

ALBERT HALL - - - NOTTINGHAM

FIRST PROMENADE

CONCERT

11th January, 1951, at 7-0 p.m.

By the CITY OF

Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

(Leader: NORRIS STANLEY)

Conductor: GEORGE WELDON

Solo Pianos: CYRIL SMITH &
PHYLLIS SELICK

PROGRAMME SIXPENCE

PROGRAMME NOTES

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THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

1. OVERTURE, *Die Meistersinger* *Wagner* (1813-1883)
(Time, 9 minutes)

Wagner's one comic opera, *The Mastersingers*, dates from a sad and discouraged period in his life ; it is as if he sought to throw off his sordid cares by turning from legendary and heroic tragedies to picture in music what he so sorely needed—human happiness. And how gloriously human and happy he is. The solemnity of the *Mastersingers*, the pomposity of the pedants, the cheekiness of the apprentices, the rapture of the young lovers, and the warm-hearted generosity of the real hero, Sachs—all these are depicted with the pen of one who enters into their every mood and upholds them with his unshakable faith that bad times can only be the prelude to better ones. The Overture foreshadows the story and those who have heard the opera will recognise some of the characters ; for those who have not, it is perhaps better to listen to it as a great human comedy in music ; not a comedy of empty laughter, but one in which happiness triumphs over trouble.

2. CLAIR DE LUNE *Debussy* (1862-1918)
(Time, 6 minutes)

Claude Debussy came of a line of farm labourers and small merchants ; at the time of his birth his parents kept a small china shop in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. His musical career seems to have started more or less by a fortunate chance ; at the age of eight he met M^{de}m^e. Mante de Fleurville, a pupil of Chopin, and studied the piano for three years with her before entering the Paris Conservatoire. There he spent eleven years making erratic progress and getting involved in endless contentions on harmony, before he finally won the coveted Prix de Rome at his fourth attempt. This should have given him three years' study in Italy, but he abandoned the Villa Medici after only two and returned to Paris. From then on he worked in his own individual style, labelled at different times "symbolist" and "impressionist," but nowadays perhaps regarded mainly as a superb artist who used the orchestra, or the piano, as his palette. Certainly it is easier to think of "colour" in connection with his music than with any other.

Clair de Lune comes from the *Suite Bergamasque* for piano, written between 1890 and 1905 ; it has been orchestrated by Mouton. Like so many of Debussy's works, it is a musical painting of a scene whose atmosphere is captured as vividly as in any visual painting. From the first bar, with its muted violins, the picture is clear in our minds. The music is mainly very quiet, with only one short-lived climax, but it is full of changing colours.

3. DANSE MACABRE, *Op. 40* *Saint-Saëns* (1835-1922)
(Time, 6 minutes)

Saint-Saëns was on the whole a genial composer but it is very probable that his name will live as much through this work—which is of a character quite opposed to that of most of his music—as by any other. It combines with that perfection of workmanship (which he always showed), a brilliant descriptiveness and an inherent vitality. The poem by Henri Cazalis, on which it is based, pictures the skeletons in a graveyard dancing at midnight to the compelling strains of Death's fiddle ; and Saint-Saëns music to it has just that combination of terror and grotesque humour which the word "macabre" alone conveys.

There are two interesting points in the instrumentation ; first, the inclusion of a part for a solo violin whose top string is lowered a semitone to E flat ; and second, the use of the xylophone, this being one of the earliest instances of the employment of this instrument in a symphonic work. The first of these gives an eerie quality to Death's tuning up of his fiddle at the beginning of the work ; the second illustrates, with humorous aptness, the clattering bones of the dancers.

A rough programme of the work is as follows : Midnight strikes ; Death steps forward and begins to play. One by one the dead troop forth and dance. The rhythm grows ; the dance goes forward, now grave, now gay ; until at last it culminates in wild revelry. Suddenly, at its height, the riot is stilled ; a cock crows and, with a shudder, the dancers vanish once more beneath the earth.

4. CONCERTO No. 10 in E flat (K.365) for Two Pianos and Orchestra

Mozart (1756-1791)

(Time, 26 minutes)

(i) Allegro. (ii) Andante. (iii) Finale—rondo, allegro.

CYRIL SMITH and PHYLLIS SELLICK

This genial early work was composed when Mozart was twenty-three. The form of Mozart's composition was always influenced by the medium for which he wrote, and in this work, as in the contemporary *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin and viola, the common convention of repeating phrases or figures is accentuated, and there is hardly a passage in one solo part which is not echoed or somehow reflected in the other. But this is done with so much variety and resource that all one notices is the gusto with which the two soloists are enjoying themselves, and the discretion with which they keep out of each other's way. When they do coalesce in similar texture, it usually marks the end of a section ; except for a few resonant passages the writing is mainly antiphonal.

A combination of two pianos can stand up to an orchestra very much better than one alone ; and this liberates Mozart's tiny orchestra for countless subtle effects of combination with the soloists, as well as enhancing its impact by giving it the chance of protracted rests.

The style of the first movement is partly melodious and partly technical, informed throughout by that atmosphere of formal dignity which is found in nearly all Mozart's concerto first movements ; the succeeding Andante is serene and beautifully ornate ; and the Finale is unrestrainedly cheerful and frequently brilliant, with just enough moments of gentle suavity to give the work as a whole perfect balance.

