



SYMPHONIA

Egyptian Piano

Keys to the future

Michael Joel - Conductor

Shan Liu - Piano Soloist

Sunday 16 November 2025, 2.30pm

Baycourt Theatre, Tauranga



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who made this concert possible.**

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Programme Design: Neale Blaymires

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PROGRAMME

Douglas Lilburn (1915 – 2001)

Aotearoa Overture

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Soloist: Shan Liu

*Piano Concerto No. 5 in F Major, Op. 103,
The Egyptian*

1. *Allegro*
2. *Andante*
3. *Molto Allegro*

– *Interval* –

Jean Sibelius (1865 – 1957)

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39

1. *Andante – Allegro energico*
2. *Andante*
3. *Scherzo*
4. *Finale (Quasi una fantasia)*



PROGRAMME NOTES

Douglas Lilburn – *Aotearoa Overture* (1940)

1940 was a successful year for Lilburn as a composer. He won 3 of the 4 composition prizes in the New Zealand Centennial Celebrations competitions and had this *Overture: Aotearoa* performed in the New Zealand Centennial Matinee concert in London. The year was also one of change, with the war in Europe no doubt contributing to Lilburn's decision to return to New Zealand. His family had paid for him to study at the Royal College of Music in London from 1937 until 1940. Whilst there he studied composition with the great composer and teacher Ralph Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams was a good fit temperamentally, as his approach to music and composition was a very practical one – something that Lilburn would need on his return to New Zealand with its nascent tertiary music education scene and professional music making community. Lilburn was a key figure in developing New Zealand's young musicians and leading its composers both by example and by his teaching. Similarly to Sibelius, his compositional career stopped well before the end of his life with his last instrumental piece being composed in the mid 1960s. This piece is obviously from the early part of Lilburn's compositional career and has a youthful energy and wonderful individuality of invention. It exhibits the characteristic musical hallmarks of Lilburn: long-limbed melodies punctuated by energetic rhythmic interjections – characteristics shared by Sibelius, as you will hear later in the programme.



Portrait of Douglas Lilburn
by Rita Angus, 1945

Camille Saint-Saëns – *The Egyptian* (1896)

Saint-Saëns was a prodigy. In his official debut concert when he was 10 he played both Mozart's *B flat piano concerto* (K450) and Beethoven's *Third concerto*. He was accepted into the Paris Conservatoire when he was 13 and finished his studies at the ripe old age of 18! The Fifth Piano Concerto was premiered in 1896 in a concert that marked the fiftieth anniversary of his debut. Around this time his works, with their classical emphasis on form and balance, had started to appear reactionary in comparison with the younger cohort of French composers (Debussy's ground-breaking *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* had premiered two years before in 1894). It is this clarity of form and structure allied to brilliant orchestration that makes Saint-Saëns' concertos so effective – brilliant solo writing that effortlessly rises above

but transparent orchestration. This fifth concerto was written in Luxor in Egypt. He frequently travelled to Algiers or various places in Egypt to avoid the Parisian winters that affected his weak chest. The melody in the second movement that begins under an accompaniment of repeated notes, is a quotation of a melody he heard Nile boatmen singing. The second movement is wonderfully rhapsodic and incorporates a vast range of sonorities; Tam-tam notes, soft chords from the whole orchestra and a wonderful passage in the piano where the right hand picks out notes of the harmonic series very softly above the left hand melody which gives the impression of an ethereal percussion instrument. The first and last movements are more conventional but abound with beautifully crafted melodies and tremendous rhythmic drive and energy.



Musicians and dancers on fresco at Tomb of Nabamun

Jean Sibelius – *Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39* (1899)

Sibelius's first musical love was the violin which he began to learn when he was 10. Despite working long and hard at the instrument, he realised in his 20s that he had started learning too late to achieve his goal of becoming a solo violinist. By this time, however, he had had several of his compositions successfully performed and was being invited to write more and conduct his own works. Sibelius began work on his first *Symphony* when he was 33 and already a successful and established composer of orchestral works. It took him less than 3 months to complete and was first performed in April 1899. Finland at the time was heavily influenced by Russian politics and Tzar Nicholas's attempts to restrict the autonomy of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Several of Sibelius's pieces with their distinctive sound-world became focal points for the expression of Finnish identity and nation-hood. The *Symphony* begins with a gentle clarinet melody that will return in full vigour at the start of the last moment. The main body of the first movement contrasts the opening melodies in the strings with a quirky and light-hearted motif in the wind. The second movement focuses on the wistful melody heard at the start that returns rather haltingly at the conclusion of the movement after an energetic middle section. The Third movement is a propulsive scherzo and the fourth movement a rhapsodic summation of the ideas with a tremendously exciting fugato in the middle. This *Symphony*, with its muscular melodies and moments of rhapsodic beauty, expresses perfectly the desires of a young nation to forge its own path in the world.

Shan Liu – Soloist



Shan Liu, a 15-year-old pianist and Year 11 student at Westlake Boys High School, is rapidly emerging as one of the most promising talents in classical music under the guidance of renowned educator Stephen De Pledge.

