



Thames Youth Orchestra

conductor
Simon Ferris

Concert

Saturday March 28th 2009
7.30pm

All Saints Kingston

Programme

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) *Sinfonia da Requiem* op.20

- I. Lacrymosa
- II. Dies Irae
- III. Requiem Aeternam

The *Sinfonia da Requiem* emerged from Britten's prolonged and career-shaping stay in the United States during the early years of the Second World War - a period in which, removed from the hothouse cultural and social contexts of his youth, his already widely-acknowledged talent and outstanding musical literacy were able to develop into a compositional voice that was inimitably his own.

In one way this was simply a case of a young man of precocious talent coming into his estate, and in another, evidence of growing emotional maturity and stability - his lifelong relationship with Peter Pears began soon after their arrival in America. But in another less readily obvious way it would seem that the fact that he experienced much of the war in self-imposed exile encouraged him to develop the psychological trope of the persecuted or ostracized individual (artist, perhaps, or homosexual), and fix it as the aesthetic that would underpin the rest of his career. The focus and independence which alienation brought would likewise show him how he might respond to the public demands and expectations and commissions with sometimes incongruously personal explorations of one sort or another, although his tendency to extrapolate social concerns from private experience would also persist.

So it is perhaps not so curious that the *Sinfonia da Requiem* was written in response to a commission from the Japanese Imperial Government on the eve of their war with America and Britain, as part of the celebrations to mark the 2600th anniversary of the Mikado dynasty. Britten was one of a number of prominent Western composers approached, but the only one to produce, as it turned out, a masterpiece (the ageing Richard Strauss, at his least endearing, produced the forgettable and almost instantly forgotten *Japanese Festival Music* op.84). And it was precisely the fact that he was working out his own aesthetic logic at this time that led him to produce, for the celebrations, a violent, dyspeptic, harrowing work borrowing titles from the Catholic requiem mass - clearly in part the response of a pacifist and conscientious objector to the barbarism then emerging in Europe (and in China, had he cared to investigate), but subsequently dedicated to the memory of his parents - ('combining', he later wrote 'my ideas on war and a memorial for Mum and Pop'); and this apparent confusion - which for Britten, in his naivety, or self-assuredness, was no confusion at all - prompted the Japanese Imperium not only to reject the work but to protest to the British Government through official

diplomatic channels in the strongest terms that the work was nothing but a calculated insult.

At only twenty minutes the *Sinfonia da Requiem* was nevertheless by far his largest purely orchestral work to date. It is arranged in three interlinked movements, but is organized as an accumulation and gradual dispersal of energy, from the violently arresting drum thwacks of the opening, through the manic scurrying of the *Dies Irae*, to the consolation of the concluding *Requiem Aeternam*, all discussed over a static D minor-D major tonal argument.

The relentless monothematicism and rhythmic stasis of the opening *Lacrymosa*, (mirrored in the simple thematic iterations of both the *Dies Irae* and the *Requiem Aeternam*), screws itself slowly up to a violent climax which reintroduces the brutal opening drum gesture. The tension, rather than disperse, moves without a break to the flutter-tonguing winds, scurrying strings and encroaching percussion of the *Dies Irae*, which soon reveals the brutality of its own intention - once again running to an almost autonomic climax which does not so much reach a conclusion as spend itself, providing nonetheless in its bitonal base gesture the seed of the consolatory *Requiem Aeternam*.

Koussevitsky's performance of the *Sinfonia da Requiem* in Boston in January 1942 prompted him to ask the young composer why he did not consider writing an opera, to which Britten replied that he was thinking of adapting *The Borough* by the poet George Crabbe, but could not afford the time for the project. Koussevitsky thereupon arranged a grant from the Foundation he had set up, and Britten was on the way to *Peter Grimes* and the full acceptance of the public mantle of Great Composer – which he nevertheless always wore as though it were a private vestment.

Interval (20mins)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) Symphony No.10 in E minor op.93

- I. Moderato**
- II. Allegro**
- III. Allegretto**
- IV. Andante-Allegro**

In the Soviet Union in the years leading up to the composition of the Tenth Symphony, the interplay of public and private music was governed by a somewhat starker set of definitions. Public music was public in the sense that it belonged to the State, to the people, and the role of the composer was that of public servant, eloquent witness to the resilience of the Russian people and the Soviet ideal in the

face of (for example) Nazi aggression. The whole concept of a private music, on the other hand, was regarded as subversive of the collective will. Moreover, in the age of Stalin, private could be equated with personally treasonable, and might be punished as such.

