

BEETHOVEN'S FIRST

Friday 6 August, 7.30pm
Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

Eivind Aadland conductor

JS BACH Brandenburg Concerto No 3 (10')

[Allegro]

Adagio (Cadenza) –

Allegro

BEETHOVEN Symphony No 1 in C, Op 21 (26')

Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

Andante cantabile con moto

Menuetto (Allegro molto e vivace)

Adagio – Allegro molto e vivace

The six Brandenburg Concertos by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) date from the first quarter of the 18th century. They would have been written at various times over a number of years, mostly likely in the second decade of the century. We know for certain that Bach gathered them together and presented them to the Margrave of Brandenburg in 1721. He prefaced the collection with an obsequious dedication – no doubt in the hope that, should the Margrave be casting around for a Kapellmeister, he would remember this magnanimous gift and look favourably upon Bach. As it turns out, Bach's offering wasn't even acknowledged, and the six concertos languished in obscurity for more than a century. Brandenburg Concerto No 3 is for strings alone and features no solo instrument as such (although the first violin takes the lead from time to time). The idea of contrast between performing groups is crucial to concerto structure and in Brandenburg No 3 contrast comes from the ensemble being divided into three. The movements follow the well-established fast-slow-fast pattern but the middle movement (Adagio) consists of two chords only, the expectation being that they would be embellished by a brief cadenza of some kind.

Like Bach with the Brandenburg Concertos, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was thinking strategically when he unveiled his Symphony No 1. The première took place at Vienna's prestigious Burgtheater (Imperial Court Theatre) on 2 April 1800. Although Beethoven had been living in Vienna since 1792, this was the 29-year-old's first public concert in the imperial capital. And what a program it was! In addition to including the Symphony No 1 (which came at the end of a long night), it featured a symphony by Mozart, sung excerpts from Haydn's oratorio *The Creation*, a performance of one of Beethoven's piano concertos (possibly the Piano Concerto No 1, with Beethoven appearing as soloist) and – something Viennese audiences loved especially – free extemporisation at the piano with Beethoven doing the honours. It ought to be noted that Beethoven was placing his First Symphony in the company of music by Mozart and Haydn. Mozart was long dead but Haydn (composer of more than a hundred symphonies) was alive and well and living in Vienna himself. Beethoven, in other words, obviously felt confident enough to place his new work beside the city's esteemed masters. The ensemble is identical in size to the orchestra for Haydn's late symphonies and Beethoven takes his cue from Haydn by commencing the first movement with a slow introduction. In a surprise move, though, the opening chords appear to be in the 'wrong' key. A musical joke à la Haydn or a gesture of individuality? The four movements follow well-established norms although the third movement, despite being labelled Menuetto, is much faster than a conventional minuet, carrying the tempo marking Allegro molto e vivace. A Menuetto in name, it is a Beethovenian scherzo in practice.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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