

BBC Philharmonic 14th January 2012

Running in the Clouds (World Premiere)

Maurizio Malagnini (b. 1977)

The Symphonic Suite “Running in the clouds” is inspired by the story of a fell runner called Joss Naylor. The suite is a diary of the memories of this runner during his extraordinary adventure running the Bob Graham Round, a challenging race that involves running for more than 24 continuous hours over 50 peaks in the fells of the Lake District.

The music portrays the intimate relationship between the runner and the wind, the rocks, the lakes and the beauty of the Lake District. In this setting the runner is pushed to the limit, transforming his human fragility into indestructible resilience.

The music takes us through the most energetic and heroic moments of the ascent towards the highest peak: the reward at the end of the journey is in his self-discovery and in the wisdom that the fells can teach the man who is willing to listen to their voice.

The suite culminates in the final movement, a view from Yewbarrow, a celebration of the beauty of the Lake District. In this movement Joss is lost in the mist until the wind blows away a cloud and uncovers an incredible view from the peak Yewbarrow.

List of Movements

Memories from the wind
The desire of the peak
Running in the Clouds
The ascent
Fantasy from a Brook
Lost in the Mist
The last Peak
A view from Yewbarrow

Double Concerto for Clarinet and Viola in E minor Op. 88

Max Bruch (1838 – 1920)

So far as concertos are concerned the German composer Max Bruch is best known for his first violin concerto (to be heard later in the season) and the *Scottish Fantasia*. There are also two other lesser-known violin concertos and a delightful concerto for two pianos and orchestra.

This double concerto for clarinet and viola is a late work written in 1911 and is characteristically romantic and melodic. Bruch once said that his goal was to write tuneful and appealing music, a goal at odds with much of what was going on around him, especially in 1911 in the world of Richard Strauss and others.

Bruch called the idea of putting viola and clarinet together ‘a bit of a mad brainwave’, but he manages to capture their characters and their abilities perfectly. His son, Max Felix, was a clarinetist and was able to give his father sound advice on writing for the instrument. In an interview in 1907 Bruch explained why he had not experimented in his music as had his contemporary Brahms: ‘*One thing that mitigated against me was economic necessity. I had a wife and children to support and educate. I was compelled to earn money with my compositions; therefore I had to write works that were pleasing and easily understood*’.

I Andante con moto – the viola has the first word in the concerto with a bravura gesture that is immediately matched by the clarinet. The two solo instruments then engage in a lyrical game,

accompanying each other, questioning and answering, before the full orchestra is given the chance to enjoy the musical ideas on offer. The soloists are treated as equals; neither dominates and each accompanies the other in this 'pleasing and easily understood' music.

II Allegro moderato – the serene mood continues. Pizzicato strings and delicate woodwind add to the serene feeling. A central episode sees the music given added impetus, but the generally relaxed gentility soon returns.

III Allegro molto – trumpets herald a surprising new mood in the concerto, and the two soloists join in with obvious eagerness. Scurrying triplets are a feature of the writing for both instruments, with the viola perhaps keen to show that it too can be as agile as the clarinet. Almost at the end of the finale a flute joins the viola and clarinet in a brief winding down before the orchestra brings this lyrical work to an end.

Symphony No.1 in A^b Op. 55

Sir Edward Elgar
(1857 – 1934)

First performance	3rd December 1908
Conductor	Dr Hans Richter
Venue	Free Trade Hall Manchester
Orchestra	Hallé

Dedicated to Dr. Hans Richter, '*true artist and true friend*'.

As early as 1898 Elgar had in mind the composition of a symphony based on the life of General Gordon of Khartoum, but it was a further 10 years before the composer had the confidence to tackle such a large-scale work with all its attendant scholarly rules. In the meantime he had written the *Enigma Variations* and *The Dream of Gerontius*, both in a form where rules didn't matter. In a diary entry Lady Elgar wrote: '*June 27th [1907] E much music. Playing great beautiful tune*'. This turned out to be the motto theme that is ever present in the 1st symphony.

After the first performance of the symphony Elgar sent a postcard of the Appian Way, the ancient Roman Road, to a friend in Novello's music publishers, and on it he had written the first three bars of the theme with the words, 'Here it was' written underneath. Indeed it was in Italy in the winter of 1907/08 that he had worked on the first and second movements. Back home in Hereford Elgar became 'possessed with his symphony' (Lady Elgar's diary 29th June 1908) and he completed it in September of that year.

The first performance was an immediate success, the composer being called to the platform several times both during and after the performance, and the same happened in its second performance in London four days later. At the rehearsals for the London performance Hans Richter introduced the work to the players: '*Let us now rehearse the greatest symphony of modern times, and not only in this country*'. Present at this huge triumph were the composers Stanford, Parry and Faure and the young Adrian Boult. In the following year it was performed 100 times all over the world – an instant hit.

I The 'great beautiful tune' (the motto theme of the whole work) is presented almost starkly after two drum rolls and 'passes by the listener as if in procession'. (Along the Appian Way?) This noble theme is swept away in music of total contrast as turbulent rhythms and melodies dominate the movement. Elgar describes two of its musical ideas as 'sad and delicate' and 'a nice sub-acid feeling'. The motto theme is present, sometimes from the back desks of the strings: '*It's there, but you can't tell where*', said Elgar. The motto theme, however, does not have the final word as the music just slips away.

II A sequence of flying semiquavers sets the pattern after two rumbles in the bass. This is followed by a perky little march, and after these ideas are well and truly dealt with, a third more gentle theme appears, described by Elgar as '*like something we hear down by the river*'. Eventually the pace begins

to slow and the flying semiquavers turn into longer and longer notes and the music finds itself in the next movement without a break.

III The beautiful melody of this slow movement (described by Richter as a slow movement ‘that Beethoven would have written’) in fact comprises the identical notes of the flying semiquavers but transformed into a theme of great passion and tenderness. The ending on clarinet and muted brass is ‘time suspended’ or, as Elgar quotes on the sketches from *Hamlet*, ‘the rest is silence’.

IV The music seems exhausted as it resurfaces from the soporific mood of the previous movement. The motto theme is hinted at by the strings but the music becomes more determined as a march takes over. From all this bluster emerges a wonderfully romantic theme, based on the first four notes of the motto theme, that soon dominates proceedings, and at one point harps colour the music ‘beyond expectation’. The motto theme does return for the ending, but as it tries to assert itself it is battered by brass and percussion and surrounded by swirling wind and strings before it finally emerges unscathed and in triumph. Is it any wonder that the audiences at those first two performances demanded no less than five calls to the platform of Elgar?

‘I have never heard such frantic applause’. Jaeger (Nimrod)

This whole symphony is truly a personal document; Elgar wrote to a friend: *‘As to the phases of pride, despair, anger, peace and the thousand and one things that occur between the first page and the last, I would prefer the listener to draw what he can from the sounds he hears’.*

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