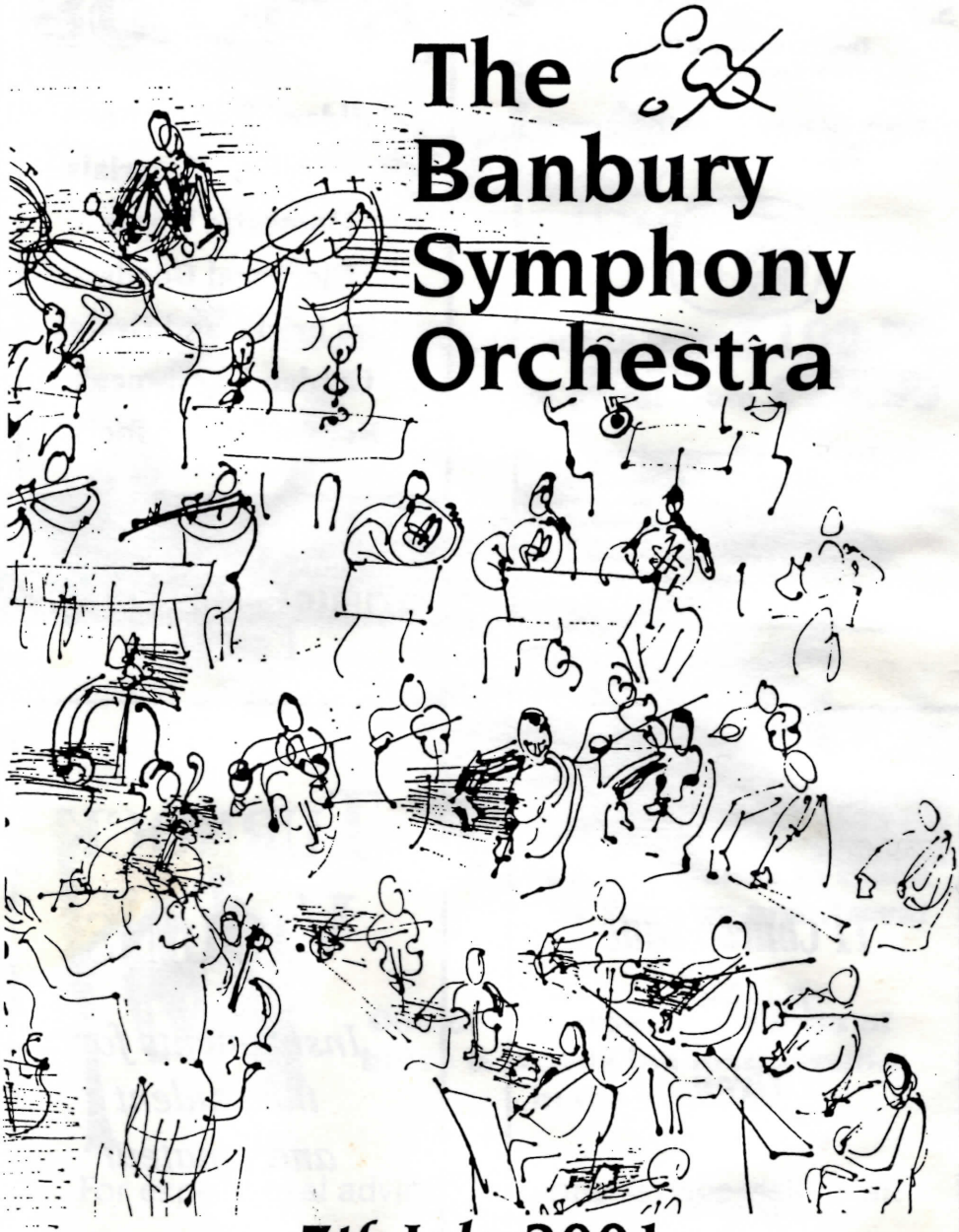
The Banbury Symphony Orchestra



7th July 2001

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Paul Willett: conductor

Paul Willett studied violin, singing and piano as a student but his main instrument was the French horn on which he gained his Performance Diploma from The Royal College of Music at 16. He then went on to read music on scholarship at The Queen's College, Oxford, and studied for his teaching certificate in Music and Physical Education at Reading University.

For several years Paul combined teaching and freelance playing. He has given solo recitals and performed concertos throughout the country. He was a member of The Five Winds, a group that performed both at home and abroad, and also on BBC Radio. Paul also worked as brass teacher for Oxfordshire Music service and was Director of a Saturday Music School of 200 students.

Recently, Paul has combined class teaching with conducting various ensembles, both adult and youth. He has been the guest conductor of several brass bands and the conductor of Thames Vale Youth Orchestra. He is also in demand as an adjudicator for both adult and student competitions. Paul is Head of Music at Didcot Girls' School, the conductor of Oxfordshire Schools' Senior Orchestra and horn teacher for Oxfordshire Music Service.

