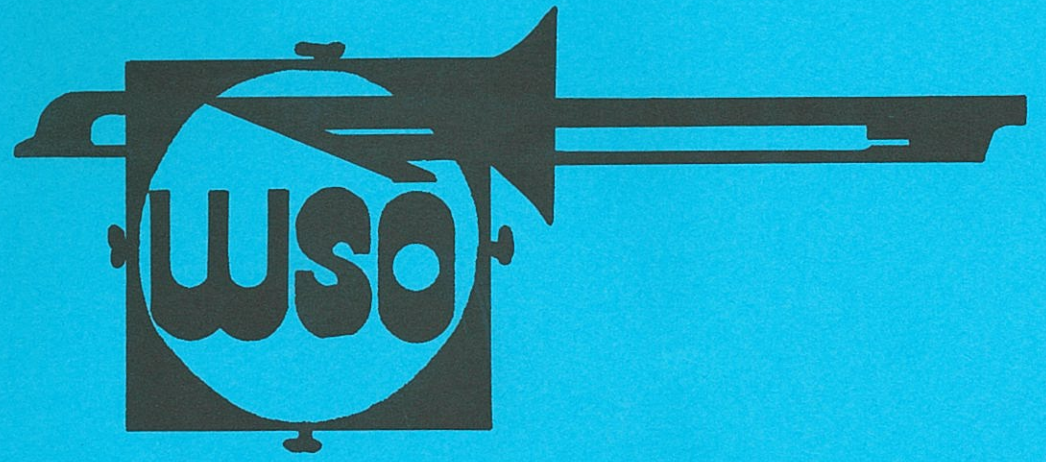


1990. NOV

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**Wolverhampton
Symphony
Orchestra**

CONCERT

17.11.90

PROGRAMME

Coriolan Overture
L. Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

This overture was written in 1807, not for Shakespeare's comedy but for a play of the same name by H.J. Van Collin, to whom it is dedicated. It's musical ideas are extremely original, probably among the most original of those in any work in Beethoven's second period, and that is saying much. All the figures and motives that make up the first subject material are of the very essence of haughty and obstinate intolerance, and the impatient syncopated rhythm which plays such an important part in the work seems to indicate an inner conflict which is the real theme of the ensuing play.

The second subject is a beautifully expressive musical phrase rather than a complete melody, and when it first appears it makes only a brief interlude in the pervading stormy mood; this appeal to Coriolanus' better nature, as it were, is quickly brushed aside. In the coda Beethoven was faced with the problem of how to suggest the final breakdown of the tyrant's will, and his inspiration did not fail him. The crashing chords die gradually away, leaving the cellos to repeat quietly and in ever-longer notes a fragment of the rising figure first heard near the start of the overture.

Violin Concerto in E Minor
F. Mendelssohn (1809-47)

- (i) *Allegro, Molto appassionato*
- (ii) *Andante*
- (iii) *Allegro, molto vivace*

Mendelssohn's only mature violin concerto was completed in 1844, after six years of a somewhat interrupted gestation, and first played at a Leipzig Gewandhaus concert the following year with the orchestra's brilliant leader, Ferdinand David, as soloist. It allows considerable scope for virtuosity, since Mendelssohn enjoyed David's technical advice over many details of figuration in the solo part, and it shows several attempts to explore unorthodox paths in the continuity of its three movements, in the abolition of the initial orchestral exposition, and in the unusual placing of the cadenza in the first movement. Nevertheless, for all his flirtations with romanticism, Mendelssohn remained at heart a staunch believer in classical ideals; his themes are not primarily chosen to expose the soloist as 'prima ballerina', but are given rather more of a symphonic status in order that they can be subsequently developed into a quasi-symphonic argument.

The deftly-scored first movement plunges without any introductory flourishes into the soloist's announcement of the well-cut E minor first subject. The Orchestra, however not only very soon gets its share of this theme, but is also entrusted with the first statement of the sinuous transitional theme, and likewise with the first statement of the G major second subject, beautifully scored for clarinets above flutes, while the soloist sustains a long low G until emerging to sing the tune itself.

The 'song-without-words' - like movement which follows is cast in simple ternary form,. Contrast to the idyllic and shapely C major melody which opens and closes the movement comes in the A minor middle section where minor tonality, double stopping and a relentless demisemiquaver accompaniment together bring agitation. When the

sun emerges again in the C major recapitulation, the music is all the warmer and richer for the additional woodwind comments on the main melody, likewise for the semiquaver accompaniment of the strings cunningly taken over from the middle section. Another link, this time fourteen winsome bars in A minor, prepares the way for the vivacious E major finale which echoes the world of fairies and sprites that had been a familiar hunting ground ever since the precocious young composer had been in his 'teens. Sonata form is again the movements's ground plan. Though the nimble first subject is followed by a second sufficiently solid at its start to suggest the momentary intrusion of the human element, the music never departs from the enchantment of fairyland - achieved as much by delicate orchestration as by the soloists fleet semiquavers.

