

Spring Concert



Saturday 25th March 2023

Deddington Church

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Banbury Chamber Orchestra

Concert

Sunday 14th May 2023

The Italian Girl in Algiers Overture – Rossini

Triple Concerto – Beethoven

Symphony No. 4 “Italian” - Mendelssohn

4.00 p.m. – Deddington Church

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Summer Concert

Saturday 8th July 2023

Froissart Overture - Elgar

Konzertstück - Schumann

Symphony No. 4 – Bruckner

7.30 p.m. – St Mary’s Church, Banbury

Tickets from

www.banburysymphony.com

Programme

Norwegian Rhapsody No. 1 – Halvorsen

1. Springar
2. I went so lately to my bed
3. Halling - Springar

A Hero's Song – Dvořák

Interval

Symphony in E minor "Gaelic" – Amy Beach

- I – Allegro con fuoco
- II – Alla siciliana – allegro vivace
- III – Lento con molto espressione
- IV – Allegro di molto

Welcome to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul

I am delighted that the orchestra will present three works tonight which I feel deserve to be much better known, particularly the fantastic Gaelic Symphony by Amy Beach.

We open with Johan Halvorsen's Norwegian Rhapsody No. 1, composed in 1919. He was a friend of Grieg, and, like Grieg, his music is full of Norwegian folk melodies.

Following this, you will hear the little-known symphonic poem A Hero's Life, composed by Dvořák in 1897 towards the end of his life.

We conclude with the Symphony in E minor ("Gaelic") by Amy Beach, composed in 1894, just one year after Dvořák's symphony "From the New World" (also in E minor) was premiered in New York. It is a piece full of memorable tunes and romantic harmonies, showing influences of both Dvořák and Wagner.

Although, like Halvorsen, Beach's music was generally forgotten after her death in 1944, her music has been increasingly rediscovered and appreciated since the 1990s.

I hope you enjoy our concert!

Dave Settle

Chair, Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Paul Willett – Conductor

Paul Willett is our Conductor and Musical Director. Paul studied violin, singing and piano as a student but his main instrument was the French horn on which he gained his Performance Diploma from The Royal College of Music at the age of 16. He then went on to read music on scholarship at The Queen's College, Oxford, and studied for his teaching certificate in Music and Physical Education at Reading University.

For several years Paul combined teaching and freelance playing. He has given solo recitals and performed concertos throughout the country. He was a member of The Five Winds, a group that performed both at home and abroad, and also on BBC radio. Paul worked as a brass teacher for Oxfordshire Music Service and was director of a Saturday Music School of 200 students.

Paul was the Director of Didcot Sixth Form and whilst he is now mostly retired to concentrate on his music making and being a 'stay-at-home' dad to his son Alfie, he has continued working as part-time Deputy Headteacher at Didcot Girls' School.



Anna Fleming - Leader



Anna was born in South Africa where she started playing the violin at the age of ten. While studying music at secondary school, Anna became a member of the South African National Youth Orchestra. After successfully completing her music degree, majoring in orchestral studies, Anna joined the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992.

Anna moved to England in late 1996. Keen to continue her orchestral playing, Anna joined the Banbury Symphony Orchestra in 1997 and became the leader of the orchestra in 2000, a post that she has held ever since. As a committed Christian, Anna plays an active role in church music. Focusing primarily on private violin tuition, Anna particularly enjoys helping adults to learn to play and she can be contacted on 01295 780017.

Norwegian Rhapsody No. 1

Johan Halvorsen

With his friends and colleagues Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen, Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935) is regarded as one of the leading figures in Norwegian music at the turn of the twentieth century. In his youth, Halvorsen was primarily known as a violinist: he frequently played as a soloist, served as concertmaster, and also taught violin.



From the 1890s, however, he made his reputation as a conductor, directing the orchestra of the National Theatre in Christiania (Oslo). Composition was in some ways an afterthought, and Halvorsen only began composing after his appointment to the Helsinki Music Institute in 1889.

A Hero's Song

Antonín Dvořák

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) composed *A Hero's Song*, Op. 111 after returning from America. This composition capped

off his creative period dedicated to programmatic music. After the symphonic poems *The Water Goblin*, *The Noon Witch*, *The Golden Spinning Wheel*, and *The Wild Dove*, which were composed in 1896 based on ballads from the collection *A Bouquet* by Karel Jaromír Erben, Dvořák went on to write *A Hero's Song* between August and October 1897.

The premiere of the symphonic poem took place a year later in Vienna with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Gustav Mahler. At Mahler's invitation, Dvořák was able to be present at not only the premiere of the work, but also the rehearsals. According to a period report by the critic Eduard Hanslick, the public was enthusiastic about Dvořák's composition: "*A Hero's Song*, inspired by true talent and created with superb technique, will certainly triumph everywhere", wrote Hanslick. "The success in Vienna is promising for such expectations. This very difficult work, played in a stirring manner under Mahler's direction, created a powerful impression. The composer was in attendance, and the tempestuous applause compelled him to go on stage repeatedly to take a bow in acknowledgement of his success."

There was another performance of *A Hero's Song* in November 1899 in Berlin, and that December Dvořák himself conducted it in Budapest. *A Hero's Song* is Dvořák's last symphonic poem

and his last orchestral composition. Thanks to its title and content dealing with a hero as subject matter, comparisons with the *Symphonie fantastique* by Hector Berlioz or the symphonic poem *Ein Heldenleben* by Richard Strauss suggest themselves.

