

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Stefan Hofkes
Leader: Lisa Orton
Soloist: Nicholas Shipman

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 25th March 2023 7:30pm
St. Mary Magdalene Church
Stoke Bishop

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Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

This splendid piece occurs at the start of Part III of Handel's dramatic oratorio *Solomon* (1748), which was based on an Old Testament episode in I Kings 10. The Queen of Sheba, an ancient kingdom in what is now Yemen, had heard reports of King Solomon's fabulous wealth and wisdom (and maybe also of his 700 wives and 300 concubines) and determined to see for herself and quiz him with "hard questions", perhaps riddles. This feisty lady, no doubt dressed to kill, arrived in Jerusalem with a huge retinue of camels loaded with exotic spices and "very much gold and precious stones". Solomon solved all her riddles and the opulence of his court surpassed even her expectations. She left feeling chastened, mightily impressed, and laden with reciprocal gifts of great value.

Some historians suggest, tantalisingly without firm evidence, that Nebuchadnezzar was one result of this visit. Others mutter that the whole episode is largely fictional.

Divertimento in D K136

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro – Andante – Presto

Mozart wrote his three Divertimenti in 1772 at the age of 16 on returning to Salzburg from Italy. These 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.

Particularly evident in K136 is the dance-like manner of all three movements – Mozart loved dancing and was, by all accounts, an excellent dancer. The lively Allegro sets the relaxed mood; the Andante flows serenely with little of the poignancy that so often haunts his slow movements, and the Presto is deliciously light-footed, composed with a smile throughout.

Clarinet concerto no. 4 in B flat

Carl Stamitz (1745-1801)

Allegro moderato – Adagio – Rondo allemande

Carl (or Karl) Stamitz, born into a musical family, succeeded his father as leader of the Mannheim court orchestra until 1770, when he became a travelling virtuoso. He undertook amazingly extensive visits but never achieved any permanent appointment. In 1794 he finally settled in Jena, near Weimar, where he may have known Goethe and Schiller. He died there in poverty, having possibly experimented with alchemy in a desperate attempt to transmute base metals into gold – such experimenting was then much in vogue, but success remained forever elusive.

He composed over 50 symphonies and more than 60 concertos for a variety of instruments, including several for clarinet. Yet he lacked the spark of genius that would have elevated him to greatness.

In tonight's concerto the opening movement is in sonata form with an extended double exposition but little thematic development. The middle movement is expressive and lyrical, and the finale is in rondo form with a principal theme alternating with contrasting secondary episodes.

Interval

Valse triste

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Jean (originally Johan) Sibelius was by far Finland's most important and venerated composer. He wrote several works inspired by its heritage over a range of genres; his hugely popular *Finlandia* has become almost a national anthem and some of his symphonies, notably the second and fifth, are also much loved.

This waltz was written for a play, "Death", by his brother-in-law; Sibelius conceived it in a restaurant when fortified by oysters, soda water and quinine. A son wearily watching over his dying mother falls asleep and has a vision in which he sees her dancing with a ghostly crowd of whirling wraiths. The dance grows ever wilder, until she collapses exhausted. Death has come to claim her.

Serenade for Strings op. 22

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Moderato - Tempo di Valse - Scherzo - Larghetto - Finale

Dvořák was born in a village outside Prague, the eldest of fourteen children of whom nine survived. He grew up without special advantages but received a good musical education, learning violin at age six and later becoming a viola player in the Prague Opera Orchestra and in a dance band. His first important compositions date from the 1860s and may show the influence of Brahms, who championed his music, helped him towards publication, and became a great friend. Dvořák's main passions, apart from music and beer, were for pigeons, railway engines and steamships. "He's slightly odd," said Brahms, "but his heart is in the right place."

The Serenade for Strings, in a sunny E major, was composed in 1875. Its style typifies his winning combination of expertise in classical composition and abiding love of the Czech folk-music tradition. A Serenade ("evening piece") is much the same as Divertimento: a light and entertaining work in contrasting movements without significant formal constraints.

The opening movement starts with a lyrical theme shared between the various parts. A new, dance-like theme is introduced subsequently, and the main melody returns towards the end. Next comes the delightful waltz, starting in C sharp minor, the relative of E major, to which the movement returns for the second theme. The energetic Scherzo has a contrasting, dreamy middle section before returning to the rustic, toe-tapping dance with which it started. The Larghetto is hushed, serene and wistful, with a strongly Bohemian flavour, which also permeates the impetuous Finale. Towards the end the tempo slows as the lyrical opening theme of the first movement returns, only to be swept aside by a hectic rush to the triumphant end.

Nicholas Shipman began to play the clarinet aged 14 and at Leicestershire School of Music he received inspirational lessons from eminent clarinetists including Jack Brymer OBE. He joined the Guildhall School of Music at 17, where his teachers included Dame Thea King, and where in due course he gained his B.MUS degree. In 1999, after two years at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague (Netherlands), he began to build his career as a professional soloist and chamber musician. He has given concerts and recitals in London and throughout the UK, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. He performs music by a wide range of composers both classical and contemporary. Local venues where he has played include the Guildhall, Bath, and St George's Bristol.

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, occasionally combining with other instrumentalists to perform concertos and chamber symphonies.

1st Violins: Lisa Orton, Wendy Gillman, Anne Harding, Jenny Heathcote, Ebony Love, Eloise Massett, Julia Smyth, Scarlett Sullivan.

2nd Violins: Bob Pinniger, Conrad Brimacombe, Philippa Heather, Alasdair Price, Iona Ramsey, Morven Ringrose, Celia Skrine, Erica Wright.

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

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

Double bass: Martin Sanders.

Oboes: Rob Heathcote, Sophie Cottrell.

Next concerts of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

Friday	30th	June 2023	St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Failand
Saturday	1st	July 2023	Parish Church Frenchay
Saturday	9th	December 2023	Trinity Henleaze URC