

### Concert Programme Autumn 2021



# **German Old Masters**

Lighthouse, Poole Wednesday 27 October

Supported by John Seldon Mendelssohn

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage

12'

Schubert

Symphony No.8 'Unfinished' 25'

Interval

**Brahms** 

Symphony No.4 39'

James Feddeck Conductor

Amyn Merchant Leader

Fiona Talkington Livestream Presenter







## Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage

#### Felix Mendelssohn

Born: 3 February 1809 Hamburg Died: 4 November 1847 Leipzig

Mendelssohn composed his Overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, opus 27, in 1828, basing it on a pair of poems by his beloved Goethe:

Silence deep rules over the waters, Calmly slumbering lies the main, While the sailor views with trouble Nought but one vast level plain. Not a zephyr is in motion! The zephyrs are sighing, Silence fearful as the grave! In the mighty waste of ocean Sunk to rest is every wave.

The mist is fast clearing, And radiant is Heaven, Whilst Aeolus loosens Our anguish-frought bond. The zephyrs are sighing, Alert is the sailor. Quick! Nimbly be plying! The billows are riven, The distance approaches; I see land beyond!

These poems had already been set as an oratorio by Beethoven, and the first of them as a song by Schubert.

However, they seem ideally suited to treatment as a concert overture because of the evocative natures of their contrasted imageries, inviting a slow introduction leading on to *Molto allegro vivace*.

The opening section, 'becalmed', has a profound stillness, as befits the anxieties felt by the sailors; then the flute, 'the breath of the zephyr', suggests the music of the Allegro to come. The winds play this lively music before the full orchestra takes it over. However, the new context allows room for lyricism also. The closing section, in keeping with the poetic inspiration and in common with the later Scottish Symphony, has a majestic tone. This surely indicates not just relief at sight of land, but the arrival and formal welcome of the voyagers, until the work's final gesture – an imaginative masterstroke – recalls the initial calm.

The work was first performed privately in Berlin on 7 September 1828, then publicly in the same city on 1 December 1832, conducted by Mendelssohn.

Terry Barfoot



### Symphony No. 8 in B minor, 'Unfinished'

#### Franz Schubert

Born: 31 January 1797 Vienna Died: 19 November 1828 Vienna

- 1. Allegro moderato
- 2. Andante con moto

It is one of music's unsolved mysteries that Schubert left his B minor Symphony (D759) in an incomplete form. It seems he composed the two existing movements in 1822, and though he left sketches for a scherzo to follow them, there is no clear indication as to why he did not complete the usual four-movement layout. Various efforts have been made over the years to transform these two movements into the expected four, generally by adapting other music by Schubert for the purpose, but all have fallen by the wayside. This is for the simple reason that, taken together, the Allegro and Andante, which were left, make such a satisfying whole. It may well be that the composer came to the same conclusion. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the symphony only entered the repertory years after Schubert's death, following its premiere in Vienna on 17 December 1865, conducted by Johann von Herbeck.

The symphony opens with an atmospheric idea in the lower strings. This is the first subject, for there is no slow introduction, and its impressively evocative qualities confirm the romantic vein of Schubert's later works. Schubert's lyrical invention is of course legendary, and soon the basic theme is transformed to a lighter presentation in the woodwind, which in turn gives way to the celebrated second subject. This is a warm melody which is played first by the cellos and then by the violins. The contrasts within the texture evoke the romantic mood which is the principal feature of the whole composition, and soon the music becomes dramatic, even powerful, with fortissimo outbursts in the full orchestra and the trombones adding their weighty tone. This emphasis is particularly strong in the development section, where logical musical progression is allied to a passionate expressiveness. In the coda the sense of symphonic unity is emphasised by the reliance on the very first theme.

The lyric beauty with which the Andante begins is by no means the movement's only aspect, for a powerful scalic idea provides the contrast of rhythm against lyricism. The second subject features solo woodwind instruments against subtly shifting strings, but soon this calm gives way to turbulence. As the music continues, this expressive flexibility creates its own remarkable momentum, until in the later stages the intensity gradually dissolves, to be replaced by a richly poetic mood, allowing the symphony to resolve in serenity.

