

Spring Concert



Saturday 26 March 2022

Deddington Church

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Banbury Chamber Orchestra

Sunday 22nd May 2022

Symphony No. 6 – Schubert

Suite for Thirteen Winds – Strauss

Coriolan Overture - Beethoven

3.30 pm – St Peter's Church, Hook Norton

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Summer Nights Concert

Saturday 9th July 2022

Concierto de Aranjuez – Rodrigo

Soloist – Craig Ogden

Summer Evening – Delius

Symphony No. 9 ('From the New World') - Dvorak

7.30 pm – St Mary's Church, Banbury

Tickets from

banburysymphony.com

Welcome to St. Peter and St. Paul Parish Church, Deddington

It's lovely to have you in the audience for the Banbury Symphony Orchestra's Spring concert.

We'll play three major romantic orchestral works from the late 19th century and early 20th centuries, **Humperdinck's 'Hansel & Gretel' Overture**, **Tchaikovsky's 'Tempest' Symphonic Fantasia** and the **Second Symphony** by **Jean Sibelius**.

It has been impossible to ignore recent calamitous world events as we approach our concert. Perhaps then it is fitting that we are performing one of Jean Sibelius' most heart-felt nationalistic works as our closing piece. It was written at a time when Finland's Russian masters were seeking to restrict Finnish language and culture, and was interpreted by the public as a 'Symphony of Independence'. Finland subsequently gained independence from Russia in 1917.

Whatever the true meaning of Sibelius' masterwork, we dedicate our performance tonight to the strength of the human spirit and the principle of national self-determination.

Ian McCubbin
Chair, BSO

Programme

Prelude to *Hansel and Gretel* – Humperdinck

The Tempest – Tchaikovsky

Interval

Symphony No. 2 – Sibelius

I - Allegretto

II – Tempo andante, ma rubato

III - Vivacissimo

IV – Finale – Allegro Moderato

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, until recently, the Director of Didcot Sixth Form. He is now retired to concentrate on his music making and being a 'stay-at-home' dad to his son Alfie.



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.

Prelude to *Hänsel and Gretel*

Engelbert Humperdinck

Engelbert Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* began as a family entertainment. In 1890, Humperdinck – then teaching at the Cologne Conservatory – was approached by his sister, who had a simple request: would the composer furnish four simple choruses from Grimm's fairy-tale *Hänsel und Gretel* for a production she planned to give with her children? The composer agreed, and the choruses turned out to be such a success that Humperdinck was encouraged to expand them, eventually transforming what had begun as a family project into a full three-act opera. The premiere of *Hänsel und Gretel*, conducted by Richard Strauss in Weimar on December



23, 1893, was such a success that the opera had 72 separate productions in its first year alone, and it has remained an audience favourite.

To introduce the opera, Humperdinck composed not an overture but a prelude based on themes that will be heard later in the opera. At the 1893 premiere, the parts for this prelude had not arrived in time, so that first performance took place without any musical introduction, but the prelude has since proven so attractive that it has had a life of its own in the concert hall.

Everyone notes the influence of Wagner on this music, which is not surprising, given Humperdinck's admiration for that composer and their close association: Wagner had invited Humperdinck to Bayreuth to assist with the premiere of *Parsifal* in 1881. Just as *Parsifal* begins with a prayer, so too does *Hänsel und Gretel*, the soft chorale-like melody of the "Evening Prayer" striking just the right tone for this fairy-tale opera. Horns and bassoons sing this noble melody, which is quickly taken up and expanded by the strings. There follows a sequence of themes taken from the opera – a stirring trumpet call, music associated with sorcery and folk dances – and Humperdinck treats these attractive ideas to some deft contrapuntal development.

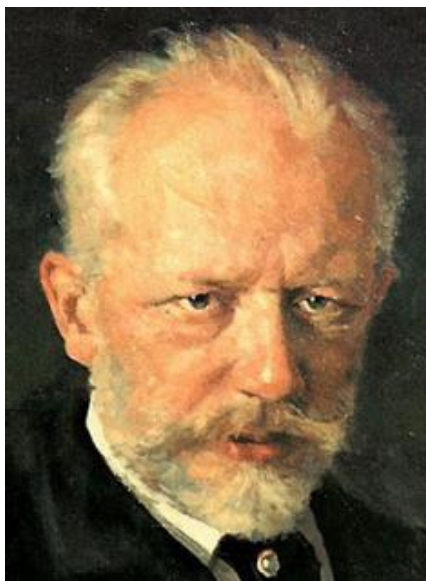
This music almost glows with its innocence and peaceful spirit – perhaps

this is one of the reasons the opera is often produced at Christmas time – and eventually the prelude draws to a quiet close on fragments of the opening prayer.

The Tempest

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Shakespeare was the impetus through which Tchaikovsky first found his true voice as a composer, via the “fantasy-overture” based on *Romeo and Juliet*, composed in 1869. A few years later, in 1873, he turned again to the playwright for another broadly sweeping orchestral work – this time a “symphonic fantasia” modelled loosely on *The Tempest*. As with *Romeo and Juliet*, his imagination was sparked by selective elements within the play, while others are



ignored wholesale. Tchaikovsky was drawn in particular to two aspects for musical evocation: the seascape surrounding Prospero’s island and the love that blossoms between Miranda and Ferdinand. Intermingled with these are portrayals of Ariel, Prospero, and Caliban. Structurally, the piece plays out as a freely associating fantasia.

