



Thames Youth Orchestra

conductor
Simon Ferris

Concert

Saturday January 17th 2009
7.30pm

All Saints Kingston

Programme

Richard Wagner – *Siegfried Idyll*

Interval (20 minutes)

Gustav Mahler – Symphony No.1

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) – *Siegfried Idyll*

Wagner composed the *Siegfried Idyll* as a birthday present for his wife Cosima, and it was first performed outside her bedroom door on the morning of Christmas Eve 1870. To those familiar with *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and in particular with the opera *Siegfried*, the third of the tetralogy, the work appears at first to be a *pot pourri* of themes taken from the opera, but the opposite is in fact the case – the relationship between *Idyll* and opera is ambiguous at best.

Wagner had first met Cosima Liszt in 1864 at the Villa Pelle on Lake Starnberg when she was the wife of the conductor Hans von Bulow, one of Wagner's closest friends at the time; a relationship had started, which was shortly thereafter followed by the birth of an illegitimate daughter, Isolde, and a 'Starnberg' string quartet, never completed. Two other children followed over the next few years, and after Cosima's divorce she and Wagner were married in August 1870.

The theme from the quartet found itself reused in the *Siegfried Idyll* along with music from Act III of the opera which Wagner was working on around the time of Siegfried's birth (*Siegfried* was first performed in 1876), and a lullaby which he had either heard or composed, and in any case noted down, in 1868. Evidence suggests that the appearance of certain new material in the love duet of Siegfried derives from the reworking of the quartet material. However that may be, rather than a direct derivative of the opera, the work is in consequence a free-standing *sinfonia domestica* – what Ernst Newmann, Wagner's great biographer, called 'a series of domestic confidences' - celebrating the inception of Cosima and Richard's love and the birth of their last son. The manuscript dedication runs as follows: "Tribschen Idyll, with Fidi's Bird-Song and Orange Sunrise, presented as a symphonic Birthday Greeting to his Cosima by her Richard, 1870". Tribschen was the name of their villa on Lake Lucerne, Fidi a pet name for Siegfried, and the Orange Sunrise a reference to Wagner's memory of how the orange wallpaper outside Cosima's bedroom was illuminated on the morning of his son's birth.

The piece was originally scored for 15 players and as such was an enlarged chamber work. It was subsequently rescored by Wagner and published, much to Wagner and Cosima's distress, in response to financial worries. Legend states the secrecy of the preparations for that Christmas Eve morning in 1870 went to such lengths that the trumpeter – a young Hans Richter, who claimed to have learned the instrument for the occasion – would row out into the middle of the lake to practise his part.

Interval (20 minutes)

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) – Symphony No.1

1. Langsam. Schleppend. *Wie ein Naturlaut* – Im Anfang sehr gemächlich
2. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell – Trio. Recht gemächlich
3. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen
4. Stürmisch bewegt

Mahler's first symphony caused consternation and puzzlement not only at its first performance in Budapest in 1889, but fairly consistently thereafter, including at the first performance of the revised version in 1900 in the Vienna Musikverein where polite applause was laced with some subdued hissing. Even his wife, Alma, recalled later that the first time she met him all she could remember about him was that she hated his first symphony. This was a reaction which Mahler was to come to expect, if never really understand, throughout his career as a composer, and this in spite of growing critical acclaim and the occasional public triumph. As one of the most gifted and respected conductors of his generation – in an age where conductors for the first time were accorded the status of great musicians – his compositions were guaranteed at the very least a polite hearing during his lifetime, but after his death he became marginalised in the canon of the Western European symphonic tradition until after the Second World War. Such a story of confusion, neglect and gradual acceptance, to a generation convinced *a priori* of Mahler's greatness and importance, must signal some uncomfortable disruption in the continuum of Austro-German musical development, and the fact is that Mahler straddled some of the most profound fault lines of western music in the last 200 years.

Something momentous happened in Austrian – specifically Viennese – musical and cultural life between, say, Haydn and Richard Strauss and Schoenberg which is of a different degree to that which separates Beethoven and Brahms and Wagner, or Rossini and Puccini. And this is not, precisely, evidence of a particularly vital and innovative culture – it is worth remembering, for instance, that the greatest figure in the musical world of Mahler's early career was Johann Strauss – nor is it simply more proof that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was decadent and teetering on the verge of a violent dissolution, although this is doubtless true; but it is certainly true that in Mahler's hands at this time (and it should be said in the hands of his almost exact contemporary and friend, Hugo Wolf) musical expression becomes the forum for something until now only obliquely present – psychological anxiety.

