

Total performance time: approximately 140 minutes, including an interval of 30 minutes

Sinfonia of London

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Charlie Lovell-Jones violin

John Wilson conductor

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Op.34 (1945)

17'

William Walton (1902–1983)

Violin Concerto (1939, rev. 1944)

29'

- i. Andante tranquillo*
- ii. Presto capriccioso alla napolitana*
- iii. Vivace*

INTERVAL

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Symphony No.2 in E minor, Op.27 (1907)

60'

- i. Largo – Allegro moderato*
- ii. Allegro molto*
- iii. Adagio*
- iv. Allegro vivace*

In each work in this programme, there is a palpable sense of a composer settling firmly into their groove, exploring many of the tropes and styles for which they are now recognised. Britten goes to town with his favourite form of theme and variation, overflowing with evident glee in working out the fiendish counterpoint at the conclusion. Walton's sumptuous Violin Concerto was described by his friend Hubert Foss as 'echt-Walton' (variously translated as real, authentic, genuine). And Rachmaninoff, after a period of critical disappointment, emerged with the most extravagant feast of melody of his entire career in Symphony No.2.

As it says on the tin, **Britten's** *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is a thorough-going tour of the modern orchestra, explicit in its aims of exploring both collective orchestral sound and the individual characteristics of instruments. While nowadays it is most commonly heard in the concert hall, it was originally commissioned as a film by the Ministry of Education. Simply entitled *Instruments of the Orchestra*, the piece showcased the immaculately turned out London Symphony Orchestra, conducted and narrated by Sir Malcolm Sargent who introduced the viewers to each section of the orchestra in turn.

Its subtitle is 'Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell', taking the main theme from Purcell's incidental music to *Abdelazer*, a play by Aphra Benn. After the theme is played for the first time, the orchestra breaks into its constituent parts: wind, brass, strings and a full artillery of percussion. In the variations that follow, individual instruments get their chance to shine and Britten exploits the particular qualities that appealed to him: the melancholy of the oboe, the liquid versatility of the clarinet, the 'lusingando' – or 'flattering' – beauty of the cello. He also enjoys himself writing for unusual combinations of instruments, such as a jaunty tuba accompaniment to the clarinet, the harp paired with gently clashing cymbals and ceremonial gong, and the percussion taking solo spots over a Spanish guitar-like string band. The dazzling finale consists of an elaborate fugue beginning with piccolo and flute, then becoming more and more complex, until Purcell's original theme emerges, triumphantly, from the brass.

In the late 1930s **Walton** was riding high. Recent successes included his First Symphony, *Belshazzar's Feast* and the Viola Concerto and, although recovering from recent hernia surgery, he was recuperating in the idyllic surroundings of the Amalfi coast when he began his Violin Concerto in 1938. It was a commission from the eminent violinist Jascha Heifetz, and Walton completed it in 1939 – coincidentally the same year Britten produced his own Violin Concerto. Unlike his younger contemporary, Walton was not a composer who wrote easily or fluently, and he was said to envy Britten's prolificness and speed. Paradoxically, perhaps, while Britten's Concerto is darkly disturbing and ambivalent, Walton's is often suavity itself, though not without its own internal conflicts.

The structure of an opening slow movement followed by two quicker ones is shared with Walton's Viola Concerto (1929). But where the earlier work was often melancholy and unsettling, the opening of the Violin Concerto has a lush, luxurious beauty, its exquisite principal melody

examined and explored from all angles. A spikier mood periodically intrudes, including a brief, biting solo cadenza. The boisterous second movement is subtitled 'Presto capriccioso alla napolitana' in homage to its Italian birthplace. The solo violin scampers frenetically, often tussling with sections of the orchestra, or leading them down a diversionary path into a different musical landscape. The bulk of the music is in a fiery 'tarantella', the composer seemingly inspired by (or thankful to have survived) a tarantula bite he received during its composition, while a contrasting 'Canzonetta' shimmers at the upper end of the violin's register. The finale alternates a punchy, Shostakovich-like march with more lyrical interludes, leading to a lightly accompanied cadenza and fragments from the rest of the concerto. Walton brilliantly manipulates the momentum in this rich, complex movement, generating an entirely satisfying sense of closure by the final bars.

