

Autumn Concert

Russian Spectacular!



Saturday 25 November 2017

Deddington Church

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Invitation to the Dance

Saturday 17th March 2018

La valse – Ravel

Concerto for Orchestra – Bartók

Symphonic Dances – Rachmaninoff

7:30 pm – Deddington Church

Banbury Chamber Orchestra

May Masterworks

Sunday 20th May 2018

Overture 'The Hebrides' – Mendelssohn

Suite, Op.49 – Saint-Saëns

Symphony No.8 – Beethoven

4:30 pm – Hook Norton Church

Tickets from

banburysymphony.org

Welcome to St. Peter & St. Paul Deddington

We're delighted that you can join us for our Russian Spectacular concert, which we present for you tonight in the lovely surroundings of Deddington Church.

Our programme contains a feast of Russian music, familiar and unfamiliar. Glinka's exhilarating and tuneful overture to his rarely-performed opera 'Ruslan and Lyudmila' gets us started, following which we welcome back the wonderful Madalina Rusu as our soloist in Rachmaninov's evergreen Second Piano Concerto. After the interval we will play Tchaikovsky's Manfred Symphony, a highly programmatic work based upon the romantic poem of the same name written by Lord Byron in 1817. The symphony contains some of Tchaikovsky's most dramatic and passionate music!

We hope you will enjoy the evening and return for more in the Spring! Our next concert, "Invitation To The Dance", will be in Deddington Church on 17th March 2018, and will feature three high-powered orchestral showpieces, Ravel's 'La Valse, Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra and the terrific Symphonic Dances by Rachmaninov. It would be great to see you here again!

Ian McCubbin
Chairman, BSO

Programme

Overture 'Ruslan and Lyudmila' – Glinka

Piano Concerto No.2 – Rachmaninoff

Moderato

Adagio sostenuto

Allegro scherzando

Interval

Manfred Symphony – Tchaikovsky

Lento lugubre

Vivace con spirito

Andante con moto

Allegro con fuoco

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 is currently the Director of Didcot Sixth Form and he continues his music making conducting various ensembles, both adult and youth.



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.

Madalina Rusu

Madalina Rusu has enjoyed performing from a very early age, and is quickly establishing a successful career as a soloist and chamber musician. She has performed to critical acclaim in Romania, and throughout Europe in Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Since her arrival in London, Madalina has appeared as a soloist at Barbican Hall, Cadogan Hall, LSO St Luke's, St Martin's in the Fields, St Margaret's Church, Chappell's of Bond Street, Fairfield Halls, and elsewhere throughout the UK.

Madalina Rusu is a recipient of scholarship awards by the Martin



Musical Fund/Phillarmonia Orchestra (2005 - 2009), Ratiu Family Foundation (2005 - 2008), winner of the Brancusi Award given by the Prodan Romanian Cultural Centre (2008), winner of a Boise Foundation scholarship (2009), winner of the Ian Flemming MBF award (2009), and winner of the Edith Vogel Bursary (2009). Madalina's list of prizes include 1st prize at the International Piano Competition PRO - PIANO, Bucharest (2002), winner of the Croydon Concerto Competition (2007), and winner of all internal Piano Competitions at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London (2005, 2008). Madalina is also a major prize winner in the International Piano Competition 'Konzerteum' (Athens, 2000), Oxford Professional Recital Prize (2005, 2007, 2008), Tunbridge Wells International Young Artists Competition (2008), and the Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition (2009).

During her studies, Madalina has played in numerous masterclasses held at the Dartington Summer School and at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where her talent has been recognised by distinguished musicians such as Richard Goode, Paul Lewis, John Lill, Imogen Cooper, Simon Trpceski, Stephen Kovacevich, Pascal Rogé, Bryce Morrison, Alfredo Perl, Joanna

MacGregor, Douglas Finch, Daniel Adni,
and Andrew Zolinsky.

Born in 1985 in Constanta, Romania, Madalina Rusu began her musical studies at the Music High School in Constanta with professors Iuliana Carlig, Cristian Dumitrescu and Constantin Ionescu - Vovu. Since September 2004, she has been studying piano with Professor Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London, where she gained a First class BMus Honours degree, and has graduated the MMus course (Guildhall Artist - Performance) with distinction. Madalina has been awarded the prestigious Guildhall Artist Fellowship, and she currently holds a piano teaching post at Orchard House School in Chiswick, London.

