

SAINT-SAËNS 1835–1921

Le Carnaval des Animaux

Introduction et Marche royale du Lion; Poules et Coqs; Hémiones; Tortues; L'Éléphant; Kangourous; Aquarium; Personnages à longues oreilles; Le Coucou au fond du bois; Volière; Pianistes; Fossiles; Le Cygne; Final.

With the exception of *Le Cygne*, Saint-Saëns never intended this *Grande Fantasia Zoologique* to be published; it was written in 1886 simply as a relaxation and intended for private performance with friends. He did not value this *jeu d'esprit*, very highly, fearing it would harm his reputation as a serious composer, but the posthumous fame it brought him is a tribute to his characterizations which are often obvious, though effective.

This is shown in the imaginative colourings of *Aquarium* and *Volière* though much of the fun in the music derives from thematic quotation. The uncommonly slow pace of *Tortues* is made all the more ludicrous by including the can-can from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* played at a funereal speed on the strings; *L'Éléphant* sounds more ponderous for the reference to Berlioz's delicate *Danse des Sylphes*. *Fossiles* includes 'Baa-baa black sheep' and an aria from Rossini's *Barber of Seville* as well as Saint-Saëns own *Danse Macabre*, chipped out noisily on the xylophone.

After the serene *Le Cygne* the work is rounded off by a lively *Final* in which most of the animals reappear. The first public performance was given in 1922. Among the privileged few to hear the work before then was the composer's friend, Franz Liszt. Since he left no written comments, we can guess his reaction – but then Liszt was known to lack a sense of humour. G.R.T.

Kathryn McDowell and Tom Oakshott *pianos*
Jenny Clough *cello*
Chamber ensemble *directed by* Guy Thomas

Next Concert: Thursday 15th January 1981

STRING ENSEMBLE *led by* MILES BASTER
ST. CECILIA SINGERS *directed by* HERRICK BUNNEY &
KENNETH LEIGHTON *with* HELEN COCHRANE *contralto*;
PAUL HINDMARSH *tenor*; MILES BASTER *violin*

FRANK MARTIN Mass for Double Choir
J.S. BACH Violin Concerto in E
LEIGHTON 'Columba Mea' (The Song of Songs) Op.78

15 pence

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1980–81

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ST. CECILIA SINGERS *directed by*
HERRICK BUNNEY & KENNETH LEIGHTON *with*
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PAUL HINDMARSH *tenor*
MILES BASTER *violin*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 15 January 1981

FRANK MARTIN 1890–1974

Mass for Double Choir

This work was begun in 1922 and laid aside for a period until 1929, the year of its completion. In spite of this apparent hesitation on the part of the composer and its fairly early date, we have here a work of complete mastery which uses the medium of two *a cappella* choirs with impressive resource and great intensity of feeling. It is the first work which shows the spiritual and visionary aspect of the composer's art, and also the only one which was intended for liturgical use.

The style owes not a little to Renaissance polyphony with its smooth soaring lines and use of mixed modes, but the expressive harmonic climaxes and the controlled use of dissonance are the composer's own and point unmistakably to the mature language of later years. Textures are consistently beautiful and full of invention – the product of a 'natural' choral composer – and the various movements may briefly be described as follows.

Kyrie – There are three main sections, the first contrapuntal and using mixed modes, the second homophonic and building up to a fierce climax. The *Christe* introduces a new theme which again accelerates and grows to a final outburst at the return of *Kyrie*. Throughout the movement the word '*Kyrie*' (with its natural rhythm) is isolated as a prime component.

Gloria – A brilliant movement full of contrasts and mostly antiphonal. The quietly declaimed *Agnus Dei* is particularly moving while the more elaborate final section sustains its counterpoint through to an unexpectedly quiet close.

Credo – The problem of setting these words to music is well known to composers, but here Martin succeeds admirably in a constantly changing texture which combines detailed illustration with a surprising overall unity. The quiet entries of *Et resurrexit* and the gradual build up from here to the brilliant ending are particularly noteworthy.

Sanctus & Benedictus – A gently rocking motive begins the *Sanctus* and is gradually expanded into a rich texture. Similarly the *Benedictus* rises from a soft chanting (which accompanies opposed modes) to a brilliant return of the *Hosannas*.

Agnus Dei – The composer's expressive use of simple harmony is particularly in evidence here. Almost throughout the second choir sustains a gently homophonic chant in equal crotchets, while the first choir sings independently and in unison. The melodic line and indeed the whole conception are beautifully sustained through to the final hushed and simple *Dona nobis*

J.S. BACH 1685–1750

Violin Concerto in E BWV 1042

Allegro – Adagio – Allegro assai

solo violin: Miles Baster

INTERVAL

LEIGHTON b. 1929

Columba Mea Op. 78.

Composed mainly during the summer of 1978, and commissioned by the John Currie Singers (with Arts Council funds) this work was first performed in Glasgow in early 1979, and has since been given in Canada and the U.S.A. It is a setting of quite large sections of the Song of Songs and the authorised version was chosen not because of its accuracy, which is often doubtful, but because of the beauty of the language and the power of its associations.

The bride and bridegroom are represented in two major solo parts for contralto and tenor and the whole design is divided into six distinct sections:

1. 'Let him kiss me – a slow introductory setting for women only and mostly soloistic. The opening movement on celesta is of crucial importance in the musical argument.
2. 'I am black – a short aria for contralto solo accompanied mainly by solo viola and harpsichord.
3. 'Behold, thou art fair my love – a more fast-moving dialogue between the men and the women together with the two soloists.
4. 'The voice of my beloved – a jubilant scherzo in which the dialogue gathers energy from the image of 'leaping on the mountains'.
5. 'My beloved is mine and I am his – an aria for contralto solo with an important obligato for solo cello. This culminates with the choral entry illustrating the appearance of the bridegroom.
6. 'How beautiful are thy feet – a second aria for the solo tenor with choral interjections of 'Set me as a seal upon thine heart'.

The latter element eventually culminates in a slow unaccompanied chorale.

K.L.