

## Romantic Classics



**Saturday 27 November 2021**

**Deddington Church**

**Programme Free**



# Concert Dates for Your Diary

## *Christmas Concert*

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

A programme of Christmas favourites and carols  
including

### **The Snowman**

**3:00 pm – St Mary's Church, Banbury**



## *Spring Concert*

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

Overture to *Hansel and Gretel* – Humperdinck  
Symphonic Fantasia, *The Tempest* – Tchaikovsky  
Symphony No.2 - Sibelius

**7:30 pm – Deddington Church**

### **Tickets from**

**banburysymphony.com**

## **Welcome to St. Peter and St. Paul Parish Church, Deddington**

After an absence of two years, the Banbury Symphony Orchestra has returned! Tonight we salute live music with our powerful programme of Romantic classics.

We begin with **Johannes Brahms' Academic Festival Overture**, one of his sunniest orchestral pieces. It's an irreverent 'thank you' to the University of Breslau, featuring a variety of student drinking songs!

Next, we play **Elgar's Enigma Variations**, with fourteen variations based on an original theme. Although the Enigma is widely believed to involve a hidden melody, Elgar never disclosed the secret. Unknown tune or not, the piece has come to represent an essential expression of friendship through music.

After the interval, we perform the **Sixth Symphony** of **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**, which was his last. Tchaikovsky's Russian title for the work means "passionate" or "emotional", a title which describes the music perfectly – the music encompasses a huge range of emotions. The shift from super-charged excitement in the third movement Scherzo to the outpouring of the final movement is a truly shattering transition.

Ian McCubbin

Chair, BSO

# Programme

## Academic Festival Overture – Brahms

## Variations on an Original Theme (“Enigma Variations”) – Elgar

Enigma	Andante
C.A.E.	L'istesso tempo
H.D.S.-P.	Allegro
R.B.T.	Allegro
W.M.B.	Allegro di molto
R.P.A.	Moderato
Ysobel	Andantino
Troyte	Presto
W.N.	Allegretto
Nimrod	Adagio
Dorabella	Intermezzo: Allegretto
G.R.S.	Allegro di molto
B.G.N.	Andante—A tempo
***	Romanza: Moderato
E.D.U.	Finale: Allegro

### *Interval*

## Symphony No. 6 – *Pathétique* – Tchaikovsky

Adagio – Allegro non troppo
Allegro con grazia
Allegro molto vivace
Finale: Adagio lamentoso

## Paul Willett – Conductor

Paul Willett is our Conductor and Musical Director. Paul 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 the age of 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 worked as a brass teacher for Oxfordshire Music Service and was director of a Saturday Music School of 200 students.

Paul was, until recently, the Director of Didcot Sixth Form. He is now retired to concentrate on his music making and being a 'stay-at-home' dad to his son Alfie.



## Anna Fleming - Leader



Anna was born in South Africa where she started playing the violin at the age of ten. While studying music at secondary school, Anna became a member of the South African National Youth Orchestra. After successfully completing her music degree, majoring in orchestral studies, Anna joined the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992.

Anna moved to England in late 1996. Keen to continue her orchestral playing, Anna joined the Banbury Symphony Orchestra in 1997 and became the leader of the orchestra in 2000, a post that she has held ever since. As a committed Christian, Anna plays an active role in church music. Focusing primarily on private violin tuition, Anna particularly enjoys helping adults to learn to play and she can be contacted on 01295 780017.

# ***Academic Festival Overture***

## **Johannes Brahms**

Johannes Brahms never went to college. When he was 20, however, he had the opportunity to indulge in the perks of student life for several weeks, without having to do a stitch of academic work. This serendipitous state of affairs resulted after he got “laid off” while on tour with the flamboyant 25-year-old Hungarian violinist, Eduard Reményi. Early in July of 1853, Reményi and Brahms were guests at the home of Franz Liszt during an extended stopover in Weimar. Reményi worshipped at the shrine of Liszt, but Brahms wanted nothing to do with their host’s artistic goals and the “New German School.” Incensed that his reticent accompanist wasn’t according the great master proper respect, Reményi sent Brahms on his way.

A few weeks earlier, at the end of May, Reményi had introduced Brahms to violinist-composer Joseph Joachim during a concert stop in Hanover. Foreseeing a personality clash between the ill-matched duo, Joachim had invited Brahms – if the opportunity arose – to join him at Göttingen, where he would be taking some summer courses in philosophy and history at the local university. For two glorious months that summer, Brahms hung out with Joachim and his circle, enjoying reading, debates, pleasant walks, beer-drinking sessions

and song fests at the local beer-halls, and general student camaraderie. By doing a recital with Joachim, he raised enough money to finance a long-held dream to take a walking tour of the Rhineland. Thus, the young composer packed his knapsack and bid peripheral university life adieu.

