



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE
Benalla & District Inc.



BTHVN 2020



Programme Notes - 11th September, 2020

About Today's Music Selections

After a "virtual" month off from the concert stage the MSO seemed to be in a hurry to make up for lost time – its planned September round of programmes containing a wealth of music too vast for us to take in in a couple of presentations. Sadly though, there wasn't any Beethoven to choose from – apart from the 9th Symphony which I have earmarked as the work to conclude our Beethoven 250th commemoration later this year. So, to remain true to the resolution to include at least one Beethoven composition in each of the year's sessions, I have looked up the ABC's Top 100 Beethoven Survey to see which works were voted in from Nos 11 -20 (numbers 1-10 have already been presented with the exception of the Moonlight Sonata – which I am saving for another month – and the 9th Symphony). It's only a small 8 minute's worth admittedly, but the Egmont Overture came in at number 13, and given the music on offer this month this will have to suffice as our 'go-to' Beethoven work for this session.

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The **Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra** is a relatively new orchestra by European standards, having been formed only since 1945. In its relatively short existence, though, it has attracted some notable music directors, among them

- Bernard Haitink of Concertgebouw fame,



- Willem van Otterloo who is remembered in Australia as chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the 1960s and of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in the 1970s and for taking both orchestras during his time with them on tours overseas. His life came to a premature end in a motor accident at St Kilda in 1978.

- Edo de Waart who, some may recall was chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for a number of years during the 1990s and early 2000s. More recently he was the music director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.



The current Chief Conductor of the Orchestra is American **Karina Canellakis**, a relative newcomer to the conducting world whose reputation has risen quickly since winning the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award in 2016. Internationally acclaimed for her emotionally charged performances, technical command and interpretive depth, this month (September) she will begin her role as Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra.



A couple of years ago Karina toured for the ABC in a four-city tour conducting the symphony orchestras of Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, and Tasmania. We will see her in action with the Netherlands Philharmonic in a performance of Beethoven's Egmont Overture.

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Mozart wrote five concertos for violin: all of them in the same year – 1775, when he was just 19 years of age. We will hear the G major 3rd. As we might expect from the hand of someone so youthful, it has a light, cheerful and almost dance-like quality to it.



The violinist, Hilary Hahn, who we have listened to previously, is the violinist of choice for this work. I saw two of her performances from which to choose – one given at a birthday concert a few years ago for the Pope of the day (Benedict 16th) and the other given at a music festival last year in Bucharest. There is divided opinion as to which of the two is the better performance, but I have selected the latter one for no other reason than it contains some new cadenzas by the soloist (from what I read Mozart did not compose cadenzas for any of his five violin concertos, and any performer of this work is required to select, improvise, or compose an appropriate cadenza, not written by Mozart himself, to implement into their performance).

More than two thirds of Vivaldi's five hundred-plus concertos are for solo instrument—violin (most plentifully, at more than 230 concertos!), bassoon, cello, oboe, and even mandolin (but no keyboards). A relatively meagre three concertos are written for "flautino," a "little flute" , sometimes called a "the sopranino recorder, which sounds an octave higher than the "alto" recorder in F, which is the recorder that got most of the solo work in the 18th century.

The flautino has F₅ as its lowest note, and its length is 20 cm. It is almost always made from soft European or tropical hardwoods, the instrument originally specified by Vivaldi, was a Baroque cousin of the recorder, but because the editor of this concerto's first published edition (from the 1950s), composer Francesco Malipiero, assigned it to the piccolo, it was generally performed by that instrument.



Flautino, pear-wood stained - three parts

Today, however, the recorder appears to be the instrument of choice by the work's exponents. And that's how it will be presented for this session.



The artist is Swiss recorder player and conductor, **Maurice Steger**. Steger is a frequent guest soloist with leading European Baroque ensembles and toured Australia a few short years ago.

In the publicity for Steger's Australian concerts, the Director of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Paul Dyer, wrote: "Fasten your seat belts because you are in for the ride of your life with Maurice Steger. He's like a stratospheric

Speedy Gonzales. This man has totally revolutionised the recorder and his playing is revered around the world."

