

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 sometime last century. As a music educator, he inspires his students to strive for excellence, but 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	Helen Crook, Brecon Carter, Mary O'Brien, Cameron Stanley, Michael Hunter, Helen Lewis, Joe Pinto, Alison Sorley
Violins II	Joseph Chen, Edward Liu, Averil Griffin, David Kayrouz, Susie Kasza, Ben King, Nicola Couch
Violas	Judith Gust, Neil Shepherd, Emily Allen, Daniel Poloha, Pat Roderick, Matthew Gough
Cellos	Claire Postlethwaite, Rachael Clark, Kate Parker, Graham Falla, Mary Greig-Clayton, Michelle Caldicott
Basses	Andrew Kincaid, Robbie Brown
Flutes	Pene Brawn-Douglas, Esther Hunter, Edwin Yu
Oboes	Eugénie Middleton, Elizabeth Lewis
Clarinets	Julia Cornfield, Roger Booth
Bassoons	David Nation, Charlotte Naden
Horns	Yih-Hsin Huang, Miriam Robinson, Tom Chester, Christine Breeden
Trumpets	Dominic Cornfield, Mollie Cornfield, Michael Plunkett
Trombones	David Paligora, Amber Kearney, Steve Taylor
Tuba	Alex King
Percussion	Paul Robertson (timpani), Darius Windarc, Michael Plunkett

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

- Devonport Copy Shoppe for printing posters, programmes and music so professionally.
- The Vicar and parish of Holy Trinity Church who have made us welcome.



Next Concert: 2pm Sunday, 27th May, Holy Trinity Church. For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website: <http://dco.net.nz/>

Devonport Chamber Orchestra

Patrick Cornfield

Peter Thomas



Wagner: Meistersingers Overture

Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 3

Sunday 25th March, 2pm

Holy Trinity, 20 Church St, Devonport

Admission \$20, Children under 12 free

Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883) **Prelude to Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg**

(The Master Singers of Nuremberg)

Although Wagner had created a prose version of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 1845, he didn't begin composition of the opera in earnest until the spring of 1862. Earlier that same year he wrote two new prose treatments of the libretto and also conceived the opera's orchestral prelude during a train voyage from Venice. The full production of the opera didn't occur until 1868 but the 10-minute Prelude Wagner unveiled 6 years earlier hinted at something that would become rather unique in his catalogue – bright, joyful, and humorous qualities. The action of the opera revolves around a singing contest and the question of what makes a good song. Unlike most of Wagner's other operas, there are no curses, love potions, or murders, only a story of rivalry between a good and a bad singer for the hand of a lovely maiden.

The Prelude includes four of the opera's main melodies. The first two themes are associated with the guild of the master singers - the first a march and the second a fanfare. The third theme is a variant of the song that wins the singing contest and thus, the maiden's hand. The fourth theme is introduced in conjunction with a funny, irreverent version of the master singers' melody, as the apprentices imitate the masters and poke fun at them. After devoting a separate section to each of them, Wagner ingeniously combines the four in a final section of the Prelude where they can all be heard simultaneously.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 - 1943) **Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30**

(Allegro ma non tanto, Intermezzo, Finale)

Rachmaninoff was revered as one of the supreme pianists of his time, yet he had a highly unconventional career. After receiving the highest marks ever awarded by the Moscow Conservatory, he soared to fame at age 19 with his Prelude in C-sharp minor, a remarkably haunting piece of chromatic yearning. However, his first piano concerto was not well received and his first symphony was an abject failure. After its premiere, poorly conducted by a drunken Alexander Glazunov, the critic César Cui savaged it as having come from a "Conservatory in Hell". Rachmaninoff was devastated: "My dreams of a brilliant career lay shattered. My hopes and confidence were destroyed. I felt like a man who had suffered a stroke and for a long time had lost the use of his head and hands." He was so disheartened, he couldn't bring himself to sit at piece of blank manuscript paper for two years.