Brahms’ next brush with academe occurred 23 years later, in 1876. Cambridge University offered him an honorary Doctorate in Music, which required his presence at the ceremony – but Brahms had a paralyzing distaste for sea travel. Then, he learned that Londoners were hatching lavish plans to celebrate his sojourn in England. Harboring an innate horror of fuss and lionization, and unwilling to face the Channel crossing, the composer stayed home and relinquished the honor.

It was in 1879 that the University of Breslau conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Brahms was flattered and sent a postcard of thanks to the faculty. However, a subsequent letter from his friend Bernhard Scholz, Director of Music in Breslau, made it clear that the university expected him to express his gratitude in musical form. While vacationing at Bad Ischl during the summer of 1880, Brahms penned his musical “thank you” – the Academic Festival Overture.

With a masterful balance of serious and light-hearted elements, the emphasis is on the “festival” rather than the

“academic” in an overture that brims with an irrepressible sense of fun. The work also sports the most extravagant orchestral forces the composer ever employed. Brahms himself described the piece as “a very boisterous potpourri of student songs.” Indeed, excerpts from four student beer-hall tunes play a significant role in the orchestral texture in what is, perhaps, a fond backward look to the carefree summer days of 1853.

A hushed, but urgent statement launches the Overture, followed by a dramatic succession of contrasting ideas and dynamics. The principal idea here is an adaptation of the Rakóczy March, a favorite tune with the composer since his youth. Following a soft drumroll, three trumpets then present the first of the traditional students’ songs: “Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus” (We have built a stately house). Its roots lie in a Thuringian folk song, which had been transformed into a defiant protest song in the East German town of Jena when the students’ association there was disbanded in 1819. After Brahms develops and mixes this song with the earlier Rakóczy adaptation, the melody of “Der Landesvater” (The father of our country) appears in a sweeping, lyrical rendition introduced by violins and violas.

The tempo shifts to *animato* for the freshman’s song known as The Fox-Ride (“Was komm dort von der Höh’ ” – What

comes from afar). Bassoons, accompanied by off-the-beat violas and cellos, add a touch of humour that must have raised a faculty eyebrow or two at the premiere. Not forgetting to stir in his original material, Brahms then plays the three student songs off one another in a light-handed development. For the grand finale, a rambunctious version of the imposing “*Gaudeamus igitur*” (Therefore, let us be merry) makes a joyful noise and provides a rousing conclusion with its blazing brass and full orchestral forces.

The Overture has been one of Brahms’ most often played works ever since the composer himself conducted the premiere in Breslau on January 4, 1881.

# Variations on an Original Theme

## ("Enigma Variations")

### Edward Elgar

Elgar was born in Broadheath, near Worcester, England on June 2, 1857; he died in Worcester on February 23, 1934. Sketches for the Enigma Variations date from the fall of 1898. The work was completed on February 19, 1899. Hans Richter conducted the first performance on June 19, 1898 in London. Elgar subsequently revised the work, extending the finale. Revisions were completed by July 12, 1899.

Elgar's Enigma Variations was his first major work. It was, in fact, the first important large orchestral piece by a British composer ever. The piece served to bring English orchestral music into international prominence, just in time for the 20th century.



It is fitting that the Variations should be known as Enigma, since several

mysteries surrounded it at its first performance. In the program note for the premiere, Elgar excited his listeners' curiosity with one puzzle.

The enigma I will not explain—its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes,' but is not played.... So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas—e.g., Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *Les sept princesses*—the chief character is never on the stage.

People have been wondering about the identity of the enigma theme past the point where it matters. Some scholars suggested that Elgar meant by "theme" not a melody but rather a programmatic or philosophic idea. His friends, however, insisted that there was a real tune involved. The composer told the secret to only three people, all of whom carried it to their graves. Late in his life Elgar admitted that the theme "was so well known that it was strange no one had discovered it." This statement prompted several musicians to try to fit popular melodies contrapuntally to the variation theme. Tunes from Wagner, Mozart, Chopin and Leoncavallo were found to work, as were "God Save the Queen," "Pop Goes the Weasel" and "Auld Lang Syne." One friend of the composer, who knew well Elgar's penchant for puzzles and practical jokes, suggested that he was merely playing a joke on posterity by claiming that there was a hidden melody when, in fact, there was none. If this suggestion is true, then Elgar may be congratulated on having



successfully led generations of musicologists on a wild-goose chase.

There is a second enigma. Since the composer did disclose the programmatic reference of each variation, just what is the meaning of the theme? Elgar did eventually concede, although not publicly, that he was himself the subject of the theme. Actually, as Elgar's biographer Michael Kennedy points out, the opening four notes of the theme seem a natural setting of the syllables "Ed-ward El-gar." Furthermore, in his later work *The Music Makers*, Elgar quotes this theme to illustrate the loneliness of the creative artist.

