

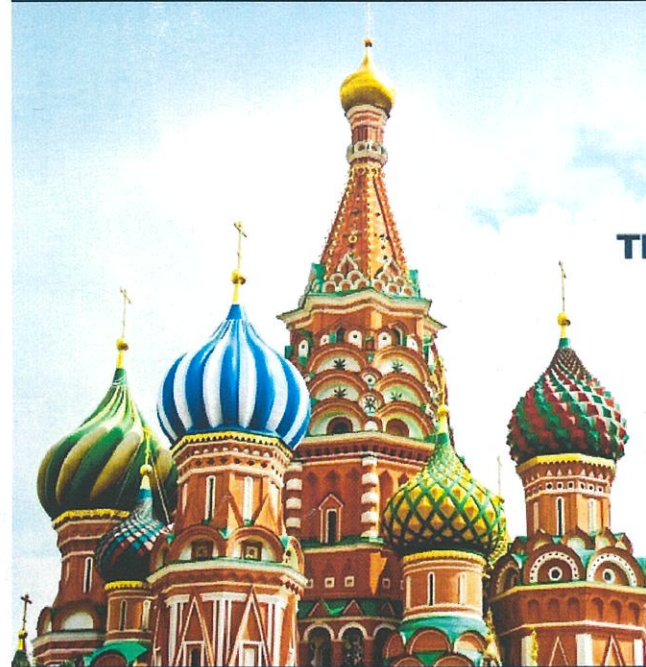


WOLVERHAMPTON
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday 24 June 2017
7.30pm

Conductor: Peter Morris

Leader: Ros Rayner



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Sibelius

Finlandia, Op 26

The Swan of Tuonela, Op 22

Karalia Suite, Op 11

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 5

Wolverhampton Grammar School

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Saturday June 24th 2017

Sibelius

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Finlandia

INTERVAL

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 5

WOLVERHAMPTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

WSO was formed in 1973 by a group of keen amateur players, to satisfy a need for local players to prepare interesting works for public performance, and that aim remains today. Membership is around 55 players and is drawn from keen competent amateur musicians, students and teachers in Wolverhampton and the surrounding areas.

The orchestra meets weekly during term time and produces around 4 concerts a year, as well as an annual playday focussing on a major work and attracting musicians from far and wide. We have also accompanied City of Wolverhampton Choir in recent concerts.

We are financed through subscriptions and are affiliated to *Making Music*, and have a partnership arrangement with the city's Music Education Hub. WSO is very grateful to Wolverhampton Grammar School for their help with the use of percussion instruments and we are glad that our concert is part of Wolverhampton Artsfest 2017

PETER MORRIS – MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Peter has conducted the orchestra since 2004. He is Director of Music at St Peter's Collegiate Church, Chair of Wolverhampton Music Education Hub, Organist of Walsall Town Hall and for the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra, Chief Examiner for A-level & GCSE General Studies, Moderator of the A-level Extended Project Qualification, and visiting Examiner for A-level Practical Music.

ROS RAYNER – LEADER

Ros studied the violin at the Royal Academy of Music. She has led WSO since 1996. She teaches at Wolverhampton Girls' High School and tutors the first violins in Wolverhampton Youth Orchestra.

MUSIC FROM NORTHERN LANDS

Jean Sibelius 1865 - 1957 is regarded as Finland's National Composer.

FINLANDIA

In November 1899, Finnish independence movements were beginning to hold political demonstrations against the century-long heavy-handed rule of Tsarist Russia, which of course included severe press censorship. That month, a group of artists in Finland's capital, Helsinki, organized a series of "Press Celebrations," which were actually political demonstrations, for one of which Jean Sibelius wrote and conducted *Finland Awakes*. The following year, he rewrote the score and changed its title to *Finlandia* for the Helsinki Philharmonic to perform on its first major tour of Europe. It turned out to have universal appeal, and in very little time it made Sibelius the best-known living Finn in the world.

