

CONCERT FOR UKRAINE

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

Ludwig van Beethoven(1770–1827): *Egmont Overture*

Sostenuto, ma non troppo – Allegro – Allegro con brio

The overture is from the incidental music for the play of the same name by Goethe. It was composed between October 1809 and June 1810, and premiered on 15 June 1810. One of the last works of Beethoven's middle period, it is powerful and expressive. It has an austere opening and a thrilling, climactic ending.

The subject of the play was the life and heroism of a 16th-century nobleman, Lamoral, Count of Egmont from the Low Countries, who led the resistance to the Inquisition and persecution of Protestants when the Spanish occupied the Netherlands. He was subsequently arrested and executed. In the music, Beethoven expressed his own political concerns. It was composed during the Napoleonic Wars when the French empire had extended its domination over vast swathes of Europe. Beethoven famously expressed his great outrage over Napoleon's decision to crown himself Emperor in 1804 by furiously scratching out his name in the dedication of the Eroica Symphony. The *Egmont Overture* became an unofficial anthem of the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

Here is John Suchet's interpretation of the music (paraphrased): First you hear the arrest of the Count; next, in the low strings, the Spanish judges prosecuting him. The plaintive wind is his wife and the mother of his 11 children pleading for mercy. The *fortissimo* staccato notes of the brass are the verdict of guilty being given. There is a final *piano* pleading in the first violins. The whole orchestra in unison on a single note is the sentence of death. A *forte* fall of a fourth in the first and second violins is the executioner's sword coming down. But finally a *pianissimo*, which slowly builds to a massive *fortissimo*, an exhilarating passage in the major key, indicates that the Count's spirit and all he fought for lives on; and that the people of the Netherlands ultimately threw out the rapacious invader.

Beethoven was obviously particularly emotionally involved in this piece. Not only did his ancestors come from the Netherlands but he was also especially moved by Goethe's writing. A friend of his reported that he told her that "Goethe's poems exert a great power over me not only by virtue of their content but also their rhythm; I am put in the right mood and stimulated to compose by this language, which builds itself into a higher order as if through spiritual agencies, and bears within itself the secret of harmony."

Franz Schubert (1797–1828): *Symphony No 8 in B minor, D 759 (Unfinished)*

Allegro moderato; Andante con moto

This symphony is commonly known as the 'Unfinished' because only two movements exist, although Schubert lived for another six years. There is no agreement amongst musicologists as to why the symphony was never completed. The Graz Music Society awarded Schubert an honorary diploma in 1823 and he felt obliged to dedicate a symphony to them in return. He sent his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, a leading member of the Society, an orchestral score he had written in 1822, consisting of the two completed movements plus at least the first two pages of the start of a scherzo. However, Hüttenbrenner did not reveal the work until 1865 when he showed it to the conductor Johann von Herbeck, who premiered the two movements in Vienna in December that year, adding the last movement of Schubert's 3rd Symphony in D major as an inadequate finale. The performance was nevertheless received enthusiastically by the audience, and the score of the two movements published two years later.

The symphony is among Schubert's most beautiful instrumental works. Reviewing the premiere of the symphony in 1865, the music critic Eduard Hanslick described the first movement as "a sweet stream of melodies so crystal-clear that you can see every pebble on the bottom". The *Andante* unfolds itself broadly and even more majestically than the opening *Allegro*. The sonorous beauty of both movements is enchanting, he claimed. "With a few horn passages, an occasional brief clarinet or oboe solo on the simplest, most natural basis of orchestration, Schubert achieves sound effects which no refinement of Wagner's instrumentation ever attains."

Béla Bartók (1881-1945): *Romanian Folk Dances*

This set of six dances is based on folk tunes from various districts in Transylvania, central and western Romania, typically played on a fiddle or a shepherd's flute. The title originally indicated that the pieces came from Hungary but this was later changed when Transylvania became part of Romania in 1920. The pieces are written in modes rather than keys – in fact Bartók did not use key signatures – and are nearly all in duple time. According to the composer, they should take four minutes and three seconds to perform, but most professional musicians take up to five minutes.

1. *Jocul cu băță* (Stick Dance). This melody was first heard by Bartók, played by two gypsy violinists.
2. *Brâul* (Sash Dance). A sash or waistband was typically worn for this dance.
3. *Pe loc* (In One Spot). A darker melody with Arabic influence (augmented seconds), employing a gypsy scale (without the leading note).
4. *Buciumeana* (Dance from Bucsum)
5. *Poarga Românească* (Romanian Polka). This constantly switches between duple and triple time.
6. *Mărunțel* (Fast Dance) This dance has two parts – two different melodies, played without a break between them.

At the end of the concert, please donate generously to the CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. You can make a cash donation in the hall before you leave, which we will forward, or send a donation via cafod.org.uk (by searching for 'Ukraine').

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
 Christopher Evans
 Nian Peng
 Mike Aldren
 Mike Malone

Violin 2

Gita Croft
 Jasmine Ali
 Piyarat Martin
 Chris Gundry

Viola

Hannah Teasdale
 Segun Victor
 Janet Farrell

Cello

Ruth Williams
 Andrew Williams
 Priscilla Eyles

Bass

Paul Martin

Flute

Liz Valentine
 Sim Murray

Oboe

David Williamson
 Victoria Ward

Clarinet

Alan Fairburn
 Elaine Gavin

Bassoon

Bryan Ogilvie
 Susie Herman

Horn

Stephen Hadley

Trumpet

Richard Cooper

Timpani

Alan Warren

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 Christopher Evans for his financial help, 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.