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Sinfonia Viva with Samuel Jacobs

Derby Cathedral
Wednesday 18th March 2015, 7.30pm

Mendelssohn
Overture: *Die schöne Melusine* (The Fair Melusine), Op.32

Pärt
Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten

Mozart
Horn Concerto No.4 in E flat, K495

Beethoven
Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92

Overture: *Die schöne Melusine* (The Fair Melusine), Op.32
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Melusina is a water-spirit whose story is related in a collection of folk-tales from late fourteenth-century France. According to this, she was one of three sisters punished by their mother for treating their father disrespectfully. Melusina's punishment was to be turned, for one day each week, into a serpent from the waist down. When a young man called Raymond of Poitou met her in the forest he fell in love with her. She agreed to marry him on condition that he left her strictly alone on the crucial day each week. But a friend aroused Raymond's suspicions. He walked in while she was taking a bath, and discovered her secret, at which she turned into a dragon and flew away, never to return.

Mendelssohn completed his *Overture to the tale of the beautiful Melusina*, to give the work its full title, in November 1833. The previous February he had attended the premiere in Berlin of an opera on the subject by the German composer Conradin Kreutzer. The overture was encored, to Mendelssohn's apparent displeasure, since he wrote to his sister, Fanny, in early April that he was writing an overture of his own, one that "the people might not *encore*, but would cause them more solid pleasure." It was given its first performance in London in April 1834; Mendelssohn thought it one of his best works.

It begins with the clarinets setting up a bubbling arpeggio figure that suggests Melusina's watery environment. It has often been remarked that, for all Wagner's antipathy to Mendelssohn and his music, he must have had this opening at the back of his mind when he came to evoke the river Rhine at the start of *Das Rheingold*; the resemblance becomes even clearer when the strings take over the figure immediately afterwards. As this opening section comes to an end the music suddenly turns tense and stormy. Out of this grows a more lyrical, aspiring new theme for the first violins. These, suggests Mendelssohn's biographer, R Larry Todd, may perhaps be associated with, first, Raymond and then the human side of Melusina's character. All these ideas are woven into Mendelssohn's intricate design, which eventually returns to its opening, undisturbed by the turbulence of the earlier music, and bringing the overture to its gentle conclusion.

Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten
Arvo Pärt (born 1935)

Arvo Pärt (pronounced 'pairt') was one of the first of a significant group of composers from the Baltic states to attract a major following in the West. Born in Paide, Estonia, he studied at the Conservatory in the capital, Tallinn. In spite of an early success with a cantata for children's chorus in 1962, his exploration of modernist compositional techniques brought increasing friction with the Soviet authorities. A growing interest in JS Bach influenced his own music, culminating in *Credo*, for chorus, piano and orchestra, of 1968. Denounced by the authorities for its openly Christian ethos, it also provoked a crisis in Pärt's own development, representing as it did an extreme point from which he needed to find a change of direction.

He spent the next eight years or so building a new approach to composition virtually from scratch, learning – as he put it – "how to walk again as a composer." Relying on work in films to earn a living, he set himself the task of writing a large number of exercises based on his study of mediaeval music, particularly plainsong. In 1976 he produced a short piano piece, *Für Alina*, in his new style, followed by a number of works that made his name internationally and remain among his most frequently performed.

These include *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten*. The death of Benjamin Britten in December 1976 struck an unusually deep chord in Pärt. The simplicity and purity he was working towards in his own music were qualities which he had recently come to admire in Britten's music. He had also been wanting wanted to meet Britten for some time, but this was not now going to happen.

Cantus, scored for strings and bell, is a typical example of the powerfully moving effect Pärt can create using very simple means. The slowly repeated notes on the bell which open the piece continue throughout, while the strings build a texture based on a descending scale, starting from a single note and adding an extra note each time it is repeated. Versions of this pattern then start moving at different speeds in different sections of the orchestra, and the build-up of resonance that results gradually swamps the bell sounds. When all the overlapping scales have reached their bottom note, and the string music is at its loudest, it suddenly breaks off to reveal the lingering sound of the final bell-stroke.

