

Programme

Verdi, Giuseppe - Nabucco Overture

Schubert, Franz - Symphony in b Minor, D.759, *Unfinished*
i. Allegro moderato, ii. Andante con moto

~ Interval ~

Beethoven, Ludwig van - Coriolan Overture, Op. 62

Weill, Kurt - Symphony No. 2
i. Sostenuto - Allegro molto, ii. Largo, iii. Allegro vivace

About tonight's music

Giuseppe Verdi - Nabucco Overture

In autumn 1840, Giuseppe Verdi was a not-so-young composer who had reached a personal and professional impasse. At an age (27) when most composers have already demonstrated what they can do, Verdi could claim only two productions at La Scala in Milan. One was a mild success (*Oberto*), the other a one-night fiasco (prophetically titled *Un giorno di regno*, "King for a Day"). Then the director of La Scala urged him to set a new libretto by the colourful author and adventurer Temistocle Solera (1815-1878). The depressed composer resisted at first, but finally he hurled himself into the project, perhaps realising that he was about to score his first smash hit opera.

Solera's libretto for *Nabucco* has its roots in the Biblical account of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, in 587 BC, which led to the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews. In 1836, with a remarkable disregard for historical credibility, two French playwrights came up with *Nabucco*, an melodrama based on a pinch of fact and a barrel of fiction. Solera took up the story and added some touches of his own. On opening night, no one in the audience was under any illusion that this fiery drama of oppression, revolution, apostasy and faith was actually about Babylonians and Jews. To the citizens of an occupied country, the message was clear: *Nabucco* was their story. Each act was greeted with more rapturous applause than the last, and the patriotic anthem "Va, pensiero" brought the house down. Despite a police ban on encores - which had a way of turning into anti-Austrian demonstrations - the opera could not proceed until "Va, pensiero" had been repeated.

It was a superb calling-card for the previously unknown composer. The opera's scoring testifies to his sensitivity and versatility in sound painting.

The slow introduction of the opera neatly lays out the argument of the opera: steadfast Hebrews versus threatening, violent Babylonians. The main body of the piece is a quasi medley of three tunes from the opera, of which the second is the show-stopping "Va, pensiero" - a simple, graceful melody in easy triple metre, in the style of a Neapolitan folk song. The galloping final theme, like the similar one that ends Rossini's *William Tell Overture* (composed a decade earlier), proclaims the liberation yearned for in that fervent tune.

Franz Schubert - Symphony in B Minor, "Unfinished"

Popular conception has sometimes fixed on the idea that this symphony was a casualty of the composer's untimely death, at the age of 31. In fact, Schubert put the score aside long before he died.

In the last decade of his life Schubert accumulated a sizeable stack of incomplete large-scale works, including several symphonic "torsos" and aborted sonatas. The *Unfinished Symphony*, which he wrote in 1822 (six years before he died), is the most superb of them all. In October of that year he sketched out three movements of the piece in piano score, and the following month he completed the orchestration of the first two movements plus a fragment of the ensuing, incomplete scherzo. There it ended.

Various theories have been proposed to explain why Schubert left the work mid-stream. Some hypothesise that he did finish it, but that sections have been lost. Perhaps the B-minor entr'acte from *Rosamunde* was intended as the symphony's finale: some speculate that it mirrors the symphony's key and instrumentation exactly. Others believe he abandoned the symphony because he felt he could not provide two final movements on the same high plane as the opening two. (This is doubtful, given the stream of profound large-scale masterpieces - including the "Great" Symphony in C major - that would still issue from his pen.)

The most credible explanation is that in late 1822, precisely when he would have moved on to the "missing" movements, Schubert was diagnosed with syphilis. The disease was incurable at the time, and the attendant treatments were as dreadful as they were ineffective. It seems possible that this news, coupled with his own manifest paranoia about stepping out of Beethoven's heavy shadow, threw Schubert out of kilter, disrupting his creative concentration entirely.

In any case, the following year Schubert sent the manuscript to his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, who put it in a desk drawer, where it languished for 40 years. Even before Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* was finally premiered in 1865, 43 years after it was written, the piece had been known in theory if not in practice, since Hüttenbrenner had made mention of

it in a biographical dictionary in 1836 and a Schubert biographer, Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, had picked up on its existence (via that source) in 1864.

He convinced Hüttenbrenner to release the work to the public - no mean achievement - using a clever ploy. Claiming that he wanted to put on a concert of three great Viennese composers - Schubert, Franz Lachner, and Hüttenbrenner himself - he begged the last to show him some suitable works, and then wondered aloud if perhaps a previously unperformed piece by Schubert might not be found. Out of the drawer came the *Unfinished*.

