

Swansea International Festival

Saturday 17 October

7.30pm

Brangwyn Hall

Dresden Philharmonic

Conductor Michael Sanderling
Cello Thomas Carroll

Wagner Overture: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
Elgar Cello Concerto in E flat

INTERVAL

Beethoven Symphony No 3 in E flat (Eroica)

Richard Wagner (1813-83)

Overture: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Wagner composed the overture before his opera, basing it on the motifs he intended to use. Those of the opening represent the Meistersinger, with their rigid rules and regulations. There follows part of the song with which the young knight, Walter, wins their prize – the hand of the beautiful Eva. The efforts of Beckmesser, a conceited Meistersinger, to win the prize provoke ribald comments from the apprentices. Then, with a single note on the triangle, comes the famous combination of themes, whose meaning is made clear by Hans Sachs, the great Meistersinger; the masters deserve their honour because they keep alive the craftsmanship without which inspiration is useless. Therefore the dry rules and prize song combine – a worthy winner is declared, and a young couple are united in love.

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Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)

Cello Concerto in E minor

- 1 Adagio: Moderato
- 2 Lento: Allegro molto
- 3 Adagio
- 4 Allegro: Moderato: Allegro ma non troppo

The Cello Concerto was Elgar's last significant instrumental work of major importance. He began it in 1918 at Brinkwells, a remote cottage in Sussex, and completed it the following year. Despite a shaky first performance, it has become one of the most loved and admired pieces in the entire concerto repertoire.

The first movement opens with a short Adagio introduction in which the solo instrument plays a broad theme marked, characteristically, nobilmente. The Moderato into which this introduction quickly leads has its developed and discussed by cello and orchestra before making way for a second theme, introduced by clarinets and bassoons.

The second movement is again preceded by a slow introduction, during which suggestions of a new theme are quickly interspersed with references to the music of the opening Adagio. The main theme is a pattern of scurrying, repeated semiquavers, which remains essentially with the solo instrument in its high register. This theme, and a short cantabile motif, provide all the material for the movement which, despite its quick tempo and apparent brilliance, is agitated and distressed in mood.

The short Adagio in B flat major is a meditative solo for the cello and is based on one theme only. The intimate, gentle character of the music is enhanced by the reduction of the wind section to clarinets, bassoons and horns and by the interplay between the solo instrument and the string ensemble.

The first bars of the finale see the orchestra playing a suggestion of the springy rondo theme. Then the cello takes over, lapsing into a brief cadenza that recalls the opening of the first movement and, in doing so, reminds us that the rondo theme itself derives from this. The two episodes of the rondo provide the soloist with a real opportunity for virtuosity. After a recapitulation a memorable coda brings a reminder of both the slow movement and the 'motto' theme of the very beginning.

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