

CONCERT IN AID OF SANKTUS

Aeolian Sinfonia of North London - Thursday 7th July 2022, 8.30pm
 Our Lady Help of Christians Church Hall, Falkland Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 2XT

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847): *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Overture, Op 21*

Mendelssohn wrote this overture (which heralded a new idiom) in 1826 when he was only seventeen years old, after he had read a German translation of the play. (A brother of the translator married one of his aunts.) Felix came from an intellectual, cultured family: he and his sister Fanny used to read Shakespeare plays for pleasure, taking each of the parts. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was one of their favourites. It was premièred the following year in Stettin, Prussia (now Szczecin, Poland) at a concert in which Mendelssohn performed as a piano soloist and first violinist. It was his first public performance, for which he had had to travel eighty miles in a snowstorm. It resulted in public acclaim and his recognition as a leading composer.

The piece is written in sonata form, incorporating both romantic and classical elements, and is notable for its striking instrumental effects. It opens with four E major chords played by the woodwinds, which immediately evoke the magical Athenian forest in which the play is set. Some of the music was composed out of doors, and it has been suggested that the chords were written after hearing an evening breeze rustle leaves in the garden. Staccato strings in E minor depict dancing fairies scurrying through the woods. The full orchestra introduces Lysander's and Hernia's lovers' theme. We hear Theseus's hunting party and clumsy, coarse tradesmen, on the horns; and Bottom's 'hee-haw' braying after Puck mischievously transformed him into a donkey, from the strings. These themes recur in the development section, notably those of the fairies and that of the lovers' transposed into the minor. The four original chords introduce the recapitulation. A gently modulating section in the winds opens the coda, where we hear a beautiful rendering of the lovers' theme, the fairies once more, and the final four chords.

The first performance in Britain – at the Argyll Rooms in London in 1829 – was conducted by Mendelssohn himself. It was a benefit concert for Silesian flood victims. The orchestra was assembled by Mendelssohn's friend George Smart and Mendelssohn was again a piano soloist. After the concert the score of the overture was given to Thomas Attwood for safe-keeping but he left it in a taxi and Mendelssohn had to re-write it from memory!

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897): *Variations on a theme by Haydn: St Antoni Chorale, Op 56*

Thema. Chorale St. Antoni. Andante; Variation I. Poco più animato (Andante con moto); Variation II. Più vivace (Vivace); Variation III. Con moto; Variation IV. Andante con moto (Andante); Variation V. Vivace (Poco presto); Variation VI. Vivace; Variation VII. Grazioso; Variation VIII. Presto non troppo (Poco presto); Finale. Andante

Brahms composed this piece in the summer of 1873 in Tutzing, Bavaria. He found the theme in the second movement of a Divertimento for wind ensemble, shown him by his friend Carl Ferdinand Pohl, librarian of the Vienna Philharmonic Society. The original was attributed to Haydn but is now thought not to have been written by him. Brahms' theme and variations were first for two pianos, which he premièred with his close friend Clara Schumann at a private event in Bonn the same year. The orchestral version appeared shortly afterwards and was premièred by the Vienna Philharmonic with Brahms conducting. It has remained one of Brahms' most popular works and is known to have been one of his favourites.

The theme is unusually based on a five-bar phrase, which when repeated results in a ten- rather than the normal eight-bar section. The variations demonstrate magnificent variety, harking back to earlier forms such as counterpoint but also incorporating romantic features. The first variation consists of a swirl of flowing string lines interspersed with persistent repeated B flats (the keynote), with which the theme ended, from the winds. Variation II shifts to the minor, featuring dotted rhythms, scurrying, descending string lines and strident chords from the full orchestra. The third variation, marked *dolce legato*, is decorated by the winds and later the strings. Variation IV, marked *dolce semplice*, changes the mood once more with a return to the minor and a slower tempo. The fifth variation is a scherzo in 6/8 time with frolicking rhythms and syncopation. Variation VI features celebratory hunting horns. The seventh variation is a charming, lilting Siciliano. Variation 8, in the minor again, begins with hushed whispering but turns into a flowing stream, in which a sense of the beat is lost. The Finale is a magnificent passacaglia, a new set of variations above a five-bar ground bass, almost obscured by all the activity above. Shortly before the end, Brahms quotes from the second movement of Haydn's Clock Symphony, as a tribute to the composer. The clock then winds down before the final triumphant blaze of colour.

Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904): Slavonic Dances, Op 46

No 5 in A major; No 6 in D major; No 7 in C minor; No 8 in G minor

Brahms, who admired and encouraged Dvořák's work, introduced him to his publisher, Fritz Simrock. After the success of a set of vocal duets, Simrock requested a set of Bohemian dances for the popular piano duet market. The orchestral version soon followed. Its success quickly established Dvořák's international reputation, drew attention to Czech music and led to a request from the publisher for a further set. Dvořák used Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* as a model but, unlike Brahms, composed the melodies himself, using only the rhythms of folk music and cleverly evoking its spirit. Contrary to their name, the dances are Bohemian rather than more generally Slavic. These lively, nationalistic pieces are some of the composer's most memorable and popular works.

Nos. 5 and 7 are based on the *skočná*, a rapid Slavic folk-dance, normally in 2/4 metre. No 6 is based on the *sousedská*, a semi-slow Bohemian dance in 3/4 time, with a calm, swaying character, usually danced in a pair. No. 8 is based on the *furiant*, a rapid and fiery Bohemian dance, with frequently shifting accents. The rhythm is essentially a 3/4 bar followed by two 3/8 bars but it's not written like that.

At the end of the concert, please donate generously to the SanKTus. You can make a cash donation in the hall before you leave, which we will forward, or send a donation using the instructions found on the website sanktus.org

Aeolian Sinfonia of North London, active for many years, was conducted for most of these by the late Roy Budden, who founded the orchestra at least thirty-five years ago as the Kensington Sinfonia. Known as one of North London's friendliest orchestras, we rehearse on Thursday evenings during school term time. If you know of anyone who would like to join us, we always need string players, and often extra woodwind and brass. Future concerts will be listed at aeoliansinfonia.com - send us a message via the site and ask to be added to our mailing list.

Violin 1

Elizabeth Ann Binks (leader)
Pamela White
Donna Chapman
Jasmine Ali

Violin 2

Chris Gundry
Kate Bailey
Peng Nian
Gita Croft

Viola

Segun Victor

Cello

Ruth Williams
George Coulouris
Priscilla Eyles

Flute

Lucy Meredith

Oboe

David Williamson

Clarinet

Bryan Ogilvie
Elaine Gavin

Bassoon

Bryan Ogilvie

Horn

Luke Stevens

Trumpet

Richard Cooper

Timpani

Ankie Postma

Elizabeth Ann Binks studied at the Guildhall School of Music and was awarded the AGSM and the Salzmann Scholarship. She has worked with the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, Scottish Opera, BBC Concert Orchestra and D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, and has led the Virtuosi of London.

Keith Bramich studied conducting with Lawrence Leonard, Rodolfo Saglimbeni, George Hurst, Paul Sarcich and Mary Mogil. He joined the orchestra in 2008, and is also a regular guest conductor of other ensembles.

We are very grateful to Father John Deehan and Our Lady Help of Christians Church, to Liz Valentine for writing programme notes and to various members of other local orchestras and the wider music community for their help in putting on this concert.