It is so beautiful, and you love it so much, but you are aware you will never see it again."

**Sergei Prokofiev** (1891-1953)

Piano Concerto No.3 (1921)

- I. *Andante – Allegro*
- II. *Tema con variazioni*
- III. *Allegro ma non troppo*

DURATION: c.28'

Of Prokofiev's five piano concertos, the third is the only one to follow the normal three-movement pattern. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that, by 1921, the composer's life had itself become relatively 'normal' after the prolonged strife of the First World War, then a difficult and ultimately disappointing emigration to the US in 1918, and in 1920 a return to Western Europe.

During the spring and summer of 1921, having found a peaceful spot on France's Brittany coast, Prokofiev settled into a life of mixing with the locals, perfecting his chess-playing skills, developing a romantic relationship with his future wife the Spanish singer Lina Llubera — and composing this concerto.

The decade of the 1920s saw the full flood of the so-called neo-classical style, which dressed up the musical forms and shapes of earlier times with peppery wrong notes, spiky modern harmonies, and sarcastic contrasts. This concerto is a perfect example of all this. Things to look out for in the first movement include the loud and forceful entry of the piano, then there are the exciting contrasts as the piano switches from rushing cascades to flickering, delicate embroidery and then into tank-like, pounding chords. At the movement's end, a coda builds up an electrical field that finally explodes in a flash of lightning.

In the second movement, a mock-classical theme opens out in the orchestra, with the piano entering only at the first variation, lyrical and nostalgic. After two fast and brilliant variations, a dreamlike

*Andante* gives place to boldly energetic music again, before sinking into a few bars of rest.

The finale shows Prokofiev's dry and thrilling toccata-like style, the start signalled by bassoons and bouncy strings. Following a lush, Rachmaninov-like central section, the toccata style reappears. Piano and orchestra pound along the closing straight, each trying to outstrip the other until they join together for a headlong dash to the finish in blazing chords.

## INTERVAL

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893)

Symphony No.5 (1888)

- I. *Andante – Allegro con anima*
- II. *Andante cantabile*
- III. *Valse: Allegro moderato*
- IV. *Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace*

DURATION: c.45'

Tchaikovsky began writing his Fifth symphony over a decade after completing his Fourth. While its first performances were marred by negative reactions from critics, it is now a work of enormous popularity, known for its visceral and emotional character.

The opening clarinet melody outlines a theme that has been become known as the 'fate' motif, which will recur reimagined in every movement. It's an ominous introduction to the symphony, but there are moments throughout that positively light up with some of the composer's loveliest music. The second movement's horn melody is an inspired creation, beautifully fitting the instrument, yet when it returns on the clarinet (with the horn's warm approval in two notes, smoothly repeated between phrases) it is made to sound just as magical.

The graceful waltz of the third movement floats in as though it hasn't a care in the world, with every note reminding us of Tchaikovsky's great legacy in ballet. Even when the 'fate' theme returns in the Finale, it is but a cloud on the horizon as recast affirmations lead the symphony to its magnificent conclusion.

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