

Dennis Simons, Ph.D., F.R.A.M., has returned to the UK after 20 years in North America where he was music director and conductor of the orchestras of Saskatoon (1993-97), Shreveport (1996-2003) and North Dakota's Minot Symphony Orchestra (2002-2012). He has also conducted in the USA, Europe and Australia including guest appearances conducting the Toronto Symphony and the Victoria Symphony.

Prior to this he was founder leader of the Albemi String Quartet, co-leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and leader of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. He has performed as solo violinist in three continents and has given over 20 solo broadcasts for the BBC.

In addition to being conductor of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra, he is also music director and conductor of the Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra with guest conducting appearances including with the Mid-Somerset Orchestra.

Lisa Orton began playing the violin at the age of eight, going on to study with Ralph Holmes at the Royal Academy of Music. After working with both the Welsh National Opera and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras, she joined the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House where she played for 30 years until her retirement. Since then she has enjoyed working with pianist Marianne Szurma as the Lima Duo and, since moving to Bristol, with the Bristol Chamber Orchestra. She is also currently leader of the Portishead Sinfonia.

The **Bristol Chamber Orchestra**, founded in 1963, has several professionally qualified players amongst its members, and gives five or six public concerts a year, occasionally combining with other instrumentalists to perform concertos and chamber symphonies.

Violins: Lisa Orton, Sarah Beetham, Susan Burdock, Wendy Gillman, Jenny Heathcote, Trevor Jennings, Catherine Lane, Bob Pinniger, Vanessa Pinniger, Morven Ringrose, Julia Smyth, Celia Skrine, Erica Wright

Violas: David Jewell, Edna Cause, Catharine Deam, Joan Sidgreaves.

Cellos: Anne Tyler, Alison Bell, Cathy Lambert, Carolyn Little, Peter Soothill, Catherine Tayler, David Trott

Double bass: Martin Sanders

Harpichord continuo: Clare Griffel

Next concerts of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

23rd June 2018	St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Failand
30th June 2018	Parish Church, Frenchay
24th November 2018	Trinity Henleaze United Reformed Church

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor & Soloist: Dennis Simons
Leader: Lisa Orton

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Friday 23rd March 2018 7:30pm

St. Mary Magdalene Church,
Stoke Bishop

Programme £1.00

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Concerto alla rustica in G

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Presto – Adagio - Allegro

This concerto “in rustic style”, without soloists, is just one of Vivaldi’s total of over 500 concertos. After the Presto, an exhilarating *moto perpetuo*, the brief but expressive Adagio forms a total contrast, consisting of a sequence of long chords. Jollity returns with the Allegro, which bounces along like a country dance.

An ordained priest, Vivaldi spent nearly 40 years teaching at a high-class orphanage, the Ospedale della Pietà, in his native Venice, writing what is probably his best-loved composition, *The Four Seasons* violin concertos (1725), for his pupils there.

His staggeringly profuse output, justly famed for its variety and inventiveness, also includes some splendid religious music and over 90 operas. Famous throughout Europe, especially England, France and Holland, as a composer and virtuoso violinist, he became rich and vain, and used to boast about how quickly and easily he could compose a concerto. Ironically, however, his popularity waned as tastes in music moved on. Disappointed, he abandoned Venice for Vienna, perhaps in search of new opportunities, died there in obscurity, and was buried in a pauper’s grave.

Violin Concerto in D

Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739)

Presto – Adagio - Presto

Benedetto Marcello and his elder brother Alessandro were born into a noble and affluent family in Venice. Both were extravagantly talented and combined a life as musicians with one in unrelated professions as well as a high degree of literary activity. Benedetto, a qualified lawyer, had a career as district governor in Pola (now Pula in Croatia). He was a prolific composer of both instrumental and vocal music both sacred and secular; he also taught music and indeed secretly married one of his pupils. Portraits show a long, handsome face with piercing brown eyes, framed by an elaborately curled full-bottomed wig and offset by a fine lace jabot.

In a pamphlet called *Il teatro alla moda* he lampooned the then fashionable operatic tradition for its empty artificiality, with particular scorn for the feeble pseudo-classical libretti: “The modern Poet should not have read the ancient Authors, Latin or Greek [...] because the ancient Greeks and Latins have never read the moderns.” Singers fared scarcely better: “It is not necessary that the virtuoso can read or write.”

This concerto, in the conventional three-movement form, fast-slow-fast, is vigorous, confident and thoroughly entertaining.

Simple Symphony

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Boisterous Bourrée (Allegro ritmico) – Playful Pizzicato (Presto possibile) – Sentimental Saraband (Poco lento e pesante) – Frolicsome Finale (Prestissimo)

Benjamin Britten, born on St Cecilia’s Day, is generally regarded as the greatest British composer since Purcell. He lived most of his life by the sea in his native Suffolk, drawing unaccustomed attention to this quiet corner of the British Isles when, with his lifelong close friend, the tenor Peter Pears, he set up the famous Aldeburgh Festival in 1948. He received little musical education until age 14, but began composing prolifically aged five; at nine he composed an oratorio which included an

aria for God in C minor, the key he hoped the Almighty would like best. He wrote in a modern and personal idiom in a variety of genres, but always with the human voice in mind, so had no regard for electronic music. Opera was his chief love and in 1944 *Peter Grimes* brought him immediate success and fame. In due course he received numerous honours: CH 1953, OM 1968, accolades from 19 conservatories and universities in Europe and the USA, and in the year before his death was created a life peer as Baron Britten of Aldeburgh, the first British composer ever to be so honoured. His passionate pacifism led to the composition of the *War Requiem* (1961), and for children he composed the popular *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* (1945). The *Simple Symphony* was written in 1933 at age 20 using melodies composed in his early teens, with two themes in each movement. This much-loved piece has great appeal and lacks the astringency that characterises much of his later work.

INTERVAL

Divertimento in B flat K137

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Andante – Allegro di molto – Allegro assai

Mozart wrote his three Divertimenti in 1772 at the age of 16 on returning to Salzburg from Italy. He was in the midst of composing a fairly weighty “opera seria”, *Lucio Silla*, and may have turned to the then popular and smaller-scale divertimento form for light relief. Mozart’s divertimenti (the word means “diversion” or “recreation”) were probably intended for a small group of solo instruments and can be seen as his first contributions to the string quartet genre.

K137 is in three movements but, unusually, the slow movement comes first. Although an early work, it already shows complete mastery of form and has Mozart’s irresistible elegance and charm.

String Symphony No.7 in D minor

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Allegro – Andante – Menuetto – Allegro molto

This is one of a set of twelve astonishingly accomplished string symphonies which Mendelssohn wrote in 1821-23 between the ages of 12 and 14. Long dismissed as “juvenilia”, they were ignored until 1960 and are not numbered with his symphonies for full orchestra, the first of which was composed in 1824.

His father was an affluent Berlin banker, and the family was very musically aware and supportive, Felix’s sister Fanny being also an excellent pianist and competent composer. They held concerts on Sunday mornings in their own palatial home, which gave Felix the opportunity both to display his brilliance on various instruments and to try out compositions of his own, usually conducting from the keyboard.

Mozart was one of his idols, but the tight construction and mastery of the difficult fugue form (amazing at the composer’s tender age) owes more to Bach, whose stature Mendelssohn did more than anyone else to establish with a famous performance of the St Matthew Passion in 1829, the first since Bach’s death in 1750.