

Welcome to our first concert of 2024, on the theme of “Changing Worlds”.

Sergei Prokofiev’s work on the 1934 film *Lieutenant Kijé* was new ground for him personally, as his first attempt at film music and his first commission. It was also innovative in the emerging art of film music; instead of the established form of broad symphonic movements, Prokofiev provided a series of 16 short fragments or leitmotifs, scored for chamber orchestra, which are repeated at appropriate times during the film’s duration, to highlight specific moments in the drama. As such the music is not heard to its best advantage by viewers of the film, which is available on YouTube but not particularly recommended. However, the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra spotted its potential and invited Prokofiev to create an orchestral suite in what was probably the first instance of a film score being adapted into a significant musical work. Prokofiev later said that producing the suite was “a devilish job” which gave him much more trouble than the music for the film itself.

*Birth of Kijé*: militaristic music as a lowly military official makes a transcription error which implies the existence of a Lieutenant Kizhe. Court officials find him a useful scapegoat, but it gets complicated when the Tsar takes a personal interest in the officer’s wellbeing.

*Romance*: based on an old Russian song, “The little grey dove is cooing”. Officials plot how to contrive a wedding for the Tsar’s new favourite.

*Kijé’s Wedding*: celebratory elaborations on the Kijé theme as two actual lovers seize the opportunity of a royally sanctioned wedding ceremony.

*Troika*: drunken troika drivers are ordered at short notice to bring Kijé back from exile, and entertain themselves on the way by singing an old Hussar song.

*The Burial of Kijé*: a medley of earlier themes creates a series of reminiscences of Kijé’s life.

Anthony Ritchie became professor of composition at The University of Otago in 2018 and has since 2020 been head of Otago’s School of Performing Arts. *Remember Parihaka*, from 1994, is his response to learning of the incident in 1881 when government troops entered the village of Parihaka with guns and artillery in order to put a stop to Maori passive resistance to unauthorised land confiscation. Despite the peaceful response of the inhabitants, many were arrested and sent to hard labour in Dunedin and the village destroyed. The composer explains that the piece starts peacefully, combines a theme based on a song composed at that time, played on flutes and oboes, with a more European-sounding theme introduced by solo violin, and ends in sadness and unease.

Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov wrote a choral setting of *Prayer for Ukraine* in 2014, in response to the protests against the Russian occupation of the Crimean peninsula. The text translates to “Lord, protect the Ukraine. Give us power, faith and hope. Our Father.” This orchestration, by fellow Ukrainian Eduard Resatch, was performed by many orchestras around the world in the months following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. Silvestrov was among millions of Ukrainians who fled their homes at that time and now lives in Berlin.

During the nineteenth century, the violin concerto underwent a period of evolution: some composers, notably Brahms, Bruch and Mendelssohn, stressed musical values while others, drawing on the technical advances made on the instrument by Paganini, championed virtuosity. Among the latter group was Charles de Bériot. He was a founder of the Franco-Belgian school of violin playing, a combination of the graceful, lyrical French style and high levels of technical skill. His pedagogical compositions are still used by violin students, among them ten violin concertos. *No 9 in A minor*, published in 1859, tests the player’s technique with double stopping and quick runs. It is often encountered by students as a stepping stone on their way to the major concertos of the Romantic era.

*Capriccio Italien* was inspired by a trip Tchaikovsky took to Rome with his brother Modest in 1880. Evidently he was enthusiastic about the project, writing "I have already completed the sketches for an Italian fantasia on folk tunes for which I believe a good fortune may be predicted. It will be effective, thanks to the delightful tunes which I have succeeded in assembling partly from anthologies, partly from my own ears in the streets." For example, the piece opens with a bugle call based on one that Tchaikovsky heard daily in his rooms at the Hotel Costanzi, next door to the barracks of the Royal Italian Cuirasseurs.

The trip was, however, only a respite from the composer's disastrous marriage with Antonina Miliukova, to whom he referred as "the reptile" while Modest called her "a crazed half-wit". By 1880 Tchaikovsky had made three attempts to persuade Antonina to divorce him, having lived together for only six weeks after the wedding. He never did get the divorce; despite her having three children out of wedlock, he was not able to divorce her due to her threats to publicly expose him as a homosexual. She outlived him by twenty-four years, of which the last twenty were spent in an insane asylum. Much of this suffering was due to legal and social conventions which are no longer in place, leaving us with the reminder that not all changes are for the worse in this world.

Programme notes by The Jabberer