Horn Concerto No.4 in E flat, K495
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

1. Allegro maestoso; 2. Romance. Andante cantabile; 3. Rondo. Allegro vivace.

Mozart wrote his four completed horn concertos, and probably his Quintet for horn and strings, for Joseph Leutgeb (1732-1811), who joined the Salzburg court orchestra in the early 1760s and became a close friend of the Mozart family. He eventually settled in Vienna where, as well as his musical activities, he ran the cheese retail business inherited by his wife.

Although known as No.4, K495 is actually the second of the four concertos Mozart wrote for Leutgeb, which he entered in his own catalogue of his works on 26 June 1786. The autograph score, only parts of which survive, is written in four differently-coloured inks. This has often been taken as a joke on Mozart's part. Leutgeb was the frequent butt of Mozart's fruity sense of humour, but he was probably not the target on this occasion, since he is unlikely to have used the autograph score to play from. One Mozart scholar has suggested that it was an attempt to represent subtleties of dynamics and shading which could not be notated by conventional means.

Of the three main themes in the *allegro maestoso's* opening orchestral section, the first is broad and spacious while the other two are more song-like. For the second of these, which rounds off the section, the horn anticipates what would normally be its initial entry by joining the orchestral first oboe – an unusual and effective touch. It then makes its proper entry with what sounds like a new theme but is actually a drastically simplified version of the opening.

The second movement combines lyrical warmth and delicacy, with a central minor-key episode adding a poignant touch.

Like Mozart's other horn concertos, K495 has a hunting-horn style finale in 6/8 time. Probably the most familiar single movement in all four works, it confirms that Leutgeb must have been an extremely agile player.

Interval

Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

1. Poco sostenuto - vivace; 2. Allegretto; 3. Presto; 4. Allegro con brio.

Beethoven began sketching his Seventh Symphony in October 1811 and completed it the following April. The first public performance took place on 8 December 1813 at a concert given by Beethoven and his friend Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (who patented the metronome two years later) to raise money for a charity for wounded soldiers.

As a sustained outburst of sheer energy the Seventh Symphony has few parallels even in the rest of Beethoven's output. Although it soon became popular, and for some years after the end of the Napoleonic wars was his most frequently performed work, initial reaction, at least among critics, was bemused. One writer complained about the music's "mixture of tragic, comic,

serious and trivial ideas, which spring from one level to another without any connection, repeat themselves to excess, and are almost wrecked by the immoderate noise of the timpani." On the other hand, Weber's supposed comment that the Seventh Symphony showed Beethoven was now "ripe for the madhouse" may have been fabricated by Anton Schindler, Beethoven's self-appointed secretary and biographer in the composer's last years, and a notoriously unreliable source of information.

The symphony's almost physical sense of abandon is due partly to Beethoven's choice of key. Because of the way string instruments are tuned, A major is a particularly bright-sounding key, and this is further heightened by the fact that it places the horns of Beethoven's day in a high part of their range, dominating the sound of his orchestra. But it is Beethoven's obsession with rhythm which is mainly responsible for the music's overwhelming impact. In each of the four movements he works a persistent rhythmic pattern with unremitting repetitive intensity. The result is a cumulative energy which could well be compared to twentieth-century developments in the music of Stravinsky and American minimalists such as Steve Reich.

The introduction to the first movement is the most powerful in any Beethoven symphony, unfolding inexorably with a weight and scope which almost marks it out as a separate movement in its own right. The tension between the stately opening and the rapid rising scales that start to appear soon afterwards generates considerable momentum. This then seems to evaporate, but it is merely held back for a moment as upper woodwind and violins exchange a single repeated note. This is then galvanised by a new rhythmic pattern, which launches the main *vivace* section of the movement and is present in nearly every bar from that point on. Beethoven deliberately downplays the element of lyrical contrast which was such an important feature of Haydn's, Mozart's and his own earlier symphonies, and this adds to the music's sense of unstoppable energy.

