



**Concert**

**Canongate Kirk  
June 10th 2017 7:30pm**

**Franz von Suppé  
Overture Dichter und Bauer (Poet and Peasant)**

**Paul Dukas  
L'Apprenti Sorcier (The Sorcerer's Apprentice)**

**Jacques Offenbach  
Intermezzo and Barcarolle from Les Contes d'Hoffmann  
(The Tales of Hoffmann)**

***Conductor: Andrew Lees***

*Retiring Collection*

## Franz von Suppé (1819 – 1895)

### Overture: Poet and Peasant

Suppé, born as Francesco Ezechiele Ermenegildo, Cavaliere di Suppé-Demelli (no less), wrote many popular operas whose characteristic features were a lightness that belies the weight of his name. These operettas were greatly celebrated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, enjoying a success that rivalled that of his French contemporary Jacques Offenbach (see below).

Born in Spalato (Dalmatia), now Split (Croatia), Suppé spent much of his life in Vienna. Although his parents were of Belgian extraction, Suppé was also a distant relative of the great Italian opera composer Gaetano Donizetti who recognised and supported his musical gifts. Certainly, Suppé had an Italianate melodic gift and dramatic abilities. Most of his (over 30) operettas (which include *Morning, Noon, and Night in Vienna* and *Light Cavalry*) are now best known (at least in English-speaking countries) by their overtures. *Dichter und Bauer (Poet and Peasant)* dates from 1846.

After retiring from conducting, Suppé continued to write oper(ett)as, but shifted his focus to sacred music (now even more rarely performed than his operettas). These include a Requiem, an oratorio and three masses. He also composed symphonies, songs and string quartets.

Their evocative tunefulness has resulted in the use of Suppé's overtures in a variety of films and cartoons: *Poet and Peasant* appears in the Fleischer Studios Popeye cartoon *The Spinach Overture* (1935), and in a Mickey Mouse cartoon *Symphony Hour*, where Mickey conducts a performance almost sabotaged by Goofy dropping the orchestral instruments under a lift. The resulting rendition on damaged instruments reduces the sponsor (Mr Sylvester Macaroni, alias Pegleg Pete) to tears. Other characters involved include Donald Duck, Clarabelle Cow and Horace Horsecollar. At one point, Donald, fed up with the chaotic concert, packs his things and leaves but Mickey points a gun at Donald's head to ensure that he stays – and plays.\*

If you can get those images out of your head, enjoy the wonderful cello melody shortly after the start of the Overture.

*\*Disclaimer: any resemblance to the conductor and members of the Open Orchestra is purely coincidental.*

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## Paul Dukas (1865 – 1935)

### L'Apprenti Sorcier (The Sorcerer's Apprentice) – Scherzo after a ballad by Goethe

Born into a Jewish family in Paris, Dukas was intensely self-critical and retiring in nature. He left only a short list of works (having destroyed many), not all of them even published now. His masterpiece is the opera *Ariane et Barbebleue* (1907), based on Maeterlinck's play, but it has never achieved the popularity of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, based on another Maeterlinck play which reached the stage five years earlier, Bartók's one act opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, based on the French folk story-derived tale by Charles Perrault, let-alone Offenbach's operetta *Barbe-bleu*. Its reception was also overshadowed by the Paris premiere of Richard Strauss's sensational opera *Salome* at much the same time. Dukas's Symphony in C and a ballet *La Péri*, preceded by an ebullient *Fanfare*, are very worthwhile pieces.

Dukas earned his living as a music critic, teacher and editor of the music of Rameau, Couperin, Scarlatti and Beethoven. As Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire de Paris and the École Normale de Musique, his pupils included Maurice Duruflé, Olivier Messiaen, Manuel Ponce, and Joaquín Rodrigo (of *Concerto di Aranjuez* fame).

Goethe's ballad *Der Zauberlehrling* had been written in 1797. The poem begins as an old sorcerer leaves his apprentice in his workshop with chores to perform. Tired of fetching pails of water, the apprentice casts a spell on the broom to do the work for him – using magic in which he is not yet fully instructed. The floor is soon awash with water and the apprentice does not know how to stop the broom. In desperation, he splits the broom in two with an axe – but each piece becomes a whole new broom that takes up a pail and continues fetching water, now at twice the speed. When all seems lost, the old sorcerer returns and breaks the spell – supernatural powers should only be summoned by the master himself.

Coincidentally, Mickey Mouse also plays a significant (and much better known) role in the history of Dukas's composition. Although, even during Dukas's lifetime, *The Musical Quarterly* commented that the work's fame overshadowed all his other compositions and also eclipsed Goethe's original poem, Dukas's Scherzo (= "joke"), which had been written in 1896/7, was greatly further popularised by the animated 1940 Disney film *Fantasia*.

*Fantasia* was made up of eight animated shorts (the others consisted of music by Bach, Stravinsky, Beethoven, Ponchielli, Mussorgsky, Schubert and an 'intermission'). Thankfully for most of us, listening to these other composers' pieces no longer conjures up visions of flowers, fish, mushrooms, dinosaurs, centaurs, cupids, fauns, ostriches, hippos, spirits and monks. However, for those of a certain age, hearing Dukas's vividly descriptive music will always be associated with Mickey Mouse as the Apprentice and 'Yen Sid' (Disney backwards) as the Sorcerer, and Mickey's increasingly frantic efforts to stem the flood as the water rises higher and higher. Mickey is also seen shaking hands with the conductor Leopold Stokowski, who recorded the Dukas soundtrack with a studio orchestra rather than the Philadelphia Orchestra with whom the other pieces were recorded, but all in pioneering multi-channel sound.

