

Autumn Concert

Aeolian Sinfonia of North London - Thursday 28th November 2019, 8pm
Church Hall, Our Lady Help of Christians Church, Falkland Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 2XT

Jacques Offenbach: *Orpheus in the Underworld: Overture*

Orpheus in the Underworld was a comic opera, parodying Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and lampooning the Greek myth of Orpheus. It was widely seen as a veiled satire on Napoleon III's court and government. When performed in Paris in 1858 and 1874 it was a great success, rescuing Offenbach and his Bouffes theatre company from financial difficulty. However, neither of these performances included a proper overture, only a short prelude. The first production of the opera in Vienna in 1860 demanded something more substantial by way of an introduction. The well-known and popular overture was in fact composed by Carl Binder, using the best music from the opera. Binder (1816–1860), an Austrian musician, was a colleague of Franz von Suppé's. Two notable features are Orpheus's violin solo (in this case Orpheus is a violinist rather than a lutenist) and the can can from the final scene of the opera. This 'infernal gallop', a bacchanalian frenzy depicting an orgy of the gods in Hades, was adopted in the late nineteenth century by the Parisian cabarets the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergère to accompany the can can, being associated with this dance ever since.

Georges Bizet (1838–1875): *Carmen Suite No 1*

Prélude; Aragonaise; Intermezzo; Séguédille; Les Dragons d'Alcala; Les Toréadors

This suite, published in 1882, consists of preludes and interludes drawn posthumously from the music of the opera by Bizet's friend Ernest Guiraut, closely following Bizet's orchestration, with its melodies and rhythms conjuring up Spain.

The Prelude, which followed the original overture, features the recurrent fate motive of the opera associated with Carmen's premonitions of death and her own murder, underpinned by tremolo strings. This leads immediately to the Aragonaise (named after a region in the south-east of Spain), a lively triple-time dance which preceded the opera's fourth act. Strings imitate the plucking and strumming of a guitar, percussion imitates crackling castanets, while oboe and piccolo play melodies over rhythmic percussion. The Intermezzo based on the prelude to Act 3, is a nocturne setting a night-time scene in the mountains. It begins with the flute over 'harp' arpeggios, passes through various sections of the orchestra, ending up with the strings. Its serenity belies the simmering conflict as Carmen and Don José's love affair sours. The Séguédille, another Spanish dance with a waltz-like rhythm, was originally an aria in the first act. Carmen's seductive love-song suggests a meeting with Don José in a notorious tavern if he will release her from arrest. It's tinged with Phrygian cadences (imperfect cadences, moving from a first inversion subdominant chord to the dominant, the bass moving down by a semi-tone) and chromatic twists, which Katherine Baber describes as 'harmonic loopholes that let Carmen slip out of our grasp at every turn'. 'Les dragons d'Alcala', which originally preceded Act 2, is a march introduced by the bassoons parodying Don José's military background and later sung by him. Finally 'Les Toréadors' contains themes from the original overture and the procession of the toreadors to the bullring in Act 4. It's a festive, quick march, matching the bravura of the bullfighter Escamillo, in the middle of which the toreador song is played by the strings.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): *Symphony No 6 in F major, Op 68 (Pastoral)*

Allegro ma non troppo; Andante molto mosso; Allegro; Allegro; Allegretto

Although sketches exist from 1802, the Pastoral symphony was mainly composed contemporaneously with the fiery 5th, during the summers of 1807 and 1808 in the rural setting of Heiligenstadt. The two symphonies were premiered together at an over-ambitious concert in Vienna in the latter year. Beethoven's symphonies were louder, longer and more exciting than anything that went before. The Pastoral is distinguished by its joyful mood and by being one of the first real examples of 'programme', i.e. descriptive, music. Beethoven said he loved a tree more than a man.

The first movement, in sonata form in the home key of F major, depicts the 'awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside' by the lulling repetition of short skipping motifs. In the second movement, 'scene by the brook', also in sonata form but in the subdominant key of Bb major and 12/8 time, various instruments imitate flowing water. Towards the end there is a cadenza featuring birdsong played by the woodwinds: nightingale (flute), quail (oboe) and cuckoo (clarinets). The movement ends on an imperfect cadence, leading directly into the third movement, 'a merry gathering of country folk', which returns to the home key.

One commentator describes it as progressing in an ebullient, though somewhat undirected fashion, as if portraying a band of barely talented, or barely sober, village musicians. It is a slightly modified scherzo; the trio appears twice and the third appearance of the main theme is truncated, speeding up and ending suddenly. The fourth movement, in F minor, follows immediately. It portrays a thunderstorm with dramatic realism, building up to a climax of thunder and lightning. When the storm subsides, the movement slips into the joyful final movement, 'cheerful feelings after the storm'. The hauntingly beautiful shepherd's song is played first on the clarinet and then the horn (here a saxophone). The main melodic idea of the symphony is developed with increasing intensity to a climactic dissonance, gradually resolved melodically and dynamically in a slow descent, which mirrors a similar pattern in the first movement, also just before the coda. At the end, the listener is left with a feeling of calm.

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 horns, and occasionally extra woodwind and brass. Future concerts are listed at www.aeoliansinfonia.com - send us a message via the site and ask to be added to our mailing list.

Violin 1

Elizabeth Ann Binks (leader)
Mariko Yamamoto
Mike Stevenson

Violin 2

Gita Croft
Lynn Norris
Emily Taylor

Viola

Annalena Lipinski
Bronwen Taylor

Cello

George Coulouris
Ruth Williams
Simon Hewitt
Katherine Gilroy

Bass

Clarissa Dann

Flute

Liz Valentine
Pat Shariatmadari

Oboe

David Williamson
Sara Ho

Clarinet

Lucy Bagshaw
Nigel Brockmann

Bassoon

Bryan Ogilvie
Toby Mitchell

French horn

Mike Walker (alto sax)

Trumpet

Richard Cooper
Lorraine Martin

Timpani / Percussion

Ankie Postma

We're indebted to our treasurer, Valerie Scarr, who unfortunately is unable to play in tonight's concert.

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 musical director of the Community Choir at Alfrick (near the Worcestershire / Herefordshire border) and a regular guest conductor of other ensembles.

Please give a donation to *SanKTus*, the welfare project for the homeless and socially excluded, at the end of the concert. Please also stay on after the concert for snacks, drinks and conversation with the performers, from about 9.20pm.