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Carlisle
Orchestra

Winter Concert

December 2019

Programme

Conductor: Leon Reimer
Leader: Robert Charlesworth

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Programme

The Bartered Bride Overture ~Smetana
Overture on Three Russian Themes ~Balakirev
Polovtsian Dances ~Borodin
~Interval~
Symphony No. 6 ~Dvorak

About tonight's music

The Bartered Bride Overture ~Bedrich Smetana

Bedrich Smetana is remembered as one of the great figures of Czech nationalism, composer of numerous operas (of which *The Bartered Bride* is the most familiar) and, most famously, of the group of six symphonic poems known as *Má vlast* (My Fatherland) and especially the second item in that set, *The Moldau*.

He was a prodigy, turning heads as a promising pianist by the time he was six and confounding his early teachers by always being a step or two ahead of them. After he finished high school, he found work in Prague as a live-in piano teacher for a wealthy family. His earnings financed further study of harmony, counterpoint, and composition. By 1851, thanks to a kind word from Franz Liszt, Smetana could take pride in seeing one of his compositions accepted by a publisher. However, times were hard. Civil war had broken out in the Habsburg Empire, and Smetana was driven to political activism. He fought at the barricades with other forward-looking, mostly young, Bohemians and wrote several musical compositions to inspire his comrades-in arms. The installation of a repressive regime played a part in his decision to leave Bohemia in 1856 to seek opportunities in Sweden, where he remained for five years, without success.

On returning to Prague, in 1862, he set about promoting his work in a more consistent way, and within a few years he occupied a place of prominence in the Czech musical world as a conductor, a critic, and, increasingly, a composer. In 1866 he was named principal conductor of the Provisional Theatre, where his opera *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride) was unveiled. It is the quintessential 19th-century Czech opera and is among the lightest of comic operas, built on a twist of plot that could have fuelled a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, but when it was created its importance was far from lightweight. *The Bartered Bride* gave operatic voice to a spirit of Czech nationalism that was breaking forth after centuries of national oppression and foreign domination.

Often extracted as a stand-alone concert piece, the overture bursts forth in a high-velocity whirlwind of figuration from the strings and woodwind, then draws back suddenly to explore its material in fugal imitation and finally explodes into a festive, syncopated dance. These ideas get worked out through the course of seven of the most ebullient minutes in the symphonic repertoire. As a stage work, *The Bartered Bride* follows a not untypical comic opera plot line of separated lovers and mistaken identities. Set in a Bohemian village, it revolves around the predicament of Marenka, a young peasant girl, who has been promised in marriage to Vašek, son of the wealthy landowner Tobias Micha. Her true love is Jenik, a farmhand of unknown parentage. Machinations involving the “bartering” of the bride ensue over the course of three acts,

but all is made right in the end; Jenik is revealed to be Tobias Micha's long-lost son, and he claims the hand of his love.

The Bartered Bride was embraced as a benchmark achievement of Czech nationalism, for its use of popular dance forms (the *furiant* and *polka*) and for its libretto, sung in the Czech language. German was the dominant language of Bohemia, a legacy of the long-standing domination of the Austrian Habsburg Empire. German had been declared the official language of Bohemia in 1784, four years after Czech had been forbidden in grammar schools. Czech would regain "cultural respectability" only as a result of the nationalistic movement in which Smetana so centrally participated. It is an odd fact, however, that Smetana was unable to either speak or write the Czech language with much fluency when he wrote the opera!

Overture on Three Russian Themes ~Mily Balakirev

As the Russian empire was expanding ever east- and southward throughout the 19th century, concerted efforts were made to create a binding national identity. Russian music was at the centre of this tonal shift as the nation moved from being very western dominated to forming its own identity. Beginning with Glinka, Russian composers began to make extensive use of Russian folk music in their musical output. As one of Glinka's prodigies Mily Balakirev continued his mentor's path and went on to found the group of composers known as "the Five" (Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky Korsakov) which dominate Russian music over much of the century.

