

Slough Philharmonic Orchestra

Musical Director: David Wilson

Saxophone soloist: Simon Allen

Orchestra Leader: Marilyn Vanryne

7.30 pm Saturday 11th November 2017

St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School, Langley Road, Slough

Wagner
1813 – 1888

Richard Wagner's predilection for the musical portrayal of high ideals (*Parsifal*), folk myth (*The Ring Trilogy*) and historical epic (*Lohengrin* and *Tristan*) should not be allowed to obscure his more down to earth operas, *The Flying Dutchman* (allowing for a touch of the supernatural) and most especially *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*.

It is paradoxical that a man such as Wagner, one of the more odious personalities to inhabit the field of composition – anti-Semite, crawler to royalty, wife stealer, inveterate borrower of money and one of the 19th century's most posing of hypochondriacs – should have been able to produce such a wonderfully warm and affectionate work as *Die Meistersinger* with its many-faceted plot of medieval guild rivalry, young lovers and "the big contest".

The idea for the work grew out of an episode early in the composer's life when he and his brother made a habit of "winding up" a theatre stage hand of their acquaintance who dreamed of becoming an opera singer. By 1861 Wagner had the plot sketched out in his mind, borrowing from various literary sources, but it was not until he had begun to exploit the pathologically naive boy-King of Bavaria, Ludwig II, that most of his money troubles were solved and he could devote some time to this composition which had grown out of all proportion to his original intentions.

There are many meetings of great artists at which one might wish to have been a silent spectator, and close to the top of anyone's list must surely be the time shortly after the predatory Wagner had settled into a cosy *ménage à trois* with an unsuspecting Hans von Bülow and Bülow's wife Cosima whom Wagner was determined to steal. Announcing his intention of looking over the new opera, Wagner's long-time friend Franz Liszt proposed to call. This however was not the Franz Liszt whose incessant womanising had caused his father to despair for fear that he would ruin his career as a piano virtuoso, but the Franz Liszt who having not only had his sexual cake but eaten it enthusiastically, had now taken holy orders and was calling on this curious household as the Abbé Liszt. As if living in the von Bülow household was not enough, Bülow's wife Cosima was Liszt's daughter, the product of a liaison between the old composer and the wife of a French aristocrat. Wagner was absolutely petrified lest his devious scheming should be rumbled by Liszt and offend the old roué's new-found piety, but he worried unnecessarily. Liszt's eyes were fixed only on the score which he transposed on sight at the piano (!) while Wagner sang through most of the principal roles. Liszt liked what he heard, praised Wagner's operatic ambition and departed the following morning without a word said.

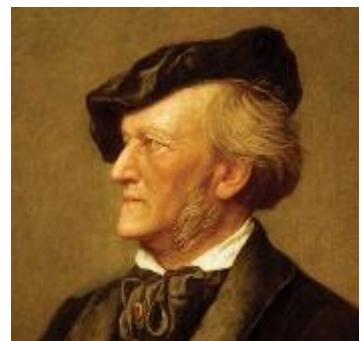
Wagner, unusually for him, wrote tonight's first act prelude before he embarked on the opera. It opens with the theme which depicts the guild of mastersingers and is predictably full of pomp and ceremonial as befits a medieval guild. We then hear the march played to accompany their procession. Next heard are references to Walther and Eva's love theme and the prize song after which the unmistakable parody of the *Mastersingers'* theme on chattering woodwind signifies the music associated with the apprentices. There is a magic moment a little later when, with a single stroke on the triangle, all of the main themes appear simultaneously and the prelude to this long complex, but very affectionate and human opera, concludes with a splendid restatement of the march and of the *Mastersingers'* theme which began the work.

Berio
1925 – 2003



Luciano Berio started out by being a composer who in the 1950s was an enthusiastic follower of the avant-garde composers of the time but unlike them (e.g. Boulez and Stockhausen) he maintained a genuine interest in Western musical heritage and occasionally adapted music by much earlier composers.

Those in the audience feeling apprehensive of what aural torture is coming their way may relax, for the *Notturna* is a reworking of a composition written by Boccherini (1743 – 1805), one of this composer's most popular works in his lifetime and one which Berio had always admired. So pleased was Boccherini with his work that he produced no less than four versions



Prelude to Act 1 of *Die Meistersinger* (1868)

Ritirata notturna di Madrid de Boccherini (1975)

and made them available for different groups of instruments. The work consists of a set of variations. It is intended to depict the approach of a platoon of soldiers passing through the streets of Madrid at night.