Interval Terry Barfoot



### Symphony No. 4

#### **Johannes Brahms**

Born: 7 May 1833 Hamburg Died: 3 April 1897 Vienna

- 1. Allegro ma non troppo
- 2. Andante moderato
- 3. Allegro giocoso
- 4. Allegro energico e passionato

Of all the major 19th century composers, Brahms is the figure least concerned with the Romantic programme, the figure most committed to the treatment of the Classical ideal. Accordingly, his symphonies retain the orchestra of Beethoven and the Classical four-movement plan. However, each of these magnificent compositions has its own distinct sound-world; and in the case of the Fourth, his opus 98 in the key of E minor, the tragic grandeur of the finale is the crucial feature, a passacaglia (a set of variations on a recurring theme in the bass) which he derived from his beloved Bach, Composed in 1884, the Fourth Symphony was first performed at Meiningen on 25 October 1885 by the Court Orchestra conducted by Brahms.

Although the main theme of the symphony's first movement is long and expressive, its initial presentation is phrased in pairs of notes before it is allowed to expand to its full potential. The second subject group comprises several distinctive themes, the finest of them a rich cello melody which maintains unity as much as it brings contrast.

The development begins with the outline of the opening theme, but soon finds room for mystery and relaxation too, before the tensions return. The closing stages are increasingly intense, culminating in a powerful statement with timpani to the fore.

The beautiful slow movement is the perfect foil, the opening horn call giving way to a tender clarinet theme against *pizzicato* strings. As the music proceeds its line is sustained through subtle variations of orchestral colour, until the cellos present the lyrical second theme. This fine melody is at once memorable and ideally suited to symphonic development. The coda is especially eloquent, as was its counterpart in the preceding movement, the richly evocative return of the horn call bringing the music to a peaceful conclusion.

The scherzo is abrupt in its rhythmic outline, unlike the more flowing movements Brahms had preferred in his other symphonies. The principal theme displays qualities of great energy and vigour, while for contrast the violins present a more graceful contour. The tranquil mood of the middle section does not linger, however, for the music of the scherzo makes a sudden reappearance, and the later stages of the movement become more vigorous still, culminating in a brightly lit fanfare.

The passacaglia finale is one of Brahms' most astonishing achievements. He took his theme from Bach's Cantata No. 150. 'Nach dor, Herr, verhanet mich' ('To Thee, Lord, I lift my soul') and in the course of some ten minutes treated it to no fewer than thirty variations, with such integrity of design that the listener is more conscious of flowing musical development than of separate interludes. As in the First Symphony, Brahms holds back the sonority of the trombones for his finale, with the result that the music attains a new richness and power in order to conclude the drama. Thus the closing phase is truly tragic, with no concession to romance.

Terry Barfoot



### 1828 - Schubert's last year

#### Franz Schubert

Born: 31 January 1797 Vienna Died: 19 November 1828 Vienna

Schubert died in his home town of Vienna, on 19 November 1928. He was only thirtyone, and -together with Mozart who died at the age of thirty-five - is one of those composers who invites his admirers to consider, "What if he had lived?". Like Mozart, his writing had been prolific. Schubert composed music in virtually all the genres; though his excursions into opera have not provided a lasting legacy, a world without the symphonies, the chamber music, the piano works and, in particular, the vast corpus of *Lieder* (artsongs), would be unthinkable.

It is noticeable that, in the case of composers spared by fate and granted a more extended stay on earth, their output often appears to fall naturally into distinct periods of 'early', 'middle' and 'late'. We talk about Haydn's 'youthful' symphonies and Beethoven's 'late' quartets. Late works especially invite commentators to speculate on a composer's notions of impending death: think of Tchaikovsky and his *Pathétique* symphony. This may or may not be an arid exercise, and it is particularly problematic in the case of those who die young.

Whether or not the composer has any intimation of mortality, the tendency to infer notions of finality in the music is actually part of our desire to 'package' a career and its legacy.

Mozart, who died in 1791, nearly forty years before Schubert, belonged to a less welldocumented era: though his surviving letters are - like his music - prolific, the relics and eye-witness accounts of his last year are uneven enough to have allowed myths to grow up around the circumstances and precise medical details of his death. Schubert was an entirely different case, for the most part lacking official appointments and aristocratic patronage, he had sought to make a living through the performance of his music and through attempts to sell it on to the growing trade of music publishing. This was better than nothing, but not exactly lucrative in a world largely unprotected by copyright law. But unlike Mozart, who was forced to compete in a handout economy, Schubert enjoyed the well-documented support of a close network of friends and supporters.

