

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1964-65

Sixth Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: DR. JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

Solo Violin

ERICH GRUENBERG

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 4th FEBRUARY, 1965

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. SYMPHONIC POEM: "VLTAVA"

Smetana
(1824-1884)

From the cycle of six symphonic poems entitled "Ma Vlast" (My country), composed 1874-79, this unforgettable masterpiece of nationalist art pictures the river (known better maybe to some as the Moldau) from its slender sparkling stream, which evokes a melody that will linger long in every ear, past scenes of the woodland hunt and meadows where peasants tread out their dances at a wedding feast, and by quiet waters where nymphs disport under the radiant moon; till once again the stream flows onward in the light of day to reach the thundering rapids of St. John, whence the broad street of the river stretches through Prague, whose royal splendour is emblazoned in the Vysehrad motive.

2. VIOLIN CONCERTO

Delius
(1862-1934)

In 1906 Delius produced his pianoforte concerto, a reworking into one movement of the material of a three movement design he had composed in 1897. It was not a success, and indeed the whole tenor and highly personal and sensitive style of his art as manifest in the operas, tone poems, fantasias, songs and great choral works of the first fifteen years of the century hardly pointed to the Concerto as a medium likely to prove essential or even stimulating for him. Yet in the six years 1915-1921 he composed three concertos for string instruments, the double concerto for Violin and Violoncello in 1915-16, followed immediately by the Violin Concerto (dedicated to Albert Sammons) and the Violoncello Concerto in 1921. Of these by far the finest is this Violin Concerto, which deserves to retain a treasured place in the Delius heritage. It has perhaps been somewhat seldom heard in the post-war period, and has not been given at a Reid Concert since the two performances under Tovey, in 1924 by Adila D'Aranyi, and in 1937 by Ernest Whitfield.

One is not to expect anything of a classical or traditional concerto form, nor of any typical concerto manner or virtuosic projection. The whole is poles apart from such a work as the Mendelssohn which Delius, himself a violinist in his youth, is known to have admired and to have performed upon at least one occasion. The work is rhapsody—for much of the time an accompanied solo, but at others a concerted rhapsody in which the personalities of solo and orchestra are briefly differentiated. It is designed as a continuous flow of one ruminating movement filled with the most sensitive nuances (within which alterations of material and inflexions of mood make a simple design which is briefly set out below), and in only some two dozen of its 350 bars of leisurely (or slow) tempo is the solo instrument silent and only then for a bar or two at a time.

The starting point is a brief resolute and aspiring theme which quickly yields to a gentle sway, and again evokes another highly expressive swaying melody (first in deep warm tone and later in the shining heights). So these motives alternate until the brass chorus brings a recurrent note of majesty (with something of the weight though not the manner of an orchestral tutti). To this succeeds a broad central adagio episode whose slow melody is offset by a delicate more pastoral motif. A long accompanied cadenza leads to a recapitulation, varied and at times condensed, but this time the majestic theme of the brass culminates in a strident impasse which is resolved by a new dance-like movement (wind and pizzicato strings) delicately decorated by the solo which alternates with a rhetorical variant of the slow-movement melody until at length the opening theme returns in retrospective tranquillity as the epilogue.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY No. 5 (Op. 50)

Carl Nielsen
(1865-1931)

I. Tempo giusto—Adagio non troppo.

II. Allegro—Presto—Andante un poco tranquillo—Allegro.

Only within the last fifteen years have we in Britain had the opportunity to begin to realise the stature of Carl Nielsen—outstandingly as a symphonist, and secondarily through some of his chamber music. There are other sides of the composer that we do not know at first hand, notably his two operas (and the humour abounding in the latter of these, 'Masquerade'). This is not the place to write a tribute to, or assessment of, the man's whole work, but to pay tribute to the whole man in the performance of a supreme work—'supreme', not in any implication that it is necessarily to be adjudged the greatest of his six symphonies (or even of the last four in which he is truly himself) but supreme because the man has the commanding measure of the well-nigh immeasurable scene of human conflict despoiling the quiet beauty of the lands, battling with ultimate impotence against the heart of things in such measure as to compel our realisation of the majesty of events, and in the aftermath the firm declaration, in the complexity of man's nature and of the aspirations of head and heart, of ultimate grandeur, of an optimism that shall prevail. If I am right in my reading of the ultimate significance of this great music, then it will be clear that this symphony without name (composed in the years immediately after the Great War and completed in 1921) extends upon a different

scene the philosophy that found expression in Symphony No. 4 "The Inextinguishable" (or "The Unquenchable") composed in 1914-16, which emphasises the 'elemental Will of Life' that prevails in all living creation.

I forbear to describe or analyse the sequence of musical events. The overall shape of things is shown in the movement headings given above. A guide to such a scene and such events might be an impertinence.

S.T.M.N.