

CBSO PROMS

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

1974

Nights at the Ballet

Tuesday 16th July 1974 at 7-30 p.m. Town Hall Birmingham





Harold Gray

Cover: 'Strauss Concert in Heaven', by Theo Zasche. Johann Strauss II is in the centre. The front row of his celestial audience comprises Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Wagner. Behind are Haydn, Johann Strauss I, Lanner, Offenbach, Brahms, Verdi and Bruckner.

CBSO



Leader : John Bradbury

Conductor : **HAROLD GRAY**

Nights at the Ballet

Suite, The Sleeping Beauty Tchaikovsky

*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune Debussy

Faust: Ballet Music Gounod

INTERVAL

Refreshments available in the Basement Hall 6.45-10.0 p.m.

Licensed Bar

Light refreshments available in the Lower Gallery during the interval

Ballet Suite, Horoscope Lambert

Suite, The Firebird (1919) Stravinsky

Patrons are asked not to enter or leave the auditorium while the Orchestra is playing. It would be appreciated if patrons would refrain as far as possible from coughing during the performance

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Floral decorations provided by the Amenities and Recreation Department, City of Birmingham

Symphonic Sketches — an exhibition of musical cartoons — is on view in the Basement Bar throughout the Proms. Hand-coloured copies of the cartoons are for sale. The cartoons are by the Orchestra's resident cartoonist — Jeremy

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra receives financial assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Birmingham District Council, the West Midlands Metropolitan County Council and the Midlands Authorities Orchestral Association

*This item has been recorded by the CBSO with Louis Frémaux and will be released by EMI in the Autumn.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Suite, The Sleeping Beauty
Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
introduction — the lilac fairy
adagio — pas d'action
panorama
waltz

That the Russian tradition in ballet is sumptuous and lavish may in part be attributed to Tchaikovsky, and to *The Sleeping Beauty* in particular. This was his second ballet, the first being *The Swan Lake*, which was, incidentally, a failure when first produced at the Imperial Theatre, Moscow, in 1877. *The Sleeping Beauty* was written for St. Petersburg, and the scenario, based on the well-known fairy tale of Perrault, was prepared by none other than Vsievolsky, Director of the Imperial Opera. Tchaikovsky was at once attracted to the project. He began working at it towards the end of December 1888 and found that he was full of ideas. Early in the new year, however, he was obliged to break off in order to begin his second concert tour abroad.

It was early summer before Tchaikovsky returned to Moscow and to his sketches for the ballet. Around the beginning of August he wrote to Nadejda von Meck: 'I think, dear friend, that it will be one of my best works. The subject is so poetical, so grateful for musical setting, that I have worked at it with all that enthusiasm and goodwill upon which the value of a composition so much depends. The instrumentation gives me far more trouble than it used to do; consequently the work goes slowly, but perhaps all the better.' By the end of August the score was finished, and when Tchaikovsky went to St. Petersburg three months later the ballet was already in preparation. The gala rehearsal, attended by the Imperial Court, took place in the middle of January 1890. This was a particularly lavish occasion, but the Tsar's only comment, 'Very nice', made it an acutely painful one for Tchaikovsky, in whose affections the music came second only to that of his opera *Eugene Onegin*. At the first public performance, on the following day, the audience seemed similarly lukewarm; but a taste for ballet on this new and grander scale soon developed, with immense consequences for the future of the art in Russia.

Of the four movements from the concert suite to be played this evening, the first consists of music for the Lilac Fairy, one of the principal portagonists, preceded by an impressive, fully-scored *allegro vivace*. The entry of the Lilac Fairy is marked by a pause, a change to *andantino* (in 6/8) and a much lighter texture in which the harp and *tremolando* strings accompany the cor anglais. The harp figures prominently in the introduction (*andante*) to the second movement, which is an elaborate *adagio maestoso* with a richness very typical of this score. Next comes the comparatively small-scale and lightly-scored 'Panorama' from Act 2 of the ballet, followed by the well-known waltz number, which makes an admirable finale. Among the many attractive features of this music, pride of place must surely be given to Tchaikovsky's sense of the orchestra; the very quality that familiarity tends most to take for granted.

