

Whittington Festival May 2021 Programme

Thursday 20th May 7pm

Rustic; song/dance

As far as live music is concerned – the very life blood of this, arguably the greatest of the arts - we music-lovers are just emerging from what has largely been a barren, cultural desert. Of course, there has been the miracle of ‘streamed’ music on our screens, but of actual, flesh and blood music-making in our presence, nothing. So three cheers – no, three hundred cheers – for the tremendous efforts put in by Rob, Sophia and their teams. Thanks to their vision and determination, we have now been led safely out of the desert and into this musical oasis of three wonderful concerts, intriguingly programmed and performed by hand-picked musicians.

In this first concert we shall hear two closely-related works by Schubert, again well-known and loved, surround three short pieces by Eller – new to us all, but still very much redolent of the country, song and dance.

Die Forelle for voice and cello

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

arr. J. Koos

*This evening, unusually, we shall hear it sung and played by the same performer.
Doubtless, like that trout, we shall be equally hooked...*

Franz Schubert was born at the end of January 1797, the twelfth of fourteen children, in the suburbs of Vienna. Before long, this little genius could have become a one-man/child band, for from the age of eight he was taught the violin by his father (a schoolmaster) and the piano by his brother, Ignaz: he also learnt the viola, and began to learn the organ and counterpoint. To cap it all, in 1809 he won a choral scholarship to the principal boarding school in Vienna, attached to the court chapel. Following his formal schooling, he continued to receive lessons from one of Vienna’s great teachers, Salieri - the same who also taught Beethoven and (allegedly) poisoned Mozart.

Not surprisingly, then, he had all the makings of a child prodigy, and for this many compared him to Mozart. Yet that was surely somewhat fanciful? After all, he was only a competent pianist (how I empathise!), he composed no concertos, and his operas are only rarely performed. However, what he did write in his tragically short thirty-two years has all the hallmarks of greatness, including two dazzling symphonies (the *Unfinished* and the *Great C major*), at least four profoundly original string quartets and an even greater string quintet, a wealth of glorious piano music, some of the most original choral works of the Romantic era and – above all, of course – his awe-inspiring legacy of well over 600 songs, including this evening’s fishy tale of the one that didn’t get away.

He was, therefore, prodigious, at least in the absolute quality of his music, if not spread. Like Mozart, he too began composing when very young. The wonderful Fantasy in F minor was written when he was just 13, and a year later he began on that great outpouring of song. By the age of 17 he wrote one of the greatest of these – *Gretchen at the Spinning-*

wheel – as well as his *Second Symphony*. A year later, the *G major Mass*: and, of course, there were the 15 string quartets....

'*Die Forelle*' recounts how a dastardly fisherman was angling unsuccessfully for a trout – until he cheated: kicking up the mud, he clouded the water and fooled the poor thing into taking the bait.

3 short pieces

Heino Eller (1887-1970) arr. A. Kaljuste

Heino Eller (b. 1887) was composer and teacher, one of the pioneers of contemporary Estonian music and the founder of the Tartu composition school influential in the first half of the 20th century. His work forged an idiom fusing the classical and romantic traditions, modernism, and folk music inflections. His *Homeland tune* and the symphonic poem *Dawn* are often performed in Estonia and abroad, whilst his Violin Concerto, string quartets, violin pieces "Pines" and "Open Spaces" and piano works "Butterflies" and "Bells" are *de rigueur* on academic and concert programs.

Eller was above all a composer of instrumental music, and even his few vocal works are written as arrangements of instrumental pieces. About 40 works for orchestra and over 200 for piano make up the major part of his oeuvre. The better part of his orchestral music is made up of short pieces reflective of scenes from nature and expressionist moods – symphonic scenes and poems. A composer who studied the violin, Eller wrote over 30 works for that instrument, including Estonia's first violin concerto (1937). The general characteristics of his idiom are an intimate, chamber-like style and a polyphonic texture rich in detail.

His musical career began at age 12 with the violin, and in 1907 he entered St. Petersburg Conservatoire. From 1908–1911, he studied at the University of St. Petersburg's faculty of law, but then returned to his musical vocation, entering the St. Petersburg Conservatoire's composition department in 1913. During World War One, he served for a time in a military orchestra, before concluding his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire (1919–1920).