*L'Apprenti Sorcier* is, in style, a miniature 'tone' (or symphonic) poem of the type popularised by Liszt and taken up by other composers contemporary with Dukas, such as Smetana, Dvorak and Richard Strauss. The reason it functions so well as a 'soundtrack' for the animation in *Fantasia* is that it falls into the highly descriptive category of, say, Strauss's *Don Quixote* with each episode of the story vividly and almost onomatopoeically depicted. This is in marked contrast to the general evocation of mood and settings chosen by Dvorak in his tone poems for example. Thus Disney's animation can follow the story of Goethe's *Ballad* extremely closely, very different to his often sentimental imagery superimposed on largely 'abstract' music in some of the other far less memorable *Fantasia* segments.

The popularity of *L'Apprenti Sorcier* was already a matter of irritation to Dukas. What he would have thought of *Fantasia* (which appeared only five years after his death) can be imagined, particularly as it has failed to lead to an increased interest in or more performances of his other compositions. Whether *Fantasia*'s popularity has even hindered a fuller exploration and understanding of Dukas's compositions is a moot point, as this single work remains far better known than its composer.

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## Jacques Offenbach (1819 – 1880)

### Intermezzo and Barcarolle from The Tales of Hoffmann

Jacques (originally Jakob) Offenbach was also born into a Jewish Family, in Cologne then part of Prussia. He first studied the violin but from the age of nine learnt the cello, soon reaching virtuoso status. In 1833, his father Isaac decided that the two most musically talented of his ten children, Julius (then aged 18) and Jakob (14) should leave the provincial musical scene of Cologne to study in Paris, the cultural capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and at the Conservatoire. It took much persuasion for the Director, Cherubini, to accept them because of Jakob's youth and nationality (he had previously refused the 12-year-old Liszt admission on similar grounds). However on listening to Jakob's playing he stopped him, saying, "Enough, young man, you are now a pupil of this Conservatoire."

Julius was also admitted and both brothers adopted French forms of their names, Julius becoming Jules and Jakob becoming Jacques. However, unlike his brother who became a successful violin teacher and orchestral leader, Jakob/Jacques did not take well to academic study and left after one year to play in orchestras including at the Opéra-Comique. His fame as a cellist grew through the 1840s, during which time he also started to organise performances of his own compositions.

In 1858, Jacques Offenbach composed his first full-length operetta *Orphée aux Enfers* (Orpheus in the Underworld) which was met with great enthusiasm. Over the next twelve years he composed another 18 operettas, reaching the pinnacle of his popularity in the 1860s with works such as *La belle Hélène*, *Barbe-bleu*, *La Vie Parisienne*, *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* and *La Périchole*.

His first attempt at a serious opera, *Die Rheinnixen*, was a failure, and not revived until this century, but he always wanted to write a 'grand opera' for which he felt posterity would remember him. He saw his 'opérettes' and 'opéra bouffes' merely as topical frippery poking fun at the Second Empire of Napoleon III (who nevertheless personally granted him French citizenship and appointed him a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur).

Late in life, and in poor health with gout and rheumatism, Offenbach embarked on the composition of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (*The Tales of Hoffmann*) but died with the vocal score all but complete but the orchestration only started. This was completed by Ernest Guiraud, a family friend, and the composer's 18-year-old son Auguste. They were forced to make many changes and cuts demanded by the director of the Opéra-Comique, where the opera was first performed to great acclaim, on 10 February 1881. Guiraud added recitatives for the Vienna premiere later that year and the opera now exists in many versions and editions.

In fact, the famous Barcarolle melody was taken over from *Die Rheinnixen*. It opens *Hoffmann's* third act which is set in Venice – a barcarolle being a traditional folk song sung by Venetian gondoliers, the rhythm supposedly being reminiscent of the gondolier's stroke. In the opera it is sung by Giulietta (soprano), a courtesan and Hoffmann's love, and Nicklausse (mezzo-soprano – a 'breeches' role), Hoffmann's muse disguised as his faithful male companion. It describes the beauty of the night and of love: "*Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour...*". It is frequently played in an orchestral version, here with an *Intermezzo* introduction.

Although this composition has no link to Mickey Mouse, the Barcarolle was used for one of the Walt Disney *Silly Symphony* series – "*Birds of a Feather*" from 1931. For the famous 1951 British Technicolor film adaptation of *The Tales of Hoffmann* directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the whole soundtrack was (pre-)recorded by Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and, for the Barcarolle, a stationary gondola seems to glide through a stylised Venetian backdrop.

*Programme Notes by Chris Kelnar*

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**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.

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## **The Open Orchestra** (<http://www.openorchestra.org.uk/>)

The Open Orchestra 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 Cluny Church Center, Cluny Drive (corner of Braid Road and Cluny Drive).

If you wish to find out more about the orchestra, please contact us at [info@openorchestra.org](mailto:info@openorchestra.org)