

BSO **BROMLEY** **SYMPHONY** **ORCHESTRA**

101st Season 2019-2020

Conductor - Adrian Brown
Leader - Andrew Laing

Saturday 25th January 2020
Langley Park Centre for the
Performing Arts

£1.50



www.bromleysymphony.org
Box office 020 3627 2974
Registered Charity no 1112117

Programme

Mozart - Overture to The Magic Flute

Vaughan Williams - Symphony No 6

Interval - 20 Minutes

Refreshments are available in the dining hall

Tchaikovsky - 3rd Orchestral Suite

This evening's concert is being recorded by Martha Taylor, who is studying Music and Sound Recording at the University of Surrey, for her final year recording portfolio.

Unauthorised audio or video recording is not permitted

Our next concert is on Saturday 14th March at Langley Park Centre for the Performing Arts

Maunder Bacchanal

Music by Tippett and Prokofiev - sung by Sine Nomine

Tippett Double String Concerto

Prokofiev Symphony No 5

Adrian Brown - Music Director



Adrian Brown comes from a distinguished line of pupils of Sir Adrian Boult. After graduating from the Royal Academy of Music in London, he studied intensively for some years with Sir Adrian, who said: “He has always impressed me as a musician of exceptional attainments who has all the right gifts and ideas to make him a first class conductor”. Adrian remains the only British conductor to have reached the finals of the Karajan Conductors’ Competition and the Berlin Philharmonic was the first professional orchestra he conducted.

In 1992 Adrian Brown was engaged to conduct one of the great orchestras of the world, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1998 he was invited by Sir Roger Norrington to work with the Camerata Salzburg, one of Europe’s foremost chamber orchestras. Adrian has also conducted many leading British orchestras including the City of Birmingham Symphony, the BBC Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony and the London Sinfonietta. His concerts with the Corinthian Chamber Orchestra in 2011 were met with critical acclaim; he was appointed their joint principal conductor.

Adrian conducted the Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra for 40 years and, on his retirement in 2013, was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by Music Teacher and Classic FM.

Adrian was one of a hundred musicians presented with a prestigious Classic FM Award at their Tenth Birthday Honours Celebration in June 2002. In the summer of 2013 he was awarded the Making Music NFMS Lady Hilary Groves Prize for services to Community Music, a much appreciated and admired honour. In December 2017, he was presented with the Berlioz International Society Medal for services to the great French composer. It was announced in late 2019 that Adrian has been awarded the Elgar Medal by the Elgar Society for “commitment to the promotion of the life and works” of the composer.

The 2014-17 seasons featured several concerts with the Royal Orchestral Society, including a performance of Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* and concerts with the Corinthian Orchestra including Vaughan Williams *Pastoral Symphony*. He conducted a centenary performance with the BSO of Holst *The Planets*, originally premiered by his teacher, Boult, in 1918.

In November 2018, Adrian formed his own orchestra, the Elgar Sinfonia of London. Sasha Rozhdestvensky performed the Elgar *Violin Concerto* with the orchestra in June 2019.

Adrian has conducted Bromley Symphony Orchestra since 1980. He directed BSO in its 2018-19 Centenary season. We celebrated this his 40th season with a repeat of the programme from his first concert (when the violin soloist was Ralph Holmes).

Mozart - Overture to The Magic Flute K 620

The Magic Flute was Mozart's first commercially commissioned stage work, just as, with Lorenzo da Ponte banished from court, he'd lost his tame librettist. Worse: he was in debt; his wife was ailing and pregnant; while his music lessons and piano recitals in no way enabled the family to make ends meet. Therefore Mozart reignited his friendship with theatre manager, writer, entrepreneur and – crucially – fellow Mason, Emmanuel Schikaneder. Schikaneder produced an opera libretto combining Austrian fairy tales with Masonic allegory – a combination which works bizarrely brilliantly, despite a hallucinogenic plot, a handful of half-human/half-bird characters, and a rather confusing villain-turned-hero.

Mozart always tended to airily leave his commissions to the last possible moment, and Schikaneder bribed him to finish *The Magic Flute* by providing him with a comfy hut in the grounds of his theatre, and by 'plying him with oysters and wine.' Mozart composed the overture itself last – in a blaze of inspiration – only two days before the premiere. Yet the premiere was still so successful and Mozart gleefully reported (of Court Composer Antonio Salieri): 'There was not a single number that did not call forth his bravo!'

In short, *The Magic Flute* proved to be a substantial hit, and was soon being performed in 59 other European venues. It would have probably changed Mozart's life forever, had he not died too soon.