Regular and convivial meetings of his circle took place in tayerns, to read poetry. discuss literature and listen to music. In particular these featured Schubert's latest compositions, and the term 'Schubertiad' was coined for them.

The occasions also provided opportunities to meet girls, and this was a possible source of Schubert's downfall. He never enjoyed a settled relationship, and it is possible that the illnesses which dogged his life were derived from syphilis, though the widespread notion that he actually died of it is by no means conclusively supported by the evidence.

So the scene is set for what proved to be Schubert's last year. It is busy: the reading parties are once again in full swing, and Schubert's circle takes a great interest in the appearances in Vienna of the virtuoso violinist, Paganini, On 26 March, his friends take a risk and promote a concert of Schubert's music in the Philharmonic Hall. It is successful and profitable.

Schubert composes steadily, and enters into negotiations to supply publishers, including the famous firm of Schott's, with new compositions. He spends the summer away from Vienna, and, on doctor's orders, moves to the outskirts of the city, where the air is alleged to be better. In early October, he spends three days on a walking trip to visit Haydn's grave at Eisenstadt. A month later – incredibly – he begins to take lessons in counterpoint.

Around 10 November he enjoys a convivial evening with friends, but on the 14th, he takes to his bed, exhausted, feverish, and unable to eat. Lucid until the 18th, he finally falls into a coma and dies the next day. Tertiary syphilis? Not proven.

From the available documentation and the evidence of the music he composed in his last year, in Schubert's case it is reasonable to infer that he did walk in the valley of the shadow of death with some awareness that his grip on life was fragile. There are the three great piano sonatas in C minor, A Major and B flat: the Mass No.6: piano duets: songs to words by Heine and Rellstab: and two 'defining' works: The Shepherd on the Rock for soprano, clarinet and piano, and most significant of all, the most-requested piece of music on radio's Desert Island Discs: the exquisite String Quintet in C. Of this the writer Thomas Mann observed that "it is the music one would like to hear on one's deathbed."

Terry Barfoot



### James Feddeck

Conductor

Born in New York and hailed by the Chicago Tribune as "A aifted conductor who's clearly going places", James Feddeck has recently been appointed as Principal Conductor of Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali di Milano. In addition to numerous engagements with Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali in Milan. in the 2021/22 season he looks forward to engagements with the Tenerife Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille. RAI Torino, Belgian National Orchestra, and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra.

Other recent highlights have included debuts with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, Staatskapelle Weimar and the Oregon Symphony Orchestra, and return visits to the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Orchestre National de France, Seattle Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Residentie Orkest.

In recent seasons he has also appeared with many other leading European and North American orchestras including the BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, Vienna Radio Symphony, Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Hamburg Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Barcelona Symphony. Stockholm Philharmonic. Helsinki Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

James Feddeck studied at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, was Assistant Conductor of The Cleveland Orchestra, and is a winner of the Solti Conducting Award and the Aspen Conducting Prize.



## Fiona Talkington

#### Livestream Presenter

Fiona Talkington has been a presenter on BBC Radio 3 since 1989 where she's worked across the station's entire output of programmes, from Breakfast to the Proms. to interviews and documentaries. She's especially known for her presentation over many years of live concerts from Wigmore Hall and LSO St Luke's. She is one of the regular presenters of Radio 3's Afternoon Concert and presents In Concert's explorations of some of the major music venues around Europe.

She is co-founder of the Sony-award winning Late Junction which she presented for over twenty years, initiating many collaborations and showcasing her wide ranging musical interests. Fiona is well known for her work with the Norwegian arts scene over twenty-five years and, in 2009, was awarded the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit for her services to Norwegian arts. Her work as a curator includes collaborating with the Royal Opera House, Kings Place, Oxford Contemporary Music, St George's Bristol.

She has written for the Guardian and Independent newspapers and is a regular contributor to Songlines magazine, and a contributor of numerous chapters and articles particularly relating to Nordic arts.

Fiona is an Associate Artist with Reading's art collective Jelly, collaborates regularly with Reading Refugee Support Group and is part of a team researching into aspects of chronic pain.

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