
MUSIC AT ST.JOHN'S

DULWICH ORCHESTRA

Conductor
JULIAN WILLIAMSON

Leader
PAULA TYSALL

Solo Violin
HELEN DAVIES

Saturday November 29th 1997 at 7.45 p. m.

Entrance by Programme

Adults £5 Concessions £3 Family Ticket (2 adults + 2 children) £10

Symphony No 4 in A ("Italian") (Op 90).....Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy
(1809 - 1847)

- (1) Allegro Vivace
- (2) Andante con moto
- (3) Con moto moderato
- (4) Saltarello - presto

Mendelssohn was never fully satisfied with this symphony. Although he conducted performances he refused to sanction any publication for fear of criticism saying that there were certain revisions he wished to make. This was almost inconceivable because the work is so very essence of perfection borne of spontaneity, and we can be thankful that the reasons for his not placing as they may have disturbed a design in which faults are as hard to find as railway staff on a Sunday. Throughout the four movements not a note appears out of place and the whole radiates the spirit of a country which the composer loved dearly.

Propelled by bustling woodwind the strings literally spring into the Italian sunshine and the whole of the first movement sparkles with infectious energy, the jaunty rhythm of the opening contrasting admirably with a whimsical March tune which suddenly appears in the middle section. The opening gait of the Andante is suggested by a procession of pigmies which Mendelssohn saw while in Naples. The chorale - like melody (possibly of Czech origin) is accompanied by a walking figure in the cellos and basses, and the minor tone of the music may have been influenced by the extreme poverty rubbing shoulders with the glittering splendour of the great city.

As so often with Mendelssohn - and later with Brahms - the scherzo has none of Beethoven's tormented drive. Instead we are treated to a leisurely stroll in the countryside in a gentle breeze, with the sound of a few birds and some distant fanfares wafting across the valley. The reason for the relaxed nature of the music becomes apparent when, for the fourth movement, we are thrust into the hurly-burly of a Roman carnival and the vigorous rhythm of the Saltarello. This folk dance, whose original was an ancient and rather sedate country dance, developed over the centuries into a bosteroso series of rapid hopping movements round an imaginary semi-circle and proved immensely popular in the nineteenth century. Some purists have indicated that what Mendelssohn has given us is, in fact, a Tarantella, but arguments such as these are meaningless as the listener is whisked along by the intoxicating sounds of a bosteroso street party - the ideal finale to a symphony intended to be played with youthful energy. As Mendelssohn wrote in one of his letters from Florence, 'I can't help feeling excited and enraptured when I see all of nature round me, with thousands of wonderful thoughts floating around my head.'

Programme notes by Julian Williamson

Over the last 20 years, Julian Williamson has been associated with a large number of orchestras and choirs. He has performed regularly at the South Bank, St John's Smith Square and the BBC Proms, where, apart from his many concerts with the Camden Choir, he has appeared with the London Concert Band, Orchestra and the English Festival Chorus. His work has taken him not only to many parts of Great Britain, but also Germany, Holland, Zimbabwe and the USA.

Apart from directing 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 Ernest Kravik, Alan Hoddinot, John Gardner, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Iain Hamilton.

Helen Davies began studying the violin at the age of five, with her father Adrian. In 1992 she won an exhibition scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music, where she studied for the first three years with Erich Gruenberg. In September 1995 she began studying with Howard Davies, leader of the Alberts String Quartet, and in the following year she was a finalist in the David Marlin Concerto Prize, playing Prokofiev's second violin concerto with the Royal Academy of Music Symphony Orchestra.

Helen's repertoire includes Mozart's violin concerto no. 5, Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons', Beethoven's Romance in F, Vaughan-Williams 'The Lark Ascending' and, next summer, she will be performing Brahms' violin concerto. She has performed regularly in this country and abroad, and for the last two summers she has attended the International Chamber Music Course in Keszthely, Hungary, both as a performer and studying with Joseph Seiger and Nelly Soreg-Wunderlich.

