

Spring Concert



Saturday 16th March 2024

Deddington Church

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Chamber Concert

Sunday 19th May 2024

Elgar – *Serenade for Strings*

Dvořák – *Serenade for Wind*

Louise Farrenc – *Symphony No.3*

4.00 pm – Hook Norton Church

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Summer Concert

Saturday 6th July 2024

Vítězslava Kaprálová – *Suita Rustica Op.19*

Stravinsky – *Suite 'The Firebird'*

Florence Price – *Symphony No.1 in E minor*

7.30 p.m. – St Mary's Church, Banbury

Tickets from

www.banburysymphony.com

Programme

Ethel Smyth – *Overture ‘The Wreckers’*

Dvořák – *American Suite*

- I Andante con moto
- II Allegro
- III Moderato (alla polacca)
- IV Andante
- V Allegro

Interval

Leokadiya Kashperova – *Symphony in B minor*

- I Andante – Allegro risoluto – Andante
- II Allegretto scherzando - Presto
- III Andante
- IV Finale. Andante sostenuto – Molto allegro - Largo

I am delighted to welcome you again to the church of St Peter and St Paul in Deddington for the first concert of our 2024 season.

For this season, we have decided to introduce a theme of female composers into our programming, and so each concert this year will include at least one work composed by a woman. Looking back on the history of all the pieces that the orchestra has performed since it was formed in 1962, I was somewhat surprised to find that the first time that we performed a piece by woman composer was in 2022, so this theme is certainly not overdue. It has certainly been an opportunity for us to uncover works which although they are not so well known, are nevertheless of very high quality.

In this concert, we are performing two such works, which are certainly new to the orchestra and may well be unfamiliar to you too: Dame Ethel Smyth's overture to her opera *The Wreckers*, set in a Cornish fishing village bent on murder, and Leokadiya Kashperova's *Symphony in B minor*, recently rediscovered in Russian archives by Dr Graham Griffiths.

The overture to *The Wreckers* covers a wide range of emotions: sections depicting the storms driving ships onto the rocks, love scenes between the protagonists, and music showing the villagers determined to murder the crews and anyone trying to help them. I think it's a very dramatic piece, and I certainly hope that you like it.

After the overture, we will be performing Dvořák's *American Suite*, orchestrated by Dvořák from a composition originally for piano, and

which like much of his music is full of invention and good tunes.

Kashperova's *Symphony in B minor*, in the second half, is a symphony composed in the Russian romantic style following Tchaikovsky, and on quite a grand scale. The symphony is full of originality, good humour, with tunes developed in beautiful colours and rich harmonies, and is quite simply a great symphony. Given how lovely it is, it's astonishing that it was entirely unknown until a few years ago.

I do hope that you enjoy listening to this mix of the new and the more familiar, and we look forward to seeing you at our chamber concert in May.

Dave Settle,

Chair, Banbury Symphony Orchestra

chair@banburysymphony.org



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 part-time at Didcot Girls' School where he was Deputy Headteacher for many years.

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.



Dame Ethel Smyth

Overture 'The Wreckers'

Ethel Smyth led a colourful life as a composer, suffragette, radiologist and author, achieving some notable firsts: her opera *The Forest* was the first by a woman to be staged by the Metropolitan Opera House in New York; she was the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate in music from Oxford University; and she became the first female composer to be awarded a damehood.

Born in Kent into a wealthy family, Smyth overcame parental disapproval to study music in Leipzig, where she mingled with the likes of Brahms, Dvořák, Clara Schumann and Tchaikovsky, being described by the latter as “one of the few women composers whom one can seriously consider to be achieving something valuable in the field of musical creation”.

On her return to England in 1890, she concentrated on composing operas, writing six in total. The first three - *Fantasio*, *The Forest* and *The Wreckers* - were completed by 1904, with the third having been inspired by a Cornish walking holiday some years beforehand. She recounted in her memoirs how the holiday had suffused her with “impressions of that strange world of more than a hundred years ago; the plundering of ships lured on to the rocks by falsification or extinction of the coast



lights... and with it all the ingrained religiosity of the Celtic population of that barren promontory”.

This overture, one of her best known works, captures how Smyth imagined that strange world. The stormy opening gives way to a calm, nautical atmosphere where the winds and strings take turns to develop a lilting melody. The music then becomes more agitated and the storm returns, although this time it is followed by a triumphant anthem full of Elgarian pomp, before the overture reaches its exuberant conclusion.