The oppressive Russian presence can be heard in the lower brass and timpani as *Finlandia* begins. Sibelius follows this with a gentle statement in the woodwind, which grows into a defiant, heroic anthem heralded by brass, horns and strings. The most memorable hymn-like theme of *Finlandia* does not make its appearance until later in the piece. This melody, inspired by folk tunes, begins quietly in the woodwind and eventually becomes an passionate cry of freedom as *Finlandia* comes to its triumphal conclusion.

THE SWAN OF TUONELA

The final version of this work was also completed in 1900.

The story comes from a collection of ancient Finnish poems compiled in the mid-1800s, *The Kalevala*, which was a source of inspiration for many of Sibelius' works. It stood as a kind of national epic at the time when Finland was still subject to the Russian Empire. In these legends Tuonela was the

Land of the Dead, and in this mood-piece the composer imagines a swan floating on a river separating Tuonela from the Land of the Living.

The Swan of Tuonela is remarkable in many ways, beginning with unusually sombre orchestration: no flutes or trumpets, only the bass clarinet, and a prominent Cor Anglais solo, sometimes answered by solo cello and viola. The Cor Anglais' melancholy refrain, played by Jane Giedhill, has phrases that suggest folksong. About halfway through, the strings play a pizzicato rhythm like an anxious heartbeat, and toward the end there is a funereal rhythm in the lowest instruments. Finally, before everything settles into silence, the strings repeat the intensely poignant passage they played near the beginning of the piece.

KARELIA SUITE

Sibelius's *Karelia Suite* was his first commission for nationalist music. A group at the University of Helsinki was putting on a pageant celebrating Karelia, two small regions in eastern Finland. Sibelius's commission, in 1893, was to write music that would accompany staged tableaux depicting some of Karelia's most dramatic historical moments.

He originally wrote an overture and eight movements for the drama and then used the fourth, fifth, and sixth tableaux to create a three-movement suite comprising movements entitled *Intermezzo*, (which was used as the theme music for ITV's current affairs programme *This Week* from 1956 to 1978), *Ballade*, a minstrel serenading the 15th century Swedish King Karl Knutsson, and *Alla marcia*, another stirring march.

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN D MINOR DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-75)

"The rejoicing is forced, created under threat. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.' What kind of apotheosis is that? You have to be a complete oaf not to hear that." Are these the words of Dmitri Shostakovich referring to the Finale of his Fifth Symphony? It's unlikely anyone will ever know for sure, but this quotation is found in the book *Testimony*, published after the composer's death and attributed to him. *Testimony* is one of the biggest musicological mysteries in all of history. The book is claimed by its author, Solomon Volkov, to be Shostakovich's memoir, the result of several interviews he held with the composer between 1971 and 1974. In *Testimony*, Shostakovich reveals anti-Soviet rhetoric and indicates that within his music there are "encoded messages" which outline his true feelings toward the Communist regime and the artistic oppression he suffered under its government. Anyone who has read the 2016 bestseller *The Noise of Time*, by Julian Barnes, will know the difficulties of writing music in Soviet Russia in 1937. We do recommend it to you for its wonderful description of Shostakovich's political context.

Shostakovich came under attack in 1936 as Stalinism grew increasingly demanding in its expectations for its artists. Shostakovich had been enjoying his place as one of the Soviet Union's most successful composers for close to ten years, ever since the premiere of his First Symphony. But he fell out of favour for 'formalism' and was denounced by Stalin for his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District* as 'Muddle instead of Music'. What had been admired for so long was now referred to as "confused," "cacophony," and "chaos." He immediately stopped work on his 4th Symphony and "flew under the radar" for a while. (Symphony No. 4 stayed unplayed until 1961, twenty-five years later.)

But in the spring of 1937, Shostakovich was ready to write again and began composing his Symphony No. 5. The premiere took place on November 21, 1937, in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and it was met with wonderful reviews and popular acclaim. Attached to the Fifth Symphony was the following statement: "A Soviet Artist's Practical, Creative Response to Just Criticism." Julian Barnes believes it was a critic's statement, but Shostakovich never denied it was his own phrase, so perhaps he was using veiled sarcasm, or perhaps he was forced to include the statement.

It is said that Shostakovich wrote a work that was so skilled in its message (perceived or real) that he was able to bring the audience to tears because they thought the Fifth was speaking to them – their fear, their anger – while the Party heard a work by a Soviet composer who now understood the error of his ways and had got back on track. This is the tightrope Shostakovich walked from 1937 forward.