The solo role in the concerto we will hear is more virtuosic and demanding than Vivaldi's normal woodwind writing (the solo enters with an unbroken string of eighty-four eighth notes, and that's just the beginning). Vivaldi must have had a superlative player in mind. I'm sure after listening to this short concerto you may agree that Maurice Steger fits the bill completely.



British conductor **Daniel Harding** is literally a “high-flier”. For his love of music is only equalled by his love of flying. He is a qualified commercial airline pilot and announced last year his intention this current season to take a sabbatical to fly for ‘Air France’. “Since I was a child I dreamed of flying planes, but my dedication to music prevented me,” he said.

In an interview Harding compared the work of a pilot with that of a conductor: “There are many interesting parallels between a pilot and a conductor. As a pilot, you sit there and press buttons. The computer does almost everything. And that’s the way it is with a conductor and an orchestra. The conductor controls with his hands, but only the orchestra plays. The opportunity to intervene is only situational for both conductors and pilots. My job is to steer the machine exactly where I want it to go. An orchestra loves to have moments when the autopilot is on. I just provide the impulse”.

Up until the middle of this year (at the end of this current season), Harding has been Music Director of the *Orchestre de Paris*. He also serves as Conductor Laureate with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and as Music Director of the Swedish Radio Symphony.

It’s with a Mahler work that we see him in action musically – a high-flying rendition (if you will pardon the pun) with the famous Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam of Mahler’s 1st Symphony (“Titan” is the name given to it). It’s a long work – it lasts for an hour – but I’m sure if you stay with it you will be so glad you did.

It seems logical to start any musical concert or presentation with an overture so let’s do that!

Ludwig van Beethoven - Egmont Overture Opus 85



Bettina von Brentano

In a letter to German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Beethoven’s friend Bettina von Brentano explained the composer’s fascination with Egmont, writing that he had told her, “Goethe’s poems exert a great power over me not only by virtue of their content but also their rhythm; I am put in the right mood and stimulated to compose by this



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

language, which builds itself into a higher order as if through spiritual agencies, and bears within itself the secret of harmony.”



Lamoral, Count of Egmont

During 1809 and 1810, Beethoven composed both the overture and the incidental music to Goethe's play *Egmont*, depicting the life of the Count of Egmont, a Flemish nobleman who was executed as part of a conspiracy in 1567.

Egmont was, on the one hand, a loyal subject of Philip II of Spain – he pled Philip's troth (an old phrase meaning 'to promise to marry to someone') before Mary I of England—and on the other a fervent opponent of the repressive measures visited on the Netherlands by the Spanish regime. He could neither support the governor-general nor bring himself to join a military insurrection against the Duke of Alba, and was at length captured and beheaded as a traitor for having entertained such high moral scruples.

Beethoven's overture is altogether appropriate to the swashbuckling tale. It begins with a terrifying unison F and then a fateful, sinister progression in F minor. The melodic undulations in woodwinds and first violins are picked up by the cellos, which work the material into the restless theme of the *Allegro*, still in minor.

The second theme is a major-mode version of the mysterious chords heard in the opening bars. A taut sonata makes its way routinely on through to recapitulation, at which point the insistent chords of the second theme are interrupted by a delicate modulation in the woodwinds. From these there breaks forth a coda in F major of rousing military triumph, with piccolos and heroic brass—quite the equal of the memorable coda that concludes the Fifth Symphony.

If the 'Pathétique' Sonata sits in Beethoven's early period, and the 'Choral' Symphony is the musical embodiment of his later years, the *Egmont Overture* finds itself squarely in the middle. In many ways, the work harks backwards and yet it also looks forwards prophetically. The stately, austere orchestral opening, so beloved of Beethoven and clearly evident in early works such as the 'Eroica' Symphony, is absolutely present here. But so is the thrilling, climactic ending, drawing together themes heard throughout the work and weaving them into a powerful finale.