Antonin Dvořák

American Suite

Dvořák's American Suite remains virtually unknown. And yet it is a product of Dvorak's 1892 prophecy that "Negro melodies" would foster a great "school of American music."

In nineteenth century classical music, the composer as tourist is a familiar phenomenon. Italy was a favourite destination. Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky, among others, composed famous keyboard and symphonic works on themes of gondolas and the Italian Alps, Giotto and Michelangelo. But Tchaikovsky's Capriccio Italien, with its Roman carnival, still sounds like Tchaikovsky. The Italian Symphony, with its tarantella finale, is vintage Mendelssohn.

One of the strangest and most intriguing chapters in Western musical history features a composer whose adaptations to the New World were more than touristic – who "became American." I am certainly not thinking of Arnold Schoenberg or Igor Stravinsky, both of whom became American citizens without relinquishing their prior artistic identities. Rather, I have in mind are Antonin Dvořák, whose American dates are 1892 to 1895.

It's popularly understood that Dvořák composed his New World Symphony (1893) in New York, and that the Largo's



English horn tune was inspired by African-American spirituals. Much less well known is that a central source of inspiration was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* – or that the Scherzo of Dvořák's symphony sets "*Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*" as a virtual tone poem. If "*From the New World*" is Dvořák's most popular symphony, his most popular chamber work is the American String Quartet, redolent of the Iowa prairie he made his home during the summer of 1893.

But to fully grasp the American Dvořák, the piece to know is not known. It is the American Suite, Op. 98, composed in New York in 1894 for solo piano and orchestrated by the composer the same year. As it postdates both "*From the New World*" and the American Quartet, it comprises a more comprehensive

snapshot of Dvořák's vivid New World impressions.

The main reason we are not aware of this music is that for decades Czech and British Dvořák scholars denigrated it as inscrutable and insipid – and so it is, unless its Americanisms are recognized. That they were not was illustrated to me when I met a Czech pianist who had long played the American Suite in complete innocence that Dvořák very obviously imitates a banjo. I can also remember reading an album note for a Nonesuch recording in which an American music critic, influenced by extant scholarship, off-handedly acknowledged that Dvořák's Op. 98 was not identifiably "American."

What does the American Suite sound like? Well, the finale begins with an American Indian dance punctuated – like the New World Symphony Scherzo -- by ankle bracelets (a triangle) and tom-toms (timpani). When this A minor dance modulates to A major, it becomes a minstrel song (and Dvořák in Iowa saw Native American and African-American entertainers singing and dancing together). The slow movement portrays the desolate Iowa prairie, which Dvořák called "sad to despair." There is also a movement that features in sequence a jaunty cakewalk, an aching plantation song, and an elegiac "American Indian" refrain redolent of the vanishing Noble Savage. The suite's five movements are framed by big skies and wide horizons.

In other words, you can hear something like Stephen Foster, Scott Joplin, and Jerome Kern's Show Boat in the American Suite. It also connects with the lyric sweep of Mark Twain's Mississippi River, animated with piquant waterfront detail. And it aligns with American genre painters like Asher Durand and George Caleb Bingham.

Even if Dvořák had not been hired to direct New York's National Conservatory with a mandate to help American composers find an American voice, he was at all times predisposed (as he told New York reporters) to "prick his ear" to the daily sounds of his environs. No sooner did he return to Prague than he reverted to a "Bohemian" style mated to Bohemian folklore.

In truth, Dvořák deserves to be ranked with de Tocqueville as a unique outside observer of the American experience. His precise findings tell us a lot about what most distinguished the United States from Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.

Equally revealing is the manner in which Americans reacted to Dvořák's findings, and to his accurate prophecy that "Negro melodies" would found a "great school" of American music. In New York City, then as now a city of immigrants, Dvořák's compassion for the Indian and the former slave was taken to heart; the discourse on race and culture was remarkably egalitarian. In Boston, the same discourse insisted upon racial

hierarchies. In the Boston press, Dvořák was classified as a “barbarian” Slav. His influence on American composers was denounced as that of a “negrophile.”



Leokadiya Kashperova

The return of a name

The name of the Russian pianist, composer and teacher Leokadiya Kashperova has only recently become known in the West, thanks to Dr. Graham Griffiths, a researcher at City University London who studied the music of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971). Kashperova turned out to be Stravinsky's piano teacher. According to Stravinsky's own statement, it was she who not only taught him excellent piano technique,

but also gave him a "sense of *métier*" or a sense of craft.