Dvořák described the programme as follows: “What naturally came to mind was more like a spiritual hero, an artist, so I think the hero is suggested by the very first theme. It expresses energy, resolve, and strength (*Molto vivace*). The second theme (*Adagio, quasi marcia*) in B flat minor introduces pain, lamentation etc.; D flat major indicates hope, solace etc. Then comes the first struggle. The E major passage in 2/4 time brings new joy and hope in a happier future; at the end come the storm and the final victory of the idea.”.

It has only been heard once at the Prague Spring Festival, at the historic inaugural event in 1946.



Symphony in E minor

“Gaelic”

Amy Beach

An homage to the composer’s ancestral heritage, this was the first symphony by an American woman to be published and performed by a major symphony orchestra.

Amy Beach is a groundbreaking figure in the world of classical music. She was the first woman to have a symphony staged by a major orchestra, and her music was widely performed and acclaimed both in the U.S. and in Europe — a rarity for American composers of the 19th century.

Beach was prodigiously gifted as a child. Before the age of 2, she could sing and harmonize numerous songs, and by age 4 she was playing the piano and composing. She studied piano with her mother and gave her debut recital in 1883 at the age of 16; within that same year, her first compositions were published. The groundwork was laid for Beach to grow into a highly successful concert pianist, but the restrictions of society and the expectations that a woman’s place is in the home held too much sway, and her parents would not support a professional career path for their daughter. Instead, Beach was married at the age of 18 to Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a prominent Boston surgeon who was 25 years her senior.



MRS. H. H. A. BEACH

As was the norm during this time, Henry became an authority figure to Amy and limited her public performances to an annual recital for charity. He did, however, approve of her compositions and allowed them to be published under her new name, Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.

For a woman who had no formal education in orchestration and composition (her husband did not approve of her having a tutor), Beach's success and prolific range is remarkable. Her Mass in E-flat was premiered by the Handel and Haydn Society, and she performed her own piano concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which

was enthusiastically received. Her popularity within the local music scene garnered her entrance into a group of composers known as the Boston Six, which included George Chadwick, Arthur Foote and Edward MacDowell. This group was greatly influenced by the traditions of German Romantic music, and their work reflected the development of an American classical style that paid tribute to Europe while still standing on its own as distinctly "new world."

It wasn't until she was widowed at age 43 that Beach revived her performing career, embarking on concert tours within the U.S. and traveling to Europe to present her compositions. She spent the remainder of her life based in New York City and Cape Cod, often spending summers composing at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. Upon her death in 1944, over 300 of Beach's compositions had been published.

The "Gaelic" Symphony established Beach as a preeminent American composer and proved the legitimacy of her talents in a male-dominated profession. The work is unique in that it is the first symphony by an American composer to use folk songs as thematic material. Beach was heavily influenced by Dvořák, who was teaching in America at the time. He advocated for a style of nationalistic music that used songs from Native American traditions as sources. Beach adapted this idea to her belief

that composers should look to their own heritage for inspiration. Thus, she chose tunes from the British Isles, the home of her ancestors, to include in her symphony.

Beach's original song about a turbulent sea voyage, titled "Dark is the Night," is used for much of the first movement's material. The opening bars clearly depict the swirl of the ocean, with the strings and winds building in excitement from the depths of the orchestra and bursting forth like a crashing wave in the brass section. Later, an Irish jig is passed through the woodwinds in a moment of quiet before the drama builds again. The music is richly orchestrated throughout this movement and establishes the traditional romantic nature found in the following movements.

The second movement introduces several Gaelic themes, the first of which is an Irish tune played by the solo oboe, accompanied by a woodwind chorale rich in harmonies. The strings enter seamlessly before taking off in a more boisterous spirit. Woodwinds and horns puncture the rollicking texture in staggered solos before the horn signals a return to the opening tempo and woodwind dance-like melodies. The brisk and brief return of the Allegro theme in the strings, with a final flute flourish, finishes the movement with humor and grace.

Beach wrote that the third movement conveys "the laments ... romance and ... dreams" of the Irish people. Though she was not Irish herself, this sentiment was a bold statement at the time. The large Irish immigrant community in Boston faced considerable discrimination and hostility, especially among the city's elite class, of which Beach had married into, and empathizing with these refugees was frowned upon in her social circle. This movement is made up of two sections, each with its own Irish theme. The lyrical violin solo soars in a short, impassioned cadenza, followed by a heartfelt cello solo. A sense of melancholy and nostalgia infuse the melodies throughout this movement.

The final Allegro di molto is triumphant and dramatic, harking back to the energy and melody of the symphony's opening bars. The pulsing syncopation in the strings builds tension while the winds and brass enter in a jaunty manner before the orchestra joins in a dramatic flourish. The second theme is slower and full of pathos, marked by expressive melodic leaps reminiscent of Irish tunes. Beach wrote that this movement was about the Celtic people, "their sturdy daily life, their passions and battles." This sentiment is evident in every note of the exuberant, joyous and dramatic finale.

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

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Joining the Orchestra

If you play an instrument to a standard of Grade 7 or above and would like to play with the orchestra, find out more by contacting Anna Fleming on 01295 780017.

All rehearsals take place in Banbury in term time on Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30 pm.

