

Music for Wind Instruments

Beethoven, Rossini, Stravinsky, and a
World Premiere first performance

Tauranga Musica 2018 concert series

Sunday 7 October

4:00 pm

Graham Young Youth Theatre

Tauranga Boys College

Music for Wind Instruments

The classical art form we know as Western music was once strictly a **vocal** tradition, born in the Christian church and housed in the grand cathedrals of medieval Europe. There was no distinct instrumental style since primitive instrument technology of the time did not enable this. Instruments simply doubled the voices, which carried the primary exploration of dissonance and the slow development of multi-voice polyphonic structures. This continued until around 1600 when the growth of instrument technology finally permitted the rise of an **instrumental** tradition. The music of JS Bach (even his choruses and vocal writing) is actually instrumental in style. This is the style we further explore in this concert for wind instruments.

Overture to The Barber of Seville

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868), arr. Sedlak

The Barber is a comic opera in two acts based on a libretto by French playwright Beaumarchais. It explores the times of a jovial character **Figaro**, subject of Mozart's successful *Marriage of Figaro* thirty years earlier. When first staged in Rome, Rossini's *Barber* was a disastrous failure: the audience hissed and jeered throughout, and several on-stage accidents occurred. Yet the second performance was a huge success, and the opera has remained firmly in the repertoire ever since.

The Overture had actually been recycled from two earlier Rossini operas, *Aureliano in Palmira* and *Elisabetta regina d'Inhilterra* and contains none of the themes of the actual opera. Instead it has led a life of its own, and its popularity rests entirely on the new melodies.

This has enabled the Overture to stand on its own, and frequently appear in reduced arrangements. The Sedlak arrangement for 11 wind instruments is scored for standard wind octet (2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 horns, 2 bassoons) plus 2 trumpets and a contrabassoon, and has become a favourite for wind players.

Octet for winds in E-flat major, Op. 103

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Allegro

Andante

Menuetto

Presto

Despite the late Opus number, *Octet for Winds* was initially written in 1792 when the young pianist-composer was only 22. It was later recomposed as a string quintet and published as his Opus 4, following publication of some early piano works numbered Opus 1-3. These preceded Beethoven's move from Bonn to Vienna to begin composition lessons with Joseph Haydn.

This *Octet* and other early pieces for winds are not mature works, but testing grounds for the treatment of wind instruments in the composer's later symphonies. *Octet for Winds* still lacks the contrapuntal equality he would not achieve until his six string quartets Opus 18. But the octet layout (2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 horns, 2 bassoons) gave Beethoven experience in writing for a balanced wind ensemble, such as he would later use in his First Symphony Opus 21. Also, the *Menuetto* already displays an early predilection for the untamed music of his later *Scherzos*, as in the high-flying virtuoso writing for the horn.

Intermission

A Program Suite for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon

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Barry Vercoe (1937 –)

This wind trio was written in June 1958 when the composer was 20. It was written in an Auckland University undergrad dorm room and has never been publically performed. In 1959 it was awarded the prestigious *Philip Neill Memorial Prize** by the University of Otago.

The work depicts 5 events, each part of an evening's programmed entertainment:

- 1. Arrival March** – the guests assemble.
- 2. Opening Address** – the bassoon offers 3 ideas, each exploring a different register of the instrument. The 3 ideas are then merged into a fast-moving patter of bassoon gymnastics.
- 3. Item** – clarinet and oboe perform a duet. This is actually a *musical canon*, with the oboe following the clarinet at the same pitch and just 2 beats behind.
- 4. Waltz** – all three instruments combine to make a lilting band. Phrases and melodies are tossed from one instrument to another until the dancers are tired.
- 5. Foxtrot** – Variations on a 12-bar blues theme. The key to hearing this is being able to follow the "changes" (i.e. chord progressions) in a 12-bar blues performance. The last oboe solo is a melodic quote from Paul Desmond, alto saxophone player in the Dave Brubeck quartet.

* Otago's *Philip Neill Memorial Prize* was first won in 1944 by 29 year-old NZ composer Douglas Lilburn, after he had journeyed to London to study with Ralph Vaughn Williams. It has now been awarded every year since that time.

Octet for Wind Instruments

Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971)

Sinfonia

Tema con Variazioni

Finale

Born in Russia, Igor Stravinsky was initially a student of master orchestrator Rimsky Korsakov. By the time he went to Paris in 1910 he was already a master orchestrator himself, and the 3 ballets he wrote for impresario Diaghilev's **Ballets Russes** (*The Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and *The Rite of Spring*) each made enormous strides in the few slim years that separated them. *The Rite* was for an enormous orchestra that only the extravagances of 1913 Paris could hope to sustain. Once the 1914-18 war had ravaged Europe and its economies, large orchestras were no longer practical and the ballets of Stravinsky gave way to something very different.

Octet for Wind Instruments was Stravinsky's first composition after his three brilliant ballets, and his new writing style would soon be termed *neo-classical*. He now wrote for small ensembles, but instead of the smooth balanced wind octets of early Beethoven, ensembles were now angular and individual. For this *Octet*, mellow horns were replaced by trumpets and trombones, and the harmonic vocabulary was refreshingly new and distinctive.

Stravinsky continued to compose in new innovating forms until his death in 1971, and his innovations were a constant challenge to successive generations of other composers.

The Performers

The performers comprise 13 musicians from Auckland, Tauranga and New Plymouth. They include seasoned professionals plus younger players whom we felt would benefit from working professionally with older colleagues. Many also relate as teacher and student.

David Adlam *clarinet, composer and conductor*, teaches in Auckland and was for many years principal clarinet with the Auckland Philharmonia. He is founder and Director of the Auckland ensemble Eklektika, and also serves as an overseas examiner for Trinity College London.

Felicity Hanlon *oboe*, has a Masters in Music from the University of Auckland where she majored in oboe performance. She plays with the Opus Orchestra, the Trust Waikato Symphony, the Auckland Chamber Orchestra, the St Mathews Chamber Orchestra, and the Hawkes Bay, Dunedin and Christchurch Symphonies.

Gordon Skinner *bassoon*, was for many years principal bassoon with the NZSO. He later joined the teaching staff of the Sydney Conservatorium and was frequently guest principal with the Sydney Symphony. He currently lives in Auckland, and has heavy teaching commitments in many NZ towns, especially Tauranga.

Barry Vercoe *composer, conductor and research scientist*, is a founding Professor at the MIT Media Lab in Boston Massachusetts. Born and educated in New Zealand he holds a doctorate in music composition from the University of Michigan, and has taught at Oberlin Conservatory and the Yale School of Music. In 1968 he was composer-in-residence in the Seattle School System, and principal conductor for the US Music Educators National Conference, conducting in the Seattle Opera House. At MIT in Boston he has supervised over 25 PhD students with theses on scientific topics.

Other performers on this concert include:

Tauranga

Pauline Logger - flute
Maggie Gething - oboe
Yasumi Kobayashi - bassoon
Hiro Kobayashi - trumpet
Josh Crump - trumpet
Leo Read - trombone
Joe Thomas - bass trombone

Auckland

James Morton - horn
Ben Hoadley - contrabassoon

New Plymouth

James Scrivener - horn

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