



Concert

Canongate Kirk
Saturday June 1st 2019
7:30pm

David Crisp
Scottish Suite

Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony No. 7 in A major op.92

Conductor: Andrew Lees

Retiring Collection

David Crisp: Scottish Suite (2002-3)

I. March

II. Jake's Lament

III. Rondo

David Crisp (1954 – 2009) was the founding conductor of the Open Orchestra, still warmly remembered for his musicality and warm and witty personality, as well as his compositions. These included works for school children (he had been Head of Music at Lasswade High School), choirs, a string quartet (*Astar*, played by the Edinburgh Quartet at the Kirking of the Scottish Parliament in St. Giles' Cathedral in May 2003) and a variety of sometimes complex, but always accessible music, suitable for the Open Orchestra itself.

Whilst he wrote much non-programmatic music, for example a Trumpet Concerto (2004) also performed by the Open Orchestra, a feeling of 'place' often inspired David's musical creativity. He had always been enchanted by Thailand, and many of his works are (overtly or covertly) evocative of that country and its people. For example, *Doi Suthep* (first performed by the Orchestra in 2005) is a musical evocation of the founding of a Buddhist temple north of Chiang Mai. His *Chanson de Bréau* was written for the Orchestra's trip to France in 2003, and Scotland has been evoked in such pieces as his *St. Abbs Suite* (1986), and *Scottish Suite* (2002-3) performed tonight.

After leaving his post at Lasswade in 2007, David achieved his ambition to emigrate to Thailand. There he became musically active in the local community, founding a choral group, "The Spirit House Singers" based in Chiang Mai, and where he sadly met his death.

We are playing three short movements from the Suite tonight, a *March* and *Rondo* framing a homage to David's beloved dog, Jake.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 7 in A major op.92 (1813)

I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace

II. Allegretto

III. Presto – Assai meno presto

IV. Allegro con brio

On one level, a piece of music such as this is so well known that it needs little in the way of description. Equally it is in a sense 'indescribable' – the Symphony is, as the great Edinburgh musical analyst (and musicologist, composer, conductor and pianist) Sir Donald Tovey said (1935), "so overwhelmingly convincing and untranslatable."

Its prodigious power is based on basic material of apparently primitive simplicity: scale passages, slow turns, dotted rhythms, repeated notes, striding minims. As a result, for Wagner (1835), the Symphony was "the apotheosis of the dance" – much later (1880), he characterised it to his wife, Cosima, as "a complete portrait of a Dionysian celebration". However, dance in the earlier 19th century had been seen as bestowing benefits on individuals in all sectors of society, not merely as a personal discipline but

through the acquisition of the graces, the refinement of expression and the other qualities of a 'civilised society'. Movement was then "the sensuous annunciation of life, and life the annunciation of the soul" (Walter Sorrell). Although the Viennese were passionate dancers, Beethoven himself was apparently appalling at it, quite unable to follow the beat. Nevertheless, the Symphony dances indeed, and in obsessive rhythms: Jan Swafford (2014) even hears "shouting horns, strings skirling like bagpipes ... a 'Scotch-snap' rhythm in the first movement theme ... the last movement resembles a Scottish reel."

However, many modern commentators, following the composer, Robert Simpson (1970), have concentrated on Beethoven's radical use of tonality in the Symphony and, in particular, his unexpected harmonies and use of modulations to unanticipated keys. Thus, the simple rhythmic building blocks that Beethoven employs are transformed by his genius in colouring the tonality in which they function: the main key is A major, but as well as exploring related keys as would be expected, Beethoven makes startling use of such 'foreign' keys as C major and F major.

The introduction to the first movement is the longest Beethoven ever wrote. It is, itself, a colossal preface to a series of enormously impressive changes of dynamics and tonality over the rest of the movement (not only employing A major, but also C and F majors), on a scale never before attempted (not even in the 'Eroica').

The second movement, in A minor, is an Allegretto (i.e. not really a slow movement, and only slow in comparison with its neighbours), and relates even more closely to the keys of F and C major. It was encored at the premiere.

The Scherzo 3rd movement blazes out at the start in F major, the Trio emerging in what should be a resplendent D major. Unfortunately too many conductors jam on the breaks for the Trio, which is marked 'Assai meno presto', and it still needs to have a 'presto feel' to it.

After the repeat of the Scherzo closes in F major, the lurch back to A major is hammered home at the very start of the Finale. The movement's paradox is to express boundless rhythmical activity (Tovey describes it as "a triumph of Bacchic fury") within an overall context that seems both architecturally immutable and transcendently liberating, a joyous lifting of restraint or, in Swafford's words: "a kind of Bacchic trance".

The work was premiered in Vienna, with Beethoven himself conducting, on 8 December 1813 at a charity concert for soldiers wounded in the Battle of Hanau (a skirmish between Napoleon's retreating French forces and the Austro-Bavarian Corps). The program also included Beethoven's patriotic work 'Wellington's Victory' (which was received with greater applause than the 7th Symphony, despite the encore of the latter's second movement), exalting the victory of the British over Napoleon. The 7th Symphony, too, would have been connected by that first Viennese audience with Napoleon's defeat, and as a joyous inauguration of a peace long-awaited.

The orchestra at that first performance was led by Beethoven's friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and included some of the finest musicians of the day: violinist and composer Louis Spohr, composers Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Antonio Salieri, bassoonist Anton Romberg, and the Italian double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti, whom Beethoven described as playing "with great fire and expressive power". The Italian guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani played cello. The orchestra, for once, was well prepared – in rehearsal the violins had found some of their parts too hard, and an unusually even-tempered Beethoven told them to take the music home and practice! The next day all went well under

Beethoven's baton: "as a sforzando occurred, he tore his arms with a great vehemence asunder ... at the entrance of a forte he jumped in the air" according to Spohr.

By 1813, Beethoven's hearing was already greatly impaired. According to his letters, buzzing noises and other sounds started in his head at around 1796 when he was 26. Deafness began to manifest itself in 1798, and by 1801 at age 31, he had lost 60% of his hearing. By the age of 46 (1816), less than 3 years after the premiere of the 7th Symphony, he was completely deaf.

In listening to a piece of music such as this, we are, perhaps, no longer surprised (let alone appalled) by the 'shock of the new', the novelty that Beethoven's contemporaries experienced hearing such a work for the first time. Many pieces from bygone eras are sufficiently of their time to transport us there, but masterpieces such as Beethoven's Seventh Symphony are also so rich in substance and meaning as to resonate with every succeeding generation as well, illuminating each period in its own way.

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. We meet 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