

Friday 27 August | Nos Wener 27 Awst 7.30pm

St David's Cathedral | Eglwys Gadeiriol Tyddewi

WELSH NATIONAL OPERA ORCHESTRA

DAVID ADAMS concert master | cyfarwyddwr a chyngerddfeistr

ISABELLE PETERS soprano

Beethoven *Leonora Overture No.3 in C major, Op 72b*

Richard Strauss *Morgen! Op 27 No.4*

Beethoven *Symphony No.4 in B flat major, Op 60*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Overture: Leonore No.3 Op.72b

The history of Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio* is impossibly complicated! At its first performance in Vienna on October 20th, 1805 it was called *Leonore* (and subtitled 'The Triumph of Married Love') and prefaced by the Overture we now know as Leonore No.2 – Leonore is the heroine! This event was a disaster and Beethoven realised that urgent revision was essential – so a second version (now in two and not three acts) was unveiled at the same Theater an der Wien on March 29th, 1806 and this had Leonore No.3 (tonight's) as its Overture (basically a re-write of No.2). Only marginally more successful, Beethoven nevertheless left it at that for the time being – after all, Vienna was being invaded by Napoleon's army and, ironically, many French soldiers had been in the audience for an opera whose German libretto started life in France as a 'rescue-drama'. The prospect of a performance in Prague in 1808 led him to compose yet another new overture – confusingly known now as Leonore No.1 – but this event never happened and so that overture languished unperformed. Beethoven eventually returned to his bruised but beloved score one more time and this final version was given at Vienna's Karnertortheater on May 23, 1814. It was now re-titled *Fidelio* (Leonore's name when disguised as a male prison guard) and the brand-new short-sharp overture is the one we actually *call* Fidelio.

So what was wrong with Leonores 2 and 3? In brief, they were far too long. Each lasts a good 15 minutes, at a time when operatic overtures were normally no more than 10 and often less – think of *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* or *Così fan tutte*. Their function, by now, was partly to settle the audience in mood and also to introduce the action to come. But time can be a very peculiar thing – and 15 minutes in the concert-hall can seem much longer in a darkened theatre with an audience waiting eagerly (or impatiently) for curtain-up. Beethoven was simply showing his idealistically burning ambition here, but forgot that the fickle Viennese theatregoers would probably start chatting and losing interest until they had something to look at. And never one to do things by halves, he also committed a terrible theatrical 'spoiler-alert' by introducing one of the opera's thrilling dramatic highlights – a series of stunning off-stage trumpet-calls – halfway through the overture itself. He was, almost without knowing it, actually inventing the new genre of symphonic poem. And because this Leonore No.3 is a dramatic masterpiece in its own right – it has found its rightful home in the concert-hall: where it tells the opera's story without need of words or any excuse for taking the time to do so.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Morgen! Op.27 No.4 - (Tomorrow!)

Richard Strauss's overwhelming love of the soprano voice took immediate and intimate form when he actually fell in love with the singer Pauline de Ahna when he was 23 (and she 24). He met her in his home town of Munich in 1887 where he initially became her teacher; she then followed him to Weimar when he became conductor at the Weimar Opera and she sang various roles under his baton both there and at Bayreuth. On September 10th, 1894 they got married and after the birth of their son Franz in 1897 she effectively gave up her singing career, apart from the odd appearance in lieder with Strauss at the piano. But she nevertheless remained his eternal muse right up to the immortal Four Last Songs of 1947-8 - and despite being rude, noisy, tactless, snobbish, shrewish – in a word, impossible – they were completely devoted to each other and the immediate family until their respective deaths in 1949 and 1950.

As a bridal gift on the eve of their wedding Strauss presented Pauline with a set of Four Songs, Op.27. After the well-known gems *Ruhe, meine Seele!* (Rest, my Soul), *Cacilie* and *Heimliche Aufforderung* (The Secret Invitation) the group reaches an ecstatically subdued climax with *Morgen*: surely one of the most glorious songs ever composed. It was miraculously written on a single day – May 21st, 1894. The others were underway soon afterwards but he cut things a bit fine in completing *Cacilie* only on the night before the wedding itself! *Morgen* was orchestrated in 1897 for strings (including a prominent solo violin), harp and 3 horns. Although the poet John Henry Mackay has a Scottish name and origins he was brought up from the age of two in Germany and he and Strauss met in Berlin in the early 1890s. The last two poems of the Op.27 set are by him – but we will probably never know if Strauss understood at the time that Mackay was a prominent and proudly active homosexual. So it is more than likely that the two pairs of eyes gazing so wonderingly into each other on the morrow are in fact both male in the poet's mind – but male and female in Strauss's intention. We can now all take our pick as we fancy – and just listen on in silent rapture.

Beethoven

Symphony No.4 in B flat major Op.60

- (i) Adagio – Allegro vivace
- (ii) Adagio
- (iii) Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- (iv) Finale: Allegro ma non troppo

While Haydn enjoyed his last active decade in Vienna as its musical Grand Old Man, his famously 'unruly pupil' Ludwig van Beethoven emerged simultaneously as the Wild Young Turk. Haydn himself happily supported the brash young man in public – giving him a platform on which to play his first piano concertos in concerts when the new 'London' Symphonies (like No.102 heard this afternoon) were first performed for the Viennese. Audiences in Vienna were much more staid than in London and their reactions rather more subdued - but in any event, their notion of the 'standard' symphony in 1800 would certainly have been that of Haydn's last 25 or so and Mozart's last handful: four movements lasting about half-an-hour: fast (maybe a slow introduction) – slow – minuet – fast finale. Beethoven's 1st and 2nd Symphonies – composed and unveiled between 1800 and 1803 didn't veer too far from this template. But with the 3rd – the 'Eroica' – which was first heard in 1805, he broke the mould and transformed the very notion of what a Symphony could be for ever. What his Fourth Symphony could *possibly* be like after this volcanic eruption is a question which has mystified musicians ever since!

One answer is what we know today as the Fifth....which he was soon sketching. But on a late summer holiday in 1806, Beethoven and his friend Prince Lichnowsky visited Count Franz von Oppersdorff at Oberglogau in Silesia. The rich and civilised Count had his own orchestra and they treated Beethoven to a private performance of his 2nd Symphony. At the do afterwards – so the story goes – Count Franz commissioned Beethoven to write the 4th specially for him, with a big fee as inducement! In the event he got his Symphony and its dedication, even though the private premiere followed in March 1807 at Prince Lobkowitz's Palace in Vienna- the prestigious venue where the 'Eroica' had also enjoyed its premiere two years previously. In scale, however, the 4th reverts to the outline of the 2nd – but it would be a complete mistake to think of it as any sort of retrenchment. There is mystery, might and mastery here in a mature realignment of what the Symphony had been pre-Eroica. The Scherzo gains an extra lap - in an unprecedented repeat of the Trio and a third (abbreviated) run for the 'scherzo' itself - and Beethoven seems, in the athletic and often mischievous finale, to be paying particular tribute to Haydn himself. It was a year later, just after the public premiere of the 4th at the Vienna Burgtheater, that Beethoven saw his teacher for the last time, at what was to be Haydn's final public appearance – a charity performance of *The Creation*. The ailing 76-year old had to be carried out in his chair at the interval – and as the audience parted to allow his progress home (festooned with the ladies' shawls) - who should come and kneel before him and kiss his hands with tears flowing – but Beethoven: the two generations reconciled in farewell and loving homage.



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