What Berio has done with the original material is to fuse all four versions together for a modern symphony orchestra, but he was absolutely loyal to the original, declaring that not a note appeared anywhere in this reworking that would not be found in Boccherini's originals.

There are many examples in a musical portrayal of the approach adopted and this work follows the predictably loud central section, book-ended with a growing and subsequent reduction of volume. Maybe it is predictable but it is Berio's skill at the organisation of his work that calls for admiration.

Title Translation – Italian to English – Night Retreat. (“Retreat” used in the military signal sense).

Ronald Binge 1910 –1979

Allegro spiritoso Andante espressivo Rondo: Allegro giocoso

Binge is one of a large number of British composers particularly prominent between 1930 and 2000 who found themselves, by their domestic circumstances composing, arranging and conducting what for a better word we call “light music” and it has to be said that almost without exception they were very good at it.

Binge lost his father in the Great War in 1914 and his mother became the wage earner in support of her three children. Relatives and some local musicians helped to foster the boy's considerable potential and his first major achievement was to be admitted to the choir of Derby Cathedral, but when his father returned from the war (not demobilised until 1919) Binge was obliged to join his siblings to earn some sort of wage. His keyboard skills helped him to secure work in the nascent silent cinema circuit. He played the harmonium and when available the cinema organ besides arranging numbers for the regular small orchestra to play (this was the silent film period of course).



Moving around a good deal our man eventually finished up arranging music for the orchestra leader/conductor Mantovani in 1935. This relationship remained in place until 1939 when the composer entered the Royal Air Force where he was soon spotted and used as an Entertainments Officer. The work palled and Binge transferred to the training of pilots in Northumberland until the war's end.

In 1951, while Mantovani was occupied leading the pit orchestra show involving The Crazy Gang on a nationwide tour, he left Binge in charge of his orchestra. At this time Binge was delighted and surprised to receive news that he had been elected a member of the Royal Philharmonic Society. As if by magic Binge then received an invitation from Decca to make a planned recording session with the Mantovani orchestra. At this point, through very innovative scoring for an enlarged string band, Binge produced an overlay of string lines cunningly welded together but sectionally delayed. It became known world-wide as the *Mantovani Sound*. Binge's idea that music for enormous spaces with vast amounts of echo came from the way 16th and 17th century composers wrote and produced by natural means, without the electronic aids which by the 1960s were becoming available in recording studios.

The BBC launched an annual international festival of light music in 1951 and it was in 1955 that the composer was offered two commissions, the second of which, in 1956, resulted in the production of tonight's concerto. The soloist was Michael Rein the leader of the MK Saxophone Quartet, an ensemble that was immensely popular for over twenty years. They were responsible for new work commissions to join those of other “serious” composers who welcomed the instrument into the orchestra, among whom were Milhaud and Vaughan Williams who includes one saxophone in his sixth symphony and three in the ninth.

The opening movement demonstrates the power and versatility of the solo instrument.

The second (slow) movement opens with a single theme, presented by the soloist and then developed by the orchestra. The tense climax gives way to what amounts to a wistful question mark hanging in the air from which grows:

The third movement finale. It begins with energetic violins, the soloist soon joining in the style of a jig.

- Interval -

Refreshments available in the Old Hall

Slough Philharmonic Society is a registered charity no. 269909

Rachmaninov
1873 – 1943



Symphony No 2

Largo - Allegro moderato
Adagio

Scherzo-Allegro molto-moderato
Allegro vivace

We have remarked before in programme notes of the potential for Hollywood style "treatment" of the early part of Rachmaninov's career. At the age of 24 he had witnessed the complete fiasco of a premiere of his First Symphony under the inebriated baton of Alexander Glazunov.

Rachmaninov, who was crushed under the weight of critical venom which followed, suffered a near breakdown and was certainly stricken with a composing block. It was three years before he was treated by Dr Herman Dahl, the Moscow-based neurologist who specialised in hypnotherapy. Dahl worked cautiously with his young patient and succeeded in re-energising the composer's creative juices. The result was the composition of one of the two most popular piano concertos ever written, that is Rachmaninov's Second in C minor. The second symphony began its life in 1905 but by the time it was completed in 1907 we find Rachmaninov with his family in Dresden taking refuge from the political repression under way at home as a result of the failed 1905 revolution. Tonight's symphony had its premiere in St Petersburg in 1908 and was generally well received. The late and much lamented Robert Simpson, whose own compositional structures were rock solid, never concealed his own disappointment at Rachmaninov's "going off the rails" as Simpson put it, after the well-constructed First Symphony, allowing himself to drift into *rhapsodic flexibility*. Certainly after 1910 until as late as the early 1960s not much that was complimentary was said about Rachmaninov's symphonic output. The 1954 edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music was sniffily dismissive of it all - the music was branded as *nothing but nostalgia*.

