

Love Stories

7.30PM, Thursday 28 August
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Antony Hermus

Programme Notes

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

Russlan & Ludmilla: Overture (1842)

DURATION: c.6'

Glinka spent his early childhood in the care of an over-protective grandmother who kept him confined to a warm room, wrapped him in furs and fed him chocolates. When his grandmother died he was sent to live with his uncle, and it was there that he first heard an orchestra.

On leaving school, Glinka experienced a major turning point in 1830 when he travelled to Italy. Hearing the Italian style that was being forged by composers such as Bellini and Donizetti, he determined to create a distinctive Russian sound.

Returning to Russia, Glinka composed his first opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, which was a huge success. He soon started a second opera, *Russlan and Ludmilla*, producing some of his finest music and sowing the seeds of a major transformation of Russian music by the next generation of Russian composers.

The rollicking overture is a popular choice as a concert opener, thanks to Glinka's dazzling treatment of the orchestra and his versatile use of folk-derived themes.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Romeo & Juliet Fantasy-Overture (1869)

DURATION: c.19'

It was the composer Balakirev who suggested to Tchaikovsky that he write a piece based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky was going through a bad patch at the time and complained constantly of burnout, but Balakirev was tenacious with his guidance and encouragement.

Intermittent changes were made over a dozen years, and eventually three versions appeared. The one that is played today was the third and final draft, and it is hard for us to believe that its apparently rich and effortless flow took such a long and stressful time to come into being.

All the musical materials are immaculately arranged, and they fit the story like a glove. The brooding introduction is there not just to create a mood of expectancy; its religious solemnity also evokes the world of Friar Lawrence, who originally wed the two lovers, but whose plan for their escape went tragically wrong. Then there's the fast and furious family-feuding music that breaks out at the start of the Allegro, to be stilled only by the heart-melting warmth of the famous love-theme.

Later, in a stroke of genius, Tchaikovsky chooses to keep violent conflict as the sole basis of the development section, but brings back the recapitulation with the love-theme (preceded by a heavenly key-change). After that, the violent feud erupts once more, then softer, funereal chords remind us of the two young lives needlessly thrown away. The overture ends with the angry gesture of a shaking fist.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

arr. **Henk de Vlieger**

Die Meistersinger (*The Mastersingers*)

— An Orchestral Tribute (1867; 2005)

11 FRAGMENTS PLAYED CONTINUOUSLY

- I. *Prelude*
- II. *Assembly of the Mastersingers*
- III. *Song of the Apprentices*
- IV. *Sachsen's Monologue* (*Hans Sachs' Monologue*)
- V. *Prelude to Act III*
- VI. *Baptismal Proclamation*
- VII. *Procession of the Guilds*
- VIII. *Dance of the Apprentices*
- IX. *Procession of the Mastersingers*
- X. *Walther's Prize Song*
- XI. *Final Song*

DURATION: c.52'

Born in 1953, Henk de Vlieger began his musical life as an orchestral percussionist, but he soon showed an astonishing gift for arranging operatic works and threading them into large-scale instrumental items. So successful were these that he was able to retire from his 'day job' and concentrate on full-time compilations.

The secret of his success lies partly in his use of the composer's original music so far as possible, limiting his own contribution to a subtle weaving of voice and choral parts through the orchestral texture, and adding his own fade-outs and fade-ins where necessary.

De Vlieger never credits these works to himself. Instead, he adds clever new subtitles to the original titles. In the works of Wagner for example (an especially fertile ground for de Vlieger), we find his treatment of *Tristan und Isolde* billed as *An Orchestral Passion*, while the *Ring* cycle reduction is subtitled *An Orchestral Adventure...* and so on. This evening's 'compilation' is of *The Mastersingers* ('An Orchestral Tribute') and transforms the nearly five-hour opera into an item of about 50 minutes of marvellous music.

The object of all this is not to prod audiences into spotting parts of Wagner's work that they may already know, but to present a compiled work to be enjoyed for its own sake. Many listeners claim that new light is shed on their remembrance of Wagner's music, and those who are not too familiar with *Die Meistersinger* will be treated to all the 'best bits' of the original, minus Wagner's sometimes heavy philosophising, and with none of de Vlieger's seams showing.

COPYRIGHT © HEATH LEES 2025

Notes Fund: Music for this concert has been supported by Gene Dillman

INTERVAL