

2017 SEASON



sydney symphony orchestra

David Robertson

The Lowy Chair of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

Cocktail Hour

Chamber Music in the Utzon Room

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

Saturday 1 April, 6pm

BEETHOVEN'S WIND OCTET

Saturday 13 May, 6pm

MENDELSSOHN'S OCTET

Saturday 1 July, 6pm



COCKTAIL HOUR – CONCERT 1

Death and the Maiden

When three is enough...

Leopold Kozeluch, fellow-composer but no friend of Beethoven, after tonight's trio had been played in Haydn's presence, is said to have torn the music from a performer's hand, thrown it on the ground and stamped on it, asking Haydn 'we would have done it differently, wouldn't we, papa?' Haydn laughingly answered, 'yes "we" would have done it differently.' Different reactions, but both acknowledge that Beethoven had done something original and daring.

Beethoven was proud of his three Opus 9 trios, declaring them his best works so far. When they were published in 1798 he hadn't attempted either a symphony or a string quartet. Of both genres Haydn was the living acknowledged master, and Beethoven surely wanted to avoid comparison – until he was ready. Instead of writing quartets, he met an equal or more testing challenge, and the trios for violin, viola and cello never give the impression of thinness, or that something is missing. This was 'self-instruction', not part of Beethoven's studies under Haydn – the anecdote suggests as much. Yet Haydn is very much present in the background: unlike Beethoven's earlier string trios, in the multi-movement serenade or divertimento form, the three trios of Opus 9 are in the four-movement form of a Haydn symphony. Beethoven's scherzo in place of Haydn's minuet dance movement shows how he meant to go on: doing it differently.

A confessional quartet?

The nickname of Schubert's Quartet in D minor (D.810) matches music of power, unity and pathos (all four movements are in minor keys). The clue to the quartet is the theme for the variations in the second movement. It comes from Schubert's song 'Death and the Maiden', a setting of a poem by Claudius composed in 1817. In the song the agitated girl expresses terror and begs death to leave her untouched. Death solemnly and reassuringly offers himself as a friend, in whose arms she will find sleep. Death is especially victorious in the last movement of the quartet, which may be a dance of death. Schubert, when he composed this quartet in 1824, after recovering from treatment for syphilis, had mortality much in mind. Yet the same fruitful period produced

SATURDAY 1 APRIL, 6PM

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
UTZON ROOM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Trio in C minor,
Op.9 No.3

Allegro con spirito
Adagio con espressione
Scherzo (Allegro molto
e vivace)
Finale (Presto)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

String Quartet in D minor
(Death and the Maiden)

Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo (Allegro molto)
Presto



Schubert



his A minor and G major string quartets and also the Great C major Symphony (No.9).

Schubert's superb quartet writing owed some debt to his acquaintance with Ignaz Schuppanzigh, leader of a string quartet prepared to tackle new music, notably Beethoven's, despite its intellectual and technical difficulties. Yet they didn't dare play this Schubert quartet in public, and in private gatherings they played it to baffled hearers. The opening, with its triplet rhythm, is a defiant challenge, and pervades the first movement. At the end, Schubert twice seems to modulate to E flat major, as though trying and failing to escape from the sombre threat of death.

The theme of the second movement variations is based on the solemn introduction to 'Death and the Maiden', played by the piano, a series of harmonic progressions. The basic rhythm remains unchanged throughout the five variations; the minor mode prevails; finally the music seems to tell us that Death's invitation has been accepted. The fiercely syncopated *Scherzo* is briefly lulled by a trio section recalling the berceuse-like second subject of the first movement. The finale is a headstrong tarantella in 6/8 time. That this is a dance of death seems confirmed after a new idea in powerful chords, an allusion to a phrase sung by the Erl King (another seductive voice of death) in Schubert's setting of Goethe's ballad.

The first page of Schubert's manuscript for the *Death and the Maiden* quartet

...they didn't dare play this Schubert quartet in public, and in private gatherings they played it to baffled hearers.

COCKTAIL HOUR – CONCERT 2

Beethoven's Wind Octet

Schumann's troubles bring musicians closer...

This concert pairs very early Beethoven with very late Schumann. Beethoven's octet was originally composed before he left his native Bonn for Vienna; Schumann's cycle of piano pieces turned out to be the last thing he wrote, just before his breakdown and attempted suicide. This makes his title 'Songs of the Dawn' especially poignant.

What is this piano music doing in a piano-free concert? Alexandre Oguey, who made it possible, explains. Schumann is one of his favourite composers, and he is particularly fond of Schumann's late works – 'perhaps his mental struggles have something to do with that'. Alexandre happened to be listening to these Schumann pieces while he was rehearsing a quartet, one of the rare chamber works featuring his principal instrument, the cor anglais, with his colleagues Sophie Cole (violin), Fenella Gill (cello) and David Campbell (double bass). The quartet was by Michael Haydn, brother of Joseph, and Alexandre was loving the sound combination. He thought of arranging something else for these instruments (with the bonus of adding to the small stock of chamber works featuring the double bass). 'I started arranging the Schumann for the same people plus Rosemary Curtin (viola) as a means of getting to know them more deeply.'