From 1920–1940, he was a member of the music theory and composition faculty at the Tartu Higher School of Music, laying the foundation for the Tartu composition school, which was influential in Estonian music in the first half of the 20th century, as well as later. From 1940 to his death in 1970, he was Professor of composition at the Tallinn Conservatoire, where, amongst numerous others, he taught Arvo Pärt. In 1940, he served as the chairman of the organizing committee of the Estonian SSR's Composers' Union. His numerous awards included the title of Merited Art Worker of the Estonian SSR (1945), People's Artist of the Estonian SSR (1957) and People's Artist of the USSR (1967). He won the Prize of the Soviet Estonia (1948, 1965) and the Order of Lenin (1965).

His musical career can really be split into three periods. The **first period** (1909–1920) centred on works for the piano and short orchestral pieces. Generally lyrical-romantic, with influences of Chopin, Grieg, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, his style at times takes on strong impressionist and expressionist features. In his **middle, Tartu period**, (1920–1939), use of modes and interval structures from Estonian folk music rose to the fore, along with a more sweeping epic style. In *Symphonic Burlesque*, Eller uses an authentic folk tune for the first time. His intertwining of folk music inflections and modernist means of expression brought fresh currents into Estonian music. The **third, Tallinn period** (1940–1970) is characterized by simplification of the idiom and the even greater role given to folk melodies. One of the finest works of Estonian music was completed – *Thirteen Piano Pieces on Estonian Motifs*.

(This evening's three short pieces have been specially arranged by Andres Kalijuste, one of this year's musicians.)

1) *Dance in G minor* During the years 1949-1955 (his third period, less productive in comparison to his other periods), we find two small sets of pieces for violin and piano. "Dance in G minor" belongs to cycle "Wedding Song and Dance" (1951).

2) *Evening Song* From his middle period while living in Tartu comes this simple and sweet "**Evening Song**" (1921) that was initially written for solo-piano but arranged later for different settings including for violin, cello and French horn.

3) *Dance* Also originally written for solo piano, the "Dance in G major" (1953) was initially called "Stick Dance".

Piano Quintet in A major (Trout) Op 114, D667

Finally, one of the Schubert's happiest compositions, to send us away smiling – but also, one hopes, determined to exclude trout from this evening's dinner menu.

Cheerful, irresistible and guaranteed to have any listener well and truly caught - hook, line and sinker – the final work this evening, Schubert's 'Trout' quintet. Yet again, it is a work that was commissioned by a friend, Sylvester Paumgartner, in whose house Schubert had spent many a pleasant musical evening whilst on holidays in Steyr, Upper Austria. Sylvester, an amateur cellist and arts' patron, had been entranced by the new piano quintet of Hummel, and equally bewitched by Schubert's song *Die Forelle (The Trout)*. As a result, he asked Schubert to write a piano quintet based on the same theme and to include a set of variations.

Thus the quintet has ended up with five movements, the fourth of which is the actual set of variations: in the sunny delight of the music we can perhaps see a reflection of the joy that Schubert experienced in this lovely Alpine area, composed there in 1819, during the first of three visits he made. The critic Massimo Mila observed: *'In the Quintet is enshrined the memory of a delightful summer, of carefree leisure days: the music is bathed in sunshine and the spirit of youth.'*

The unusual scoring is a matter of conjecture. Here, instead of the normal string quartet plus piano, the second violin is replaced by double bass, perhaps because Sylvester wanted the cello freed from always having to supply the bass line so it could have some of the lovely tunes that the upper strings and piano always get! To simplify the task of composing five movements, Schubert uses a little guile. Two of the movements have a second half that exactly reproduces the first – but in a different key!

If ever music existed to be enjoyed by player friends amongst listener friends, this is surely it. The scoring is never heavy: the piano writing is deftly contrived, since often the two hands simply proceed in parallel octaves (unison), creating an impression of light and luminosity. (Think of Shostakovich, who also frequently adopts the same technique.) Finally, the whole work is given a sense of homogeneity by means of the rising sextuplet figure (taken from the original piano accompaniment to the song) which is found in all but one movement.

