John Mietus: Conductor

John is an American conductor and double bassist. Based in Auckland, he currently serves as Music Director of the Devonport Chamber Orchestra and Resident Conductor of the Auckland Metropolitan Orchestra. He also appears regularly as a guest conductor with the XiangJiang Philharmonic Orchestra in Changsha, China, and has led performances across a broad range of orchestral and chamber repertoire. Equally at home on the podium and the concert stage, Mietus maintains an active international career both as a conductor and as a double bassist. Since 2022, he has served as Associate Principal Bass of the Auckland Philharmonia and has performed with ensembles including the Houston Symphony and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. As a soloist, he became the first bassist in the world to perform the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* on double bass with orchestra, a landmark achievement that expanded the instrument's repertoire. Mietus studied conducting with Sharon Lavery at the University of Southern California and further developed his approach during his masters under the late Larry Rachleff at Rice University. He has appeared as guest faculty at Northwestern University, the Australian National Academy of Music, and James Madison University. Away from the podium, John enjoys spending time with his two cats, Zuko and Azula.

ORCHESTRA

Flutes	Pene Brawn-Douglas, Kathleen Mistry
Oboes	Carolyn Hyde, Amy Cooper
Clarinets	Hannah Boocock, Gautam Pathumanithy
Bassoons	David Nation, Catherine Bold
Horns	Miriam Robinson, Christine Breeden
Trumpets	Vaughan Malcolm, Dominic Cornfield
Timpani	MingHsuan Lee
Violins I	Selena Sun, Michael Hunter, Joe Pinto, Helen Lewis, Nicola Couch, Alison Sorley, Ellie Wyatt, Charlotte Lamb
Violins II	Heidi Bowmast, Jerry Lam, Tsui-Wen Chen, Averil Griffin, David Kayrouz, Dianne Sainsbury, Arthur Ranford
Violas	Judith Gust, Stephanie Thomas, Daniel Poloha, Neil Shepherd, Iona McDonald, Anne-Marie Forsyth
Cellos	Claire Postlethwaite, Shiho Odlin, Kate Parker, Mary Greig-Clayton, Michelle Caldicott, Iain Rea
Basses	Gordon Hill, Ted Malan

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

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

For further information or to be on our mailing list, visit our website:
https://dco.net.nz/

ASB Account: Devonport Chamber Orchestra 12-3015-0630092-00

Devonport Chamber Orchestra



2pm, Sunday 8th November, 2026
Holy Trinity, 20 Church St, Devonport
Adults: $25, Seniors/Students $20,
Children under 12 free

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Coriolan Overture, Op 62

Beethoven composed this work for the play Coriolan, written by his friend Heinrich von Collin. Collin's play was based on Plutarch's '*Parallel Lives'*, which also served as the source of Shakespeare's Coriolanus. Collin's version of this tale differs from Shakespeare's in that Coriolanus is not killed by the Volscians, but commits suicide. He has been driven from Rome and has joined the Volscians, the traditional enemy of Rome. He leads the Volscian forces against Rome, and is on the point of victory when his wife and his mother, still living in Rome, come to his tent to plead with him to spare the city. They succeed, and he withdraws his troops. He has preserved family honour by not conquering Rome, but believes he has betrayed his promise to the Volscians. Like so many heroes of Greek drama, much admired by Collin, he takes his own life in remorse.

The overture was written in 1807 and the themes bear some resemblance to those in Beethoven's fifth symphony, written in the same year. The opening chords form a motif which recurs throughout the piece and suggest the determination and strength of Coriolanus. The first principal theme reflects the agitation of Coriolanus grappling with conflicting obligations. The next major theme is lyrical and gracefully feminine, perhaps suggesting the exhortations of Coriolanus' wife and mother. These two themes interplay and conflict with each other, the former being gradually softened by the latter, until at the end, Coriolanus has given in. The end comes with the soft dying of the Coriolanus motif, a brief reiteration of the agitated theme, and a final four pizzicato notes, pianissimo.

At the time that Beethoven composed the Coriolan Overture, he was living in Vienna and was eager to secure a position as the house composer of the *Theater an der Wien*. Beethoven hoped eventually to compose an opera based on a libretto by Collin. In the meantime, he thought that the overture would demonstrate his theatrical style to his prospective employers. Although they were impressed by his music, the didn't offer Beethoven the job. Collin's play was not a success either and sank into obscurity, but at least it served to justify Beethoven writing this wonderfully dramatic overture.

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 r*ondo* 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 several sources including Richard Freed, Alexander Rothe, Paul Serotsky, James Adams, Michael Steinberg, Günther Herbig, Michael Allsen and Robert Markow

Geoffrey Hill: Piano

Geoff grew up in Auckland, and has been playing piano since he was 4. Born into a musical family, he began taking lessons at 7, and was heavily involved in the music programmes all throughout school. He attended Westlake Boys High School, and in his senior year, he led the bass section of both the school's boys and mixed choir (*Voicemale* and *Choralation*) as well as percussion in the Concert Band and Symphony Orchestra, and the pianist of the Big Band. These groups all frequently won numerous top prizes at the KBB Music Festival and Big Sing.

Geoff moved to the United States in 2023 to spend a year studying at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, where he won a Fine Arts Prize. He is currently in his junior year at Rice University in Houston, Texas, doing a Bachelors in Piano Performance at the Shepherd School of Music. Last summer, he attended the Aspen Music Festival as a piano student in Aspen, Colorado, and spent this summer accompanying vocalists at the AIMS festival in Graz, Austria as well as travelling across Europe. Earlier this year, he accompanied past MHIVC winner Jenny Jin in a recital at Rare Violin Workshops in New York City.

Geoff is also a composer, having won the 2022 National Composition Prize at the National Chamber Contest and performed his Piano Concerto in 2023 with the Westlake Concert Band at KBB; he recently wrote a Piano Quintet called 'Press/Exhale'. He played in an award-winning Jazz Combo throughout high school, and is a frequent chamber music player, having been a gold medal winner at the NZ Chamber Contest in 2021. He aspires to be a conductor when he is older.