(Sources: classiefm.com; arts.ucdavis.edu)

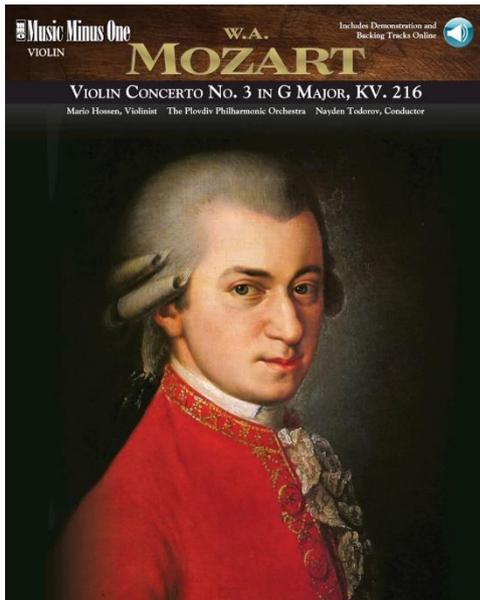
The recording of the *Egmont Overture* by the Netherland Radio Philharmonic Orchestra (Radio Filharmonisch Orkest) under the baton of Karin Canellakis can be accessed on YouTube via this link:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWmiP7rdRBg>

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Concerto No 3 in G major for Violin and Orchestra K 216 ("Strassburg")



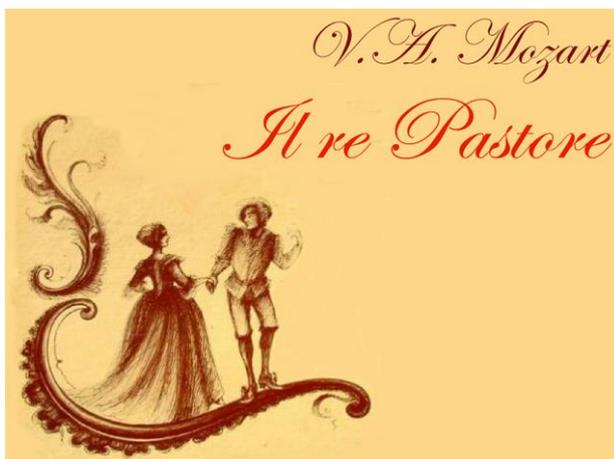
We think of Mozart as being a composer first and foremost, but he was also acknowledged as an uncommonly fine keyboard virtuoso. He was an accomplished string player, too, having been tutored in the violin by his father, Leopold, whose violin treatise (published the year of Wolfgang's birth) stands as a monument of teaching method and practice in the eighteenth century. Young Mozart became adept enough to serve as a court violinist—eventually as concertmaster—in his native Salzburg. Once he left Salzburg for Vienna he seems to have preferred playing the violin's alto cousin, the viola, which he often did in chamber music.

In his maturity Mozart showed little interest in string concertos and was always curiously negligent of the cello as a solo instrument, which is fascinating given his background as a violinist - he also was Concertmaster in the Court orchestra of the local Prince Archbishop at Salzburg (concertmasters in orchestras nearly always are violinists). So perhaps we have to be grateful that his five violin concertos exist at all. They belong to the days of his youth: he was but 19 years of age when he composed them for fellow-violinist Gaetano Brunetti who Concertmaster in the Salzburg Orchestra, and, doubtless, they were intended for performance at the Salzburg Court with Mozart himself as soloist.



Hieronymus von Colloredo
Prince Archbishop of Salzburg
1772-1812

The Fourth and Fifth Concertos are the most frequently performed of the five, but the Third, in G major, is nonetheless a work of very considerable charm, a fine example of how Mozart was experimenting with adventurous ideas.



It reveals common ground between symphonic and operatic music, since the opening theme of the first movement (Allegro) also appears in the aria "Aer tranquillo e di sereni" in his opera *Il rè pastore* (The Shepherd King), which had been premiered in the palace of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg on April 23, 1775—so just four and a half months before this concerto was completed. Indeed, this piece is so operatic that it breaks into a brief recitative for solo violin just before the recapitulation section in this sonata-form movement.