Rachmaninoff's Symphony No.2 is one of his best-known works, celebrated for its apparently endless melodic invention and skilful orchestration, and for being the longest pre-Soviet era Russian symphony. The composer's gift for lusciously-scored melody is almost irrepressible here; even in the lively Scherzo listeners are treated to one of his best. Yet the opening motif – two notes, a semitone apart – creeps out of the blocks almost stealthily, followed by a first-violin tune that begins as though halfway through a thought. The opening two notes are played in the low strings, followed by woodwind, and germinate the motivic material for most of the symphony, testament to Rachmaninoff's ability, as David Fanning has put it, to 'spin material out from seemingly unpromising sources'.

The first movement 'proper' begins after 68 bars, heralded by a melancholy cor anglais solo, and the theme here is a clear descendant of the opening pair of notes. There is a contrasting major section infused with Rachmaninoff's own trademark Romanticism, with little touches palpably borrowed from his Second Piano Concerto. The Scherzo begins with great effervescence and a nod to the Dies irae ('Day of wrath', from the requiem mass) plainchant in the horns. It is in a complex-seeming ABACABA form, with skilful transitions between the contrasting elements. 'B' is brief, but memorably sensuous; while 'C' is a hectic fugue shared across the orchestra and including a wonderfully-placed march section in the brass.

The famous third movement begins unobtrusively, but blossoms into one of Rachmaninoff's most famous themes. This tune – which has inspired several popular songs, including Eric Carmen's 'Never Gonna Fall in Love Again' – lasts a surprisingly short time at its first appearance (though it will return). A wonderfully-wrought, seemingly endless clarinet melody follows, then a recapitulation of material from the first movement, explored by the whole orchestra. The finale has a carnival atmosphere, bustling with a dance-like tarantella, a march, another knock-out tune and – later on – a brilliant intervention from the bells. The Symphony then races towards the finish line in glorious, epic style.

Flute Amy Yule [piccolo], Imogen Royce, Diomedes Demetriades [piccolo]

Oboe Tom Blomfield, Imogen Davies

Cor anglais Peter Facer

Clarinet Chris Richards, James Gilbert

Bass clarinet Katy Ayling

Bassoon Daniel Jemison, Dominic Tyler

Horn Christopher Parkes, Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans, Christopher Gough, Jonathan Durrant, Zoë Tweed [assistant]

Trumpet James Fountain, Matthew Williams, Aaron Akugbo

Trombone Peter Moore, Jonathan Hollick, James Buckle

Tuba Dave Kendall

Timpani Matthew Hardy

Percussion Sam Walton, Owen Gunnell, Paul Stoneman, Alex Neal, Fiona Ritchie, Elsa Bradley

Harp Sally Pryce

Violin 1 – Britten / Walton

John Mills, Ciaran McCabe, Andrew Harvey, Beatrice Philips, Samuel Staples, Katerina Nazarova, Ruth Rogers, Jack Greed, Julia Ungureanu, Dan-Iulian Drutac, Emily Davis, Djumash Poulsen, Juliette Roos, Magnus Johnston

Violin 2 – Britten / Walton

Michael Trainor, Jens Lynen, Victoria Gill, Zahra Benyounes, Steven Wilkie, Michael Jones, Greta Mutlu, Marciana Buta, Harry Kneeshaw, Mitzi Gardner, Francesca Barritt

Violin 1 – Rachmaninoff

John Mills, Charlie Lovell-Jones, Ciaran McCabe, Andrew Harvey, Beatrice Philips, Samuel Staples, Ruth Rogers, Jack Greed, Katerina Nazarova, Emily Davis, Julia Ungureanu, Dan-Iulian Drutac, Juliette Roos, Magnus Johnston

Violin 2 – Rachmaninoff

Michael Trainor, Jens Lynen, Victoria Gill, Zahra Benyounes, Steven Wilkie, Michael Jones, Greta Mutlu, Marciana Buta, Harry Kneeshaw, Mitzi Gardner, Francesca Barritt, Djumash Poulsen

Viola Edgar Francis, Ben Newton, Vicci Wardman, Rebecca Chambers, Matthew Quenby, Joel Hunter, Lydia Northcott, Carol Ella, Asher Zaccardelli, Luca Wadham

Cello Jonathan Aasgaard, Tim Lowe, Jessie Ann Richardson, William Clark-Maxwell, Max Calver, Rowena Calvert, Leo Popplewell, Eliza Millett

Double bass Philip Nelson, Will Duerden, Simo Vaisanen, Evangeline Tang, Harry Atkinson, Marianne Schofield