Overture

'Ruslan and Lyudmila'

Glinka

Mikhail Glinka is considered to be the father of modern Russian music. His nationalistic, Russian style was a seminal influence on all Russian composers who followed, from Rimsky-Korsakov to Tchaikovsky to Stravinsky.

Born into a wealthy family, Glinka left his life as a government bureaucrat in his late twenties to pursue music, studying in Italy and Berlin. In 1834 he returned to Russia and rediscovered his Russian heritage, reading the works of Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol. From this, he was inspired to write his first important work, the opera *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), the story of a young Russian hero who, at the expense of his own life, saves the Tsar from a group of Polish kidnappers. The work drew on Russian and Polish folk themes, and also prefigured the use of the leitmotif - a recurring theme for a particular character - that Richard Wagner would refine in his operas.

A Life for the Tsar met with immediate popular success, and the director of the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg suggested that Glinka adapt Pushkin's epic poem, *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, as his next opera. The poem tells of the abduction of Ludmilla by an evil sorcerer, Chernomor, from a party given

for Ludmilla's three suitors, one of whom is Ruslan. Each suitor rides off to save the girl, encountering a fantastic assortment of witches, hermits, magic castles, enchanted gardens, magic swords, and so forth, rather in the style of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. The sorcerer is vanquished in the end by Ruslan, who revives Ludmilla from a trance and wins her hand in marriage.

Glinka agreed to write the opera, but before he could begin Pushkin was killed in a duel. The composer began the work without a librettist, and although eventually one was found, Glinka wasn't satisfied with the libretto and not only called in other writers to work on it, but rewrote some sections himself.

The result was a plot that was grandiose and rambling, and the opera was not as successful as its predecessor, being



withdrawn from the repertoire in 1848, six years after its premiere in 1842. However, *Ruslan and Ludmilla* was eventually recognized as a stronger work musically than *Tsar*, and the composer Mily Balakirev produced a complete, uncut staging in Prague in 1867.

The opera is a musicological travelogue, with themes based on Russian, Finnish, Tartar, and Persian music, all brilliantly orchestrated. Folk songs represent *Ruslan's* Russia, while whole-tone harmonies depict the magical world of the sorcerer Chernomor. Glinka's inspiration for the overture was particularly down-to-earth. He attended a wedding dinner at the Russian court, and later wrote: "I was up in the balcony, and the clattering of knives, forks and plates made such an impression on me that I had the idea to imitate them in the prelude to *Ruslan*. I later did so, with fair success." The overture consists of two main themes, the first driving and rhythmic (one hopes the servants at the dinner Glinka attended weren't really hustling at this speed!), the second more lyrical and reminiscent of courtly dances.

Piano Concerto No.2

Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninov admitted that he was influenced by both Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. In itself, that seems innocent enough, but gives us pause for thought when we remember that the Russian Nationalist Rimsky-Korsakov favoured insularity whilst Tchaikovsky, preferring Western European models, embraced 'community'. Absorbing and reconciling conflicting elements such as these, Rachmaninov incorporated the best of both worlds.

Had he been a footballer, his manager would undoubtedly have announced, 'This lad's a natural'. Why? Because the fire and melancholy that are part



and parcel of 'Russian-ness' flowed so freely through his veins. Making no bones about it, Rachmaninov himself openly regarded his sleeve as a perfectly proper repository for his heart ('And good for him,' I say!)

All in all, it's perhaps not surprising that 'Insecurity' was his middle name. The First Symphony's critical slating (1897) plunged him into a pool of despond, certainly as far as his faith in his composing abilities was concerned. Several hypnosis sessions were needed to shift his 'writer's block'. Just as quickly re-invigorated he penned the Second Piano Concerto (1900-1), a success both critical and popular for which the world will ever be in his debt.

Uncharacteristically for a Russian, he was marvellously adept at spinning out a long line. Characteristically for him, in his concertos he would festoon his 'line' with incessant and elaborate pianistic 'laundry'. Maybe this was his way of putting his insecurity where his heart was: it's almost as if he was afraid to shut up for a second, lest he run dry.