A third enigma concerns the identities of the friends depicted in the Variations. The score is dedicated to "my friends pictured within." As he was finishing the work, Elgar wrote:

I just completed a set of Symphonic Variations (theme original) for orchestra—thirteen in number (but I call the finale the fourteenth, because of the ill fate attaching to the number). I have in the Variations sketched portraits of my friends—a new idea, I think—that is, in each Variation I have looked at the theme through the personality (as it were) of another Johnny.

Each variation is prefaced by the initials or nickname of the friend whom it depicts. When the work was new, Elgar refused to disclose who the individual friends were, thereby compounding the mysteries. He subsequently did publish an extensive explanation, however:

Theme. Enigma (Andante). Since the theme is an "enigma," Elgar offers no explanation.

Variation 1. C.A.E. (Andante).

The composer's wife, C. Alice Elgar, is portrayed in "a prolongation of the theme with what I wished to be romantic and delicate additions."

Variation 2. H.D.S.-P. (Allegro).

The friend is Hew David Steuart-Powell, a pianist with whom Elgar used to play chamber music. "His characteristic diatonic run over the keys before beginning to play is here humorously travestied in the semiquaver passages; these should suggest a Toccata, but chromatic beyond H.D.S.-P.'s liking."

Variation 3. R.B.T. (Allegretto).

This variation is a caricature of Richard Baxter Townshend, whose deeply resonant bass voice is portrayed by the bassoon. The variation refers to "R.B.T.'s presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals—the low voice flying off occasionally into 'soprano' timbre."

Variation 4. W.M.B. (Allegro di molto).

The subject is William Neath Baker, "a country squire, gentleman, and scholar. In the days of horses and carriages, it was more difficult than in these days of petrol to arrange the carriages for the day to suit a large number of guests. The Variation was written after the host had, with a slip of paper in his hand, forcibly read out the arrangements for the day and hurriedly left the music-room with an inadvertent bang of the door.... [There] are some suggestions of the teasing attitude of the guests."

#### Variation 5. R.P.A. (Moderato).

Richard Penrose Arnold was the son of poet Matthew Arnold. The younger Arnold “was a great lover of music, which he played (on the pianoforte) in a self-taught manner, evading difficulties but suggesting in a mysterious way the real feeling. His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical and witty remarks.

#### Variation 6. Ysobel (Andantino).

This was Elgar’s nickname for Isabel Fitton, who studied violin with Elgar. She switched to viola—hence the prominence of that instrument in this variation. The opening “is an ‘exercise’ for crossing the strings—a difficulty for beginners.” The composer was fully aware of Ysobel’s charms and quite taken with her beauty, so that the variation is “pensive and, for a moment, romantic.”

#### Variation 7. Troyte (Presto).

Arthur Troyte Griffith was an architect who had a gift for saying the unexpected—hence the cross-rhythms in his variation. This section is not so much a portrait as a remembrance of Troyte’s “maladroit essays to play the pianoforte; later the strong rhythm suggests the attempts of the instructor (E.E.) to make something like order out of chaos, and the final despairing ‘slam’ records that the effort proved to be in vain.”

#### Variation 8. W.N. (Allegretto).

Winifred Norbury and her sister Florence were music lovers. Winifred was employed as a secretary to the Worcester Philharmonic Society. “The

gracious personalities of the ladies are sedately shown. W.N. was more connected with music than others of the family, and her initials head the movement; to justify this position a little suggestion of a characteristic laugh is given.”

#### Variation 9. Nimrod (Adagio).

Nimrod was a hunter, and the German word for “hunter” is Jäger. Elgar is depicting his friend, the critic August J. Jaeger. “Something ardent and mercurial, in addition to the slow movement, would have been needed to portray the character and temperament of A.J. Jaeger. The Variation...is the record of a long summer evening talk, when my friend discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven and said that no one could approach Beethoven at his best in this field, a view with which I cordially concurred. It will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the Eighth Sonata (Pathétique).”

#### Variation 10. Dorabella (Intermezzo: Allegretto).

Dora Penny was a close friend whom Elgar nicknamed Dorabella, from the Mozart opera *Così fan tutte*. “The movement suggests a dance-like lightness.” Dorabella wrote an entire book on the Enigma Variations and the people portrayed therein.

#### Variation 11. G.R.S. (Allegro di molto).

The subject is George Robert Sinclair, a cathedral organist. Some injustice is done, Elgar notes, since the variation has “nothing to do with organs or cathedrals or, except remotely, with G.R.S. The first few bars were suggested by his great

bulldog Dan (a well-known character) falling down the steep bank into the River Wye...his paddling up stream to find a landing place...and his rejoicing bark on landing.... G.R.S. said, 'Set that to music.' I did; here it is."

