

GIL SHAHAM PLAYS BEETHOVEN

7.30PM, Saturday 27 June
Auckland Town Hall

Conductor Antony Hermus
Violin Gil Shaham

Programme Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Concerto (1806)

- I. *Allegro ma non troppo*
- II. *Larghetto*
- III. *Rondo: Allegro*

DURATION: c.42'

1806 was a year of extraordinary productivity for Beethoven. While continuing to revise his opera *Fidelio* he completed his Fourth Piano Concerto and Fourth Symphony and produced all three 'Razumovsky' String Quartets. As if this were not enough, in the final month or so of the year he composed a work that would in time prove to be almost as revolutionary for the concerto genre as his *Eroica* had been for the symphony.

The title page of the manuscript bears the words 'Concerto par Clemenza pour Clement', Beethoven's punning plea for mercy from its dedicatee, violin prodigy Franz Clement. One assumes that Beethoven fed instalments of the solo part to Clement as he composed it, but the finale was completed barely two days before the premiere. Hurried though its creation may have been, the concerto was one of Beethoven's most ground-breaking works. While it adopts the overall structure for a concerto as epitomised by Mozart, its proportions surpass those of any previous work in that form.

Five quiet repetitions of the note D on timpani open the work, a stroke of genius that raised eyebrows at the first performance. Throughout the movement this motto repeatedly shares the limelight with the movement's actual themes, which all hug the contours of the D major scale. On a number of occasions Beethoven brings back the repeated notes in the violins – disconcertingly on D-sharp. The slow movement is a set of variations on a simple yet well-proportioned theme. It leads without pause into the *Rondo* finale.

Much of the solo part is written in the high register of the instrument, a nod to Clement's reputation for flawless intonation and sweetness of tone. The concerto was enthusiastically received by its first audience; not so by the critics, who were unimpressed by the work's length and by Beethoven's symphonic approach. It wasn't until 1844, when 12-year-old Joseph Joachim performed the concerto in London with Mendelssohn conducting, that the concerto began to enter the standard repertoire.

INTERVAL

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Cinderella (selections)
(1940-44; rev. 1946)

Introduction

Quarrel

Fairy Godmother and Fairy Winter

Cinderella Goes to the Ball

Cinderella in the Palace

The Three Oranges

Cinderella's Waltz

Midnight

Galop

Slow Waltz

Amoroso

DURATION: c.30'

Following the success of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1940 at Leningrad's Kirov Theatre (today's Mariinsky Theatre, Saint Petersburg), Prokofiev was asked by the company to compose another full-length ballet. In consultation with the Kirov's principal ballerina Galina Ulanova, who had created the role of Juliet, Prokofiev decided upon *Cinderella* as the subject. Nikolai Volkov produced the scenario, based mainly on the well-known fairy tale by Charles Perrault.

Prokofiev had completed the piano score for the first two acts by June of 1941, but when Germany invaded Russia on 22 June he decided to set aside the ballet and work instead on a project more appropriate to Russia's wartime struggle. Thus, the opera based on Tolstoy's *War and Peace* came into being.

Prokofiev resumed work on *Cinderella* in mid-1943, expecting that the ballet would be given its first performance at the Kirov. However, having become aware of Ulanova's talent, in 1944 Joseph Stalin made a personal directive that she should be transferred to Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. As a consequence the premiere of *Cinderella* in November 1945 was given at the Bolshoi. Due to ill health Prokofiev was unable to attend orchestral rehearsals, and at the premiere he was greatly annoyed to discover that the conductor, Yuri Fayer, had made 'improvements' to his orchestration.

Despite the supernatural elements inherent in bringing the fairy tale to life, Prokofiev's foremost intention in writing the music was to reflect the human emotions of the characters. The *Introduction* contrasts Cinderella's unhappiness with her dreams of a brighter future, while *Quarrel* depicts a fight between her sisters over which of them should wear a shawl to the prince's ball. The two fairies whose magic will transform Cinderella into a beautiful princess appear, and she is warned she must leave the ball by midnight or the spell will be broken and she will return to rags.

When Cinderella arrives at the palace, the prince is overcome by her beauty and they immediately dance. On the stroke of *Midnight*, twelve dwarfs leap out of the clock to remind Cinderella that she must leave. The following day the prince sets out in search of Cinderella. When he finds her they dance a *Slow Waltz*, and the final selection celebrates their love.

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