BRITTEN PEARS ARTS

Summer at Snape 2025

Wednesday 20 August 7.30pm
Snape Maltings Concert Hall

Duration: 110', including an interval of 20'

Sinfonia Smith Square

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Sam Lucas cello
Simon Over conductor

Kate Kennedy presenter

Introduction to the Hermann Cello Concerto *10'*

Kate Kennedy is a presenter and broadcaster for Radio 3, and author of 'Cello: a Journey Through Silence to Sound' (2024)

Pál Hermann (1902–1944)
Cello Concerto (1925, unfinished), completed in 2018 by Fabio Conti (b.1967), UK premiere *40'*

i. Allegro cantabile
ii. Allegro – Lento – Andante 'Disappearance' (After Hermann)
iii. Allegro (After Hermann)
iv. Andante (After Hermann)
v. Allegro giocoso (After Hermann)

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92 (1812) *40'*

i. Poco sostenuto – Vivace
ii. Allegretto
iii. Scherzo: Presto – Assai meno presto (trio)
iv. Allegro con brio

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Hermann: Cello Concerto

Of Hungarian-Jewish descent, Pál (Paul) Hermann was regarded as one of the finest cellists of his generation. He was based in Berlin until the ever-present and increasing threats of 1930s Germany forced him to uproot to Brussels, then to Paris. For much of the war he hid in a rural France farmhouse before being rounded up and deported to a Nazi death camp in May 1944, after which all traces of him disappear.

He was also a highly regarded composer, but only two works were published in his lifetime. Twenty-five further manuscripts survive, amongst them an expansive first movement for this concerto. Thanks to some determined and imaginative advocacy from Hermann's grandson Paul van Gastel, the composer Fabio Conti was engaged in 2016 to complete the full work. Conti plundered other Hermann manuscripts and existing works to create a cohesive whole. As van Gastel points out, 'all of the cello part you hear [is] by Hermann's signature, Conti looked after orchestration and interweaving of various themes and pieces and the structure.'

There are undoubtedly echoes of Hermann's teachers Bartók and Kodály here – he reputedly secured private lessons with the latter after passing him a manuscript through the open window of a departing tram! The big-hearted lyricism of the opening cello melody calls to mind Korngold, and perhaps the spirit of his violin concerto. Conti's contribution includes a second movement in which the cello for the most part is silent before an eloquent solo cadenza links it to the ensuing Allegro. In the fourth movement the soloist duets in turn with viola, violin and flute (Hermann the cellist did much to establish Kodály's *Grand Duo* for violin and cello and indeed wrote one of his own). The finale has a youthful vigour and seems to capture the spirit and vivacity of a folk dance.

This tale of a generational talent, a life tragically cut short, and music rediscovered and reconstructed is extraordinary enough. But there is one final twist. Hermann's very fine cello (a Nicolò Gagliano from the 1720s) was rescued by his friends in 1944, but his surviving family sold it to make ends meet. Last year, after years of searching, the instrument was traced to a German conservatoire where it had been on loan to the then-student Sam Lucas, tonight's soloist. So instrument and composer were finally reunited, 100 years after the concerto's first movement was completed. The cello was traced primarily by a distinctive inscription in Latin burned into the ribs of the instrument. It reads *Ego sum anima musicae* – I am the soul of music.

Please note that Pál Hermann's cello cannot be taken out of Germany, so tonight's UK premiere will not feature this particular instrument.

Beethoven: Symphony No.7

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was written at a time of personal struggle. He was beset by bouts of ill-health and his increasing deafness meant the premieres of this work turned out to be the last time he was able to conduct in public. The piece's first performance was part of a benefit concert for injured troops (alongside the composer's 'Battle Symphony' *Wellington's Victory*, a raucous *piece d'occasion* that unfortunately rather overshadowed the symphony). But this is not 'about' the privations of war or overcoming personal hardship. It is an abstract work bound together by one abiding principle: rhythm. Alongside his often-radical approach to harmony and key relationships, Beethoven creates a symphonic structure based largely around obsessive repetitions of single rhythmic motifs.

We are made to wait for the dance. The introduction is the longest in in the symphonic literature to that date. Emphatic chords, a falling figure in the winds based on the interval of a 5th, a chattering, rising string passage. Separately at first then combined, these ideas contain the kernel of the movement, indeed the whole work. A sweetly bucolic woodwind hook is inserted, decorated by string trills, before the music rampages through various keys. Suspenseful silences and isolated, repeated unison notes tease us before, in the upper reaches of the orchestra, the rhythm emerges that will dominate the opening Vivace. It's a rollicking gigue enlivened by braying horns. Toward the end, tension is built by ten repetitions of a two-bar passage over an unchanging bass line, to the point where it seems the forward momentum cannot possibly withstand such wilful and prolonged stasis. This is Beethoven though, thrilling us with his innovation as well as baffling some of his contemporaries. (The composer Weber thought Beethoven 'ready for the madhouse' after hearing this symphony.)

The Viennese audience may have gone wild for *Wellington's Victory*, but they also recognised this symphony's quality and demanded the second movement be immediately repeated on each of the first three performances. Its impact goes beyond this work; it has found standalone success in popular culture; in this century it has played a starring role in film soundtracks as diverse as *X-Men: Apocalypse* and *The King's Speech* as a signifier of gravitas, or of a layering of tension. Where a slow movement should be, Beethoven inserts a sad-sweet Allegretto ('at a brisk pace') whose mesmeric tread never lets up. It is, on the face of it, simplicity itself – built on the principle of layering, with melody and countermelody gradually piled up on top of each other, the 'long–short–short–long–long' rhythm repeated over and over. The intensity is broken only by appearances of a sweet-toned clarinet melody before the movement ends with the same plangent call-to-arms that was the opening minor-key woodwind chord.

The rapid scherzo skips through several key changes in triple-time, its staccato delicacy broken by belligerent *tutti* outbursts and ricochets of timpani. Twice the tempo broadens for a wind-led section accompanied by a violin line that barely deviates from a single sustained pitch; amongst this furious kinetic energy, Beethoven can still engineer passages of breadth and nobility. In the closing bars the trio's third appearance is a coy interpolation of a mere four bars. The opening of the now familiar melody is given a tiny turn of the watchmaker's screwdriver to twist it into the minor key before the door to the movement is slammed shut.

Without much of a pause for breath, we are hurled into the bedlam of the finale. A whirling, delirious romp, it would test the stamina of any dancer (or orchestra). Again, Beethoven keeps us on the edge of our seats with startlingly unorthodox, prolonged repetitions and unchanging bassline figures, before hurling us at the manic concluding bars.