

Chamber Music New Zealand
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CONCERT SEASON 2009



Stephen De Pledge

Welcome

Thank you for joining us for this recital by one of New Zealand's most versatile and successful musicians.

Pianist Stephen De Pledge is known for his skill in crafting interesting programmes and his commitment to contemporary music. It is a pleasure to have him back in the country following his acclaimed performance in the 2008 NZ International Arts Festival, where he premièred the New Zealand Landscape Preludes. You will hear three of these today along with a colourful and varied selection of piano masterworks.

I hope that you will enjoy this concert.



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Euan Murdoch

Chief Executive, Chamber Music New Zealand

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Stephen De Pledge



New Zealand pianist Stephen De Pledge began his studies in Auckland with Margaret Crawshaw and Bryan Sayer, then undertook postgraduate studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London with Joan Havill. He was chosen for the NFMS Young Concert Artists' Award in 1996, and has since maintained a diverse and wide-ranging performing schedule as soloist, chamber musician and song accompanist. His acclaimed Wigmore Hall debut in 1999 has been followed by regular recitals there, and he has also given solo performances around Britain and in Hong Kong, Italy, France, Singapore, Japan, Australia and the USA.

As a chamber musician, Stephen has collaborated with groups such as the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, the English Chamber Orchestra Ensemble and the Scottish Ensemble. He has worked with some of the finest musicians of our time, including Viktoria Mullova, Colin Carr, Alan Hacker and Rivka Golani, and performed at many International Festivals in the UK and abroad. As a member of Chamber Domaine, he has recently featured on a recording of chamber music by Gorecki.

Stephen De Pledge's repertoire ranges from the 17th to the 21st centuries. He has always maintained an interest in contemporary music, and has given the

world première performances of many works. Early this century he began commissioning a suite of works from leading New Zealand composers on the theme of 'landscapes'. The resulting twelve part work, Landscape Preludes, received its first complete performance at the NZ International Festival of Arts in February 2008.

In 2001 he presented the complete chamber works of Arvo Pärt at the Edinburgh Festival, under the guidance of the composer, and that year he also made the world première recording of Pärt's piano sonatinas. Stephen De Pledge has become particularly associated with the music of Messiaen, which he studied in Paris with the composer's widow, Yvonne Loriod. He has recorded solo works of Messiaen, as well as those of English composer Arthur Bliss.

In addition to solo recordings, De Pledge's recordings include song cycles by Ned Rorem and Samuel Barber, French saxophone music (with Christian Forshaw) and chamber music of Messiaen, Shostakovich, Schnittke and Pärt. He has broadcast for Radio 3 and Classic FM in the UK, and also performed on radio in USA, Australia and New Zealand.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Baptised Bonn, 17 December 1770

Died Vienna, 26 March 1827

Beethoven grew up during the period of tremendous upheaval that resulted in the French Revolution (1789-94). His music is built on the achievements of the Classical age of composition, and became the source of characteristics found in the Romantic age. More than any previous composer, Beethoven allowed his own personality to influence his compositions.

The son of a court musician in Bonn, he had to shoulder huge responsibilities at an early age. He was working as an assistant organist at the court by the age of 11, and at 18, after his mother's death, he took over as head of his family due to his alcoholic father's incompetence. After a visit to Bonn by Haydn, Beethoven's employer was urged to give him leave to study further in Vienna and, in the words of his friend Count Waldstein, to "receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands". When Beethoven arrived in Vienna in late 1792, Haydn introduced him to Prince Karl von Lichnowsky. The Prince had been a pupil and patron of Mozart, and quickly became one of Beethoven's main supporters.

The 32 piano sonatas written by Beethoven span his compositional career and collectively form a monument to his creative genius. The extent and promise of his originality, technical skill and powerfully expressive writing are in evidence right from his early Opus 2 set of sonatas composed in 1795.

