

Nicholas Forbes: Conductor

A conductor, singer and organist, Nicholas is the Director of Music at St Matthew-in-the-City and Organist of King's College, Auckland. Originally from Christchurch, he studied organ and conducting at the University of Auckland with Dr. John Wells and Dr. Karen Grylls CNZM, before continuing orchestral conducting studies at the University of Adelaide under Dr. Luke Dollman. Nicholas has been a Conducting Fellow with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and an Associate Conductor of Voices New Zealand. He also conducts Harbour Voices and GALS, Auckland's Rainbow Choir. Currently, he is the Chorus Director of the NZ Opera Chorus in Ōtautahi/Christchurch and a trustee of the Auckland Town Hall Organ Trust.

ORCHESTRA

Flutes	Pene Brawn-Douglas, Kathleen Mistry
Oboes	Eugénie Middleton, Elizabeth Lewis Daniell
Clarinets	Julia Cornfield, Brendan Dalton
Bassoons	David Nation, Leonard Thomas
Horns	Miriam Robinson, Christine Breeden, Henry Swanson, Isaac Kirkpatrick
Trumpets	Adrian Hirst, Dominic Cornfield
Harp	Paddy Cornfield
Timpani	Rachel Thomas
Violins I	Michael Hunter, Helen Lewis, Nicola Couch, Joe Pinto, Alison Sorley, Selena Sun, Takashi Schwarz, Ellie Wyatt
Violins II	Heidi Bowmast, Tsui-Wen Chen, David Kayrouz, Dianne Sainsbury, Arthur Ranford, Tenwei Liu, Susie Kasza
Violas	Judith Gust, Neil Shepherd, Henrietta Reid, Daniel Poloha, Stephanie Thomas, Iona McDonald
Cellos	Claire Postlethwaite, Dora Green, Emily Giles, Graham Falla, Mary Greig-Clayton, Iain Rea, Vicki Earl, Kate Parker
Basses	Ted Malan, Andrew Kincaid

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

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

Next Concert: 2:00pm Sunday, 22nd September, Holy Trinity, Devonport. For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website: <https://dco.net.nz/>

Devonport Chamber Orchestra



2pm, Sunday 28th July, 2024
Holy Trinity, 20 Church St, Devonport
Adults: \$25, Seniors/Students \$20,
Children under 12 free

Maurice Ravel (1875 - 1937): Pavane for a Dead Princess

Although Ravel and Debussy were considered the two most successful French Impressionist composers, Ravel considered himself to be classical. He was born in the Pyrenees, only a few miles from the Spanish border and that, along with his mother being Basque, gave him a fascination with Spain and Spanish musical forms. Like many of his contemporaries, Ravel studied at the Paris Conservatoire and although he did not write a large number of works, many of his compositions are considered masterpieces and are still regularly performed.

At the turn of the 19th century, the Pavane for a Dead Princess (Pavane pour une Infante Défunte) was commissioned as a salon piece for piano. Ravel, still in his early 20s, was surprised by the success of the work and when he orchestrated it several years later, it became even more popular. A pavane is a slow processional dance from Padua (*Pava* is a dialect name for Padua). According to an old Spanish tradition however, it was performed in church as a stylish gesture of farewell to the dead. Despite its name, Ravel's Pavane was not meant to be a funeral lament for a child. Rather, he chose the title because he liked the sonority of the French words "*infante défunte*." He also hoped to evoke the scene of a young Spanish princess, as painted by Velázquez, delighting in this stately dance in quiet reverie. The music therefore, is not elegiac, but more in the realm of fantasy and nostalgia. Richard Freed suggests that a more apt English title might be: "*Pavane for a Princess from a Faraway Time*".

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897): Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor (Op 15)

(Maestoso, Adagio, Rondo allegro non troppo)

As a shy 20-year old, Johannes Brahms summoned the courage to present himself at the home of the famous Robert and Clara Schumann. To his relief, the Schumanns were the perfect hosts, and Robert was so deeply moved when Brahms sat down at their piano to play his own music that he introduced Brahms to the music world, pronouncing him to be a genius for a new generation. Clara also was impressed by the music, and also by the appearance of this short, delicate man with flowing blond hair and attractive eyes. She and Brahms soon began playing duets at that same keyboard, launching a relationship that developed into something more than friendship.

