



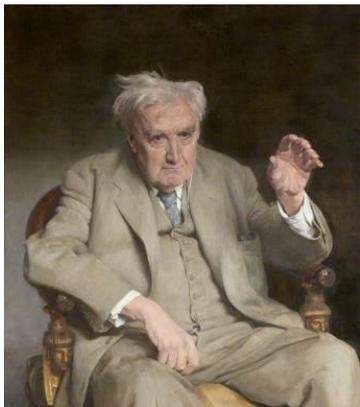
UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



Programme Notes

24th April, 2020



Ralph Vaughan Williams



Igor Stravinsky



Bohuslva Martinu (& his cat)

BTHVN
2020

About Today's Music Selections

In its earlier planning for this year the MSO had arranged for only one concert in April, comprising only three works: the Act 1 Prelude to Wagner's 'Lohengrin'; a work for trumpet - "Aerial" - by contemporary Austrian composer HK Gruber; and Schumann's 2nd Symphony. The symphony was also part of their March programming and we heard part of it in our previous presentation. This doesn't leave us with much to go on for this month.

Serendipitously, with the current social distancing measures we all are experiencing, the MSO to "Keep the Music Going" is posting on YouTube recordings drawn from previous concerts. It is from the recordings so far posted, then, that the works chosen for this presentation are mostly drawn.mostly!

We will watch and listen to the MSO (and /or sections of it) in performances of the Beethoven Septet Opus 20; Vaughan Williams "The Lark Ascending" and Madrigals for violin duo by Martinu - the latter a recording only made earlier this month.

In his final year at the helm of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Sir Andrew Davis led the Orchestra in a double bill of Igor Stravinsky's two paeans to spring: The Rite of Spring and Perséphone. The former is wild, riot-inducing and revolutionary, the latter a lyrical, little-known masterpiece performed in Australia for the first time in more than 50 years.

An enormous musical undertaking, for Perséphone Davis is joined onstage by not only the musicians of the MSO, but 180 choristers. The 120-voice MSO Chorus appeared alongside the Australian Girls Choir and National Boys Choir of Australia, with mezzo Lotte Betts-Dean and tenor Paul Groves.

"I wanted to do "The Rite" in context together with Perséphone partly because they're both about spring and also because Perséphone is a piece that I think is quite unjustly neglected," Sir Andrew Davis told the Arts Magazine 'Limelight'.

"The Rite" is a ballet depicting the celebration of spring in pagan Russia, which culminates in a young girl, deemed the Chosen One, dancing herself to death. Perséphone, sometimes dubbed a second 'rite of spring' sees the world plunged into winter when Perséphone, goddess of spring and queen of the Underworld, descends below the earth. Each year when she returns, she will bring hope and the new life of spring. Separated by 21 years, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*) and *Perséphone* both depict a sacrifice for the sake of renewal.

But a little of Stravinsky, for me, I have to say, goes a long way, and hence today's presentation includes only a snippet of "The Rite of Spring", and this not by the MSO but from a ballet performance in 2008 by the Mariinsky Ballet company.

For those of our number who would, however, like to tune into the MSO concert performance of these works, the YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtn2PvE4qd0&t=3954s> .

As a Beethoven 'bookend' I have included his 7 Variations on the duet from Mozart's "The Magic Flute: "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" ("In men, who feel love"), but it's not by the MSO, though. I hope you enjoy what follows. Bill.

Beethoven - Septet in E flat Major, Opus 20



Performers - The MSO Melbourne Ensemble

One of Beethoven's early compositions (he was 29 when he wrote it) the Septet has become one of his most popular and enduring works. So much so that Beethoven developed an intense dislike for the work.

An article published by the Sydney Mozart Society states that a number of remarkable people have been associated the Septet, calling them: the role model, the composer, the performer, the younger composer, the conductor, and the manuscript buyer.

The Role Model



It all starts with Mozart. Beethoven drew his influences for the Septet from Mozart's Divertimento for String Trio K.563, both as a musical work and as a method of composition.

Despite never having the opportunity to study under Mozart, Beethoven absolutely worshipped the works of Mozart having met the master in 1789. During his time in Vienna, Beethoven learnt composition under Haydn who was a dear friend to Mozart.

Mozart had demonstrated that it was possible to take an existing form, with which audiences would be familiar and comfortable, and invest it with freshness and unique character. This was what the young Beethoven did with his Septet. He gave the Septet the movements, charming melodies and harmonies the public would have expected of a serenade/divertimento, but surprised them with the richness and sophistication of his writing; the public loved it.

