

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Tim Harrison
Leader: Lisa Orton
Piano Soloist: Jason Anderson

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 24th November 2018 7:30pm
Trinity Henleaze
United Reformed Church

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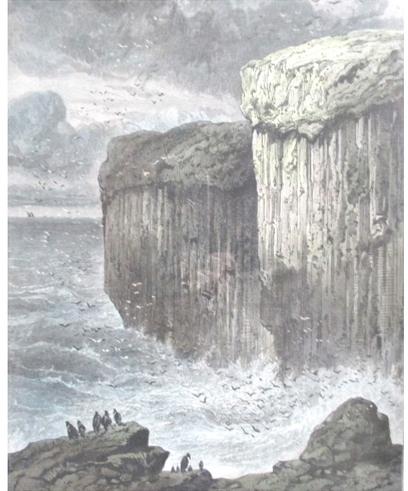


Hebrides Overture “Fingal’s Cave” op.26

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

In summer 1829 the 20-year-old Mendelssohn and a friend, Karl Klingemann, undertook the lengthy journey to Britain and on 7 August took the paddle-steamer from Oban on Scotland's west coast to the tiny uninhabited island of Staffa in the Inner Hebrides to see Fingal’s Cave, already famous as a tourist destination. (Fingal was a favourite hero of Celtic mythology.) Formed of vertical black basalt columns 34’ high, the cave extends 200’ deep into the rock and is filled by musical echoes of the turbulent sea. Klingemann describes it: “A greener roar of waves surely never surged into a stranger cavern, whose many pillars made it look like the inside of an immense organ, black and resonant...”

An initial idea came to Mendelssohn at the time and later formed the opening theme of this concert overture, which is best described as an early tone poem, creating a sound-picture rather than telling a narrative. Mendelssohn wanted it to conjure up the crash of the sea battering the rocks, the cries of seabirds, and even the smell of engine oil and fish. Now and then the sea and the blustery wind calm down as a shaft of sunlight pierces the clouds, but the restless momentum soon returns. Brahms later said, “I would gladly give all that I have written to have composed something like the Hebrides Overture.”



Piano Concerto no. 24 in C minor K491 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro – Larghetto - Allegretto

Mozart, the most brilliant pianist of his day, wrote twelve piano concertos between 1784 and 1786 for performance by himself at sold-out subscription concerts in Vienna. Only two of these are in minor keys, the other being no. 20 in D minor. He was composing *The Marriage of Figaro* at the same time (1786) and it has been suggested that his mercurial personality needed to compensate for the wit and jollity of the opera by expressing its darker side in this sombre and turbulent concerto.

The opening theme, unusually in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, presents an immediate surprise when the third note is not G, to complete the rising triad as one might expect, but A flat. It continues with amazing chromaticism, using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale within thirteen bars. When the piano comes in after the lengthy orchestral exposition, it does not repeat the same material but sets off in a new direction, and the whole long movement is full of surprises. Mozart did not notate a cadenza (he always improvised them) but various pianists since his time have written their own. Our soloist tonight is performing his own cadenza.

The slow second movement, in E flat major, presents the greatest possible contrast, transparently lyrical and serene. The finale returns to C minor, with a dark, restless theme and several ingenious variations, two of them in a major key and highlighting the extensive wind section. Towards the end, after an unexpected pause, a further surprise is in store.

INTERVAL

Aria *Erbarme dich, mein Gott* (“Have mercy, my God, for my tears’ sake”) for voice and violin. From the St Matthew Passion BWV244

Voice: Stephanie Harrison

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Bach’s “Passion according to St Matthew” follows the events of Holy Week from the Last Supper to the death and burial of Christ as told in Matthew 26 and 27.

Tonight’s alto aria comes at an acutely poignant moment. The Evangelist tells how, after Christ’s arrest, Peter three times vehemently denies knowing him. As the cock crows, Peter remembers Christ’s prediction, “and he went outside, and wept bitterly.” This aria – not sung by Peter but by a more universal female voice - now follows.

Set in a lilting siciliano (a slow Italian baroque dance rhythm) but in a desolate B minor, it features an obbligato violin solo which is just as important as the vocal solo and even more melodious and intricate. Yehudi Menuhin considered it the most beautiful melody ever written for the instrument.

