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ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY
75th ANNIVERSARY SEASON

GALA CONCERT

BRAHMS

Academic Festival Overture Op.80

BORODIN

Polovtsian Dance No. 17 ('Prince Igor')

CONSTANT LAMBERT

Rio Grande

CARL ORFF

Carmina Burana

SOLOISTS

BARBARA LOWE — Soprano
STEPHEN ROBERTS — Baritone
ROBIN MORRISH — Tenor

GALA ORCHESTRA

Leader: Jane Pamment

PIANISTS

Elsie Jennings and Anthony Smith-Masters

CONDUCTED BY

Derek Watmough

Saturday 24th March 1979 at 7.30 p.m.



Photo: Clive Barba

BARBARA LOWE commenced her singing studies in Derby, where she was born. She later studied at the Royal Academy of Music for four years with Flora Nielson, gaining the Recital Diploma, and winning most of the major singing prizes, including all the opera prizes, and the coveted Elena Gerhardt Lieder Prize. She has also been awarded the Worshipful Company of Musicians' medal for outstanding work and performance.

Barbara continued to study with Flora Nielsen and M. Pierre Bernac, taking part in Master Classes given by Gerald Moore and M. Bernac, some of which were broadcast. She has sung in recitals and concerts abroad, and has appeared as soloist in choral and orchestral concerts and recitals in many parts of the British Isles, including recitals in the Wigmore Hall and Purcell Room, and has sung in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral. She has broadcast recitals, appeared on television, been a member of the Covent Garden Opera Company and on the teaching staff at the Royal Academy of Music. She also gives illustrated talks on life behind the scenes at Covent Garden at Music Clubs and Societies.

OUR YOUNGEST GUEST ARTIST

Looking to the future we are opening the second half of our concert with a special birthday item — **Stravinsky's Andante and Balalaïka** played by Mark Edwards and Anthony Smith-Masters.



Photo: Manning Photographers

STEPHEN ROBERTS is now recognized as one of the most outstanding young baritones of his generation. He is already well-known in this country both for his recital and oratorio performances. A native of Denbigh in North Wales, he won an Associated Board Scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London where he was awarded many prizes and scholarships including the Agnes Nichols Harty Trophy for the best singer of the year. He also won a Boise Foundation Scholarship and a Countess of Munster Scholarship.

Stephen Roberts has sung at such festivals as Aldeburgh, Bath, City of London, York, as well as the Three Choirs Festival. He broadcasts frequently for the B.B.C. and has made several television appearances, including a B.B.C. 2 relay of Purcell's *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day* from the 1977 Proms. His Prom. appearances include a performance of Schubert's *Missa Solemnis* conducted by Rudolf Kempe. He is also appearing with increasing regularity in all the London concert halls in performances with the Bach Choir, London Mozart Players, B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra and Richard Hickox Orchestra.

Stephen Roberts has given many first performances of works written specially for him by such contemporary composers as Alun Hoddinot, Robin Holloway and Nicola Le Fanu. Although he is still in his early twenties, he already has a formidable list of recordings to his credit. These include C.P.E. and J.S. Bach *Magnificat* and Charpentier *Te Deum* and *Magnificat* conducted by Philip Ledger and Handel's *Messiah* conducted by John Tobin.

Stephen is also very busy abroad and has travelled all over Europe appearing at festivals in Lucerne, Bourdeaux, Barcelona, Israel and Holland. He has also sung in concerts in Carnegie Hall (New York) and the Kennedy Centre (Washington).

AD MULTOS ANNOS

When we celebrated our 60th birthday fifteen years ago a programme for the full season — printed far more sumptuously than this — included among many other items a message of congratulation from the then Mayor. Cllr, John Spare. In it he said "...many of you who lived in the town in 1904 will remember the formation of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society".

Despite the longevity of Tunbridge Wells residents and the fact that Cllr. John Spare is, happily, still very much with us, the harsh mathematics of the passing years makes that statement rather less true now than it was then. Nevertheless, if there are octogenarians in our audience today who can still remember Mr. Foote's first concert, held in May 1905, we salute you and thank you for a long lifetime's support.

That concert deserves a footnote in the history of music-making in Britain for it included the first provincial performance in this country of Brahms' *German Requiem* — the work we chose to start this 75th anniversary season. One of the players in the orchestra was a close friend of the composer and considered that the interpretation was exactly as Brahms himself would have wished.