The Composer



Beethoven was subject to a classic dilemma of the artist with early success. As a young composer, he had to put up with being compared unfavourably to Haydn and Mozart. As a mature composer, he would have to endure unfavourable comparisons to his younger self'. So while the Septet was composed by Beethoven, not many years later he would fume, "It was written by Mozart!" This was his exasperated response to comments that his later works were oddities and what the public wanted were compositions by the "real" Beethoven. Sadly Beethoven came to loathe the Septet's popularity. To his eternal annoyance, it became the biggest success of his life.

The Performer

One of the enduring and most valuable friendships in Beethoven's life was with violin virtuoso Ignaz Schuppanzigh. For Beethoven, Schuppanzigh was a teacher of violin technique and an expert interpreter and commentator on the works of Haydn, Mozart and others. Schuppanzigh loved the good life, great music and Beethoven. He was someone who could bring life to Beethoven's most demanding violin compositions.



With Schuppanzigh in mind, Beethoven created a prominent violin part with solos and a cadenza for the Septet. Schuppanzigh performed in the Septet premiere and continued to champion the Septet throughout his life, performing it on many occasions and contributing to its popularity.

The Younger Composer



In 1824 Franz Schubert received a commission from Count Ferdinand Troyer, a talented amateur clarinetist and an admirer of Beethoven. He asked Schubert to compose a work for winds and strings modelled on the Septet. Schubert enhanced the string part by adding a second violin to the Septet's ensemble, thus creating an Octet.

The work was given a private premiere with an ensemble that included Count Troyer himself and several of the musicians – among them Ignaz Schuppanzigh – who had performed in the premiere of Beethoven's Septet many years earlier. This announced that Schubert's Octet was indeed a worthy companion piece to the earlier Beethoven work.

The Conductor



The Septet has continued to inspire arrangements and tributes, including an arrangement by the renowned twentieth century conductor Arturo Toscanini. Toscanini had a great fondness for the Septet. As a young man he had gone without lunch so that he could afford to buy the score.

In his arrangement Toscanini left the woodwinds untouched, but gave the string parts to the full string section of the orchestra. The effect is like a concerto grosso, with a small group of instruments – the woodwinds – in exchanges with a larger orchestral group – the strings.

Toscanini conducted his arrangement of the Septet a number of times, including a sparkling Carnegie Hall performance recorded in 1951 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

The Manuscript Buyer

Following Beethoven's death his belongings, including a number of notebooks and music autographs, were sold at auction in 1827. The auction aroused what was described at the time as "an uncommon level of interest".

The autograph score for the Fifth Symphony was sold for 6 florins, the original score for the great Missa Solemnis was sold for 7 florins.

The original score for the Septet, however, fetched 18 florins, indicating the high regard – perhaps even love – the successful buyer and the other bidders must have felt for the Septet some 27 years after its first public performance.



The septet is in six movements

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| I. Adagio; Allegro con brio | (Slow; Fast with spirit) |
| II. Adagio cantabile | (Slowly, in a singing style) |
| III. Tempo di minuetto | (Speed of a minuet dance) |
| IV. Tema con variazioni: Andante | (Theme and variations: moderately slow) |
| V. Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace | (spritely and humorous:
Very fast and lively with spirit) |
| VI. Andante con moto alla marcia; Presto | (Moderately slow with movement of a march;
quickly). |

The rendition we hear is from a group from the MSO known as "The Melbourne Ensemble"
The YouTube Link to their performance is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcin13ho0M8&t=2s>

Vaughan Williams – The Lark Ascending



Ralph Vaughan Williams

From the beginning of his career, in the first years of the twentieth century, Ralph Vaughan Williams was seen as a composer rooted in the past. His first significant large-scale work, the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* composed in 1910, is indebted to the music of his sixteenth-century predecessor and to the great English tradition.

His entire upbringing was steeped in tradition—he was related both to the pottery Wedgwoods and Charles Darwin. (“The Bible says that God made the world in six days,” his mother told him. “Great Uncle Charles thinks it took longer: but we need not worry about it, for it is equally wonderful either way”). He became a serious student of English folk song and edited the *English Hymnal*.

Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark Ascending* has been voted (in 2020) Britain’s favourite piece of classical music for a second year running. The 15-minute work, written in 1914, topped this year’s *Classic FM Hall of Fame*.

An iconic piece of music, it has won the poll ten times since 1996. Last year, the English composer’s 15-minute work returned to the top spot in the *Classic FM Hall Of Fame*, after being briefly displaced to third by Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*.

The composition – written in its earliest form just over a century ago – was inspired by a poem of the same name by George Meredith.