The first movement begins with a striking ascending and descending pattern that melts into the first theme, filled with mystery and trepidation. The rising and falling gesture is a unifying factor of the movement which finds prominence in many different ways throughout, one of the most notable in the flute and horn duet near the end. While there are some bright spots in the first movement, it would be safe to say that the overall feeling would be stark, with a touch of pathos and a hint of desperation. The starkness of the opening theme returns at the end of the movement, and just when we begin to believe all is lost, Shostakovich ends with an ascending line that doesn't seem to come to a satisfactory conclusion, perhaps an indication of hope.

The second movement is a scherzo that alternates between sounding like a dance (the more traditional feel for a scherzo) and a march. The colours

used are much brighter in this movement than the first, and the overall feel is witty and wry, like much of Shostakovich's dance and theatre music. Just when we thought we could relax, **the third movement** reminds us that sadness and tragedy are everywhere. The third is the emotional centre of the symphony and allegedly where members of the audience at the first performance began to cry. There are echoes of Tchaikovsky's most emotional orchestral music.

The fourth movement, the subject of the opening quote of this programme note, is either a representation of triumph over tragedy, or a mockery of that triumph, with an undertone of "forced rejoicing." Like the increasing intensity and quickening heard during both the opening movement and the fourth, it can be thought of as either, but, as an orchestra, we are trying to feel, express and enjoy a message of hope here.

Wolverhampton Symphony Orchestra

Forthcoming Events

28 October 2017 Wolverhampton Music School

Playday (Mahler *1st Symphony*)

18 November 2017 Wolverhampton Grammar School

Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue*

Finzi *Clarinet Concerto*

Brahms *Symphony No. 2*

11 March 2018 Wolverhampton Grammar School

Tomlinson *Suite of English Folk Dances*

Korngold *Violin concerto*

Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*

23 June 2018 Wolverhampton Grammar School

Invitation to the Dance

Marques *Danzon no 2*

Ponchielli *Dance of the Hours*

Stravinsky *Firebird Suite*

Strauss *Blue Danube Waltz*

Weber *Invitation to the Dance*

Borodin *Polovtsian Dances*

(Dates and Programmes may be subject to alteration)

1st Violins

Ros Rayner (leader)

Jonathan Harper

Jessica Barnett

Francis Bunch

Jo Jordan

Margaret Mascerenhas

Caroline Meads

Sarah Wynne

2nd Violins

Claire Norden

Jenny Bailey

Suzanne Barratt

Joanne Bircher

Sarah Chatterley

Michael Clement

Anne Forster

Alice Harper

Ken Hawkins

Hilary Hurd

Amy Price

Samantha Spilsbury

Philip Ward

Violas

David Cope

Alain Anderton

Sharon Bayley-Kitts

Michael Cooper

Elizabeth Fleetham

Rory Freckleton

Rhiannon Watts-Robinson

Cellos

Sarah Tulley

Sarah Carter

Michael Crockett

Fiona Daniel

Janey Harrold

Sheila Moore

Natalie Reynolds

Jean Waller

Basses

Holly Anderson

Suzanne Chadwick

William Hollands

Harp

Vera Khait

Flutes

Jane Eminson

Di Manasseh

Piccolo

Claire Lakin

Oboes

Rachel Orotayo

Jane Gledhill

Ella Pearson

Cor anglais

Jane Gledhill

Clarinets

Lynn Curtis

Ros Jacom

E flat clarinet

Graham Hobbs

Bassoons

Michael Darke

Sean Massey

Geoffrey Sterland

Horns

Sara Shepherd

Jill Brittle

Kevin Boyd

Robin Hopper

Lauren Storey

Trumpets

Chris Cummings

Dan Byant

Cameron Chin See

Trombones

Mike Griffiths

Laurence Hopper

Bass trombone

Bernard Moses

Bass Tuba

Joe Barnett

Percussion

Stephen Plummer

Jerome Blackburn

Nathan Smith

Jake Allen

Piano and Celeste

Francis Murton