And there, that is in the dustbin of received critical disapproval, it might have stayed but for a fortunate conjunction of events involving the record industry. The celebrated Decca record producer John Culshaw was riding high after the phenomenally successful and epoch making version of Wagner's Ring cycle that was produced in spectacular sound. Culshaw, like any keen music enthusiast, had his passions and in this case one of those was the music of Rachmaninov. He wrote the first English language biography of the composer and remembered very clearly that remark in Grove when thinking back to an occasion when he had given a short talk on the second symphony to a group of Royal Air Force cadets training in Trinidad in 1943. There had been tremendous enthusiasm shown when he had played the complete work on 78 rpm records. What had aroused that enthusiasm? Nostalgia? - in a group of lads whose average age was 19? Hardly.

Culshaw thought not and towards the end of 1960s planned to record all three symphonies and then release them one at a time. He found another enthusiast, the conductor Walter Weller, and booked the renowned Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra with whom he had worked so successfully on the Ring project. Unknown to Culshaw, over at EMI, the recently appointed principal conductor of the LSO, André Previn, also harboured a passion for tonight's composer and his influence over recorded repertoire choice ensured for him the recording of all three symphonies and the Symphonic Dances, Rachmaninov's last work. Previn's record of the Second Symphony was the first out and it caused a sensation. Not only was the playing of the LSO a revelation, the work was given uncut and, *quelle surprise*, it all hung together very well and Previn's grip on the nature of this work was universally acknowledged. Suddenly critics were queuing up to apologise for the lack of foresight and analytical skill of their predecessors! In the four or five years subsequent to the appearance of both these sets of records, Rachmaninov's status as a symphonic composer was completely transformed.

What is it about this symphony that caused such a response? Surely it can't be pure nostalgia? No, the raw nerve that this symphony touches is that of emotion. No native born Russian visits a live performance of this work without a large handkerchief. Those in Russia itself had to wait a long time after the Revolution before there was the slightest chance of hearing any of the composer's work. Performances of it were banned in the then Soviet Union for quite a time. According to the cultural commissars "...the composer's work represents the decadent attitude of the lower middle classes and is especially dangerous on the musical front in the class war". In reality Rachmaninov, who stayed in permanent exile from 1917 to his death in 1943, never adapted to life in the West though as a concert pianist of transcendental skill he made a great deal of money there. However, when this symphony was written, Rachmaninov was not in any sort of exile but simply on a long vacation waiting for the dust to settle. Culshaw was right - nostalgia plays no part in the composition. On the other hand, we have none of that understated emotional restraint which makes Turgenev such a great writer. Here the emotion pours out, dramatically in the first movement, eagerly in the second, feelingly in the third and joyously in the fourth. Generally speaking, then, any audience is in for an emotional roller coaster ride mostly carried along by multitudinous strands of interleaving melodies which frequently can look the contemporaneous expertise of Richard Strauss in the eye without embarrassment.

The first movement of this considerable work begins with an extended slow introduction and when the main section sets off at allegro the first and second themes arise out of the same small cell of notes in spite of the fact that as developed they sound quite contrasted - we move from the realms of the melancholic to a brighter confidence in the process. Throughout there is a strong sense of control both in the area of climactic moments and (*pace* Dr Simpson) of structure.

The second movement is a scherzo with an urgent driving main theme announced right at the start, but this gives way to a resplendent and emotional melody on violins - a melody of such richness that most composers would have reserved it for a slow movement, but this composer had no need to economise - he had something very special waiting. Suddenly, the orchestra

erupts into an energetic fugue based on the theme that opened the movement and this material forms the basis for what is to come.

After a few introductory bars in the slow movement, we hear the clarinet play what is, without question, one of the loveliest melodies ever written and the way in which the composer gathers together the strands of this movement and brings them to one of the most cathartic climaxes anywhere in the symphonic repertoire, defies description. The strings which have been the main channel for creating the climax are given the task of concluding it by making a last statement of that clarinet melody.

