
Aurora Orchestra and Chloë Hanslip

Aurora Orchestra
Chloë Hanslip violin
Nicholas Collon conductor

Caroline Shaw (b.1982)
Entr'acte (2011, adapted 2014) 12'

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)
Violin Concerto No.2 in G minor, Op.63 (1935) 30'
i. Allegro moderato
ii. Andante assai
iii. Allegro, ben marcato

INTERVAL

Nicholas Collon with Aurora Orchestra:
A Musical Introduction to Mendelssohn's 'Italian Symphony' 15'

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)
Symphony No.4 in A, Op.90, 'Italian' (1833–4) 30'
i. Allegro vivace
ii. Andante con moto
iii. Con moto moderato
iv. Saltarello: presto

Caroline Shaw: Entr'acte

Caroline Shaw's music is distinguished by both a lucid clarity and a creative, questing sonic imagination. Whether writing for voices or instruments (she is a professional singer and violinist), she utilises what are rather forbiddingly labelled 'extended techniques'. Far from being modernist shock and awe, these are simply imaginative if unconventional splashes of instrumental colour, the pitchless rustling noise from the lightest of finger pressure on the string, for example. As her website biography puts it, she is 'trying to imagine a world of sound that has never been heard before but has always existed'.

Entr'acte, originally for quartet, was inspired by a performance of a Haydn string quartet. She says it's 'like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further.' But to this listener it also recalls the voluptuous beauty and playful improvisatory air of a Renaissance fantasia; 'like the lute stop on a harpsichord' she says of a particular part bowed, part pizzicato effect. The score is littered with poetic, non-Italian performance instructions – 'like granite', she describes the second section, and later demarcates a drooping, mini downward glissando as 'like a little sigh'. The score is a blend of both meticulous precision and the absence of precision – as a performer herself, she knows where discipline meets interpretation, and where rigour needs freedom. 'Feel free,' she writes of the cello coda, 'to roll the chords extra luxuriously where needed for technical or aesthetic reasons.' The gently surging opening material is elaborated with pizzicato cross-rhythms (reminiscent of another quartet, by Ravel). The work returns to its arresting opening material, and is completed by that spellbinding solo coda, marked by the composer 'like recalling the fragments of an old tune or story.'

Sergei Prokofiev: Violin Concerto No.2 in G minor

This concerto was the last piece Prokofiev wrote before he settled permanently in the Soviet Union. Perhaps his imminent return, and his self-confessed search for a 'new simplicity' in his music – one that might find more favour with Soviet audiences (and authorities) – was on his mind. Restraint, a formal Classical structure and an abundance of memorable melodies replaces the biting rhythms and spicy dissonance of some of his earlier music. It was written at around the same time as his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, and comparisons with the ballet's musical language – its lush Romanticism, lyricism and rhythmic vitality – are inescapable.

The work begins in simplicity itself; alone with its thoughts, the solo violin spins a brooding melody based on the most basic of musical building blocks, a minor key arpeggio, a 'broken chord'. The orchestra murmurs its approval, imitating and overlapping that obsessive opening. Sighing flutes and oboes in tandem with rocking clarinets eventually herald a sumptuous second theme. This soaring melody and its energetic elaboration seem destined to propel the movement to an upbeat conclusion, but it ends instead with drooping horns, then the dull thud of a bass drum underneath the soloist's pizzicato chords. The second movement is the more tranquil sibling of the impulsive, fretful first. A ticking

accompaniment sets the mood, plucked strings magically doubled by clarinets in broken chords, this time in a major key. Over it, the soloist sings a languorous melody. A mysterious chromatic passage with muted strings and gently propulsive accents heralds a genial faster passage reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*. The movement ends with one of many inspired touches of orchestration: the soloist now becomes the slowly plucking accompanist, a barely audible bass drum adds resonant warmth, and a brief, mellow duet for clarinet and solo double bass leads us home.

The soloist launches the good-humoured rondo finale – a gruff polonaise with trip hazards, invigorated by frequently changing metre – from three, to two, to seven beats in a bar – and by the clack of castanets – which may be a nod to its premiere in Madrid. The concluding bars, following an athletically-leaping soloist dancing over a 5/4 bass line, are marked 'tumultuoso', the moody uncertainty of the concerto's opening long-since banished.