For our programme today, as befits a celebratory occasion, we have chosen works characterised by sparkle and brilliance rather than profundity. Indeed, we had hoped to match Constant Lambert's *Rio Grande* with a performance of Walton's *Facade* which, among other things, would have given us an opportunity of welcoming, in addition to our distinguished soloists Barbara Lowe and Stephen Roberts, a no less familiar figure — Richard Baker. Unfortunately, a recent re-arrangement of BBC news reading schedules has made this impossible, so we must keep this idea in store for a future occasion.

Brahms wrote two concert overtures during a summer holiday spent at Bad Ischl in 1880, the *Academic Festival Overture (Op.80)* and the *Tragic Overture (Op.81)*. As their names suggest, the two works are totally different in both content and style. The first was intended by Brahms as a graceful tribute to Breslau University and to mark the honorary doctorate of philosophy which had been conferred on him. After a lengthy, somewhat processional introduction, we hear a number of students' tunes — some original, others traditional — which culminate in a resounding orchestral version of *Gaudeamus igitur* to which, it is said, the students of Breslau responded with riotous enthusiasm. What the professors thought has not been recorded.

The *Polovtsian Dances* provide the climax to Act II of Alexander Borodin's dramatic opera *Prince Igor*, in which two great forces — Slavonic and Tartar — are represented on stage and in the music itself. Igor has been defeated in battle by the nomadic Asiatic chieftain Khan Konchak, who thoughtfully orders a great entertainment in order to raise the spirits of his captive. The brilliant choral dance is part of a very familiar sequence which has been much plagiarised (or perhaps, as this is a birthday celebration, we should be charitable and use the word 'adapted' instead) in recent years.

It is a melancholy reflection on the state of musical scholarship in France that one can turn to the current edition of the Larousse music encyclopaedia and search in vain for the name of Constant Lambert. Yet as composer, conductor and, indeed, author, this brilliant and mercurial figure exercised a most profound influence on musical life in England between the two wars. His concert piece *Rio Grande*, written in 1929, is a setting of a poem by Sacheverell Sitwell which evokes the exotic, lush warmth of Brazil:

By the Rio Grande
They dance no sarabande

On level banks like lawns above the glassy, lolling tide;
 Nor sing they forlorn madrigals
 Whose sad note stirs the sleeping gales
 Till they wake among the trees and shake the boughs,
 And fright the nightingales;
 But they dance in the city, down the public squares,
 On the marble pavers with each colour laid in shares,
 At the open church doors loud with light within,
 At the bell's huge tolling,
 By the river music, gurgling, thin
 Through the soft Brazilian air.

Like his sister, Edith, Sacheverell Sitwell is often concerned as much with the sounds of words as their sense, and it is these sounds which Lambert uses to brilliant effect in his rhythmically complex score:

The Comendador and Alguacil are there
 On horseback hid with feathers, loud and shrill
 Blowing orders on their trumpets like a bird's sharp bill
 Through boughs, like a bitter wind, calling
 They shine like steady starlight while those other sparks are falling
 In burnished armour, with their plumes of fire.
 Tireless while all others tire.
 The noisy streets are empty and hushed is the town
 To where, in the square, they dance and the band is playing;
 Such a space of silence through the town to the river
 That the water murmurs loud
 Above the band and crowd together;
 And the strains of the sarabande,
 More lively than a madrigal,
 Go hand in hand
 Like the river and its waterfall
 As the great Rio Grande rolls down to the sea.

So eloquently is poetry and music matched throughout this remarkable work that we can indeed

*Hear this enchantment
 Of the soft Brazilian air....*

No contemporary piece has enjoyed more spectacular success since 1945 than Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, nor — to be fair — has any modern work aroused more heated controversy. When we first presented this Cantata in 1975 we used the scaled-down version for percussion and two pianos: today we shall hear the full orchestral score, to bring our birthday celebration to a *fortissimo* climax.

As is well known, Orff has taken as his text a selection of secular medieval writings in corrupt Latin and German which depict a single turn in the Wheel of Fortune — a theme which is reflected by the cyclical form of the work itself. The first two pieces are a lament, rather than an invocation, to the goddess Fortune — 'Empress of the World' — which lead to the first main section, in praise of Spring and of Love.

The second section 'In Taverna' opens with an extract from the Confessions of the Archipoeta which is followed by a painful lament from a roast swan and the wicked liturgical parody *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis*. After a vigorous hymn of praise to wine and good companionship in drinking, we return to amorous themes in the section *Cour d'Amours* which reach their climax in a triumphant salute to Helena, loveliest of all. A repetition of the opening chorus *O Fortuna* brings the wheel full circle and the Cantata to an end.

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