His journey to international acclaim is marked by a series of remarkable victories, including the Grand Jury Prize at the 8th Macao International Piano Competition, the Grand Gold Prize at

the Pacific Rim International Music Competition, and the Gold Award at the GOCAA (Global Outstanding Chinese Artists Association) New York International Music Competition. Shan has also achieved First Place at prestigious events such as the César Franck International Piano Competition in Belgium, the Kings Peak International Music Competition in the USA, and the International Piano Competition for Young Musicians in The Netherlands.

In 2023, he made history as the youngest-ever winner of the Lewis Eady National Junior Piano Competition and received the VAC (Variety Artists Club of New Zealand) Classical Music Award. In 2024, Shan was honoured with the GOCAA Young Artist Award and the AIMES Emerging Talent Award, and he was invited as a Featured Soloist with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) for 2024, 2025 and 2026 seasons and the Manukau Symphony Orchestra (MSO) for 2023, 2024 and 2025 seasons. Shan won the First Place at the 2025 National Concerto Competition and became the youngest ever winner in the 57 years' event history.

In 2024, his international reputation expanded further when he became the first New Zealand young pianist invited to the prestigious Morningside Bridge Music Programme (MMB) at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.

Shan's performances have graced renowned venues such as Carnegie Hall in New York, the Sydney Opera House, and Auckland Town Hall. His solo recital at the 2022 Beethoven Orbit Festival in Aachen, Germany, garnered widespread acclaim for his technical brilliance and emotive interpretation.

He has collaborated with many of New Zealand's leading orchestras, including the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, NZSO National Youth Orchestra, Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (APO) Up Close Concerts, Auckland Youth Orchestra, Manukau Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Symphony Orchestra, Bay of Plenty Symphonia, St. Matthews Chamber Orchestra, and Orchestra Auckland, making his soloist debut at the age of nine.

Michael Joel – Conductor and Music Director



New Zealand-born conductor Michael Joel studied at Otago University with Professors Jack Spiers and Peter Adams. Having completed his honours degree, he continued his studies with conductors Heinz Wallberg, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Jac van Steen, and at the Dartington International Summer School.

Equally at home in the orchestra, choral and operatic repertoire, Michael has conducted extensively throughout New Zealand and the United Kingdom. He has worked at The Royal Opera House, assisting Antonio Pappano, Alexander Joel, Dan Ettinger, Plácido Domingo,

Oleg Caetani and Mark Minkowski.

He has conducted many of the established orchestras and companies in New Zealand – Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Dunedin Symphony Orchestra, Opera Otago, the City of Dunedin Choir, NZSO National Youth Orchestra and, prior to relocating to London, principals and members of the NZSO and NZ String Quartet in a critically acclaimed performance of Mahler's 4th Symphony.

Michael is currently also Music Director of St Matthews Chamber Orchestra and has worked on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden as duty conductor on productions of *Tosca*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and *Carmen*. He also assisted with the music preparation and children's chorus for *La Bohème* and *Carmen*. He conducted pianist, Pascal Rogé in Saint-Saëns *2nd Piano Concerto* with the Lakeland Sinfonia in the UK to great acclaim. Since returning to New Zealand Michael has continued his work with St Matthew's Chamber Orchestra, Opus Orchestra and Bay of Plenty Symphonia.

Rebecka Beetz – Concertmaster



Rebecka took up the violin in her native Germany at age 6 and played in many local and regional symphony orchestras from age 11 where she discovered her love for orchestral playing. After completing a linguistic degree in Leipzig, she moved to New Zealand with her husband in 2006 and joined the Bay of Plenty Symphonia in 2009. She has been the orchestra's concertmaster since 2012 and took up lessons with APO Concertmaster Andrew Beer in 2021. Since

July 2025, Rebecka has been the General Manager for Opus Orchestra, with whom she also performs regularly as a player.



We hope you have enjoyed today's performance!

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THE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1

Rebecka Beetz
Michie Nishiyama
Rosana Houthuesen
Gillian Shapley
Chintamani Rath
Alyson Hendren
Sarah Hart
Rachel Moxham

Violin 2

Rebecca Irvine
Miriam McFarlane
Brigid Eady
Michele Wahrlich
Robert Shelton
Jill Fleming
Monique Corney
Joy Shepherd
Catriona Gordon
Glenys Weathley

Viola

Sylvia Neild
Bronya Dean
Virginia McGowan
Judith Gust
Chris Nation

Cello

Therese Ahlers
Trish McNutt
Gina Nored
Amelia Ward
Marisha Duijzers
Susan Enticott

Double bass

Ros Oliver
Rosemary Severinsen

Flute

Pauline Logger
Adele Dixon

Oboe

Kate Rendall
Chris Martin

Clarinet

Kimberly Jones
Miranda Churchill

Bassoon

Yasumi Kobayashi
Karla Putt

French Horn

Jane Carson
Gary Valentine
Hugo Broad
Heather Thompson

Trumpet

Peter Logger
Josh Crump
Ned Shaw

Trombone

Mark Barnes
Wex King
Bryce Minnell

Tuba

Steve Webb

Harp

Margaret Harper

Timpani & Percussion

James Pinchin
James Whitlock
Philip Wiley