

BRIGER CONDUCTS TCHAIKOVSKY

Friday 8 October, 7.30pm
Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

Alexander Briger conductor
Jonathan Békés cello
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

TCHAIKOVSKY Nocturne (5')

TCHAIKOVSKY Variations on a Rococo Theme (18')

MENDELSSOHN Symphony No 5, 'Reformation' (28')

Andante - Allegro con fuoco - Andante come I - Meno allegro come I

Allegro vivace -

Andante -

Chorale (Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott): Andante con moto - Allegro vivace -

Allegro maestoso - Più animato poco a poco

The Nocturne by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) is an arrangement for cello and orchestra of a piece originally written for solo piano (it comes from Tchaikovsky's Six Pieces Op 19, composed in 1873). Tchaikovsky arranged it for cello and orchestra for a concert in Paris in 1888. This lightly scored work is in A-B-A form, the A section comprising a sorrowful melody introduced by the solo cello. We veer from D minor into B-flat major for the B section before returning to D minor for the return A section in which the cello theme is decorated by a countermelody on the solo flute.

More substantial is Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme, which dates from 1876 (a year or two after the mammoth Piano Concerto No 1 in B-flat minor and two years before the Violin Concerto). The 'Rococo Theme' is Tchaikovsky's own. While we'd hardly mistake the theme for a genuine 18th-century melody, Tchaikovsky has scored the work for a Mozart-sized orchestra and keeps a light hand throughout, retaining a delicate, transparent texture. A short orchestral introduction sets up the theme which is introduced by the solo cello (the most memorable feature of the theme is the decorated descending line heard at the outset). As for the successive variations (there are seven all up), they segue one into the other and differ in various ways, including tempo, key and mood. A number of cadenzas are sprinkled throughout the work including a particularly lengthy one at the end of Variation V. The Variations on a Rococo Theme was composed for renowned cello virtuoso Wilhelm Fitzenhagen (1848-1890), who took liberties with Tchaikovsky's music. Fitzenhagen's alterations were incorporated into the first published edition of the music and it is the 'Fitzenhagen version' that is performed in this concert.

Although numbered fifth among the symphonies of Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), the Symphony in D minor, 'Reformation', was Mendelssohn's second symphony. Composed in 1830, it was written to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, a key document in the early history of the Lutheran Church. That said, the symphony had a chequered performance history and wasn't premièred until 1832. It was subsequently withdrawn from circulation by the composer, which explains why it is numbered fifth among his symphonies, finally making it into print in 1868, more than 20 years after Mendelssohn's death. It follows the conventional four-movement plan but reverses the order of the middle two movements – the slow movement coming third, not second. The first movement quotes a snippet of liturgical music, the so-called 'Dresden Amen', while the finale makes explicit reference to the Reformation, taking as its theme 'Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott' (A Mighty Fortress is our God) which was penned by Martin Luther himself.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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