

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1968-69

Fifth Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: MILES BASTER

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 16th JANUARY, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. TRAGIC OVERTURE (Op. 81)

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo, leading to
Molto piu moderato, leading to
Tempo primo.

We find the truth of tragedy where the sublime holds truck with the common stuff of the world. The formal conventions of life are merged with the technically formal elements of dramatic art. So it is with this great overture. Both during the course of the work and at its conclusion themes of purely formal significance tie us to earth. But within the formal structure we are made to feel the force of cosmic events in the opening theme, the promise of some mysterious harmony of the universe in the passage that succeeds, and the consolation of the individual heart that the aspiring second theme reveals. We see also in the formal development section tragedy writ small, as though some gentle wretch were made the pathetic parody of the great, as the poor beggar fool in Boris Godounov.

S.T.M.N.

2. SYMPHONY No. 7 (Op. 105)

Sibelius
(1865-1957)

Sibelius conducted a concert of his own music in Stockholm on 24th March, 1924, the programme being the 1st Symphony, the Violin Concerto and the first performance of "Fantasia Sinfonica" C major, Opus 105. Thus was introduced the work he later called the 7th Symphony. The composer evidently was in doubt about the correct title for this gigantic single movement and he discarded the word "Fantasia" as inappropriate for such a highly organized piece of music. This work shows many of the characteristics of the 5th and 6th Symphonies, with one large central theme and many small phrases, some occurring often and in varied form, others taking little part in the design after their initial appearance. The main theme, which makes three complete entries, has a noble and impressive sound, played on each occasion by a solo trombone. The contrasts of speed, mood, key, etc. contained in the four movements of a normal symphony are all present in this one movement, including a theme of dance-like rhythm akin to a Scherzo. However the listener is unaware of sudden changes of tempo as they are contrived in such a subtle way that the sections merge imperceptibly to form a logical whole.

J.F.

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY No. 1 (Op. 10)

Shostakovich
(b. 1906)

Allegretto—Allegro ma non troppo—Allegretto
Allegro
Lento—
Lento—Allegro molto—meno mosso—Allegro molto—Largo—
Presto

Dmitri Shostakovich entered the Leningrad conservatory when he was thirteen. Four years later he had completed the course for pianists, and was only nineteen when he completed this astonishing first symphony, his "graduation exercise" on finishing his studies as a composer under Glazounov and Maximilian Steinberg. It was composed in 1924-25 and first performed at Leningrad in May, 1926. The following year Bruno Walter introduced it to Berlin and amongst other early performances Walter gave it at a Gewandhaus concert in Leipzig in November 1929, an occasion upon which I, then a travelling student, was privileged to be present at his first rehearsal. Well I remember how Walter finished his ten minute conversation with me, tapping his brief-case and saying, "Now come in and hear an astonishingly mature symphony by a young man of nineteen of whom you will never have heard. His name is Shostakovich. I brought it back with me after a conducting visit to Russia".

An astonishing first symphony indeed! Eclectic it may be, but it is incredibly mature, inventive, full of warm feeling and likewise of vigorous animation, richly endowed with subtle harmonic colouring and chromaticism and masterly in its scoring. This youthful masterpiece was not of course his first essay in orchestral composition. Those first ten opus numbers include—besides pianoforte pieces, songs and chamber music—an orchestral Scherzo (composed when he was thirteen), a Theme and Variations (1921-22) and an orchestral Scherzo in E flat (1923). But in retrospect one still sees this as a quite exceptional work amongst all that this prolific composer and symphonist has since produced.

The symphony is scored for full orchestra (with a third trumpet and tuba) and also uses the pianoforte in the second and last movements. It opens quietly with two motives on muted trumpet and bassoon alone, and continues for a while in such light transparent textures as though sketching in fantasy, momentarily flushed with excitement, then suddenly restrained in measured step, until it falls into the alert march of the main F minor allegro with a previous motion turned into a whimsically gay chromatic tune by the clarinet, that quickly spreads through the orchestra. The second theme, in triple measure, establishes the normal tonal territory of A flat major with a lightly accompanied swaying lyrical melody led by flute and clarinet whose cadence lingers on many instruments in turn. The quiet measured staccato of a solo violin re-evokes the initial fantasy sketch, developing these motifs (and the second theme) in chamber-music ensemble of soloists until the march resumes, bringing with it sturdy four-square developments of the second theme, and culminating in the first trumpet motif in brilliant canon with trilled violins. Immediately the march reappears fortissimo on the strings and in a trice is forced to give way to the recapitulation of the lyrical second theme (now in F). There follows the quiet re-enactment of the powerful development, but soon the drummed step of power dissolves into the fragments of the introduction transformed into epilogue and brought to vanishing point.

The second allegro, after some brief impetuous preliminaries, quickly reveals itself as a scherzo in A minor, whose infectious tune dances from violins to pianoforte to bassoon. Its trio section, suspended below an unbroken pedal E, reiterates a chanted plaint in duo of flutes, then of clarinets, then in quasi-canon of paired oboes and bassoons. The reprise is momentarily teased by the bassoon's drollery in slow motion, but once given its head proceeds to the brilliant combination of both themes, with trumpets and horns hammering out the chant. All ends with the pianoforte, in crashing chords and deep bell-clangs, re-evoking the pallid spirit of the trio which ghost-like vanishes.

The slow movement in D flat major opens with an oboe melody of great beauty accompanied with exquisitely sensitive chromatic harmony of strings. Solo cello with heart-searching phrases of Wagnerian eloquence leads on to the ardent resumption of the melody in full orchestra. But now there intrudes upon this the repeated admonition of a powerful short motto-theme curving downwards from its bitter minor third. Dissolved by this the theme gives place to a new melody—a quietly treading funeral-march on the oboe, whose steps are completed in the basses. Impassioned outburst of strings brings the march to full power on the brass. With the reprise the initial melody shines in the height on solo violin; again the admonishing motto intervenes and brings the march now upon a muted trumpet, protracted in its downward step, and resolved in a brief coda of supreme beauty.

It is not only the emergence of a side-drum roll exploding into the finale which links these two movements. The finale admittedly has its own themes—the opening passionate soliloquy of woodwind and reflecting bass, and when the clarinet breaks away with the restless agitation of the allegro molto there is a new surging chromaticism. But hidden and half-seen within these are phrases that linger from the slow movement or reflect traits of the first, and the purpose of all becomes clear when, with overwhelming power and as though a new theme, the erstwhile oboe funeral-march melody breaks forth *inverted* in its movement and at impetuous speed. In calm this continues on solo violin and horn, its ending curling now of course upwards in its gentle steps. Agitation breaks forth again and accumulated power piles up in impasse, broken by dramatic silence. Then it is that the drums thunder out, with echo and re-echo, that admonitory motto, but now transformed to upward step, and brought to great tenderness as this motive lies about the melody upon solo cello. All now has been told and the dramatic tensions are clinched in the solid structure of a brilliant coda-peroration of full orchestral power.

S.T.M.N.