The concerto opens, as stated above, with a theme that Mozart had used in the aria 'Aer tranquillo' in his opera *Il rè pastore*, performed in Salzburg earlier that year. This allegro (fast) movement is in sonata form and features a good deal of dialogue between the soloist and the orchestra, with oboes prominent.



Mozart's violin, now housed at the Mozarteum Foundation, Salzburg

The second movement – Adagio has a dreamy quality with muted upper strings in triplets and pizzicato cello and bass imparting some of the same expressive qualities as the slow movement of the much later Piano Concerto in C, K. 467. Here, also, the oboes are replaced by two flutes – the original players would have been able to double on both instruments but modern orchestras have to hire flutes for this movement. The effect is to impart a softer, more silvery quality to the Adagio, emphasized by the muting of the orchestral violins while the cellos and basses play pizzicato.

The final movement – Rondeau – is a sprightly 3/8 time dance in Allegro tempo which suddenly breaks out of its rollicking 3/8 time into unexpected and contrasting sections that draw on popular dances and folk songs, including a graceful dance step for the solo violin over pizzicato strings, which runs directly into a livelier tune of folklike character. This two-section minor/major tune has recently been identified as a Hungarian melody known as the "Strassburger"; hence the concerto bears the nickname: "the Strassburg".

In this performance Hilary Hahn is accompanied by the Camerata Salzburg conducted by Louis Langrée.

The Link to the YouTube recording is:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywA_BsFvYxY&t=36s

Antonio Vivaldi – Concerto for Flautino in C major RV 443

The most original, popular, and influential Italian composer of his time, Vivaldi was very quickly forgotten. Within a hundred years of his death, he had achieved the ultimate fate of most composers—complete oblivion. After he was finally rediscovered in the early twentieth century, and eventually became one of the most performed of all composers again, he often was written off as excessively prolific and facile. Stravinsky famously dismissed his entire career as "the same concerto four hundred times," an assessment that was not just unkind, but also unfair. We now know that he wrote more than five—not four—hundred concertos, in addition to operas (he once claimed ninety-four, no doubt with characteristic exaggeration; some twenty survive), cantatas, and trio sonatas.



Vivaldi began his career as a violin virtuoso (he studied with his father, who played at the great Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice), but he also prepared for the priesthood and took Holy Orders at the age of twenty-five.

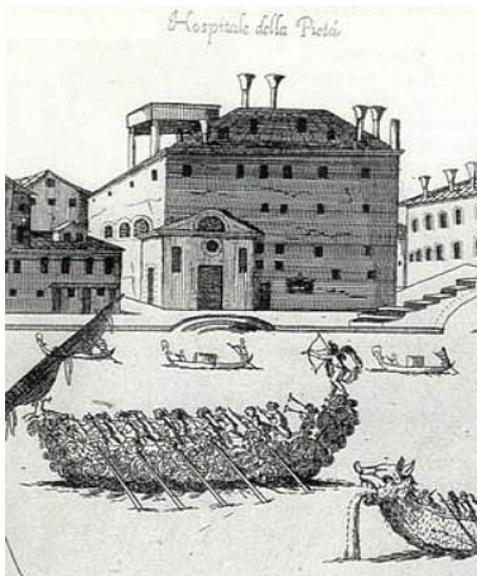
(He soon became known as the "Red Priest," after the colour of his hair.)



That same year, he accepted a job as music director, violin teacher, and composer at La Pietà, a Venetian orphanage for girls—a post he would keep for more than thirty-five years, nearly the remainder of his life. At the height of his career, Vivaldi was as highly regarded as any living composer, including J. S. Bach, who admired Vivaldi's music, copied out several of his scores for performance, and arranged others for different instruments. (Perhaps the most ingenious of Bach's transcriptions is his reworking of a solo concerto in B minor into a concerto for four harpsichords in A minor.)

Vivaldi's apparent specialty was the concerto, for one or more solo instruments, which he composed in abundance and with unusual ease, even by his own standards. (Vivaldi claimed he could compose a concerto faster than a scribe could copy it.)

(Source: Programme notes, Chicago Symphony Orchestra -cso.org).