Of the foremost pianist/composers, Chopin was a virtuoso pianist who - not to put too fine a point on it - couldn't orchestrate to save his life, whilst Liszt was a virtuoso pianist who wrote plenty of highly original, purely orchestral music. There's still a fairly common perception that, in this respect, Rachmaninov is nearer the former than the latter. This originally grew out of

acoustic recordings where the piano was placed well forward, a practical necessity that became a habit.

Particularly as most folk knew his concerti only through recordings and radio, this inflated the relative importance of that incessant chattering and by default relegated Rachmaninov's orchestration to the shadows. More recently, his straight symphonic music has moved back up the repertoire league table, providing ample evidence that he was no slouch when it came to brilliant orchestration.

Of course, in the concert hall, unless the performers deliberately contrive to perpetuate the myth, it's a very different - and far more satisfying - story. We cannot but admire his astonishingly original presentation of the glorious opening subject of the Second Concerto - but why? Well, underlying the stunningly luscious melody is what appears to be a double rôle-reversal. Firstly, the piano swaps with the orchestra, introducing then accompanying the first subject. Secondly, this subject seems 'feminine' - more what you'd expect of the less obviously 'showy' second subject. When a friend mildly suggested that this opening sounded more like an introduction (à la Tchaikovsky?) than a first subject, Rachmaninov promptly over-reacted, dismissing the whole first movement as 'revolting'. Fortunate indeed are we that this genius was not

quite so insecure as to make a habit of shredding his manuscripts!

Nor is the opening a 'one-off'. Rachmaninov's even-handedness is as pervasive as the formal inventiveness that passes almost unnoticed beneath the welter of hedonistic delights. He constantly reverses the rôles of accompanist and soloist, generating a true dialogue where one protagonist frequently passes a phrase to the other, even in 'mid-sentence'. Thus, in spite of the abundance of pianistic pyrotechnics, Rachmaninov never lets us forget which of 'composer' and 'virtuoso pianist' comes first in his book.

1. Moderato. Bluff, and double bluff! Following the first subject, a flurry of excitement duly implies the arrival of a 'masculine' second. Except it isn't - compared to the first, it's as feminine as silken lace. Gracefully, the cellos offer it to the piano, which with equal grace accepts the limelight. Then, another wonder: armed with only that brief flurry, Rachmaninov transmutes his embarrassment of lyrical riches into a development section of devastating dynamism. It is only in the reprise, as this energy subsides, that the orchestra cedes the first subject to the piano, which likewise yields to a solo horn in respect of the second.

2. Adagio sostenuto. Basically variations, this is also a fantasy told in purely musical terms. Of the piano's opening arpeggios Christopher Howell

perceptively observed, 'Some notes ... have special emphasis ... these notes are off the beat, so that when the orchestra enters [they] seem slightly out of phase. [This] accounts for the ... uneasy repose'. Yes, but what of the 'cause'? Gradually, the piano becomes more agitated, eventually losing its rag in a cadential outburst. To quell its sulky scampering, the orchestra emits a mighty chord: 'Alright, play your cadenza!' Formal protocol somewhat belatedly satisfied, tension dissipates and the piano overlays the returning serene melody with fulsome thankyou.

3. Allegro scherzando. Having cleared the air, the protagonists celebrate in no uncertain terms, kicking off with what amounts to a cadenza each. At the movement's core, the fleet main theme is heartily tossed every which way, but at either side of this the secondary theme - not the Big Tune, but merely yet another big tune - remains respectfully unmolested. Until the coda, that is. Here, as at the very beginning, the orchestra plays whilst the piano supports, only now it is done in the grandest of manners - a gentle invitation for the audience to satisfy the demands of protocol.

Manfred Symphony

Tchaikovsky

Manfred had a torturous genesis typical of Tchaikovsky's creative process. When Berlioz fever hit Russia in 1868, composers scrambled to create riffs on works like the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Harold en Italie*. Mily Balakirev tried to talk Berlioz himself into composing a symphony based on Lord Byron's *Manfred*, but he demurred. Years later, Balakirev recommended the project to Tchaikovsky, who initially found the program "cold" and uncongenial. After reading Byron's poem himself in 1885, however, he began warming to the idea. Balakirev continued pressing him, and a visit to the Alps (where *Manfred* is set) finally inspired him to launch a "symphony in four pictures after Byron's dramatic poem."

