

Peter Thomas: Conductor

Peter Thomas is a New Zealand-based conductor and music educator. He is the Music Director and conductor of the Auckland Symphony Orchestra and Head of Music at Epsom Girls Grammar School. Peter has conducted many orchestras, including the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Auckland Youth Orchestra, St Matthew's Chamber Orchestra, Devonport Chamber Orchestra and West Michigan University Orchestra, either during master classes or as a guest conductor. Though his repertoire is broad, he feels a particular affinity with Romantic and 20th century works and is passionate about performing new music. Peter graduated with a Bachelor of Music from the University of Auckland some time last century. As a music educator, he inspires his students to strive for excellence, but to have fun while doing it - a philosophy which he extends to many other walks of life. His other activities include contract work for NZQA, occasional radio and TV appearances, and directing Remuera Music School.

ORCHESTRA

Violins I	Joseph Chen, Michael Hunter, Mary O'Brien, Helen Lewis, Alison Sorley, Tenwei Liu, Sofia Wigram, Emily Allen
Violins II	George Wang, Tsui-Wen Chen, Averil Griffin, David Kayrouz, Susie Kasza, Arthur Ranford, Roger Booth
Violas	Henrietta Reid, Lawrence Yang, Neil Shepherd, Daniel Poloha, Andrea Smith, Pat Roderick
Cellos	Maxine Cunliffe, Claire Postlethwaite, Dora Green, Graham Falla, Andrea McCracken, Kripa Ravi
Basses	Samantha Cooke, Andrew Kincaid
Flutes	Pene Brawn-Douglas, Priscilla Scanlan (piccolo)
Oboes	Eugénie Middleton, Elizabeth Lewis Daniell
Clarinets	Julia Cornfield, James Daniell
Bassoons	David Nation, Kate Nelson
Horns	Miriam Robinson, Christine Breeden, Michael Grimwood, Henry Close
Trumpets	Bill Rimmer, Dominic Cornfield
Trombones	Davide Paligora, Sarah Rathbun, Steve Taylor
Percussion	Rachel Thomas (timpani), Patrick Cornfield

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

The Vicar and parish of Holy Trinity Church who always make us welcome.

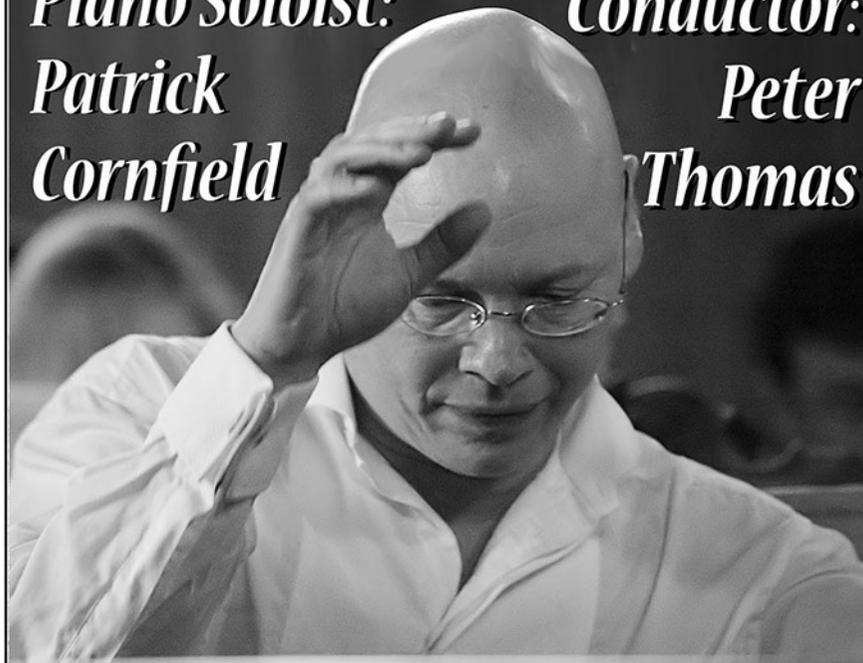


Next Concert: 2pm Sunday, 14th July, Holy Trinity Church. For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website: <http://dco.net.nz/>

Devonport Chamber Orchestra

Piano Soloist:
Patrick Cornfield

Conductor:
Peter Thomas



Rossini: Semiramide Overture
Grieg: Piano Concerto

Sunday 2nd June, 2pm

Holy Trinity, 20 Church St, Devonport
Admission: \$20, children under 12 free

Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868): Semiramide Overture

Philip Gossett begins his chapter on Rossini in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians with the sentence: “No composer in the first half of the nineteenth century enjoyed the measure of prestige, wealth, popular acclaim, or artistic influence that belonged to Rossini.” However, although Rossini was a prolific and renowned composer of operas in his time, having composed 40 by the time he was 37. Yet, few of his operas are performed today apart from The Barber of Seville, and most are remembered almost entirely on the strength of concert performances of their respective overtures.

Like most of Rossini’s works, Semiramide was written very quickly - he completed it in just 33 days. Moreover, while most operatic overtures introduce themes to be found throughout the opera itself, Rossini rarely did that. He often wrote the overture at the very last minute and frequently used material of an overture already used in a previous work, so that usually the themes of his overtures are unrelated to the music of the opera. The Semiramide overture is an exception in that Rossini peppered it with the most attractive tunes from the opera. It is a very substantial overture and, behind the monumental ‘mini-symphony’ that is the William Tell overture, it is the longest of Rossini’s overtures. Semiramide was a dramatic (rather than comic) opera based on a Voltaire tragedy involving kings and queens, battles, conquests, love, murder and self-sacrifice. By comparison, the overture is filled with mostly joyful and sparkling themes making it a deceptively cheerful beginning to a rather dark and bloody opera.

