

Sheffield Symphony Orchestra

Registered Charity number 701526

Ecclesall Parish Church
Saturday 9th February 2019 7.30pm

Conductor: Juan Ortuño
Leader: Martin Usher
Soloist: Ben Powell

Antonin Dvořák...In Nature's Realm
Edvard Grieg.....Piano Concerto in A Minor

INTERVAL

Ludwig Van Beethoven.....Symphony no. 6

Antonin Dvořák 'In Nature's Realm'

This concert overture was written in 1891 and is the first part of a trilogy of overtures with the title 'Nature, Life and Love'. 'In Nature's Realm' fulfils the nature part of the trilogy, with the subsequent overtures having individual titles of 'Carnival' and 'Othello', and the main tune from this work is the unifying musical theme of all three. The trilogy is suggested to

represent the life giving and destructive cycle of nature, natural cycles being a theme we return to in our symphony after the interval, but Dvořák never specified exactly what each overture was to represent. However, other titles he considered for 'In Nature's Realm' were 'In a secluded place' and 'Summer's night', which gives us some ideas of his intentions.

The main theme in this overture is suggested to be similar to Moravian folk yodelling 'halekacka' with the theme being passed and echoed across the orchestra, as if a phrase being called across a landscape. This is typical of Dvořák, who is known for the use of Moravian and Bohemian folk music within his works. The form of the piece has been described as a 'symmetrical arch', starting and ending quietly with louder passages in the middle, returning at the end to the pulse of the double basses that is heard at the beginning before it ebbs away.

Dvořák was a Czech composer, described as romantic in style and contemporary with that period of music. Dvořák was the eldest of many children (8,9 or 14 depending on the source), in a family of butchers, innkeepers and folk musicians. Having had a more classical education at the Prague Organ School he went on to be a viola player for the Bohemia Theatre Orchestra and later a church organist when he left the orchestra to pursue composition. He didn't become 'famous' as a composer until he was in his 30s but he became very popular very quickly at that time. This may have been down to the support and publicity of his friend Johannes Brahms, which meant that his Slavonic Dances for piano duet penned in 1877 intended for the 'domestic market' sold out of sheet music in just one day when it was first released. His fame then led him to a move to America for a massive salary, where he stayed for some years and wrote his most famous works. This overture, along with its 'brothers', was premiered in 1892 in the Rudolfinum in Prague, as part of Dvořák's farewell tour before he left for America.

Edvard Grieg Piano Concerto in A Minor

This concerto was composed in 1868 but Grieg revised the work many times during his lifetime, with the version we now know being his final revision before his death. Originally the score was for 2 trombones and tuba and no horns, but these were later added and the tuba replaced with a third trombone. He wrote the original version when he was in Denmark 'for the climate' and the work was premiered there. The concerto is in three movements but the second and third movement run into each other without a break.

The first movement 'Allegro Molto Moderato' is in sonata form with its famous flourish at the beginning and a cadenza at the end. This cadenza is reported to have been written by Edmund Neupert who was the pianist who premiered the work. The main theme of this movement has hints of Norwegian folk music within it, the falling minor second followed by a falling major third being typical of that music.

The second movement is an 'Adagio' in tertiary form, where we hear one theme, followed by a second, with the first returning again at the end. The final movement has three sections 'Allegro moderato molto e marcato', 'Quasi presto' and 'Andante maestoso'. The first section presents two themes with a variation of the first theme making up the faster section followed by a slow and dramatic rendition of the second theme to finish.

The concerto was the first piano concerto that was ever recorded in an abridged version of 6 minutes. It is also famous for featuring in the Morecambe and Wise sketch with André Previn where it is suggested what is being played is 'all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order'. It is also my cat's favourite piece of music.

INTERVAL
(Refreshments will be served at the back of the church)

Ludwig Van Beethoven Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral'

Beethoven's 6th symphony was written at the same time as his 5th symphony in 1807 and 1808 and both were premiered in an epic concert at the end of 1808. The 5th Symphony is regarded as typical of the 'fire and brimstone' of the grumpy, increasingly deaf Beethoven, but his 6th Symphony shows a different, and less expected, side of him.

The Pastoral symphony (as it was titled by Beethoven himself) 'does what it says on the tin' and is a celebration of the wonders of nature and the countryside. Although Beethoven lived in urban Vienna for most of his life, he valued his excursions into the surrounding countryside, writing in a letter that 'no one can love the country as much as I do. For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo which man desired to hear'. Accordingly, he wrote the 6th Symphony during summer retreats at Heiligenstadt, a rural resort on the banks of the Danube not far from Vienna, where he enjoyed walking in the woods in all weather.

Beethoven said of this work is his own programme notes 'Pastoral Symphony, more an expression of feeling than painting' and this was fairly radical in 1808 when symphonies weren't supposed to depict your holiday postcard or bad weather. The symphony is an example of 'programme music' music which tells a specific story or paints a musical picture, which progressed as a genre following on from this symphony. However, although this depiction of real place was suggested to be novel, it wasn't a particularly new idea and harked back to the time of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* or works by Haydn. The movements of the Beethoven symphony align closely in description to those of a work by Knecht of 1784 called 'Grande Sinfonie', which would have been known to Beethoven in his youth, although Beethoven's version is the more famous, and arguably better, one.

The symphony is in five movements, however, the last three movements follow on from each other without break. Each movement has a title added by Beethoven to describe what it represents.

1- Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country

This movement is surprisingly quiet, with very few loud dynamics throughout. This is unusual for a symphony of the time, where first movements should be concerned with 'drama'. The harmony remains static with repeated ideas identifying with the cyclical movement of the natural world. The central part being dominated by one single rhythm. This emphasises the effect when it does eventually change key halfway through.