The A minor second movement was particularly admired at the first performance (to the extent of being encored), and it influenced a number of later composers, in particular Schubert, Berlioz and Mendelssohn. Again, a single rhythmic unit – long, short, short – dominates the music. The approach to the first climax is marked by running figures, starting in the strings, that echo those of the first movement's introduction. A minor becomes A major in two contrasting episodes where the persistent rhythmic pattern continues in the background while more flowing violin and woodwind material claims our immediate attention.

Beethoven's rhythmic obsession takes a playful, but no less forceful, turn with the rapid three-in-a-bar motion of the scherzo. The contrasting trio section, though still relatively fast, sounds almost static in comparison, and recalls the atmosphere, though not the actual music, of the second movement. One of Beethoven's contemporaries stated that the theme came from an Austrian pilgrims' hymn. This section comes round a second time, and begins to make a third appearance before being abruptly cut off.

After the stamping gesture that opens the finale Beethoven plays with two rhythmic ideas - a rapid semiquaver figure in the first violins, underpinned by off-the-beat accents in the rest of the orchestra, and a insistent jagged repeated-note rhythm heard, again on the strings, soon afterwards. Together they build up a movement of overwhelming power and exhilaration. Certainly the symphony's first audiences can have heard nothing like it before. Writers on Beethoven may repeat Wagner's description of the Seventh as "the apotheosis of the dance" with wearying predictability (as I just have), but Wagner really did put his finger on what makes this extraordinary symphony tick.

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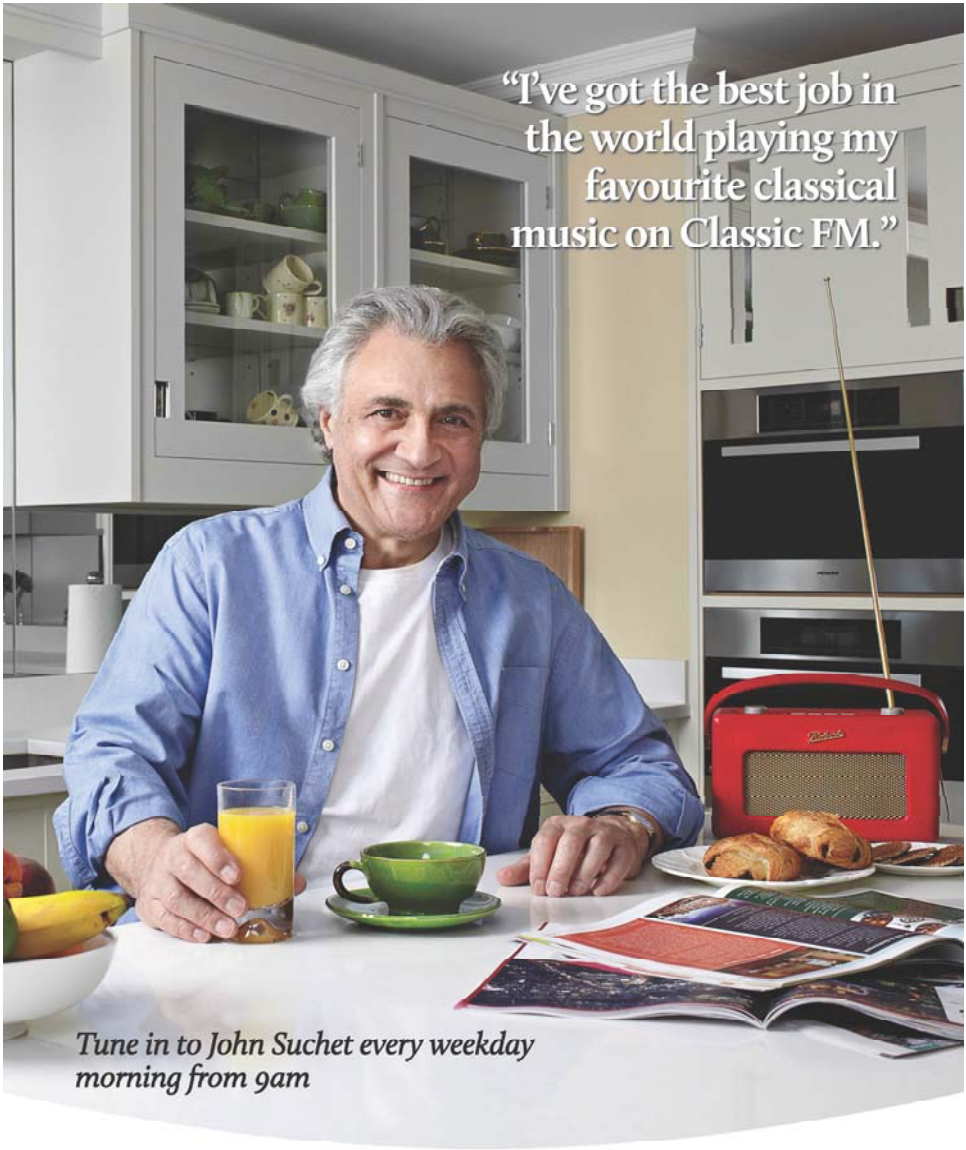

