Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church
Pen-y-Pound, Abergavenny

Sunday 26th March 2023, 2.30pm

www.abergavennysymph.org.uk

Abergavenny Orchestral Society

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Our Friends scheme enables us to benefit from your financial support and to involve you with the Society. For a subscription of £20 per annum you will not only be making a valuable contribution, but you will receive newsletters giving details of forthcoming concerts **and other orchestra news.**

For more information, please c**ontact the Friends' Secretary**, Sue Rogers, on 01291 672170 or info@abergavennysymph.org.uk

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Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Leader
Marisa Riordan

Conductor
Michael Bell MBE

Cello
Rosie Biss

Egmont Overture, Op.84 Beethoven

Cello concerto in E minor, Op.85 Elgar

1. *Adagio – Moderato –*
2. *Lento – Allegro molto*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Allegro – Adagio*

INTERVAL

Symphony no.6 in D, Op.60 Dvořák

1. *Allegro non tanto*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Scherzo. Furiant: Presto*
4. *Finale: Allegro con spirito*

Programme Notes

Egmont Overture, Op.84 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Goethe's play *Egmont*, a romantic tragedy concerning the struggles and eventual defeat of Count Egmont in the 16th-century Dutch Revolt, was written in 1788, and it was for an 1810 revival that the Vienna Burgtheater asked Beethoven to provide music. As a great admirer of Goethe and of the play's revolutionary and libertarian sentiments, he approached the task with enthusiasm, providing an overture, a series of songs and entr'acts and a final Victory Symphony. The music was a great success, both in 1810 and at a further performance in Weimar in 1814, with Goethe commenting: *Beethoven has done wonders matching music to text*. Less successful was the eventual meeting between playwright and composer in 1812. Beethoven never wavered in his admiration; ten years later he was writing: *How patient the great man was with me! How happy he made me then! I would have gone to death, yes, ten times to death for Goethe*. Goethe, on the other hand, whose musical and social principles were those of Haydn's time, seems to have been given a rougher ride: *His talent astounded me; nevertheless, he unfortunately has an utterly untamed personality, not completely wrong in thinking the world detestable, but hardly making it more pleasant for himself or others by his attitude*.

The overture begins with a slow introduction, a powerful dotted rhythm being followed by falling figures in woodwinds and violins, providing in its few bars all the material for the rest of the piece. The first theme of the *Allegro* slides down into the depths of the cellos before being repeated, fortissimo, by full orchestra; the following major-key theme then picks up on the dotted rhythm from the introduction. The briefest of developments leads to a recap of the main themes before launching into a triumphant coda (which also turns up as the two-for-the-price-of-one Victory Symphony at the end of the play). The triumph is perhaps a little premature for the unfortunate Count Egmont, but his uprising and martyrdom led ultimately to independence for the Dutch Republic in 1648, a fact to which Beethoven, himself a quarter Dutch, responds with uninhibited musical rejoicing.

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op.85 Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

E minor seems to have been a key with special significance for Elgar, shared by three of the four late great works that he produced between the end of the war and the death of his beloved wife Alice in 1920. He had been asked for a concerto as early as 1900 by the cellist Carl Fuchs, but only turned to its composition during the summer of 1919.

The premiere was given by Felix Salmond, with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Elgar, in October 1919, and its disastrous circumstances are well-known; the LSO's new Principal Conductor, Albert Coates (working without pay to try to stabilise the orchestra's finances), overran his rehearsal time on a challenging programme (Scriabin's *Poème de l'extase*, Borodin's 2nd Symphony and some Wagner), leaving Elgar very little to prepare his own work. In his review, Ernest Newman wrote: 'Never, in all probability, has so great an orchestra made so lamentable a public exhibition of itself.' Nevertheless he, unlike almost anyone else present, was able to hear beyond the orchestral incompetence: *The work itself is lovely stuff, very simple - that pregnant simplicity that has come upon Elgar's music in the last couple of years - but with a profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity... the realisation in tone of a fine spirit's lifelong wistful brooding upon the loveliness of earth*. But the sad fact is that Elgar was no longer fashionable; in the age of Stravinsky, Scriabin and Ravel, his premieres attracted small audiences and lesser interest. It needed critics of the perceptiveness of Newman or Bernard Shaw to appreciate his true stature. Soon after the premiere, Shaw wrote:

> *Elgar has not left us any room to hedge. From the beginning, quite naturally and as a matter of course, he has played the great game and professed the Best. He has taken up the work of a great man so spontaneously that it is impossible to believe that he ever gave any consideration to the enormity of the assumption or was ever conscious of it. But there it is, unmistakable. To the north countryman who, on hearing of Wordsworth's death, said, 'I suppose his son will carry on the business' it would be plain today that Elgar is carrying on Beethoven's business. The names are up on the shop front for everyone to read. ELGAR late BEETHOVEN & CO...*

But these were largely voices crying in the wilderness. Of the American premiere in 1922, The *Musical Courier* wrote: *About the Elgar there was no dissenting opinion. It is a long* (!) *work, and it ambles on and on and on, utterly without distinction, utterly without inspiration*. It quickly disappeared from concert programmes and failed to make any impression before Jacqueline du Pré's recording in 1965, which revealed it as a forgotten masterpiece.

