



Thames Youth Orchestra

conductor
Simon Ferris

Concert

Saturday April 26th 2008
7.30pm

Holy Trinity Sloane Square



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Programme

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) – Helios Overture op.17

Aulis Sallinen (b.1935) – Symphony No.1 op.24

Interval (20 minutes)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) – Symphony No.1 op.39

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) – Helios Overture op.17

At the beginning of 1903 Nielsen, by then a well-regarded composer in Denmark, although struggling to make a mark internationally, received a grant from his publisher which enabled him to take a leave of absence from his position as violinist in Copenhagen's Royal Court Orchestra, and spend much of that year with his wife, the well-known sculptor Anne-Marie Brodersen, in Athens, where she was copying statues and bas-reliefs in the Acropolis Museum. The local conservatory made a room and a piano available to Nielsen, and he divided his time between composition and walks, alone or with Anne-Marie, in the surrounding mountains. It was in that room that on April 23rd he completed his *Helios Overture*, into which he was able to distil something of the concoction of new-won freedom and energy which he had found in Greece.

The overture is more, however, than a Northern artist's response to the Athenian sun. Nielsen himself glossed the overture very simply, as follows:

“Stillness and darkness – the sun rises with a peaceful song of praise – wanders its golden way – sinks silently into the sea.”

Given his fascination with Greek culture and his own peculiar philosophical economy, it might be argued that in choosing to identify the sun with Helios, son of the Titan Hyperion, rather than the Classical Athenian Apollo, Nielsen was deliberately reaching back to some European pre-historic unconscious (at a time, of course, when European intellectual culture's fascination with the conflation of myth and psychology was approaching its zenith). Certainly, in its meditation on the elemental simplicity of the sun's diurnal course, there lies an indication of how this work intersected with his own increasingly idiosyncratic aesthetic development. One year previously, in his second symphony, subtitled *The Four Temperaments*, he had begun to explore the compositional potential of, on the one hand, dualistic structures (inherently conflictual, generating tension through contrast) and on the other monodic, more heavily-centred architectures (of which the *Helios Overture* is clearly an example). The monodic forms he later came to call his vegetative principle, and they could be expressive either of a quasi-Buddhist 'oneness', or of a more anxious, Western emotional stasis: which, ultimately, would depend on a variety of personal and external contexts. In the *Helios Overture*, written at a time for Nielsen of great emotional contentment, with its motivic tautness and cyclic structure, it is clearly the former.

The tonal structure is, appropriately, a single arch, moving from C major through E major and back to C major; but within that broad trajectory Nielsen allows his themes to slip their tonal moorings here and there, introducing pitches associated more with modal scales, so that musically, also, the work has its feet in a pre-Classical (or perhaps, rather, non-Classical) European heritage.

From the Wagnerian pre-conscious night, then, of the lower strings and brass, a rising and falling figure emerges on the violins and is taken up by oboe and horn as the sun rises, and steadily thickens in texture and quickens in pulse, and leads ultimately to a theme of full solar expansiveness; from here we are brought through a fugato of crisp energy and a final statement of the theme, calmly, if never easily, downward, until the sun is once again extinguished in the Western Ocean.

Aulis Sallinen (b.1935) – Symphony No.1 op.24

Aulis Sallinen started life as a composer in the 1950s, in a Finland whose musical life was dominated by the tenets of post-war serialism. Sallinen himself attended the summer courses at Darmstadt, latter-day spiritual home of serialism, and his first compositions (chamber works) can be regarded as essays in this strictly non-tonal language.

However, as with the German symphonic tradition in the decades after Beethoven, Sibelius, morose giant of Finnish music, silent in his forest retreat for thirty years before his death in 1957 like some god of the Kalevela, still exerted a huge gravitational pull, such that Sallinen's first symphony, dating from 1970, marked the crossing of a threshold of peculiar significance in his return, by way of free chromatic atonality, to a spare tonal language and organic formal structure which Sibelius would have recognised and approved.

As with the Sibelius of the *Seventh Symphony* and *Tapiola*, the work is cast in one movement (lasting roughly fifteen minutes), and dispenses with any Classical tonal architectonic in favour of a teleological development: a fragmentary stepwise movement towards some moment which at once crowns and retrospectively explains the tectonic drift of the work. In this context, Sallinen has often talked of his composition in terms of mosaic (a word Sibelius also famously liked to use); indeed, his fifth symphony was to be subtitled *Washington Mosaics*.