This is already discernable in the complex genesis of the first symphony, which was not so much an early opus as (part of) a project which kept Mahler occupied until the end of the century. That project was centred upon the early song cycles (*Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*) and the first four symphonies, all of which share material like strands of musical DNA – the symphonies 2, 3, and 4, all contain movements taken directly from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, and much of the first symphony is drawn directly from the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* or *Wayfarer* cycle, in which the wandering youth consistently questions the subjectivity of his responses to an idyllic nature – as though he is a young, ingenuous Kant out for one of his walks. And it is something of this habitual reading of the psychic in terms of the cosmic, and vice versa, which informs the whole Mahlerian symphonic project, and finds direct articulation in the first symphony.

In its original form the symphony comprised *five* movements, not the four we know now. A central andante entitled *Blumine* ('Flower Piece') divided what Mahler called a symphonic poem in two parts; he later supplied a title (*Titan*, still occasionally used today, inaccurately, of the four movement revision) and an extensive programme, both of which he dropped for the final revision of 1896 (entitled Symphony in D major) and the publication, with its final title of Symphony No.1, of 1899. It is as though the whole of the 1890s saw Mahler trying to disentangle song cycles from symphonies, programmatic tone poems from symphonic 'pure' music; an aural or acoustic experience of the real world from some underlying metaphysical truth.

Mahler's insistence on the bipartite structure of the symphony in his early titles and programmes was almost wholly unnecessary: the first two and last two movements are distinct worlds – earth-bound, tintured with natural sounds and punctuated by peasant dances in the opening and second movements; dark, nightmarish, conflicted in the third and fourth, where we enter a world somewhere between those of Grimm, Bosch and the Apocalypse. What unifies them, apart from the explicit recycling of material from the opening introduction in the fourth movement, is the Wayfarer trope of the spiritual journey of a young man, and the constant sense of ironic knowingness in the handling of all, or nearly all, of the material.

The irony is present from the beginning – a cuckoo singing fourths, not, as in nature, minor thirds (as if to say, who, after the Pastoral symphony can write cuckoos into a symphony?); or fanfares juxtaposed with birdsong, as though a military reveille were just one more part of the dawn chorus. These fragments are supported in a medium of an ethereal sustained A natural spread over seven octaves in the strings, as though Mahler could not get his symphonic career going without first doing duty to Beethoven's ninth symphony (with its opening fragments of chaos) and of course Wagner and the Ring, where the bonds of tonality had been significantly loosed and the way to the twentieth century shown. Mahler marked this section *Wie ein Naturlaut* – like a sound from nature. The supporting harmony for the cuckoo's perfect fourth (an interval which will connect nearly all the musical ideas throughout the symphony) modulates from minor to major as it provides the germ of the lilting first theme, taken directly from the second song of the Wayfarer cycle, *Ging heut morgens über Feld*, in which the Wayfarer remarks upon the beauty of the spring morning in apparently conventional terms. Strikingly it is the slow introduction which returns at the opening of the development, and we are led this time into a section where, in the song, the Wayfarer contrasts the simple beauty and promise of the spring morning with his own rather less auspicious prospects of happiness and fulfilment; in its symphonic working we move from F major through F minor to D flat and then, with trumpets bringing the parade ground now to the fore, back to the sunlit D major uplands of the exposition and a triumphant blaze of brass which might not now appear so straightforward.

The first part of the symphony (subtitled as a whole *From the days of youth – Flower- Fruit- and Thorn-pieces*) ends with a relatively uncomplicated ländler, an Austrian country dance which Mahler usually favoured for the scherzo in his symphonies, drawing again on an earlier song, *Hans und Grethe*, which stomps its way in ever wilder cycles towards a lyrical trio and out again. The hero is, in the words of the discarded programme, *under full sail*.

The early audiences in fact responded well to the first two movements, finding their pastoral and country dance idioms relatively congenial; it was the more progressive, uneasier compositional voice of the slow movement, in particular, and the finale – sub-titled together

Commedia Humana - which they found bewildering. With the third movement we enter a peculiar, fairy-tale world: Mahler claimed that it was inspired by a famous children's woodcut, Jacques Callot's *The Huntsman's Funeral*, where the forest animals accompany the dead hunter to the grave, playing and dancing as they go; and it is indeed a funeral march with *Frère Jacques* as its (minor mode) theme (Mahler knew this piece as *Brüder Martin*, and it was often played in the minor mode in nineteenth century Austria); but this is abruptly overtaken by a passage of overtly parodistic klezmer music on oboes and trumpets, which gives way, in turn, to more material from the Wayfarer songs (*My love's two blue eyes*, and *By the road stands a linden tree*), then arching back to *Frère Jacques* by way of more klezmer. It was this fact of stylistic juxtaposition, the unmediated, dreamlike jump-cuts from one idiom to another, which early audiences found disorientating, and which was to become, whether they liked it or not, a hallmark of his compositional voice.

