

Sibelius: Symphony no. 3 in C

Composed 1904-1907. First performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Spring 1908.

- Allegro Moderato
- Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto
- Moderato - Allegro (ma non tanto)

"The grounds of Broad Meadow definitely exerted a strong influence over all who visited us there. Jean Sibelius, walking with my mother under the great overhanging trees in the shrubbery turned to her with a characteristic gesture and remarked in French, 'Ah, this is like my own dear Suomi.' His own home at Järvenpää, in Finland, was built on the edge of a forest, and had the same sense of tranquillity." (From Granville Bantock - A Personal Portrait. Dent, 1972.)

Myrrha Bantock was recollecting one of the frequent visitors to the rambling home in Kings Norton rented by her father, then the original principal of Birmingham School of Music and an early champion of Sibelius. The name, Broadmeadow Lane, is all that survives of it. It requires an effort now to see the similarity with Finland (Suomi in Finnish) where Sibelius had recently built his house, Ainola, near Järvenpää, 25 miles north of Helsinki, not in snowy forest wastes but on the maritime coast where he grew up. He would live in that house for the rest of his life, but Bantock stayed nowhere for long.

After the Second Symphony (1901) and Violin Concerto (1903, rev.1905) Sibelius was re-thinking his music. The lengthy gestation period of the Third Symphony included several extended stays with Bantock in the evidently congenial company of others consciously at the forefront of modern music. It may not seem very modern to us, but these glorious sounds are not innocent in the subsequent history of 20th century music. His way of overlapping one chord with another, producing an effect of resonance, goes only one step further in Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Winds*. His way of holding a complex sound and making you listen to it is the grandfather of approaches in electronic music.

Most significant for his own future work are new approaches to form - the overall shape and hence the identity or purpose of a movement. He finds ways to produce satisfyingly complete shapes by balancing off blocks of similarly weighted music rather than by repeating them, so the work never goes back but takes us forwards to a new home, showing the way to whole new possibilities of purpose in musical pieces.

The first movement develops from a modest and distant dance to music of high aspiration, with references to the holy awe of Wagner's *Parsifal*. The slow movement presents a stylised and sensual dance, possibly evoking the dancing of the Lapps of Northern Finland, interspersed with moments of thoughtful stillness. The finale begins as a classical structure, but for its ending in place of recapitulating the opening themes it balances them with a broad hymn-like march

- a real song of swans - which grows with self-repetition into the affirmative close of the symphony.

Weber: Concertino for Horn and Orchestra in E minor Op45 Introduction and Variations - Cadenza (in recitative form) - Alla Polacca

Original version (now lost) 1806; revised 1815; first performed 1818 in Dresden.

The young Weber was struggling to make a career for himself, and making as many enemies as admirers. We may owe the existence of this and other solo works of the period to an attempt to win friends among court musicians when his position was insecure. When it was finally performed it made little impact in an era that no longer had a market for horn concerti, and found itself a place in repertoire only in the 20th century, being championed by the famous teacher Fritz Huth.

The Concertino is astonishingly difficult for the soloist - perhaps impractically so and many soloists will not touch it. It features an absolute catalogue of the hand horn player's tricks and devices. The use of the modern valved horn has not really made it significantly easier. The demands of stamina and agility are as severe as ever.

Weber by-passes a formal first movement, making do with a brief slow introduction before the horn announces a simple tune that is then treated to increasingly elaborate variations. He pauses for an operatic cadenza, allowing the soloist to display other sorts of virtuosity, before launching into a merry polonaise to finish off the piece - and the soloist - most decisively.

Tchaikovsky: Symphony no.2 in C minor Op17 "Little Russian"

Original version composed Jun-Nov 1872, first performed 7th February 1873 in Moscow; revised version first performed 12th February 1881 in St. Petersburg.

- Andante sostenuto - Allegro vivo
- Andantino marziale, quasi moderato
- Scherzo (Allegro molto vivace)
- Finale (Moderato assai)

The nicknames of Tchaikovsky symphonies are not his. The connections of this piece with Little Russia (i.e. the Ukraine) are minor and coincidental, but passages were composed or revised while he was holidaying there, and a few well-known folk tunes - not necessarily regional - are used as themes. At this stage in his life he had yet to fall out with the Nationalist composers led by Balakirev. Like them, he saw the incorporation of folk music as a way to Russianize his music, and Borodin's recent First Symphony is the clear model for this work's Scherzo.

The first movement was substantially re-written, gaining sophistication in the 1880 revision. To begin, the horn intones the haunting *Down The Mother Volga*, which the orchestra develops with growing anticipation, until a vigorous Russian dance of his own composition introduces the muscular main body of the movement.

The second movement is the Nuptial Procession salvaged from his largely destroyed opera *Udine*. It already has some very Tchaikovskian features, such as the use of the timpani as a bass line, and a choir of low clarinets and bassoons. His mentor Rubinstein had seen the draft score of the opera, and while praising it had criticized its poor sense of form. Tchaikovsky never found it natural to reconcile his spontaneous melodic gifts with the need to present them in satisfyingly rounded structures, and heeded the criticism. This is one of only a few passages he recycled in other works.

The Scherzo is an intricate play of artifice that shows the formal - as opposed to the spontaneous - Tchaikovsky at his best. The central Trio section provides contrast with a carefully contrived simplicity.

The finale is a colourful and energetic set of variations on *The Crane*, a folk dancing song which tumbles along to a spectacular conclusion, affirming Tchaikovsky's faith in native Russian culture, and anticipating the future great master of ballet music.