

Orchestra dell'Arte

Soirées Musicales 16 October 2023

We will be together on Monday 16 October for a real Soirée Musicales. The term refers to an evening gathering, sometimes in a private house, for the purpose of good conversation and lovely music – we aim to have both of these at our event!

There was a tradition for Monday Popular Concerts (Pops) which started in London, with concerts based at St James's Hall. This convention was taken up all round the UK, especially by the fledgling Liverpool Philharmonic Society (the *Royal* prefix came later). To further confuse matters, these Monday concerts were often held on Wednesdays, but we are returning to the letter of the tradition.

Soirées Musicales:

Our programme starts with the eponymous *Soirées Musicales*, based on music by Rossini, and compiled and arranged by Benjamin Britten. The suite was first performed in 1937, the title was Rossini's own, being used originally for a similar selection of his own music.

Britten has made no attempt to copy the orchestral style of Rossini too closely, but has put in to each of the five movements his own flashes of brilliant orchestration and glamour. He has given us a musical picture of what a musical evening would be in five different locales.

March:

This lively opening march is based on a melody taken from Rossini's opera *William Tell*. It starts with a real flourish, calms down and then starts to build up to a grand finish. This particular soirée sounds as if there might have been some tiny disagreements between the participants.

Canzonetta:

This movement is much more restrained, and Britten has given us a gentle Italian song played mainly on the woodwind. The strings provide a soft carpet of sound to support these melodies.

Tirolese:

There is no doubt about this being anything other than a rollicking evening at the local beer hall. The sound of the orchestra tuning up at the start gives way to a lively, slightly wobbly, dance, complete with yodelling.

Bolero:

A complete change of mood here, with a brooding Spanish dance. The mood is sombre and the warm Spanish evening adds to the drama – here anything might happen, and probably will.

Tarantella:

No doubts at all that this is to be the final section of this work, as Britten treats us to a whirling Sicilian tarantella. This dance was originally used as a supposed cure for the bite of a tarantula spider. Whether it worked is a moot point, but it has given us a splendid finish.

Neapolitan Songs:

The institution of the Neapolitan song became formalised in the 1830s when an annual song contest was inaugurated in Naples. Even though the contest ceased operations in 1950, this style of song, usually in the Neapolitan dialect, has stayed immensely popular, being essentially an emotional and longing expression of nostalgia for the city of Naples as it once was. There is a similar tradition of songs written about the city of Vienna.

Many of these songs have been featured by famous singers such as Caruso and more recently by Pavarotti. Tonight, in the company of our tenor soloist, *Nick Hardy*, we will be hearing five songs in different settings, but all with that wonderful sugary coating which is the hallmark of the style.

Core ‘ngrato:

Or *Ungrateful Heart*, was composed, not in Naples, but in the USA in 1911 by an emigrant Italian composer. Enrico Caruso immediately adopted it as his own, but many other tenor soloists have performed it. It has all the standard longings and surges of emotion that characterise the Neapolitan style.

Marechiaro:

Written by Francesco Tosti in 1886. The song tells us about how when the moon shines in the town of Marechiaro even the fishes fall in love. At a window are the shining eyes of the one true love of the singer – he exhorts Carolina to wake up, enjoy the evening air and to hear his serenades on the guitar.

Addio, sogni di Gloria:

Goodbye, dreams of glory, is the tempestuous and longing of the singer to return to the carefree days of his boyhood, when everything was possible and the future was bound to be bright. Now a sad and disillusioned adult, he looks back at his castles in the air, now gone for ever. Even his hopes for a partner of his dreams have come to nothing, so he once again bends to his his tedious existence.

Neapolitan Finale:

As a fitting end to this festival of songs based on the Neapolitan tradition, tenor *Nick Hardy* starts us off in fine style with a song that was written to celebrate the opening of the funicular railway on the slopes of Vesuvius. *Funiculi Funicula* was written in 1880 by Luigi Denza. Sales of the sheet music exceeded a million copies in its first year.

Hard on the heels of this exuberant opening, the mood changes, always to the ever-present sombre but hugely emotional style now so familiar. From 1894, Torna a Surriento, *Return to Sorrento*, is reputed to have been written as a tribute to the visit of the Italian premier to that city. Regardless of the truth of that, we are left with a splendid example of the true Neapolitan style, in this version complete with a suitably grandiose ending.

Prague Waltzes:

This collection of jolly waltzes was written in 1879 by Antonin Dvorak. It was commissioned by a prestigious music society in Prague. Even though the work follows the traditional form of the Viennese waltz with an introduction and a series of related waltz melodies, there is no trace of the river Danube in this piece, but it is firmly based in the Slavonic tradition, being composed just after Dvorak's first set of Slavonic Dances. This delightful set of waltzes helped to boost the reputation of Dvorak as a master composer.

Symphony in E (The Irish):

Though not described as *The Irish* by its composer Arthur Sullivan, this work has often been known by that name.

Work began on the symphony in 1863, when the 21-year-old Sullivan was on holiday in Ireland. He had originally decided to call it *The Irish*, but changed his mind, thinking that he might be thought of as putting this piece up against Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony.

The first performance was given in 1866 in London at the Crystal Palace. The music was generally well received, but music critics pointed out the obvious influence of other composers, notably Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner. It is interesting to think that Sullivan's symphony predates some of the well-known works by Tchaikovsky, Dvorak and Brahms.

The first movement starts with a stately Andante introduction, note the Dresden Amen, very reminiscent of Mendelssohn and Wagner. This leads very soon to a lilting and rather yearning melody which is developed throughout the movement.

The second movement is a lyrical and sensitive study in putting a soaring melody above a rhythmic and undulating accompaniment. The horns and the alto trombone (a rarity in the orchestra) provide the main melody.

The third movement gives us an insight into what Sullivan would be writing later in his Savoy operettas. In a very similar vein to his light and tripping melody for the 'dainty little fairies' in *Iolanthe*, the main theme eventually comes through, played by the oboe solo.

The finale is a happy mixture of orchestral colour, with many examples of what would later become a trademark style, an amalgam of dotted rhythms played against a calm and elegant melody elsewhere in the orchestra.