The overture perfectly balances the serious with the work's opera buffa elements. The slow introduction opens with the triple chords associated with the priests. Due to the symbolic importance of the number three (to Masons) the overture opens with three sonorous chords in the key of three flats – Mozart had also added three trombones. The chords give way to an effervescent, almost bubbling fugue, the theme of which – so profligate was Mozart's genius – never even appears in the opera. Here, silvery quavers are whipped-spun by occasional curls of semis, ornamented by ascending woodwind solos and feathered by offbeat accents ... only to be eventually interrupted by the three powerful chords (same feel, different key). They are again undercut by a curling motif, but this time in the minor, along with development featuring wind links, chirruping bassoons and an affirmatory conclusion. This overture is the perfect concert opener: light yet deep. Imagine Mozart's conceiving it, with only two days to go, replete 'with oysters and wine.'

Vaughan Williams - Symphony No 6 in E minor

Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony was composed between 1944 and 1947 and was premiered in April 1948, by Adrian Boult (long-term conducting mentor of Adrian Brown). It caused an immediate sensation, possibly because it was unsurprisingly perceived as having been inspired by the Second World War. A grumpy Vaughn Williams denied it. ('It never seems to occur to people that a man might just want to write a piece of music,' he growled.) All he would admit was that his finale could be summed up in this from *The Tempest*: 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.' (Although he did allow that the tenor saxophone had been inspired by the death of a black jazz artist in a Luftwaffe air-raid.)

A less contentious influence was Vaughan Williams' relatively recent fascination with film scores. At least two sections here emerged from discarded film music: one from the wartime film *Flemish Farm*, another originally intended for Richard II. (One colleague remembers him good-naturedly complaining as he set out to conjure up film music for a battle scene: 'I've had enough of crashes and bangs. Why can't I write some "pretty nurse" music?') In addition, the soaring Elgarian tune in the first movement of the Sixth, incongruous amidst so much turbulence, has the feel of being a director's cut: from the Battle of Stalingrad to the soft Shropshire Hills.

The symphony's actual opening is wild, restless with jazz elements and Mephistophelian accents. Once

the unison brass get the bits between their teeth, the timpani heralds a storm-like fury: the winds rise amid a tumult of whipped leaves (and structural damage!) returning us to the tearing, gusting opening... Then, something strange happens: the church doors open, and harps usher in that spacious string theme in all its bare-boned beauty. However, its repetition, with harmonising brass, is overruled by the return of the force nine gales, with the connection to the second movement being a sullen held note in the lower strings.

The second is a notably odd slow movement, with malicious brass chords endorsing the opening sharp-sour (short-short-long) motif. Amidst rising unease in the strings and malevolent accents, the timpani again awaken the brass, who intimidate both winds and strings. Out of a scarred landscape, with surrounding strings burdened by mists of grief, the trumpets begin – at first softly, but with a sick persistence – the Shostakovich-like three-note motif hinted at during the movement's opening. This gradually grows more and more menacing, embellished with the sniper-like percussion, as if describing the relentless approach of some monstrous tank or robotic creature.

This is hard sci-fi. By the time the strings recognise their danger and begin to scream there's no escape: the machine is upon them. A howl of cymbals marks the moment of impact, after which the surly trumpets plow implacably on into the distance, leaving nothing behind but a single lamenting cor anglais and the memories of strings.

The heavy brass incite the scherzo, which is boisterous, edgy, urban, sardonic and rampant, rich with the clatter of xylophones, restless string figuration and devilish tritones. Members of the percussion trade insults amidst foreboding blasts from the brass, amidst non-stop tumult from the strings. A tenor sax – insouciant, jaunty – wanders in off the street, and is chased away. String figurations overlap in a bitter fugal war, amidst chuntering woodwinds and granite-like interpolations from the brass. Yet the movement's energy ebbs quite sharply near the end, transitioning (via bass clarinet) into the finale. The finale is marked *sempre pianissimo e senza crescendo* ('always very quietly, without crescendo'). The composer, when pressed, described it rather dismissively as 'whiffs of themes, drifting about', but there is something momentous going on. Very chromatic, with a modal feel, it opens with high, lost, almost disembodied strings, strangely disassociated – delivering overlapping, undulating phrases curiously without feeling – without vibrato too. Utterly colourless, it resembles water in a sunken lake. Flutes, weirdly united, falter. Out of the trumpets, a disconsolate solo cello rises from the shattered landscape: a solo oboe sounds both high and strange. Solo strings lean for strength upon each other. The solo oboe returns, this time with no support. The music drifts towards an unknown region: possibly annihilation. This is probably the movement that sparked so many to see Vaughan Williams' whole masterpiece as a vision of a post-nuclear world. (Is there a spark of solace in the final oboe elegy? Hard to be sure.) In the end, two string chords, swing back and forth on the ruined playground, over an abyss.

Tchaikovsky - Orchestral Suite No 3 Opus 55

While staying in Paris in February, 1884, Tchaikovsky wrote to his sister-in-law, 'I'm still not feeling wholly myself due to exhaustion, and I think that without the peace and tranquillity of the countryside I won't be able to do any work, but I feel the urge to start something new.'

And, in his diary, that April: 'Walked around the garden and came up with the seed, not of a future symphony, but of a suite,' adding to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, 'For the present I still haven't started work, and have only been collecting some materials for a future symphonic composition.'

