

John Bradbury

John Bradbury was born in Manchester in 1944. Violin tuition at the Royal Manchester College of Music was with Hundre Wolf, Georgy Pauk, Marong Parikian and the late Alexandre Moskowsky of the Hungarian String Quartet. On leaving college in 1966, he joined the B.B.C. Northern Symphony Orchestra, and within three months was appointed Sub-Leader of the B. B. C. Welsh Orchestra and became a member of the Chamber Ensemble of Wales. In 1967 he was appointed Leader of the B.B.C. Midland Light Orchestra and since March, 1970 has been joint Leader of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. As such, he has been able to embark upon a wide range of musical activities including a Wigmore Hall debut in 1971, duo and trio recitals and broadcasts, a world tour with the English Chamber Orchestra and concerto performances throughout Great Britain. John Bradbury was recently elected a Fellow of the Royal Manchester College of Music.

Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra

The Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra is an independent association of local musicians. Some of its members are engaged fulltime in the musical profession, others pursue different occupations during the week and meet for rehearsal every Sunday morning with the common desire to play large-scale orchestral music and to bring it especially to places and people who might otherwise miss the opportunity of hearing it in a live performance. Giving an average of fifteen concerts a year, often with distinguished soloists, they travel as far afield as Leominster, Gloucester, Bedford, Kenilworth, Loughborough and Congleton, as well as playing twice in Birmingham itself, in the Town Hall and at the university of Aston.

The enthusiasm of the orchestra is largely due to Kenneth Page who has been its conductor for the past 16 years. His training and guidance have inspired them to undertake more and more ambitious programmes with increasing success. Since 1968, for instance, each season has included works by Delius - "Paris", "Appalachia", "Sea Drift", "Eventyr", "North Country Sketches", "Song of the High Hills", and in particular "Brigg Fair", which forms part of the orchestra's L. P. stereo Record. Highlights of last year's programmes were Mahler's Fifth Symphony and "Also Sprach Zarathustra" by Richard Strauss. Planned for this year are "Harold in Italy" and "Symphonie Fantastique" by Berlioz, Janacek's "Sinfonietta", the "Dance Rhapsody number 1" and "Florida Suite" of Delius, and Holst's suite "The Planets".

Despite a desperately busy life, Kenneth Page has maintained his resolve to learn all his scores by heart. He is convinced that his sort of conducting cannot be accomplished with a desk and score standing between him and the orchestra. His other activities include his position as Leader and frequent Conductor of Orchestra da Camera and as an eminent violinist in the world of chamber music, particularly in the Archduke Trio, which he founded in 1961.

Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor Kenneth Page
Leader Leslie Bowron
Solo Violin John Bradbury

Presented by
Kenilworth Grammar School
Parents' Association
in the School Assembly Hall
Saturday, October 19th, 1974

The Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor - Kenneth Page Leader - Leslie Bowron
Solo violin - John Bradbury

Prelude to Tannhäuser

Wagner

In his essay "The Overture", published in January, 1841, Wagner elaborates on the ideal function and form of an operatic overture. It should represent the main ideas of the drama, but not try to describe the action in detail, so as to spoil the listener's appetite for what is to come. In his prelude to "Tannhäuser", which appeared four years later in 1845, the composer demonstrates his theory by creating a tone poem of themes from the opera. For his libretto, Wagner combined two German legends set in Thuringia during the thirteenth century, concerning the minstrel knight Tannhäuser's epic struggle between sacred and profane love, represented by the saintly Elizabeth and the goddess Venus. Beginning with the Pilgrims' Chorus, the motifs which form the substance of the overture are Tannhäuser's solemn repentance, the sensual Venusberg music, the hero's impassioned hymn to the seductive Venus, and again the solemn grandeur of the Pilgrims, symbolising the ultimate forgiveness of the knight.

Violin Concerto in E minor

Mendelssohn

Soloist - JOHN BRADBURY

1st movement: Allegro molto appassionato.

2nd movement: Andante.

3rd movement: Allegretto non troppo - Allegro molto vivace.

In the summer of 1844, Mendelssohn went to Soden with his family for a holiday and a rest. He was at the height of his fame and had just conducted six successful concerts for the London Philharmonic Society. At Soden, in an atmosphere of content and relaxation, he completed the violin concerto which he had been shaping in his mind for some years. Not only does the happy circumstance of its composition shed a radiance over the music, but in this work Mendelssohn crystallised with complete assurance his experiment in handling the concerto form. Its exceptionally successful blend of solo instrument and orchestra must be in part due to the composer's close collaboration with the eminent violinist Ferdinand David, to whom he dedicated the work and who gave its first performance at Leipzig on March 13th, 1845.

The solo violin enters in the second bar of the first movement, singing the first theme high above a simple accompaniment before handing it to the orchestra. Clarinets and flutes introduce a more tranquil second subject while the violin holds a low G, then develops and embroiders their melody. The cadenza, written out by Mendelssohn himself, comes at the end of the development - an original touch - then the recapitulation begins

with the orchestra playing the main theme, accompanied by the soloist with figures from the cadenza. The second subject appears for the first time in a minor key, followed by a passionate coda, before a single-note thread on a bassoon leads into the andante. Here the atmosphere is tranquil and serene, rich in the melody of Mendelssohn at his most lyrical. A short allegretto bridge passage links this to the high-spirited, joyous finale. Both themes are gay and exuberant but never is the virtuosity too obvious; both soloist and orchestra handle their material with a light touch. The movement builds up to a bubbling climax until a few bars of emphatic double stopping herald its final flourish.

INTERVAL

Summer Evening

Delius

The brief orchestral sketch of some aspect of nature is a musical form which Delius made peculiarly his own. He does not describe in purely representational detail, but rather gives a musical impression of man's emotional reaction to the natural scene before him. His later works in this genre are justifiably well known, but "Summer Evening" is the earliest of all of them and the composer's original was never published. Sir Thomas Beecham edited the manuscript before he performed it, but his undoubted integrity and respect for this composer's intentions probably mean that he added little more than dynamic markings, which Delius often omitted.

Symphony No. 7 in C major

Sibelius

The composer's first inclination was to call this work "Fantasia Sinfonica". It is the last of his symphonies and, more than any other, it is cast as a single, unified whole. It forms one great movement which nevertheless contains four clearly defined sections, to earn the title of symphony which Sibelius gave it, on second thoughts, on its completion in 1924. The first section is a slow introduction, leading to the next in a fast tempo, then followed by a scherzo and a broad finale on a grand scale.

After a rising scale passage from the strings, with a syncopated accompaniment on double basses, the flutes provide the background to the first subject. Fragmentary motifs shared by strings and woodwind enrich the texture until a quiet, broad passage for strings brings in a second subject. The tension increases with the richness of orchestral sound, building up to the entry of a solo trombone. Gradually the tempo quickens until it reaches vivacissimo and the trombone theme reappears, this time in the minor, to a turbulent string accompaniment. This sombre mood clears in a transition passage which leads to the scherzo and produces several new motifs woven together in ever changing patterns. After a long string passage in characteristic Sibelius style, the trombone theme returns once more and the closing section uses this and the ideas of the slow introduction in repeated but varied ways, first building up a powerful crescendo, then subduing the atmosphere to quietness and leading to a clear, logical conclusion.