

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1957—58

Sixth Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader : DR. JOHN FAIRBAIRN
Conductor : SIDNEY NEWMAN

Solo Pianoforte :
MARY GRIERSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 30th JANUARY, 1958
AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. TRAGIC OVERTURE (Op. 81)

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo, leading to
Molto piu moderato, leading to
Tempo primo.

We find the truth of tragedy where the sublime holds truck with the common stuff of the world. The formal conventions of life are merged with the technically formal elements of dramatic art. So it is with this great overture. Both during the course of the work and at its conclusion themes of purely formal significance tie us to earth. But within this formal structure we are made to feel the force of cosmic events in the opening theme, the promise of some mysterious harmony of the universe in the passage that succeeds, and the consolation of the individual heart that the aspiring second theme reveals. We see also in the formal development section tragedy writ small, as though some gentle wretch were made the pathetic parody of the great, as the poor beggar fool in Boris Godounov.

S.T.M.N.

2. PIANOFORTE CONCERTO IN A MAJOR Op. 15

D. F. Tovey
(1875-1940)

Energico
Adagio ma non troppo
Alla marcia, non presto.

This concerto was first performed in 1903, the composer being the soloist and the conductor Sir Henry Wood. But the work was written some years earlier. Tovey mentions it in a letter written in 1895, when he was twenty years old. The work was unfavourably received by most critics, Tovey having antagonised the London press by two seasons of concerts which were in advance of what the public was prepared to tolerate. Stanford however wrote, "A composer who writes a concerto like Tovey's Op. 15 is to be reckoned with."

Though an early work, it displays the same mastery of classical form as does the much later (and longer) 'cello concerto. It does however show a characteristic of the youthful composer in a tendency to thematic austerity, but this is more than compensated by great rhythmic vitality and a poetic feeling for colour.

The pianoforte sets the mood of the first movement with a vigorous opening gesture, which is followed by a grand procession of themes forming the orchestral tutti. These include a broad cantabile (over a persistent drum rhythm) which later becomes the first theme of the second "subject." As the orchestra subsides, the piano re-enters, assertively at first, but quickly yielding to a more lyrical mood leading back to a tranquil version of the opening theme. Thereafter the movement follows the lines of the usual classical exposition. The tutti which closes this merges into the development—the orchestra annexing material from the assertive piano entry. The solo re-enters in gentle conciliatory mood, but events move rapidly and the recapitulation arrives at the height of the climax in a blazing unison. The spacious coda is an apotheosis of some of the main themes.

After the glowing vigour of the first movement, a slow movement of touching pathos (and a wealth of rhythmic complexity) provides the appropriate reaction.

Tovey had a strong sense of humour, relishing both wit and sheer fun and nonsense. So it is quite in character that he ends both his concertos with a humorous rondo. This finale starts with a soft rhythmic figure on trumpets and drums over which appears a theme set aslant the main key. Great play is made with contrapuntal devices, in which Tovey had incredible facility: even the melodic second "subject" cannot move a bar without somebody entering in imitation. The returns of the rondo theme are mysterious, with a horn figure swinging towards the home key and the piano confusing the issue with a soft chromatic scale coiling upwards in major thirds. A short cadenza leads to a riotous coda, whose headlong course is twice checked in quasi-solemnity, but whose high-spirits nothing can quench.

M.G.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY No. 2, IN D MINOR (Op. 70)

Dvorak
(1841-1904)

Allegro maestoso
Scherzo : Vivace
Poco Adagio
Finale : Allegro.

This is one of the great symphonies of musical literature and the highwater mark of Dvorak's symphonic achievement. The numbering is apt to be misleading as to the maturity of the work, and it is as well to emphasise that it is Opus 70, dating from 1885. In fact it was the composer's seventh symphony and not his second. The

first two dating from 1865 remained unpublished, nor were the next two (E flat major, 1870, and D minor, 1873) admitted by Dvorak to the definitive canon of his symphonic works. The F major of 1875 (originally Op. 24) was revised in 1887 and published as Op. 76 taking its place as No. 3. By that time of course the D major of 1880 and this great D minor Symphony had already established themselves as Nos. 1 and 2.

The public who responded so readily to the attractions of the Fourth Symphony in G and the "Symphony from the New World" were slow to recognise the proper worth of this great 'tragic' work, and it may be here recorded as a further tribute to Sir Donald Tovey that he did as much as, possibly more than, anyone in this country to establish this masterpiece in its due place. For a full analysis and appreciation of the work the reader is referred to Tovey's 'programme note' (Essays in Musical Analysis Vol. II).

The quiet circumscribed phrases of sombre colouring with which the work opens nevertheless are charged with a spirit which quickly develops into fiery turbulence with gestures of titanic span. This highly impassioned movement, veering from the tender melody of its second theme to onslaughts of terrific energy, closes at length in the sombre shade in which it had begun. The slow movement, unsurpassed for beauty of colour and of melody from its first moment, extends also over large tracts of varied mood, from moments of profoundly brooding thought to sylvan lyricism and again to majestic grandeur. The third movement transfigures dance rhythms into a scherzo of tragic import. The finale extends the theme of tragedy yet further with passion and vigour, and even moments of quiet respite betray an undercurrent of restless agitation. But the second main theme already broadly proclaims the confidence of triumph and at the last the whole drama is resolved in a truly noble scene.

S.T.M.N