

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1968-69

First Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: MILES BASTER

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 17th OCTOBER, 1968

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. OVERTURE: Leonora No. 2

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

The history of Beethoven's overtures to his opera *Fidelio* (first named *Leonora*) is that of the discovery and demonstration of the difference between the operatic prelude and the symphonic tone-poem. It is not possible to arrive at any certainty as to the exact place which the overture known as Leonora No. 1 occupied in this historical development, though it is supposed to have followed No. 3 in its public appearance. The symphonic dramatic import of No. 2 attained its perfect realisation when transformed into the mighty structure of No. 3. But these are symphonic tone-poems, not merely epitomising but indeed enacting the drama they are intended to introduce. With his fourth overture, *Fidelio*, Beethoven sought and found the ideal prelude to introduce the opening scene of his drama. For those who would make a close comparison of the two closely related overtures (2 and 3), there are several alternative means available. Those who prefer books should read Tovey's programme note (*Essays in Musical Analysis*); those who prefer scores might care to try listening to one version whilst attempting to read the score of the other! But whilst we are occupied with a performance of No. 2 it exists for us entirely in its own right. So let it suffice that we attend to what happens therein.

S.T.M.N.

2. SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS, Op. 78

Antonin Dvorák
(1841-1904)

No-one should be misled by the comparatively high opus number that Simrock gave this work. The number 39 would have been more realistic. As a composer Dvorák developed quite late. He wrote the Variations when he was thirty-six, and so they stand midway between his F major and D major symphonies (Nos. 5 and 6, but published as Nos. 3 and 1 respectively!)

When the Symphonic Variations were performed for the first time in Prague at the end of 1877, Dvorák was still unknown outside his own country. He had achieved some success at home a few years earlier with his cantata *The Heirs of the White Mountain*, and had won the Austrian State Prize three years in succession, but he did not become recognized abroad until his *Moravian Duets* and more especially his *Slavonic Dances* had been published in Germany. Since the Variations were received rather coolly by the public, Dvorák made no attempt to arrange for a second performance and he dismissed them from his mind.

Some ten years later, when great demands were being made on him by concert promoters, conductors, publishers and others, Dvorák unearthed a number of his earlier compositions and polished them up in the light of the experience he had gained in the intervening years. Among them was the Symphonic Variations, which he improved in innumerable small ways. He

conducted the work in Prague on 6th March, 1887, and then wrote as follows to Hans Richter: "If you would like to have something new, then I would suggest a work that has not yet been published, but will not remain so for long if you launch it." Richter jumped at the suggestion, and immediately arranged to include the Variations in his next series of London concerts. After the first rehearsal he wrote: "It is a magnificent work! I am happy to be the first to perform it in London, but why did you hold it back for so long? These Variations can take their place among the best of your compositions." And after conducting it on 16th May at St. James's Hall he wrote again, saying: "Your Symphonic Variations had an enormous success, and at the several hundred concerts which I have conducted during my life no *new work* has ever had such a success as yours."

The title on the manuscript reads: "Symphonic Variations on an original theme from the part-song 'I am a fiddler' for full orchestra composed and entangled by Antonin Dvorák." The theme, which is in C major but includes both the Lydian and perfect fourths in its first bars, consists of phrases of seven, six and seven bars, a structure that reappears in the variations that follow. The work consists of twenty-seven variations and an extended finale. It is natural that Dvorák should have felt much freer in writing this independent work for orchestra than when he wrote other sets of variations, such as the Theme and Variations for piano, the finales of the Terzetto and the E flat String Quintet, and the Adagio of the G major Quartet. After all the symphony orchestra was a medium that he found exceptionally attractive and for which he had an instinctive sympathy and understanding.

Even if some of the variations may at first appear to be rather far removed from the basic theme, it soon becomes apparent that there is always a vital and logical link between them. They sometimes appear as pairs. Some seem to suggest the spirit of the *Slavonic Dances* that he was engaged on a year later, and one (Var. 19) is in waltz tempo. Others range from the delicate pastel shades of *pp* strings, muted horn and echoing flute (Var. 14) to the majestic declamation of trombones (Var. 15), or may be characterized by a striking arch-shaped theme in B flat minor for solo horn and a succession of perfect cadences (Var. 22), or by harmonies made mysterious when clothed in a blend of dark and high-pitched sonorities (Var. 24). Dvorák's theme opens up endless possibilities, but in this work it is only viewed from new key centres in the later variations. The earlier part of the Finale is fugal, and this leads to a stretto. It then takes on the character of a polka and ultimately we hear a joyful peal of bells.

J.C.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY NO. 2 in D major (Op. 73)

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo

Adagio non troppo

Allegretto grazioso (quasi Andantino)

Allegro con spirito

Brahms' second symphony followed very closely upon his first, the completion of which had been delayed over a period of fifteen years. With the impression of that great tragic yet triumphant symphony fresh in their minds, Brahms' friends were prepared by him for this altogether different experience by such remarks as, "The new symphony is so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it."

The broad theme of the opening, on horns and woodwind, is punctuated by a bass motive which is to prove of great importance both in its own right and also in the themes, eloquent, solemn or playful, which are derived therefrom. It is only after the glorious melody of the "second subject" (on cellos and violas) that the movement springs to resolute action and foreshadows the full measure of the power it wields in the development. Relaxation brings the reprise stealing upon us unawares, because what was previously given in succession is now entwined in simultaneous statement. In the coda a very expressive horn solo opens the way to an aftermath of ever increasing ease and tranquillity, and tender playfulness at the last.

The glorious 'cello melody which opens the slow movement is rich in phrases which may be extracted and considered on their own. The design, or rather the emotional range, is to prove rather more complex than that melody would suggest; wavering counterpoints bring mystery, and composure is not regained in the gentle syncopation of the contrasting theme. It is the simple childlike preoccupation of four rising notes which turn and turn again to the summit of their gentle slope which is to cast out doubt; and glorious things are to follow from this simple absorbing pleasure.

The tender tunefulness of the Scherzo, which will go off of a sudden into the most delightful pranks of tempo, has made this movement a first favourite.

The Finale is to prove brilliant and festive, yet not forgetful of a generous heart and a tender sympathy. But it delights at first to make a stage secret of its high spirits.

S.T.M.N.