At that time, Brahms had written nothing but chamber music and piano pieces, but he had a strong urge to express himself also through symphonic music. In March 1854, Brahms traveled to Cologne to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time. This was pivotal in his development as a composer as it left him convinced that no-one could better such a symphony and it took him another 22 years before he produced a symphony of his own. Nevertheless, with Schumann's encouragement, Brahms gradually began to explore symphonic composition. Later, when he received news that Schumann had tried to commit suicide and was in an asylum, Brahms dropped everything and went to help Clara and her seven children. By that time, Brahms had developed strong feelings for the older Clara but wisely kept his passions to himself, and through his selfless support, demonstrated the depth of his love and respect for the entire family. Schumann died two years later and the extraordinary turbulence of the intervening period, including the conflicting feelings around his emotional attachment to Clara, left an indelible mark on Brahms.

One of the pieces that Brahms and Clara played together during this time of uncertainty was a big sonata for two pianos that he had begun early in 1854, shortly after Robert was institutionalised. This music would take nearly four years to find its ideal form. With the encouragement of his friend, the celebrated violinist and conductor Joseph Joachim, Brahms reworked the material from the sonata into his first major orchestral work - the first piano concerto. Its first performance in Hanover, with Brahms at the piano and Joachim conducting, was well received, but in Leipzig a few days later with a different conductor, it was a disaster. After this, Brahms wrote to Joachim: "*three pairs of hands attempted to applaud but were quickly stopped by unmistakable hissing all around. It forces you to gather your thoughts and increases your courage.*" He then made some revisions to the score.

The first movement is over 20 minutes long and of titanic proportions. It is epitomised by extremes, from the dramatic power evident in the opening menacing timpani roll and fierce unison orchestra theme, to the tenderly reflective lyricism of the theme the piano introduces before the orchestra takes it over. It is a monumental score that bears the imprint of Brahms' grief over Robert Schumann's breakdown and death, as well as the conflict and passion of his growing relationship with Clara.

Brahms often addressed Schumann as '*Meinherr Domine*' and matched the opening phrase of the theme in the concerto's second movement to the words '*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domine*' ('*Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord*'). The poignant, reverential tone of this movement, conceived as a tribute to Schumann after his death, indicates the depth of Brahms' feelings towards his mentor and friend.

The finale is a joyful and rollicking rondo in which two themes are continually varied in surprisingly seductive ways. It ends with some surprises - after the cadenza, the themes appear again, 'winding-down' to accentuate the subsequent dash for the finish line, but this is then interrupted by a further, brief cadential display from the piano before the jubilant ending.

Programme notes compiled by Roger Booth from several sources including Richard Freed, Barbara Heninger, Max Derrickson, Thomas May, Paul Serotsky and Phillip Huscher

Patrick 'Paddy' Cornfield writes...

Welcome to the 20th year anniversary DCO piano concert, but who's counting? Well actually - me. I'm a big fan of data in my IT day job (or 'Digital', as we now call it). Since first appearing in 2004, I will have played 19 concerts with DCO at 2 local venues, covering 25 piano concertos from a repertoire of 16, plus 1 chamber work. I haven't counted the overtures or encores - some of which I would prefer to forget! This has been made possible thanks to 4 conductors, 2 wonderful administrators (Roger Booth and David Kayrouz), and countless orchestral players willing to brave the Lake Road traffic for the love of making music. Some of us are lucky enough to live in Devonport, so I salute your passion and commitment.

Along the way, I have encountered interesting in-concert distractions such as crying babies, bouncing babies, crawling children, cheeping birds, and even a stray dog walking around the piano. All are welcome at the DCO experience. My high point would be a toss-up between performing Rach 3 for the first time, and playing the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand, which was the first concerto I saw live as a teenager. The low point would be when I foolishly announced my retirement in the programme and so hadn't prepared an encore, but was compelled by the audience to play one anyway... I won't make that mistake again!

So, to today's work - Brahms 1. It's long, it's complex, it's dramatic. When we first performed it in 2013, it was also the first time the DCO was blessed with a full-size Steinway. The work is highly emotional, being written around the time of his close friend Schumann's death. You can hear a dying soul rise to Heaven at the end of the intimate 2nd movement. He seems to get over it rather quickly in the 3rd movement though, perhaps helped by Clara...

Looking back at my 2013 programme notes, I mention a lot of crazy anecdotal things about what this concerto meant to me, all of which are true. But what I didn't know at the time was that this would be the last concert my UK parents would attend, and the last time I would hug my father, who spontaneously stood up from his seat in the audience.

I hope I don't get too emotional today. Thank you for coming. Thank you for your support. Notice that I'm not complaining about my arthritic fingers this year, so that's an attitude adjustment. See you next time.