
MUSIC AT ST. JOHN'S

DULWICH ORCHESTRA

Conductor
JULIAN WILLIAMSON

Leader
LYNN COOK

Solo Soprano
LESLEY-JANE ROGERS

Saturday July 6th 1996 at 7.45 p.m.

Admission by Programme £4.00 • Concession £2.50 • Family £10

ALEXANDER BORODIN (1833 - 1887)

Overture "Prince Igor"

Borodin was the eminent medical doctor who became one of Russia's greatest composers in his spare time! We heard his tone poem "In the Steppes of Central Asia" at a recent Daboch Orchestra concert, a piece full of Russian folk-flavour, and this brilliant overture is another such.

Borodin didn't finish his opera Prince Igor before he died, and it was Rimsky-Korsakov who completed it for the first performance in 1890. It's a huge epic piece, with a grand and complex plot from Russian history, and you won't find many opera houses staging it these days. But the ever fresh overture has never been out of the repertoire, and is typical of his unique gift for memorable themes.

EDVARD GRIEG (1843 - 1907)

Five Movements from "Peer Gynt"

Originally written in 1876 as incidental music, these beautiful pieces stand perfectly on their own, which is just as well, as Ibsen's stodgy and abstruse play is all but forgotten.

Grieg's inspiration sprang from Norwegian folksong, and he was essentially a miniaturist, at his best in the short "Lyric Pieces". The Peer Gynt interludes are typical, each being constructed out of a single theme only. We begin with his famous evocation of "Morning", then the gorgeous, tragic "Death of Asa". Then "Peer Gynt's Homecoming" (as fine a musical poem as any by Beethoven, Rossini, Wagner or Verdi), and the famous "Song of Solweig". Finally "The Fall of the Mountain King", beginning in the gloom of the Trolls' Cavern and building ever faster and louder to a rousing conclusion.

PETER TCHAIKOVSKY (1840 - 1893)

"Tatyana's Letter Scene" from Eugene Onegin

Soprano soloist: Lesley-Jane Rogers

Tchaikovsky's most popular opera was composed in 1878. It is full of the passionate and colourful tunes for which he is famous, and the Letter Scene is no exception. But this music goes a lot deeper, being a particularly touching piece of characterisation.

In the story Lensky brings his friend Onegin to meet his fiancée Olga's family. Predictably, Olga's shy, dreamy younger sister Tatyana falls for the hypocritically attractive but cold and cynical Onegin, and that night confesses her love to her old nurse. Alone, she writes a letter pouring out her feelings to Onegin as her ideal romantic hero. Yet she is not too naive to be aware of the risk she is taking: "Who are you, my guardian angel or an evil tempter?"

The music is one of Tchaikovsky's tenderest portraits, perfectly catching Tatyana's innocence blossoming into ardent emotion.

* INTERVAL *

ANTONIN DVORAK (1841 - 1904)

Symphony No. 8 in G

I. Allegro con brio II. Adagio

III. Allegretto grazioso IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Dvorak was the essentially Czech composer, but (like Haydn before him) struck a chord with audiences in England, where he felt very much at home. His great Seventh Symphony was commissioned by the Philharmonic Society of London, and it was followed in 1890 by the Eighth, which was published in London and which he conducted both in London and Cambridge.

The Eighth is now probably even more popular than the celebrated Ninth ("From the New World"), but it took time to be appreciated. This may have been because its power is at times belied by a wonderfully appealing innocence and lyricism - Dvorak at his most laid back, reveling in his seemingly inexhaustible gift of melody. It is surely one of the most enjoyable symphonies ever written.

Despite this there are dark moments. The first movement opens with a wistful theme in the minor key, and in the central development section of the movement this reappears in grand tragic mood, with trumpets and fierce string scales reminiscent of Tchaikovsky. But these sterner passages always resolve into bright major keys, by turns charming and triumphant. This contrast is often found in Dvorak's music, for example in his Slavonic Dances.

The slow movement is deeply lyrical, with a stream of tunes. The hesitant opening gives way to an evocative call from the flutes, and these are followed by a second subject of almost childlike innocence with a lovely (but famously difficult!) violin solo. The middle section is another dark, Tchaikovskyian passage, for a moment sinister and threatening. But immediately it dissolves into laughter again ("I was only joking!"). Dvorak's own life was threaded with tragedy, including the death of a child, over which his good nature always seemed to triumph.

There follows a delicious scherzo third movement in the familiar form of a Slavonic dance; another example of how in Czech music the minor key need not always be gloomy.

The finale is a bold experiment - after an opening trumpet fanfare ("Roll up, roll up!"), a relaxed and highly effective set of variations. Again, fierce passages interrupt the tenderness from time to time, but they are more passing clouds that mean no harm. The symphony ends, very properly, in blazing triumph.

Over the last twenty years, **Julian Williamson** has been associated with a large number of orchestras and choirs. He has performed regularly on the South Bank, at St John's Smith Square, and the Barbican Hall where, apart from his many concerts with the Camden Choir, he has appeared with the London Bach Orchestra and the English Festival Choir. His work has taken him not only to many parts of Great Britain, but also Germany, Holland, Zimbabwe and the United States.

Apart from directing all the standard repertoire, he has always been keen to promote contemporary music. In recent years, he has been involved with the work of various 20th Century composers including Ernst Krenek, Alun Hoddinott, John Gardner, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Iain Hamilton.

Leslie-Jane Rogers studied singing and piano at the Royal Academy of Music, taking both subjects successfully to postgraduate level, and was awarded three Principal's prizes. She now specialises in oratorio and solo cantatas and is heralded as one of the most versatile young soloists of today, having a vast repertoire ranging from renaissance to contemporary music.

She has now also worked as a soloist for many other renowned conductors and orchestras, such as the English Chamber Orchestra and the London Mozart Players, as well as singing for Music at Oxford, the Music around Cambridge series and the Almeida Festival of Contemporary Music.

MEMBERS OF THE ORCHESTRA:

Violin I

Lynn Cook (leader)
Maisie Hipperson
Keith Allen
Ian Ferguson
Chris Martin
Mick Russell
Susanna Allen
Ken Brace
Emma Robson
Alan Thompson

Violin II

Nigel Stephens
Barry Mawer
Christine Bailey
Elisabeth Cleary
Frank Dalquen
George MacDonald
Dinah Hyans
Jane Howard

Viola

Bing James
Bernadette Benati
Barbara Mattner
Philip McKenna
Maureen Montrose
Vincent Turner
Ruth Baber

Cello

Sara Heathcote-Holmes
Kate Anderson
Katherine Badger
Andrew Brabin
Jean Horne
Ruth Preston
Marion Wootton
Emma Wakeling

Double Bass

Arthur Pennie
Christine Bond

Flute

Sam Morris
Jim Colby

Oboes

Graham Ruffell
Hilary Gould

Clarinet

Sue Best
Duncan McInnes

Bassoons

Nick Bradshaw
Jill Blakey

Horn

Graham Vernon
Hilary Brindley
Jenny Davis
Joe Wright

Trumpet

Michael Brooks (tenor)
Richard Tighe (tenor)
David Nicol (bass)

Tuba

Paul Goodwin

Timpani

John Tilzey

Percussion

Anne Harcombe
Vicki Gluck

Harp

Keziah Thomas

Programme notes by Lynn Cook.

The orchestra is a member of the National Federation of Music Societies.

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