

East of England Orchestra

Conductor Nicholas Kok

Peter and the Wolf

Presenter and Narrator **Bill Oddie**

Soloists **Adrian Spillett**, percussion

BBC Young Musician 1998

Briony Shaw, violin

7.30pm

Oundle School Chapel

The Programme

Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave) **F Mendelssohn**
(1809-1847)

Many composers have drawn inspiration from nature for their works - none more so than the young Felix Mendelssohn, inspired to compose this piece as he travelled for the first time around the west coast of Scotland in 1829. He had been sent on a tour of the world by his father, a wealthy banker, as a starting point for his compositional career.

He wrote letters back to his family in rather self-consciously picturesque terms, the kind of language which was perhaps to be expected of a cultured young man of the Romantic era. Mendelssohn suffered from habitual sea-sickness, and the crossing to Staffa was particularly wretched. However, this did not lessen the impact of the unusual and striking sight of Fingal's Cave on the island. The undulating geological structure of the cave immediately suggested to him a musical theme, which he sketched out in a letter to his sister Fanny. This theme became the rhythmic figure of this famous overture; it runs throughout the work, is developed and transformed, and even used in counterpoint to the lyrical tune that eventually appears.

Peter and the Wolf **Sergei Prokofiev** (1891-1953)

Peter and the Wolf is a 'young person's guide to the orchestra' as well as an enchanting musical tale for all ages. It has become a universal favourite in many languages all over the world.

Prokofiev's musical talent was spotted early by his mother, and she nurtured his gifts by teaching him at home. He later attended the prestigious St Petersburg conservatoire, followed by many years of touring abroad. He finally returned to his homeland in the mid-1930s and began working on music for children, amongst other projects, partly as it was politically useful: the Soviet authorities were keenly interested in music for children.

Responding to an invitation from the recently opened Central Children's Theatre in Moscow to write 'a musical tale for children', Prokofiev discussed with his collaborators the way in which this should be done. They

decided that images would need to be found which could easily be associated with the sound of different instruments. The flute could represent a bird, that was an obvious starting point, and Prokofiev suggested having a string quartet to play the human being 'because, of course, there'll be more facets to his character'. He went on 'Yes, yes, we've got to begin with concrete, impressive, and above all else, contrasting images. A wolf, a bird, good/evil, big/small. Striking characters, pronounced and different musical timbres, and every character with a leitmotif of his own'. Both Prokofiev and the theatre wanted the plot to be thrilling and packed with events to keep children gripped for the 20-25 minutes of the tale. Prokofiev was inspired, and noted in his memoirs that following these conversations he composed the music within a week and orchestrated it in another week.

Interval

The Lark Ascending

Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958)

In his youth Ralph Vaughan-Williams studied the violin, an instrument he came to regard as his musical salvation. Therefore it is not surprising that his unique attachment to the instrument would culminate in this serene romance for violin and orchestra. Redolent of the English countryside, it conjures up a spring morning with a slight haze in the air, the solo violin representing the lark.

The work was written in 1914 for Marie Hall, but laid aside at the outbreak of World War I until 1920, when it was revised and performed for the first time. It takes its title from a poem by George Meredith, the following extract of which appears in the score:

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel **James MacMillan** (b. 1959)

This concerto for percussion and orchestra is in one continuous movement and is based on the Advent plainsong of the same name; it was started on the first Sunday of Advent 1991 and completed on Easter Sunday in the following year. These two liturgical dates are important: on one level it is a purely abstract work in which all the musical material is drawn from the 15th century French Advent plainchant. On another level it is a musical exploration of the theology behind the Advent message.

Soloist and orchestra converse throughout as two equal partners, and a wide range of percussion instruments is used, covering tuned, untuned, skin, metal and wood sounds. Much of the music is fast and, although seamless, can be divided into a five-sectioned arch. It begins with a bold, fanfare-like 'overture', in which the soloist presents all the instrument types used throughout. When the soloist moves to gongs and unpitched metal and wood, the music surges into the main argument of the first section - music of a more brittle, knotty quality, propelled forward by various pulse rates evoking an ever-changing heartbeat. Advancing to drums and carried through a metrical modulation, the music is thrown forward into the second section characterised by fast

'chugging' quavers, irregular rhythmic shifts and the 'hocketting' or chords between one side of the orchestra and the other. Eventually the music winds down to a slow central section, which pits cadenza-like expressivity on the marimba against a floating tranquillity in the orchestra which hardly ever rises above *ppp*. Over and over again the orchestra repeats the four chords which accompany the words 'Gaude, Gaude' from the plainsong's refrain. They are layered in different instrumental combinations and in different speeds, evoking a huge distant congregation murmuring a calm prayer in many voices.

James MacMillan

The Performers

Founded in 1982 the **East of England Orchestra**, under its Principal Conductor Nicholas Kok, is committed to performing a wide breadth of repertoire, from Bach to Birtwistle. It has a strong commitment to new music and commissions, and performs new works. The orchestra also runs an innovative and diverse education and outreach programme. Recent projects include a collaboration with Derby County Football Club, creating a piece of music theatre based on the game of football.

Nicholas Kok

Nicholas Kok was an organ scholar at New College, Oxford, and continued his studies at the Royal College of Music as a répétiteur. He has been Principal Conductor of the East of England Orchestra since May 1996, and continues to work with many other notable orchestras, both in the UK and overseas. He has a long association with opera, conducting English National Opera, Scottish Opera and Opera North amongst others.

Bill Oddie

Now Britain's best known birdwatcher, Bill Oddie was for many years in the 1970's and early 80's known to television viewers as one third of the offbeat comedy series *The Goodies*. In recent years he has promoted his lifetime passion for birds into a fulltime occupation. He has written several books on the subject, presented many wildlife programmes for television and publicly represents numerous conservationist organisations, including the Worldwide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and the RSPB.

Adrian Spillett

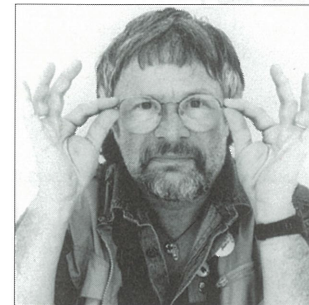
OIE is delighted to welcome Adrian Spillett, who won the title of BBC Young Musician 98 on the eve of his twentieth birthday, with his outstanding performance of Joseph Schwanter's Percussion Concerto. A student at the Royal Northern College of Music, he has taken part in several masterclasses, including one with Evelyn Glennie at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Adrian also performed in 1998 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the BBC Proms; this year he makes his debut with the BBC Philharmonic and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras.

Briony Shaw

After taking up a violin scholarship at Wells Cathedral School, Briony Shaw went on to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. After leaving the Guildhall in 1984 she was invited to join the Academy of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, and has since appeared regularly as a soloist with them, both in the concert hall and on recordings. In October 1993 Briony was appointed leader of the East of England Orchestra.



Nicholas Kok



Bill Oddie



Adrian Spillett



Briony Shaw

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