



THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTOR
SIMON FERRIS

CONCERT

SATURDAY JANUARY 13TH 2007
7.30PM

KINGSTON PARISH CHURCH
MARKET PLACE, KINGSTON UPON THAMES



PROGRAMME

Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921) – Hänsel und Gretel: Prelude

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) – Nutcracker Suite, op.71a

- I. Overture miniature
- II. Danses caractéristiques
 - a. Marche
 - b. Danse de la Fée-Dragée
 - c. Danse russe Trépak
 - d. Danse arabe
 - e. Danse chinoise
 - f. Danse des mirlitons
- III. Valse des fleurs

interval (20 minutes)

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) – Symphony No.8 in G major, op.88

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo



Engelbert Humperdinck – Hänsel und Gretel: Prelude

To write a music drama in Germany in the decade or so after Wagner's death was perhaps not unlike writing symphonies after the death of Beethoven – a futile straining against a gravitational field of planetary proportions. For the precociously gifted Engelbert Humperdinck the pull was perhaps even stronger, since he had been invited by Wagner to Bayreuth to assist in the first production of *Parsifal*, and had even managed to put in some time as musical tutor to the great man's son, Siegfried.

Sure enough, nearly every account of the opera written since its first performance credits it with Wagnerian scoring, texture and colour, and there is much discussion of leitmotifs and through-composition. And while not wanting to deny its evident debts, it

is perhaps worth pointing out, to begin with, that children never formed part of Wagner's aesthetic or imaginative world – the contrast between, for example, the simple piety of the evening hymn with which the overture begins and the tortured Christian ceremonial of *Parsifal* could not be stronger; and if there is exuberance and a lightness of touch in Wagner's output (notably in *Die Meistersinger*), it is nothing to the rambunctious anarchic mischief which permeates *Hänsel und Gretel*.

The opera sprang from a request for a family entertainment from Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette, (who subsequently wrote the libretto); he set four songs based on the Grimms' fairy tale, the success of which prompted him to expand the work into a *singspiel* strictly for family consumption, and only after further prompting and much anguished hesitation (*Was so slight a subject really worthy of the master? What about the future of German music drama?*) was it finally ready for its first performance, under the baton of an enthusiastic Richard Strauss at Weimar in December, 1893. Humperdinck's fears were assuaged by the rapturous reception of the opera over the next few years, not only by the German and European opera-going public, but also by his peers (as well as Strauss, the influential critic Eduard Hanslick and, perhaps unsurprisingly, Gustav Mahler were enthusiastic supporters). Its performance has since become one of the inevitable harbingers of Christmas in Germany.

The overture recapitulates much of the musical and thematic material of the opera as a whole, and Humperdinck himself referred to it as 'Children's life'. The opening chorale-like evening hymn (later sung by the children when they are lost in the forest) seems to suggest the over-arching providential protection of the innocents; it is followed by a series of increasingly turbulent folk-like dances (although most of what appear to be folk tunes in the opera are in fact skilful pastiche); and concludes with an impressive polyphonic interweaving of all of this material - whatever else Wagner had taught him, he had clearly learnt valuable lessons from *Die Meistersinger*. Already, at the conclusion of the overture, just as the children are about to make their tumbling entrance, we are at once hard under the eaves of, and a very long way away indeed from, *Parsifal*. As though that might, after all, be the best place to escape the great dead Wagner's searching gaze.



Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky – The Nutcracker Suite, op.71a

The Nutcracker (*Shchelkunchik*) was part of a double commission for an opera (*Iolanta*) and a ballet to be performed over one gala evening in 1892, and of the two it was the Nutcracker which caused Tchaikovsky the greatest problems.

His was a notoriously fragile creative ego, and he had spent much of his professional career terrified that his powers might be waning. In the spring of 1891 he wrote to Ivan Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres, that he was making no progress; he felt little affinity with the confection which had been foisted upon him as subject matter – a setting of Alexandre Dumas' adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* – and identified the fairy realm of Act II, Confiturembourg, as the root

of his block. It has been conjectured, from allusions in his diaries, that it was news of the death of his sister, Sasha, which finally broke the deadlock: upon hearing the news, he said, he felt as though he had passed out of himself, had become someone else, and memories of his sister were like memories of a distant past.

Of course the problems of which Tchaikovsky writes and their subsequent working out might well have been musical and aesthetic rather than necessarily psychological, but it is nevertheless true that the draft score was subsequently finished with great rapidity; it is perhaps not too fanciful to see in this glut of childhood nostalgia a coherent if disconcerting response to his bereavement, and an obliquely consistent contribution to the clutch of works which constitute his valedictory late style.