Internationally acclaimed pianist and scholar Charles Rosen describes this Sonata, which is the eighth of the 32, as Beethoven's 'first successful effort at the sublime'. It was published in 1799 and dedicated to Prince Lichnowsky. The subtitle 'Pathétique' refers to the French word for 'touching', or 'moving'. It was probably suggested by the publishers but met with Beethoven's approval. Beethoven was experiencing the first signs of deafness around this time – the famous 'Heiligenstadt Testament' of his despair was written three years later in 1802 – and so it seems particularly appropriate.

The Pathétique Sonata is the earliest of the popular Beethoven sonatas that are regularly performed by both amateurs and professionals. According to the Beethoven scholar Lanz, the work has always enjoyed this level of popularity, and he lamented in 1855 about "the suffering it has gone through for fifty years in boarding schools and other institutions where one learns to play the piano."



Sonata in C minor Opus 13 'Pathétique'

Grave – Allegro molto e con brio

Adagio cantabile

Rondo. Allegro

Sonata Opus 13 in C minor 'Pathétique'

The Sonata Opus 13 opens with a dramatic slow introduction which establishes its tragic character. It leads into the furious *Allegro molto e con brio* where the first theme, in C minor, provides the material for the explosive rising figure that Beethoven uses to create further drama throughout the movement. Rather than brightening the mood by using the relative major key for the second theme, the minor mode prevails, and Beethoven instead provides contrast through the more lyrical nature of the theme itself. The speed at which harmonies change adds to the driving force of this movement, although the *Grave* opening returns briefly during the movement and at the end.

The second movement is perhaps an example of the 'sublime' referred to by Charles Rosen. An exquisitely tender melody is set over a left hand accompaniment that becomes increasingly complex as the music progresses. Two contrasting minor interludes and subtle rhythmic changes in the accompaniment intensify the dramatic component.

Although it seems lighter in touch and tone, the final *Rondo* retains an underlying sense of sadness. As with the *Adagio*, the sections between each appearance of the *Rondo* theme tend to reinforce the Sonata's wistful nature, rather than provide light relief, and the music quickly returns to the character of the opening.

Programme note by Julie Sperring

Claude Debussy

Born St Germain-en-Laye, 22 August 1862

Died Paris, 25 March 1918

Images, Book 1

Reflets dans l'eau

Hommage à Rameau

Mouvement

Debussy won a scholarship at the age of 10 to study at the Paris Conservatoire, intending to become a piano virtuoso, but eventually won the Prix de Rome as a composer in 1884, aged 22. He had a wide range of contacts who were leading artists in other disciplines, such as sculptors, poets, painters and writers, and he was always interested in the relationship between music and the other arts. Although he did not like the term, Debussy is often described as an 'impressionist' composer, using a term borrowed from French painting of the time. Translated into musical terms, impressionist piano works have a delicate, iridescent tonal quality. The use of whole-tone scales, dissonant triadic sequences

(often played very softly), and above all the sustaining pedal, contribute to this hazy, physical ambience.

Combining a new approach to pedaling, and exploiting the extreme compass of the piano, Debussy created a unique palette of sound which ebbed and flowed in imitation of natural events and sensations. However, the 'impressionist' label tends to obscure the strong sense of form in his works.

The first series of Images was published in 1905 and written over the previous four years. A second set, also containing three pieces, was published in 1908. The titles of the three pieces in Book 1 suggest general impressions of reflections in the water, of 18th century French music (as a homage to Rameau), and of generalised motion. However, it is best left to each listener to create an appropriate 'image', and as Debussy once said, "Let us at all costs preserve this magic peculiar to music ... let us not attempt to destroy it by explanation".