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Duncan Ward
Principal Conductor

As well as taking up the position of Principal Conductor with Sinfonia Viva, the 2014/15 season will mark Duncan Ward's debut with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Symphony Orchestra of India. He also returns to Baden-Baden Easter Festival (Traviata), Britten Sinfonia, Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele, and MIAGI – a specialist youth music organisation in South Africa.

Recent highlights include conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker in their Britten100 concert with Ian Bostridge, International Contemporary Ensemble in the Acht Brucken Festival, Cologne and conducting a special arrangement of "Kleine" Manon Lescaut at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival.

He has also made successful debuts with the Bamberg and Lucerne Symphony orchestras, Northern Sinfonia, Royal Scottish National, Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele with Igor Levit, Southbank Sinfonia, Ulster Orchestra and BBC National Orchestra of Wales as well as conducting the Chinese premiere of Peter Grimes in Beijing with a stellar international cast.

Duncan won the 2005 BBC Young Composer of the Year and is now published by Peters Edition. Recent composing highlights include a work for the LSO as part of their Panufnik Scheme and "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" performed by members of the National Youth Orchestra at the Southbank's "Imagine" Festival in 2014. His works have also been performed by groups such as the Endymion Ensemble, BBC Singers and The Sixteen. He was appointed Composer for Coutts Bank's Family Business Awards in 2008.

He is passionate about working with young people and local communities. Following a month working in India in 2006, Duncan subsequently co-founded the WAM Foundation which sends young UK musicians each year to teach Western classical music in schools across Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Kerala. The charity attracted the attention of the great late Ravi Shankar, who invited Duncan to study with him in California in 2010.

In Summer 2012, he conducted at the Royal Opera House as part of the London 2012 Festival with members of Streetwise Opera and in 2013 was Music Director of their critically acclaimed production "The Answer to Everything".

Duncan Ward was educated in Kent, attended Junior Trinity and was a member of the National Youth Orchestra. He went on to Manchester to study jointly degrees at the University of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music and has since worked with some of the top international orchestras.

Photo credit: Maurice Foxhall

Samuel Jacobs
Horn

Samuel Jacobs is Principal horn of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, having returned from two years as Principal horn of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Samuel has freelanced as guest Principal horn with the London Symphony, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Melbourne Symphony and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras.

He has made numerous commercial recordings for the film and pop industries, including Principal horn on the soundtrack for *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*.

Personal career highlights include recording the Sting *Symphonicities* album at Abbey Road and going on to perform with Sting at the Hollywood Bowl, New York Met and MGM Grand in Las Vegas, and touring America, Canada and Europe playing Principal horn with the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra on their Star Wars In Concert tour.