Shostakovich was caught for many years in the web of state and private paranoia that Stalin and his version of Soviet regime had built around themselves, and he twice came close to disaster: once in 1936, when Stalin paid an impromptu visit to the Bolshoi theatre to see Shostakovich's opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and hated it - the Fourth Symphony had to be shelved, and the composer felt the need to make amends (of a sort) in the form of the less obviously contentious Fifth Symphony (although the popularity and global acclaim which flowed from that appear to have goaded Stalin still more); and again in 1948, when Shostakovich, accused with virtually every other Soviet composer of note of the catch-all sin of 'formalism' by Stalin's aide Andrey Zhdanov, was forced to make what was tantamount to a written confession; from that year until 1953 and the death of Stalin he composed no new symphonies, and withheld his violin concerto, but divided his labours between cantatas and oratorios lauding Stalin and the glories of Soviet Russia, and a sudden proliferation of string quartets and solo piano music (notably the preludes and fugues) - the forms, in other words, of domestic bourgeois musical consumption which had become associated, in the course of the nineteenth century, with a particularly intimate artistic self expression and introspection.

And then, in a burst of phenomenal creative energy between March 1953, when Stalin died, and November 1953, Shostakovich wrote his vast and defining Tenth Symphony. And it is, despite the scale and expanse of it, an unmistakably inward work. We might conclude from this, either, that the symphony as a form was, or at least could be, for Shostakovich, as intimate and 'private' as a quartet, or that the distinction was for him - as for Britten - false: that what emerged on the death of Stalin was not a triumph of liberal self-expression (as was often supposed in the West during the Cold War), but a reunited musical personality.

In fact, of course, both symphony and string quartet are art works and both presuppose a measure of rhetorical control, a dialogue with the music of the past, not just the tyrants of the present, and from neither can we expect an outflowing of unmediated psychological or emotional revelation. Both are concerned with the form that music takes, and to that extent Zhdanov's catch-all accusation of 'formalism' was true.

The long breathed opening of the symphony, from that perspective, sounds like nothing so much as restrained indulgence - and a perhaps intentional resemblance to the opening of Liszt's Faust symphony (so, at least, was the contention of Shostakovich's friend and biographer Dmitri Rabinovich). In this vast opening movement Shostakovich, whatever else he might be doing, is setting out to explore

what sonata form sounds like when informed by no tonal tension, but rather by a set of metamorphic processes operating on the motivic material – and exploring, simultaneously, how to produce a monumental, even epic work in the age of irony. What emerges is a vast arch spanning some twenty-five minutes, the first two-thirds of which amount to a step-wise approach to the movement's great climax, and then a retreat from the same; along the way passages of reflective Wagnerian trombone timbres alternate with wintery pastoral - solo woodwind over subdued pizzicato strings - and the clatter of trumpets and the shriek of violins and piccolo and snarling brass over snare-drum tattoos - as though every dark orchestral timbre and gesture from the pages of Western music had been called to the opening of a sort of supreme soviet of depressed and impotent daemons. There is no catharsis, no dramatic argument as such; but there is, unifying all, a highly distinctive morose undertow of resignation. Its conclusion - two piccolos over sustained strings and a rumble of timpani - looks forward to the peculiar, otherworldly sonorities of the Fifteenth Symphony.

The second movement, by contrast, is a concentrated assault, four of the most breathlessly terrifying minutes of music in the Western canon. Supposedly a portrait of Stalin (some have heard, in the abundance of squeezed one-note crescendi, a caricature of Stalin's speech patterns) with its shattering snare drums and brass and wind, over *moto perpetuo* slithering strings, we descend to some nether hall of Shostakovich's hell - in which, of course, Stalin was always the presiding deity.

The third movement *Allegretto*, a sort of nocturne alive with cryptograms and gnomic fragments, is private and introspective in the sense that an autopsy is private and introspective. In it, for almost the first time, Shostakovich uses the musical monogram - DSCH (D, Eflat, C, B natural in German notation), and intertwines it, we now know, with a monogram devised for a pupil of his, the Azerbaijani pianist and composer, Elmira Nazirova, with whom he seems to have been infatuated at about this time. Her monogram (E,A,E,D,A using a mixture of standard notation and sol-fa) comes in the form of a melancholy tolling horn call, which punctuates the movement exactly twelve times - midnight in the forest of desire, perhaps: in any case, private utterance is seared into the most public of forms.