This tessellated approach to organic structure, each tile distinct from yet contiguous to, the next, and each governed by a sharply limited set of rhythmic-melodic motives, is clearly audible through the *Symphony No.1*. It opens with a sparsely outlined F sharp minor chord, around which tonal base the whole symphony is to orbit; so much so that, when the chord returns at the conclusion of the work, it feels not so much like a return as a reiteration; this chord is punctured by a rising, repeated two note figure on high woodwind tinged with glockenspiel. From this sparse opening gesture emerges a long-breathed lament on the viola, whose quality of bleak meditation is not modified by the dialogue it soon enters into with the equally melancholic violin. From this base, with two flutes and piccolo acting, as Ronald Weitzman has said¹, as pilot birds to this ship of a symphony, tonal, atonal, and bitonal

¹ *Tempo*, New Ser., No. 202 (Oct., 1997), pp. 8-15

elements converge on what is at once the heart and telos of the work, a climax marked by a sustained chiming of the bells which have punctuated the progress of the symphony thus far. From this point of culmination comes a peculiarly spectral descent, by way of a waltz-like theme; the waltz, in the wrong (right?) hands, is perhaps the chilliest of dance forms, and there is an enervating civility to its irruption. It leads back to the opening F sharp minor chord, bringing closure of a sort to a symphony which, in its eerie concentration, seems to have been the work of a moment.

Salinen's *Symphony No.1* was awarded first prize in a competition to inaugurate Helsinki's Finlandia Hall in 1971. It stands at the head of a symphonic corpus now numbering eight works, and, from the mid-1970s, a substantial and important body of operatic works on which his reputation outside Finland is currently based. In commenting on the diversity of his own output, he has stated that the criteria of good art is its lucidity, and in the first symphony, with the intellectual sharpness of its approach to structure, the careful juxtaposition of timbres and the motivic economy of its writing, the lucidity of his mature style can be said to have achieved its first characteristic expression.

Interval (20 minutes)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) – Symphony No.1 op.39

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Scherzo*
- IV. *Finale (quasi una fantasia)*

Sibelius's first symphony is neither, properly speaking, an early nor an immature work; it was written in 1898-9, at a time when the composer, 34 years old, had already established a reputation within Finland as its foremost musical voice. Like Brahms, a symphony was expected of him. If, then, it is generally regarded as standing preliminary to, and to an extent apart from, his mature symphonic idiom, it is because it numbers prominently among the first works where Sibelius was trying to reconcile two highly distinct musical voices – that of the urbane, conservatory-trained musician who had studied in Berlin and Vienna on the one hand, and that of the 'Finnish Barbarian' alive to the re-emerging Finnish bardic traditions on the other. It was, and was to remain, a perplexing problem.

He had made his first rapid gains in status on the back of such truly early works as *Kullervo* (op.7), a five movement proto-symphony based on the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic assembled from oral sources in the nineteenth century. His work on *Kullervo* was grounded in a deep, and for Sibelius, important understanding of this Finnish oral tradition: in particular, two movements with chorus stand out in clearly grasping the spirit of the repetitive strophe/antistrophe form of Finnish versification, and in so doing developing an unmistakably Finnish idiom.

Sibelius's interest in the forms of Finnish national self-identity was not unusual; the 1890s for Finland were a time of increasingly radical self-awareness. The country had been a Grand Duchy of Russia since 1809, and throughout the decade stirrings of nationalist resentment were to bring ever harsher oppressive measures from Saint Petersburg, culminating in the

programme of overt 'Russification' which followed the so-called February Manifesto of 1899, which led to arrests, deportations, and the whole uneasy apparatus of oppression.

Sibelius, an ethnic Swede who only learnt Finnish in early manhood, had been gravitating towards Finnish nationalist circles for some time, and had married into the influential nationalist Järnefelt family in the early 1890s. And while most of his time in the company of the group surrounding the two Järnefelt brothers (who were themselves a painter and a composer respectively) seems to have been spent drinking heavily and discussing art, enough of it, at least, was dedicated to politics for Sibelius to feel prompted to make various patriotic gestures, *Finlandia* (1899) prominent among them.

And yet for some years he had been becoming increasingly dissatisfied with his own compositional practice. In Vienna in his youth he had bullishly resisted the pull both of Brahmsian conservatory classicism and slippery Wagnerian decadence; but there were other powerful influences, and he looked to the Russian nationalists, and in particular to Tchaikovsky, for models of intellectual and formal control of his material, and through them encountered, once again, the Austro-Germanic tradition, and in particular the motivic strictness of Beethoven and Haydn.

The first symphony was steered, then, across these powerful cross currents. It is ostensibly structured in a relatively conservative symphonic manner, with its traditional sonata-form architectonic; yet it eschews contrapuntal elaboration in favour of carefully constructed sonorities which develop a sort of aural perspective, and in particular a sort of proto-organic development of motivic cells.

