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Coleridge-Taylor Violin Concerto


24-25 Oct 2024



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Coleridge-Taylor Violin Concerto

Thursday 24 October, 2pm, The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

Friday 25 October, 2pm, City Halls, Glasgow

DVOŘÁK Romance

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR Violin Concerto

Interval of 20 minutes

SCHUBERT Symphony No 2

Anthony Marwood Director / Violin



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WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Romance, Op 11, B 39 (1877)

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR (1875-1912)

Violin Concerto, Op 80 (1912)

Allegro maestoso

Andante semplice - Andantino

Allegro molto - Moderato

SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Symphony No 2 in B major, D 125
(1814-15)

Largo - Allegro vivace

Andante

Menuetto: Allegro vivace

Presto

If there's one thing that brings together the three pieces of music in today's programme, it's – sad to say – a degree of neglect, and a sense that they've been somewhat overlooked. That's not to imply that there's anything second-rate or unworthy of attention here – quite the opposite. Antonín Dvořák's tender Romance might be seldom heard in concert programmes, but that's more to do with its brevity, and the fact that it's often overshadowed by longer and more ambitious pieces for violin and orchestra. Similarly, the 17-year-old Franz Schubert's Second Symphony (along with many of his early symphonies) was long dismissed as a mere student exercise. Simply experiencing its disarming melodies and its turbulent drama, however, makes you immediately aware of its value, and of the distinctively Schubertian qualities it exhibits. In the case of today's central piece, however, any neglect that Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto encountered has probably far more to do with prevailing attitudes with classical music, and within society more generally – a subject we'll return to shortly.

But let's start with today's opening piece. Antonín Dvořák was the principal viola player in Prague's Bohemian Provisional Theatre Orchestra for nine years, from 1862 to 1871, during the early stages of his musical career. He clearly enjoyed and valued the experiences that the role offered him: he found performing under Richard Wagner in 1863 a profoundly inspirational experience, and he also took part in the premiere production of Bedřich Smetana's comic opera *The Bartered Bride* in 1866. In 1871, however, he took the gamble of devoting himself full-time to composition, and left the Orchestra.



Antonín Leopold Dvořák

In 1871, Dvořák took the gamble of devoting himself full-time to composition, and left the Orchestra.

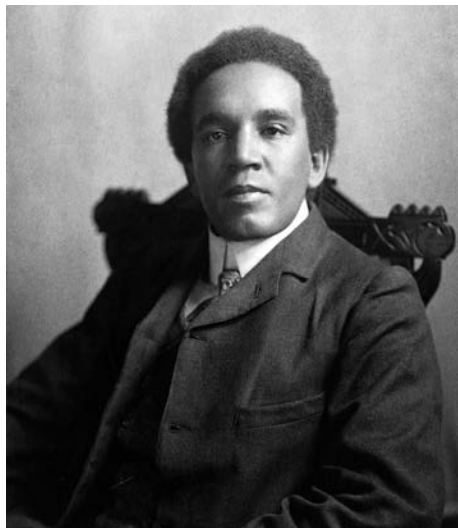
With the warm support of fellow composer Johannes Brahms, things would go well for Dvořák. In 1877, now better known and gaining recognition, he was asked to compose a piece for the Orchestra in which he once played, specifically to showcase the talents of its leader, Josef Markus. The new piece would be premiered at the Orchestra's annual December performance in Prague's Žofín Palace, in a benefit concert to support the institution's pension association.

For the occasion, Dvořák composed – well, not entirely a new piece, it has to be said. His Romance, which you hear this evening, stole heavily from the slow movement of his String Quartet No 5, which he'd written in 1873. (In fact, it's even been speculated that he transformed the String Quartet movement into a piece for violin and orchestra, at least partially, around the same time.) To be fair, however, the Romance is hardly just a wholesale lifting of that earlier music: Dvořák

added two new melodies to it, and expanded the music's overall structure as a result.

