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The opening of the second movement is marked "dolce". It is a hymn-like cantabile, characterised by a dotted rhythm which, when repeated by clarinets and bassoons, is interrupted by a note of questioning as the music is "forced" from A^b major into an aggressive and triumphant C major. This alteration of calm and furious activity marks the whole movement. The essential simplicity of the material enhances the disturbing vastness of musical space produced by transitions which are always unexpected, both in harmony and phrase length. The opening theme recurs several times, often in varied guises, and the last of these appearances, just prior to a slightly surprising "piu moto" section, contains in its tail a most magical leap up of a 5th like a descant to the original melodic phrase.

The questioning reappears in the opening of the "Allegro Scherzo", rising from the lowest strings and answered by the horns who return to the inexorable repeated notes of the fate-theme. This contrasting of ideas is interrupted in the trio section by a confident and even good-humoured contrapuntal dialogue in the major mode, again initiated in the lower strings. At the return of the scherzo (whose first nine notes significantly bear an exact pitch relationship to those of the finale to Mozart's G minor symphony, as was noticed by Beethoven himself) the pizzicato of the strings lends a ghostly air to the music while the "aggressive" horns are replaced by woodwind.

Beethoven's decision not to use a Mozartian theme for the finale determined a new shape for the whole symphony. Instead of the scherzo ending normally it is plunged into darkness before it has finished its proper course with a sudden interruption on A^b as the tamps maintain an unbroken throbbing rhythm of thirty bars, out of which darkness the triumphant finale emerges in a blinding light. Thus he created a new pattern for the nineteenth century. The "weight" was moved from the first movement to the finale, in which all the conflicts are at last triumphantly resolved in, of course, the major key, The consequence here is the return of the Scherzo's ghost in the midst of Beethoven's march before the movement returns to the business of proclaiming a victory that seems inassailable.

We have to wait until his very last works for Beethoven's vengeance to give way to a spiritualism that is capable of rising above the melee of human existence.

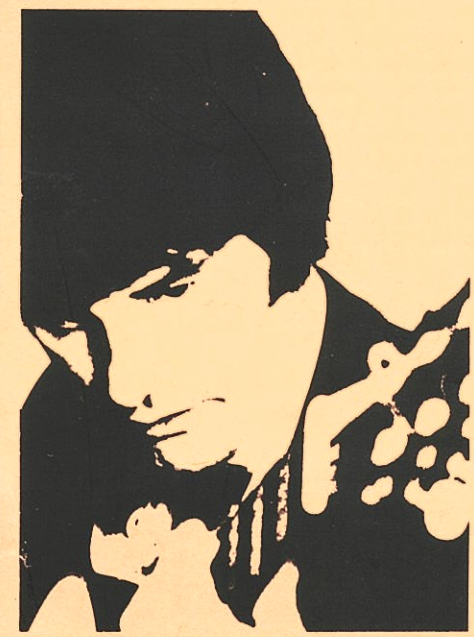
NEIL SMITH

Neil Smith studied in London with the composer, John Duarte and later with professors at the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music. He has also studied with the distinguished Venezuelan guitarist, Alirio Diaz at the University of Toronto. On his return to the U.K. he has given several T.V. and radio broadcasts and later had a highly successful debut at the Wigmore Hall. He has played as soloist with several major symphony orchestras under the direction of the world's leading conductors. He has also given recitals in Norway, Italy, Switzerland and Holland.

Neil Smith appears by arrangement with
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Wolverhampton Symphony Orchestra Conductor Mark Finch with

Neil Smith Guitar



PROGRAMME

- ***** Saturday 28th November 1981 7.30 p.m.
- Overture "The Hebrides" Mendelssohn
- Concierto de Aranjuez for Guitar and Orchestra Rodrigo
- Symphony No. 5 in C minor Beethoven

Overture, "The Hebrides"

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

The age of Mendelssohn was one of the stylistic change in music. He was a "Romantic" chiefly in his skilful use of literary and other extra-musical stimuli, although his "Classical" inclinations led him to embody these in music of traditional form and elegance, expressed with an individual melodic grace and brilliance. The present concert overture amply shows traits from both worlds.