Hugh Ottaway ©

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune
Debussy (1862-1918)

Just as Beethoven, in his *Eroica Symphony*, threw off the shackles of eighteenth century elegance and formal symmetry, so Debussy in his briefer tone-poem, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, tore the scales from the eyes of those romantic musicians whose previous attachment had been to the tortured egoism of a Wagner or the solemn chromaticism of a Franck. The work was allegedly written during 1892-4, though possibly earlier, and quickly became a landmark in European music, asserting for the first time the values of aural sensibility we nowadays glibly associate with the term 'impressionism'.

The prefix 'prélude', sometimes missed by those familiar with the fluid work suggests that more music was intended, the ultimate objective being to add a

YEHUDI MENUHIN



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series of interludes and finale, giving the entire project a character somewhat complementary to that of the *Nocturnes* of 1900. It is nonetheless possible that Debussy announced his larger dramatic or symphonic plan merely in order to secure a more sizeable advance from his publisher. At any rate, no more music appeared. Mallarmé's eclogue, his well-known source of inspiration, was not a divided poem, but simply a group of loosely-strung stanzas. All the same, the author confirmed his preference for some sort of stage presentation of them. As it stands, the poem relates the dream of a faun as he lecherously contemplates a crowd of nymphs from his position of noonday repose. It begins:

I would perpetuate these nymphs.
So clear,
Their light carnation that it floats on the air
Drowsy with clustered sleep.

Whatever the intention, the work was performed as a single movement on 22 December, 1894, at the Société Nationale, with Gustave Doret conducting. Mallarmé, who was present at the première, seemed pleased with the musical realisation of his material, the audience treating it more as an intriguing novelty. It was encored after a long programme. Afterwards, the composer was prevailed upon by Diaghilev to transform the work into a ballet.

Texturally, the music Debussy wrote may be taken as the paradigm for most subsequent pieces of scene-painting for orchestra. It leads off with the famous slow flute solo, as if to create an image of the sensual, reclining animal with reed or pipe faintly raised to the lips. Then follows a splashed chord in which horns and harp *glissandi* appear to bring about a firm awakening. Other instruments gradually join in a succession of arabesques, notably the clarinet. Another melody, presented *en animant* is eventually heard on the oboe, and the movement develops in ternary fashion by means of a short interlude. Towards the close, the writing gets much heavier and is marked by rather lavish string climaxes. Finally, the opening phrase is projected again in a slower, drooping tempo until it reaches its *pp* cadence. Notwithstanding the composer's reputation for using the chord as an independent harmonic cell (as in the dissonant Tristan-like opening plunge), it would be fair to say that, at this stage in his career, traces of Gounod or Massenet can still be detected in the long melodic phraseology of the piece taken as a whole. Yet within a quarter of an hour, Debussy introduced us in this work to a new sonic realm that is standardly explored and re-explored in nearly all the French music written since his time.

Laurence Davies ©

Faust: Ballet Music

Gounod (1818-1893)

allegretto (tempo di valse)
adagio — Helen of Troy
allegretto
moderato maestoso
moderato con moto
allegretto
allegro vivo

Ever since the court of Louis XIV allowed itself to be persuaded that the Italian invention, called opera, was worthwhile, French opera has contained ballet. By the 19th century it was *de rigueur* that any work written for Parisian audiences must contain a large section devoted to dancing. Ballet fans would go to the opera, but without the slightest interest in the singing, just waiting for their favourite ballerinas to appear. They were a vociferous section of the audience, so woe-betide any composer who fell short of their exacting standards. Wagner did in Tannhäuser and the opera was doomed in Paris. Very often, the ballet bore little resemblance to the plot, and was a mere appendage, not literally, for the accepted place for it was before the last Act. To the singers it was a welcome relief, for it was the French who added the adjective *Grand* to opera, and the minimum number of acts was four, but, sometimes the plot was stretched to encompass five.



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All credit is due to Gounod, who managed to make his ballet fit although rather tenuously into the plot. In Act IV Mephistopheles and Faust join in the wild debauchery of Walpurgis Night, and the devil conjures up the most famous courtesans of history. Surely Faust must have been a little surprised to find Helen of Troy appearing on points in a white tutu?

Of its kind Gounod's music is superb. It is real ballet music; one has only to close one's eyes and the patterns of the *corps de ballet* and the set pieces of the *pas de deux* and *trois* can be imagined, although few of us will have actually seen Faust with its ballet scene. A short description of each movement may help.