This Schumann music is mainly lyrical and slow – five movements in a kind of pyramid shape: slow, moderate, fast, moderate, slow. Alexandre finds it sad but hopeful, nostalgic and melancholic, characteristics often attributed to the cor anglais. The left hand part for much of the piano original lies low, and is reinforced by doubling in octaves: 'that detail tickled my idea of including the double bass'.

When the music was brand new, Clara Schumann said her husband's *Songs of the Dawn* were original, but difficult to grasp: 'there is such a strange mood in them.' Clara is right, says Alexandre, 'these are not easy pieces, but I am secretly hoping that this version may make them more immediately accessible.'

Even Beethoven wrote supper music...

The high opus number suggests late Beethoven, but actually this wind octet is very early. It was composed in 1792, just before Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna, and was probably intended as dinner music at the court of Beethoven's employer, the Elector of Cologne. The instrumentation reminds us that Bonn was a

SATURDAY 13 MAY, 6PM

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
UTZON ROOM

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810–1856)

Gesänge der Frühe, Op.133
(Songs of the Dawn)

Arranged for cor anglais and quartet by Alexandre Oguey

Im ruhigen tempo

(In a calm tempo)

Belebt, nicht zu rasch

(Lively, not too quick)

Lebhaft (Brisk)

Bewegt (Agitated)

Im Anfange ruhiges, im

Verlauf bewegtes tempo

(Calm to begin with,

then livelier in tempo)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

Wind Octet in E flat, Op.103

Allegro

Andante

Menuetto

Finale (Presto)



Schumann



This 18th-century wind band is playing for a funeral, hence the black crepe tied to their instruments

province of the Austrian Empire – its ruler’s wind ensemble had (probably by imitation) the same make up as the Emperor’s in the capital, Vienna: pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns. The title on Beethoven’s manuscript, ‘Parthia’, was a common name for this kind of entertainment music; ‘serenade’ was another.

The Schumann in this concert is an arrangement, and the Beethoven may be too. As a student of Haydn in Vienna, rather than composing anything new during the first year, 1793, Beethoven revised several works from his Bonn years. The finale of the Octet as published, a fast movement, may have been the substitute for a more moderately paced movement, but the substitute finale, too, may have been first written in Bonn [Beethoven also arranged this octet for string quintet, as his Opus 4, not to be confused with the quintet arrangement of the C minor Piano Trio, heard in these concerts last year]. This wind octet is entertainment music, yet Beethoven adopts the four-movement form of a Viennese symphony, rather than that of a six-movement serenade. If you didn’t know, you’d be hard-pressed to recognise this music as Beethoven’s. But that doesn’t make it any less rewarding, for the players to show off and for the listeners to enjoy.

‘They are musical pieces that describe feelings at the approach and growth of the morning, but more as expressions of feeling than painting.’

Schumann describes his *Gesänge der Frühe*, adopting words Beethoven had used for his *Pastoral Symphony*.



Beethoven

COCKTAIL HOUR – CONCERT 3

Mendelssohn's Octet

More than a bridge to Britten...

It would be fair to Frank Bridge to mention him for once without referring to his brilliant disciple Benjamin Britten. But it can't be helped: if you know Britten's Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, you will recognise the beginning of one of Bridge's **Three Idylls** (1906) for string quartet. Britten was in his early 20s when he took it as the theme of his brilliant tribute to his teacher. Britten had already revealed himself as a composing prodigy, though less amazing than Mendelssohn (see below!).

Bridge was a composer of attainments, whose music became increasingly daring in response to World War I and to musical modernism. Bridge's early style, heard in the Idylls, was influenced by Brahms and late romanticism, with just a dash of French music. Britten's observed that Bridge liked on occasion to write music grateful to play and easy to listen to. **Three Idylls** is dedicated to E.E.S. – Ethel Elmore Sinclair, an Australian who had shared the first desk of second violins with Bridge in the Royal College of Music Orchestra. She and Frank Bridge married in 1908, two years after the Idylls were composed. In the second of the Idylls it was the harmonic ambiguities that most attracted Britten. The first Idyll is more searching, and played consecutively the three feel rather like the movements of a string quartet, building through contrasts and increase of tempo.

Bridge rarely used folk tunes, and when he did, he re-shaped them creatively, as in **Sir Roger de Coverley** (1922), where he breaks up the tune and uses it for variations. This dance tune is a good way to end a Christmas Ball, and *Auld Lang Syne* turns up too, pointing towards the New Year.

Young, yet fully formed...