'Very dissatisfied,' he wrote a few days later, 'since everything that comes into my head seems so commonplace. Am I played out? – The Valse gives me infinite trouble. I am growing old... While the first movement has become so hateful that I've decided to set it aside and to invent something else.' But Tchaikovsky was nothing if not mercurial. (A work of greater genius than the new suite never was!) he boasted to his publisher, when sending off the completed suite: "I could hardly be more optimistic!" The premiere, in Saint Petersburg, conducted by Hans von Bulow, fully justified his opinion. He wrote

afterwards: 'I had a secret presentiment that it would please the public, but the reality far surpassed my expectations. I have never had such a triumph; the greater part of the audience was touched and grateful. Such moments are the best in an artist's life. Thanks to these, it is worthwhile living and labouring!' Yet the Third Orchestral Suite has never equalled his most favoured symphonies or concertos in the public consciousness. Perhaps it lacks the wholehearted, romanticism of the late symphonies – or perhaps the form is to blame? Despite moments of pure joy and radiant power it can feel like a procession of vignettes, without the sustained intensity of Tchaikovsky at the peak of his powers. Still, there is much to enjoy.

I) *Élégie* (Andantino molto cantabile) - Musicologist Roland John Wiley calls this movement 'resolutely melodic'. Neither main theme is overtly elegiac, indeed, the movement really has more the feel of a Romance. Even when *agitato* it remains primarily lyrical, the woodwinds vaguely pastoral, the cellos nostalgic. The second theme eventually culminates in a tumultuous bridge back to the first, which emerges triumphant in the violins. There is a beautifully nostalgic epilogue, starring cor anglais and solo violin.

II) *Valse mélancolique* - Not a typical Tchaikovskian waltz, this possesses the elegiac pensiveness lacking in the *Élégie* itself. It features restless, nervy flutes, and intense – even uneven – metrics. A syncopated, rather desolate woodwind-dominated second theme returns to the intensity of the opening and fades away into the high ether (marked *pppp*, which is frankly about as soft as music gets). Wiley wrote, 'The long, uneven spans are uncharacteristic, as is the formal scheme: a tripartite reprise that mimics a scherzo. The unwaltz-like result is strangely enigmatic.' Strangely effective, likewise.

III) *Scherzo* - The mood lightens a good deal with the Mendelssohnian, technically brilliant, *Scherzo*, which alternates electrically between 6/8 and 2/4. It features scintillating winds, fiendish violins and puckish percussion, including snare drum sizzles – with a fiery flash at the end.

IV) Tchaikovsky's *Finale* is a set of variations on a simple theme, some so swift that you can blink and you miss one. Here is The Rough Guide:

Tema con variazioni: an unassuming march-like theme

1. *Andante con moto*: Mostly in flutes and clarinets, decorated with pizzicato.
2. *Andante con moto*: *moto* perpetuo violins, supported by horns.
3. *Andante con moto*: high and wistful. Starring solo flute, with commentary from an artful bassoon.
4. *Pochissimo meno animato*: Here the cello section gets soulful. The theme morphs into a brass-led *Dies Irae* – however, the cellos are not to be denied, and resume their tune as if nothing had occurred.
5. *Allegro vivo*: Fugal episode.
6. *Allegro vivace*: This is lively: double-note attacks in the strings are opposed to thrusting chords in winds.
7. *L'istesso tempo*: A lovely contrast, a chamber vignette for solo winds, leading into:
- 8 *Adagio*: This is autumnal, and densely textured, with an almost medieval feel, with an important solo for the cor anglais.
9. *Allegro molto vivace*: A boisterous tutti, full of panache, catapults into a cadenza for solo violin, who gets entirely carried away and introduces his own variation.
10. *Allegro vivo e un poco rubato*. A gift from Tchaikovsky to the leader: a delightful, wistful, nostalgic little esprit with solo woodwind commentary and elements of virtuosic cadenza. A gem.
11. *Moderato mosso*. A brief sunny return to bright, full-throated and expansive major mode.
12. *Finale. Polacca*—*Moderato maestoso e brillante*: The brief and powerful introduction leads into a true Polonaise, full of flair, fire and brio, at which Tchaikovsky basically throws the book, including yearning second theme, horn chorale, deep-throated threats from the brass, before his trademarked wind-up to the final statement of the theme, with the violins rising and the brass descending. Timpani, symbols... fireworks!

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BROMLEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Bromley Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1918 by Miss Beatrice Fowle and Miss Gwynne Kimpton, teachers at Bromley High School for Girls. Over the years, it has earned a high reputation for concerts of professional standard and has worked with many famous soloists and conductors. Sir Adrian Boult conducted regularly in the 1940s and in 1952 Norman Del Mar took over. Internationally renowned soloists who have performed with the orchestra include Paul Tortelier, John Lill, Dennis Brain, Kathleen Ferrier, Ralph Holmes, Hugh Bean, Emma Johnson, Leslie Howard and Sir Donald McIntyre.

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