

# Plush 6 ~ Lunchtime Concert

Saturday 15 July 2017 ~ 1pm

## **Beethoven**

**Eyeglass Duo for viola & cello (9 mins)**

Lawrence Power, Adrian Brendel

## **Harrison Birtwistle**

**Precis**

**Sarabande: The King's Farewell  
(7 mins)**

Tim Horton

## **Michael Berkeley**

**At a Solemn Wake (7.5 mins)**

Tim Horton, Adrian Brendel

## **Bela Bartók**

**Duos for Two Violins (10 mins)**

Lawrence Power, Corey Cerovsek

## **Beethoven**

**Cello Sonata in G minor, No. 2 Op. 5 (20 mins)**

Tim Horton, Adrian Brendel

# Programme Notes

One of the less trumpeted of **Beethoven's** many virtues was his playfulness. He was capable of all sorts of musical humour, two examples of which find their way into today's programme. The opening work's title refers to the eyeglasses worn by his cello playing friend Baron Nikolaus Zmeskall. Zmeskall looked after Beethoven's needs, finding him accommodation, providing him with wine and quills, and going over his proofs.

Beethoven played the viola, and it is likely he wrote the work for both of them to play. The cello part is comically difficult at times, no doubt intended by Beethoven to amuse himself at his friend's horrified squints as he ascended the fingerboard at lightning speed. Its character is one of energetic bonhomie, with lots of musical jokes and other surprises thrown in.

One of **Harrison Birtwistle's** earliest recognised works was his solo piano piece 'Precis', premiered at Dartington Hall, Devon, by his friend John Ogdon in 1960. There are early shoots of Birtwistle's unique soundworld here, with a sense of strong influences of the time in the background such as Stockhausen and Maxwell Davies. It is in five short fragments - the first is followed by a 'fortissimo' refrain' which also precedes the final fragment, this time in 'pianissimo'. The 5th fragment is essentially a retrograde of the 1st, giving the piece a cyclical feel. 41 years later, 'Sarabande: the King's Farewell' reveals a different dimension, somewhat Schoenbergian in harmony but much more characteristic of Birtwistle's later work.

Commissioned for the Ryedale Festival (where it received its world premiere with Adrian Brendel and Christopher Glynn in 2015), **Michael Berkeley's** 'At a Solemn Wake' is a virtuosic single movement piece for cello and piano. It moves through a series of moods, from mysterious and atmospheric to turbulent and agitated, and takes full advantage of the range of timbral, rhythmic, and textural possibilities allowed by this combination of instruments. It is a very moving work written in memory of his late wife Deborah.

The great **Bela Bartók** didn't intend his duos for two violins to be performed. A teacher himself, he embarked on a series of educational works for students that included his piano works 'Mikrokosmos', inspired by the suggestion of the German violinist Erich Dolflein. Bartók being Bartók, the works are memorable little vignettes nonetheless, full of folk music motifs of several Eastern European countries. He wrote 44 in all, of which only a few will be played today.

To end, we return to **Beethoven** and one of the great sonatas in the cello repertoire. Beethoven waited until the age of 25 to assign an opus number to his music, and stunned the music world with the daring brilliance and emotional maturity of his music. This sonata begins in dramatic fashion, a 'fortepiano' chord opening an intense extended introduction that is amongst the most harmonically ambitious of all Beethoven's early music. The cascading allegro that follows unpacks the drama hinted at earlier, with the odd 'grazioso' motif providing a little relief from the intensity and heralding the amazing and unusual finale. Here, Beethoven reveals himself as a true humourist, not in an overt way but with subtle jokes and plenty of surprising twists. The character is light-hearted, rustic and lyrical in turn. It sounds like Beethoven had a ball writing it, and it has an irresistible trajectory despite all of its unusual kinks. It was the work that made me want to become a cellist as a child.