After a lively opening the overture settles to a lovely *andante* tempo in which the first of the three themes ("The Silver Birch") is introduced by the wind. What follows is a sonata form movement based on the remaining two themes. This faster section of the overture begins with the second of the three themes ("In the fields stands a birch tree"). First introduced by the clarinets it is passed around the orchestra and repeated several times invoking a *quasi*-Passacaglia structure but much more likely emulating the strophic nature of this folk song. After a brief transition the oboe suddenly introduces the third theme of the Overture ("At the Feast") which leads to the first climax in the movement. The following development briefly reintroduces both themes in different shapes and colours before a full orchestra entry heralds the beginning of the recapitulation by reintroducing the second theme in its purest and loudest form yet. Balakirev ends his overture wistfully with a return to the serene "Silver Birch."

Both the second and third themes of this overture went on to become much more famous in compositions by composers heavily influenced by the work of "the Five." "In the Fields stands a Birch tree" became the main theme of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony Finale and "At the Feast" features prominently in the fourth Tableau of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.

Polovtsian Dances from "Prince Igor" ~Alexandr Borodin

The Tale of Igor's Army, the great medieval Russian epic, appealed mightily to Romantic Russian nationalists of the 19th century, poets, musicians and critics alike. And it held a particular fascination with Alexandr Borodin, a medical doctor by profession, but a musician by natural gift and inclination. Borodin became one of Russia's most popular and influential composers. His opera, *Prince Igor*, occupied him for the last sixteen years of his life! Left unfinished at his death in 1887, it was completed and orchestrated by two of his closest composer friends, Glazunov and

Rimsky-Korsakov, being first produced at the Bolshoi Theatre of St. Petersburg on 4th November 1890.

The plot tells of a 12th century military expedition led by the Russian Prince Igor against the wild Polvtsi nomads, who had invaded Russian lands. Igor and his son are both taken prisoner. But the magnanimous Polvtsi chieftain, Khan Konchak, treats Igor and his son with gallant hospitality, giving a great banquet in Igor's honour and entertaining him afterward with dances. The great ballet scene which closes Act II is known in the concert hall as the Polovtsian Dances. This is an attempt of the Tartar Khan Konchak to cheer Igor, whom he treats more as a guest than a prisoner. Slaves of the Polovtsians begin a slow and lamentable dance, which to Western ears has an almost oriental sound. There is a wild, athletic dance for the men, alternating with a livelier dance of young boys. A more graceful, lyric strain accompanies a dance for the young girls. They are interrupted first by the boys, then by the men, and the excitement grows as all join in a general dance of homage to the Khan.

Symphony No. 6 ~Antonin Dvorak

During Antonin Dvorak's formative years his musical training was modest and he was a competent, but hardly distinguished, pupil. As a teenager he managed to secure a spot as violist in a dance orchestra. The group prospered, and in 1862 its members formed the founding core of the Provisional Theatre orchestra. Dvorak played principal viola in the ensemble for nine years, in which capacity he sat directly beneath the batons of such conductors as Smetana and Wagner. During that time he honed his skills as a composer, and by 1871 he left the orchestra and devoted himself fully to composing. This was at considerable financial risk, but the aspiring composer eked out a living by teaching piano and playing the organ. In 1874 he received his first real break as a composer: he was awarded the Austrian State Stipend, a newly created grant to assist young, poor, gifted musicians. He was re-awarded it in 1876 and again in 1877. Fortunately for Dvorak, the powerful music critic Eduard Hanslick encouraged him to send some scores to the great Johannes Brahms in 1877. The eminent composer was so delighted with what he received that he recommended Dvorak to his own publisher, Fritz Simrock, who immediately contracted a first option on all of the younger composer's new works.