The influential Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick, writing about the premiere, said: "With a few horn figurations and here and there a clarinet and oboe solo, Schubert achieves, with most simple, basic orchestra, tonal effects which no refinement of Wagnerian instrumentation can capture." He was right about the sonic beauty of Schubert's *Unfinished*. It would be hard to think of an earlier symphony, including even those of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, in which the use of symphonic sound is so consistently evocative.

Ludwig van Beethoven - Overture to *Coriolan*, Op. 62

Ludwig van Beethoven's career was littered with fervent expressions of desire, and even a few fragmentary attempts, to compose an opera worthy of his genius. In the end he managed to complete only one, *Fidelio*. But there was more to the stage than opera, and in other theatrical genres Beethoven seemed less given to self-censure. He wrote for ballets and composed incidental music for half a dozen stage plays: *Egmont*, *Coriolan*, *King Stephen*, *The Ruins of Athens*, *Tarpeja*, and *Leonore Prohaska*. Except for Goethe's *Egmont*, these plays would be profoundly forgotten but for Beethoven's contributions.

Coriolan came early in this succession of works. The *Coriolan* in question is not Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, but rather a tragedy by the Court Secretary Hernich Joseph von Colin that was premiered in Vienna on November 24, 1802. Beethoven attended that performance, hearing an accompanying score arranged from bits and pieces of Mozart's *Idomeneo*.

It's easy to see why Beethoven liked the play, which considered the dilemma of a heroic political leader torn by the conflicting forces of patriotic impulse, family devotion and personal pride. *Coriolan*, a Roman general banished from Rome despite long and valiant service to his people, seeks vengeance by leading an opposing army against the native city. When the Romans send his mother and wife to persuade him to withdraw, he consents to place his fate in the hands of the Roman mob, effectively choosing suicide as the only acceptable solution. Richard Wagner, in an essay about this overture, characterised the *Coriolan* to whom Beethoven was drawn as "the man of force untameable, unfitted for a hypocrite's humility."

Beethoven completed his overture in early 1807 and it premiered in March that year. On that occasion, however, the overture did not introduce the play that inspired it; instead, it formed part of a mammoth subscription concert that also included the first four of Beethoven's symphonies, his Fourth Piano Concerto, and excerpts from his opera *Leonore* (an early version of what would evolve into *Fidelio*).

It works well as a concert piece, a sort of early tone poem that describes the tortured state of the title character. Beethoven chooses the key of C minor, to which he seems to have attached the sentiment of heroism wedded to tragedy. Three powerful unisons are uttered by the strings, and each is answered by a furious chord from the full orchestra. These launch an *Allegro con brio* movement with two principal themes of contrasting character: the first is quiet but frantic, laced with appoggiaturas; the second, in the relative major key of E-flat, achieves an anxiousness that may suggest the hero's family pleading with him. At the end, the overture dies away, leaving the listener somewhat up in the air. We should remember, however, that Beethoven intended this movement not as an ending, but rather as an introduction to the action that would follow.

Kurt Weill - Symphony No. 2

The son of a cantor, Kurt Weill (1900-1950) received a strong musical education that included studies with Engelbert Humperdinck (of *Hänsel and Gretel* fame) at the Berlin Musikhochschule and with Ferruccio Busoni at the same city's Akademie der Künste. Weill had been accepted into the program for a three-year term, and shortly after that period ended - in December 1923 - Busoni recommended him to prestigious Viennese publishing house Universal Edition, which published his works for the next ten years.

The anti-establishment spirit of Weill's works, combined with his Jewish heritage, ensured that he would encounter problems when the Weimar Republic gave way to the racism of the radical right. By 1932-33 his work was practically absent from German stages, but he was gaining an international following. On February 27, 1933, the Nazis suspended civil liberties, and on March 21 the composer fled Berlin for Paris, taking only a few essential belongings, fortunately including the sketches he had begun for his Second Symphony. He finished a draft by the end of 1933, with the full, orchestrated score reaching completion in February 1934. His European years were reaching their end, however, and in September 1935 he left Paris for America, where he would embark on building a new career centred on Broadway.

Following a private performance in Paris at the Hôtel Particulier of the Princess Edmond de Polignac, the Second Symphony received its public

premiere in October 1934, with Bruno Walter conducting the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam. “The rehearsal was wonderful,” wrote the composer to the singer Lotte Lenya the day before the premiere. “Walter does it marvellously and everyone is really enthusiastic, especially the entire orchestra!” Indeed, the Amsterdam audience greeted the work warmly, but the critics were unenthusiastic. The Belgian critic Henri Monnet heard in it “a Berlin dialect” but also noticed “From time to time, an accent coming from somewhere else, perhaps from the Semitic”. Acknowledging the concertgoers’ response he concluded: “If the audience is right about this, I ask myself, then what pleasure can it go on finding in concerts? Works like this put the question in an especially significant light, for one may well ask whether they mean a revival of the concert hall or its death-knell.”

