

## Lakeland Sinfonia Concert Society : Concert Calendar 2011-2012 Season

Hallé

25th February 2012

### *Overture The Magic Flute K.620*

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**  
(1756 - 1791)

In his final year Mozart completed two contrasting operas: *The Magic Flute* and the more serious *La Clemenza di Tito*. Both received their first performances in Vienna in September 1791, with varying receptions. *La Clemenza di Tito* was described as 'Germanic meat' by the Empress, but *The Magic Flute* was a complete success. The overture 'combines magic with Masonic ritual' (Mozart and his librettist Schikaneder belonged to the same Masonic Lodge), hence the three solemn chords that appear in the introduction and in the main body of the overture. These symbolise the ritual knocking at the door of the temple of the initiate; in the opera, the high priest, Sarastro, responds to the request for admission from Tamino. The unusual inclusion of trombones in the orchestra adds a solemnity that is balanced by the more cheerful music of the overture.

### Notturmo in B for Strings Op. 40

Antonín Dvořák  
(1841 - 1904)

Originating from the slow movement of his string quartet No. 4, Dvořák arranged this music for violin and piano, for piano duet and, in 1875, for string orchestra in the version performed this evening. Over somewhat restless rhythms, lyrical ideas are passed around the orchestra, before a final tender chord brings this short nocturnal interlude to a close.

### Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor Op. 26

Max Bruch  
(1838 - 1920)

During his lifetime Bruch was famous not only in his native Germany but also throughout Europe as a conductor, performer and teacher, as well as composer of well over 100 works, including three symphonies. His fame was sufficient for him to be appointed as conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society for three years from 1880. His time in Liverpool was largely successful although he did have some problems with the members of the chorus (or the 'Practicals' as they were known). Perhaps insisting on being rehearsal pianist and conductor had something to do with it. His poor English was a handicap, and the orchestra's committee probably took umbrage when they noted his many complaints about concerts starting too late, intervals being too long and soloists being paid too much.

In 1883 promises of high-level work in Edinburgh and Glasgow evaporated, as did those of work in New York, so after Liverpool, with a great degree of disappointment, he returned to Germany. His wife Clara was probably happier as she had found Liverpool 'somewhat monotonous'.

In later years, Bruch wondered why his first violin concerto, written in and premiered in 1866 and revised in 1868, was so popular at the expense of his other works. In 1907 he was asked how the musical world would view him in 50 years' time, say, compared with Brahms. His reply echoes his disappointment and his honesty: '*He will be more appreciated,*

*while most of my works will be more and more neglected... He will loom up as one of the supremely great composers of all time while I will be chiefly remembered for my G minor violin concerto'. Bruch also expressed the opinion that with a family to support he had had to write music that sold readily. His music 'was never anything to quarrel about. I never outraged the critics'.*

**I Prelude** – after a few notes from a subdued orchestra the violin enters with a similarly restrained solo passage. The orchestra returns a little less restrained manner followed by a more vigorous violin passage. The whole orchestra takes up this introductory idea preparing the way for the first theme, presented by the soloist. A second more expressive idea appears and thus the scene seems to be set for a traditional full-blown first movement. An energetic passage for full orchestra seems to confirm this but Bruch has other plans as the opening ideas of introductions and soloist responses return, albeit more expansive. This all leads quietly into the second movement.

**II Adagio** – a lengthy melody for the violin sets the tone for this movement. Two other melodies present themselves including a little falling phrase that Richard Strauss was to use in his *Alpine Symphony*. The solo violin is in the spotlight for most of the time in this 'soul of the concerto' movement.

**III Allegro energico** – this movement is laced with the Hungarian style that Brahms was to use in his concerto a decade later. The brilliant solo writing and the orchestral colour, especially of the broader second theme, complement each other. Eventually a sudden quickening of the mood takes us to the end of this masterpiece, rated by the master of 19th-century violin playing Joseph Joachim to be alongside those of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms.

### *Symphony No. 7 in D minor Op. 70*

*Antonín Dvořák*

Dvořák's music had become increasingly popular since a selection of his *Slavonic Dances* had been performed in London and, as a result, on 5th March 1884 he left Prague to travel to London at the invitation of the London Philharmonic Society. Dvořák's first concert was in the Royal Albert Hall where he conducted his *Stabat Mater*. The size of the orchestra, the choir and the venue made an overwhelming impression... '250 sopranos, 160 contraltos, 180 tenors and 250 basses... 24 first violins, 20 seconds, 16 violas, 16 cellos and 16 double-basses' he wrote in a letter to a friend back in Prague. He also commented that all the inhabitants of his local town would fit into the Albert Hall and there would still be plenty of room!

The upshot of the visit was that the Philharmonic Society elected him as an honorary member and commissioned a new symphony. He also took back home to Prague a commission from the Birmingham Festival, worth £2000, for a new choral work. Later that year he returned to England to conduct in the Three Choirs Festival where, among other tasks, he conducted the *Stabat Mater* in Worcester in an afternoon concert. In the evening he conducted his 6th symphony in which a young violinist, Edward Elgar, was playing in the orchestra.

As well as the commission for the new symphony, he was spurred into action on hearing a performance of the 3rd Symphony of his friend Brahms. 'Now I am occupied with my new symphony [for London] and wherever I go I have nothing else in my mind but my work'. The 'new symphony' was completed in Prague between 13th January and 17th March 1885 and its first performance took place in London, directed by the composer, on 22nd April

1885. By 1889 the work had reached Berlin where two performances convinced the composer that now his 'new symphony' had come to life.

**I Allegro maestoso** – 'subdued and expectant' might be an apt description of the opening, but agitated ideas and a graceful lilting woodwind theme supply momentum. This material is developed into an exquisite climax on full orchestra but the opening mood eventually returns to end the movement as it began.

**II Poco adagio** – serenity as a clarinet opens the movement, but soon the agitation of the first movement creeps in. A stormy section mirrors more of the mood of the first movement but the opening theme returns, the agitation is subdued and the movement ends quietly.

So far, Dvořák has ended the first two movements as Brahms had ended the first two in his 3rd symphony, but in the

**III Scherzo: vivace** Dvořák returns from the world of Brahms to his beloved Bohemia whose native dance rhythms, full of vitality and spirit, played such a part in Dvořák's climb to fame. The power of the Furiant sweeps serenity and any doubts aside; the Trio is lighter in mood and texture but the Furiant comes roaring back to end the movement in a blaze of colour.

**IV Finale: allegro** – the two main themes (one rather angular and announced on cellos, horns and clarinets and the other smooth and lyrical) provide all that Dvořák needs for this final movement. At times the second theme and its mood dominate; so are we heading for a long winding down to the conclusion, as in the ending of the 3rd symphony of Brahms? Not in this movement! Dvořák turns to another 'B' – Beethoven – as the work ends in a blaze of triumph, the D minor of the work finally turning into the positivity of D major.

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