

## CONCERT 15 JUNE 2020

Dear WHO members and friends,

As we enter the 'winter of our discontent' with no live music, no MSO (I have written two letters to the Age and the MSO general manager, got no reply from the GM, a reply from The Age but no publication) and, most importantly to us, no WHO, recorded music to maintain our sanity has taken on vital importance. I have spoken to a couple of colleagues who conduct orchestras interstate and they are hoping to resume later this year. Victoria is taking a more conservative approach so we shall have to wait and see. In the interim I will continue to source music for, I hope, your pleasure and edification and put together a weekly concert.

As I mentioned last week, I have been reading a couple of books I have on Anton Dvorak and listening to and studying some of his lesser known works. In the first 50 or 60 years of the 19th century, before LP's became universally available, there were very few Dvorak Symphonies on the shelf and then only the Czech Philharmonic recordings of the last three and a handful of recordings of the New World or Symphony No. 5 in E minor as it was then called. It was not until 1960 that it became known generally that Dvorak, like Beethoven, had actually written nine symphonies. In that year a Czech musicologist named Jarmil Burghauser published a thematic catalog of his works. When the Symphonies were placed in chronological order the old set of numbering didn't make sense.

The new numbering was:

- 1 C minor Op3. 1865
- 2 B flat major Op4 1865
- 3 E flat major Op10 1873
- 4 D minor Op13 1874
- 5 F major Op 24 1875(oldNo3)
- 6 D major Op 60 1880(oldNo1)
- 7 D minor Op 70 1883(oldNo2)
- 8 G major Op 88 1889(oldNo4)
- 9 E minor Op 9 1893(oldNo5)

Dvorak himself numbered his symphonies one to eight, starting with the second. He had submitted the first (C minor) to a music contest and it was never returned. The work was discovered 20 years after his death. Of course, being a musician, he didn't keep a copy!! (no computers, no photo copying in those days!). Only five of his symphonies were published during his lifetime and even then the numbering was confused because Simrock, his publisher, issued numbers 5, 6, 7, and 9 in an incorrect order.

The Third and Fourth Symphonies were published in 1912 and the first two existed in manuscript only until the first was published in 1959 and the second two years later, in 1961. The five symphonies published during his lifetime, 5 to 9, had a great head start in performances but with some justification I believe, as they were the works of a more mature symphonist. But then, the same can be said for Beethoven and Schubert of their nine symphonies. You can see how confusion reigned over the order and numbering of this great composer's work until the 1960s.

Let us now get to his Fourth Symphony. Dvorak began this work in late 1873 and completed it in the first three months of 1874. The previous year (1873) was a turning point in Dvorak's career after the failure of his second opera "King and Collier" and that of his long time relationship with Josefa Cermakova. Feeling disillusioned, he turned his attention to symphonic writing and Josefa's 19 year old sister Anna, a contralto in the Prague National Opera. Both changes worked out as he soon married Anna, quit his job as a viola player in the Opera company and spent all his composing energies on the Fourth Symphony. This time in his life, I believe, saw the first mature awakenings of his great symphonic writing, with the true direction of his composing journey realised. Dvorak now began producing works characterised by a clarity of form, an imaginative elaboration of themes and marvellous transparent orchestration. These were the hallmarks of the great body of works to come. The first movement marked 'Allegro' opens with a rumbling and mysterious ostinato in the lower strings moving swiftly into the lovely melodic and rhythmic first subject. You can hear the foreshadowing of his later symphonies in its lyrical nature as is very much the case in the second subject.

The second movement is a theme and variations. Marked 'Andante' it demonstrates a considerable degree of skill and like his Third Symphony is a salute to his great favourite, Wagner. The Dvorak scholar Alex Robertson described the Third Symphony as a "Wagnerian love-child". At that stage in his life Dvorak seemed besotted with the Wagnerian spell. However, most of the Fourth Symphony seems to reflect the great symphonic writing of Beethoven and Schubert, and Dvorak's move away from opera towards the great German tradition of symphonic writing. In fact later in his career, Brahms became his great mentor.

If I could digress, for a moment, to his relationship with Brahms. Brahms tried to persuade Dvorak to move to Vienna later in his life. "Look here Anton" he wrote "you have a lot of children and I haven't almost anybody. If you need anything, my fortune is at your disposal". He didn't take up the offer. Whereas Dvorak possessed a sincere and almost child-like faith, Brahms looked on things differently. "Such a man such a soul" Dvorak is reported to have uttered "and he doesn't believe in anything, he doesn't believe in anything!".

The Scherzo has been described by some as pure early Verdi complete with offbeat bass drum. Dvorak always had a love of band music, as in his youth his first introduction to music was listening to concerts given by Austrian army bands in the villages of Bohemia. The main theme later shows up in "From the Bohemian Forest" Op 68. This movement was first conducted by Smetana as a stand-alone work shortly after it was finished.

The last movement ends with a brassy March full of confidence after a lovely lyrical second subject. This symphony is so important as it provides a yardstick to this great symphonist's potential and growth, and demonstrates the enormous improvement from his first three works in that genre. It is not performed very often. His early symphonies were relegated to obscurity as they were published after his death. The Fourth was not performed as a complete work for nearly 20 years after publication and is still rarely heard in performance: perhaps WHO could rectify that in the future. There are many great recordings of the whole symphony on YouTube with world famous orchestras and also of the Scherzo as a stand-alone.

The concerto for the week is the guitar concerto by Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo. Born in Valencia in 1902 he suffered blindness from the age of three. Nevertheless, he pursued his studies in Valencia and then in Paris for five years as a pupil of Paul Ducas at the 'Ecole Normale de Musique' after winning a scholarship and further study in Paris and following a period of travel in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, he returned to Spain in 1936 at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Three years later he took up residence in Madrid where the premiere of his "Concierto de Aranjuez" brought him immediate fame. One of the best-known performers and promoters of this work is guitarist John Williams. I well remember him performing this work in the 80s with the MSO at Hamer Hall. The acoustic there, a problem from when the hall was built, necessitated the use of an amplified acoustic guitar which allowed us to push up the dynamic, but in the right acoustic setting the orchestration is of such subtlety that no amplification should be needed. In fact Rodrigo has been especially successful at combining guitar and orchestra in many of his larger works, works of distinctly Mediterranean lyricism, always achieving a delicate balance between solo instrument and full orchestra.

John Williams was born in Melbourne in 1941 and began learning guitar from his father at the age of seven. The family moved to London in 1952 and John was taken to meet the great guitarist Andres Segovia, from whom he learnt at his summer school in Siena. He attended classes there for the next five years, along with study at the Royal College of Music in London. Williams made his London debut in 1958 at Wigmore Hall after which Segovia wrote "a prince of the guitar has arrived in the musical world". There are a few videos of John performing the Adagio on YouTube and a visual of the great guitarist Pepe Romero, but listen to the work and imagine a castle in Spain, tapas and vino. A special hello this week to our intrepid percussion section.

I quote from a book I have, entitled "Know your Orchestra" by Alice Brown published in 1938.

Chapter 5- Percussion.

'Almost anything portable which makes a sufficiently loud and distinct noise when struck or shaken may be admitted to the percussion section of an orchestra'.