

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 the former Head of Music at both Epsom Girls Grammar School and Selwyn College. 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. Currently, Peter is the Conductor for the KL Music Project. 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, Conductor of Synphony, and Director of Remuera Music School.

ORCHESTRA

Flutes	Pene Brawn-Douglas, Kathleen Mistry
Oboes	Eugénie Middleton, Vanessa Bruell
Clarinets	Julia Cornfield, Brendan Dalton
Bassoons	David Nation, Charlotte Naden
Horns	Miriam Robinson Christine Breeden
Trumpets	Bill Rimmer, Adrian Hirst
Timpani	Annabel Yu
Violins I	Joseph Chen, Brecon Carter, Michael Hunter, Helen Lewis, Alison Sorley, Sofie Wigram, Tenwei Liu, Helen van Druuten, Mary O'Brien
Violins II	Heidi Bowmast, Averil Griffin, Tsui-Wen Chen, David Kayrouz, Arthur Ranford, Takashi Schwarz, Roger Booth
Violas	Judith Gust, Sharyn Palmer, Nicholas Turner, Henrietta Reid, Neil Shepherd, Pat Roderick, Daniel Poloha
Cellos	Claire Postlethwaite, Rachael Clark, Kate Parker, Graham Falla, Andrea McCracken, Michelle Caldicott, Mary Greig-Clayton
Basses	Andrew Kincaid, Ted Malan

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

The Vicar and parish of Holy Trinity Church who always make us welcome. The Edge for allowing us to hire a Steinway Grand piano. Takapuna Grammar School for lending us their timpani. Atutolu Piano Movers for expertly transporting piano and timpani for us.

Next Concert: 2:30pm Saturday, 22nd May, The Pumphouse, Takapuna. For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website: <http://dco.net.nz/>

Devonport Chamber Orchestra

Patrick Cornfield
Peter Thomas



2pm, Sunday 18th April, 2021
Holy Trinity, 20 Church St, Devonport
Adults: \$20, Students \$15,
Children under 12 free

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Don Giovanni Overture

Opera composers often wrote the overture last, basing it on the opera's more memorable themes. Mozart always wrote rapidly, having first composed the whole work in his head, but he did not enjoy the writing process and therefore tended to put it off until the last minute, apparently preferring to have company and conversation while he wrote out the actual notes of his masterpieces. In the case of *Don Giovanni*, Mozart put off writing out the overture until the night before the dress rehearsal. His wife, Constanze's account of this appears in Georg von Nissen's biography of Mozart as follows: "*In the evening, he told Constanze that he wanted to write the overture that night, and asked her to make him some punch and stay up with him to keep his spirits up. She did so, telling him fairy tales which made him laugh until tears came to his eyes. But the punch made him sleepy, so that he dozed off when she paused, and only worked as long as she kept talking. At last the excitement, the sleepiness, and his frequent efforts not to doze off were too much for him, and his wife persuaded him to go to sleep on the sofa, promising to wake him in an hour. But he slept so soundly that she did not have the heart to wake him until two hours had passed. It was then five o'clock. At seven o'clock the overture was finished and in the hands of the copyist.*"

The Italian librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who collaborated with Mozart on *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutte*, adapted the libretto for *Don Giovanni* from the legend of the rake and womaniser, Don Juan. In the first scene of the opera, Don Giovanni kills Donna Anna's father, Don Pedro, the Commendatore, and in the final scene of the opera, a marble statue of the Commendatore comes to life to punish Don Giovanni, dragging him into hell. The overture begins with portentous D-minor chords which Mozart uses again at the end of the opera to signal the statue's appearance. The fiery D-major allegro that follows in the overture, doesn't use any of the themes from the opera but manages effectively to convey the sense of restlessness, drive, humour and conflict which pervades much of the opera.