I Allegro vivace Immediately, with an upward arpeggio on the piano, the trout leaps to the surface for a fly - and we are away! The simple melody is announced quietly in the strings, and before long the normal second theme appears. As usual in sonata form, both are developed, then recalled in the recapitulation.

II Andante In F major, a movement of great serenity, perfectly illustrating Schubert's ability to score economically and allow light to suffuse every bar. The first half has three distinct themes, which are then repeated in the second half, but in a different key (A flat major). This magical key change prevents any sense of our having been cheated, however.

III Scherzo In a wonderful contrast, this *scherzo* fair fizzles along. One imagines that friend Sylvester et al might have been at the schnapps a little too freely before sitting down to tackle this! The *Trio* restores a little calm, but it is short-lived, thwarted by the reappearance of the schnapps-fuelled *scherzo*.

IV No sooner do we hear the famous *Forelle* melody announced than we are transported to the river bank and that dastardly fisherman, muddying the water with his boot and hooking the poor fish. The utter charm of the six variations springs from two devices – variation of key and decoration of melody. In the final variation we hear the familiar upward-darting figure in the piano accompaniment – perhaps this time the hooked fish desperately trying to leap free. A quickening of the tempo deepens the pathos – *andantino* to *allegretto*.

V Allegro giusto To end, another of those 'cheating' movements, with a repeated second half in a new key, and then, fishers all – pack away the rod and flies. It's over, dusk is creeping on, and grilled trout beckons. Whoops!

Programme notes: Christopher Symons

(We are deeply indebted to Oswestry School for the generous loan of their grand piano – yet one more example of the support they have given to the region's music over many years, especially their lengthy underpinning of the Oswestry School Recital Series.)

Friday 21st May 7pm

Music exploring the theme of transformation

Syrinx, for solo flute

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Claude Debussy was born in St Germain-en-Laye in 1862, where his parents ran a china shop – unsuccessfully, it turned out, for they moved to Paris soon after. This enabled Debussy to begin at the Conservatoire – aged just 10 – in 1872. He may have begun early, but he continued to study there until 1884, as winner of the prestigious Prix de Rome – surely the most thoroughly trained Western European composer of all time? If he is thought to have been a revolutionary in his style, he at least had a full knowledge of what he was rejecting.

In some ways, Debussy created a new style of French music. He fought hard to resist the lure of any Wagnerian influences, became alienated from Italian opera while resident in Rome (1884-87), became enamoured of Russian music whilst tutoring two Russian children, and in 1889 discovered the plangent delights of Javanese gamelan at the Paris Exhibition. Further threads in this complicated warp came from two friends, the symbolist poets Verlaine and Mallarmé, and he was deeply influenced by the dreamy world of Monet and Cézanne. Impressionism in art ‘began’ in 1870, and was therefore just taking hold when Debussy began at the Conservatoire. In casting to one side the accepted concepts of art realism, Impressionism focused more on effects – especially of texture and light – and that is exactly what seems to be reflected in the new music of Debussy. It first manifested itself in one of his most popular works - *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – an 1894 work, which, according to Boulez, caused ‘...the art of music to begin beating with a new pulse.’ A new, sultry languor, extended contemplation and momentary beauties characterised the work, elements that would colour all his later output, including this evening’s *Syrinx*, whose sultry, sinuous dreaminess recalls the mesmeric quality of a snake-charmer’s pipes - perhaps apt for our Arabic oasis analogy. Impressionism had crept into music.

These years of the 1890s proved the acme of his contentedness. Sadly, as the years passed, the more difficult side of his not altogether pleasant character emerged: he could be fickle, had a caustic tongue, and was self-obsessively depressive. He was rabidly nationalistic (signing himself ‘*C. Debussy, musicien français*’), and was jealous of Ravel and scornful of Fauré. Be this as it may, a stream of wonderful music continued to flow from him – orchestral, piano and chamber – until his life was brought to a painful early end from cancer in March 1918.