Compared with the violin concerto of ten years earlier, an expansive work running to nearly an hour, the one for cello is practically a miniature, packing four brief movements into about 25 minutes. It begins with a stirring call to attention, four heroic solo chords which recur at structural points throughout the work. There follows one of Elgar's strangest inspirations, a wraith-like unaccompanied theme that winds its way to the bottom of the strings, rather like, in slow motion, the first *Allegro* theme of the *Egmont* overture. It came apparently unbidden into Elgar's mind when he regained consciousness after a tonsil operation; he later commented to W.H. Reed, leader of the LSO: *If ever after I'm dead you hear someone whistling this tune on the Malvern Hills, don't be alarmed. It's only me*. There follows a *moto perpetuo* scherzo and a heartfelt *Adagio* in the remote key of B flat (the same key, incidentally, as the slow movement of the violin concerto). The finale begins in a mood of spirited resolve, but gradually dies away to nothing after recalling the theme of the slow movement, before once again gathering its forces and ending, if not optimistically, at least with some of the old fight left in it, as though Elgar were saying, with Gerontius: *Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man*.

The concerto proved to be the last major work he would complete; after Alice's death, in April 1920, he wrote: *Music I loathe – I did get out some paper – but it's all dead*. Even more heartbreakingly, he went through a score of the Enigma Variations, putting crosses against the variations whose subjects were no longer alive: Variations 1 (Alice), 9 (Augustus Jaeger ("Nimrod"), 11 (George Sinclair) and 14 (himself). But then, more happily, although not composing he became absorbed in recording his own music, laying down a number of classic performances including the violin concerto with the 16-year-old Yehudi Menuhin.

Symphony no.6 in D, Op.60 Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

At first sight, Dvořák appears to be another victim of the "Curse of the Ninth", that mysterious fate that has felled composers from Beethoven and Schubert to Vaughan Williams, Schnittke and Malcolm Arnold as they approach symphonic double figures. However, Dvořák really only acknowledged his last five symphonies, no.1 remaining lost and unperformed during his lifetime, and nos. 2-4 unpublished. Michael writes of the unjust neglect of these works in our recent newsletter; although not yet mature Dvořák, they contain much fine music (this writer would particularly urge you to hear the slow movement of no.2, a gorgeous romantic effusion of almost Berliozian intensity). No.5, composed in 1875, is a transitional work, but no.6 (the first to be published, so previously and unhelpfully known as no.1) from 1880 is the real deal. The influence of Brahms' Symphony no.2, premiered two years earlier, seems to have been crucial to this development in Dvořák's symphonic thinking. The long melodies of the earlier works are now turning into shorter motifs that are worked to their limits in pursuit of coherence and continuity.

The first movement begins with just such a motif, a simple rising 4th which is heard five times before blossoming into a longer theme. The second subject arrives in a very Schubertian B major and, as often in Dvořák, comes as a relaxation from the intense development that has already taken place. The following *Adagio* is an ingenious combination of rondo and variation form.

In the 5th Symphony, Dvořák compensated for the lack of drama elsewhere with a turbulent, minor-key finale, but no.6 whips up the excitement in its scherzo, a superb D minor *Furiant* which skips back and forth between 3/4 and 3/2 in the manner of a 16th-century Galliard, a metrical ambiguity that also appears throughout Brahms' music. (And note the repeated rising fifths at the start, mirroring the fourths at the first movement's opening.) The Finale presents perhaps the only explicit nod to Brahms 2, opening with a theme of very similar contour to Brahms' Finale.

David Fraser 2023

In addition to her role of Principal Cello of Welsh National Opera, **ROSIE BISS** enjoys a busy and varied career as chamber musician, soloist, guest principal, and teacher.

As recitalist and former member of the Zehetmair quartet and trio, the European Music Project and the Scottish Ensemble, Rosie has played throughout Europe and America's and Asia's concert halls, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM, WDR 3 and performed at major music festivals including Edinburgh, Aspen, Verbier and Schleswig-Holstein. Around the busy WNO schedule, Rosie has also guest-led the cello sections of Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé, Bournemouth Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Scottish National Orchestra, among many others.