Mendelssohn's Octet is one of music's most astonishingly precocious masterpieces. Its composer was 16. No one had written for eight strings in this way before. The Octet still seems a wondrous leap into mastery, even after the rediscovery of Mendelssohn's unpublished 12 symphonies for strings, composed during the years leading up the Octet, from 1821 to 1823. Like the Octet, these were played in the Sunday musicales at the Mendelssohn family house in Berlin. Felix chose the programs, directed rehearsals, was piano soloist, and played violin and viola in the ensembles. He also conducted, even when he had to stand on a stool to be seen. The excellent

SATURDAY 1 JULY, 6PM

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
UTZON ROOM

FRANK BRIDGE (1879–1941) **Three Idylls**

Adagio molto espressivo
Allegretto poco lento
Allegro con moto

Sir Roger de Coverley – A Christmas Dance

FELIX MENDELSSOHN **(1809–1847)**

Octet in E flat, Op.20

*Allegro moderato ma
con fuoco*
Andante
*Scherzo (Allegro
leggierissimo)*
Presto



Bridge



Mendelssohn's 'fairy' scherzo finds inspiration in Shakespeare via Goethe (*The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania*, 1847, by Joseph Noel Paton)

string players included Eduard Rietz, Felix's violin teacher, and the Octet's first violin part reflects Rietz's virtuosity.

Mendelssohn's Octet is appropriately played by eight players from an orchestra, rather than combining two string quartets. Mendelssohn indicated that: 'this Octet must be played by all instruments in symphonic orchestral style. *Pianos* [softs] and *fortes* [louds] must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasised than is usual in pieces of this character.' Many years later Mendelssohn said that the Octet remained his favourite among his works: 'I had a beautiful time writing it.'

Among the Octet's near-orchestral effects are the tremolos and syncopation accompanying the first violin as it launches the soaring first theme. Seeming at first a little remote, the slow movement (*Andante*) may be most remarkable of all, opposing the four violins and the lower strings, each group playing in a different key. Mendelssohn's colours and changes of texture here enriched the language of Romantic music.

Next comes the earliest of Mendelssohn's trademark 'fairy' scherzos. Mendelssohn pointed his sister Fanny to a passage in *Faust*, where Goethe is channelling Shakespeare: a dream of a fairy wedding. Fanny reported that the whole *Scherzo* is to be played staccato and pianissimo, 'the trills passing away with the quickness of lightning....So near the world of spirits, one is half inclined to snatch up a broomstick and follow the aerial procession'. Material from the *Scherzo* returns in the *Presto* finale, becoming the catalyst for a survey of all the work's themes. We no longer think of classical models – not even Mozart, whose 'Jupiter' Symphony so clearly inspired the fugato episodes at the beginning of the finale. We only wonder at Mendelssohn, the 16-year-old master.

'...so near the world of spirits, one is half inclined to snatch up a broomstick and follow the aerial procession.'

Fanny Mendelssohn's reaction to the scherzo in her brother's octet



Mendelssohn

THE MUSICIANS

APRIL

Beethoven

Andrew Haveron *violin*
Tobias Breider *viola*
Umberto Clerici *cello*

Schubert

Sun Yi *violin*
Alexander Norton *violin*
Sandro Costantino *viola*
Umberto Clerici *cello*

* Guest Musician

MAY

Schumann/Oguy

Alexandre Oguy *cor anglais*
Sophie Cole *violin*
Rosemary Curtin *viola*
Fenella Gill *cello*
David Campbell *double bass*

Beethoven

Shefali Pryor *oboe*
David Papp *oboe*
Francesco Celata *clarinet*
Sandra Ismail* *clarinet*
Matthew Wilkie *bassoon*
Noriko Shimada *bassoon*
Ben Jacks *horn*
Marnie Sebire *horn*

JULY

Bridge

Fiona Ziegler *violin*
Léone Ziegler *violin*
Jane Hazelwood *viola*
Adrian Wallis *cello*

Mendelssohn

Lerida Delbridge *violin*
Emma Jezek *violin*
Claire Herrick *violin*
Alexandra Mitchell *violin*
Anne-Louise Comerford *viola*
Justin Williams *viola*
Kristy Conrau *cello*
David Wickham *cello*

ABOUT THE ORCHESTRA

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

David Robertson *The Lowy Chair of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director*

Founded in 1932 by the ABC, the SSO evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the Sydney Opera House, the SSO tours NSW and internationally and is well on the way to becoming the premier orchestra of the Asia Pacific region.

The SSO's orchestral performances encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, special events, and collaborations with guest artists and ensembles from all genres, reflecting the orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal.

The musicians of the orchestra also perform in chamber music, both in independent presentations as well as under the auspices of the SSO, appearing over the years in concerts



at City Recital Hall Angel Place, the Sydney Opera House, Verbrugghen Hall at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, in venues on tour and in suburban Sydney, and in regular lunchtime concerts at St James' King Street.

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