Syrinx was originally composed in 1913 as part of the incidental music to a three-act play, *Psyche*, by his playwright friend Gabriel Mourey. Unfortunately, by the time the play was produced, all that remained of the music was this small flute solo. Called *La flute de Pan*, it was played in the wings whilst Pan died onstage. Pan, ever one for the women, had been pursuing the beautiful nymph *Syrinx*. Reaching a river, she begged the river gods for help and was transformed by them into hollow water reeds. Pan found that by blowing on them, he could create a haunting sound to match his mood – yet, in the cutting, his love had died.

Trio for alto flute, piccolo and cello (world premiere) Jeremy Sams

Now, the first of three works this evening by Gabriel Fauré, a composer whom Debussy reputedly scorned. Quite extraordinary.

Elégie in C minor Op 24

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Gabriel Faure was born in 1845 in Pamiers, SW France, the youngest son of a schoolmaster, who, recognizing his natural talent (especially on the harmonium), sent him off to the Niedermeyer School for budding church musicians in Paris, aged eleven. It was there that the young Gabriel met the person who would become his lifelong friend, mentor and champion – his piano teacher, Camille Saint-Saens. Faure himself would go on to become the bridge in French music between the 19th and 20th centuries, being born in the age of Romanticism, and dying in the age of Jazz. Outwardly traditional yet inwardly revolutionary, he was never a composer to follow fashion at the expense of musical integrity. In 1877 he became choirmaster of the Madeleine (the high society Parisienne church where Saint-Saens was organist), following the popularity of his first violin sonata and his song ‘*Après un rêve*’. The biggest personal change in his life came in 1883, with his marriage to Marie Frémiet; now with a family to support, he spent most of his working years in a bit of a struggle – teaching, choir-mastering and snatching holiday time to compose. Migraines and periods of depression took their toll, and then, in 1903, he began to suffer a cruel loss of hearing. Perhaps it was this that in some way accounts for the very individual and deeply personal nature of his music: it is as though he retreats into an inner, ecstatic world of the imagination, filled with heady atmospheres. His harmonies have a feel of timelessness – think of that lovely mix of tonality and modality in the *Requiem*, 1888, for example – that make his music easily recognizable.

The final phase of his life came with his appointment as director of the Paris Conservatoire. There was a certain irony here: he had always rather rejected the conventional, being, perhaps, a radical in disguise. As may be expected, he soon began a programme of reform, lasting until his retirement in 1920, aged 75. He died at home in Paris in 1924, leaving a small treasure trove of compositions – mainly chamber works, piano music and songs.

This moving *Elégie* was originally conceived as the slow movement for a proposed cello sonata that never materialised (though two others did.) When the *Elégie* received a warm reception at an unofficial play-through at the home of Saint-Saens in 1880, and at its first public performance in 1883, he decided to keep it as his Op 24, later recasting it for cello and orchestra. The mood of the work is one of real anguish, in which he reveals himself to be a master at combining passion with grace in his long-lined melodies. It was played at Fauré’s own funeral.

Piano Quartet No 1 in C minor, Op 15

Faure (1845-1924)

Next, this second work by Fauré, again full of deep passion, though this time with an actual biographical link, since it was inspired by a relationship that was drawing to a sad close.

Mixed emotions were swirling around in young Gabriel, then, as he wrote this appealing quartet, summed up as ‘*one of his most readily accessible works, charming and gently melancholic music off-set by a sparkling scherzo.*’ Just what was causing these swirling emotions?

The quartet was written in 1879, at a time of considerable personal emotional turmoil. As was the case with Pan earlier, that mischievous Cupid was once again to blame: for Fauré, Love was in the air, but souring. For five years, he had wooed Marianne Viardot (daughter of a well-known singer) and had finally become engaged – only for his beloved to break it off.! The work is dedicated to the Belgian violinist Hubert Léonard. The first of two piano quartets written by Fauré, it is understandably one of his most popular chamber works, and has four movements.

I *Allegro molto moderato* There are the usual two main themes, the first an energetic, jerky C minor melody and the second, much gentler and yearning. With the movement following the regular pattern of sonata form, the development soon emerges, and a rather dream-like, lazy summer-afternoonish mood establishes itself. A linking section, moving through several keys, eventually leads to the recapitulation of the opening theme, back in C minor. A gentle coda ends the movement.

