

**Saturday 22 May 2.30pm**

**Baroque/Baroque-dance inspired; 300th Anniversary of the Brandenburg concertos**

*Sadly, with this third and final concert, we now reach the end of this Covid-abbreviated Festival. How wonderful it has been to have had the chance to hear LIVE music, played by such a group of fine musicians brought together by Sophia. To repeat what I said at the beginning of these notes, we are deeply indebted to them all, and of course to Rob and his band of helpers, for having the vision and determination – and optimism – to bring the whole thing to fruition. Many many thanks, all of you....*

*In this afternoon's programme we shall hear music from an earlier age – directly, in the case of Bach, and derivatively in the works by Britten and in particular Warlock. It also allows us to celebrate the tercentenary of Brandenburg concertos.*

**Capriol Suite**

**Peter Warlock (1894- 1930)**

*We begin with a popular work, written in 1925 but recalling music from a much earlier period, one that was the over-riding passion of its composer, Peter Warlock, a tortured soul whose life ended in suicide. (Incidentally, it was originally written for piano duet, a version thoroughly to be recommended, especially when played with one's daughter and a liberal glass or two of G&T.)*

Christened Philip Arnold Heseltine, and born into a wealthy London family on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1894. An editor and writer, he was a respected authority on neglected Elizabethan and Jacobean music. He was also a sharp-toothed music critic, and took the satanic pseudonym Peter Warlock from his interest in the occult, to protect the music he composed from the vengeance of musicians he had wronged. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of English poetry from medieval times onwards, which helps to explain the charm and sensitive word-settings of his many songs. Of these, some were dark, bleak and depressively intense, and others amorous, rumbustious or charming.

He was educated at Eton College and Oxford University, where he read for a degree in classics. Fascinated from an early age by the work of Fredrick Delius (whom he met in 1911), the two became close friends, and Delius supported and mentored him throughout his short life. On graduating, he resisted family pressure to work in the stock exchange, choosing rather to frequent an artistic circle of friends that included the novelist D H Lawrence (though his friendship with Lawrence was fraught and short lived.)

Although he never settled into a conventional career, he did have some short-lived appointments, such as his spell as music critic for the Daily Mail. His really serious study he reserved for his one true passion - serious musical scholarship, editing, transcribing and arranging early music manuscripts - and writing a major study of the music of Delius. His first major compositions, mainly songs, began to appear in 1917, at which time he had moved to Dublin to avoid possible conscription. In 1922 he completed his first widely acknowledged

masterpiece (the song cycle named the Curlew). Yet this period of creativity continued for only a few years, culminating in the composition of his most famous work – this evening's Capriol Suite - in 1925. The original piano duet version of the work was a great success and was quickly followed by a version for string orchestra (1926) and a version for full orchestra (1928).

Sadly, by 1928, things were going badly. He was getting into financial difficulties and his creativity seemed to be evaporating. He did receive help from Thomas Beecham, who engaged him to write articles for the Delius Festival held in October 1929, but this only offered a short respite from his decline into depression and inactivity. The end came on the morning of the 17th December 1930 when, aged just 36, he was found dead from gas poisoning in his Chelsea flat. The coroner returned an open verdict on the case, but suicide seems the most likely explanation. Such a tragic loss.

The **Capriol Suite** is a set of dances in the Renaissance style. It was based on tunes in a manual of Renaissance dances by the French priest Jehan Tabourot (1515-1595). The treatment of the source material is very free and the work can be regarded as an original composition rather than an arrangement. It comprises six contrasting movements (of which we shall hear five), each in a different dance form.

1. **Basse-Danse** The Basse-Danse is a stately dance in which the feet were not raised (pieds-en-l'air), but were kept low (en basse) and glided over the floor in a dignified striding motion. Try it at home.
2. **Pavane** An Italian court dance of the 16th and early 17th century, originally called Padovana, from its roots in the city of Padua. It was traditionally slow and solemn in character.
3. **Tordion** This was mostly commonly (as in this case) a brisk triple metre dance with, like the Galliard, a pattern of five steps (cinque pas) fitted to six beats, a jump on the last beat.
4. **Bransles** Originally a rustic 'chain' or 'round' dance involving several couples in a circle or a line. In its more sophisticated forms, the gentry could enjoy the simple pleasures of the country at wedding celebrations. The music was often provided by the singing of the dancers, and its popularity continued well into the 17th century.
5. **(omitted)**
6. **Mattachins** This brisk duple-time sword dance, also known as the buffens or boufons, was traditionally performed by the young men clashing their swords and shields in time with the music. Sounds much more fun than Play Station.