Allegretto. A charming, typically French, waltz on strings with a contrasting middle section introduces us to the full company.

Adagio — Helen of Troy. Harp arpeggios introduce a rich sinuous theme on lower strings, which is contrasted with a perky theme on piccolo and flute.

Allegretto. The Queen of Sheba enters with her slaves who dance attendance. Woodwind and tambourine supply the Arabian flavour.

Moderato maestoso. Cleopatra dances to the accompaniment of strings which glide suitably. The jerky rhythm of the middle section makes sufficient contrast.

Moderato con moto. Helen's Trojan maidens dance to a glorious theme on full strings in unison. The coda is important enough to be classed a new theme.

Allegretto. Helen dances a solo of great intricacy, with delicately pointed music to match.

Allegro vivo. This is both a brilliant finale to the ballet music and a link back into the opera. It is a Bacchanale of orgiastic fury, with one section of relaxation, and leads skilfully into the Walpurgis scene, where Mephistopheles and Faust wait to proceed with the main plot.

Harry Jones ©

Ballet Suite, Horoscope

Lambert (1905-1951)

dance for the followers of Leo
sarabande for the followers of Virgo
valse for the Gemini
bacchanale
invocation to the moon and finale

Horoscope is one of the most distinguished products of that exciting era in the 1930's when the Sadler's Wells company was putting British ballet fairly and squarely on the map. In the theatre down in London's Rosebery Avenue, a brilliant group of creative artists had gathered a new and keenly inquiring audience. It was the platform from which was to go forward the later and greater achievements of the company, which, after the agonies of World War Two, was to move to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and become the Royal Ballet.

The triumph of the Sadler's Wells Ballet was the triumph of team work and partnership. Here, Frederick Ashton and Ninette de Valois worked in the closest collaboration with Constant Lambert, so that a new ballet grew as the music grew, sound and movement directed towards a common objective. The parallel with the partnership of Stravinsky and Diaghilev is obvious.

In *Horoscope*, Lambert provided Ashton with a score that stimulated the choreographer to the extent his range of expression seemed to find new dimensions; it was really Ashton's first great ballet. Lambert's liking for jazz colours and syncopated rhythms had been expressed before, notably in *The Rio Grande* of 1929, and it helped to condition *Horoscope* as well. Today, when composers so frequently explore the textural possibilities of such percussion instruments as maracas and Chinese blocks, it is useful to be reminded that Lambert used them as a matter of course in *Horoscope* 36 years ago.

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The ballet had its first performance at Sadler's Wells Theatre on January 27, 1938. The first appearance of the concert suite was at a Promenade Concert at Queen's Hall on August 8 in the same year. The composer conducted on each occasion.

The story concerns the young man, born under Leo, and the young woman, born under Virgo, who have a common sign in Gemini. Leo personifies strength, Virgo represents weakness, and these opposing factors drive them apart, but they are united through Gemini and the influence of the moon.

Dance for the followers of Leo. Clarinets and violas announce a jaunty rhythmic figure which recurs regularly. A fanfare motif is also important. The music throughout is a characteristic example of Lambert's gift for generating energy through the use of sharp-etched, repetitive phrases over a syncopated pattern.

Sarabande for the followers of Virgo. The femininity of the subject is tenderly expressed. Violins and violas have the tune which sets the mood at the start; there is some lovely writing for oboe, and rich writing in the exchanges between muted strings, woodwind and horns.

Value for the Gemini. More gentle writing for the strings, and an appealing oboe tune, imposed on a three-four rhythm which rises and falls easily, occasionally expanding into something more sumptuous.

Bacchanale. Lambert again calls up the syncopated rhythms which are so consistent a feature of his handwriting. The *bacchanale* grows out of a bustling string figure followed by a brittle rhythmic phrase which returns regularly to assume a dominant optimism. After some brilliant writing, the *bacchanale* dies away with faint echoes of the themes with which it opened.

Invocation to the moon and finale. The Moon is represented by pale, chilly music; a flowing violin tune is echoed and developed by woodwind and horns and returns to the strings to be enriched into something quite passionate. Now ecstasy steals over the music; the lovers have been brought together in final happiness, and the ballet fades in a tranquil conclusion.