Overture: "Tancredi".....Gioachino Rossini
(1792-1868)

Most audiences today associate Rossini with comedy without realising that nearly half his forty-odd operas were set to heroic or tragic plots. In fact his "Tancredi" - the story of two ill-starred lovers - brought in the turmoil of the crusades - but launched Rossini's international career in 1813. Apart from the hero's vocal lines many people note the inventiveness of the orchestration, and they focused on the overture as a fine example of the composer's skill. This is indeed true. During the slow introduction and the lively allegro which follows it there are many delightful touches, particularly in the woodwind writing, and the clever design carries the listener along with its infectious vitality. The fact that the music is borrowed almost note for note from an earlier opera (in fact of the original Venetian audience were obviously unaware) need remove none of our admiration. La Pietra del Paragone" had been produced six months earlier in Milan and Rossini calculated that time and distance were great enough for him to get away with a small amount of self-appropriation. He was right and we can only stand back and marvel at his impudence.

Violin Concerto in D (Op 61).....Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

- (1) Allegro, ma non troppo
- (2) Larghetto
- (3) Rondo

Soloist: Helen Davies

Serene grandeur - those two words encapsulate the mood of this most popular of concertos. Written in close proximity to "Fidelio" and the 5th symphony, it matches these in breadth of vision but turns its back on their world of dramatic tension. Instead we find ourselves strolling in some vast Elysian fields where few clouds are allowed to darken the atmosphere of peace and happiness. All this comes as no surprise when we learn that the concerto was written for a violinist who moved audiences by the sheer beauty of his sound rather than through any showy brilliance. Franz Clement had long been a prominent figure in Viennese musical life and knew Beethoven well. An infallible technique allied to a deep musical insight made him the perfect player for this concerto. He was of enormous help during its composition, giving much technical advice, and there can be little doubt that his sound influenced the flowing lyricism of the solo line.

The three movements are conceived on an expansive scale. The first begins with an extraordinary original touch - the staccato for the trumpet on the note D. Miss this seemingly insignificant phrase and the mood on which the whole structure is built has passed you by. Its presence as a binding agent is felt in almost every page of the concerto, and it helps the broad themes to provide a firm base over which the solo part can weave its own intricate tale. The element of partnership established here becomes even more apparent in the Larghetto. Here the orchestra plays different versions of a single melody over which the violinist has the freedom of a bird to indulge in flights of fancy which give the impression of being improvisation on the spot. Beethoven making much use of the soloist's upper register in which Clement was so strong. The tranquility of this mood is suddenly arrested by the orchestra's entry in the Rondo. Now we are in the realm of the dance and the catchy rhythm it engenders sweeps us through a variety of episodes, which give the soloist space to engage in extensive passage work, before the music skips out of the hall closing the door with a bang.

INTERVAL

VIOLIN I

Paula Tysall (Leader)
Jessica Rittstieg
Ivor Cox
Nigel Burrowes
Alistair Thomson
Susanna Allen
Mick Russell
Richard Jones
Dennir Reynolds

VIOLA

Bing James
Philip McKenna
Maureen Montrose
Mary Keeler
Francis Barrett
Ruth Baber

DOUBLE BASS

Arthur Pennie
Chris Bond
Louise Stoddard

FLUTE

Sam Morris
Sheree Abraham

CLARINET

Sue Best
Duncan McInnes

TRUMPET

Eric Milner
Bob Love

VIOLIN II

Nigel Stephens
George Fuller
Adrian Chen
Elisabeth Cleary
Ken Brace
Jane Howard
Stuart Dearnley
Keith Allen

CELLO

Alex Galloway
Sara Heathcote-Holmes
Marion Wootton
Katherine Badger
Lal Keenan
Kate Anderson
Catherine Johnson

HORN

Graham Vernon
Joe Wright

TIMPANI

Mike Grant

OBOE

Graham Ruffell
Louise Simon

BASSOON

Helen McLachlan
Jill Blakey

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