When his Symphony No. 6 was composed in 1880, Dvorak was a relatively recent acquaintance to most music lovers. Nonetheless, he had been busy composing even when nobody was listening. His five previous symphonies were essential workshops in the development of Dvorak's personal style, forums in which to try his hand at compositional techniques that had worked for others while injecting something of his own into the mix. His Third Symphony (1873), for example, was a fascinating and adept exercise in Wagnerism, a flirtation that ultimately would not predominate in Dvorak's musical language. His Sixth is just as overtly an homage to his true mentor and friend, Johannes Brahms, and especially an emulation of Brahms's Second Symphony (1877), also in D major.

Like Brahms's Second, Dvorak's Sixth Symphony may be regarded as a virtual "Pastoral Symphony." Indeed there is such a strong resemblance that several passages of Dvorak's sixth symphony may leave listeners wondering if some pages weren't mistakenly collated into the parts and the orchestra has simply drifted off mid-phrase into Brahmsian territory. A bit of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony seems to have gotten appended, too, at the opening of the *Adagio*, and more than a few modulations

in this symphony may recall Schubert. That said, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms are not bad models for an emerging symphonist, and one shouldn't be too hard on Dvorak for not distancing himself more unambiguously from those archetypes. The fact is that there is plenty in this symphony that could be called "genuine Dvorak," probably nowhere more so than in the third movement, which is meant to evoke a *Furiant*, a swirling Bohemian folk dance.

Dvorak, a man of the 19th century rather than the 20th, did not feel compelled to reinvent the symphony, and he was content, certainly at this formative point in his career, to add his voice in modest increments to the symphonic language he inherited from earlier masters. In the three symphonies that still lay ahead – his Seventh in 1884-85, Eighth in 1889, and Ninth (*From the New World*) in 1892-93 – he would display a firmer sense of independence from his models. But he was already on that path with the Sixth Symphony, a formidable marker at the intersection of indebtedness and individuality.

Written by Leon Reimer

Our Conductor: Leon Reimer



After graduating from the University of Glasgow with a degree in Music in 2013, **Leon Reimer** went on to study orchestral conducting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where he received tuition from Garry Walker, Sian Edwards, Martyn Brabbins, Christopher Seaman, Jean Claude Picard, Baldur Brönnimann and Alasdair Mitchell. Professional engagements since his graduation in 2015, include working for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra (Associate Musician), the National Youth Choir of Scotland (Musicianship tutor and Workshop leader), Cumbria Youth Orchestra (Music Director) and Scottish Opera Youth Company (Assistant Conductor).

Eager to embrace the challenges and rewards of music making at all levels, Leon has heavily been heavily involved in the community music and education scene across Scotland and the UK. Notable engagements include the City of Carlisle Orchestra (Music Director), Paisley Sinfonia (Music Director), Lomond and Clyde Community Orchestra (Music Director), Amicus Orchestra (Assistant Conductor) and University of Glasgow (Musicianship tutor and Singing Workshop leader).

Having been brought up as a singer, Leon also enjoys frequent choral conducting opportunities, most notably as the Associate Conductor of the University of Glasgow Chapel Choir and Glasgow Chamber Choir and as Conductor of the University of Glasgow Choral Society. Leon has lead ensembles at several major festivals, including the Edinburgh International Festival (2016, 2018), the Celtic Connections Festival (2015, 2017), St Magnus Festival (2015) as well as Glasgow's West End Festival (2017, 2018).

The players - City of Carlisle Orchestra

1st Violins

Robert Charlesworth
Rachael Cosslett
Joan Masters
Sarah Wilson
Linda Mages
Angela Duckett
Graham Barke

2nd Violins

Katharine Bowness
Isobel Fenton
Catherine Swarbrick
Hilary Lawrence
Philip Chapman
Lorna Strong

Cellos

Kenneth Wilson
Linda Forsyth
Sol Ligertwood
Lee Willis
Mary Lawler
Rachel Owen
Steven Thompson
Roger Cooke
Janet Hornby

