

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1968-69

Third Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: MILES BASTER

Conductor:
SIDNEY NEWMAN

Solo Violin:
LOUIS CARUS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 14th NOVEMBER, 1968

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. SYMPHONY IN ONE MOVEMENT

Robin Orr

(b. 1909)

This Symphony of serious tragic import, within the unity of a continuous movement spans that wider experience that normally in a multi-movement work lies beyond the scope of any one movement though embraced by the whole. It brings this into close perspective in a closely wrought design of great imagination in which basic elements, tersely stated, expand and are metamorphosed in perpetual organic growth to build ultimate themes at times of melodic span and at others of superb and overwhelming power, resolving at the end in a retrospective epilogue where, in much foreshortened perspective, the several elements are held in the tranquillity of memory, yet not forgetful of the pulsing restiveness that runs almost throughout and at the very last wells out in the emblazoned forbidding theme that strides on to the ultimate bare fifth of B minor, from which in sombre foreboding the whole has originally sprung.

It has rightly been said that the work divides into four main phases, which may in a general sense be termed exposition, slow movement, development and recapitulation. But this recognition does not help us far until we appreciate the nature of each—particularly of the first, third and fourth of these, for the violoncello plaint that so movingly sways the slow section, evoking moments of tender melodic response from wind or violins, stands somewhat apart until in retrospection it colours the epilogue. The composer has told us that this symphony composed in 1960-63 derives in some motives from the incidental music he composed for Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* in 1950. The precise connections are irrelevant for us, but what is profoundly relevant is that the symphony addresses itself with sombre foreboding to a theme of tragedy writ large, to its restive fears, the stings that spurt from time's galloping wheel, the alert of challenging utterances that coalesce to build up the solemn majesty of a forbidding doom. Thus the "exposition" is prophetic of things to come, in itself only a half realisation of what it handles. The third phase (which I have called the "development") opens as though a somewhat elaborated recapitulation starting on an A minor tonal centre but the whole comprises in fact three great prolonged paragraphs each of intensive development of different kind and each culminating in a great climax where the full theme stands in full stature, the last and greatest of these succeeding a passage akin to a grim-faced scherzo with even some show of military power. The final phase is indeed recapitulation in key structure, but in all else is epilogue as I have shown.

S.T.M.N.

2. VIOLIN CONCERTO No. 2 IN G MINOR, Op. 63

Prokofieff
(1891-1953)

Allegro moderato

Andante assai

Allegro, ben marcato

Composed in 1935, this Concerto shows the composer in his full maturity, giving those acid harmonies so characteristic of him, and using the orchestra as much for colour as contrapuntal collaboration. But it is the lyrical element in the work which is most stressed, long outpourings of legato melody, a style of concerto writing which is the extreme antithesis to all the other violin concertos of the period, Bartok, Berg, Stravinsky and Schoenberg.

The first movement has a very simple formal design, the various sections having an almost classical key system. It is within each section that the unexpected and sometimes abrupt changes of tonality occur. The first melody, for unaccompanied solo violin, assumes a very important part in the movement, appearing in different guises in most of the development, with many colourful woodwind phrases, including one for flute and bassoon at a distance of three octaves. The return has this melody in the cello and bass.

The first part of the slow movement might be called a serenade, of which there are so many examples in opera, a long melody, quite vocal in character, with a pizzicato accompaniment. Indeed this operatic feeling of the melody is accentuated on its second appearance by the grandiose colour expressed by the orchestra. Again can be noticed the quick changes in tonality. The contrasting theme relies on florid decoration by the solo violin, the outline being supplied by a muted trumpet. The coda seems to be almost an afterthought, but it contains a masterly stroke—the solo violin takes up the pizzicato, the tune now being in the bass. Rarely has pizzicato sounded so effective in a solo. The last bar is quite an extraordinary duet for clarinet and bass. The movement is episodic, a little stiff in design, and there is a feeling of Schubertian discursiveness which is alien to most of the music of this period.

The finale says farewell to all the lyrical qualities, and is really a display piece for the violin, difficult, effective and well-written for the instrument. In place of the previous cantabile, the music is dominated by its rhythmic impulse, one section being in an unusual seven-four rhythm. Every movement contains piquant colours, but nowhere more startling than here in the repeat of the second melody, when the double-bass plays in octaves with the solo. The coda has the seven-four rhythm telescoped to five-four, with the bass-drum taking a very active part in the proceedings, and the concerto finishes with a real tour de force for the soloist.

J.F.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN B FLAT (Op. 38): "SPRING"

Schumann
(1810-1854)

Andante un poco sostenuto—Allegro molto vivace

Larghetto

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Allegro animato e grazioso

It is a mistake to imagine that Schumann had not busied himself with orchestral ideas during the thirties, before his *annus mirabilis* of song in 1840 (the year of his wedding). The Pianoforte Concerto (first movement) of 1841 had been preceded by three unfinished attempts at concertos some ten years or so before. Three movements of a G minor Symphony had been written in 1832, of which the first movement had been aired in performance. The Abegg variations were originally written for pianoforte with orchestra, and to Schumann himself the style of the *Etudes Symphoniques* appeared quasi-orchestral—indeed, the original title was "Etüden im Orchestercharakter . . ." It is clear that Clara was ambitious for him to give scope to these orchestral inclinations as her diary shows, and for the first nine months of 1841 Schumann became enthusiastically absorbed in symphonic composition. This symphony was sketched in four days and orchestrated in the following three weeks. In April-May followed the Overture Scherzo and Finale (at one time styled Symphonette). Twelve days after finishing this he had completed the Fantasie (Pianoforte Concerto, 1st movement). Ten days later he began the D minor Symphony (eventually published as No. 4); and when this was completed, he sketched two movements of an unfinished Symphony in C minor.

Schumann's handling of the orchestra is decidedly not that of a natural symphonic composer. He plays on his orchestra as a pianist, and what is more as a pianist with a very personal idiom which juxtaposes an articulate positivism and a poetic impressionism. In attempting to direct an orchestra as conductor he was gauche, but although he was and felt himself to be insecure in the technique of orchestration, in judgment of tonal balance and so on, and for security unhappily resorted to thickening so much of his later scores, yet it would be grossly unjust not to recognise the many characteristic felicities he achieved, especially in passages of delicacy and of intimate expression.

This symphony was originally titled "Spring," and indeed the several movements had descriptive titles which he later suppressed. Clearly he pictured the spring as evoked by a solemn clarion call, and answering thereto with lively animation and increasing exuberance. But the intimate beauty and the delicate touch are revealed in the slow movement and the first of the two trios of the Scherzo and in the dancing lightness of much of the finale.

S.T.M.N.