The Finale begins with an abrupt swing to E major and the exuberant theme which follows is a distant relation of the motto theme heard in the first movement. There is a sudden switch into D major for the big tune which comes to dominate this section of the movement. There follows a much more reflective and slower (Adagio) section which refers to the opening of the slow movement. Then comes a magical series of descending phrases which sound remarkably bell-like, heard from all quarters of the orchestra, some doubling up on themselves speed-wise after which with good will oozing from every pore the composer restates the fourth movement's major tune before concluding with an absolutely typical Rachmaninovian flourish.

Throughout this symphony, and indeed in much of Rachmaninov's music, the thematic shape of the *Dies Irae* is heard. He was a devout member of the Russian Orthodox Church throughout his life. Though he was only temporarily away from home when this symphony was written, one is tempted to wonder whether because of the unsuccessful revolution attempt of 1905 he knew instinctively that the end of the old institutions in Russia was near. W R Anderson suggested some years ago that this obsession with the requiem mass for the dead throughout his composing career was in fact reflective of the composer's inner conviction that Russia, particularly religious Russia, was or would shortly be dead. Events post 1917 proved that supposed conviction to be very nearly true until, post *Glasnost*, the country's current president gave the Orthodox Church his support.

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Simon Allen (Saxophone)

Simon began his career with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and the Pendulum Jazz Orchestra, performing alongside the likes of Jazz Stars Art Themen, Gerard Presencer, Jamie Cullum and Peter King.

After being a winner in the Daily Telegraph 'Young Jazz' competition, and a finalist in the 'Young Jazz Musician of the Year', Simon gained a place at the Royal Academy of Music, and was selected to join UK drummer Clark Tracey's acclaimed Quintet, winning further awards and touring the UK over 7 years.

Simon is also a member of the Laurence Cottle All Star Big Band, and works with Colin Towns Mask Orchestra for the Birmingham Royal Ballet, the Matthew Herbert Big Band, touring around Germany, China, Belgium and Poland. He has appeared at major UK venues and festivals including Ronnie Scott's, the Barbican and Brecon Jazz Festival, and worked with an astonishing array of top musicians from the jazz and pop world.

Between 2005-2013 Simon was featured in the late Stan Tracey CBE's various groups, and is featured on his final two quartet recordings, as well as octet and big band album releases. Simon appeared on Jools Holland's "Later" TV show performing a track from the album "Senior Moment".

Simon also leads a horn section which has backed Phil Collins, Eric Clapton and Paul McCartney. He has recorded and played live with Robbie Williams, Beverley Knight, Katie Melua, Jamie Cullum and many others. He is featured on the soundtracks of Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" and Sujoy Ghosh's "Aladin", and in 2014/15 played for the Strictly Come Dancing UK arena tours and Brendan Cole's tour in 2016.

Simon has also recently released an album under his own name, "Any Minute Now – Simon Allen Quintet", featuring Laurence Cottle, Martin Shaw, Tom Cawley and Mike Bradley. In 2014 he was appointed Head of Jazz at the prestigious Purcell School of Music and in 2012 he was commissioned to write the orchestral arrangement of the Olympic "Song for Peterborough", which was recorded at Pinewood Studios and performed by 800 singers as the Olympic Torch passed through Peterborough.

In the West End he has worked for Jersey Boys (2008-2012), Sinatra (2014) - The Musical, Lazarus (2016) and Dreamgirls (2017) and in 2015 toured the UK with the Colin Towns' Mask Orchestra. He was the soloist for the Royal Ballet School's performance of Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Covent Garden Opera House (July 2016) and gave performances with the award winning group Sax Appeal and with Gloria Gaynor, Ronnie Scott's Jazz Orchestra, Joss Stone and Beverley Knight. He plays in Alexander LeStrange's touring group, accompanying choirs performing his choral works.

Simon runs his own recording studio, where he has recorded tracks for various artists, and adverts including Land Rover, Honda and the Co-Op.



David Wilson (Conductor and Director of Music)



On November 1959, David Wilson raised his baton to direct his first concert with the Slough Philharmonic Society, and he has been its conductor and Director of Music ever since.