His solo experience includes concertos by Haydn, Mozart, Hoffmann, Franz Strauss and Richard Strauss, as well as Schumann's 'Konzertstuck' on Principal horn. Previous teachers include Richard Kennedy, Beccy Goldberg, Julian Plummer, Martin Owen, Michael Thompson and Richard Watkins; and Samuel himself has taught horn at the New Zealand School of Music, and given classes at the Royal College and Royal Academy of Music in London.

Outside of music, Sam has been an extra in the hit Bollywood movie 'Blue' and appeared on four television quiz shows, including Countdown.

Photo credit (and front cover): Olivia Taylor

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Duncan Ward

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Ben Holland
Michael Jones
Clare Bhabra
Caroline Bromley
Rebecca Allfree
Belinda Hammond
Ken Mitchell
Matthew Batty

Violin 2
Philip Gallaway
Melissa Court
Hazel Parkes
Elizabeth Porter
Jacob Lay
Emily Chaplais

Viola
Richard Muncey
Isobel Adams
Meghan Cassidy
Ali Vennart

Cello
Deirdre Bencsik
George Hoult
Freddie Collarbone
Lucy Wilding

Bass
David Ayre
Josie Ellis

Soloist
Samuel Jacobs (horn)

Flute
Rachel Holt
Nicky Hunter

Oboe
Emily Pailthorpe
Maddy Aldis-Evans

Clarinet
Joseph Shiner
Helen Bishop

Bassoon
Adam Mackenzie
Llinos Owen

Horn
David Tollington
Jose Lluna

Trumpet
Anthony Thompson
Gordon Truman

Timpani
Tim Gunnell

Tonight's concert is being recorded by Classic FM for transmission at a later date.

To keep up to date with this and other developments and news from Sinfonia Viva, visit our website at www.vivaorch.co.uk

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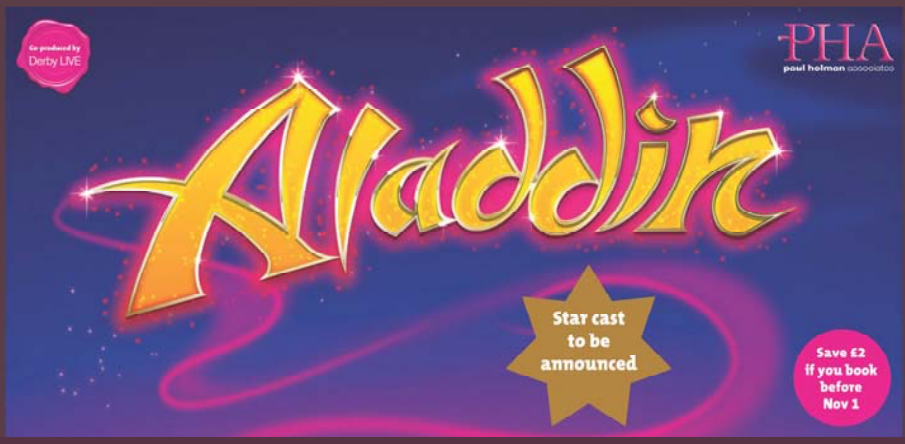

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About the Orchestra

Sinfonia Viva is a virtuoso ensemble delivering original and extraordinary creative musical experiences. Founded in 1982, Sinfonia Viva has a national reputation as a leader in creative music activity in the UK. Its work offers relevant and enriching possibilities for all.

On stage in concert halls and smaller venues across the region Sinfonia Viva continues to deliver high quality performances and concerts of extraordinary range based on original programming and project development. Partnership working, often bringing together musicians from other musical styles, genres and traditions is central to the ethos of the organisation. This is supported by extensive experience in event management activity and delivery.

Sinfonia Viva is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and receives funding from Derby City Council. Principal Conductor position sponsored by the Nottingham City Gate Branch of Handelsbanken.

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