The Concerto in C Major was likely composed for the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice. The girls of the Pietà, mostly orphans and illegitimate daughters, were famous throughout Europe for their musical performances. When he was not employed teaching at the Ospedale, Vivaldi was usually under contract to send new concertos from wherever he happened to be.

This orphanage increasingly came to promote musical talent and commanded an orchestra of international repute.

Vivaldi wrote only three concertos for "flautino," the sopranino recorder, which sounds an octave higher than the "alto" recorder in F, which is the recorder that got most of the solo work in the 18th century, including the Second Brandenburg. That concerto is virtuosic, but makes at least one concession to the instrument: it makes sparing use of the recorder's lowest notes, which are its weakest. Low notes are less of a problem on the sopranino, which sounds so high (its lowest note is at the top of the treble clef staff) that it has little problem being heard, but Vivaldi's Concerto in C nonetheless has few notes at the bottom of instrument's range.

Acknowledgement Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra - (hollywoodbowl.com).

The concerto opens with a lively orchestral ritornello ('a little return' or recurring passage) after which the soloist enters with a display passage that dazzles with its rhythmic drive and virtuosic writing. Thereafter, the orchestra and soloist alternate, with the latter receiving sparse accompaniment from the former and the whole exuding delicate music that brims with joy and effervescence.

The second movement is a lovely Largo, dreamy and somewhat lonely in the main theme, introduced at the outset by the recorder (or piccolo). If the music calls to mind grey skies above a lonely whistler treading soggy earth, it at least consoles the heart with its soaring beauty and subdued scoring. While the soloist thoroughly dominates the middle panel, the orchestra returns to nearly equal footing in the finale, presenting the chipper main material right off. The recorder then takes up bits of the thematic goods, giving them an almost ecstatic treatment, the music bouncing and chirping, dazzling both ear and mind. Later on the soloist's writing turns even more colourful, with swirls of colourful sounds and notes tossed about athletically, leaving the listener breathless and in awe. (Source: allmusic.com).



Maurice Steger is joined in this performance by members of the music group Cappella Gabetta.

The Cappella Gabetta is a family affair: Sol Gabetta (remember her?), her brother – concertmaster Andres Gabetta – and a hand-picked team of highly qualified musicians from the same musical background devise repertoires of baroque and early classical music which they perform on original instruments.

The YouTube link to this performance is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hggISFswKcw>

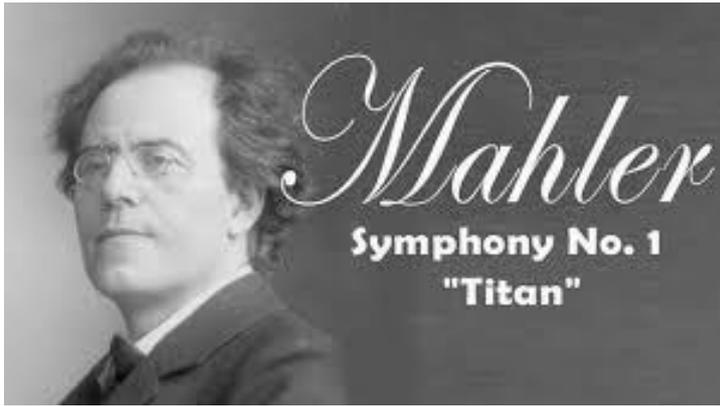


NOTE: You may notice that Maurice Steger uses a different recorder for the second movement.



A comment on his performance informs that the second recorder is boxwood – arguably it produces a more flexible/ sweeter sound. The first is made from grenadilla (left) – a form of rosewood sometimes known as African blackwood. The grenadilla has much more projection and volume. Also, if he were to play the same instrument all the way through there is more chance of the recorder clogging up with condensation from the breath. Swapping in the middle gives the Blackwood soprano a chance to rest in between.

Gustav Mahler – Symphony No1 in D major (“The Titan”)



When is a symphony not a symphony?

Mahler's first is one of the most thrilling symphonies – but it suffered a long time from an identity crisis.