After a hushed orchestral introduction, which begins magically with just first and second violins unsupported by any other players, an increasingly dense texture is built up from the same folk-like melody. When the solo violin enters, it's with that same melody, and a second main theme is later set against an airy, accompaniment from violins and flute. After a quicker, more unsettled central section, the opening melody returns – first on flute, then on clarinet, then bassoon, before the soloist takes it up. The second main theme only gets a brief look-in before the violin explores showy, exuberant gestures to take the Romance to its calm conclusion.

In 2024, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor is a relatively well-recognised musical figure. Go back just a couple of decades, however, and



Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

few beyond the world of music scholarship would have been aware of his creations. It's ironic, because in his time, Coleridge-Taylor was a widely celebrated figure, admired by Elgar and also Elgar's editor August Jaeger (immortalised as 'Nimrod' in the composer's *Enigma Variations*), who called Coleridge-Taylor 'a genius'. Born in London to an English mother and a father from Sierra Leone, he gained his unusual name because of his mother's love for the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and entered the Royal College of Music at the age of just 15, where he studied composition under Stanford.

In later works, he set out to draw on traditional African music and integrate it into Western classical music – as he felt Brahms had done for Hungarian music, and Dvořák for Bohemian. He held, too, a fascination for Native American culture, at least as evoked by the poet Longfellow, whose *Song of Hiawatha* he transformed into a trilogy of cantatas

which would later pack out the Royal Albert Hall for ten seasons in extravagant ballet versions conducted by Malcolm Sargent. Even before this, Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha* was so acclaimed that it led to three successful tours of the USA, including an invitation to visit President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House. But Coleridge-Taylor's life was cut tragically short by pneumonia in 1912, when he was just 37.

Inevitably, he struggled against racial discrimination. None other than Stanford was appalled by another student's racist slur against Coleridge-Taylor in a Royal College of Music class, reprimanding the offending young man that his fellow student had 'more talent in his little finger' than the rest of the class put together.

Alongside his musical activities, Coleridge-Taylor was also a pioneering Black activist, seeing it as his personal mission to join the struggle for racial equality. He helped organise a 1900 Pan-Africanist conference in London, and was also involved in founding the London-based campaigning newspaper *The African Times and Orient Review*.

Ironically, however, it was in the USA that Coleridge-Taylor found his Black identity and achievements more warmly recognised. On his tours, he was hailed as an iconic Black figure. The *Georgia Baptist* newspaper reported on a concert that Coleridge-Taylor conducted in Washington, DC: 'when Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, of London, walked upon the platform of Convention Hall last Wednesday night, and made his bow to four thousand people, the event marked an epoch in the history of the Negro race of the world.' Nonetheless, his music was allowed to slip quietly from public consciousness after his death. It's only in



Maud Powell

It's the influential US violinist Maud Powell we have to thank for encouraging Coleridge-Taylor to write his only Violin Concerto – the final major piece he composed.

far more recent years that it's undergone a major reappraisal.

And it's the influential US violinist Maud Powell we have to thank for encouraging Coleridge-Taylor to write his only Violin Concerto – the final major piece he composed, in fact. Powell was a pioneering artist herself at the start of the 20th century, giving the US premieres of many violin concertos we know today (by Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, Bruch, Dvořák and others), and she was about a century ahead of her time in actively including music by women and composers of colour in her recitals.

Coleridge-Taylor and Powell first met in November 1898, when Powell was giving her London debut performance, in which she included his *Gypsy Suite*. They first discussed a violin concerto, however, in 1910 at the Norfolk Music Festival in Connecticut. Coleridge-Taylor was there to

conduct the New York Philharmonic, and Powell suggested that he might write a violin concerto for her. He was delighted by the proposition, and put together an initial version based around African-American spirituals, although he later abandoned this first draft (despite sending Powell the score for her thoughts – she agreed). He started again, virtually from scratch, and when Powell received the score of the new and final version, she described it as 'like a bouquet of flowers' and compared Coleridge-Taylor to Dvořák.