The critic Vladimir Stassov, one of Tchaikovsky’s artistic father figures, suggested the following basic program as an outline for the composer: “The sea. Ariel, spirit of the air, raising a tempest at the bidding of the magician Prospero. Ferdinand’s ship sinks. The enchanted island. The first shy awakening of love between Miranda and Ferdinand. Ariel. Caliban. The young couple’s love grows to overwhelming passion. Prospero renounces his magic powers and quits the island. The sea.”

A lengthy slow introduction sets the scene with melancholy minor arpeggiations in strings and far-ranging horn calls. Tchaikovsky’s placid sea shimmers with an almost proto-Minimalist sheen. Ariel emerges with rapid flickerings in high winds. The music quickens into a glorious, chorale-like brass fanfare that signals Prospero’s majesty and awesome power to work up the very elements. This is exactly what happens as Tchaikovsky gives us another face of the sea: a roll of the timpani lets loose the storm’s furious

energy. Against surging strings, the brass graphically splinter the horn call theme from the opening into pieces and the survivors land on the island.

For the love music – which occupies a good part of *The Tempest's* thematic content – Tchaikovsky adheres to the strategy which had proved so successful in his earlier Shakespearean venture (indeed, the music's yearning at times echoes the famous *Romeo and Juliet* love theme). We first hear a subdued version of the music in a tenderly shy awareness of emotion. Its sprawling melody emerges in a series of hesitant statements that also contain questions. Much of the pleasure here comes from the varied ways in which Tchaikovsky orchestrates the love music – just as we think we've encountered its fullest expression, he outdoes it with an even more grandiose set of romantic gestures.

Meanwhile a scherzo-like interlude interrupts the young lovers: an especially elfin variant of Ariel's music is contrasted with the elephantine, clumsy music for Caliban in low strings, which leads into a busy polyphonic detour and recall of the storm and shipwreck music. Finally, following the most extravagant triumph of the love theme, Prospero inserts his powerful presence once again in the brass fanfare. Tchaikovsky immediately deflates its pomposity with a ghostly fade to correspond to the magician's renunciation of magic,

returning us in a circle to the sea's lonely beauty, as if untouched by all the illusions that have transpired.

Symphony No. 2

Jean Sibelius

In March 1900, a couple of months before the first European concert tour of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Sibelius received a letter signed by "X." X inquired whether Sibelius had considered writing an overture for the concert at the World's Fair in Paris. He reminded Sibelius of Anton Rubinstein's fantasy *Rossija* (Russia) written for the 1889 World's Fair and declared: "The name of your overture should be Finlandia – shouldn't it?" It was Mr. X, alias Baron Axel Carpelan, who invented the name of one of Sibelius' most well-known compositions.

Later the same year Sibelius received another letter: "You have been sitting at home for quite a while, Mr. Sibelius, it is high time for you to travel. You will spend the late autumn and the winter in Italy, a country where one learns cantabile, balance and harmony, plasticity and symmetry of lines, a country where everything is beautiful – even the ugly. You remember what Italy meant for Tchaikovsky's development and for Richard Strauss."

Unfortunately, Baron Carpelan was penniless. He had connections, though,



and he managed to find a patron who consented to supply funds for Sibelius'

stay in Italy. Sibelius with family left home in October 1900, stayed first for two months in Berlin and continued from there to Italy at the end of January 1901. He hired a mountain villa near Rapallo. Sitting there in his study a literary remembrance suddenly came to his mind: "Jean Paul says somewhere in *Flegeljahre* that the midday moment has something ominous to it ... a kind of muteness, as if nature itself is breathlessly listening to the stealthy footsteps of something supernatural, and at that very moment one feels a greater need for company than ever."

This image continued to haunt him and he wrote on a sheet of paper the following vision: "Don Juan. Sitting in the twilight in my castle, a guest enters.

I ask many times who he is. – No answer. I make an effort to entertain him. He remains mute. Eventually he starts singing. At this time, Don Juan notices who he is – Death." On the reverse side of the sheet he noted the date 19/2/01 and sketched the melody that became the D-minor bassoon theme of the *Tempo andante, ma rubato* second movement of the Second Symphony. Two months later, in Florence, he drafted a C-major theme above which he wrote the word 'Christus.' This theme became the second theme, in F-sharp major, of the same movement. The former may well stand for death and defeat and the latter for life and resurrection.

There is no evidence of eventual programmatic ideas related to the other movements of the Second Symphony. But immediately after its premiere on March 8, 1902, the Symphony was appropriated as an emblem of national liberation. The hard times the Grand Duchy of Finland was going through during the 'russification program' of Tsar Nikolai II in the years 1899-1905 spontaneously invited such an interpretation. But it was Robert Kajanus, founder and conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, who put it in words: "The Andante strikes one as the most broken-hearted protest against all the injustice that threatens at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent. ... The scherzo gives a picture of frenetic

preparation. Everyone piles his straw on the haystack, all fibers are strained and every second seems to last an hour. One senses in the contrasting trio section with its oboe motive in G-flat major what is at stake. The finale develops towards a triumphant conclusion intended to rouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future.”

Sibelius categorically denied any such programmatic readings, claiming that

his symphonies are pure absolute music. Nevertheless, there are scholars who firmly believe in the Symphony’s political connotations. The controversy, however, is not very productive, since it cannot be solved; and even if there was a secret program in the composer’s mind at the time he composed the Symphony, the reception of it as a work of art does not require any knowledge of it.

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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 9:30pm.