The finale, Mahler's scrapped programme assures us, dramatises an inner turmoil (*dall-inferno al'paradiso – the sudden outburst of the despair of a deeply wounded heart*) whether spiritual or psychological, a turmoil which ends in victory; but not before a number of interludes have been surmounted, including one, a moment of lyrical tenderness taken from the conclusion of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, in which the hero sings of the release he found in sleep and dreams at the foot of a row of lime trees, a prolepsis of death and the escape it promises from the toils and disappointments of the world. The whole movement has the same abrupt changes of gear as the third movement, and a working out of many of the fragments and suggestions of the slow introduction to the first movement. It ends in a blaze of glorious D major – with, at Mahler's request, the seven horns standing, bells lifted - but not before a number of additional hesitations and false starts.

By the end of the century Mahler had long since found his compositional voice and was on the way to producing a body of symphonic writing which would (eventually) tower over the twentieth century much as Beethoven's had over the nineteenth; but the nature of the shadow it cast would be different. By the time of his early death in 1911 Schoenberg was already an established figure, and in the uncompleted tenth symphony (subsequently realised by Deryck Cooke) Mahler stands on the brink of atonality, truly shaking the dust of the nineteenth century from his feet. These were symphonies written for a modern age, an age of anxiety, of faltering intellectual certainty, by a cerebral, over-sensitive musician of genius.

programme notes © John Ferris, 2008



Jacques Callot (c.1592-1635), *The Huntsman's Funeral*

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

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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
Lower Strings Coach – Pippa Hyde
Brass Coach – Ian Stott
Wind Coach – Andrew Watson
Percussion Coach – Ben Porter

Librarian – Mayuko Tanno
Administrators – James Andrewes, Tillie Dilworth

Treasurer – Sarah Bruce
Friends Coordinator – Miranda Fagandini

Many thanks to Sarah Hedley-Miller for her generous help with the cello section's musical preparation for this event.

Thanks also to Tillie Dilworth for the continuing excellence of her poster artwork.

This evening's performance is being recorded for a future cd release. 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

March 28th 2009, All Saints Kingston

Britten *Sinfonia da Requiem*, Shostakovich Symphony No.10

July 18th 2009, All Saints Kingston

Holst *The Planets*

THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

Max Liefkes, leader

First Violins

Max Liefkes*
Eunyoung Kim
James Walsh
Bola Kim
Timothy Shipley
Celia Rogers
Luisa Page
Oisin Huhn
Declan Seachoy
Aran Garrod
Valerie Albrecht
So-Yeon Kim

Second Violins

Pradeep Kannan*
Aashraya Shankar
Olivia Johnson
Imogen Dodds
Rosie Parker
Sian Davies
Sung-Hyo Lee
Toby Piachaud
Lakmal Mudalige
Alex Ewan

Violas

Tillie Dilworth*
Eleanor Figueiredo
Grace Moon
Iain Hunter

Cellos

Jonathan Bruce*
Eunyoung Lee
Miles Dilworth
Tom Davis
Hannah Evans
Emily Hearne
Fred Mikardo-Greaves
Arran Mornin

Bass

Marianne Schofield*
James Andrewes
Daniel D'Souza

Flutes

Mayuko Tanno*
Sem Lee
Rhona Cormack
Beatrice Arscott
Chris James
Sung Kim

Oboes

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

Clarinets

Georgina Feary*
David Knowles
Tom Nichols
Charles Kimber

Bassoons

Isabel White*
Leah Mirsky
Toby Hasler-Winter

Horns

Catie Igoe*
Hugh Sisley (*Wagner)
Alexei Watkins
Ben Davies
Clara Hardingham
Emma Walker
Chris Born
David Liu

Trumpets

Imogen Hancock*
Bryony Watson
Matthew Parker
Max Fagandini

Trombones

Ben Pearce*
Edmund Jillings
Julius Whiteman
Matilda Ashe-Belton
Hatty Martin

Tuba

Olivia Archibald

Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

Percussion

Rupert Price
Millie Davies
Enoque Adolfo

Harp

Danielle Megrarahan

*principal