

## BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH

Friday 27 August, 7.30pm

Saturday 28 August, 7.30pm

Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

**Eivind Aadland** conductor

**Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra**

**BARBER** Adagio for Strings (7')

**BEETHOVEN** Symphony No 5 in C minor, Op 67 (31')

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Allegro –

Allegro

American composer Samuel Barber (1910-1981) is best known for the work heard in this concert, the celebrated Adagio for Strings. The Adagio, in fact, is an arrangement of the slow movement of Barber's String Quartet, which was composed in 1936. Barber had no interest in 20th-century modernist styles, preferring to write in a lyrical, mildly chromatic vein. American idioms such as jazz and the so-called 'prairie' style of Aaron Copland also held little attraction for him. That said, he ventured reasonably close to the latter in his work for soprano and orchestra, Knoxville: Summer of 1915. The Adagio, which is in the unusual key of B-flat minor, has a timeless, archaic quality. The printed music gives the impression of something from another era in that it uses the largely antiquated time signature of 4/2 (sometimes 5/2) and includes sustained notes written out as square breves (i.e. superficially resembling music from the Middle Ages or Renaissance). The harmony avoids tonic-dominant progressions preferring, instead, to 'float' in a quasi-modal nether region, which amplifies still further the music's archaic quality. But, archaic or not, Barber's Adagio is poignant and beautiful and, for good reason, has won a wide audience, even becoming a touchstone for grief and mourning in American culture at large.

From its arresting opening motif – da-da-da-DUM – the Symphony No 5 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) takes hold of the listener, creating an atmosphere of drama and suspense. The first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth provide the acorn from which the mighty oak grows. The horticultural metaphor is apt, as it draws attention to the way in which the first movement appears to grow and take shape before our ears. After the C-minor tempo of the first movement, the Andante con moto presents a more serene world. In the key of A-flat major, the second movement offers a series of double variations and includes some notable woodwind solos, along with some particularly brilliant moments for the brass. The third movement, Scherzo and Trio, brings a return to C minor. Significantly, it also brings a return of the rhythmic hook from the start of the symphony – da-da-da-DUM. But in this iteration the rhythm, which is in longer note values, is forceful and heavy footed (DA-DA-DA-DUM). Departing from convention, Beethoven leads without a break from the end of the third movement into the Finale. 'Leads' is perhaps too weak a word as the orchestra, driven by persistent and ever louder tapping from the timpani, charges into the closing movement. The powerful tutti downbeat at the start of the Finale introduces the trombones, hitherto silent in this symphony (indeed, this is one of the first instances of trombones in any symphony). Every instrument on stage, including the piccolo and contrabassoon (both also silent up until this point), plays the notes of a single chord: C major. It is a blistering, blazing moment. A moment of joy and triumph.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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