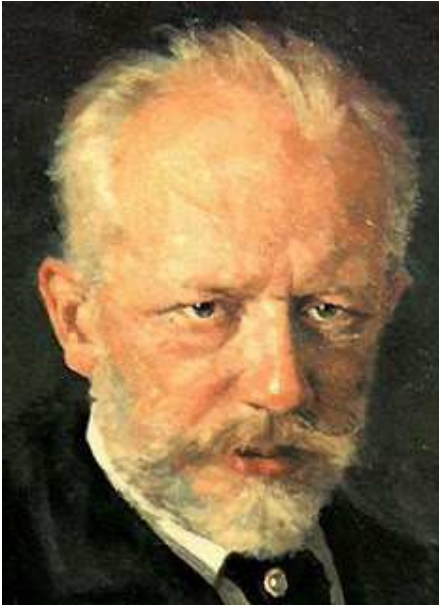
He was then beset by his usual doubt and ambivalence. "After some hesitation," he wrote to his former pupil, Sergei Taneyev, "I have decided to write *Manfred*, because I feel that until I have fulfilled the promise that I imprudently made to Balakirev during the winter, I shall not be at ease. I don't know what will come out, but at the moment I'm dissatisfied with myself." Once he plunged into the project, he became obsessed by it, as he confessed to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck: "I am working on a very difficult,

complicated symphonic work (on the subject of Byron's *Manfred*), which happens to have such a tragic character that occasionally I turn into something of a *Manfred* myself ... I am having to squeeze out every last drop of effort from myself."

Part of Tchaikovsky's problem was that he loved Schumann's *Manfred*, which he linked indissolubly with Byron's poem, and couldn't imagine writing anything as good. Nonetheless, an "inner voice" told him that *Manfred* would turn out to be his best symphonic piece, and he was able to write Balakirev that he had become "terribly infatuated with *Manfred*, and cannot remember ever having felt such pleasure in working."

The symphony was premiered in Moscow in 1886 to mixed reviews. Tchaikovsky wrote to von Meck that he believed "this is my best symphonic work. It was performed excellently, but it seemed to me that the public had little concept of it and received it rather coolly, although at the end I was given an ovation."

Feelings of pleasure and pride rarely lasted with Tchaikovsky, and this was no exception. As with *The Nutcracker* and the *Fifth Symphony* (his next large work), he began denigrating the piece, telling Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich in 1888 that with the exception of the first movement, *Manfred* was a "loathsome" and "abominable" work



that he was intent on destroying. Fortunately, this was one self-destructive obsession he did not make good on.

Today, Manfred is rarely heard live (though audiophiles enjoy its huge orchestra and wall-shaking organ on recordings). Its length, difficulty, and large forces are often blamed for the neglect, though the symphonies of Mahler and Bruckner—once shunned for the same reasons—are now frequently performed. Toscanini championed Manfred early on, but influential conductors like Leonard Bernstein (who denounced it as "trash") ignored it.

The opening movement depicts the lonely Manfred wandering in the Alpine mountains. As Balakirev's original program puts it, "His life is shattered ... Nothing remains for him except

memories. Images of his ideal Astarte [his lost love] permeate his thoughts ... He seeks and begs for oblivion." This is one of Tchaikovsky's most visionary pieces, a self-contained tone poem that features a majestic chorale (the symphony's *idée fixe*), a hauntingly beautiful love theme, and electrifying climaxes.

The two middle movements are delicate splashes of color. In the scherzo, "the Alpine fairy appears before Manfred in the rainbow from the spray of a waterfall." The scintillating fast music in the outer sections is the closest Tchaikovsky comes to a Berlioz-like tapestry. In the slow movement, "the bare, simple, free life of the mountain folk" is evoked with bucolic winds, scampering strings, mellow horns, and subtle touches of bells and harp.

In the finale, a fragmented Allegro con fuoco, the program calls for an "infernal orgy," depicting "the caves of Arimanes, to which Manfred has gone to seek a meeting with Astarte." A swift fugue leads to variations from the first movement, including a ravishing re-visitation of the love theme. Manfred's death is announced at the end with an organ playing a glorious hymn, a paradisaal summons unlike anything in Tchaikovsky's symphonic output. Afterward, the symphony ends serenely, its minor key gloom finally transcended.



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