For much of his life, Vaughan Williams lived near Dorking, Surrey, not far from Meredith’s beloved Box Hill, where the poet died, crippled and nearly deaf, in 1909. When Vaughan Williams enlisted in the army in 1914, after the outbreak of World War I (he was forty-one at the time), he set the score aside. The experience of serving in the war—he was an orderly with the Royal Army Medical Corps in France and then an officer—seems only to have heightened his nostalgia for a simpler time and for a world that no longer existed.

It isn’t surprising then, that shortly after he came home in 1919, he picked up *The Lark Ascending*, lovingly fine-tuned it, and eventually orchestrated it as a touching souvenir of a time gone by. Even the song of the lark itself, which Vaughan Williams suggests in the flourishes of the solo violin, is now a rare thing, the bird’s population in decline and much of its natural habitat irrevocably spoiled.



The composer termed the piece a “pastoral romance for orchestra”. It is full of the folk melodies that the composer loved to collect, with singing violin lines, mingling with the sounds of the earth before breaking free, rising to ever loftier heights. The mood is deeply nostalgic, and his writing evokes the glorious image of the rolling British countryside. It starts with the darkest, richest sounds a violin can make, then rises to an airy lightness.

Vaughan Williams prefaced his score with these lines from Meredith's poem: "The Lark Ascending":



Gordon Meredith

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup
And he the wine which overflows
to lift us with him as he goes.
In light, and then the fancy sings.

Listen now to The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis. The solo violinist is Richard Tognetti. The work comes as part of a larger concert performance by the MSO of works by 20th century composers including Benjamin Britten, Witold Lutoslawsky (he's Polish if you haven't heard of him), and Sergei Rachmaninov. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy1pA4NHhqU>

and "the Lark Ascending" comes 36 minutes and 45 seconds into the recording.

Igor Stravinsky – The Rite of Spring (or –The Celebration of Spring)

Igor Stravinsky was one of the greatest writers of music, not just of the twentieth century when he was living and working in his native Russia and later in the United States, but of all time. This is even more impressive when we hear that he trained not as a musician, but as a lawyer!



Stravinsky's big break came when he was commissioned to write the music for a series of ballet performances for the Ballet Russes – a Russian Ballet company in Paris. He became the company's star composer, creating a series of incredible masterpieces such as *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. With *Rite of Spring* however, he created something entirely new, exciting and, as it turned out, highly controversial! This became the most talked-about piece of music when a riot broke out at the first performance.

What was it that caused such chaos? The music in this performance creates a little magic. As we listen and watch, the music uses the sounds of the orchestra – from the beautiful to the bold, the dramatic and even sometimes, the scary – to conjure up a celebration of Spring.

Presented in two parts, the narrative behind what is one of the most famous and influential, not to mention complex and controversial pieces of classical music, is surprisingly simple. It tells of an ancient tribe celebrating the coming of spring by watching as a sacrificial virgin, dances herself to death.

Part One: The adoration of the Earth is the section in which we meet the tribe and the spring atmosphere is conjured.

Part Two: The Sacrifice is the grisly bit in which our unfortunate maiden whirls and gyrates to an untimely demise.

While it starts quite calmly, the music showing us the glint of sunshine on water, blossom fluttering on a breeze, a bird or two, flitting and twittering, the music suddenly switches to a driving rhythm in the strings. As the curtain rises a group of ancients sits in a circle ready to begin the ceremony of Springtime in which a young maiden is selected to be a sacrifice – to dance and dance until, shockingly, she falls.



The combination of the sometimes-brutal music from Stravinsky and the story of a young girl dancing herself to death was just too much for the original audience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This very brief synopsis is drawn from programme notes for the MSO performance designed for the younger members of the audience. The link to these notes is:

https://issuu.com/melbsymphony/docs/discovery_guide_-_stravinsky_double_bill

Download , then scroll through to pages 6-8.

The snippet we watch and listen to is the opening orchestral introduction to Act 1 and the first three dances: Augurs of Spring, Ritual of Abduction, and Spring Rounds. Movements in the ballet sections are continuous but the commencement of each dance is these intervals:

Augurs of Spring @ 3 mins 5 secs, Ritual of Abduction @ 6mins 20secs; Spring Rounds @ 7 mins 40 secs.

The recording is from a 2008 production by the Mariinsky Ballet. The YouTube link for the complete Ballet is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-3wl3Upvpw&t=557s>

If watching the video on YouTube the commencement of each of the three dances occurs 1 minute 15 seconds later than the intervals given above.