The work opens with a melancholy, hesitating clarinet solo over an intermittently rumbling timpani, as though these were the mere disjecta membra of symphonic ideas; but all of the motivic material in the first movement and much of that in the rest of the symphony can be shown to derive from this theme; and it makes its (fully orchestrated) return at the beginning of the fourth movement. The opening theme proper (described in a subsequently discarded early programme for the symphony as "a cold wind blowing in from the sea") leads through a cascade of interrelated motifs in recognisable, if truncated, sonata form; the dominating structural impetus remains, however, synthetic rather than analytical.

The opening theme of the Andante slides disconcertingly between major and minor, from which uneasy foundation a dramatic tension is generated, again, not contrapuntally but motivically; this tension culminates in a passage of scurrying violence from which the melancholy theme of the opening reemerges, as though in some obscure way it had lain at the heart of the storm of violence all along.

After a scherzo in which a grotesque dance of bilious, bucolic footstomping surrounds a neurotic, bird-like trio section, the fourth movement returns to the opening theme of the symphony; it is marked *quasi una fantasia*, as though giving up on the attempt to maintain the illusion of classical architectonic (although this is not, actually, the case); as in the second movement, at its culmination a passage of highly energetic, almost distempered violence releases an andante theme of melancholy breadth, as though this discontented, maturing young man, like D.H.Lawrence's God, "cudgelling his mighty brains" for "some other beauty", has been thrown back, this time at least, upon the shore of his own gloomy ruminations.

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.

Thames Youth Orchestra was formed in 2005 with funding from the Performing Arts College, Tiffin School. Now comprising musicians from fifteen South West London schools, TYO looks ahead to an exciting future fully committed to providing for its young players an exhilarating and enriching first-hand experience of great orchestral music.

Music Director, TYO – Simon Ferris

Executive Director, TYO – Rebecca Lacey

Orchestra Manager, Upper Strings Coach – Joanna Korzinek

Lower Strings Coach – Pippa Hyde

Brass Coach – Ian Stott

Wind Coach – Andrew Watson

Percussion Coach – Ben Porter

Librarian – Mayuko Tanno

Administrator – James Andrewes

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

TYO is indebted to Lords Estate Agents for its continuing support.

FRIENDS OF TYO

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For further details, or to apply for membership, please contact the Executive Director
Rebecca Lacey: rebecca.lacey@blueyonder.co.uk

Forthcoming Concerts

July 12th Kingston Parish Church – Respighi *Pini di Roma*, Walton *Capriccio Burlesco*, Chabrier *España*, Mitchell *Three Etudes* (world premiere)

September 18th Cadogan Hall – Prokofiev *Lieutenant Kijé*, Stravinsky *Firebird Suite*, Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*

THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

So Yeon Kim, leader

First Violins

So Yeon Kim*
Max Liefkes
David Mogilner
Rachel Bruce
Sam Berrow
Eli Lee
Anna Selig
Amy Sibley
Daniel D'Souza
James Walsh

Second Violins

Eunyoung Kim*
Pradeep Kannan
Josh Donaldson-Colls
Cheryl Pilbeam
Olivia Johnson
Aashraya Shankar
Imogen Dodds
Sian Davies
Sun-Kyo Lee

Violas

Tillie Dilworth*
Eleanor Figueiredo
Matt Appleyard
Alexi Ayliff-Vellianitis

Cellos

Toby Perkins*
Miriam Figueiredo
Jonathan Bruce
Eunyoung Lee
Miles Dilworth
Tom Davis
Jonah Park
Fred Mikardo-Greaves
Oliver Woodings

Bass

Marianne Schofield*
James Andrewes

Flutes

Nicky Chalk*
Mayuko Tanno*
Sem Lee
Lydia Dance
Lawrence Thain (piccolo)

Oboes

Catherine Hancock*
Olivia Kenyon*
Emma Price

Clarinets

Georgina Feary*
Ben Ingledew
Tom Nichols
Charles Kimber

Bassoons

Nicholas Fletcher*
Leah Mirsky

Horns

Catie Igoe*
Clara Hardingham
Ben Davies
Emma Walker
Christy Born

Trumpets

Max Fagandini*
Imogen Hancock
Bryony Watson
Matt Parker

Trombones

Hatty Martin*
Henry Affonso
Julius Whiteman
James Hansell
Peter DeBurke

Tuba

Josh Donaldson-Colls

Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

Percussion

Piers Thompson
Rupert Price
Millie Davies

Harp

Danielle Megrannahan

*principal