

1087

BIRMINGHAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

RICHARD STRAUSS

An Alpine Symphony

MOZART PIANO CONCERTO IN D MIN. K.466

SCHUBERT SYMPHONY No. 8 in B MINOR

MONDAY 7th DECEMBER 7.30 p.m.

THURSDAY 10th DECEMBER 7.45 p.m.

GREAT HALL, UNIVERSITY OF
ASTON IN BIRMINGHAM

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

PROGRAMME

BIRMINGHAM ONLY:

MOZART Piano Concerto in D minor K.466
Soloist : Valerie Pither

COVENTRY ONLY:

SCHUBERT Symphony No. 8 in B minor
 (Unfinished)

I N T E R V A L

RICHARD STRAUSS Ein Alpensinfonie Op. 64

BIRMINGHAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
leader Rosalind Page
conductor Kenneth Page

VALERIE PITHER read music at the University of Birmingham, and studied piano with Tom Bromley and William Fellowes at the Birmingham School of Music. She was lecturer at Bishop Otter College of Education, Chichester, and is now teaching in Birmingham with special responsibility for Sixth Form Advanced Level music. She has given recitals at Music Clubs in Nottingham, Chichester and Stourbridge as well as at the Barber Institute and the University of Aston.

KENNETH PAGE has been conductor of the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra since 1959. He is largely known in central England as the chief conductor of Orchestra da Camera but his career has taken him as far away as Seattle in North West America. As a violinist he holds a resident appointment with the Archduke Trio at the University of Leicester where he has been awarded an honorary Master of Music degree. Kenneth Page is also a violin and viola concerto soloist and this season's programmes feature him in this role.

THE BIRMINGHAM PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA is an independent association of musicians who meet each Sunday morning to rehearse an exacting but rewarding concert schedule. The members of the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra are drawn from all walks of life and range from the genuine amateur player to those who teach and perform music as their livelihood.

Year by year the B.P.O. performs a wide variety of music both well and little known. If this year's programmes interest you and you would like to consider joining the orchestra (particularly in the string sections) please apply to either the leader, Miss Rosalind Page (Tel: Coventry 467886) or to the secretary, Mrs Margaret Worsley (Tel: Coventry 612688).

MOZART
(1756-91) PIANO CONCERTO IN D MINOR
K.466

Allegro

Romanze

(*Allegro assai*)

It was Mozart's two minor key concertos that most impressed Beethoven, and nineteenth century concert audiences. Although it is difficult now to see why the others failed to reach a wider public it is easy enough to see why the dramatic qualities of K.466 in D minor and K.491 in C minor proved so popular.

In particular the opening orchestral ritornello of the D minor work has the atmosphere and the key of *Don Giovanni*; the mood is sombre and uneasy. As in many of Mozart's mature works the wind players enjoy a degree of independence, and their reassuring presence as a quartet (two oboes and two bassoons) takes the music into the major tonality. The range of orchestral expression is further refined, elaborated and developed in the role of the soloist, who typically for Mozart begins with new material. The earlier theme remains under the control of the orchestra but the piano adds its own commentary to it.

Mozart left no cadenza though many others have, and Beethoven's own example even today can outrage the purist's ear. In the slow movement Mozart is expansive, but the contrasting central section carries the music forward in its emotional piano part supported by wind instruments. Like the *Romanze* the finale bears no speed indication: early editions usually settle for *Allegro assai*. The scheme is a rondo; and if Beethoven's cadenza for this music is anything to go by he quite obviously felt a strong dramatic urgency in Mozart's writing.

SCHUBERT
(1797-1828) SYMPHONY NO.8 in B minor
The Unfinished

Allegro moderato

Andante con moto

By the end of 1822 Schubert knew he had contracted syphilis and in 1823 he was seriously ill. It is probable that the repugnant associations of so sensitive a man were a major cause for the work being left incomplete. But there are several cases, particularly in the piano sonatas, where he suddenly breaks off composing a finale or in at least one instance an opening allegro. We know this Symphony was never intended to be left as two movements since sketches for a scherzo exist, and we know it was handed to his brother Anselm possibly as a private gift. Although Schumann discovered the Great C major Symphony (which has a stunning finale) on a visit to Anselm in 1839, it was not until 1865 that the *Unfinished* reached the conductor of the Vienna Musikverein's Orchestra and performed in December that year.

The ease in which themes appear in the first movement, each new idea with its distinctive orchestral colouring, is matched by an elaborate development of the opening. These initial bars act as an introduction, but in the *tempo* of the whole movement; and like the *Quartettsatz* (the only work of comparable stature dating from the Autumn of 1822) the first idea is withheld from the re-capitulation, only to reappear with greater emphasis in the coda.

In the Andante Schubert expresses himself with themes of a singing quality in a movement of some length. The gentle opening finds contrast in the grand heroic manner of the first subsidiary idea; likewise the plaintive minor key theme (clarinet over syncopated strings) is followed by its own subsidiary idea, *fortissimo*.

For today's audience the closing bars bring their own satisfaction that seems to eliminate any need for further discussion about the unfinished nature of the work; and it seems strange now that in 1928, marking the centenary of the composer's death, a competition was set up in which composers were asked to complete the work in a convincing style.

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864-1949)

EIN ALPENSINFONIE Op.64
(1911-1915)

Work began on *An Alpine Symphony* immediately after completing what is one of the greatest scores of this century, the opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. Richard Strauss's great period of tone poems had been from 1885-1898, from his debut as soloist in Mozart's C minor Piano Concerto and in the same concert as conductor of his own F minor Symphony. With *Don Juan* and *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), and *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1895) he established himself as an orchestral wizard. There was no stopping him; and in *Symphonica Domestica* (1903) he had portrayed in orchestral terms events in his own home life, including the husband, easygoing, dreamy and fiery in turn, and the wife, lively and joyful!

Programme or descriptive music is often regarded as secondary in importance to pure, abstract expression which leaves the imagery to the individual listener. In reality the greatest descriptive music transcends its programme which is used only as a starting point or as an expression of feeling. Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* is probably the supreme example. Like composers before and since Strauss tended to suppress the written descriptions relating to each symphonic poem; but even so he rides dangerously, and one must add, confidently. His orchestras, as here, are often vast: his scores meticulous. In *An Alpine Symphony*, *Symphonica Domestica* has been simplified, but the scale is enlarged. Its twenty-one sections and its forces of over 150 players, depict a day in the mountains he could see from his study in Garmisch. The craftsmanship of the texture and the splendour of the sound ensure the work's stature in an output of very many fine compositions. Composing was a joy to Richard Strauss.

The work is in one continuous movement and ends where it begins (at Night), naturally rising towards the summit (Vision) before a thunderstorm and the descent. The sections are as follows:

Night. Sunrise. The Ascent. Entering the Woods. Wandering by the Brook. At the Waterfall. Scenery. On Flowering Paths. The Mountain Pasture. Off the Path through Thicket and Undergrowth. On the Glacier. Vision. The Fog Rises. The Sun is Gradually Observed. Elegy. Stillness before the Storm. The Thunderstorm. Descent. Sunset. Sounds. Night.

The symphony is scored for two flutes, two piccolos, two oboes, cor anglais, hecklephone, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, double bassoon, four horns, four tenor tubas, four trumpets, four trombones, two bass tubas, two harps (at least), organ, wind-machine, thunder-machine, glockenspiel, cymbals, bass drum, side drum, triangle, cow bells, gong, celesta, timpani (2 sets), at least eighteen first violinists, sixteen second violins, twelve violas, ten cellos, eight double basses, and off stage, twelve horns and two trumpets.

December 1981