There were delays in getting the final score and parts from London to America – musical legend has it that they went down with the Titanic, but they were actually being transported on another ship entirely. Nonetheless, the Violin Concerto was an enormous success at its premiere at the Norfolk Music Festival in June 1912. *Musical America* praised the piece: 'The Coleridge-

Taylor work is fascinating, if not great music. It contains interesting melodic material and piquant rhythms, and it is gratefully written for the solo instrument. Miss Powell played it with all the consummate artistry of which she is mistress.'

Coleridge-Taylor was unable to attend that first performance, and died suddenly just three months later, not surviving long enough to hear the Concerto's UK premiere at the Proms in the Queen's Hall, in October 1912, with Arthur Catterall as soloist – a rather poignant performance that took place just five weeks after the composer's death.

In many ways, Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto is a piece that exists on its own terms, and that takes a distinctively idiosyncratic perspective on the traditional push-and-pull of soloist-versus-orchestra concerto dynamics. Powell herself later remarked: 'I wish somebody would suggest some name besides that of "concerto" to be attached to a composition which is not too serious in its nature... it is not quite a full-grown concerto, nor is it yet a suite.'

A grand, richly orchestrated theme opens the expansive opening movement, with perhaps a hint of African-American spirituals to it. The soloist offers a slightly more intimate version, and orchestra and violinist go on to develop the theme, sounding at times uncannily like music composed by Debussy or Delius. A far quicker, brighter, dancing melody forms the movement's second main theme, but that grand opening theme quickly returns. After a central development section that fractures and blends elements from both ideas, there's a grand restatement of the opening, before a solo violin cadenza set over a timpani roll leads the movement to its conclusion.

Beginning on hushed strings, with no bass to tether them to the earth, the second movement is a nocturnal song with a seemingly airborne melody, plus a more animated central section that begins in the wistful minor. Coleridge-Taylor launches a galvanising dance in the third movement, with a recurring theme that's set between several contrasting episodes. Near the end of the substantial movement, however, the first movement's grand opening theme makes an unexpected return, and it comes back yet again – in rather more transfigured form – to close the Concerto, bringing the music right back to where it started.

From neglect through disregard, we turn to what's probably a case of a rather patronising attitude towards a young person's creations. Franz Schubert's father was a respected schoolmaster in the Lichtental district of Vienna, and though young Franz gained a choral scholarship to study at the city's Stadtkonvikt (or Imperial Seminary), where his teachers included none other than Antonio Salieri, upon graduating he returned home to Lichtental, where his father put him in charge of teaching some of the school's youngest pupils.

Schubert hardly found it inspiring work. But it was paid work nonetheless – and, more importantly, it allowed him to continue twice-weekly composition lessons with Salieri, to play viola in a student orchestra, and to continue composing. He wrote his Second Symphony between December 1814 and March 1815, and dedicated it to the Stadtkonvikt's headmaster, Innocenz Lang. It's likely that the institution's orchestra gave the Symphony its premiere.

Admittedly, the Symphony shows the 17-year-old Schubert consciously grappling



Franz Peter Schubert

The Symphony shows the 17-year-old Schubert consciously grappling with the models of Beethoven and Haydn, and attempting to forge a style all his own.

with the models of Beethoven and Haydn, and attempting to forge a style all his own. It's nonetheless a thoroughly distinctive, memorable piece, full of songful melodies and stormy drama, and quite a remarkably mature achievement for such a young musician.

A ceremonial-sounding slow introduction kicks off the Symphony's first movement, and its main faster section seems to overtly acknowledge Beethoven's *The Creatures of Prometheus* Overture: its quick theme steals in quietly before blazing out across the full orchestra. A slower-moving second main theme is set against a distinctive oscillating, buzzing accompaniment, and both themes return after the movement's intricate but brief central development section.

