

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS
SEASON 1966-67

SIXTH CONCERT

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: MILES BASTER

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 2nd FEBRUARY, 1967

AT 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

1. SYMPHONY NO. 86 IN D

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Adagio - Allegro spiritoso
Capriccio: Largo
Minuet: Allegretto
Finale: Allegro con spirito

The most resplendent (with its trumpets and drums), and if perhaps not consistently the greatest in content, yet the greatest in design, of the set of six 'Paris' symphonies composed in 1785-6 at the request of the Comte d'Ogny for Concert de la Loge Olympique, this splendid work is nevertheless unduly neglected. Fifth of the set as we know its numbering, but seemingly the last to be composed (in immediate succession to the C major No. 82 (L'ours) whose power it also reflects), it would appear to be designed especially to enjoy the resources of an orchestra that numbered about forty violins and ten double basses in its ranks.

Whilst the two great Allegri contain a good deal of material that can confess to being very ordinary in itself, this is used to far from ordinary purposes. Not only is Haydn building large with block after block of the same stuff, but in his grand schemes there are countless surprises and also great contrasts of grace and delicacy. The Minuet is one of his most developed, yet retaining naive delights in its intimate Trio. But most remarkable of all is the Largo - an imaginative and unpredictable blend of sonata form with rondo-like recurrence of its profoundly moving first phrases - a caprice not in any sense of frolicsome whimsy, but a serious phantasia of deep emotion whose vision catches also both delicate adornment and full show of strength.

S.T.M.N.

2. SERENADE IN D MINOR, OP. 44
for Wind Instruments, Violoncello and Bass

Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Moderato, quasi marcia
Tempo di minuetto - Presto - Tempo di minuetto
Andante con moto
Allegro molto - Moderato - Allegro molto

Since Dvořák's second Serenade is written for an ensemble of wind instruments and even begins with a 'quasi marcia', it possesses characteristics that suggest it would be suitable for performance on a warm summer evening out of doors. The choice of instruments - two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, double bassoon 'ad lib.', three horns, violoncello and double bass - and especially Dvořák's skill in using them, result in a unique series of tone colours. This delightfully fresh composition was written just after the string quartet in D minor, and immediately before the 1st 'Slavonic Rhapsody' and the first set of 'Slavonic Dances'. It will be observed that a unifying motif which Dvořák was almost certainly unaware of, an upward leap of a fourth, occurs at the beginning of several of the themes, and that this interval is also an important feature at other times.

The sturdy march with which the work opens includes a middle section, during which an oboe and bassoon weave charming decorations around the simplest of thematic fragments, a descending scale. The minuet is beautifully written for the instruments and perhaps especially so for the horns. The Trio (Presto) takes on some of the rhythmic characteristics of a 'furiant'. Clearly the Andante is the artistic and emotional climax of the work. The combination of steadily moving crotchets for 'cello and double bass, of the highly syncopated accompaniment for horns and of the languid melodic parts for oboe and clarinet in the opening

bars, is extraordinarily telling. It is hardly surprising that Dvořák found that it was not at all easy to bring this lovely movement to a conclusion, for it is certain that it gave him intense pleasure. The Serenade ends with a spirited finale, during the course of which we are reminded once again of the first movement.

J.C.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY NO. 4, OP. 53

Rubbra
(b. 1901)

Con Moto
Intermezzo - Allegretto grazioso
Introduzione - Allegro maestoso

The Symphonies of Rubbra are not exactly fashionable at the present time, but after all fashion has never been a reliable basis for any artistic valuations. Even the great composers have suffered from the pendulum of fashion, and the British practice of being dominated by minority groups (at any rate where the arts are concerned) has made the power of fashion greater here than it is in most other countries. There is no guarantee that anything that is fashionable is of lasting value; nor is there any guarantee that anything that is unfashionable is unjustly neglected. The problem for all of us is how to keep our ears and our minds sufficiently open.

Rubbra's seven symphonies provide a characteristically British solution to the symphonic problem. Their thought is mostly diatonic. Old chords (like the dominant seventh in this symphony) are used in fresh and sometimes startlingly original ways; the lyrical element is always present, and his lines grow and grow with a seemingly inexhaustible invention in a way that is natural to many English composers; but above all the music revels in the one source of riches which can never be exhausted - counterpoint, with all its myriad constructive and expressive possibilities. Rubbra's remarkably consistent (even austere) exploitation of these elements, to the exclusion of more immediately attractive ones such as orchestral colour for its own sake; his power to build up a rich and perfectly integrated large scale form; his extremely personal harmonic style; all these things have produced a symphonic achievement which cannot be ignored.

Though the powerful first symphony made a deep impression, by common consent it was the 3rd Symphony in which the procedures the composer had evolved for himself reached their first mature development. The fourth was begun in 1940, but army service interrupted its composition, and the composer was not able to complete the work until 1942.

There are three movements, of which the second is a comparatively short interlude of somewhat lighter character, without climax, and offering a respite between two movements of greater tension. The movements are in a sense monothematic, the material being generated from one theme. The contrasts arise from the various new organisms which arise, rather than from the confronting of opposed themes. Thus in the first movement the melodic material seems to spring from the falling fifth and rising third (characteristically both major and minor) of the

opening phrase. The nearest thing to a second subject (wood-wind and pizzicato strings) occurs after the first climax and with its pulsating rhythm provides a second main element in the structure. The movement proceeds inexorably, the texture becoming progressively more polyphonic, to its climax. This climax is a kind of combination of the independent rhythms of the various melodic strands, every line in the texture being a logical consequence of the preceding material. The tension relaxes and leads to a final section like the homophonic opening, but more compressed and elliptical. The tonality (which is very fluid) finally settles down into a serene D major.

Harmonically the first movement is dominated by the sound of the dominant seventh (particularly in its last inversion), a chord which is used almost in isolation and produces a remarkably personal kind of restrained tension.

This chord does not pervade the other two movements to the same extent, but it does appear frequently in the flowing texture of the Intermezzo. Though less contrapuntally developed than the other movements, this gentle and delicate waltz-like movement is equally characteristic of Rubbra. The tonality centres round a Lydian G flat, but the tonal shifts are subtle, and though the movement is essentially dance-like, the melodic rhythm is delightfully flexible and almost wayward.

There is no slow movement, but a solemn introduction to the Finale. The music here grows entirely out of the opening phrase with its descending semitone and rising sixth. After a while the Introduction broadens into a six-eight rhythm with another throbbing accompaniment on trombones. The music gains in intensity with an entry on trumpets and trombones, and then is suddenly quiet, with an echo of the opening phrase and a distant drum-beat.

The final Allegro Maestoso has no direct thematic relationship with the first movement, but it works like an inevitable fulfilment of it. It opens with a big characteristic melody of enormous range, over a descending scale ostinato in the manner of Holst (Rubbra's teacher). This is one of the composer's finest melodies, "both heroic and contemporary." As it grows, it is joined by a fine counter-theme in dotted rhythm, and eventually arrives in a triumphant and clear E major. A sudden piano leads to a Meno Mosso section in D major, and a triplet figure in the accompaniment grows into a quiet interlude in E flat major and minor. Quite quickly this leads to a magnificent return of the original tempo and material over repeated dominant sevenths. The bass falls chromatically to E and continues with the previous scale ostinato, this time with a new theme above it derived from the accompanying triplets of the interlude. Again a triumphant E major is reached and introduced a chorale-like theme in E major played in canon - a noble and marvellously controlled consummation of the whole work.

K.L.