INTERVAL

***Symphony in C* I. Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

Fifty years ago, on 7th November, 1940, Stravinsky himself conducted the first performance of his 'Symphony in C' with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for whose fiftieth anniversary it was written. This was at the beginning of what proved to be a permanent stay in America. However, they were not happy times for the composer who, in the space of a few months, lost his daughter, first wife and mother and suffered a prolonged spell in hospital, eventually recovering from tuberculosis.

The work is firmly placed in Stravinsky's neo-classical period; which is to say that many of the more overt stylistic traits are classical in their origin. Indeed, many commentators have noted the similarity in mood between the pounding rhythms of the opening of this work to the opening of Beethovens 5th Symphony; other links include the key centre and compilation of the orchestra which in comparison with Beethovens work, replaces a contrabassoon with a tuba. These neo-classical features do not, however, obscure their essentially twentieth century treatment.

A series of repeated notes, a rising semitone and falling fourth are the essential characteristics of the first movements opening group of themes. This thematic unity contrasts with the great variety of accompanimental figures employed. The more lyrical interval of a falling sixth ushers in the start of the second thematic group. The climax of the development section brings the repeated notes and falling sixth together in a agitated passage before an abrupt return to the main tempo at the start of a recapitulation. This follows much the same course as the opening of the movement. At the end the first subject reappears, petering out into a cadence alternating two chords until the final chord of C major with its seventh, B natural.

The second movement is in ABA form with a middle section at double speed that makes great use of dotted rhythms. The movement is marked 'largetto concertante', the second word giving a clue as to its character. The brass and percussion sections are reduced and the other instruments used more sparingly and, in the case of the strings sometimes singly. The composer saw the movement as "simple, clear and tranquil" and so it is, with his particular synthesis of the classical (in proportion, texture and Bach-like ornamentation) and the modern (harmonic) idioms.

The third movement has been described as a Minuet passepied and Fugue with traditional dance rhythms being subjected to some typically Stravinskian irregularities. The semitone and interval of a fourth from the works opening theme pervade much of the material and are constantly reworked. After a silent bar an extraordinary free fugue begins in which Stravinsky shows off a vast array of contrapuntal techniques and complexities. The final chord contains a reference by the flute to the opening theme of the minuet.

The largo, with which the finale opens, is a duet for two basoons accompanied by horns and trombones. The main part begins at the tempo giusto with a theme based on the scale of G major. After references to the work's opening motto theme a climax ensues followed by a return of the initial largo section. A very contrapuntal passage succeeds this, with parts of strongly independent character, though many of them start with a similar upward scale. There is further discussion of the motto theme which has left its mark throughout the symphony in a way which again compares with the Beethoven symphony mentioned earlier. Indeed, the whole of the final slow chorale is unbued with its spirit. As Stravinsky commented, everything tends towards the note 'c' at the conclusion, not the key of C major or C minor but the note 'C' for this is a Symphony in C.

MARK ROBINSON

Mark Robinson joined the C.B.S.O. In 1981 following study at the R.S.A. in Glasgow and R.C.M. in London . Alongside his busy orchestral schedule, Mark founded the Arcadian string quartet, is a member of the Atheneum piano quartet, which recently performed in Wolverhamptons Art Gallery, and is a principal member of the Birmingham Chamber Orchestra.

Mark plays on a 200 year old Gagliano violin. This was recently purchased by the C.B.S.O. Endowment Fund, following a generous anonymous donation.

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY:-

W.S.O's next concert will be on Sunday, March 3rd, 1991 when they will be appearing with the Penn Choral Society and the Mercia Men's Chorus in the Wulfrun Hall in a programme of popular works by composers including Rossini, Verdi, Elgar and Gounod.

WOLVERHAMPTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Leader:- Martin Blythe

First Violins

Katalin Beke
Colin Elton
Margaret Friar
Judith Fynn
Susan Hopkins
Jennie Lewis
Vanessa Owen
Jayne Price
Sarah Wills

Second Violins

Michael Clement
Sara Fletcher
Jonathan Geitner
Ken Hawkins
Maria Mulligan
Linda Murray
Margaret Myatt
Jenny Walton
Philip Ward

Violas

Sharon Bayley
David Cope
Sheila Freeman
Cyril Love
Steve McNamara
Philip Turley
Paul Westwood

Horns

Percy Cotterell
Stuart McCourt
David Dewan
Robin Hopper

Trombones

Richard Pugsley
Jonathan Chuter
Adrian Sanders

Timpani

James Hood

'Cellos

Margaret Bell
Lesley Hinton
Louise Lawrie
Jane Lewis-Rees
Sheila Moore
Richard Painter
Sylvia Ulrich
Angela Wakefield

Double Basses

Jonathan Bentley
John Fosbrook
Br. Godric F.M.S.

Flutes

Diana Manasseh
Helen Layne

Piccolo

Jane Coxon

Oboes

Richard Anderson
Jennifer Jackson

Clarinets

Diana Cotterell
Lynn Sargeant

Bassoons

Michael Dark
Douglas Servant

Trumpets

David Knock
Martin Orgill

Tuba

Philip Shirley