



## **Dorset Chamber Orchestra. 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021 Programme Notes.**

We are delighted to welcome you back to our first concert in eighteen months.

This afternoon's performance presents three major works from the string orchestra repertoire alongside one less familiar item.

Our Conductor is Walter Brewster, and our Leader is Jane Bultz.

### **Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 3**

In one of the many bitter ironies of music history, Johann Sebastian Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos are now his most popular work and an ideal introduction to his art, yet Bach himself may never have heard them – nor did anyone else for over a century after his death. To our modern ears, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brandenburg Concerto may seem to be the least concerto-like work in the set of 6. Whereas Concertos 2, 4 and 6 have solo instruments, No. 3 works around the idea of soloists emerging within the string groups. Brief ideas are passed around the group in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, a treat for the eye and the ear!

The short 2<sup>nd</sup> movement is only notated as 2 chords but many performances extend this with flourishes from the continuo or a solo violin cadenza. The 3<sup>rd</sup> movement is a swirling dance begun by the violins and passed to the others. It is an exhilarating headlong rush to the finish with textures and dynamic shapes that engage the listener throughout.

### **Grieg – Holberg Suite**

#### **1. Praeludium    2. Sarabande    3. Gavotte    4. Air    5. Rigaudon**

Grieg originally conceived the Holberg Suite for piano but later made the string arrangement we know best. The outer movements are the most characteristically keyboard-oriented, though the original Prelude's imitations of perpetual motion harpsichord figuration are converted into a galloping figure for strings around which gentler melodies revolve. Grieg's stately Sarabande is the kind of piece that manages to sound sad even though it's written in a major key – the phrases are poised and balanced as in olden times, but the composer's signature brand of Nordic melancholy is just as evident. The bouncing Gavotte is the most light-hearted of the set. It features a contrasting musette section in the middle which begins over a folksy drone and builds to a passionate climax.

The Aria is the most heartfelt of all the movements, and probably gives a sense of how the Romantics heard Bach's ornamented melodies, which often float about the same kind of solemnly descending harmonies used by Grieg. This music is full of dark shadows and intense outbursts. The mood changes immediately for the rustic Rigaudon finale, which in the orchestra version turns into a showpiece for violin solo, with the orchestra providing robust cadences. As with the third movement, there's a contrasting middle section, reflective and in a minor key, but the high spirits prevail.

## **Rutter – Suite for Strings**

- 1. A- roving**
- 2. I have a bonnet trimmed with blue**
- 3. O Waly Waly**
- 4. Dashing away with the smoothing iron**

John Rutter's choral works and arrangements are well-known, but this Suite for Strings is a rarely played but wonderfully written gem that sets out 4 well-known folk tunes across its contrasting 4 movements.

There are few recordings of the suite yet the well contrasted movements are always engaging and make an excellent concert work. A-roving is set out with vigorous, syncopated rhythms in the accompaniment. A lovely middle section is short but sweet before the vigour of the main theme returns. 'I have a bonnet trimmed with blue' is partnered with a graceful accompaniment embellished with trills. 'O waly waly' is simply set but expressive in Rutter's own unique way. The suite concludes with a wonderfully brisk arrangement of 'Dashing away' that gives every section a chance with the main tune. One of our violinists, Kevin Rogers, has also managed to track down the extra tune Rutter slips in towards the end which he has identified as 'The Bailiff's Daughter'!

## **Vaughan William Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis**

Vaughan Williams' famous Fantasia sprang from a combination of passions: his absorption in Tudor music and English folk song collecting, and from his editorship of The English Hymnal, which occupied him almost exclusively from 1904 to 1906. Several of the tunes included in the Hymnal influenced his own subsequent compositions, including the third of nine Psalm tunes by the Elizabethan composer Thomas Tallis. This melody, in the Phrygian mode, is set in the English Hymnal to Addison's words 'When rising from the bed of death'.

In 1910, Vaughan Williams was commissioned to write a piece for the Three Choirs Festival. His piece was to be performed in Gloucester Cathedral alongside Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius, and Elgar's Introduction and Allegro probably inspired Vaughan Williams to use the same forces in a Fantasia based on Tallis' psalm melody. He conducted the strings of the London Symphony Orchestra at the work's premiere on 6 September 1910. Overall, the critics received it coolly, and after its London premiere in February 1913, Vaughan Williams withdrew it for substantial revision. It took another two decades for the work to be recognised as a minor masterpiece, and it has since been one of the composer's most popular and frequently performed pieces.

Several other prominent musicians were present at the first performance, including Herbert Howells. He was said to have wandered the streets of Gloucester in the early hours of the next morning, still stunned by the effect of the new work.

The Fantasia is scored for double string orchestra of unequal size (the second consists of only nine players), from which the section leaders emerge as a solo quartet. Vaughan Williams took as his starting point Tallis' original harmonisation of his modal melody, and based his structure on the sectional concept of the Tudor fantasia. The theme itself appears in various embellished guises, before reappearing in its original grandeur in the closing section.

*Walter Brewster September 2021*

***We hope you will join us again at 4pm on Saturday 20th November 2021 when we welcome back colleagues in the woodwind, brass and percussion sections. Our one-hour concert comprises Honegger - Pastoral d'été; Fauré - Suite from Masques et Bergamasques; and Hubert Parry - Symphony No. 3, 'English'.***

***Tickets will be available at [dorsetchamberorchestra.org](http://dorsetchamberorchestra.org) from mid-October.***