



PROGRAMME NOTES

Wagner	
Prelude, <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	8'
Rachmaninov	
Piano Concerto No 1	27'
Interval	
Brahms	
Symphony No 4	42'

Richard Wagner

(1813-83)

PRELUDE, DIE MEISTERSINGER
VON NÜRNBERG

In *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers) Wagner put aside the gods, heroes, kings and knights of many of his other works and, instead, the central character is a cobbler and the story deals with the progress of young love set in sixteenth century Nuremberg. In the majestic warmth and naturalness of its musical invention, Wagner created the most human and lovable of all his music dramas and it was instantly recognised as a masterpiece at its premiere in Munich in 1868.

Writing to his long-suffering publisher, Schott, in 1861 Wagner promised that *Die Meistersinger* would be "a popular comic opera ... light in style and easily staged" and would be completed within a year. In the event, it was nearly another six years before it was finished and, lasting some four and a half hours, is one of the longest operas in the repertoire.

The Prelude was written early in

1862 at Biebrich, near Mainz before Wagner set to work on the opera itself. He later wrote, "one evening with a fine sunset lighting up in glory the splendid view of 'golden Mainz' and the majestically flowing Rhine, the prelude to my *Mastersingers* suddenly sprang up clearly in my mind." Wagner's associates were not slow to recognise a new mature wisdom of the music and by mid-1862 Hans von Bülow was writing that *Meistersinger* is "a real masterpiece... with an immense wealth of musical ideas and a humour that makes Shakespeare seem a trifle threadbare." The first performance of the Prelude was given in Leipzig under Wagner on 31 October 1862.

The Prelude opens with a sturdy theme depicting the Mastersingers. A lyrical melody, representing the love of the young knight Walter, is swept aside by the stately march of the proud guild of Mastersingers and is followed by the famous *Prize Song*. A lighter chattering idea, associated with the group of apprentices, and their light-hearted jokes is soon halted by a grand peroration, bringing the prelude to a celebratory conclusion.

CD: The London Classical Players / Roger Norrington. EMI 7243 5 55479 2 7

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-83)

The late nineteenth century regarded Wagner as a colossus. More than any other composer since Beethoven, he opened up new musical vistas, and in his music dramas his contemporaries experienced a degree of intensity never previously encountered. As a man, Wagner was arrogant, manipulative and