## *Concerto for two violins*

*JS Bach (1685-1750)*

*Bach's much-loved double violin concerto needs little introduction, and neither perhaps does Bach himself.*

Born in 1685 in Eisenach, Johann Sebastian was the youngest of 8 children (something obviously passed down in the genes, for he himself later sired an even larger clutch.) At the age of fifteen he moved to Luneburg to complete his education, before moving on to various organist posts, culminating as court organist at Weimar. In 1717, he became Kapellmeister at Cothen, where he wrote the six Brandenburg Concertos (one to be heard later this afternoon) and the 1st book of the Well-tempered Clavier. Just six years later (1723) he took up the position as Kantor at St Thomas' Church, Leipzig, a post he held for the rest of his life, until his death in 1750.

Bach wrote several concertos which he later arranged for solo harpsichord or harpsichords for performance in Zimmermann's Coffee House. In some cases only the harpsichord version survives and many reconstructions have been made as a result, but this famous double concerto has come down to us both in its original violin version and in Bach's later arrangement of it for two harpsichords. It is fascinating to compare the two versions, since the tempo markings are different and Bach adds some ornamentation in the later version which gives us many insights into his manner of performance of both this piece and his other works.

Bach studied the music of many other composers during his lifetime by copying or arranging many of their works. In the field of the concerto we know that he learnt from Vivaldi since he made arrangements of all twelve of his *L'Estro Armonico* set (Op.3), most of them for solo keyboard. Yet he was never content merely to imitate models such as these and it is notable that he blurs the distinction between solo and tutti of his Italian models by making the tutti parts much more than mere accompaniment during the solos - in fact, the solo lines sometimes even become an accompaniment to the tutti.

What exactly is it that makes this concerto one of Bach's most popular works? The first movement (*Vivace*) has a seriousness of purpose and directness that seizes the listener's attention from the first note and never lets it go. The sheer beauty of the themes in the slow movement (*Largo ma non tanto*) must certainly be one of these factors as well as the wonderful way in which the musical lines of the two soloists interweave. And then the finale (*Allegro*): it is in this Allegro especially that we can hear several elements of his writing which make the music so irresistible, aspects of his genius that are evident throughout, of course, in all three movements. But what specifically are these particular elements? Yes, the soloists are treated with great equality, as we might expect, but what is particularly special is the way in which Bach arranges for the 'supporting' soloist not merely to accompany but to inspire, galvanise or even compete with the other. It is perhaps this 'competitive' element that (especially in the finale) generates such extraordinary energy and which, apart from a couple of brief episodes, is quite relentless yet infectious and leads us on to the exhilarating conclusion.

## **Simple Symphony**

## **Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)**

*To follow one of Bach's most popular concertos we now have another work for strings – either string quartet or small string orchestra – written in 1933, when Britten had just completed his study at the Royal College of Music. Britten was something of a child prodigy, and by the age of five he was already having piano lessons. Just four years later he began composing and the following year started his viola studies. Some of those early compositions were for piano, and at the age of only twenty he reassembled parts of those earlier nuggets to create this evening's Op 4 'Simple Symphony'.*