2- Scene by the brook

The second movement again relies on the repeated motifs in the strings to show the natural world, in particular the movement of water, which bubbles continuously throughout this movement on the first desk of cellos, violas and second violins. Eventually the water falls into a still pool and we hear the sound of birdsong with the flute playing the nightingale, oboe the quail and clarinet the cuckoo.

3- Merry Dance of the countryfolk

This movement depicts a village band, complete with sleepy bassoonist who wakes every so often to play a couple of notes. The two dances alternate and you expect they could

repeat ad infinitum but for the interjection of the next movement with the coming of a storm.

4- Thunder and storm

This movement cuts through the stately and lulling repetitiveness of the rest of the movements to depict an almighty storm. The turbulence starts in the bass line with double basses playing groups of 4 notes against the cellos playing groups of 5 notes. Then trombones and timpani are introduced for the first time in this symphony to further emphasise the thunder, which appears before the lightning! But as quickly as it starts the storm subsides and the clouds roll away to let the sunbeams of the final movement shine through.

5- Shepherd's song, thankful feelings after the storm

This movement begins with a 'hunting call' followed by a simple but lovely 'Shepherd's song'. This is the climax of the symphony and is suggested to be most 'joyful' moment of all Beethoven's work. The symphony then ends gently with the music subsiding and descending in pitch, dynamics and intensity echoing the ending of the first movement, again reiterating the 'cycles of nature' theme of the whole symphony.

BEN POWELL

"Pianist Benjamin Powell demonstrated an immense range of tone and sound in his programme: granitic and stern for Stockhausen, brilliantly light-fingered in Elliott Carter, fiery and moody for Anthony Gilbert, volcanically sensuous in Skryabin."
Ivan Hewett – Daily Telegraphy

Since winning the British Contemporary Piano Competition in 2010 Benjamin Powell has gained a reputation for intelligent and expressive performances with a strong commitment to contemporary music. He has performed across the UK and Europe as a soloist, chamber musician, and song accompanist in venues including Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Snape Maltings, Bridgewater Hall, IRCAM (Paris), and Harpa (Reykjavik). In 2014 he was appointed pianist for Manchester's leading contemporary music group, Psappha.

He has taken part in a performance of the complete solo piano music of Helmut Lachenmann at the Aldeburgh Festival and a performance of Marco Stroppa's Traiettoria in IRCAM, Paris. Benjamin's recording of selections from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier was used in the recent National Theatre production of 'the Hard Problem', Sir Tom Stoppard's latest play. Benjamin is much in demand as a chamber musician and has collaborated with many distinguished musicians including Stefano Canuti, Leland Chen, Levon Chilingirian, Craig Ogden, Miklós Perényi, Thomas Riebl, Sophie Rosa and Eva Thorarinsdottir.

He studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Carole Presland and later (thanks to scholarships from the MBF, DAAD, and Lynn Foundation) with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Alexander Melnikov at the Hochschule für Musik Cologne and RNCM respectively. Benjamin has also attended the International Musicians Seminar in Prussia Cove studying in the class of Thomas Adès.

Since 2007 Benjamin has been a staff pianist at the RNCM where he now also teaches piano. His students have gone on to win prizes in major competitions, including BBC Young Musician of the Year, James Mottram International Competition, Manchester International Piano Concerto Competition and the British Contemporary Piano Competition.

Benjamin was born and raised in West Sussex and currently lives in Glossop with his wife and three children.

JUAN ORTUÑO

Spanish conductor Juan Ortuño is enjoying an exciting career in the UK, where he is principal conductor of the *Sheffield Symphony Orchestra* and the *Gorton Philharmonic Orchestra*. He also regularly conducts concerts with Crosby, North Staffordshire, Alderley Edge and Wilmslow Symphony Orchestras.

Coming from a family of singers, Juan is very passionate about working with opera and choral societies. He is Musical Director of the *City of Manchester Opera*, with whom he has most recently conducted thrilling performances of *Carmen* and *The Magic Flute*. Since 2014, he has been Director of Music of *Bury Choral Society*, receiving praising reviews for the performances of *St. Matthew's Passion*, *The Creation* and *The Armed Man*.

Juan also enjoys teaching young talented musicians in the Junior RNCM, where he conducts the symphony orchestra, and has just started a collaboration with the Manchester University Confucius Institute to create an international Chinese choir.

Juan started music lessons in Madrid with his parents. Both were performers in the Spanish National Radio and Television Choir. His first ambition was Astrophysics in which he obtained a Bachelors Degree. At the same time, he was studying voice, piano, and violin. He then decided to focus on a career in music and earned degrees in Orchestral and Choral conducting at the *Royal Conservatory of Madrid*.

After finishing his degrees in Spain, Juan was awarded with a scholarship from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to continue further studies in the UK. He obtained his Masters degree from the *Royal Northern College of Music*, where he studied with Clark Rundell and Mark Shanahan and conducted his final concert with the *Manchester Camerata*.

During his academic studies, Juan was selected to take part in the young conductors' project of the Spanish Youth Orchestra (*Joven Orquesta Nacional de España*), working with them as guest conductor in concert tours. He also attended several conducting master classes with Benjamin Zander, George Hurst, Martyn Brabbins, and Antoni Ros-Marbà, and has worked with orchestras such as the *Royal Scottish National Orchestra*, the *Sappha Ensemble*, *Kammerphilharmonie Graz*, and *Orquestra Simfònica del Vallés* among others. Juan was a finalist in the "Luigi Mancinelli" *International Opera Conducting Competition* in Orvieto.