

John Choi: Violin Soloist

John's stunning performance of Beethoven's violin concerto with the Devonport Chamber Orchestra last September will live long in the memories of those of us fortunate to have been there. John started playing the violin when he was 5 years old and has won numerous awards since then. In 2005 he was awarded Royal School of Music Grade 8 Violin Distinction "High Achiever" and best performance at the Auckland Junior Music Contest. In 2009 he was awarded LTCL Violin Performance with Distinction. John has received scholarships to several violin and string quartet schools, has been a soloist with St Matthews Chamber Orchestra, and has participated in master classes with world-renowned violinists Yair Kless, Feng Ning and Vesa-Matti Leppanen. Currently John is in his fourth year of studying medicine at the University of Auckland.

ORCHESTRA

Conductor	Brecon Carter
Violins I	Helen Crook, David Choi, Mary O'Brien, Fiona Murray, Helen van Druuten, Lucy Burrows, Ashley Ayton
Violins II	Tsui-Wen Chen, Heidi Bowmast, Averil Griffiin, David Kayrouz, Roger Booth, Ben King
Violas	Robyn Strange, Dora Tsao, Judith Gust, Pat Roderick, Neil Shepherd, Daniel Poloha
Celli	Luke Choi, Emily Giles, Heather Armstrong, Graham Falla, Mary Greig-Clayton
Basses	Andrew Kincaid
Flutes	Priscilla Scanlan, Pene Brawn-Douglas
Oboes	Eugénie Middleton, Matthew O'Ryan
Clarinets	Julia Cornfield, Claire Turner
Bassoons	Charlotte Naden, David Nation
Horns	Tom Chester, Miriam Robinson
Trumpets	Dominic Cornfield, Mollie Cornfield
Timpani	Patrick Cornfield

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Next Concert: 2pm Sunday, 7th September, Harmony Hall, 4 Wynyard St.. For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website: <http://dco.net.nz/>

Devonport Chamber Orchestra

John Choi - Violin
Brecon Carter - Conductor



*Mendelssohn:
Hebrides Overture
Violin Concerto in E minor*

Sunday 27th July, 2pm
Holy Trinity Church, 20 Church St
Admission \$10, Children under 12 free

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Mendelssohn was born in 1809 in Hamburg, into a wealthy, distinguished, Jewish, intellectual, artistic and banking family, which converted to Christianity in 1816, and then added the name Bartholdy to the Mendelssohn surname. When Felix was a child, the family moved to Berlin, and he spent his childhood in contact with famous writers, artists and others influential in the cultural life of the city. A child prodigy, Mendelssohn became a musical leader of the 1830s and 1840s as an outstanding conductor, composer, pianist, and organist. In 1823 he received an important gift from his grandmother—a score of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. He became fascinated by the work of Bach and was responsible for the 19th century rediscovery of this great master, beginning with a first performance of the St. Matthew Passion since Bach's death 80 years before. His intense study of Bach, Beethoven, Handel, and Mozart informs his compositional technique, creating classical works coloured with baroque complexity and romantic chromaticism.

Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave)

Fingal's Cave is on the uninhabited island of Staffa, in the inner Hebrides of Scotland and part of the same ancient lava flow that formed the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. The cave has an un-navigable sea inlet, a giant arched roof and is filled with the eerie sounds produced by the breaking waves. Sir Walter Scott described Fingal's Cave as *“One of the most extraordinary places I ever beheld. It exceeded, in my mind, every description I had heard of it, composed entirely of basaltic pillars as high as the roof of a cathedral, and running deep into the rock, eternally swept by a deep and swelling sea, and paved, as it were, with ruddy marble.”*

Between 1829 and 1832, Mendelssohn began a series of travels in Europe, visiting England, Scotland, Wales, Switzerland, Italy and France, as was common for young men of fortune at the time. After visiting Fingal's cave, he wrote to his sister Fanny *“In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, I send you the following, which came into my head there.”* The musical extract he enclosed was the opening theme of the overture which was not completed until December, 1830. It was originally entitled *“Die einsame Insel”*, or *“The Lonely Island”*, however, Mendelssohn changed the name, rather confusingly using the title *“Hebrides Overture”* on the orchestral parts, but *“Fingal's Cave”* on the full score.

Although called an overture, it is a self contained work. Its lyrical theme evokes the stunning beauty of the cave, and perhaps conveys the sense of excitement felt by the composer on seeing it for the first time. It is developed and extended in various ways suggesting the beauty of the natural surroundings. The second subject, in the relative major key, is longer and more lyrical and evokes the rolling movement of the waves. It builds to a tremendous climax where a closing theme, strongly related to the first subject explodes with excitement.

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64 (Allegro molto appassionato, Andante, Allegretto non troppo)

In July 1838, Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his friend, the distinguished German violinist Ferdinand David, *“I'd like to write a violin concerto for you next winter; one in E minor sticks in my head, the beginning of which will not leave me in peace.”* The concerto took Mendelssohn six years to complete and he regularly consulted David for technical and compositional advice – a testament to how much Mendelssohn respected David, given that Mendelssohn himself was a very capable violinist. The concerto was first performed in Leipzig on 13 March 1845 with David as soloist. Mendelssohn was unable to conduct due to illness and the premiere was conducted by the Danish composer Niels Gade.

Mendelssohn's concerto is groundbreaking and goes against established concerto conventions in several ways. It breaks with the Romantic violin concerto tradition of showpieces for the soloist with uninteresting orchestral parts and little need for artistry or passion from anyone. Mendelssohn referred to such concerti as merely *“juggler's tricks and rope dancer's feats.”* His was the first significant concerto for violin since Beethoven's, and was the last until the concerti of Bruch, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky and Brahms later in the 19th century.

Although he wasn't the first composer to introduce his soloist at the start of a concerto, Mendelssohn chose to do it in this work, letting soloist and orchestra explore the exposition of the main themes together instead of the more traditional double exposition, first with orchestra alone and then from the soloist. The idea was subsequently followed by nearly every 19th century composer except Brahms and Dvorak.

It also stands out from previous concerti with its connected movements. There is no break between the first and second movements, with a held bassoon note connecting the two. The bridging passage between the last two movements begins almost immediately after the slow movement, with a melody that is similar to that of the opening, hinting at the cyclic form of the piece. The linking was designed to eliminate applause between movements so that the work could be heard as a coherent whole. This would have come as a surprise to audiences of the day, who were used to applauding between movements.

This violin concerto was to be Mendelssohn's last orchestral work and a masterpiece that remains one of the most popular in the solo concerto repertoire. It is also one of the most plagiarised concerti of all time, the most recent example being the theme of the second movement uplifted almost in its entirety for the song: *“I don't know how to love him”* in Andrew Lloyd-Webber's *“Jesus Christ Superstar”*.

- Programme notes compiled by Roger Booth from several sources including Steven Schwartz, Phillip Huscher, Richard Dyer, Elizabeth Schwartz, Michael Steinberg, Kevin Bazzana, Paul Schiavo, Lori Newman and Wikipedia