



Concert

Canongate Kirk

7:30pm Saturday March 17th 2018

Carl Maria von Weber

Overture to *Der Freischütz*

Nino Rota

The Legend of the Glass Mountain

Franz Schubert

Symphony No. 3 in D major, D200

Conductor: Andrew Lees

Retiring Collection

Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826)

Overture to *Der Freischütz*

Rossinian Italian opera was all the rage in early 19th century Austria and Germany. However, Weber, who had family links to Mozart (Weber's cousin Constanze married Wolfgang after her sister Aloysia rejected him) and professional ones to Haydn (he studied composition with Michael, Joseph's brother), single-handedly developed the genre of German Romantic Opera. His inspiration was the German forest, German legends and German folk song and his influence on German composers of the next generation (not least Wagner, born in 1813) was huge.

Unfortunately, the poor qualities of the libretti that Weber had to work with have inhibited the viability of *Oberon* and *Euryanthe* in the opera house, despite them containing much magnificent music. *Der Freischütz* has been difficult to stage adequately because, in particular, of the supernatural effects required in the Wolf's Glen Scene, and what Vaughan Williams, with typically English puritanism, called a "farrago of a story". *Der Freischütz* is, indeed, the archetype of German romanticism with its evocation of the forest, depiction of magic bullets and the supernatural, and its tale of a Faustian pact with the devil. The literal translation of the title as "The Free-Shooter" does not fully convey the meaning of the German original. It refers to the six bullets, cast by the 'hero' Max and the evil Caspar, that are guaranteed to find their mark after Max's pact with the Devil's representative, the 'Black Hunter' Samiel, on condition that the seventh belongs to the Devil.

The overture makes a marvelous concert piece divorced from its context in the opera, as it is virtually a miniature tone poem in itself – a vision in sound of the drama to come. As Weber himself described it, the overture contrasts the the forest life of the hunter (depicted by the sound of a horn quartet) with the rule of demonic powers (represented by clarinets, bassoons and strings playing in their lowest registers and diminished sevenths). Its principal tonalities, C major and C minor, respectively represent the opposing forces of good and evil. The slow introduction introduces a feeling of foreboding which is present throughout much of the opera, whilst the main *allegro* section presages music from Max's *scena* closing the first act and, in beautiful contrast, the clarinet 'singing' the melody of the heroine Agathe's aria when she meets her lover in the Act 2. As Gerald Larner has commented: "No other work of Weber better shows off his skill as an orchestrator, and perhaps no other opera overture better sets the stage for the drama to follow."

Despite the dramatic inadequacies of Kind's libretto, the opera's premiere in Berlin (June 1821) was triumphantly successful. It rapidly became the most popular German opera of the first half of the 19th century, helped on its way by the upsurge of German patriotic feeling following Napoleon's defeat. It was soon performed not only all across Europe (with translations into English, French, Dutch, Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Russian, Danish and Swedish) but, by 1850, as far afield as Australia, South Africa and South America.

Giovanni ('Nino') Rota (1911–1979) The Legend of the Glass Mountain

Although best known for his scores for films by Fellini (*La Strada*, *La Dolce Vita*), Visconti, Zeffirelli and the first two parts of *The Godfather* (receiving an Academy Award for *The Godfather Part II*), Nino Rota was a composer of wide talents, writing ten operas, five ballets, many orchestral and choral works and much chamber music. In addition, he was a conductor and pianist of note and maintained a teaching career in Bari in southern Italy for nearly 30 years.

The Glass Mountain is a British romantic film drama from 1949 directed by Henry Cass (1902–1989), (who, coincidentally, I met as a child, as he and his wife, the actress Joan Hopkins, were friends of my parents). It stars the 'matinee idol' of the time, Michael Denison, and his frequent stage and screen partner (and wife in real life), Dulcie Gray. The couple had become a romantic icon of the British entertainment scene at a time when Britain was only gradually beginning to emerge from World War II into a period of grey austerity (rationing would be in place for another two years).

Thus, a film largely shot on location in the Dolomite mountains, and also introducing the 'exotic' actress Valentina Cortese (much later nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in François Truffaut's *Day for Night*, 1973, and now aged 95), acted as a wonderful distraction. It also featured the great Italian baritone, Tito Gobbi (1913–1984) playing himself, and the orchestra and chorus of *La Fenice*, the Venice Opera House. This was not Gobbi's first appearance in an 'opera within a film' – *Avanti a Lui Tremava Tutta Roma* ("Before Him All Rome Trembled"), featuring Anna Magnani, from 1946, intermingles the story of a group of opera performers who are part of the underground Italian resistance against the Germans in Rome in 1944 with their presentation of Puccini's *Tosca*. (Gobbi was later to become most famous for his charismatic interpretation of the sadistic chief of police Scarpia in *Tosca* – his dramatic sparring with Maria Callas in that opera at Covent Garden in 1964 is one of the operatic highlights of the post-war era).

