

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Stefan Hofkes
Leader: Lisa Orton
Soloists: Lisa Orton and Bob Pinniger

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 2nd July 2022 7:30pm
Frenchay Parish Church
Bristol

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Charterhouse Suite

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 -1958)

Prelude – Slow Dance – Quick Dance -- Slow Air - Rondo – Pezzo ostinato

Vaughan Williams, whose 150th anniversary we celebrate this year, was born into a patrician English family: his mother was a Wedgwood and a niece of Darwin (“Uncle Charles” to young Ralph). The Welsh surname derives from a great-uncle. The familiar photographs of him show him elderly, tweed-suited and decidedly overweight, but he had been a rather dashing young man.

The pleasant Charterhouse Suite was written in 1920 for piano, shortly after he returned from war service, during which he served as an ambulance driver. His pacifist leanings went well with his love of the English countryside and traditional British folksongs which he, along with his great friend Holst and others, enthusiastically collected; much of his music is harmonically in the idiom of folksong.

His most popular composition is probably *The Lark Ascending*, but he wrote several large-scale symphonies, choral works and a vast quantity of other music, plus many fine hymn-tunes including *For All The Saints*.

Modest, serious and unassuming, he twice refused a knighthood but consented to the OM. He lies in Westminster Abbey.

Concerto in A minor for Two Violins

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Allegro poco - Andante - Allegro

Vivaldi was ordained a priest but did not say Mass after the first two years, owing to a chest complaint. He was nicknamed the “Red Priest” owing to the colour of his hair, sometimes seen in portraits peeping out from under his somewhat eccentric blond wig. For nearly 40 years he taught at a high-class orphanage for girls, the Ospedale della Pietà, in his native Venice, writing *The Four Seasons* violin concertos (1725), for his pupils there.

He became famous throughout Europe as a composer and virtuoso violinist. His staggeringly profuse output of compositions, justly famed for its variety and inventiveness, includes some splendid religious music, over 90 operas, and 500 concertos, several of them double concertos such as the one we play tonight.

He was not a man racked by self-doubt, and was known to boast that he could compose a concerto faster than it could be manually copied. His success made him rich, and then vain and conceited. Ironically, however, his popularity suddenly waned as tastes in music moved on. He left Venice for Vienna, probably in search of better luck, died there in obscurity, and was buried in a pauper’s grave.

Two Waltzes from op. 54

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Opus 54 consists of eight waltzes for piano of which we are playing nos. 1 and 4 in his arrangement for strings. His melodic inspiration and love of the musical traditions of his native Bohemia came out very strongly in his dances but also in his beautifully crafted symphonies, chamber music, operas and songs.

He was for a time employed as director of the New York conservatoire, at a salary 50 times what he had been earning in Prague, but was so homesick that he resigned and returned to his beloved homeland.

Dvořák’s surprising passions, apart from beer, were pigeons and railway engines. “He’s rather an odd chap,” said his great friend Brahms, “but his heart is in the right place.”

Interval

String Symphony no. 8

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Adagio e grave: Allegro - Adagio - 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.

String Symphony no. 8 is confident and dazzlingly energetic. Mendelssohn must have been particularly pleased with it as he made an arrangement of it to include woodwind, brass and timpani shortly afterwards.

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 home, which gave Felix the opportunity both to display his remarkable facility on various instruments and to try out compositions of his own, usually conducting from the keyboard.

Mozart was one of his idols, and the unusual importance given to the violas in these works is perhaps due to Mozart’s influence. But the tight construction and mastery of the difficult fugue form in the finale (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.

The first movement, in D minor, starts subdued though lyrical, but soon the key changes to D major and the pace becomes lively and inventive. Throughout the second movement, slow and solemn and in the related key of B minor, the upper strings are silent – a daring and original touch. A graceful minuet in D major follows next, with a faster trio in D minor. The finale is very fast and full of exuberant scale passages. Here young Mendelssohn experiments with form, inverting the theme at one point and venturing into fugue at another. It draws to an apparent close in ff; but then comes another little surprise...

“Molly on the Shore”

Percy Grainger (1882-1961)

Australian Percy Grainger spent much of his life in Europe or the US. He achieved fame as a fine pianist as well as composer. Possessed of good looks, originality and great personal charm, he became firm friends with, among others, Delius and Grieg. His lighter compositions are inspired by folk music, of which he was an enthusiastic collector, but the fact that the jaunty “Country Gardens” became his best-loved piece rather annoyed him, since he had also written a quantity of serious music.

“Molly” is variations on an Irish reel. It contains quirky indications of dynamics such as “louden hugely bit by bit” instead of the conventional Italian “poco a poco cresc.”

Stefan Hofkes, born in the Netherlands, studied piano and conducting at Utrecht conservatoire, concluding with the coveted solo-recital diploma. He continued his conducting studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, winning the Ricordi conducting prize in 1996. Later he received valuable coaching and support from the much-loved Bernard Haitink and a chance for work experience at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Stefan now has an established international career. As a conductor he fulfils engagements throughout Europe, working with distinguished orchestras, and also directs an annual opera festival in the Netherlands. In Britain he already directs the Bristol Concert Orchestra and the Reading Symphony Orchestra. As a pianist he has worked with many prominent international soloists and has performed at venues including the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, London's Wigmore Hall, and St George's Bristol. As an accompanist to singers Stefan has made many CD recordings.

He has developed a special relationship with the Royal Netherlands Embassy in London, leading to engagements to conduct and record major Dutch compositions at a variety of prominent concert venues. He also attaches great importance to working with young people.

This is Stefan's first concert season with the Bristol Chamber Orchestra, which is delighted to welcome him.

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.

Bob Pinniger began piano and violin lessons at an early age at the Garjulo School of Music in Bristol. He played in the National Youth Orchestra and became an Associate of the Royal College of Music in 1967. He enjoys playing in small ensembles and performs in concerts at Bristol Music Club. He has given concerts in the Chapel at Tyntesfield the local National Trust property and plays for their various Christmas events. In his other roles, he performs with Bristol Concert Orchestra and is kept busy as Secretary of Bristol Music Club. He has a long history with Bristol Chamber Orchestra, joining when he was 15 years old, and conducting the orchestra between 1992 and 2003.

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.

1st Violins: Lisa Orton, Susan Burdock, Wendy Gillman, Jenny Heathcote, Alasdair Price, Morven Ringrose, Julia Smyth, Scarlett Sullivan, Hilary Wilcox.

2nd Violins: Bob Pinniger, Eloise Massett, Philippa Heather, Trevor Jennings, Iona Ramsay, Celia Skrine, Erica Wright

Violas: Vanessa Pinniger, David Benson, Edna Cause, Catharine Deam, Rebecca O'Brien

Cellos: Anne Tyler, Alison Bell, Carolyn Little, Peter Soothill, Catherine Tayler.

Double bass: Martin Sanders.

Next concert of Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

Saturday 26th November 2022 Trinity Henleaze United Reformed Church