After initial orchestral flourishes, the overture opens with an extended slow introduction in which horns and woodwinds play a lyrical hymn-like melody derived from a chorus of praise for the queen in the first act. This ends with the return of the orchestral flourishes heralding a driving and sustained allegro with characteristically attractive tunes and brilliant effects throughout, including several examples of the famous ‘Rossini crescendo’.

Edvard Grieg (1843 - 1907): Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16

(Allegro molto moderato, Adagio, Allegro moderato molto e marcato)

Grieg entered the Leipzig Conservatory at the age of 15, not as an aspiring composer, but as a virtuoso pianist who originally expected to make his career as a soloist. At the conservatory, Grieg was introduced to the music of Robert Schumann and heard Clara Schumann perform the concerto Robert had composed for her. Grieg was strongly influenced by Schumann’s concerto and adopted a similar form and even the same key for his own. This was the only concerto Grieg wrote. He composed it during a holiday at Sölleröd in the Danish countryside during 1868 when he was 25, and regularly revised it throughout his life.

Grieg was unable to attend the premiere of his concerto in Copenhagen, due to prior obligations with the Oslo orchestra, but he was delighted when pianist Edmund Neupert reported several eminent music critics had “*applauded with all their might*”. Neupert later told Grieg that Anton Rubenstein, the famed Russian composer, virtuoso pianist, and founder of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, had attended the premiere and said he was “*astounded to have heard a composition of such genius.*”

Grieg took the music of his own country, Norway, as his model, although like Dvorak, he preferred to create his own folk-inspired melodies, rather than using actual folk songs. Her wrote little in the way of symphonic music, much preferring works for smaller forces - songs, piano pieces and chamber music. Of Grieg’s music Tchaikovsky wrote, “*there prevails that fascinating melancholy which seems to reflect in itself all the beauty of*

Norwegian scenery, now grandiose and sublime in its vast expanse, now grey and dull, but always full of charm”. While Liszt, after having sight-read through Grieg’s newly-completed concerto, exclaimed enthusiastically, “*Keep going. You’ve got what it takes – don’t let them intimidate you!*”

The dramatic beginning of the concerto is probably one of the most famous openings in the concerto repertory - a timpani crescendo, a loud orchestral chord, followed by a series of downward cascading figures for the piano. After this, the movement is based on two main themes, the first introduced quietly by winds, answered by strings, and the second, a singing melody first heard in the cellos. The slow movement is in the remote key of D-flat major, and is very lyrical and calm. The piano moves into the even more remote key of F-flat major, but the serenity of the melody hides all the underlying complexity. The finale, which follows without a break, has two main themes. The first is a vigorous Norwegian folk-dance known as a *halling*, while the second is a beautiful melody heard first on the flute. At the end of the movement, the *halling* is transformed into triple metre which, coupled with a powerful version of the second theme, drives the concerto to an exhilarating conclusion.

- Programme notes by Roger Booth from several sources including Richard Freed, Phillip Huscher, Daniel Bruce, James R. C. Adams, J. Michael Allsen, Elizabeth Schwartz, Stephen Johnson, and Lawrence Budmen

Paddy Cornfield writes:

I must apologise to any audience members who were looking forward to a rendition of Saint-Saens 5 for my 16th annual DCO concert. I had been excited to learn a new work, but music I ordered back in January took six weeks rather than the promised three days to arrive from Europe - out of stock at numerous music publishers, and clearly not as popular a work as I had thought. And then my mother passed away, which meant a trip back to the UK. I now have the unlikely distinction of playing the organ for both of my parents’ funerals.

So an executive decision was made to fall back on that old warhorse, the Grieg. This is the first concerto for which I had a child play in the orchestra (DCO, in 2008), and also the first concerto I ever performed. Back in 1982, I had to impress the UK local education grandees sufficiently that they would award me a second grant to attend the Royal College of Music, after I had abandoned my Chemistry degree. Not a consideration my children’s generation would have, but more on that topic later. Plus everybody seems to love the Grieg - so a good outcome in the end.

I usually start writing these notes by reviewing whatever nonsense I concocted last year, mainly to see if any of my predictions have been accurate. And sure enough, last year’s premonition of financial Armageddon was spot on. Nineteen auditions and nearly three years after leaving Takapuna Grammar, my elder daughter showed us the power of never giving up on your dream by landing a place at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, in London. She was also lucky enough to receive a generous AIMES (Arts, Innovation, Music, Education, Sport) award, which helped foot the bill. But wait, it gets more expensive – my younger daughter decided Victoria University was the place to be for the full student experience. Damn, I hadn’t seen that one coming...

We are now approaching the empty nest stage of parenthood. People assure me that this state can be quickly reversed without warning. But for now, we are getting used to having less movement and drama in our tumbling-down Devonport villa, trying to remember not to cook for six. Enjoying the odd crisis when a child does come to stay (the latest being my son abandoning his car on the Desert Road). Yes, music is a great solace in these quieter times. Only not always for my wife, when I fire up my now turbocharged home church organ, and blast out Messiaen through three sets of large speakers I used to use for ‘*Wonderfish*’ gigs. Happy days.

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