

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Stefan Hofkes

Leader: Lisa Orton

Soloist: Ellabeth Little

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 26th November 2022 7:30pm

Trinity Henleaze

United Reformed Church

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Overture: The Marriage of Figaro Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart's delightful *opera buffa* was composed in 1786 to a libretto in Italian by Lorenzo da Ponte and based on a seditious new comedy by the French dramatist Beaumarchais which was banned in conservative Vienna because it daringly exposed the aristocracy as decadent, callous and corrupt; Europe was already seething with the social discontent that erupted in the French Revolution just three years later. The opera's plot revolves around how the resourceful manservant Figaro, his wife-to-be Susanna and her mistress, the Countess Almaviva, conspire to outwit the Count in his lecherous hopes of seducing Susanna. It is full of comic devices - mistaken identities, disguises, intrigues, secret messages, and situations of near-farce – and its witty, clever libretto is set to ravishing music. Without containing any tunes from the opera itself, the Overture creates the perfect atmosphere of gaiety, cleverness, originality and fun, and the hectic momentum never slackens.

In his highly entertaining *Reminiscences* (1826) the Irish tenor Michael Kelly, who sang a minor role in the opera, recalled his impressions of Mozart conducting: "I never shall forget his little animated countenance, when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius; – it is as impossible to describe it, as it would be to paint sunbeams."

Violin Concerto in E minor op. 64

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Allegro molto appassionato – Andante – Allegretto non troppo: Allegro molto vivace

Mendelssohn had ideas for a violin concerto in his head for six years before he actually composed it. Throughout his life he undertook an exceptional amount of international travel, performing and conducting, which meant he rarely took a holiday. But in 1844 he did take his young family for a stay in the countryside, and this was when he composed his violin concerto, which was premiered the following year.

The relaxed holiday atmosphere went to form the sweetly lyrical character of this immensely popular work. Only the first movement is in E minor, with the soaring opening theme introduced immediately by the violin without any orchestral preamble. This brilliant first movement has the violin cadenza at the end of the development section and it is the orchestra that then re-introduces the opening theme. A long-held low bassoon note leads into the rapturously calm slow movement in C major. After this a brief bridge passage returns to E minor before suddenly breaking into the sparkling finale in E major whose exquisite playfulness recalls the fairy-like dancing of his *Midsummer Night's Dream* music composed many years earlier.

Mendelssohn visited England ten times and was enormously popular and admired. He also visited Scotland, perhaps at the suggestion of Queen Victoria, who loved it; two of his best-loved works were inspired by the Scottish landscape. He had a warm relationship with the young queen and Prince Albert (both then in their early twenties), made music with them, and on one occasion in 1844 they even compared notes on the upbringing and handling of young children. It is an intriguing thought that he doubtless met the little boy who, over half a century later, was to become King Edward VII.

I n t e r v a l

Symphony no. 4 in B flat op. 60

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Adagio: Allegro vivace – Adagio – Scherzo : Trio – Allegro ma non troppo

Beethoven's Fourth symphony is one of his sunniest. He wrote it in 1806, perhaps for light relief after completing the towering Third (the "Eroica") and while beginning to work on the equally portentous Fifth. The Fourth combines ebullient energy with many humorous touches as well as episodes of graceful lyricism. The first movement starts in a mysterious and unsettling mood in fluctuating keys, but this is blown away by a sudden acceleration into the joyous main section in B flat major. The dreamy slow movement is filled with melodic lines of great beauty. The third movement, a scherzo, is marked by boisterous syncopations, and its contrasting trio features some lovely woodwind writing, the strings remaining silent. Unusually, the trio and scherzo are repeated so that the movement is in five parts instead of the more usual three. The finale scurries along merrily, with moments that recall Haydn (who was briefly his teacher) and with a final Haydnesque joke.

A little vignette brings all three of tonight's composers together. In 1821 the great German writer Goethe, then aged 72, heard of young Mendelssohn's talents and invited the 12-year-old to stay at his home in Weimar to enjoy hearing him play music at first hand. One evening Goethe invited friends in to hear him and at his request Felix played some Bach and then volunteered the minuet from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. Goethe then brought out two music manuscripts from his collection, the first being in Mozart's small, immaculate script, which the boy sight-read without difficulty. The second was so messy and illegible that he burst out laughing. But Conrad Zelter, a composer friend of Goethe, recognised the hand at once. "That's Beethoven's! I'd know it anywhere - he always writes with a broomstick and brushes his sleeve over the page before the ink has dried." Felix, sobered, looked again and managed to decipher the music and perform it, much to everyone's amazement.

Programme notes by Celia Skrine

Ellabeth Little studied with Chris Hiron and Daniel Battacharya and has had master classes with Remus Azuitei. She led the Hampshire Youth Orchestra and played in the National Youth Orchestra. Ellabeth is currently based in Hampshire and she teaches locally. She has performed concertos with several local orchestras and has played in many recitals. Ellabeth plays a violin by David Munro.

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.

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.

1st Violins: Lisa Orton, Emily Bell, Anne Harding, Janet Lewis, Eloise Massett, Morven Ringrose, Scarlett Sullivan.

2nd Violins: Bob Pinniger, Conrad Brimacombe, Susan Burdock, Wendy Gillman, Philippa Heather, Alasdair Price, Celia Skrine, Erica Wright.

Violas: Vanessa Pinniger, Edna Cause, David Jewell, Rebecca O'Brien, Claire Prince.

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

Double bass: Martin Sanders, Roger Levett.

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

Flutes: Gareth Williams, Jane Foister.

Oboes: Rob Heathcote, Hannah Speake.

Clarinets: Matt Tanner, David Dodd.

Bassoons: Jeanie Prince, Jack Mellors.

Horns: Mike Lea-Wilson, Sue Tyley.

Trumpets: Andrew Stephen, Nerys Watts.

Timpani: Mike Organ.

Next concerts of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

Friday	25th	March 2023	St. Mary Magdalene Church, Stoke Bishop
Friday	30th	June 2023	St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Failand
Saturday	1st	July 2023	Parish Church Frenchay
Saturday	9th	December 2023	Trinity Henleaze URC