Variation 12. B.G.N. (Andante).

Basil G. Nevinson was an amateur cellist and a member of a trio with Elgar and H.D.S.-P. "The Variation is a tribute to a very dear friend whose scientific and artistic attainments, and the wholehearted way they were put at the disposal of his friends, particularly endeared him to the writer." Predictably, the variation includes a wonderful cello solo.

Variation 13. \* \* \* (Romanza: Moderato).

"The asterisks take the place of the name of a lady who was, at the time of composition, on a sea voyage. The drums suggest the distant throb of the engines of a liner over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*." The timpani were supposed to be played with snare drum sticks, but at the first rehearsal the timpanist tried using coins instead, and Elgar liked the sound. The mysterious woman was Lady Mary Lygon, who was on her way to Australia when Elgar wanted to ask her permission to use her initials.

Variation 14. E.D.U. (Finale: Allegro).

E.D.U. stands for "Edoo," Alice Elgar's pet name for the composer. He paints himself "bold and vigorous in general style." Just before the first overt restatement of the original theme, the woodwinds play a phrase which is also

hidden in Alice's variation. Elgar used to whistle this tune as his special signal to Alice. The Nimrod variation is also recalled.

## **Symphony No. 6**

### ***Pathétique***

#### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

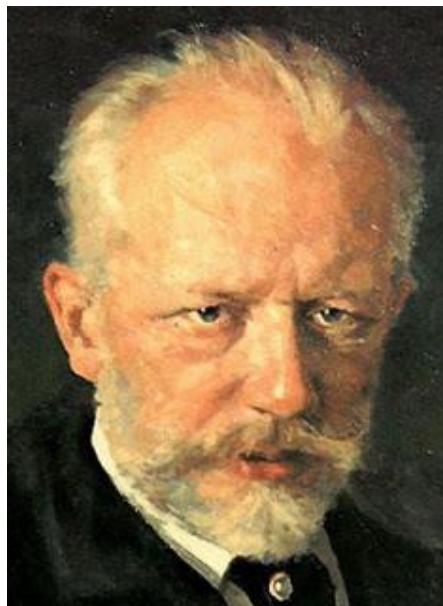
Tchaikovsky believed himself the victim of a cold, implacable fate. In the last three of his six symphonies, he depicted his struggle against it. He won some degree of victory in the fourth and fifth. But in the sixth, his greatest work (which could be taken as his last will and testament), fate reigned supreme.

He conducted the première himself, in St. Petersburg on October 28, 1893. It met with a puzzled reaction, especially regarding the unprecedented act of concluding a symphony with a slow movement. Nine days later Tchaikovsky was dead, perhaps by suicide. The second performance took place at his memorial service, and made a much deeper impression than the first.

According to his brother, Modest, on the day after the première, the composer was still searching for an appropriate title for the piece. Modest suggested 'pathétique,' a French word of Greek origin that is commonly used in Russian. The composer inscribed this immediately on the score. Translating it into English simply as 'pathetic' reduces the original word's undercurrent of passion and suffering.

The symphony opens with a slow, mournful introduction. The expansive exposition section contrasts a restless first subject with a consoling second. The explosive start of the development heralds many pages of mounting hysteria. This section contains a musical

quotation from the traditional Russian Requiem Mass, sung to the words 'with thy saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant.' It is crowned by a



passage of slow, stern grandeur, where the trombones and tuba take on the roles of funeral orators.

At first, the next movement, a waltz, promises graceful contrast. But with five beats to the bar instead of the usual three, the mood is thrown off kilter, with disturbing, bittersweet results. In the middle panel, the quiet but insistent beat of the timpani further robs the themes of their otherwise graceful nature.

The third movement begins as a dynamic scherzo. Gathering momentum, it appears to become a blazing march of triumph, sweeping all before it. Yet this is not the only possible way of looking at

it. David Brown, author of an authoritative, four-volume biography of Tchaikovsky, comments, "...this march is, in fact, a deeply ironic, bitter conception – a desperate bid for happiness so prolonged and vehement that it confirms not only the desperation of the search, but also its futility."

The symphony's slow, anguished finale confirms this view. Despite repeated protests, resignation becomes complete. A quiet stroke on the tam tam announces fate's victory. The music sinks back into the dark depths of the orchestra where it began.

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## Joining the Orchestra

If you play an instrument to a standard of Grade 7 or above and would like to play with the orchestra, find out more by contacting Anna Fleming on 01295 780017.

All rehearsals take place in Banbury in term time on Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30pm.