Programme note from Chamber Music NZ files

Billy Mayerl

Born London, 31 May 1902

Died Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, 25 March 1959

Shallow Waters

Railroad Rhythm

Billy Mayerl was a phenomenal pianist with an eclectic taste in music, but lived at a time when musicians were not expected to cross the boundaries between classical and popular. At the age of nine he attended Trinity College where he had a thorough grounding in classical music, and won tuition scholarships to cover his fees. He left the College when he was 15 because he wanted to also play 'syncopated music', which had arrived in Britain from America, and which was disapproved of by the establishment. He earned a living playing in cinemas and private houses, and in the early 1920s became the pianist for the New York Havana Band, which played for popular dances at the Savoy Hotel in London. By

1923 the band was broadcast each week by the BBC, and Mayerl was one of those who supplied a constant stream of new pieces. Of the many songs, transcriptions, rags and interludes he wrote, the most famous - and lucrative - was probably *Marigold*. His personal fame led to him recording both pianola rolls and 78 r.p.m. records, which were an ideal length for his short pieces.

Although he made his career in popular music, Mayerl also had a deep love for the music of Grieg, Delius, Debussy and Ravel, and references to chords and sonorities used by those composers can be found throughout his work. His interest in education led to the establishment of the Billy Mayerl School of Music in 1926, and branches were eventually found throughout the world, including in NZ. Many of his pieces were written for teaching purposes.

Programme note by Jane Dawson

Johannes Brahms

Born Hamburg, 7 May 1833

Died Vienna, 3 April 1897

Two Rhapsodies Opus 79

Rhapsody in B minor: *Agitato*

Rhapsody in G minor: *Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro*

Brahms was born in a poor area near the docks of Hamburg. His father was a double-bass player and recognized his son's musical abilities early on. A professional pianist by the age of 14, Brahms helped supplement the family's income by playing in the bars and brothels of Hamburg while continuing his studies.

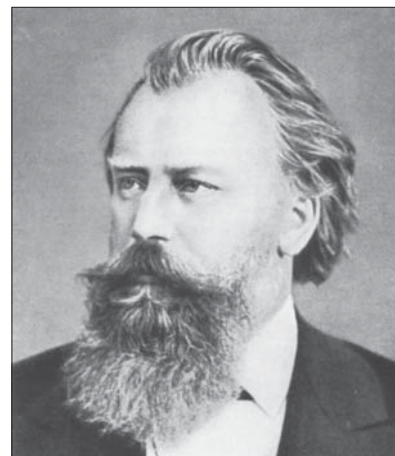
During a tour with violinist Reményi in 1853 Brahms met and impressed Liszt and the famous violinist Joachim, and was introduced to Robert Schumann. In an article in his *Neue Zeitschrift Für Musik*, Schumann introduced the 'genius' Brahms to the music world, resulting in life-changing fame and acceptance for the 20-year-old composer in the space of a few months.

Brahms moved to Vienna in 1863 and made a successful living there as a composer, teacher and performer. The social ambience was one of gaiety and and 'gemütlichkeit' (geniality) as reflected in the craze for the waltz, operetta, beer halls, coffee houses, music and outdoor concerts.

Brahms never married, once commenting that the 'ladies of the night' encountered in his early piano playing engagements "turned me against marriage", although his deep friendships with both Clara Schumann and Elisabet von Herzogenberg were very important to him, and he valued both the emotional support and the musical advice he received from them.

He was considered to be a conservative man, in both his personal and musical tastes. His conservative side enjoyed the order and strict form of the classicists, but his dreamy imaginative nature meant that he was a romantic in temperament. At the height of 19th century Romanticism, Brahms established himself as a 'classical' revivalist, particularly in his large-scale symphonic works and sonatas.

Despite their titles, each of the two Rhapsodies Opus 79 has a very clear format, and they are passionate rather than improvisatory in mood. They were written during Brahms's summer holiday in Portsach in 1879 when he was at the height of his career, and are dedicated to von Herzogenberg.



