

STRAUSS & BEETHOVEN

Saturday 20 February, 2pm and 4.30pm
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston

TSO musicians perform chamber music

Lucy Carrig-Jones violin

Anna Larsen Roach viola

Martin Penicka cello

Stuart Thomson double bass

Andrew Seymour clarinet

Tahnee van Herk bassoon

Greg Stephens horn

RICHARD STRAUSS (arr. Hasenöhr) Till Eulenspiegel einmal anders! (8')

BEETHOVEN Septet in E-flat, Op 20 (40')

In English, the title of the first work is Till Eulenspiegel differently, for once! Till Eulenspiegel is the name of a legendary prankster from the German middle ages. A peasant with attitude, Till likes to shake up authority – mocking those who are self-righteous, proper and pompous. Earthy and lusty, Till has no time for social niceties and order. The full title of Richard Strauss's symphonic poem of 1895 is Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks. Essentially film music before its time, Strauss's orchestral work depicts in sound various episodes from Till's life: charging through the marketplace on horseback, posing as a monk and delivering a sermon, arguing with pedants, flirting and generally misbehaving. The authorities finally catch up with Till and he's led to the scaffold. In this mini version of Strauss's symphonic poem, the orchestral forces have been reduced to a mere five players and the length has been almost halved to eight minutes. That said, a number of memorable themes and instrumental colours are retained: notably the 'once upon a time gesture' at the start, the horn solo which follows (Till coming to life, as it were) and the cheeky clarinet motif. The tremolando gesture on the double bass towards the end signals Till's march to the scaffold. But lest we take matters too seriously, the 'once upon a time gesture' returns, reminding us that it's all a tale. Franz Hasenöhr's arrangement of Strauss's original was published in 1954.

If you were asked which of Beethoven's works was the most popular during his lifetime, you might answer 'the Moonlight sonata' or 'Für Elise'. A definitive answer is probably impossible to determine but those works would be given a run for their money by the Septet in E-flat, which was tremendously popular. Oddly enough, this didn't entirely please Beethoven who, as he matured as a composer, was irritated that this early work (it was composed in 1799) received such wide currency. But it's easy to understand the popularity of the congenial, divertimento-like Septet. The six-movement work opens with a slow introduction (Adagio) establishing the key of E-flat. The succeeding Allegro con brio commences with a cheerful, 10-bar theme delivered by the violin and immediately restated by the clarinet. These roles are reversed at the start of the slow movement, Adagio cantabile, with the clarinet announcing the lilting 9/8 theme before it is taken up by the violin. The horn comes to the fore in the retransition with the clarinet heralding the return of principal theme in the key of A-flat. If the theme of the Tempo di minuetto sounds familiar that might be because Beethoven has repurposed it from the second movement of his Piano Sonata Op 49 No 2. The theme-and-variations form of the fourth movement allows for all instruments to come to the fore at various points. The 16-bar theme (Andante) is heard in five variations, the fourth of which is in the minor mode. The horn announces the theme of the marvellous Scherzo, possibly the best-loved of all of the Septet's movements. The grandly conceived final movement opens with an Andante con moto alla marcia, which summons a tragic mood. But all notions of tragedy are dispelled in the good-natured Presto and, following a breakout cadenza from the violin, the Septet comes to a sparkling close.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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