The story of *The Glass Mountain* centres on Richard, a sensitive composer (Denison) who marries Anne (Gray) on the eve of World War II. He is shot down in the mountains but saved by a local girl, Alida (Cortese), who nurses him back to health and tells him the myths about the doomed lovers who haunt the Glass Mountain which looms over the village. [The Legend involves a mountain made of glass and the need to climb it in order to win the love of a princess – for every step climbing a suitor slides back two steps. The one who is successful ingeniously turns around and climbs it backwards, gaining double elevation with each downward stride!].

The war ends, and Richard comes back to England, but his heart is still in the mountains, so he returns to Italy (and Alida) to write his opera, weaving local folk music into its themes. Anne, his (now estranged) wife, harbours an irresistible urge to experience the allure of the Glass Mountain for herself. At the premiere of Richard's opera, at the *Teatro La Fenice*, Alida receives word that Anne's plane has gone off course and crashed in the mountains. The lengthy and beautifully staged sequence of the opera's climax was written by Nino Rota and sung by Gobbi (for once the baritone is the hero!) and Elena Rizzieri, a well-known lyric soprano of the period.

Rota's music for the film is hauntingly memorable. He adapted it from a symphony he was then working on, the *Sinfonia Sopra una Canzone d'Amore*, and the wonderfully romantic principal tune is based on an Austrian/Italian folk song, *La Montanara*. He added a brief overture for the film (performed tonight in an orchestration by Ondra Soukup). The film itself, although very 'dated', is still worth watching.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Symphony No. 3 in D major, D. 200

I. Adagio maestoso – Allegro con brio

II. Allegretto

III. Menuetto. Vivace

IV. Presto vivace

In May 1815, two months after completing his second symphony, Schubert started work on his third, completing it less than two months later. However, after a first week in which the first movement's slow introduction and opening bars of the succeeding Allegro were sketched out, Schubert did not return to the work until July 11th, finishing the whole of the rest of the Symphony in eight days.

At the time, he was also working full time as a school teacher, taking composition lessons with Antonio Salieri and undertaking some private music teaching. Yet, in that year alone, he composed four operas, two masses, two symphonies and 145 songs. Like many of Schubert's compositions, the Symphony was never published in his lifetime, appearing in print only in the first complete edition of his works in 1884. Whilst Weber (eleven years Schubert's senior) was intent on breaking out from the current popularity of Italian music (and, especially, Rossini) in Vienna, the young Schubert was still very much influenced by it. This can particularly be heard in the rhythms, harmonies and 'Rossini crescendos' that he employs.

The first movement, with its slow introduction, follows the model Haydn used in so many of his own symphonies. Despite the seeming effortless composition, Schubert originally scored the bubbling clarinet theme that introduces the Allegro for oboe and horns, and then for strings, before finding what now seems the inevitably 'right' clarinet tone colour. Although Schubert originally planned to write one (there is a sketch with an adagio theme), there is no slow movement proper. Instead, the second movement saunters along merrily, again with a prominent clarinet in the middle section. The third movement 'Minuet' is more in the style of a German *Ländler* or a waltz (although with 'Haydnesque' off-beat accentuations), and its Trio (with solo oboe and bassoon) is more reminiscent of another German dance, the *Deutscher*, which Schubert and his friends would undoubtedly have encountered in the local taverns. In the whirling finale, we are back to the spirit of Italian *opera buffa*, with a driving *tarantella* rhythm bursting with a Rossinian vivacity and momentum, anticipating in feel the finale of Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4 (the '*Italian*') of 1833.

Programme notes by Chris Kelnar

Andrew Lees is a former member of both the Hallé and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras playing viola. Since returning to Edinburgh he has taken up the violin and concentrated on solo playing, arranging, teaching and conducting. He is a member of the Roxburgh String Quartet. As well as the Open Orchestra, he has conducted many other Edinburgh-based groups including Edinburgh Grand Opera, Edinburgh Musical Theatre and Edinburgh University Savoy Opera Group. He also directs the Leader Ensemble. However perhaps his most significant achievement to date is an arrangement of Rossini's William Tell Overture for 40 violas and triangle.

The Open Orchestra (<http://www.openorchestra.org.uk/>) is an established group of amateur musicians of all ages and abilities. We meet throughout the year for rehearsals and performances, aiming to increase our knowledge and enjoyment of orchestral music in a friendly atmosphere. We aim for high standards but, as our name suggests, we are open to all, subject to vacancies, with no auditions.

The Orchestra meets on Wednesday evenings (7.45pm – 9.45pm) between September and June at Morningside Parish Church Hall, Braid Road (corner of Braid Road and Cluny Gardens).

If you wish to find out more about the orchestra, please contact us at info@openorchestra.org