

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1962-63

Second Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: Dr. JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

Solo Violin:

FREDERICK GRINKE

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 1st NOVEMBER, 1962

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. OVERTURE: "FINGAL'S CAVE"

Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

In a letter headed "On one of the Hebrides: August 7, 1829," Mendelssohn wrote home: "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my mind there." He then gives 21 bars of music which approximate very closely to the opening of the overture which he was to complete in Rome in December of the following year and to revise in London in June, 1832, after his travels were over. No "Young Person's Guide to Musical Experience on (or off) the West Coast" is needed by this familiar and ever impressive overture. But those who feel that their notions of Mendelssohn's personality are a bit obscured by Elijah, St. Paul and the Leipzig Conservatoire may care to know that they can find the most deliciously amusing and colourful bedtime reading in the letters which Mendelssohn and his companion, Klingemann, wrote home from Edinburgh, Abbotsford, Bridge of Tummel, the Hebrides and Glasgow, etc.

In the boat off Staffa they experienced much more than modulations rising by thirds—Klingemann recorded that "ladies as a rule fell down like flies, and one or the other gentleman followed their example; I only wish my travelling fellow-sufferer had not been among them, but he is on better terms with the sea as a musician than as an individual or a stomach . . . We were put out in boats and lifted by the hissing sea up the pillar stumps to the celebrated Fingal's Cave. A greener roar of waves surely never rushed into a stranger cavern—its many pillars making it look like the inside of an immense organ, black and resounding, and absolutely without purpose, and quite alone, the wide grey sea within and without."

2. SYMPHONY No. 4 (OP. 63)

Sibelius
(1865-1958)

Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio
Allegro molto vivace—Doppio più lento
Tempo largo
Allegro

Sibelius' Third Symphony (C major) completed in 1907 marked his break away from the romantic symphony, from luxury of scoring and from indulgently expansive protraction of design. Its concision, economy of means, clarity of scoring, are remarkable—but none of these, nor its bright optimism, could prepare Sibelius'

followers nor audiences either in Finland or in the world at large for the extraordinary condensation of musical thought, the novel concepts of orchestration or the psychological outlook of the Fourth Symphony which appeared in April 1911. Sibelius himself knew that it must prove a formidable challenge at a time when the musical world was so much intoxicated by the latest lavish luxuries of sound which Strauss and Mahler poured out. It was a conscious protest. He himself proclaimed it as such in writing to Rosa Newmarch—"Nothing, absolutely nothing of the circus about it!" he added.

However, the really important point about this symphony is not its "protest" in 1911, but the guarantee it carried for Sibelius' personal development as a symphonist, his power to expand from condensed thought to broad design within one work as in the ultimately jubilant Fifth Symphony, or to concentrate complexity of thought as in the Seventh Symphony. Not only so, but much of the concentrated and deeply serious symphonic thought of the middle of this century stems ultimately from the bid made by this most impressive work of Sibelius. Yet never again did he proffer anything quite so succinct, so disruptive of the orchestral ensemble into its contrasted elements of strings, woodwind and brass, nor so challenging to the habits of ear and mind with regard both to formal design and to psychological developments.

One is to know from the broad span of the main solo 'cello melody near the outset, and from the tonal scheme of the whole that it is a Symphony in A—"minor" in its main stance of opening and conclusion, but "major" in the eventual repose of its first movement and in the predominant jubilation of its finale up to the sombre mood of its concluding phase. But this is to be wise after the event, and what one hears at the outset is a deep resonant "tritone motive"—ambiguously sounding like a Lydian (sharp fourth) to a major scale until it proves it is a sharp sixth to a Dorian minor scale (which was to have so telling an effect in the pine forests of "Tapiola"). The happy scherzo movement suggests a normal design—but well on in its course it flows suddenly into a sobered half-speed triple measure fraught with the strongest, almost painful stresses with recurring diminished fifths, tapering at the last suddenly to the timpani's vanishing point. The Largo has its warmth of passionate melody, but this only emerges from the transparencies of quiet contemplation and unpredictable ruminations. Only the finale brings a bigger sweep of design and an impetus that runs unthwarted throughout until colours are suddenly faded away into a monochrome of minor key at the last.

INTERVAL

3. VIOLIN CONCERTO IN B MINOR, OP. 61

Elgar
(1857-1934)Allegro
Andante
Allegro molto

The Violin Concerto was composed in 1909-10 between the two great symphonies—No. 1, first performed 3rd December, 1908, under Richter in Manchester, and No. 2 (dedicated to the memory of King Edward VII) on 24th May, 1911, under the composer during the London Musical Festival. In April, 1909, Sir Edward and Lady Elgar paid a visit to Careggi, near Florence, at the invitation of their American friend Mrs. Worthington, and the first ideas for the concerto originated about that time. Back in Hereford that summer the composer was preoccupied with the project—but other duties and the composition of several songs and the “Romance for Bassoon” intervened, and it was not until March, 1910, that he began to devote himself entirely to bringing the work from the stage of innumerable sketches to complete composition. The late W. H. (Billy) Reid played an invaluable part in assisting Elgar at the ‘trial and error’ stage of determining technical points in the lie of the bravura passages, bowing, fingerings, etc., playing as has been said the part of a Joachim to Elgar’s Brahms. And it was Reid who first played the completed work (with Elgar at the pianoforte) at a private party on the Sunday preceding the Gloucester Three-choirs Festival. But the first performance was given by Fritz Kreisler (to whom the work is dedicated) at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert on 10th November.

The score bears the motto (in Spanish) “Herein is enshrined the soul of . . .” It is generally believed, though not conclusively proved that the undisclosed name is Julia (i.e. Julia Worthington)—but what is really relevant for us is that we are assured of what alone matters, the personality so sensitively and richly portrayed. This great work—whose three movements have the span of a very long symphony—despite its orchestral weight and potentialities of grandeur and of boisterous vigour, is first and foremost sensitive and reflective in character, and there is something retrospective in its thought almost from the beginning; indeed the violin enters with an eloquent and nostalgic cadence. Both solo and orchestral lines are moulded with the most subtle plasticity—the temper of emotion and the tempo of action perpetually swayed by *rubato*, *agitato*, *tenuto*; yet all is framed within a sure logical design of splendid strength. It is in the approach to the extensive accompanied *cadenza* in the finale that the mind begins to revert to the slow movement, and the *cadenza* itself looks yet further back to dwell lovingly upon themes first heard in the opening orchestral *ritornello*.

S.T.M.N.