Bach composed this great work in 1729 in Leipzig while employed at St Thomas’s Church and school. It was a distinguished position but his life there was, he complained, “full of hindrance and vexation” - he felt undervalued and overworked, and, living in cramped quarters in the school with his large family, lacked peace and privacy. That he could produce such sublime music is miraculous.

Symphony No 1 in C major, op. 21

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Adagio molto: Allegro con brio - Andante cantabile con moto - Menuetto & Trio - Adagio: Allegro molto e vivace

Today we regard Beethoven as one of the great Classical symphonists, but it is easy to forget that, unlike Mendelssohn, Mozart and Schubert, all of whom died in their thirties, he did not start writing his nine symphonies until he was 30. This work, premiered in Vienna in 1800, reflects the symphonic traditions of his admired predecessors, Mozart and Haydn, but already clearly reveals his individuality.

The introduction of the first movement demonstrates an early insight into Beethoven’s experimental and witty side. Instead of starting the piece in its home key of C major, he creates harmonic ambiguity by beginning in a different key so that the tonality is established only gradually, in time for the boisterous dotted-rhythm *Allegro*, which features quick key changes. The elegant *Andante* demonstrates his mastery of developing melodic ideas and counterpoint. The *Menuetto* is essentially a *scherzo*, a dance widely used by composers of the Classical era. The introduction of the finale is often considered a musical joke and has the wit of Beethoven’s teacher Haydn, with seemingly tentative rising scales in the first violins before exploding into a lively *allegro*. This dancing finale features virtuosic woodwind playing, dialogue between instruments, and syncopated rhythms. Critics slated the poor quality of the premiere, especially the slow movement, where the orchestra fell apart. We trust our performance tonight will not be historically accurate! Beethoven wrote this music “for sharing with friends”; we hope this is an appropriately spirited work to conclude tonight’s concert.

Jason Anderson is a freelance pianist and composer based in London. Originally from the Philippines, he moved to England aged 4 and studied at the Yamaha School of Music, later moving on to the Purcell School and the Royal College of Music. He completed a master's degree in composition and piano and a Junior Fellowship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was a finalist for the Ivan Sutton Piano Prize and won a coveted prize for composition. He has given professional solo and duo recitals in London and recently made recordings for BBC Radio 3. As a composer he has already received professional performances of two of his works.

Tim Harrison, originally from Neath, South Wales, came to Bristol University to study music, specialising in composition and orchestration. He achieved a master's degree in performance on the viola at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and while there formed his own orchestra, Cardiff Camerata, which prided itself on performing neglected music alongside more popular works. He later gained a PGDip with Distinction for his performances with Sinfonia Newydd and the RWCMD Symphony Orchestra. Now living in Bristol and teaching music in a secondary school, he is in demand as a conductor throughout the wider Bristol area.

Stephanie Harrison read Music at the University of Bristol, graduating with First Class Honours and being awarded the university's Centenary Performance Prize for her final vocal recital. She continues to pursue her passion for singing through performing regularly as a chorister and soprano soloist with local choirs and orchestras. She also works as a freelance musical director, most recently as part of Thornbury Musical Theatre Group's production of Sondheim's *Into the Woods* in October 2018.

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, Bob Pinniger, Morven Ringrose, Celia Skrine, Julia Smyth, Erica Wright
Violas Vanessa Pinniger, Edna Cause, Catharine Deam, David Jewell, Joan Sidgreaves.
Cellos Anne Tyler, Alison Bell, Carolyn Little, Peter Soothill, Catherine Tayler, David Trott
Double bass Martin Sanders, Roger Levett

The orchestra wishes to thank the following players for joining it in this concert:

Flutes: Gareth Williams, Jane Foister **Oboes:** Chris Golding, Rob Heathcote. **Clarinets:** Robert Watson, Matt Tanner. **Bassoons:** Jeanie Prince, David Miller **Horns:** Andrew Putin, Melanie Arnot **Trumpets:** Steve Bodiley, Andrew Stephen. **Timpani:** Mike Organ

Next concerts of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

Friday 5th April 2019	Saint Mary Magdalene Church, Stoke Bishop
Friday 28th June 2019	St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Failand
Saturday 29th June 2019	Parish Church, Frenchay