



## SYMPHONY SEPTET

Sunday 21 April 2023, 2:30 pm

Phillips Hall | Blackheath Blue Mountains NSW

Lerida Delbridge | violin

Justin Williams | viola

Catherine Hewgill | cello

Kees Boersma | bass

Francesco Celata | clarinet

Matthew Wilkie | bassoon

Euan Harvey | horn

### PROGRAM NOTES

**Franz BERWALD** [1796-1868] | *Grand Septet* in B-flat major [1828]

The Swedish Romantic composer and violinist, **Franz Adolf Berwald**, was recognised more as a composer after his death than in his lifetime. He primarily made his living as an orthopaedist, and later as the manager of a sawmill... and then a glass factory.

Berwald's *Grand Septet* in B-flat is a work of delightful originality. Beethoven's Opus 20 Septet was already well established and performed frequently in Sweden before Berwald composed his septet. Although written for the same instrumentation: clarinet, horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello and double-bass, and sharing both an opening format and sonata form first movement which are not dissimilar...this is where similarities between the two septets end. Berwald has expressed himself well with his own voice.

**The first movement** begins with a short exclamatory *Adagio* 'Introduzione'. A pattern of two strident string chords, followed by legato winds, happens three times whilst moving forward with a rich harmonic chord progression before settling into the *Allegro molto* section. Here the winds present the melody against string pizzicati. There is continued discourse between winds and strings, with the clarinet and 1st violin exchanging lead voice from time to time. Pleasing harmonies abound within this well-balanced scoring, as we are spirited along a winding, fanciful path.

**The second movement** starts with a lyrical *Adagio* followed by a *Scherzo* and trio section, before returning to the *Adagio*. The well-balanced harmonic discourse

continues throughout this movement allowing each instrument to contribute to the conversation with charming elegance.

**The third movement** is a lively finale, *Allegro con spirito*, and shows the cultivated and attractive colours and style found in other music of the time, not unlike the music of composers such as Rossini and Spohr.

“Neither the media, money nor power can damage or benefit good Art. It will always find some simple, decent artists who forge ahead and produce and stand up for their works. In Sweden, you have the finest example of this: Berwald.” – Carl Nielsen (1911)

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### Ludwig van BEETHOVEN [1770-1827] | *Septet* in E-flat major [1799]

**This Septet** was begun in 1799, completed and first performed in 1800, and published in 1802. It was one of Beethoven’s most popular works during his lifetime, much to the composer’s chagrin.

The overall layout of the septet resembles a light-hearted divertimento. During the second half of the 18th century, serenades and divertimentos represented the favourite ‘pop music’ of the aristocracy. It was performed as background music, a kind of ‘classical elevator music’. Everyone, including Beethoven, was writing this sort of music, even Mozart and Haydn. However, Beethoven felt, much to his dismay, that the intense popularity of his septet overshadowed some of his greater masterpieces. After its premiere, it immediately appeared in transcriptions for solo piano, two guitars, piano four-hands, piano quartet, and Beethoven’s own trio arrangement for clarinet or violin, cello and piano.

The Septet made its public debut, along with the First Symphony, at the Royal Imperial Court Theatre on April 2, 1800 at a benefit concert for the composer himself. The first of several concerts Beethoven sponsored to show off his own music. He dedicated the piece to Empress Maria Theresia, second wife of Franz II. Within a year, the septet was being performed throughout Europe.

**The first movement** begins with a stately *Adagio*, that leads into a fast *Allegro con brio*. Not unlike the Berwald it begins with a statement of chords and dialogue three times before the conversation starts in a questioning way that quickly establishes an earnest dialogue in the energetic *Allegro*. 1<sup>st</sup> violin and clarinet often reiterating each other’s statements with the full support of the other instruments who also exclaim from time to time. There is a lot of head nodding and satisfied agreement between the group as they explore their lively, colourful views.

**The second movement**, *Adagio cantabile*, begins with a wistful clarinet solo taken up by the 1<sup>st</sup> violin as the group meanders with a pastoral calm, exchanging lilting melodic lines.

**The *Tempo di menuetto*’s** theme, taken from Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata Opus 49 No.2*, bounces along playfully with notably gleeful outbursts from horn and clarinet.

The *Tema con variazioni ~ Andante* are variations on a Rhenish folk tune, “Ach Schiffer, Lieber Schiffer”. Starting with violin and viola the movement quickly envelops all the instruments in these five variations, with a constant change of textures and colours including string trios, cello solos, bassoon and clarinet duets, horn solos. Ever changing clouds of sound across a clear blue sky.

The *Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace* is led by the horn in this delightfully playful, triplet pulsed first section. A cello solo emerges in the lyrical trio, supported by a walking counter melody in the bassoon.

The *Andante con moto alla marcia ~ Presto* starts with a solemn, almost funereal march, again featuring the horn. The strings quickly lead us on a merry chase into the high-spirited sonata-rondo finale theme. This finale also features a virtuosic violin cadenza. This was probably included and written for Beethoven’s friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Vienna’s leading violinist, who was to play at the Septet’s premiere. Carl Czerny, recorded: “He could not endure his septet and grew angry because of the universal applause that it received.” – Carl Czerny

Years later, when Beethoven was told how much his septet was admired in London the composer responded with: “That damned thing, I wish it were burned!”

| Notes by LOUISE JOHNSON