Bohuslav Martinu – Madrigals for Violin and Viola



We might term Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959) the “bad boy” of Czech music. Although, historically he belongs in the illustrious line of Smetana, Dvořák, and Janáček, Martinu’s early years were turbulent and full of chaos. One of the most influential men in Czech music pronounced him “unfit” for a teaching career, but by 1920 he had selected a career in music and was playing the violin with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

On performing a work by Albert Roussel, Martinů decided to study with him. From 1923 to 1941, Martinů remained in Paris working with Roussel (with whom he was a kindred spirit), while his own music was gradually gaining favour both at home and internationally.

When Germany invaded France, Martinů and his wife fled to the United States. With New York as his base most of the time, he spent time in New England and elsewhere in Eastern U.S., holding teaching assignments at Tanglewood, the Mannes School in New York, and Princeton University.

Following from a near-fatal fall from a balcony in the summer in 1946, which affected his health and psychology for the rest of his life, Martinů spent the majority of 1947 composing during his recovery. Throughout this time he composed 'Madrigals' - a three movement work for string duo filled with imaginative textures.



Brother and sister duo Joseph & Lillian Fuchs

Avoiding a return to his homeland because of the Communist government, Martinů and his wife eventually did return to Europe in 1953, residing in France and later Switzerland.

The Three Madrigals for violin and viola were completed in New York in July 1947 and dedicated to the violist Lillian Fuchs and her violinist brother Joseph. The three movements or madrigals are: Poco Allegro, Poco Andante and Allegro.

The first Madrigal is playful with a perpetual motion interrupted only to present two engaging themes. These are eventually developed as a climax to the movement.

Martinů's background as a string player and his vast imagination for string music comes to the fore in the Poco andante. At first, mood statements take precedence over melodic themes, though the latter become more important as the movement progresses. Here, too, Martinů's deep love of Renaissance counterpoint surfaces at times, particularly as the movement sweeps toward its finish.

The third Madrigal is dominated by an 18th-century flavor and brief satirical reminiscences of well known music.



Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony is recognizable in the opening passages, and the style of Vivaldi flashes through later ones, although tinged with the harmonic language of Richard Strauss and César Franck. A reprise of the opening ideas wraps up the Madrigals in a fun, jolly mood.



Our performance is by MSO concertmaster Sophie Rowell and violist Christopher Moore.

The YouTube link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvltzH9Odc>

Beethoven – 7 Variations on 'Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen', WoO 46 ...

Beethoven's second set of cello and piano variations on a tune derived from Mozart's Magic Flute was composed in 1801, five years after his previous *Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen* variations of 1796.



In this set, Beethoven picks another simple folk-like tune, a duet between Pamina, who has just learned that Tamino loves her, and Papageno, who laments that he can't even get a Friday-night date. Despite this difference in their amatory status, there is one thing they can both agree on in song, and that is that "Love sure is grand, isn't it?"

The original form of the duet – with each singer presenting the tune separately, then both singing together – is preserved in the variations that follow. Of course, when you are 'covering' a Mozart tune, the bar for wit and elegance is set rather high. So Beethoven is on his best behaviour here, combining the twin virtues of contrapuntal ingenuity and textural variety in the best Austrian tradition. Thus, while fulfilling the formal expectations of the genre – figural ornament, a variation in the minor mode, a lyrical adagio preceding a toe-tapping finale – he makes sure that each variation is as different as possible from its neighbours, by giving each a distinct rhythmic and textural profile.

A good example is the **first variation**, which treats the theme like chopped liver, doling it out in punchy little rhythmic chunks and leaving you dazzled by a musical mosaic that echoes the opening four-note motive in virtually every bar.

Variation 2 can't get enough of runs while **Variation 3** sings the praises of the melodic ornament known as the turn. **Variation 4**, the inevitable minore, takes a walk on the dark side in the unusual key of E flat minor to offer a portrait of psychological fragility and lyrical introspection. Here is where the cello gets to unburden itself emotionally in the deep bass register, accompanied by a rather spooky, bare-bones accompaniment in the piano.

Variation 5 has no time for moping and picks up the pace in a merry game of tag between the instruments. The variations reach their emotional epicentre in the lavishly ornamented and lyrical Adagio of **Variation 6** before the expansive **Variation 7** finale skips its way home – not without a bit of minor-mode turbulence, mind you, in its middle section.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Vancouver Recital Society – Programme Notes for a concert in 2015

We listen first of all to the duet sung by Lucia Popp and Wolfgang Brendel and then the variations by cellist Heinrich Schiff and pianist Francesco Piemontesi.

The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9HY6xZYHnA>