INTERVAL

5. ENTRY OF THE LITTLE FAUNS

Pierné (1863-1937)

(Time, 4 minutes)

Gabriel Pierné was of the French school and a prolific writer—opera, ballet, incidental music, chamber music and song—all flowed from an unceasing pen.

This work (a cheeky little piece) was taken from the Ballet *L'Ecole des Aegipans* first produced in Paris in 1923. The pretty little dancer Cydalise is given lessons in love-making by a little faun, whose pan-pipes are imitated by the piccolo. The scene is laid in the park of the palace at Versailles and ends in Cydalise lodging in the chateau where the faun leaves her to fall asleep. The quaint tune throughout is played by the muted trumpet accompanied by strings—an unusual effect being obtained by the violins using the wood instead of the hair of their bows.

6. CARNIVAL OF ANIMALS

Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

(Time, 20 minutes)

CYRIL SMITH and PHYLLIS SELLICK

This work—whose impressive sub-title is *Grand Zoological Fantasy*—was first performed on Shrove Tuesday, 1886, and afterwards given a few private performances at one of which Liszt was present. In due course, Saint-Saëns forbade its further performance—perhaps feeling it to be out of keeping with his dignity, but in his will he permitted its posthumous publication. It was written for eleven instruments, but the string parts are usually doubled at concert performances. The movements are as follows :—

1. INTRODUCTION AND ROYAL MARCH OF THE LION.—The two pianos and strings are here most imposing, the pianos particularly roaring like any sucking doves.
2. COCKS AND HENS.—The pianos and clarinet crow and the violins and viola cackle ; the first violin appears to have laid a double-yolker.
3. WILD ASSES.—Two pianists.
4. TORTOISES.—The strings most deliberately enunciate a melody from Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*, and the first piano refuses to allow them to hurry.
5. THE ELEPHANT.—The double bass, ably supported by the second piano, displays his agility by means of Berlioz' *Danse des Sylphes*, and the scherzo from Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.
6. KANGAROOS.—The two pianos leap and peer gingerly over the horizon.

7. AQUARIUM.—Flute and Glockenspiel swim lazily about amongst the shimmer of pianos and strings.
8. PERSONS WITH LONG EARS.—Two violins.
9. THE CUCKOO IN THE DEPTHS OF THE WOOD.—Respectively, a clarinet and two pianos.
10. THE AVIARY.—The flute and pianos flutter and chirp against a tremulous background of strings.
11. PIANISTS.—Yes.
12. FOSSILS.—The results of Saint-Saëns' excavations are three French folk songs, his own *Danse Macabre* and Rossini's *Una voce poco fa*.
13. THE SWAN.—In this, its original setting, a 'cello solo of real romantic loveliness.
14. FINALE.—A grand parade of the whole menagerie.

7. CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL, *Op. 34* *Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)*
(Time, 14 minutes)

(i) Alborada. (ii) Variations. (iii) Alborada. (iv) Scena ; Gypsy Song. (v) Fandango Asturiano.

The Capriccio Espagnol is a "display-piece" for orchestra in much the same sense as Chopin's studies are "display-pieces" for the piano ; the technical resources of the medium are in each case the basis of the work, but in each case also its purely musical value is pre-eminent. It would be a mistake to claim for the capriccio the emotional power and subtlety of the studies ; but it is an engaging and delightful piece, in which one of the greatest of all masters of orchestration exhibits to us, with affectionate care, the details of his craftsmanship.

There are five movements ; (1) Alborada, a short and bustling introduction in which are displayed the brilliant qualities of the full orchestra, the agility of the clarinet, and the *pizzicato* of the strings. Next comes (2) Variations, consisting of a short theme on four horns, which is successively repeated by 'cellos, cor anglais answered by horn, violins with wood-wind, 'cellos with wood-wind, and violins with wood-wind again. The movement ends with a chromatic passage for flute and might be described as a study in orchestral ensembles. (3) Alborada is practically a repetition of the opening movement, with modified scoring ; a solo violin is introduced and the clarinet has a particularly brilliant passage at the end. (4) Scena e canto gitano, opens with five cadenzas (there is a short interlude between the second and third), respectively, for trumpets and horns, solo violin, flute, clarinet and harp. After this the tune which these instruments have foreshadowed grows in intensity of sound and excitement until it leads into (5) Fandango Asturiano, in which new combinations and resources too numerous to mention are introduced to provide an exhilarating finale.

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SECOND AND THIRD "PROMS" by the CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

JANUARY 12th, 1951 at 7.0 p.m.

OVERTURE, Merry Wives of Windsor	Nicolai
SUITE, The Sleeping Princess	Tchaikovsky
PIANO CONCERTO in A minor	Grieg
SYMPHONY No. 41 in C (Jupiter)	Mozart
FINLANDIA	Sibelius

Conductor : GEORGE WELDON Solo Piano : LIVIA REV

JANUARY 13th, 1951 at 7.0 p.m.

MARCH, Pomp and Circumstance No. 1	Elgar
OVERTURE, Raymond	Thomas
WALTZ, Blue Danube	Johann Strauss
ARIA : Softly Awakes my Heart (Samson and Delilah)	Saint-Saëns
BALLET SUITE, Swan Lake	Tchaikovsky
TRUMPET VOLUNTARY	Jeremiah Clarke
LONDONDERRY AIR	arr. Grainger
SONGS with Piano	
FANTASIA ON BRITISH SEA SONGS	arr. Sir Henry Wood

Conductor : GEORGE WELDON Soloist : NANCY EVANS (Contralto)