Violas

Peter Wood
Ruth Scholes

Double Basses

Emma Gray
Charles Hattrell
Wendy Willis

Oboes/Cor Anglais

Glenys Braithwaite
Jennifer Slee

Clarinets

Jane Bell
Rebecca Le Breton

Flute/Piccolo

Lyn Young
Terry Mullett
Samantha Willis

Bassoons

Andrew Smith
Ann Bishop

Trombones

Graham Harris
Giles Wilson
Cliff Attwood
Ruth Wood

Horns

Pam Harris
Justin Borlase
Julie Ratcliffe
Ian Williams

Percussion

Toby Cass
Jamie Hoyle
Sue Roe

Trumpets

Gordon Kydd
Mike Edwards

Tuba

Chris Hampson

Timpani

Toby Cass
David Birkett

Why not join us?

In particular, we are currently looking for upper string players. Please see our website for details of how to join or email us at CityOfCarlisleOrchestra@hotmail.com.

Rehearsals take place once a week during term time at Trinity Secondary School, Carlisle. We rehearse on Tuesday evenings from 7.15pm till 9pm.

Other classical concerts coming up soon

- 8 Dec (Sun): Keswick Music Society Theatre by the Lake, Keswick Gitarrissima of Vienna (guitar quintet), *Pre-concert talk at 6.45pm*, Bizet, Carmen, York, African Suite: Bantu, Shingo Fujii, Rhapsody Japan: Furusato, Copland, Hoedown from Rodeo, Shostakovich, Tahiti Trot, Tchaikovsky, Swan Lake, Nutcracker
- 14 Dec (Sat), Wigton Choral Society, St Mary's Church, Wigton, Handel, Messiah
- 5 Jan (Sun): Keswick Music Society, Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, Jonathan Radford, saxophone, Ashley Fripp, piano, *Pre-concert talk at 6.45pm*, Debussy, Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un Faune, Schumann, Violin Sonata no 1, Bernstein, West Side Story, Yoshimatsu, Fuzzy Bird, Piazzolla, Histoire du Tango, Gershwin, Three Preludes
- 16 Jan (Thurs): Carlisle Music Society, St Cuthbert's Church, Carlisle, The Solem String Quartet, Haydn, Bartok, Beethoven
- 12 Feb (Wed): Keswick Music Society, Theatre by the Lake, Keswick (7pm), Local young musicians' concert
- 16 Feb (Sun): Keswick Music Society, Theatre by the Lake, Keswick (3pm), Afternoon family concert, Tim Kliphuis Trio, Vivaldi, Bach, Duke Ellington, *and at 7.30pm, with pre-concert talk 6.45*, Tim Kliphuis Sextet, a semi-improvised programme, "Reflecting the Seasons" and "Brandenburg", Duke Ellington, Stephane Grappelli
- 20 Feb (Thurs): Carlisle Music Society, St Cuthbert's Church, Carlisle, Emmanuel Bach, violin,
- 14 March (Sat): Wordsworth Singers, see website when information available
- 19 March (Thurs): Carlisle Music Society, St Cuthbert's Church, Carlisle, Alicja Fiderkiewicz
- 22 March (Sun): Keswick Music Society, Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, Brodsky Quartet and Martin Roscoe, piano, *Pre-concert talk at 6.45pm*, Elgar, String Quartet no 4, Elgar, Sonata for violin and piano, Elgar, piano quintet

Our next concert – 'Proms'

Sat. 28th March, City of Carlisle Orchestra - St John's Church, London Road, Carlisle. Our 'Proms'-style concert will be supporting the out-going High Sheriff of Cumbria's charities. The programme will include:-

Bernstein
Holst
Gershwin
Gilbert and Sullivan
Parry
Elgar
Wood
Anon

Candide Overture
Cotswold Symphony
Girl Crazy Overture
2 Songs
Jerusalem
Pomp and Circumstance No 1
Fantasia on British Sea Songs
Auld Lang Syne

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