Chabrier **Espãna**
(1841-1894)

In spite of his musical gifts Emmanuel Chabrier remained a civil servant until his thirtieth year. This immensely popular rhapsody for orchestra, as he subtitled it, brought him in 1883 to the forefront of Parisian esteem, and was, and remains, a milestone not only in orchestral virtuosity but in the many loving tributes exacted from French musicians by the heady delights of Spain. The work exploits a succession of dancing themes heard by the composer on holiday there. For most of the time the harmonies, however gaudily dressed, are of the most basic kind, but in the one real excursion to a distant key the almost static quietude is shattered memorably by the three trombones in unison. There is an irreverent *joie de vivre* about the music, which had obvious effects on Poulenc and Satie in the next century.

Rimsky-Korsakov **Capriccio Espagnol**
(1844-1908)

Alborada
Variazioni
Alborada
Scena en canto gitano
Fandango asturiano

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov was the youngest of the group of Russian Nationalist composers known as 'The Five' or as 'The Mighty Handful'. He wrote his first symphony while serving as a naval officer, but he was invited on the strength of this work and the tone poems *Sadko* and *Antar* to become professor of practical composition and instrumentation at the St Petersburg Conservatory. During the 1870s he was concerned to acquire a sound 'academic' technique, and he wrote

numerous fugues and exercises in counterpoint. He also became a master of brilliant and colourful orchestration, eventually writing a valued textbook on the subject.

He composed his *Capriccio Espagnole* in 1887. His original idea had been to write a virtuoso fantasy on Spanish themes for violin and orchestra. Traces of this design are clear in the many solo passages, not only for the leading violin (including harmonies, triple stops, flying arpeggios and other virtuoso displays) but also for various wind instruments.

The work lives up to the composer's desire that it should 'glitter with dazzling orchestral colour'. The Spanish influence is heard in the rhythmic and melodic figures, although he spent a mere three days in Spain as a youth. The capriccio is in five short movements beginning with an Alborada (Morning song) and closing with an exuberant Fandango.

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interval

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Berlioz
(1803-1869)

Symphonie Fantastique

Reveries and Passions
A Ball
Scenes in the Country
March to the Scaffold
Dreams of the Witches' Sabbath

Berlioz was the most innovative composer in the history of music. He broke away from rigid 2, 4 and 8 time markings, introducing irregular rhythms, regarded at the time as eccentric. His use of the 'idée fixe', a recurring motto, was the forerunner of Wagner's leitmotiv. He reinvented orchestration, adding completely new dimensions of orchestral colour. He introduced new instruments into the orchestra never previously used in symphonic music. For him, music writing was an intense, passionate and personal testament. It is amazing to realise that this symphony was written only three years after Beethoven's death. Berlioz had a passionate romance with the English Shakespearean actress Harriet Smithson. Her initial failure to take any notice of him stimulated him into the emotional outpouring of this symphony. Berlioz himself provided a detailed programme for the work, but also stated that the symphony should be heard on its own merits.

The programme notes tell of a young musician who, in a fit of amorous despair, poisons himself with opium. This plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by strange visions in which his beloved figures as a melody, which he hears everywhere. The five movements trace the hero as he falls in love; meets her at a ball; thinks of her as he wanders through the countryside; dreams in a nightmare that he has killed her and must go to the gallows, and attends the rites of a Witches' Sabbath.

The first movement, *Reveries and Passions*, has a slow introduction followed by a vigorous, fiery allegro, closing in slow chords expressive of religious consolation. The second movement, *A Ball*, shows the glitter of a ball at which the artist catches tantalising glimpses of the beloved (the 'idée fixe' again) through the dancers. The third movement is a long adagio, descriptive of a scene in the country: shepherds call to each other on their pipes, the wind murmurs in the trees, the artist reflects mournfully on his solitude. But the calm is broken by despairing thoughts of his beloved and at the end only rumbles of distant thunder answer the shepherds' plaintive call. In the fourth movement he dreams he has killed his beloved and is marched to the scaffold before the raucous jeers of the crowd. At the end, the 'idée fixe' registers piercingly in his brain before the

blade falls. Finally he finds himself transported in his dreams to a witches' sabbath where, amid the grimacing of every kind of diabolic creature, he sees her grotesquely distorted; her theme is now ignoble and strident. The *Dies Irae* plainchant and a deep tolling bell ring out and the witches' fury explodes in a wild delirious dance.

To convey a drama of such vividness and power Berlioz used every resource of the orchestra. His extraordinary aural imagination is now made plain by the sound of instruments of the period, with their remarkable clarity and individuality. From the opera house he took a style of orchestration unknown to Beethoven and used it in extraordinary new combinations. He called for four harps (in *Un Bal*), a cor anglais (in the *Scene aux champs*) with its plaintive, romantic call, the squeaky little E-flat clarinet (in the finale), the deep bells familiar to opera-goers but unknown in the concert hall, and a whole array of percussion. He also called for two ophicleides in the final two movements. This was an instrument invented in France in Napoleonic times to provide a heavy brass bass line in military bands. Berlioz used it for strength in the *Marche* and as a satirical intoner of plainchant in the finale. With its revival, the impact of its coarse, vulgar sound may be appreciated in full, an effect lost when the rounder, smoother tuba is used to replace it.

THE BANBURY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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Our next concert

Saturday 24 November at 7.30pm
Deddington Church

Maccunn: Land of the Mountain and the Flood
Walton: Henry V Suite
Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 2