Ludvig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Piano Concerto No. 5 in Eb major (Allegro, Adagio un poco mosso, Rondo Allegro)

In May 1809, Napoleon invaded Vienna and Beethoven sought refuge in the cellar of a friend's house where he covered his sensitive ears with pillows to protect them from the concussion of the blasts. Later, he wrote to his publisher, "*We have passed through a great deal of misery. I tell you that since May 4th, I have brought into the world little that is connected; only here and there a fragment. The whole course of events has affected me, body and soul... What a disturbing, wild life around me; nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts.*"

Despite the chaos and turbulence of 1809, Beethoven was able to finish his last and largest piano concerto during that year. The name "*Emperor*" was certainly not given to the concerto by Beethoven who once wrote of Napoleon, "*This man will trample the rights of men underfoot and become a greater tyrant than any other.*" The name may have been tacked on by an early publisher because of the grand character of the work, although another story suggests that it originated from the premiere performance when one of Napoleon's soldiers, overcome by the majesty of the concerto, cried out: "*C'est l'Empereur!*"

The concerto begins in a highly unconventional manner, opening majestically with three imperious orchestral chords, each in turn elaborated by the soloist in cascades of arpeggios, trills, scales and broken octaves. The piano writing is more brilliant than in any of Beethoven's earlier concertos and includes virtuosic passages in both hands simultaneously, dashing octave runs, and expressive melodic motifs, often in very close succession. After a furious development section there is a recapitulation of the main themes and then an orchestral chord

on which a piano cadenza would normally be launched. However here, Beethoven wrote into the piano part, "*Do not play a cadenza, but begin immediately what follows*" and supplied a tiny, written-out solo passage. Because of his deafness and ill-health, this was the first of his concertos that Beethoven himself would not play, and so he wanted to have more control over the finished product by prescribing exactly what the soloist was to do.

The serene slow movement, in the remote key of B major, is one of Beethoven's most profound. A hushed mood of sublime simplicity offers a refreshing, soothing contrast to the militant grandeur and exuberance of the first movement. It makes use of two main elements only - a solemn tune first heard on muted violins, and a pensive theme with which the piano follows. Later, the soloist takes over the violin tune, elaborating and developing it. The woodwinds then repeat it while the piano accompanies, and finally nothing is left but a cold grey octave B in the bassoons which, in a magical moment, falls a semitone to become a long held B-flat for horns. Above this, the piano hesitantly plays two bars of ascending E-flat major harmonies amidst an atmosphere of suspense, followed immediately by an exuberant restatement of the same material as the main theme of the *Rondo* finale. The central episode of the *Rondo* takes on the characteristics of a sonata development and the main theme is taken to various distant keys before returning triumphantly to the home key. In the coda, the piano part grows progressively slower and quieter, with only the timpani as accompaniment. Having reached *adagio*, the tempo suddenly accelerates again and the work ends abruptly and triumphantly. Overall, a spirit of heroism infuses this music, and it stands as a stirring testament to Beethoven's heroic will to survive in trying times.

Programme notes by Roger Booth from sources including Phillip Huscher, Barbara Heninger, Michael Steinberg, Günther Herbig, Michael Allsen and Robert Markow, Beryl Peters, Geoffrey Decker.

Patrick 'Paddy' Cornfield writes...

Here we are at my 17th annual DCO concert, a little later than scheduled. We skipped Beethoven's 250th birthday, discovered cycling, fed our sourdough mothers, and dared to walk our dogs across Narrow Neck golf course. Well some of us did, at least. In the future, young children will enquire, "*Grandpa, what did you do in the Great Lockdown?*" My response shall be "*I didn't play the piano much, but I did spend 6 days on a single board game with my kids. And I got into cocktails big time*".

I have nothing to grumble about - except perhaps the human ageing process. The fingers won't stretch as far, the eyes can't read the dots as swiftly, and the big octave passages can hurt. The only way I get through my long exercise program now, is by simultaneously watching '*Game of Thrones*' on my iPad and headphones. This can appear a little freakish to passers-by, but at least it shows my memory isn't shot yet.

After my wolf cry of 2015, I have been banned from using the 'R' word (as distinct from 'R' value, which we all understand thanks to Covid-19). However, I read that the nation's finest pianist (Michael Houstoun) is using the 'R' word this year, despite being a decade my senior - what a guy!

Like athletes, musicians can simply wear out. My younger brother has just done so, after 27 years of pounding the keyboard for the Royal Ballet in London. He was having steroid injections into his little fingers at the end. Worse still, being a professional musician for so long (in his case, read 'dance servant') killed his love of performing music at any level. I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to perform amazing works with an orchestra for so long.

One final irony: the reason for my premature thoughts of 'R' in 2015 was the departure of our former DCO conductor, Ashley Hopkins. He now conducts the Central Otago Symphony Orchestra, with whom I have played as a soloist for two years running. So never say never, and it's definitely not over until the Fat Lady sings - or I can't stretch an octave anymore.