

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021/22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, June 3, 2022

Kevin Griffiths
Dejan Lazić, piano

Frederick Delius
The Walk to the Paradise Garden

Duration: around 8 minutes

Benjamin Britten
Diversions on a Theme for the left hand and orchestra, Op. 21

Duration: around 23 minutes

Gustav Holst
The Planets for female choir and orchestra Op. 32

Mars, the Bringer of War
Venus, the Bringer of Peace
Mercury, the Winged Messenger
Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity
Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age
Uranus, the Magician
Neptune, the Mystic

Duration: around 50 minutes

The works of the English composer **Frederick Delius** (1862-1934) encompass numerous genres, in the late Romantic style that grew out of the early influences of Edward Grieg and Richard Wagner into a unique musical expression. He started his professional composition relatively late (in the early nineteen twenties), so his music was almost unknown and was not performed at the beginning of the 20th century. As soon as he gained his first creative recognition, his illness prevented him from composing, which he returned to in the late 1920s. This last creative period brought some of Delius' most significant works.

As a great admirer of Richard Wagner's musical dramas, he himself contributed to the stage by writing several operas, including *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, which belongs to Delius' middle creative period. He transformed the story of Gottfried Keller, who moved Shakespeare's heroes to the then modern Swiss village, into a work in which an orchestra was engaged, larger in composition than Wagner's. ***A Walk in the Garden of Eden*** is an interlude that was created after the opera ended and just before the premiere in Berlin in 1907, when the composer realized that he needed additional music for the last change of scene. The Garden of Eden is actually an abandoned old inn where Romeo and Juliet go the night before they realize their suicide plan. Although added later, this interlude represents the culmination of the opera, bringing a reminder of several major themes and preparing the final tragic scene.

The piano concerto ***Diversions on a Theme for the Left Hand and Orchestra***, Op. 21, are another in a series of commissions by Viennese pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm while fighting in World War I. He also ordered works from Ravel, Prokofiev, Korngold and Richard Strauss, and he met the author of this concert performance, **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976), in New York in 1940. The result is a brilliant score in which one simple theme is transformed through different forms and genres, culminating in a virtuoso sprint to a finish in a moving, fast tarantula.

Wittgenstein had objections to the orchestration, but the composer initially refused to make any changes, only to eventually agree with minor alterations. He always felt resentment about it, and after 1950, he revised the score to create an official version that would prevent Paul from playing the work in its outdated version. Wittgenstein retained the performing rights for the concert for a number of years, which prevented other pianists from performing it. He played *Diversions* at the premiere with the Philadelphia Orchestra, under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, on January 16, 1942. Positive reviews dealt more with the nature of the composition than with its essence, but it was pointed out that the work was ingeniously written, but also that was a composition containing enjoyable as well as unexciting moments.

The seven-part orchestral ensemble of the English composer **Gustav Holst** (1874-1934) is his most famous work and one of the most significant achievements of English classical music. During his life, Holst was dissatisfied with the fact that this work had overshadowed his other great achievements. In addition to Hindu mysticism, with which he was fascinated, Holst also studied astrology with pleasure. By 1914, when he began composing ***The Planets***, only seven of them had been discovered, and Holst named the same number of movements after the planets of the solar system that had been discovered by then, omitting the Earth as its center (so his inspiration was astrology, not astronomy). For many years, the work

seemed incomplete due to the late discovery of the planet Pluto in 1930, but since Pluto's status as a planet was revoked in 2006, the integrity of the work has not been questioned in recent years. The first performances presented only certain movements, while *The Planets* were performed in its entirety by the London Symphony Orchestra in 1920. While studying horoscopes, Holst became interested in the influence of the planets on the human psyche, and thus he titled his movements. The first version was written for a piano duo, except for the last movement for organ, because Holst thought that the sound of the piano was too loud for the mysterious and distant Neptune. The rich orchestration later showed strong influences of Schoenberg, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Stravinsky. For many years, this suite was considered difficult music and differences between the movements can be seen in all elements, primarily in their character. The robust sounds of Holst's terrible vision of war in 5/4 time dominate the first movement. He is contrasted by the calm Venus with delicate tones of solo violin. Eleven repetitions of the first theme of Mercury, the winged messenger, are lavishly orchestrated, while Jupiter represents a central movement full of joyful and solemn moods, which is opposed by the depressed image of Saturn. Uranus, the wizard, grows from a core of four tons to a brilliant climax, after which they are heard again in the Coda and disappear in an echo. Neptune, the mystic, is devoid of melody and rhythm, with delicate orchestration (again unusual 5/4) that at times resembles voices. Then the sound becomes real, because the ethereal voices of the female choir can be heard from a distance, which slowly disappears, mixing sounds and silence.

Asja Radonjić, M. Sc.