Two Rhapsodies Opus 79

The B minor Rhapsody is in ternary form, with a short coda. An impassioned opening theme and contrapuntal texture dominates the first section, with a brief diversion into a more lyrical second theme. This gentle melody becomes the focus of the central section, which shifts to the key of B major and provides a contrasting mood of repose. In the da capo repeat of the first section, the lyrical theme takes on a notably stronger character, acting as a recall of the central section. The work ends with a short coda.

Dramatic gestures are a major feature of the G minor Rhapsody, from the initial sweeping, wide-ranging theme to the decisive closing chords. Triplet patterns against dotted rhythms give the second subject an unsettled air, and insistent and repeated motifs add a sense of foreboding. The development section of this sonata form piece intermingles the two ideas, and a lengthy crescendo created from the repeated triplet figure leads to the recapitulation.

Programme note by Jane Dawson

John Psathas

Born Taumaranui, 3 July 1966

Sleeper

John Psathas studied both piano and composition at Victoria University of Wellington, then continued his studies in Belgium with the composer Jacqueline Fontyn. At the age of 27 he took up a position at Victoria University, where he is now an Associate Professor in composition. He also has a high international profile and his music has been championed by Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie. In 2000 his Saxophone Concerto was premièred in Italy and he was commissioned to compose the music for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

In New Zealand, his music featured at the opening of Te Papa, the national museum, in 1998. In 2002 and 2004 John Psathas received the SOUNZ Contemporary Award, and in 2004 he was one of five Artist Laureates of the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, and his Piano Concerto was premièred by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and pianist Stephen Gosling.

sleeper *noun*

a person who is asleep

a train carrying sleeping cars

a railroad tie

Sleeper was commissioned by the James Wallace Foundation for Stephen De Pledge as part of the 'Landscape Prelude' series. It was first performed, like the other two preludes in this programme, in February 2008.

Ross Harris

Born Amberley, North Canterbury, 1 August 1945

Piano Prelude – A landscape with too few lovers

Ross Harris studied at the University of Canterbury before moving to Wellington in 1970, where he simultaneously joined the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as a french horn player and enrolled in a Master of Music degree at Victoria University. He was appointed a lecturer in music at Victoria University in 1971, leaving that position in 2007 to work as a freelance composer.

The sonic possibilities of electroacoustic music had a strong influence on his early development as a composer. In 1978 he spent three months working in the Swedish centre for sonic artists and composers of electroacoustic music, and in 1982 he became a found-

ing member of the live electronic music ensemble Free Radicals. The première of his opera *Waituhi* led to Harris being awarded the QSM for Public Service in 1985. He received the 1990 Citation from the Composers Association of New Zealand and the SOUNZ Contemporary Award in 2000, 2005 and 2006.

Recently, he has worked with various structured musical systems and developed a linear, goal-oriented style of writing, though intuition is still his primary motivator.

The title *A landscape with too few lovers* is taken from the fourth panel of *Northland Panels* by Colin McCahon.

The work was commissioned by the James Wallace Foundation for Stephen De Pledge as part of the 'Landscape Prelude' series.

Jenny McLeod

Born Wellington, 12 November 1941

Landscape Prelude

Jenny McLeod has earned her reputation as one of New Zealand's most important composers not only because she writes great music, but also because her music embraces the tremendous diversity of New Zealand culture. She approaches composing from two positions: a desire to communicate with ordinary people and the music with which they are familiar; and the need for an intellectual approach to art and life. To this end, the diversity of her music and life is evident from a comparison of the serial pieces *Piano Piece* (1965) and *For Seven* (1967), with the multi-media spectacle of *Earth and Sky* (1968), and the two *Rock Sonatas* (1987). Through her music we hear the influence and

inspiration not only of her teacher and mentor, Olivier Messiaen, but also the unique qualities of New Zealand's multicultural environment.

Landscape Prelude is imbued with the spirit of New Zealand's west coast on a still day. The accompanying poem begins:

“barely stirs the dark ripple
through liquid bell-tones
ancient echoes
of grey-green tree-gods
high sky
wild crags and rocks
the deep earth gong beats...”