Leokadiya Kashperova had the chance for a brilliant career after graduating from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In fact, Kashperova soon achieved considerable success as a concert pianist and a brilliant, original interpreter of music by Russian and European composers. Her own compositions form a considerable oeuvre, including a symphony in B minor, op. 4 (1905), but also a piano concerto in A minor, op. 2 (1900, lost), choral compositions and a

number of chamber music works. She also tried her hand as a conductor.

Contemporaries appreciated Kashperova as a mature personality “capable of... captivating her listeners.” Many noted her “masculine energy” and “determined, strong-willed character.”

In 1907 Kashperova undertook her only European tour with concerts in Berlin, Leipzig and London. In Berlin, the orchestra performed their piano concerto and symphony under the direction of August Max Fiedler (a German conductor, composer and pianist, 1859-1939). The further development of her musical career was complicated by her marriage to Sergei Andropov, a military engineer close to revolutionary circles, in 1916 and by the tumultuous events of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The new Soviet regime considered their compositions uninteresting.

Kashperova's only symphony, which has a clearly romantic character with themes in the style of Russian national folk traditions, can be considered her main work and the pinnacle of her creativity.

The Swiss connection:

“A Monsieur Max Neuscheller”

The symphony is dedicated to the entrepreneur Maximilian (Max) Josef Othmar Neuscheller (approx. 1859 – 1919), who was born in Switzerland (Canton of Graubünden, Chur). As a

businessman in the rubber goods industry, he was co-owner of the “Russian-American Rubber Manufactory” in St. Petersburg. Neuscheller was an art patron, collector and a close friend of the famous jeweler Carl Fabergé. Although no direct evidence was found, Neuscheller was most likely among those who financially supported Kashperova.

After the October Revolution of 1917 he was arrested as a “capitalist and exploiter”. The great writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) himself appealed to Lenin (1870-1924) at the request of the workers in his rubber factory to free Neuscheller because he was an “honest employer”. He was eventually released.

Programme note with many thanks to
Dr Elena Shchapova and Martina Rivola of
Medizinerorchester, Bern.

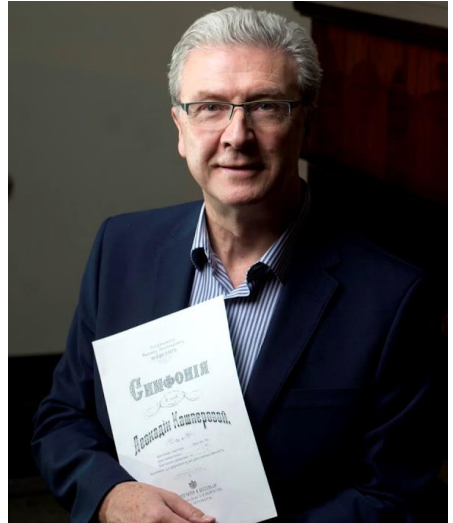
Symphony in B minor

The Symphony in B minor of 1905 is Kashperova's grandest composition. Testimony to her originality is that the work illustrates her enthusiasm not only for the Russian symphonic tradition but also that of central Europe. Indeed, upon hearing the work one commentator has likened the experience to being transported down the Danube and up the Rhine. In the Symphony her instinct for instrumental timbre and subtle combinations extends to every section of the orchestra. The work is full of wonderful solos for woodwinds and brass, and it reveals many effective and original 'chamber ensembles' from within the symphonic palette, the first movement's cello solo to the accompaniment of horn quartet being a memorable example. Equally notable is Kashperova's exploitation of the extremities of register, which is also a characteristic of the piano writing in her chamber music and art-songs. In the slow introduction, the violins reach higher than one expects at such an early moment, with delightfully expressive results; whilst the *Andante's* closing bars plunge ever deeper, possibly reflecting the impact of the final bars of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. Yet, Kashperova's uplifting *Finale (Molto allegro)* emphatically does not follow this script. On the contrary, the modest 'folk tune' (*Andante sostenuto*) which heralds this final journey is transformed

in the closing bars into triumphant life-assertion. The whole orchestra, as it were, lights up the vast sky of the Russian hinterland in a sustained and iridescent sunset of blazing colour and majesty.

Dr Graham Griffiths, who rediscovered the symphony, sends the following message to the orchestra.

"I send my most cordial greetings to all present at tonight's very special and rare presentation. Most especially, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and thanks to all the members of the Banbury Symphony Orchestra and their inspirational conductor for their dedication and selfless contribution to the restoration of Kashperova's name. I salute the vital contribution they are playing this evening in the long-awaited return of Kashperova's beautiful music to the concert stage."



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