Felix Mendelssohn: Symphony No.4, 'Italian'

Mendelssohn the psychogeographer? Psychogeography, a 20th-century concept, is usually associated with literature and philosophy, and more commonly applied to specific localities as opposed to a whole nation. So is it too much of a stretch to see this symphony as an early 19th-century example of the term? The French writer Guy Debord defined it as the interpretation of 'specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'. When Mendelssohn travelled to Italy in 1830, like Handel before him, and Tchaikovsky afterwards, he quickly fell under its spell. 'This is Italy!' he wrote to his father 'and now has begun what I have always thought ... to be the supreme joy in life. And I am loving it.' This symphony, written by a German, is not explicitly programmatic, nor pictorial (Mendelssohn saved that for his watercolour sketches – he was a respectable amateur painter). But it does feel undeniably 'Italianate': a response to the plains, mountains and coastlines, the art and architecture of its great cities, the joy and solemnity of its secular and religious traditions; it is a symphony bathed in the warmth and clear light of its Mediterranean climate.

The first movement pings into life with irrepressible energy; a pizzicato chord, chattering winds and a buoyant theme in the strings, and we are in the thick of a *moto perpetuo*, a whirling dance of almost unblemished high spirits – Mendelssohn once described it as 'blue sky in A major'. Occasionally clouds scud across the sky – twists into the minor key that cast the briefest of shadows. But sunny optimism reigns, and its concluding pages are marked 'piu animato' (more animated). As if it could get any livelier!

Mendelssohn witnessed the Easter festivities in Rome, as well as the coronation of Pope Pius VIII, and the Symphony's second movement is widely regarded as representing a religious procession, from Rome perhaps – or maybe from further south: in a letter to his sister Fanny he wrote 'I have not found anything for the slow movement yet, and I think I will save that for Naples.' Its prevailing solemnity (a



Felix Mendelssohn: Amalfi Coast, 1831, watercolour

devotional in D minor) is punctured by a switch to a major-key melody during which the ever-present trudge of cellos and basses ('always quietly and staccato' insists Mendelssohn) briefly falls silent. In its steady tread, grainy, dark-hued texture (the primary melody is first given to violas, unison oboes and bassoons), and the return to its sombre opening, it has echoes of the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh. It's also a forerunner of the penultimate movement of Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony, a movement explicitly described as an ecclesiastical ritual, albeit from more northern climes.

A minuet and trio of easy charm follow. As elsewhere in this symphony, the winds are prominent – the mellifluous horn calls of the middle section give it a pastoral air. The finale is marked *saltarello*, a lively Italian folk dance in triple time (from the verb *saltare* – to jump). Mendelssohn signs off his love letter to Italy with the energy and exuberance of its people. And perhaps their melancholy traits too; shortly before the end, woodwinds intone a plaintive minor key echo of the symphony's sunlit opening, bringing us full circle.

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Aurora Orchestra

Violin 1 Alexandra Wood, Marcus Barcham-Stevens, Peter Liang, Maria Spengler, Elizabeth Cooney, Katharina Paul, Naoko Keatley, Anna Caban, Sijie Chen

Violin 2 Jamie Campbell, Elvira van Groningen, Hannah Bell, Gillon Cameron, Ana Do Vale, Alexandra Lomeiko, Elise Scheurer

Viola Kinga Wojdalska, Kay Stephen, Hannah Shaw, Anna Barsegjana, Kasia Ziminska

Cello Sébastien van Kuijk, Reinoud Ford, Ben Chappell, Ariana Kashefi

Double Bass Ximo Clemente, Lucía Polo Moreno, Samuel Rice

Flute Fiona Kelly, Clare Jefferis

Oboe John Roberts, Katie Bennington

Clarinet Adam Lee, Massimo Di Trolio

Bassoon Amy Harman, Dominic Tyler

Horn Annemarie Federle, Joel Ashford

Trumpet Russell Gilmour, Sam Kinrade

Timpani Elliot Gaston-Ross