One may wince at Monnet’s scarcely veiled anti-Semitism, but still appreciate what flustered him on a musical level. While today’s listeners are likely to consider Weill’s distinctive imprint an appealing characteristic, critics in 1934 worried the the piece exemplified concert music whose genes had been weakened through interbreeding with the music hall. Certainly it is symphonic in conception, with thematic cross references worked out through three movements. (The main theme of the central funeral march, for example, is transformed into a giddy tune when it reappears as a tarantella in the coda of the finale.) On the other hand, the keening melodies, piquant harmonies, edgy sound and sardonic turns of phrase - Mahleresque, even, in feeling - are not inherently different from those found in Weill’s popular stage works. Much of the symphony displays a sombre, even acerbic attitude, which might be viewed as reflecting the political unhappiness of its time. Still, Weill insisted that the work “was conceived as a purely musical form”, and he resisted Walter’s entreaties for him to attach a descriptive title to it. Nonetheless, Walter presented the piece twice with the New York Philharmonic in December 1934, to indifferent critical reception. It fared better in Vienna when Walter introduced it there in 1937, but after that the work vanished from the repertoire for three decades. Its re-emergence was marked by London performances (and a recording) in 1967-68. Its Berlin premiere finally took place in 1975.

Written by Leon Reimer
(Music Director and Conductor)

The players - City of Carlisle Orchestra

1st Violins

Robert Charlesworth

2nd Violins

Rachael Cosslette

Cello

Kenneth Wilson

Katherine Bowness
Sarah Wilson
Kasia Davies
Catherine Swarbrick
Graham Barke
Monica Davies

Susan Campbell
Hillary Lawrence
Alice Reid
Philippa Hall
Eleanor Buchan

Robert Denby
Mary Lawler
Susan Beeby
Pam Przbyla
Steven Thompson
Janet Hornby

Viola
Peter Wood
Jon Buchan
Nick Wragg

Double Bass
Emma Burt
Ben imThurn
Ruth Pickles

Flute/Piccolo
Lyn Young
Samantha Willis
Terry Mullett

Clarinets
Jane Bell
Rebecca Raven

Oboe
Glenys Braithwaite
Anthea Lee

Bassoon
Andrew Smith
Ann Bishop

Trumpet
Gordon Kydd
Alison Richardson

Trombone
Graham Harris
Giles Wilson
Ruth Wood
Cliff Atwood

Horn
Pam Harris
Julie Ratcliffe
Justin Borlase

Percussion
Sue Reed
Toby Cass
Jamie Hoyle

Timpani
David Birkett

Thank you



Eden Valley Hospice

We thank Eden Valley Hospice for providing the refreshments this evening.

Eden Valley Hospice provides care for adults with life limiting illnesses from North Cumbria within a 12 bed adult in-patient unit. The home from home environment creates a relaxing atmosphere for patients and families with each room overlooking the beautiful walled garden. The local NHS trust provides around 28% of our running costs, while the remaining 72% (over £2.7 million annually) comes from the generosity and efforts of our supporters in the local area and beyond.

City of Carlisle Orchestra: Next Concert

Summer Concert – Saturday July 1st, 7:30pm, St.John’s Church

Other Classical concerts coming up soon:

18 April (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Leah Nicholson, piano

23 April (Sun) Keswick Music Society - Theatre by the Lake, Keswick

Primrose Piano Quartet, Schumann, Bottesini, Schubert

25 April (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Charles Edmundson, organ

2 May (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Nelson Thomlinson School, choir and instrumental

9 May (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Millbeck Quintet, wind quintet

14th May (Sun) Wordsworth Singers - St John's Church, Keswick **(7pm)**

Bach Mass in B minor with the Adderbury Ensemble

16 May (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Solway Singers

23 May (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

City of Carlisle Orchestra

30 May (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Scott Bradley, guitar

6 June (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Sheffield Academy Duo, French horn and piano

13 June (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Jack Stone, organ

16 June (Fri) Wigton Choral Society - St Mary's Church Wigton

"The Baltic Way" Sacred music from around the Baltic Seas

20 June (Tues) Lunchtime Live - Carlisle Cathedral **(12.45)**

Brief Encounter Duo, trumpet/sax/clarinet/vocal, keyboard