A less than reassuring human element also enters the picture...

Sergei Prokofiev

Born Sontsovka, Ukraine, 27 April 1891

Died Moscow, 5 March 1953



Sergei Prokofiev showed precocious musical talent, commencing study at the St Petersburg Conservatory when he was only 13. The rumblings of the Russian revolution came shortly after his graduation in 1914, and in 1918 Prokofiev went into self-imposed exile, first in New York and then Europe, eventually establishing himself in Paris as a leading composer and virtuoso pianist. During the 1920s he developed contacts with the Soviet Union and toured there several times from 1927. He seems to have decided that he was not opposed to living in a communist state, and he returned from France in 1936, declaring that he was homesick. Unlike many at the time, he was still allowed to travel out of the country to give concerts, and he set about becoming a responsible Soviet composer, saying “the search for a musical language which corresponds to socialist times is a difficult one, but it presents a noble problem”.

Russian patriotism, with its basis in collectivism, has been inherent in the national character for centuries. A major reason for it has been the necessity to defend the borders against everlasting invaders – from Tartaro-Mongols in the middle ages to Germans in the second World War. The leading figures of Russian culture have always felt it natural and a matter of pride to be identified with their nation, and Prokofiev was no exception. His sixth and seventh Piano Sonatas are nicknamed the ‘War Sonatas’, and both were written just before and during the second World War. The Sonata No 7 was completed after the German invasion of Russia, and that act was responsible for the defiant nature of the work. Fellow composer Nikolai Miaskovsky described it as “splendidly wild”. The musical language is very advanced for Prokofiev, and together with his unique sense of rhythm creates a work of tremendous tension, anxiety and disquiet.

Composed in 1942 and premièred by Sviatoslav Richter, the Sonata No 7 won the Stalin Prize for that year, and certainly reflects many of the qualities that ‘good’ Soviet music was required to have: simplicity, intellectual clarity, an understanding heart, and an awareness of the needs and aspirations of a society.

Sonata No 7 in B flat Opus 83

Allegro inquieto – Andantino

Andante caloroso

Precipitato

Sonata No 7 in B flat Opus 83

The first movement opens with a persistent and highly energetic marching rhythm, which ruthlessly pursues its course for several pages until the calm of an *Andantino* section is reached. Here a sad melody, whose repeated notes recall the figure that accompanies the first theme, is heard. It is developed briefly until a long *accelerando* returns us to the anxious, agitated *Allegro inquieto* mood of the opening. A further *Andantino* episode, using the same material as before, emerges, and the movement ends with a return to the *Allegro inquieto*.

The second movement escapes from the pounding, moto-perpetuo effects of the two outer movements and by contrast is often warm and lyrical. Its principal theme is heard in rich thirds at the opening, with bell-like echoes, a technique that persists throughout. As in the first movement, there is a pattern of large-scale tempo contrasts, and this movement proceeds successively from *Andante caloroso*, to faster, slower and faster sections, and finally back to the warmth of the original *Andante caloroso*.

The final movement is a short and extremely forceful toccata. It has an unsettling 7/8 metre and its tremendous drive and energy are reminiscent of the opening movement. The work ends in a blaze of octaves and leaps.

Programme from Chamber Music NZ files

Glossary of Italian musical terms in this programme

<i>adagio</i>	very slow
<i>agitato</i>	restlessly
<i>allegro</i>	lively
<i>andante</i>	at a walking speed
<i>andantino</i>	a little <i>andante</i>
<i>caloroso</i>	with heat, passion
<i>cantabile</i>	in a singing style
<i>con brio</i>	with spirit
<i>grave</i>	solemn
<i>inquieto</i>	restless, uneasy
<i>ma non troppo</i>	but not too much
<i>molto</i>	very
<i>passionato</i>	passionately
<i>precipitato</i>	impetuously
<i>rondo</i>	a round

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