

PHILHARMONIA CONCERT SOCIETY
(Walter Legge and Victor Schuster)

ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Manager: C. S. Taylor

★

PHILHARMONIA
ORCHESTRA

(Leader : LEONARD HIRSCH)

ALCEO GALLIERA

~~DINU LIPATTI~~

LANCE DOSSOR

★

FRIDAY

FEBRUARY 28th

at 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME 6d.

NO SMOKING PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM

Programme Notes by Scott Goddard

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Overture : "The Hebrides"

Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

In the development of the concert overture, as opposed to the theatre overture, one of the earliest, as it is one of the most distinguished, of impressionist orchestral pictures was Mendelssohn's "The Hebrides or Fingal's Cave." This was a style of work evolved from Beethoven's character overtures. "The Hebrides" became the most famous of Mendelssohn's overtures. To this day it is unsurpassed for intense imaginative insight. It is a purely romantic picturesqueness, a vision which one day in the Hebrides ("how extraordinarily the place affected me") flashed across the mind of a young man whose native river was the stately Rhine. Mendelssohn was then twenty. The material of the overture is slender. There is the famous opening phrase which he noted down in a letter describing his impressions—five notes and a turn falling to the octave. Practically an inversion of this makes the other main phrase. It is rather broader. Nevertheless, the music is altogether light and transparent. There are master strokes of orchestration; such are the fanfares and calls between wood wind and brass, and then the rising flute tune against a descending one on the clarinet at the end where in that moment all the chief material is heard together.

Tone Poem : "Don Juan"

Richard Strauss
(b. 1864)

It was in this tone poem that the young Strauss, a man of twenty-five, first showed how his mastery of the pictorial in orchestral music had become a fully-ripened technique. The music must have been startling in 1889; in 1947 it is still intensely invigorating. This is not the usual figure of Don Juan. With the score is part of a poem by Nicolaus Lenau, telling of an impotent man, all passion spent, but memory still hotly and cruelly active. He remembers and as he does so he seems to make an impetuous gesture which Strauss seizes on for the opening of the work. This is to take the form of a rondo, with some salient music returning time after time; as Juan is to return after each adventure to his hearth where now "all is cold and dark" he will bring with him the bold, leaping theme that we shall hear immediately after his first gesture. This is to be the great Male Theme; another will appear much later, starting with the leap of an octave full-power on four horns in unison. But in the meantime come the Female Themes; the first little more than a giggle punctuating Juan's assault. He returns from this in full fettle. Then the next woman; a flute breathes the sighs which are all her response to the superb love-making of Juan (a strong melody for the lower strings). This is soon burnt out; the music quietens. Against a background of held string chords an oboe starts the one really impressive Female Theme. We hear it begin with the gentle rise of an octave. This surely is the one woman Juan knew for an equal. He seems to listen to all she has to say; then with sudden energy comes his reply. It starts as she did by rising through an octave; though now no weak oboe but the full male fury in the tone of four horns. From that encounter Juan returns triumphant. It seems almost as though he brings the woman with him now, for as the music works out in this third part of the rondo her music can be heard in snatches through the vigour and noise of his. And so to the climax hammered out by practically every instrument in this large score. Abruptly the mood alters; this is the shudder of absolute disillusionment, too bitter to be anything but short even in a work where passion has been as generously portrayed as here.

Pianoforte Concerto

Grieg
(1843-1907)

Allegro molto moderato
Adagio, leading to
Allegro molto moderato e marcato

Should the listener to this concerto, which contains one of the most poetic of all slow movements in the literature of the pianoforte, desire some poetic analogy let him turn to Tennyson's

"The Princess," where there is the line "And dark and true and tender is the North." The analogy is close to Grieg's concerto and at least one, possibly two, perhaps all of the adjectives will be found to suit sensations aroused by the music. This is national music, the Norway not of Ibsen but of the folk-singers, players and dancers whose tunes and rhythms Richard Nordraak, close friend of Grieg, knew well and will have brought to the composer's notice. There are no quotations from folk music in the concerto but the material is deeply imbued with recollected folklore. The dance rhythm of the wood wind tune that opens the concerto as soon as the pianoforte has ended its brilliant introduction is of that nature. So, too, is practically all the music of the last movement. The middle movement is of an altogether different character. Already, in the flowing tune that succeeds the pianoforte's repeat of the opening tune there is a sign that Grieg knew his Schumann; and as this movement goes forward there are other hints in the way the pianoforte embroiders the tune first played by the 'cellos early in the movement. This will be easily discovered; it appears as the key changes from minor to major and immediately upon a rising arpeggio for the solo instrument. As the 'cellos play the tune it sounds vaguely folkish; the pianoforte turns it immediately towards Schumann. But in the remarkable slow movement it is not only the fineness of the melodies that is striking but the way in which now Grieg recalls Beethoven. He shapes his movement in alternating, conversational paragraphs between the orchestra which begins the broad melodic music and the pianoforte which provides decorative lyrical passages as relief. It is the design of the same movement in Beethoven's Fifth Pianoforte Concerto; thereupon Brahms had used that design nine years before Grieg turned it to such fine account in 1868. He was then twenty-five; he was to get great fame from this concerto. Such delight on the part of the public came partly from the warm sentiment of the slow movement and still more from the vivacious tunes. They are that even when Grieg is being wistful. And in the last movement that acceptable melancholia too gives way to the gaiety of dancing.

INTERVAL

Symphony No. 5 (From the New World)

Dvorak
(1841-1904)

Adagio, Allegro molto; Largo; Scherzo; Allegro con fuoco.

When Dvorak arrived in America in 1892 he was one of the first great European composers to make the journey. He stayed three years and wrote at least three works which have since linked America and Europe in the imagination of listeners. This is especially the case with one of those works, the Fifth Symphony. Its title "From the New World" is preparation for what is to come, a symphony in which there are tunes reminiscent partly of Negro spirituals and partly of the folk-music of Dvorak's own Bohemia. It was an extraordinary chance that put this magnificently gifted musician and direct, simple-minded man in contact with what was then the only authentic American music, the simple and direct negro chants. The result was to be the closest imaginable amalgamation of the two cultures.

To this day, listening to the second subject of the first movement, it is hard to decide whether it is nearer to "Swing low, sweet chariot" than to the pentatonic tune in a symphony Dvorak had written in 1875, the kind of tag which on the evidence of his pre-American music had long been part of his normal musical equipment. To link the cultures of the old world and the new was a task needing a special and rare type of understanding. It was fortunate that Dvorak, having this vision, was available for solving the problem. The Fifth Symphony, because it was the first attempt at fusing the two cultures to produce great art, has historical importance above its musical worth. It is far from being the profound work the D minor Symphony is; for it speaks firstly to those strong emotions that lie near the surface of consciousness. But it offers many facilities of tune and rhythm not only in the unforgettable slow movement but in the scherzo which has one of the deftest trios since Schubert. There is, too, the fine and reasoned workmanship of each movement. The themes cross from movement to movement and in the last some are combined; it is a point of ingenious craftsmanship achieved with that intelligent and sensitive grace which makes "From the New World," for all its hackneyed associations, still irresistibly convincing.



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Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64 —Tchaikovsky
Cond. by Paul Kletzki
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The Three-Cornered Hat —de Falla
Cond. by Alceo Galliera
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Egmont Overture, Op. 84 —Beethoven
Cond. by Alceo Galliera
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