Arguably England's greatest composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Britten has been called '*the English voice of Europe*', and his rare sense of balance between tradition and innovation (vouchsafed to only the really great composers) has allowed him to emerge alongside Janacek and Shostakovich – if not as one of the iconoclasts, then at least as one of the central figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century European music. Again, like so many of the masterful composers his was not an easy life or career: sniffy English critics did not take kindly to such a shining and precocious talent emerging from a merely provincial setting (he was born in Lowestoft in 1913), they did not value his 'cleverness', his close links to left-wing intellectuals (Auden, Isherwood etc), and other 'suspicious' affiliates caused further antagonism. Such was the level of uncertainty that this sowed within himself that he later began to have self-doubts about the quality of his earlier music from the 1930s, and was reluctant to have much of it performed. (The real stylistic importance of his music from that period – the seeds sown in the piano and violin concertos and the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, for example, and how they fed into his 1945 masterpiece *Peter Grimes* – was not truly appreciated until after his death in 1976.) He was all too aware of his unfashionable status, and sometimes depressed by it. Buried away in the Suffolk fishing town of Aldeburgh, he seemed to fight shy of the 'fashionable', preferring to write mainly for sympathetic colleagues to perform at his own Aldeburgh Festival. He said, almost by way of his own artistic credo, '*I believe in roots, in associations, in backgrounds, in personal relationships*'. (Despite this, his music does have two far-flung influences – a period in America during the war, where he imbibed the spirit of the American musical, country and blues idiom - and several trips to the Far East in 1955/6, where something of the exotic chimed in with his own difficulties with sexual orientation).

By 1927 (still only 14 years old) began composition lessons with Frank Bridge and then John Ireland – two hugely important influences. In 1930 he entered the Royal College of Music, and in 1939 (during his USA stay) formed a bond with the man who would remain his partner and colleague for the rest of his life, the tenor Peter Pears. (Very movingly, their respective tombstones rest next to each other in Aldeburgh Churchyard.) His compositional output, though not huge, was varied, and a large number of his greatest works have come into the mainstream repertoire: the operas (*Turn of the Screw*, *Peter Grimes*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Death in Venice*, *Noye's Fludde* etc), choral works (*Ceremony of Carols*, *War Requiem*, *Saint Nicholas*, *Rejoice in the Lamb* etc), and his many orchestral and chamber works, including this evening's Op 4, in four movements (like the work itself, all alliteratively titled) and dedicated to his childhood viola teacher, Audrey Alston.

**I Boisterous Bourrée** Lively, a theme in D minor, borrowed from his early Suite for Piano, 1926, is explored in baroque counterpoint. A secondary, sweeter theme follows, in F major, and then the minor theme is explored more fully. A short coda ends pianissimo, preparing the way for the quiet opening of the second movement.

**II Playful Pizzicato** Sheer fun! The second theme recalls the theme music for *The Archers*!

**III Sentimental Sarabande** Tender, heart-felt and echoing string music from an earlier time, stretching perhaps from Purcell to Elgar. The second then moves into a slow, major key waltz – until, fading, we are plunged back into the aching emptiness of the opening, now even more anguished....

**IV Frolicsome Finale** An energetic, bouncy minor key opening, the movement gallops along to its brief coda, which recalls the opening and brings this youthful work to a close.

***Brandenburg Concerto No.4 in G major BWV1049 JS Bach (1685-1750)***

Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Brandenburg Concertos were commissioned by Margrave (Prince) Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg in 1621, and have deservedly become some of the most popular baroque music we have. In the baroque period the concerto form was as important as the symphony was to become in the classical era. The opportunities for solo display in an intimate environment were popular with virtuoso players and with the monarchs, princes and other aristocrats who patronised them.

Although it later became an orchestral genre, the concerto began as an alternative chamber music form to the solo and trio sonata - the first published examples can be found mixed with trios - with the general understanding that each part should be performed by one player. Each Brandenburg Concerto is essentially a 'concerto grosso', a genre pioneered by Corelli and developed further by Bach and Handel. These concerti are written for a different combination of instruments – a group of solo instruments (string, wind or keyboard) in alternation with the strings or with the orchestra/ensemble as a whole. In No 4, he teams up a violin with two treble recorders (flutes today) as the featured solo instruments as well as the conventional string forces that accompany them.

There are three movements. In the outer, fast movements it is the solo violin that dominates the texture, most obviously in the virtuosic whirlwind passages of semiquavers and demisemiquavers that contain some of the most difficult concerto writing Bach provided for the violin. Conversely, the violin is given a subservient role in the slow movement as it merely provides a bass line for the two recorders in the solo passages. In his manuscript Bach calls the recorders *fiaute d'echo* which is somewhat of a puzzle since it is not clear what he meant by this. We know of no specific instruments with this title so it is assumed that Bach was referring to the role he gives the recorders (flutes) in the *Andante*.

***Programme notes: Christopher Symons***

*This concert is sponsored with a bequest from the late Mr John Dangerfield*