Kenneth Loveland ©

Suite, The Firebird (1919) Stravinsky (1882-1971)

introduction (kastchei's magic garden) and dance of the firebird
round dance of the princesses
infernal dance of king kastchei
berceuse and finale

When Serge Diaghilev was planning the great Ballet enterprise which he opened in 1909, he chose as one of his first subjects the Russian fairy-tale of the Firebird. For the score he commissioned his old music-teacher, Liadov, who had a special and charming talent for fairy-tale music. But Liadov was a slow worker, and very soon willingly agreed to hand over the task to a younger composer who had recently attracted Diaghilev's attention. So came into being the first major work of an astonishing musician whose creative career had been diverse and as influential as Picasso's. Igor Stravinsky was a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, as Liadov himself had been thirty years before, and his score carries clear evidence of the fact that the veteran Rimsky-Korsakov was at that time pre-occupied with his colourfully fantastic opera, *The Golden Cockerel*.

The Ballet shows Prince Ivan Tsarevitch chasing the Firebird and capturing it in the enchanted garden of the sorcerer Kastchei. Releasing it for pity's sake he is rewarded with a feather, a pledge of speedy aid in danger. For a time he is happy in the company of the thirteen captive princesses (and of one of them in particular) who are allowed to leave the palace and play in the garden. But when he tries to follow them back through the gates he is captured by Kastchei and his horde of monsters. The Firebird, fulfilling its pledge, reappears, charms the monsters into frenzied dance followed by slumber, and directs the prince to the casket wherein Kastchei keeps his evil soul. So the power of evil is destroyed, and the world is saved because of the prince's pity for the

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Firebird. It should perhaps be stated that the curious description of the Finale on the label of some gramophone records — 'Marriage of Firebird and Prince Ivan' — is inaccurate. The bride is the 'solo' princess of the thirteen. The Firebird hovers around to bless the union.

This Suite (which contains about half the music of the Ballet) was arranged by the composer in 1919, for a more economical orchestra. The *Introduction*, which precedes the rise of the curtain, evokes an atmosphere of sinister enchantment, with creeping and menacing bass, uncanny *arpeggiando* harmonics on violins, and a scattering of spells from the piano. The *Dance* (which follows immediately in the Suite, though not in the Ballet) accompanies the Firebird as it skims about the garden and pecks at the golden apples. The succeeding music of its capture, supplication, release and pledge is here omitted. So also is that of the princesses' game with the apples. Their *Round Dance*, in which the prince joins, is sweet and gentle, though there are hints of watching evil; its most prominent melody is derived (as are many themes in early Stravinsky) from a folk-song. Then, after another considerable 'cut', we have the frenzied *Infernal Dance*, which begins the downfall of Kastchei's power. This inspired what is said to have been Fokine's greatest masterpiece of *ensemble* choreography; and its terrific rhythmic vitality clearly foreshadows the Stravinsky who, immediately after finishing this score, was to begin that of *The Rite of Spring* (the completion of which was interrupted by *Petrouchka*). Finally we have the Firebird's swaying and soporific *Berceuse*; and, omitting the music of Kastchei's awakening and the destruction of his soul, proceed at once to the radiant *Finale*, which, again, is founded on a folk-song.

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Projected repertoire: 17 July Haydn's Creation; 1974-5 Fauré Requiem, Berlioz' Grande Messe des Morts; Ravel's Daphnis & Chloe (complete); Holst's Planets and Mahler 3; Beethoven's Missa Solennis and Choral fantasia; Verdi Requiem; and including gramophone recordings with the CBSO.



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Overture, The Gipsy Baron Johann Strauss II
 Unfinished Symphony Schubert
 Waltz, Voices of Spring Johann Strauss II
 Overture, Poet and Peasant Suppé
 Waltz, The Blue Danube Johann Strauss II
 Champagne Polka Johann Strauss II
 Pizzicato Polka Johann & Josef Strauss
 Thunder and Lightning Polka Johann Strauss II
 Suite, Der Rosenkavalier Richard Strauss

Friday
19 July

LOUIS FRÉMAUX
ELEANOR BRON
Family Prom III
Russian Music

Capriccio Espagnol Rimsky-Korsakov
 Peter and the Wolf Prokofiev
 Nutcracker Suite Tchaikovsky

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20 July

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