This is a work that went through many revisions before Mahler arrived at the version we hear today. In fact, he started by not calling it a symphony at

all! When the work was premiered on 20 November 1889, Mahler described it as a Symphonic Poem in Two Parts, and within those parts there were five movements, rather than the four of the version we know now.

His starting point seems to have been modelled on the *Symphonie Fantastique* by Berlioz and which was built around an elaborate narrative. But the audience anger and incomprehension that followed the work's premiere in Budapest prompted Mahler into a whole series of changes.

Four years later and the work had an amended title – ‘Titan – tone poem symphonic form’.

In an attempt to guide his audience, the composer had latched onto the work of the romantic writer Jean Paul Richter¹, and his epic tale that follows the hero Titan² from passionate youth to mature ruler. But there was little to link the novel and manuscript, so for the next outing, Mahler ditched that title – and a movement called *Blumine* from the original work – and called the work simply the *Symphony in D for large orchestra*. Finally in 1898, he finally settled on *Symphony No.1 in D* – and then published! Phew!

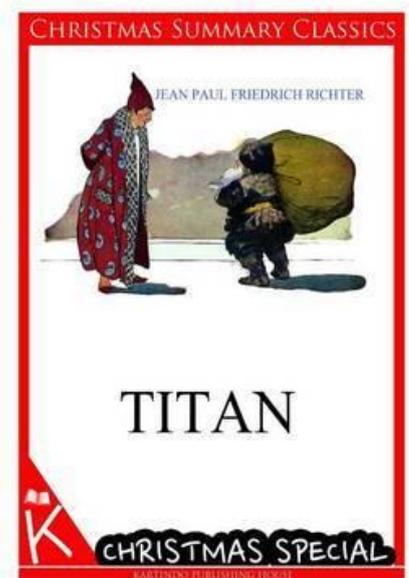
¹ Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825) was Gustav Mahler's favourite author.

² *Titan* recounts, in four volumes, and with numerous shifts backward and forward in time, the rearing of Albano, the Prince of Hohenfliess, from childhood to his coming into his rightful inheritance as a man..

After such a painful process, what about the music itself? Despite Mahler's attempts to eradicate a theme or storyline, there is a musical link between this first symphony and Mahler's earlier song cycle, ‘*Songs of a Wayfarer*’³ – and it's the wayfarer whose journey you can follow through the symphony's four movements.

³ Mahler wrote “*Songs of a “Wayfarer”*” in the wake of his unhappy love for soprano Johanna Richter (no connection with Jean Paul Richter) whom he met while conductor of the opera house in Kassel, Germany,

The opening movement celebrates the great outdoors. The wayfarer is walking in a forest on a lovely spring day where, according to Mahler, the sunlight sparkles and shimmers. Listen out for carefree folk tunes and even a cuckoo from the clarinet!



By the second movement, our protagonist seems to be positively striding along. Although you can still hear birdsong, this scherzo is building to something more ominous – the cellos and basses do their best to erode the sense of optimism until the glorious mood returns in a thrilling climax.



"The Hunter's Funeral Procession," the engraving by Moritz von Schwind which was Mahler's inspiration for the Funeral March in the First Symphony

The third movement sinks to a funereal pace. Mahler plays with several symphonic versions of funeral marches – even echoes of the children's song we know as Frere Jacques (to Mahler it was Bruder Martin) sound solemn and tense.

The mood is finally broken in the fourth and final movement, with the crashing of the trumpets and trombones – what Mahler called 'the cry of a wounded heart', but this gives way to a lush romantic theme, as if the wayfarer is recalling his love and reminiscing more happily about his past, giving way to the end of heartbreak and a final glorious massive climax – which apparently was enough to wake a sleeping concert goer at the premier whose attention had slipped after the third movement!

You won't want to miss a minute of this outstanding first symphony by Mahler which cannot fail to stir the soul – and leave you with a determined sense that anguish and loneliness can be banished and the human spirit will triumph. (Acknowledgement: classicfm.com).



The link to YouTube for the recording of this work by Daniel Harding and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXMFbGRyII&t=1019s>