

Royal Northern Sinfonia: Beethoven 'Emperor' Concerto

Friday 30 October

Lars Vogt director/piano
Royal Northern Sinfonia

FELIX MENDELSSOHN 1809-1847 OVERTURE: THE HEBRIDES (FINGAL'S CAVE)

Multi-talented Felix Mendelssohn came from an affluent and enlightened German family. The young musician, artist and literature enthusiast was encouraged to travel Europe, experiencing the countries and their peoples, as well as seeking out landscapes that inspired his watercolour sketches almost as much as his music.

Visiting London in 1829, he and a family friend, who lived in the capital, decided on a summer expedition to Scotland.

First impressions weren't good for Mendelssohn; the sound of the bagpipes alarmed him and he noted gloomily that the Highlands 'brew nothing but whisky, fog and foul weather' – but that foul weather soon played a major role in bringing a little musical masterpiece into the world.

While on the west coast, the pair took a steamship trip to the Hebridean island of Staffa with its spectacular natural formation opening on to the sea, Fingal's Cave. The journey was a rough one, with the little craft being rolled by the waves, and most passengers – including Felix – were seasick.

But as the boat drew near the island, he was confronted by the massive grandeur of the basalt pillars at the cavern's threshold and the awesome cathedral dimensions of its roof. He swiftly jotted down the opening bars of a rhythmic theme inspired by the swelling of the waves. A version of a concert overture was put on paper in December of that year and revised in 1832.

Mendelssohn was never one for composing music that conjured up pictorial imagery, but the orchestral expression of the motion and changing

moods of the waves ebbing and flowing into the great cave of Fingal, the legendary Celtic warrior, is breathtaking.

KRISTINA ARAKELYAN b.1994 FANTASIA ON A THEME BY LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (WORLD PREMIERE - SAGE GATESHEAD COMMISSION)

Fantasia on a Theme By Ludwig van Beethoven was inspired by the rondo theme from the third movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's 'Waldstein' sonata, Op.53. *Fantasia* is in reverse-variation form, with several glimpses of the main theme throughout the composition and an explosive fanfare at the end where the theme is finally heard in its full glory. Inspired by Beethoven's music, it is a fiery composition, with frequent and sudden changes in character.

The choice of the theme from 'Waldstein' sonata is deliberate as it encapsulates Beethoven's philosophical ideas about kindness towards one another and has a euphoric feeling, characteristic of melodies expressing Beethoven's humanitarian intentions. Written one year after the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, a heart-wrenching glimpse of the composer's most painful period, the sonata ends with a glittering C major theme, which appears as the 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

Fantasia seeks to be a positive message to its audience, not only on a personal level of overcoming hardship but also as a Beethovenian message of goodwill and friendship between all people, encouraging us to overcome our differences just as the music overcomes its struggles and arrives at Beethoven's melody.

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

PIANO CONCERTO NO.5 IN E FLAT,

OP.73 'EMPEROR'

ALLEGRO - ADAGIO UN POCO MOSSO - RONDO :

ALLEGRO

Beethoven was renowned as a virtuoso pianist with a great talent for improvisation long before he achieved fame as a composer. Only his increasing deafness forced him to end his concert career and devote himself more to composition, but in the course of that dazzling career he'd been able to perform the first four of his five piano concertos.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had done much to transform and broaden the appeal of the piano concerto, finely balancing the respective roles and strengths of soloist and orchestra, but Beethoven took the concerto to new heights. He considerably extended the soloist's range, in the first movements dramatically brought the piano much earlier into the action, and introduced changes of key and mood

which surprised – and often puzzled – the musicians and audiences of his day.

Beethoven's majestic fifth concerto, written between 1809-1811 in Vienna, was dedicated to his talented pupil and patron Archduke Rudolf. It was first performed in November 1811 in Leipzig with Friedrich Schneider as soloist.

The concerto asserts its power from the start of the *Allegro* with a solo flourish against mighty chords from the orchestra, before two themes – one dramatic, the other more reflective – are explored.

The *Adagio un poco mosso* presents the orchestra with a serene, hymn-like theme into which the piano then joins in delightful partnership.

A short, quiet coda – a tail-piece to the movement – lets the piano hint at the fun to come before leaping into the *Rondo Allegro* with a galloping tune which is joyfully developed and varied between orchestra and soloist, encouraging some dynamic playing.

Programme notes © Richard Yates unless otherwise stated.

FIRST VIOLIN

Bradley Creswick
The Huntington Chair
Kyra Humphreys
The Christine Swales Chair
Katerina Nazarova
Iona Brown
The Voigt Chair
Jane Nossek
Sarah Roberts
Liz Rossi
Jens Lynen

SECOND VIOLIN

Gaëlle-Anne Michel
The Anonymous Chair
Jenny Chang
The BA Summers Chair
Marie Schreer
Sophie Appleton
Alanna Tonetti-Tieppo
John Garner

VIOLA

Michael Gerrard
The Rossiter Family Chair
Malcolm Critten
The Merle Rewcastle Chair
James Slater
Tegwen Jones

CELLO

Steffan Morris
The Share Family Chair
Daniel Hammersley
James Craig
Gabriel Waite
The Manning Chair

DOUBLE BASS

Philip Nelson
The Anonymous Chair
Siân Hicks

FLUTE

Dan Pailthorpe
Hannah Grayson

OBOE

Amy Roberts
The Richardson Family Chair

OBOE/COR ANGLAIS

Michael O'Donnell
The Sylvia Fuller Chair

CLARINET

Ben Mellefont

CLARINET/ E FLAT CLARINET/ BASS CLARINET

Jessica Lee
The Bragg Family Chair

BASSOON

Stephen Reay
The Pyman Family Chair

BASSOON/ CONTRABASSOON

Charlotte Cox

HORN

Peter Francomb
The Friends of RNS Chair
Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans

TRUMPET

Anthony Thompson
The Alan Johnson Chair
Marion Craig

TIMPANI

Richard Cartlidge