Mendelssohn conceived the first few bars aboard a steamship in quite choppy seas during a visit to the Hebridean island of Staffa in 1829. The "ebb" and "flow" apparent within each "arpeggio" and also from phrase to phrase underpins the whole piece. Furthermore, these opening bars also contain the seeds of all the thematic material (e.g. the second, slower theme is quite clearly audible in bar 3, albeit in embryonic form). This "monothematic" approach is coupled with a process of continual variation, so that no two bars (excepting the first two) are identical — a very unusual feature in classical or romantic music. Perhaps these techniques and the importance given to the lower strings were employed in direct response to the original extra-musical stimulus. However, the clarity of the contrasts inherent in sonata form are as classical as ever, even if the means of attaining them — changes of speed and widely differing orchestrations of material at their repeats — may be new, and the whole is set in the most classical of harmonic frameworks.

Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra — Joaquin Rodrigo (b. 1902)

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Allegra gentile

This work appeared in 1939, when it was first performed at Madrid and acclaimed with tremendous enthusiasm. Rodrigo had described his ideal guitar as "a strange, fantastic, multi-form instrument with the wings of a harp, the tail of a piano and a soul of its own". After the guitar's characteristic self identification at the very start, it is set in orchestral contexts where it can most effectively beguile or command. Its voice can be heard through transparent textures, as an accompaniment to solo commentaries by other instruments (as in the lyrical slow movement), as a vehicle for plain or florid melody, or again as the leader of the dance in the concluding movement.

As in all Rodrigo's music, the influence of Spanish folk music, especially that of Valencia, the composer's birthplace, is apparent, not in any pejorative sense but, nevertheless, unmistakable in the buoyant rhythms, the tunefulness, the colourfulness and the demands — virtuosic yet idiomatic — made upon the soloist. "it should sound like the hidden breeze that stirs the treetops", claimed the composer, "as strong as a butterfly, as dainty as a veronica".

Such an element is to be heard in the almost purely rhythmical nature of the first idea, with the frequent 3/4 cross rhythms against the pervading time of 6/8, although this hemiola device is common to a great deal of western dance-folk music.

The second movement banishes the vigorous dance with a quasi-improvisatory and highly ornamented song. There was no place for the cadenza earlier, so here the soloist has a lengthy and elaborate one.

The finale is more reminiscent of the stately court dances of the Spanish classical period, whose origins are referred to in the formal title of the work, "Concierto de Aranjuez", Aranjuez being the name of a royal and ancient palace, associated with Charles I and Phillip II, and situated between Madrid and Toledo. Throughout the movement a constant but irregular alternation of 3/4 and 2/4 times persists.

INTERVAL

Symphony No. 5. in C minor — Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Scherzo (allegro), leading to

Allegro

Beethoven completed his 5th Symphony in 1808 after working at it on and off for a period of four years. It was first performed with the Pastoral Symphony under his own direction at a mammoth concert at the Theatre an der Wien on December 22nd, 1808. The other works were his last public performance of a concerto, the fourth in G major and the Choral Fantasia. By this time his deafness had become a serious handicap and led to countless difficulties and unpleasantnesses with the orchestra.

The work represents the most complete expression of the composer's initial reaction to the tragedy of deafness. There is no mistaking the sinister, threatening nature of the opening bars, of which Beethoven said "Thus Fate knocks at the door!" Each hammer-blow is answered by a series of indomitable gestures which succeed each other throughout the orchestra so that threat and defiance are woven into a single, symphonic web. The second theme from the horns retains the same proportions as the first five bars and is simply a variation in the major of the fundamental motif. Much of the tension is created by means of abruptness e.g. sudden dynamic changes, sudden crescendos and diminuendos, sudden pauses and, most of all, sudden silences of very short but altered duration.