



A WALK IN THE PARK

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Mozart: Symphony 31 in D (Paris)
Borodin: In the Steppes of Central Asia
Delius: The Walk To the Paradise Garden
Smetana: From Bohemia's Fields and Groves

-----Interval-----

Nielsen: Symphony 1 in G minor

Bristol Millennium Orchestra

7:30pm Saturday 16th March 2024

St Monica's Trust, Westbury on Trym

A warm welcome to our Spring concert 'A Walk in the Park', with a programme to hopefully put a spring in your step and give a sense that lighter and sunnier days are ahead. A few pieces of symmetry are worth pointing out. The symphonies that begin and end our concert were both written by composers in their relative youth, and at the start of their respective compositional journeys, whilst two other works were created by composers who had no way of hearing their creations other than in their heads. Delius' disabilities meant that he had to verbally dictate his musical thoughts to an amanuensis. Smetana, by contrast, could write his score but not hear it due to his profound deafness.

We hope you enjoy all the pieces (some of which, for the record, are **not** *a walk in the park* to play!)

--- PROGRAMME ---

Symphony 31 in D major (Paris) (K297)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1795)

- i. Allegro
- ii. Andantino
- iii. Allegro

The young 22 year-old Mozart wrote his *Symphony 31* in 1778, during a summer when he was, unsuccessfully as it happens, looking for worthwhile musical employment in Paris – hence the nickname that has stuck over subsequent years. Despite his job-hunting disappointments, if concert programming records are to be believed, this particular work seems to have gone down rather well with Parisian orchestras and audiences alike, with the work receiving several further performances in following years. For Mozart's part, this work makes use of a bigger orchestra than he had previously written for, a larger than usual string section allowing for inclusion of parts for both clarinets and trumpets for the first time. As Mozart's father, Leopold, remarked, "judging by what he had seen, the French must like noisy symphonies"! The work has 3 movements, fast, slow, fast.

In the Steppes of Central Asia

Alexander Borodin (1834-1887)

In the Steppes of Central Asia is a short tone poem, written to mark the 25th anniversary of the succession of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, whose reign had seen much expansion of the Russian Empire – east into Central Asia, and south into the Caucasus. It was first performed in April 1880. The music depicts the meeting of Russian troops, whose theme is first heard on clarinet, then French horn, with a caravan of Asians (represented by Cor Anglais) that they are escorting through the vast barren desert. A travelling theme on pizzicato lower strings further describes the plodding hooves of the horses and camels. Borodin combines these themes in a suggestion of common harmony before, as the caravan moves off into the distance, only the Russian theme is left.

The Walk To the Paradise Garden

Frederic Delius (1862-1934)

The Walk to the Paradise Garden is an orchestral interlude between scenes in Delius' opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, which deals with the doomed relationship of a young couple from opposing farming communities. First performed in 1907, the opera has had relatively few revivals, but this short rhapsodic pastoral picture has always been a favourite in the concert hall. Whatever the music might evoke in the listener's imagination, and without spoiling any illusion, it has to be admitted that The Paradise Garden of the title is, in fact, the local hostelry. On the other hand, what's not to like about a walk to the pub...?

From Bohemia's Fields and Groves

Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884)

The set of six tone poems that comprise *Ma Vlast (My Fatherland)* were conceived and written as individual pieces during the 1870s by the Bohemian (Czech Republic) composer Smetana, by way of celebration of the culture, history and countryside of his beloved Bohemia. *From Bohemia's Woods and Groves* (1875) is nowadays placed 4th in the set, though it was originally intended to be the final work. The first section represents the grandeur of the forest, whilst the second part depicts a village festival in full swing.

-----20 minute interval-----

Symphony 1 in G minor (Op 7)

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

- iv. Allegro orgoglioso (*proudly*)
- v. Andante
- vi. Allegro comodo
- vii. Allegro con fuoco

The Danish composer Carl Nielsen was working as a professional orchestral violinist when he wrote his first symphony during 1891-92. Its premiere was given by the Chapel Royal Orchestra, now named Royal Danish Orchestra, on 14th March 1894 (so tonight's performance is something of an anniversary occasion), with the young Nielsen himself playing among the second violins. Folklore has it that the rather diffident composer had to be prized from his seat in the orchestra to acknowledge the enthusiastic reception from audience and colleagues alike. The symphony was dedicated to Nielsen's wife, Anne Marie.

Although Nielsen's Symphony 1 is listed as 'in G minor', it displays, perhaps for the first time in the composer's oeuvre, a hallmark compositional device of 'progressive tonality' – in other words, starting in one key and finishing in a different place. In this instance, whilst the work starts in G minor, the final movement eventually closes in a rousing C major. Nielsen scholar Robert Simpson goes as far as to suggest it to be the first work of its kind to start and end in different keys.

Given his post in one of Copenhagen's leading orchestras, Nielsen will have been familiar with the traditional European symphonic repertoire of 18th and 19th centuries. His harmonic world has a distinctive 'Nordic' flavour, falling both chronologically and musically between two other Scandinavian greats, Norwegian Grieg and Finnish Sibelius. In this work, as elsewhere in Nielsen's writing, a particular trait to listen out for is the juxtaposition of major and minor 3rds, heard not only in the harmonic writing but in the shape of melodies as well. The ensuing bitter-sweet feel to the music leaves an aura of ambiguity – is the music tragic or heroic, cloudy or sunny, based on despair or optimism?

The Nordic nature of the music notwithstanding, the symphony is conventional in its four-movement structure. Simpson even describes it as "probably the most highly organized first symphony ever written by a young man of twenty-seven." The first movement is in conventional sonata form, with a lyrical second subject introduced by woodwind, led by solo oboe. This comes in strings in the recapitulation. The pastoral slow movement that follows is in ternary (ABA) structure, with the central section featuring a lilting melody, again led by oboe. The return of the opening music comes from horn and bassoon, with a gentle rocking string accompaniment. Most instruments get a bite at the cherry of this tune, before a peaceful (G major) conclusion. The third movement has something of the feel of a Beethoven scherzo, though without quite as much frenzy (*allegro comodo* translates as *comfortably cheerful*, ie not necessarily rushed). A contrasting slower and more serious section features tutti solo brass for the only time in the whole work. While the finale follows a sort of sonata form pattern, it has as its underlying principle the potential not to stick to convention. Tonal ambiguity is at its greatest in this movement, with the tussle between major and minor (as well as G and C key centres) almost at conflict status. Despite constant ramping up of intensity in the closing pages of the score, the resolution to a definitive C major comes only in the final 4 (of 400) bars. True edge of seat stuff!

Tonight's performance of this work will take approximately 35 minutes.

Bristol Millennium Orchestra was founded in 2000 by BBC Radio Bristol as part of the Music Live project. The orchestra thrived and is now completely independent, having changed its name to the Bristol Millennium Orchestra to reflect the date of its conception. Nowadays, it is funded entirely by members' subscriptions and concert revenue. BMO performs symphonic and light repertoire, and is delighted to continue to consider St Monica's as the home venue for our concerts.

Tonight's concert is conducted by **Graham Bull**, who has been BMO's Principal Conductor since 2012. Graham is also Director of Music for both Chepstow Choral Society and Fromside Benefice of Churches.

Information about joining as a player and other events the orchestra is involved in can be found on our website:

www.bristolmillenniumorchestra.co.uk