

BEETHOVEN'S SECOND

Saturday 7 August, 7.30pm
Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

Eivind Aadland conductor

BARTÓK Romanian Folk Dances (6')

Stick Dance (from Mezőszabad)

Sash Dance (from Egres)

In One Spot (from Egres)

Horn Dance (from Bisztra)

Romanian Polka (from Belényes)

Fast Dance (from Belényes)

Fast Dance (from Nyágra)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No 2 in D, Op 36 (32')

Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

Larghetto

Scherzo (Allegro)

Allegro molto

When he wasn't composing, Béla Bartók (1881-1945) was out in the field recording the songs and dances of Eastern European peasant cultures. Bartók was a trailblazing ethnomusicologist, accumulating thousands of recordings of the folk music of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, above all. He even ventured further afield, recording music in Turkey and northern Africa. Not surprisingly, his ethnomusicological research seeped into his own compositions, mainly in the form of scales, harmonies, rhythms and time signatures that lie outside the Western tonal tradition. In addition to his original music, Bartók arranged for Western instruments and ensembles music collected on his fieldwork trips, including the music being performed in this concert, the Romanian Folk Dances. While the melodies in this collection are transcriptions of Romanian folk music (specifically, music from the Transylvania region of Romania), the harmonic underpinnings and orchestrations are Bartók's own. The Romanian Folk Dances are among Bartók's most popular works and exist in various versions. Bartók originally scored them for solo piano (1915), orchestrating them two years later. They are also well known in a version for violin and piano by Bartók's compatriot Zoltán Székely.

The year 1802 was a time of reckoning for Beethoven. He had been aware for some years that his hearing was deteriorating but he received painful confirmation of the fact when, in the bucolic surrounds of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, he noticed that he was deaf to the sounds of a shepherd's pipe or a shepherd's song. For a composer-pianist, profound hearing loss was a painful discovery. But it was during that same summer at Heiligenstadt that Beethoven completed his Symphony No 2, which offers few if any signals of the composer's despair. The first movement, which commences with a slow introduction, is rich in dynamic contrasts. We swing between light and dark, calm and storm. Here, and elsewhere in the symphony, Beethoven brings the woodwinds into prominence, using the full range of orchestral colours to achieve his musico-dramatic ends. The second movement, Larghetto, takes us into an interior world. It is the first example in Beethoven's orchestral music of the type of reflective and soulful slow movement that would become a hallmark of Beethoven's style. As for the third movement, it is Beethoven's first orchestral Scherzo designated as such (from the Italian word meaning 'joke', a scherzo is livelier and more robust than a minuet). Finally, the symphony closes with forceful finale in which humour and seriousness spar with each other. I'll leave you to decide who wins.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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