He was educated at Maidstone Grammar School where he played as soloist in piano concertos by Bach and Beethoven with the excellent school orchestra, in which he played timpani and later bassoon. He went on to study piano, organ and bassoon at the Royal College of Music, the latter with the great Archie Camden. After National Service in the RAF Central Band, and a year at Reading University, he was

appointed Director of Music at Slough Grammar School. He also became conductor of the Beaconsfield Choral Society and organist at Slough Parish Church. He played widely as a professional bassoonist, honing his conducting skills by observing the conductors under whom he served, including the young Colin Davis. It was at this time that he first became involved with the Slough Phil by playing bassoon. In his first two years at Slough Grammar School the Senior Choir grew to one hundred members, and he conducted a performance of Handel's Messiah, with four visiting soloists and an orchestra drawn from the Slough Phil. In 1959 he moved to Bracknell to become Director of Music at Ranelagh School, and in the same year was appointed conductor of the Slough Phil.

At Ranelagh he built up a strong choral tradition until his retirement in 1997. Choral works included Verdi's Requiem, Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius, Brahms' Requiem, and a concert performance of Bizet's Carmen with three soloists from English National Opera, with three hundred pupils involved. Biennial opera productions included many of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, and musicals such as My Fair Lady and West Side Story. All the choral works and operas were accompanied by members of the Slough Phil.

In his tenure as conductor for over fifty years, the Society has played and sung an immense range of music, from Mahler's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies to Beethoven's Missa Solemnis, and recently two concerts devoted to film music. In 1996 David Wilson was awarded the "Individual Contribution to the Arts" by Slough Borough Council.

The Orchestra

Orchestra Leader

Marilyn Vanryne

First Violins

Veronica Challis
John Graham
Kathy Lambert
Rosalind Lucas-Smith
Geoffrey Maidment
Alison Morris
Philip Ratcliffe
Sylvia Rose
Cathy Shaw
Jane Stallard
David Thompson

Second Violins

Stephen Cossins
(Principal)
Douglas Dick
Debbie Finch
Sara Grant
Jenni Green
Chris Harrup
Anthony Lucas-Smith
Corinne Makepeace

Violas

Kathryn Stephens
(Principal)
Juliet Grayson
Helen Minton
Sue Taylor
Giles Wade
Laura Williams

Cellos

Neil Charlton
(Principal)
Sally Andrews
Gavin Fisher
Alex Hankin
Angela Haymonds
Adeline Moston
Fiona Thompson

Double Basses

Sharron Davies
Leo Bowsher
Andrew Culver
Martin Jones

Flutes

Hayley Tull
(Principal)
Annette Vanryne
Piccolo
Laura Broughton

Oboes

Rebecca Heathcote
(Principal)
Jasmine Huxtable-Wright

Cor Anglais

Melanie Macfarlane

Clarinets

Susan Cossins
(Principal)
Marion Connah
Bass Clarinet
Carolyn Yates

Bassoons

Kate Harper
(Principal)
Sarah Milum

Horns

Tim Pocock
(Principal)
Terry Crooks
Andrew Hills
Robin Morrison

Trumpets

Alison Croxon
(Principal)
Alison Davidson
John Woodward

Trombones

Dave Clarke
Christian Day
Tim West (Bass)

Tuba

Ed Sills

Harp

Jenny Broome

Timpani

Andy Spicely

Percussion

Roger Griffin
Matthew Dapré



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The 2017-2018 Season Ahead

7:30 pm Saturday 16 December 2017 at School Hall, Eton

Puccini *Messa di Gloria*
Vaughan Williams Fantasia on Christmas Carols
Hely-Hutchinson Carol Symphony (extracts)
Carols for the Chorus and Carols for the audience

William Branson (Tenor) Jonathan Wood (Bass)

7:30 pm Saturday 10 March 2018 at Caldicott School, Farnham Royal

Dvořák Overture: *Vanda*
Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2
Tchaikovsky Symphony No 5
Alexander Ullman (Piano)

7:30 pm Saturday 28 April 2018 at St Bernard's School, Langley

Handel *Messiah*
Vanessa Bowers (Soprano) Dawn Burns (Mezzo Soprano)
James Bowers (Tenor) Andrew Tipple (Bass)

3:30 pm Sunday 20 May 2018 at Caldicott School, Farnham Royal*

Programme includes short works by Holst, Sullivan, Rossini, Sibelius & Elgar

Sunday 24 June 2018 - English Sunday Afternoon Tea Concert*

Venue, time and programme to be confirmed

* Not included in the Patrons' Scheme

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