The fourth movement, founded on an andante of equivocating woodwind solos over reserved strings and a rumble of timpani, alternating with meditative interjections from the lower strings, breaks into a sort of defiant allegro dance, an example of what Alex Ross characterizes as the "dance on the gallows", a trope Shostakovich would use with increasing frequency; and whether the semi-hysterical iteration towards its conclusion of the DSCH monogram reads as a defiant two-fingers to Stalin - Shostakovich, after all, is still around, alive and well - or what Alex Ross, again, calls an obnoxious jingle, a rhetorical distancing of self - remains ambiguous. But if there is nothing we could call catharsis, or resolution at the

conclusion of the work, there is an exhausted, exhilarated sense of a storm weathered, and the restoration of a fully musical intellect.

programme notes © John Ferris, 2008

Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from Geoffrey Bush.

A skilled and experienced jazz musician, Simon's wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, encompassing performing, composing, arranging, writing, conducting and teaching.

Simon is currently Composer in Residence at Tiffin School, and Musician in Residence at The Tiffin Girls' School

FRIENDS OF TYO

The purpose of the Friends' Association is to provide financial support to the orchestra to help offset the significant expenses of running a full-scale symphonic ensemble. These costs include music, venue and instrument hire, staffing, performing rights, publicity, transport, maintaining a web presence, catering – the list goes on.

The cost of membership of the friends' scheme is £15 per annum for an individual subscription, £25 for family membership and £40 for corporate members. The benefits are as follows:

- Reduced ticket prices for concerts and events
- Members' names listed in concert programmes
- Receipt of a regular email newsletter

Current Members

Mrs Peggy Linton
Mrs Catriona Rogers
Mrs Mary Reid
Mrs Miranda Fagandini
Mrs Penny D'Souza
Mr and Dr Kenyon
Irene and Howard Mallinson

Janet Hoyle Notary Public
Peter Jagger
Sally and Rupert Bruce
Rachael and Peter Nichols

For further details, or to apply for membership, please contact Friends Coordinator,
Miranda Fagandini: friends@thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk

TYO STAFF

Musical Director – Simon Ferris
Executive Director – Rebecca Lacey

Violins Coach – Adrian Charlesworth
Cellos Coach – Sarah Hedley-Miller
Lower Strings Coach – Pippa Hyde
Brass Coach – Ian Stott
Wind Coach – Andrew Watson
Percussion Coach – Ben Porter

Librarian – Mayuko Tanno
Administrator – Tillie Dilworth

Treasurer – Sarah Bruce
Friends Coordinator – Miranda Fagandini

This evening's performance is being recorded. Please try to keep audience noise to a minimum.

For further information, please visit the orchestra website:
www.thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk

or contact Rebecca Lacey, Executive Director of TYO:
rebecca.lacey@blueyonder.co.uk

Forthcoming Concerts

July 18th 2009, All Saints Kingston
Holst *The Planets*

September 12th 2009, Cadogan Hall
Programme tbc

THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

Max Liefkes, leader

First Violins

Max Liefkes*
Eunyoung Kim
James Walsh
Bola Kim
Eli Lee
Timothy Shipley
Celia Rogers
Anna Selig
Sam Berrow
Luisa Page
Celia Rogers
Ben Rolt

Second Violins

Pradeep Kannan*
Aashraya Shankar
Olivia Johnson
Imogen Dodds
Rosie Parker
Sian Davies
Jessica Plummer
Sung-Hyo Lee
Adisha Kapila
Lakmal Mudalige
Alex Ewan

Violas

Tillie Dilworth*
Eleanor Figueiredo
Grace Moon

Cellos

Jonathan Bruce*
Eunyoung Lee
Miles Dilworth
Emily Hearne
Fred Mikardo-Greaves
Arran Mornin

Bass

Marianne Schofield*
Gregor Reid
Daniel D'Souza

Flutes

Mayuko Tanno*
Sem Lee
Rhona Cormack
Beatrice Arscott
Chris James
Sung Kim
Lawrence Thain (piccolo)

Oboes

Catherine Hancock*
Diya Kapila
Olivia Kenyon (+cor anglais)

Clarinets

Georgina Feary*
Tom Nichols
Charles Kimber
Ben Ingledeu

Alto Saxophone

Matthew Sulzmann

Bassoons

Isabel White*
Toby Hasler-Winter

Horns

Catie Igoe*
Hugh Sisley (*Shostakovich)
Alexei Watkins
Clara Hardingham
Chris Born
David Liu

Trumpets

Imogen Hancock*
Bryony Watson
Matthew Parker
Max Fagandini

Trombones

Ben Pearce*
Edmund Jillings
Julius Whiteman
Hatty Martin

Tuba

Katherine Chevis

Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

Percussion

Rupert Price
Enoque Adolfo
Patrick Milne
Hugo Fagandini

Piano

Patrick Milne

Harp

Danielle Megranahan

*principal