

*The
Oxford
Sinfonia*

P R O G R A M M E

8.00 p.m. Saturday 2 December 1989, University Church of St Mary, Oxford (by kind permission of the Vicar and the P.C.C.)

THE OXFORD SINFONIA

(funded by Oxfordshire County Council - Leisure and Arts)

Conductor: Stefan Asbury

Leader: Mariette Richter

THE CHERWELL SINGERS

(Chorus Master: Andrew Carwood)

This concert has been sponsored by Pergamon Press in the context of the support given by the Maxwell Communication Corporation to celebrations of the Bicentenary of the French Revolution.

Overture: La Chasse de Jeune Henri Méhul

Hymne à la Victoire Cherubini

Symphony No 4 in E Major Méhul
(First public concert performance in
Great Britain)

Adagio-Allegro

Andante

Menuet-Trio

Final-Allegro

+++ I N T E R V A L +++
20 minutes

Invocation for choir and orchestra Gossec

Fantasy on Shakespeare's The Tempest Berlioz
for choir, piano duet and orchestra

The next Oxford Sinfonia concert will take place on 31 March 1990 in the University Church. The programme will include Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and Beethoven's Eroica Symphony.

Overture :La Chasse de Jeune Henri Etienne-Nicolas Méhul
(1763-1817)

This famous overture, easily Méhul's most popular work ever since its first performance in 1797, remained an oddity in his career. Ordinarily, he favoured symphonic opera preludes, though always related to the topic of the parent work, and expertly orchestrated. In this hunting piece, Méhul produced a miniature tone-poem. There is no written 'programme'. Instead, the listener's imagination must build its narrative around the various horn signals symbolic of successive stages in the hunt. (Haydn was to create a comparable movement in 'Autumn' of The Seasons just four years later).

The opening Andante in duple metre was interpreted by E.T.A. Hoffmann, in his review of the overture, as 'a sort of pastorale (which) depicts the agreeable serenity of the countryside on a calm night'. This gives way gradually to hunting music, but not before 'the huntsmen, still befuddled with sleep...sink back again into their previous torpor'.

Hymne à la Victoire (1796) Luigi Cherubini
for choir and military band (1760-1842)

Specially-written music for the festivals of the great 1789 Revolution had been heard since the Festival of Federation in 1790. Some of it was routine, but in many cases inspiration and naive fervour blended to produce music that is still enjoyable today. The normal accompaniment was for wind ensemble and percussion, with the clarinets and flutes playing the melodic leading role. Extra sonority for open-air environment was provided by the addition of parts for serpents and neo-classical instruments specially developed for the purpose: tuba curva and buccin. (We have had to forgo these!).

Hymne à la Victoire was composed for the Festival of Thanksgiving and Victories on 29 May 1796. It was performed by personnel of the recently-opened Conservatoire of Music, since one of that institution's prime purposes was to service exactly such occasions. The ceremony took place on the Champ de Mars, decorated with flags, trophies, and emblems celebrating the recent French victories under Bonaparte in Italy. Various pieces of music by Gossec, Méhul, Catel and Louis Jadin were heard as well.

Cherubini's piece is conceived in a grand sweep of melodic energy, but is always responsive to the changing ideas in the words. These factors may remind us as much of Berlioz as of Cherubini's masterpiece Médée (1797).

Symphony No 4 in E major (1810) Méhul
(first public concert performance in Great Britain)
Adagio-Allegro; Andante; Menuet-Trio; Final-Allegro

The discovery of Méhul's lost Third and Fourth Symphonies took place so recently that not even The New Grove Dictionary contains accurate mention of them. After their premieres in 1809-10 Méhul chose not to publish them, but to refine them. (The full story of this process has yet to be discovered). Weakened by the tuberculosis that killed him, Méhul left a fifth symphony incomplete. The manuscripts of the Third and Fourth consist of original performance parts that may never have left Paris, since they were finally located at the Orchestre de Paris, successor of the Conservatoire Concert Society. (The full scores are still lost).

Now that they have been published and recorded, Méhul's symphonies are coming into focus as a major contribution to the genre. For it was not just in France that the immense value of the legacy of Haydn and Mozart caused something of a symphonic shortage in the early 19th century. Beethoven, Méhul and Spohr all explored new approaches that can turn out to be surprisingly similar: use of the cellos; use of enharmonic modulation; use of pizzicato strings; thematic interconnections between movements. The powerful impact of Viennese works was fully absorbed by Méhul, and the lessons of tight thematic structure were used to underpin a unified work both optimistic and personal in character.

Invocation for choir and orchestra F-J Gossec
(1734-1829)

This single-movement piece was probably first heard in 1791 for the impressive funeral procession honouring the memory of Voltaire. The piece was played and sung by the Opéra musicians as the cortege passed by that building. The words, by M.J. Chénier, invoke the 'god of liberty', and are a prayer for the prosperity of France. As a powerful secular canticle, it celebrates the crucial role played by Voltaire in preparing rationally for the overthrow of the Old Order.

Fantasy on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' Hector Berlioz
for choir, piano duet and orchestra (1803-69)

Although properly known as the concluding movement of Léo (the 'mélologue' forming the sequel to Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*), this work was originally a free-standing composition and was first performed in 1830. Miranda's and Ariel's spirits are evoked in the first section; there follow sections depicting the sea storm, Miranda's love for Ferdinand, Caliban's appearance and Prospero's power. The choir of spirits bids farewell to Miranda and the work concludes with a supremely unambiguous coda. Tone-poem or

narrative? Overture or imaginary opera? E.T.A. Hoffmann would have had an answer.

David Charlton

THE OXFORD SINFONIA

1st violins:

Mariette Richter
Yoon Hee Park
Mike Riley
Valérie Chardon
Liz Julier
Paul Johnson
Mike Garrod
Tim Jones

2nd violins:

Steven Pringle
Jane Terepin
Ingalo Thomson
Hyang Sook Yoo
Liz Beynon
Penny Tyack

Violas:

Andrew Chadwick
Jane Hollery
Annika Ekedahl
Jennifer Hay

Cellos:

David Julier
Margaret Chadwick
Eleanor Mathews
Sue Hipkiss

Basses:

Saffron Young
Toni Rogers

Flutes:

Christine Woodward
Amanda Kaye

Oboes:

Michael Stinton
Margaret Malpas

Clarinets:

Clare Powell
Malcolm Sadler

Bassoons:

Stephen Cooper
Jonathan Ross

Horns:

John Bleach
Julian Morris
Timothy Barrett
Bernard Lovell

Trumpets:

Garry Howarth
Paul Mummery

Cornets:

Sara Lambert
Clare Tritton

Trombones:

Aidan Chamberlain
Paul Macey
Andrew Godfrey

Tuba:

Nigel Chamberlain

Timps & Percussion:

Shirley Hill
David Pett

Piano:

David Findlay

STEFAN ASBURY began his musical training studying composition with Oliver Knussen at the Junior Department of the Royal College of Music. In 1983 he was awarded a music scholarship at Christ Church Oxford, and whilst there studied conducting with George Hurst. After graduating in 1986 he returned to the RCM and studied with Norman Del Mar and Christopher Adey, winning both the Theodore Stier and August Manns Conducting prizes at the end of his first year. In 1987 he was awarded the Opera Conducting Scholarship, and at the conclusion of his studies the Michel Mudic Opera Conducting Prize and the Dulcie Nutting Choral Conducting Prize. He was invited back to conduct Ethel Smythe's Fete Galant last summer. Future plans include a tour of twentieth century music with Jane Manning, and a tour of Australia and New Zealand with the Oxford University Chamber Orchestra.