

BEETHOVEN'S SEVENTH

Saturday 27 November, 7.30pm
Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

Eivind Aadland conductor
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

JOHANN STRAUSS II Emperor Waltz (11')
BEETHOVEN Symphony No 7 in A, Op 92 (39')
Poco sostenuto – Vivace
Allegretto
Presto
Allegro con brio

'You're the melody from a symphony by Strauss, / You're a Bendel bonnet, / a Shakespeare sonnet, / you're Mickey Mouse!' The 'Strauss' in Cole Porter's You're the Top is most probably Johann Strauss II (1825-1899), even though he was a composer of waltzes and other popular works, and not symphonies. The fact is, Porter would have known that the name Strauss would have meant 'classical music' to his audience. Composer of The Blue Danube, Tales from the Vienna Woods and the operetta Die Fledermaus, Johann Strauss II trained as a banker before following in his father's footsteps and becoming a conductor and composer. (His father, Johann Strauss I, is probably best known as the composer of the Radetzky March.) It turned out to be a wise move, as Johann II enjoyed a 50-year career in music and became known as the Waltz King. The Emperor Waltz was composed in 1889 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Franz Josef I as Emperor of Austria. Like all of Strauss's waltzes, the Emperor is a chain of waltzes, each link in the chain having its own melody and often its own key. Nevertheless, there's a principal episode (a principal waltz theme) that returns from time to time. Like many of Strauss's waltzes, the Emperor commences with an introductory episode – a 'warm up', if you like, before the lilting waltz rhythm kicks in. Interestingly, the introductory episode is a march (in 2/2) which transitions beautifully to the principal waltz theme in 3/4.

Vienna, Strauss's hometown, became the adopted hometown of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), who moved there from the German city of Bonn in 1792. It was in Vienna that Beethoven's Symphony No 7 received its première, on 8 December 1813. For the first time since the Fourth Symphony, the Seventh opens with a slow introduction, Poco sostenuto. Majestic without being pompous, the slow introduction features powerful tutti chords, marvellous solos for winds and horns, and a great sequence of rising scales punctuated by steady timpani downbeats. Then, after all the buildup, Beethoven strips back the grand gestures and leads us into the main part of the movement (Vivace) with a little dancing theme on the flute. It's often said that rhythm is the driving force in this symphony and in the first movement it comes in the form of the skipping idea developed from the little flute theme. We swap A major for A minor in the second movement. Again, a particular rhythmic pattern – long, short-short, long, long – pervades the entire movement. This has always been one of Beethoven's most popular symphony movements – the audience at the première gave it such an ovation it had to be repeated on the spot. Two quick movements follow, a scherzo marked Presto and an even faster finale, Allegro con brio. In the finale, Beethoven makes powerful and repeated use of the orchestral tutti (the entire orchestra playing at the one time). What's more, he indicates that the orchestra is to play loudly: fortissimo, sforzando and, in the last 30 seconds or so, triple-forte (or fortississimo), its first appearance in a Beethoven symphony.

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