Away from the regular classical regime, Rosie has recorded albums with folk musicians Rachel Unthank and Troy Donockley and performed with the German Cabaret show "Ensemble Extravagance!".

Rosie plays on a Roman Cello, circa 1730, by Gulio Cesare Gigli, and a 1990 Welsh cello by Clive Morris.

MICHAEL BELL was born in Neath. After graduating from Cardiff University, Michael formed Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted the orchestra since CPO's inaugural concert in June 1982.

Michael has conducted an enormous and wide-ranging repertoire with CPO, in more than 350 concerts, including symphonies by Mahler, Richard Strauss, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Vaughan Williams, Elgar and Shostakovich, as well as major orchestral works by Stravinsky, Ravel and Prokofiev, and many more besides.

As well as being Music director for Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra, Michael is now also the regular conductor of Brecknock Sinfonia and Musical Director of Hereford Symphony Orchestra.

Michael was awarded an MBE for services to Music In the 2018 New Year's Honours

Local Concerts coming soon…

Hereford Symphony Orchestra / Joshua Ballance
Saturday 1st April, 2.30pm, St Peter's Church, Hereford HR1 2DL
Brahms: Haydn Variations, Mozart: Horn Concerto no.4, Haydn: Symphony in D, Hob.104.

Gwent Bach Choir
Saturday 1st April, 6.30pm, St Mary's Priory, Abergavenny
Bach: St Matthew Passion.

Crickhowell Festival 2023
Friday 28th April – Monday 1st May
Including Mozart: Mass in C minor, Handel: Dixit Dominus, Bach: Cantata

Acknowledgements

Abergavenny Orchestral Society is grateful to the staff and members of **Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church** for allowing us to use this beautiful church for our concert.

AOS is affiliated to **Making Music**, which represents and supports amateur music societies throughout the UK.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of **Llanarth Village Hall Committee** and **Llangynidr Village Hall Committee** for provision of our rehearsal venues;

The **Performing Arts Service** at Monmouthshire Libraries and **Music Parts Service** at Liverpool City Libraries providing music;

Graham Bradley (gbzcases.co.uk) for hire of percussion.

New members
If you would be interested in joining the orchestra, please contact us at info@abergavennysymph.org.uk. You can check our website for details of the rehearsal schedule.

Our Next Concert
We'll be playing our next concert on June 25th at 7.30pm in Our Lady & St Michael's Church. Our theme for this summer evening will be *Shakespeare in Music* featuring a selection of music written for or inspired by Shakespeare's work.

Nicolai – Overture, The Merry Wives of Windsor
Mendelssohn – A Midsummer Night's Dream (Dance of the Clowns, Nocturne, Scherzo)
Cole Porter – Kiss Me Kate (selection) based on The Taming of the Shrew
Bernstein – West Side Story (selection) based on Romeo and Juliet
Walton – Henry V (film suite)

It should be great fun and we are very much looking forward to it.

Orchestral Workshop
Next Sunday, 2nd April, we will be holding one of our orchestral workshops. Unfortunately, Dennis Simons is unable to be there this year, so we have postponed the Elgar 2 workshop until 2024 and will instead be looking at Mahler symphony no. 1 with Michael Bell MBE.

Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

1st Violin
Marisa Riordan
Kathryn Clarke
Romilly Cook
Roger Evans
John Jenkins
Jane Leney
Diana MacPherson
Erin Morgan
Derek Pike
Stephen Shearman

2nd Violin
Selina Hamilton
Jane Anscombe
Anita Bromley
Simon Marr-Johnson
Lynne Pollitt
Stephen Shaw

Viola
Simon Large
Clare McGowan
Gavin Stoddart
Rachel Tucker
Angi Turnbull

Cello
Stephen David
Clare Fisher
Helen Fowles
Laura Kostoris
Rohan Lewis
Tessa Lewis
Keira Morgan
Sue Rogers
Hannah Poulsom

Bass
James Leney
Richard Mynors
Will Stephens

Flute
Bethan Barlow
Heather Thornton

Oboe
Malcolm James
Martin Bailey-Wood

Clarinet
Robert Watson
Ian Hall

Bassoon
Janet Lloyd
Chris Poynton
Becky Rogers

Horn
Peter Geraghty
Ian Axtell
Rod Paton
Hannah Stonelake

Trumpet
Paul Kelly
Mark Perry

Trombone
Salvatore Frusteri-Chiacchiera
Mike Standley

Tuba
Chris Baker

Timpani
Judith Pendrous

The orchestra is grateful for the support of non-members who have augmented various sections for this concert.

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