II *Scherzo: allegro vivo* This playful scherzo is one of those moments in Fauré when some virtuoso playing is called for. The piano's first theme is introduced by some pizzicato strings, in a lively 6/8 rhythm, in E flat major. This all bounces along happily until a rising 'kangaroo-jump' theme appears on the piano - all of which is then developed, leading into a Trio which doesn't really sound very different in mood. Things are rounded off by the reappearance of the ideas heard in the opening scherzo.

III *Adagio* Some sadness seems to permeate this C minor movement – remember that broken-off engagement? *'It is a movement striking for its unsettled, lachrymose air, which Fauré prolongs through a combination of frustrated harmonic progressions and ascending melodic fragments.'* The critic Stephen Johnson puts it well, saying that the movement *'...gives the listener more than a hint of sadness at the recent events... though the emotion is always nobly restrained, with not even the slightest hint of self-indulgence.'*

IV *Allegro molto* Back again in C minor, in an energetic finale which is so structurally complicated that I think the time has come to end technical notes and let you sit back and revel in this Gallic high romance, played so beautifully by these four super musicians.

Requiem Op 66

David Popper (1843-1913)

Though I am only too aware that I am writing for musically cultured cognoscenti, I nevertheless would lay a small bet that, like me, not many of you are familiar with David Popper or his music. (OK. Don't all shout at once!)

David Popper was born in Prague in 1843 into a musical family, the son of the city's Cantor. As a young man, he studied cello at the Prague Conservatory under the eminent German teacher Julius Goltermann, and within a few years had established a reputation as one of the finest cellists of his day. As soloist he toured the great European capitals for over thirty years – not unlike Franz Liszt, with whose life Popper's seems to have been closely linked. His first real position (as chamber virtuoso at the Court of Prince Freidrich von Hohenzollen) was obtained through the agency of the conductor Hans von Bulow, Liszt's son-in-law; in 1872 he married a pupil of Liszt, Sophie Mentor, reputedly the greatest woman pianist of her age, with whom Popper formed a duo partnership; it was in the year of Liszt's death in 1896 that this marriage was dissolved; finally, in 1896, Popper settled in Budapest to teach at the Conservatory that Liszt had established there.

Through his great travels and burgeoning reputation he became acquainted with nearly all the leading composers of the day, including Wagner, Bruckner, Schumann and Brahms. He developed an equally fine reputation as a teacher, and his book of 40 cello studies – ‘High School of Cello Playing’ – is still even today familiar to advanced cello students. His many compositions included four cello concertos (rarely heard now) and numerous salon pieces, mainly for cello and piano.

This evening’s poignant work, his Op 66 Requiem, originally written for three cellos and orchestra, was first performed in London in 1891 and dedicated to his good friend and first publisher Daniel Rahter. Thought by many to be his most moving work, it is full of gorgeous flowing lines (both melancholic and elegiac) and intense climaxes. Each instrument is generously granted its solo opportunities, with its full tonal range fully exploited. The general sound world recalls the harmonic sphere of Brahms, highly expressive yet conservative, with key explorations usually closely related. It is marked ‘Andante sostenuto’, and is constructed around three discernible sections – the first, in F sharp minor, the second in B flat major, and then a return to the original key and material of the opening.

Sicilienne Op. 78 arr. for flute, strings and piano ***Fauré***

To close, the third of Fauré’s contributions, and one of his most popular short works, perhaps most often heard in its cello and piano guise.

This Op 78 was composed originally (1893) as part of the incidental music for a production of Molière’s play *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, but sadly the theatre folded before the play ran and so the music remained unheard. Five years later Fauré, determined not to waste everything, extracted from the score just one short piece, which he then re-cycled twice: first, as part of the incidental music for a production of Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and later as this evening’s *Sicilienne*. It was dedicated to the English cellist William Henry Squire, then a member of the famous Queen’s Hall Orchestra.

Programme notes: Christopher Symons

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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 30th 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 20th 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 20th 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

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