Seeing him depressed and drinking too much, relatives convinced him to visit Dr. Nicolai Dahl, a specialist in the new field of 'neuropsychotherapy', who had an interest in hypnosis. Dahl was also an amateur cellist and violist who performed in a string quartet. Between the doctor's gentle hypnotic suggestions ("you will begin your concerto", "the concerto will be excellent") and his pleasant conversations about music, Rachmaninoff found his depression lifting and began to write his second piano concerto. Whatever transpired during the sessions with Dr. Dahl, Rachmaninoff emerged from his doldrums with a gorgeous, vibrant work that spoke with a distinctive personality, and which he dedicated to Dr. Dahl.

Rachmaninoff introduced his new 3rd Piano Concerto on his first American tour in 1909, a trip he had been extremely anxious about and had only accepted because he hoped that

the fees he was promised would allow him to realise his dream of buying a car. The two New York performances of the 3rd Piano Concerto were both successful but the second, under Gustav Mahler was the highlight of the tour for Rachmaninoff, who thought very highly of Mahler and his New York Philharmonic Orchestra. New York critics praised the work but complained about its length suggesting that Rachmaninoff should shorten it. Rachmaninoff did undertake some revisions; however, the changes were minor and didn't shorten the work at all. Perhaps he felt, as Mozart once remarked about his own music, that it had exactly as many notes as were required.

It is a work that certainly doesn't lack pianistic brilliance, even though the first two dozen measures of the piano part could actually be played by a child. It starts with the famous "Russian hymn" theme that some commentators have tried to trace to an old religious chant from Kiev. However Rachmaninoff insisted that there was no such connection. When asked how his theme had been conceived, the composer said: "It simply wrote itself!" The work is undoubtedly a technical tour de force and yet the great technical demands are more a means than an end, as the composition seems much more focused on conveying Romantic musical ideas than being a simple virtuoso display piece.

- Programme notes by Roger Booth from several sources including Peter Laki, Jeff Counts, Michael Thrasher, Betsy Schwarm, Paul Serotsky

Paddy Cornfield writes:

In keeping with last year's concept, the theme for my 15th annual DCO concert is *'The Impossible Dream'*. For me, this was always to perform Rach 3 (so named since the movie 'Shine' was released in 1996). I seem to have dropped into a nine-year repeat cycle, so this exorbitantly difficult work is up next. For those who attended last time, yes - you really are nine years older. I certainly felt much older when I attempted to keep up with the recording of my younger self. I do not envisage trotting this out again in 2027, when I get my hands on a Gold Card.

My wife once bought our son a book for Christmas, titled *'100 Things You Will Never Do'*. It's a fun read, with an entry on the steps required to achieve each achievement included. Naturally *'Play Rach 3'* was in there, along with *'Win an Olympic Medal'* and the rather bombastic *'Found a Nation'*. But omitted were the equally unlikely *'Become an International Recording Artist'* and *'Build a Viable Career in Musical Theatre'*. The success rate so far for these two is 50%, based on a sample size of Devonport girls I know called 'Ella'.

As I predicted last year, my Ella has moved to the UK in pursuit of her own impossible dream. She is going well with it – rather too well. The Bank of Mum and Dad could easily be stress-tested as other banks were in 2009. For being British and living in The Commonwealth counts for little in the pre-Brexit world of higher education fees assessments. At least she is able to stay with my sister-in-law, herself the mother of multi-Olympic medal winning triathlete sons... Now *'Impossible Dream'* starts to seem like the *'Actually, Pretty Common Dream – I know loads of people who've done that'*.

When the impossible dream takes root in an elder child, it can easily draw in a younger sibling. My own brother followed me to the Royal College of Music because he *"couldn't think of anything else to do"*. He's been a pianist with the Royal Ballet in London for over 20 years. This would have seemed highly unlikely when as a teenager, he scraped Grade 8 Distinction by one mark. (I scraped Grade 8 Pass by one mark – not likely to play Rach 3!)

They say *'Never go back'*. So my hope is that, as I do battle with those 29,217 notes, it doesn't turn into the *'All Too Predictable Nightmare'*. Finally, the customary footnote about my other musical aspirations – the Cello is STILL in its case, minus an A string. But I am finally the proud owner of a Church Organ. My neighbours are the best!

continued over ...