The suite was assembled as a shop window for the complete work, being performed in March 1892, some months before the opening of the ballet itself. With the exception of the first two numbers, all of the music is from Act II – from that very Confiturembourg, in fact, which had caused him so much pain in the composition. Clara, the daughter of the family, having helped the toys vanquish the Mouse King and his minions, is taken by the Nutcracker (somehow translated into Prince Charming) to Confiturembourg, where she is feasted and entertained by the monarch of that realm, the Sugar Plum Fairy.

It is from this entertainment that the sequence of dances is taken, although they are not presented in the same order as the ballet. The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy (*Danse de la Fée-Dragée*) is scored, famously, for celesta, an instrument created in 1889 by Auguste Mustel which Tchaikovsky came across in Paris and had sent back in secret to Moscow, fearing that either Rimsky-Korsakov or Glazunov might beat him to the novelty of its “divinely beautiful tone”.

The three numbers that follow are dances characterized by genial pastiche – *Trepak* is a headlong Russian dance in duple time, *Coffee (Danse arabe)* a languid evocation of the souks and bazaars of some composite Araby, while *Tea (Danse chinoise)* ushers in a troupe of Chinese acrobats. These are followed by the Dance of the Mirlitons (referring, by a complex of puns, to the marzipan shepherdesses of the ballet and their flutes, mirlitons being at once a type of marzipan pastry from Rouen and a class of crude reed instrument); and finally the elegant Waltz of the Flowers.

The suite is at once memorable and touching, skilfully and scintillatingly scored; redolent, then, of the salons and brilliantly-lit Court and theatres of Russia and Paris of the 1890's; and insofar as the work can be described as valedictory, it constitutes a very public farewell to these great public spaces, and gives in the process and in contrast with the ballet as a whole, only the most shadowy indication of the complex emotional eddies running around and beneath it.



interval (20 minutes)

Antonín Dvořák – Symphony No.8 in G major, op.88 (B.163, first published as Symphony No.4, London 1892)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Dvořák's Eighth Symphony was written in 1889 when the composer was at the height of his international fame. Just prior to its first performance he was invited to Vienna to an audience with the Emperor Franz Josef, where he was awarded the Austrian Iron Cross (third class); a year later he was in Cambridge receiving an honorary doctorate, and the Eighth Symphony was given in lieu of an acceptance speech – its more than hundredth performance in just over a year.

For a man who advertised himself as – and in some respects was – simple, uncomplicated, a countryman, such attention was only partly welcome. Here was a man, after all, who was conspicuously uncomfortable in the company of anyone whom he regarded as his social superior, who had a pathological fear of busy streets, enjoyed raising pigeons, and whose greatest passion outside music was the steam locomotive and the railway timetable.

It was perhaps in keeping, then, that the Eighth Symphony, written in the summer of 1889 in a little under a month, should be in G major, a key in which no one since Haydn – that other reputedly simple, happy man of the country – had written a major symphony. And there is certainly a studied naivety to the musical language, which moves freely and engagingly between folk-like melody, pastoral subjects, fanfares and imitation of natural sounds, with nods in the direction of the chorale and funeral march.

But, also like Haydn, Dvořák's was a fundamentally complex and inquisitive musical personality, and he consistently and consciously interrogated his own compositional practice. He was, moreover, very well read, intellectually voracious, interested in new technologies, and widely travelled, and the rapidity with which he composed was predicated on prolonged periods of mental preparation.

And so, in the Eighth Symphony, while the work is genially rhapsodic, having perhaps more to do with the symphonic poems of Liszt and Richard Strauss than the symphonies of Brahms, and richly nationalistic (he draws heavily upon the idiom of Slavonic folk tunes, without actually using any), in solving the problems of large-scale structure which he posed himself he succeeded in producing a work not only of warmth and sunlight, but also of subtle ingenuity.

The symphony opens, in fact, in G minor with a cello theme which makes its return, more or less unaltered, at several key moments throughout the movement – as though this introspective G minor gesture were in some way the cornerstone of the whole

movement. In contrast, the themes introduced in what might be regarded as the exposition (some count as many as eight in the opening 126 bars) are warm and engaging; and yet each is subjected to at least partial development over the course of the movement.

