

Australian
National
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of Music

BEETHOVEN & BRUCKNER

Nicholas Carter conductor
ANAM Orchestra

Friday 24 May 2019 7.30pm
Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
Melbourne Recital Centre

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Symphony no. 4 in B-flat major op. 60
(1806)

- I. Adagio—Allegro vivace*
- II. Adagio*
- III. Allegro vivace*
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo*

Interval

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)
Symphony no. 4 in E-flat major,
Romantic (1878/80 ed. Nowak)
(1874)

- I. Bewegt, nicht zu schnell*
- II. Andante - andante quasi allegretto*
- III. Scherzo: Bewegt*
- IV. Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell*

Duration: 32' - interval 20' - 64'

*The 2019 ANAM at Melbourne Recital Centre
series is generously supported by
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BIOGRAPHY



Newly appointed as Chief Conductor of the Stadttheater Klagenfurt and the Kärntner Sinfonieorchester, **Nicholas Carter** will lead three new productions per season and appear regularly in the Orchestra's concert series. In his first season, he conducted *Rusalka*, *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and concert programs include Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* and Mahler's *Symphony no. 1*.

Since his appointment as Principal Conductor of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra in 2016, Nicholas has established a reputation as a conductor of exceptional versatility, equally at home in the concert hall and opera house, and fluent in a diverse repertoire. Indeed his appointment was significant, as he became the first Australian to be chosen as Principal Conductor of an Australian orchestra in over 30 years. Between 2011 and 2014, he served as Kapellmeister to Simone Young in Hamburg, before moving on to a two-year engagement as Kapellmeister and Musical Assistant to Donald Runnicles at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, a house where he enjoys a rewarding ongoing association.

Highlights of recent seasons include debuts with Orchestre Métropolitain (Montreal), Bochumer Symphoniker, MDR Leipzig, Oregon Symphony, Florida Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestre National de Lille, Deutsche Oper am Rhein (*Don Pasquale*), Santa Fe Opera (*Die Fledermaus*, summer 2017). He also returned to Hong Kong Philharmonic, and to Deutsche Oper Berlin (*The Love for Three Oranges*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *La bohème*, *La Traviata* and *Hansel und Gretel*).

In Australia, he collaborates regularly with many of the country's leading orchestras and ensembles and led the 2018 Adelaide Festival's acclaimed full staging of Brett Dean's *Hamlet*. Past engagements have included the Melbourne, Sydney, West Australian, Queensland and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras

with soloists such as Michelle de Young, Simon O'Neill, Alina Ibragimova, Alexander Gavrylyuk and James Ehnes; also galas with Maxim Vengerov (Queensland Symphony) and Anne Sofie von Otter (Sydney Symphony).

This season includes performances with the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin (concert debut, including Brett Dean's *Pastoral Symphony* and Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*) and returns to BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Deutsche Oper am Rhein (*Don Carlo*). The Adelaide concert season features Bernstein's Chichester Psalms and Beethoven's *Symphony no. 9* and a commercial recording of the complete Beethoven piano concertos with Jayson Gillham. He also returns to the orchestra of the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) in Melbourne and to the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. The 2021/22 season sees his Metropolitan Opera debut with Brett Dean's *Hamlet*.

In 2010, before embarking on his European career, his wide-ranging musical interests led him to found a period orchestra in Sydney focusing on the music, instruments and historical performance practices of the early 19th century and his three-year association with the Sydney Symphony, first as Assistant Conductor, later as Associate Conductor, gave him the opportunity to work closely with Vladimir Ashkenazy and a number of the orchestra's guest conductors. At the invitation of Donald Runnicles, he also served as Associate Conductor of the Grand Teton Music Festival in Wyoming from 2010 to 2013.

Nicholas Carter's ANAM residency is supported by David and Gai Taylor

Photo by Annette Koroll

PROGRAM NOTES

Almost three years after trialling the Third Symphony there in 1804, **Beethoven** returned to the Lobkowitz palace in March 1807 to conduct his Coriolan Overture, op. 62 and the Fourth Symphony, both for the first time, in a private concert with the Prince's orchestra. He had begun composing the Fourth, and possibly completed most of it, during the summer of 1806, while also working on his Fourth Piano Concerto and revisions of his opera, *Fidelio*.

Beethoven had been staying (near the modern Czech-Polish border) at the summer residence of another one of his princes, Karl Lichnowsky, when he and his host came almost to blows over the Prince's insistence that Beethoven (to whom he paid a handsome annual retainer) play for some visiting Napoleonic army officers. Whether in republican high dudgeon (as some suppose) or simply to accept a welcome invitation, Beethoven then left for the nearby castle of Lichnowsky's cousin, Franz Oppersdorff, whose private orchestra welcomed him with a performance of his Second Symphony. Oppersdorff also commissioned him to compose two new symphonies, and Beethoven duly received full payment for dedicating the Fourth to Oppersdorff in 1807, and part payment toward the Fifth a year later. He must have started work on the Fourth immediately. Responding to Oppersdorff's enthusiasm for the Second, it retreats from the gravity and length of the Third. But its orchestral brilliance, tonal energy and thematic focus also prepare for the Fifth.

Instead of launching directly into the *Allegro* main theme, Beethoven begins with a dramatic *Adagio* introduction. This in itself was nothing unusual: the First and Second have slow introductions; but here Beethoven was experimenting as he went. Insignificant as it may seem in retrospect, the novelty of beginning an introduction (indeed, a symphony) with a single pizzicato note for the strings is sure to have registered with his original

audience. And, to 18th-century ears only recently graduated to the 19th, the meandering harmonies and Beethoven's disinclination to find definite cadences must have seemed wilfully perverse. But there is nothing perverse or obfuscating about the way the main *Allegro* breaks. Sudden fortissimo chords accelerate toward it almost like a cavalry division being spurred into action. As this ebullient movement proceeds there are some especially beautiful solos, notably for the flute and bassoon, and unexpectedly too for the kettledrums.

The *Adagio* encompasses a typically Beethovenian 'dove and crocodile' mix of moods: serene and sentimental one moment, heroic and even bellicose the next. The orchestral textures vary accordingly, from a standard Classical slow movement's soft strings, winds and a pair of horns, to full fanfares for trumpets and drums, instruments which Beethoven had previously used to such dramatic effect in the Third Symphony's funeral march.

The third movement looks backward again to the minuet (still so-called in the first edition), of which it is a somewhat hyper-activated example; and forward to the scherzo of the Fifth Symphony. An innovation is its five-section form, built out of two components: the minuet proper (A), and a contrasting slightly slower Trio (B) from the winds, with a little help from the violins. These are played in the order A-B-A-B-A.

Berlioz called the finale "an animated swarm of sparkling notes, a continual babble; interrupted only by occasional rough and uncouth chords". That about sums it up, except to add that it also teems with unexpected sounds. There are short solo appearances for bassoon, clarinets (who also contribute a 'babbling brook' accompaniment), oboes and flute. At the very end, the music stops short, there is a coy exchange between violins, bassoons, violas and cellos, and a rush to the end.

Graeme Skinner © 2014, reprinted by permission of Symphony Services International

Bruckner's Fourth Symphony has long been his most popular. This is a puzzle, since there is a grain of truth in the superficial but amusing observation that Bruckner composed, not nine symphonies, but the same symphony nine times! The Fourth is the only symphony to which Bruckner himself gave a title, and *Romantic* is an apt word for the moods and atmospheres the music evokes. Bruckner went further: when asked to explain his symphony, he invented (after composing it) an imaginary program in which the first movement is supposed to represent a medieval city at dawn, trumpet calls signalling the opening of the city gates, knights riding out into the countryside where they are surrounded by the bird calls and magic of the forest. Bruckner's program is best ignored – this unsophisticated man provided it to oblige well-meaning friends, and the Fourth is no more programmatic than any of his other symphonies. Bruckner once said of a friend's program for the Seventh Symphony, "If he has to write poetry, why does he have to pick on my symphony?"

Bruckner reluctantly tried to explain his music because its first audiences found it so hard to understand. They were not helped by Vienna's music critics, particularly the powerful Eduard Hanslick, champion of Brahms, and deeply prejudiced against the Wagner disciple, Bruckner. When the Vienna Philharmonic played through the first version of the symphony shortly after Bruckner completed it in late 1874, all except the first movement was pronounced 'idiotic'. The most famous of all Bruckner stories presages the success of the revised Fourth Symphony at its first performance, at a Vienna Philharmonic concert conducted by Hans Richter in February 1881. After a rehearsal, Bruckner gratefully approached Richter and slipped a coin into his hand. "Take it and drink a beer to my health," said the delighted composer.

Bruckner's symphonies demanded a new way of listening. He is often tagged 'the Wagnerian

symphonist', but his debt to Wagner was very partial: he studied *Tristan und Isolde* from a piano score without text, and when he went to hear *Die Walküre* he is reported to have asked someone after the performance, "Tell me, why did they burn the woman at the end?" Even the orchestral and harmonic innovations in Bruckner which sound so Wagnerian – the chromatic harmony, the rich brass scoring, the expressive use of the massed strings – are present in embryo in Bruckner's earliest orchestral music, before he became familiar with Wagner.

The true sources of the musical craft of this church-trained teacher and organist from Upper Austria lie in that country's musical tradition – in Beethoven and even more in Schubert. Bruckner's symphonies are not dramatic in Wagner's sense, nor dialectical or argumentative in Beethoven's. His inspiration, like Schubert's, is lyrical, and the music is built into long paragraphs, put side by side, and compared by one musician to a series of terraces. "Schubert," wrote the great English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey, "is always ready to help Bruckner whenever Wagner will permit."

The spirit of Bruckner hidden behind the 'Wagnerian' sound is entirely different from Wagner's. As Tovey puts a truth obvious to anyone who knows Bruckner well, he never forgets the high altar of his Catholic church, nor, one might add, the magnificent organ of the Augustinian monastery of St Florian, where he first learnt music. The simple religious devotion of the man can be heard in the developments of the second subject of the *Romantic* Symphony's first movement, and in the magnificent brass chorales which recur in the last movement.

It is often called organists' music, and certainly Bruckner's fondness for contrapuntal devices such as inversion, augmentation and diminution is very obvious in the symphonies, and shows his deep learning in the methods of the old church composers. Bruckner was one of the great improvisers at the organ, but his symphonies, despite

their vast scale, are never rambling. His orchestra often sounds like an organ, but as Tovey observes, this is because it is completely free of the mistakes of the organ-loft composer. Bruckner is master of the orchestra.

Perhaps the popularity of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony is chiefly due to its memorable opening. The mysterious beginning of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony fascinated Bruckner, and it has been said that he couldn't get a symphony under way without a tremolo. It is not a symphony which starts, but the beginning of music itself: major and minor horn calls sounding the interval of a fifth, gradually rousing the woodwind to join in. The string tremolos continue, after a climax, as accompaniment to the second subject, and the characteristic 'Bruckner rhythm' of a duplet and a triplet is heard. The recapitulation starts with the opening horn calls, now surrounded by a flowing figure in muted violins, and they also provide the material of the elaborate coda.

The slow movement is an elegiac march in C minor, the relative minor key. Whereas the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth, often invoked as Bruckner's model, consists of variations on two themes, the returns of Bruckner's broad main theme are separated by an episode that returns twice, a chant-like theme for the violas heard against pizzicato notes from the other strings. Each statement of the main theme is more richly scored and displays more movement than its predecessor, rising at last to a great climax before a solemn coda.

The last two movements were subject to the revisions and second thoughts so typical of Bruckner's career as a symphonist. Between 1878 and 1880, years after the fiasco of the first read-through, Bruckner wrote a completely new *Scherzo*, and revised the *Finale* extensively. The success of the first performance under Richter protected the Fourth Symphony from further major revision by the composer.

Bruckner's description of the *Scherzo* as a hunt with horn calls, and the *Trio* as a dance melody played to the hunters during the rest, is the only useful though obvious part of his 'program'. The scale of this sounding of the horn, however, suggests King Mark's moonlight hunt in *Tristan und Isolde*, or even the *Ride of the Valkyries*, more than Bruckner's bucolic 'hunting of the hare'. The *Trio*, by contrast, is an Austrian peasant dance with which Haydn, Mozart and of course Schubert would have felt at home.

The *Finale* is the longest movement, a feature of the overall balance of the symphony again suggested by Beethoven's Ninth. As in Beethoven, there are reminiscences here of the earlier movements. A three-note descending phrase is heard in the introduction, recalling the opening of the symphony, while the brass remember the *Scherzo*. This phrase is gradually revealed as the main theme, played in unison by the whole orchestra. The second thematic group is dominated by a C minor melody for violins and violas, later combined with a lively woodwind motif. Themes from all the movements occur, combined most artfully with the new thematic material, as Bruckner works his way to a restatement of the symphony's opening theme in the home key. The brass dominates the coda, with the motto of the symphony's first pages.

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