Schubert's second movement is a set of five variations on an elegant, song-like tune that focus more on colour

and instrumentation than radical transformations of the original theme. The first variation sends the melody to the oboe, with decorations from the flute, while in the second it appears in the cellos and basses. The slightly ironed-out melody appears in horns and oboes in the third variation, while the fourth is an angry, stormy episode in the darker minor, and the fifth returns us to the elegance of the opening.

After a rather gruff, serious minuet for his third movement, contrasted against a more intimate central trio section for solo oboe and thin string accompaniment, Schubert rounds his Second Symphony off with galloping melodies and intense drama in his quicksilver finale. The music hurtles along, propelled forward by incessant rhythms, bringing sudden explosions of drama as it builds to its hearty conclusion.

© David Kettle

Director / Violin

ANTHONY MARWOOD



Anthony Marwood enjoys a wide-ranging international career as soloist, director and chamber musician. Recent solo engagements include performances with the Boston Symphony, St Louis Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New World Symphony, London Philharmonic, Spanish National Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony and Sydney Symphony. He has worked with conductors such as Valery Gergiev, Sir Andrew Davis, Thomas Søndergård, David Robertson, Gerard Korsten, Ilan Volkov, Jaime Martin, Douglas Boyd and Gemma New.

As director and soloist Anthony has appeared with many of the leading chamber orchestras, including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, the Tapiola Sinfonietta, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Les Violons du Roy, Orchestre de chambre de Paris and the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

As a chamber musician he has a wide circle of regular collaborators including Steven Isserlis, Aleksandar Madžar, Inon Barnatan, Alexander Melnikov, Denes Varjon and James Crabb.

Many leading composers have written concertos for him, including Thomas Adès (Anthony also made the first recording of the work, for EMI) Steven Mackey, Sally Beamish and Samuel Carl Adams. Anthony is a prolific recording artist, and his most recent release – his 50th on the Hyperion label – is a recording of Walton's Violin Concerto with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Martyn Brabbins. The disc received wide critical acclaim, including a 5-star review in *The Guardian* and a 'Recommended Recording' in *The Strad Magazine*, whilst the *Sunday Times* described him as "a thrilling, virtuosic soloist".

Anthony is co-Artistic Director of the Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival in East Sussex, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2018. He performs annually at the Yellow Barn Festival in Vermont and enjoys a close association with the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne. He was appointed an MBE in the 2018 Queen's New Year's Honours List and was made a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music in 2013. He uses a bow by Joseph René LaFleur and plays a 1736 Carlo Bergonzi violin, kindly bought by a syndicate of purchasers, and a 2018 violin made by Christian Bayon.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk



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An exciting new chapter for the SCO began in September 2019 with the arrival of dynamic young conductor Maxim Emelyanychev as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor. His tenure has recently been extended until 2028. The SCO and Emelyanychev released their first album together (Linn Records) in November 2019 to widespread critical acclaim. Their second recording together, of Mendelssohn symphonies, was released in November 2023. Their latest recording, of Schubert Symphonies Nos 5 and 8, will be released in November.

The SCO also has long-standing associations with many eminent guest conductors and directors including Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze, Pekka Kuusisto, François Leleux, Nicola Benedetti, Isabelle van Keulen, Anthony Marwood, Richard Egarr, Mark Wigglesworth, Lorenza Borrani and Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen.

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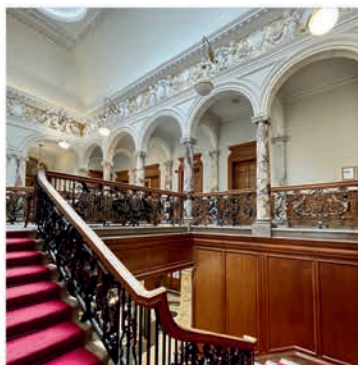
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