The central movements continue this dialogue between major and minor, between the childlike simplicity and directness of folk tune and a more liminal, shadowy world. The adagio starts in the 'false' key of E flat major and feels its way to the 'real' key of C minor, exactly mirroring the movement in the adagio of the *Eroica* symphony, that epitome of funeral marches to 19th century sensibilities. And yet its central section is the most disingenuous of folk melodies. In a similar spirit, the scherzo opens with a lilting G minor essay in the spirit of the Austrian folk dance, the *Ländler*, while in the trio we are once again in a disarmingly simple G major.

The finale is a theme and variations with a central section doing the work of a development. Its opening fanfare is followed by a statement of the theme by the cellos (doing their work of orientation, once again) and the first three notes are identical with those of the opening flute theme of the first movement proper – the sort of motivic allusion with which the whole work is filled, melody becoming structural sinew.

The symphony, in spite of its enthusiastic public reception, was not universally admired. Brahms, a personal friend of Dvořák, considered the lack of formal structural control alarming: "everything" he said "is finely judged, musically enthralling and beautiful – but there is no real substance." But given that from its very opening gestures the folk elements are made to emerge from a much more shadowy world, it is perhaps worth remembering that Dvořák, twelve years previous to the composition of the symphony, had buried three children in the space of twelve months; and while there is no suggestion of autobiographical content, a complex (musical) intellect such as Dvořák's is likely to entail a complex emotional life. As with *The Nutcracker* and *Hänsel und Gretel*, the world of folk and child-like innocence is fringed by fleeting presences and still more alarming absences, and if the work is warm and sunny it is not therefore uncomplicated or unconsidered; its simplicity, if that is what we are ultimately offered, is hard won.



programme notes © John Ferris, 2007

THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

So-Yeon Kim, leader

Section coaches

Joanna Korzinek, strings

Ian Stott, brass

Paul Price, woodwind

First Violins

So-Yeon Kim*
Rebecca Minio-
Paluello
Rachel Bruce
Max Liefkes
Jessica Eccleston

Second Violins

Eun-Young Kim*
David Mogilner
Pradeep Kannan
Jonathan Wong
Eli Lee
Cheryl Pilbeam
Celia Rogers
Imogen Dodds
Nicholas Lung
Sian Davies

Violas

Ric Hollingbery*
Tillie Dilworth
Eleanor Figueiredo
Alexi Ayliff-Vellianitis
Thom Andrewes

Cellos

Toby Perkins*
Miriam Figueiredo
Jonathan Bruce
Isabella Hatfield
Miles Dilworth
Jonah Park
Tom Davies
Fred Mikardo-Greaves

Bass

James Andrewes

Flutes

Nicky Chalk*
Mayuko Tanno*
Sem Lee
Neshma Shah
Hani Kim (piccolo)

Oboes

Kabir Bhalla*
Sophie Robin
Laura Lewis
Emma Price

Cor Anglais

Kabir Bhalla

Clarinets

Natalie Rukuts*
Georgina Feary
Ben Ingledew

Bass Clarinet

Ben Ingledew

Bassoons

Victor Jones
Nick Fletcher
Isabel White

Horns

Freddie Bruce*
Clara Hardingham
Catriona Igoe
Oliver Watson
Zacchaeus Rodwell

Trumpets

Max Fagandini*
Nick Goodman
Matthew Parker
Bryony Watson

Trombones

Hatty Martin
Henry Affonso
Julius Whiteman
Peter DeBurke

Tuba

Leo Whiteman

Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

Percussion

Sam Foster
Rupert Price
Chris To

Harp

Danielle Megranahan

Celesta

Olivia Walker

*principal

Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris, musical director of the Thames Youth Orchestra, read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. In addition, he pursued instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and received private composition tuition from Geoffrey Bush. A skilled jazz musician, his professional career embraces a diverse range of styles and disciplines and finds at its core a mixture of performing, composing, arranging, conducting and teaching.

Simon is currently, and uniquely, on the staff both at Tiffin School and at Tiffin Girls' School in Kingston upon Thames.

Thames Youth Orchestra was formed in 2005 with funding from the Performing Arts College, Tiffin School. Now comprising musicians from ten 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.

For further information, please contact Rebecca Lacey, chair of TYO:

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TYO is very grateful to Lords Estate Agents for its continuing support.



THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

March 22nd 2007, 7.30pm
Kingston Parish Church

Bernstein Candide Overture
Gershwin An American in Paris
Roy Harris Symphony No.3
Copland Appalachian Spring

www.thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk

