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UNIVERSITY PHILHARMONIA

Saturday 30 November, 7.30pm
Great Hall, Trent Building, University Park

Michael Coleby, Conductor
Paul Emmett, Assistant Conductor
Samuel Davis, Oboe

PROGRAMME

The Unanswered Question

Charles Ives

Oboe Concerto in D minor

Alessandro Marcello

The Magic Flute: Overture

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21

Ludwig van Beethoven

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

PROGRAMME NOTES

The Unanswered Question

Charles Ives (1874–1954)

One of the most appealing and durable myths of twentieth-century music is the popular image of the professional insurance salesman Charles Ives, an amateur genius of avant-garde composing who experimented with groundbreaking techniques years ahead of their time, but who composed seemingly for his own gratification, the vast majority of his output entirely overlooked by the American musical establishment for decades until his belated discovery when he was in his seventies. But the reality is that Ives started out as a highly trained conventional composer and organist (his musical education was at Yale University), who seemed well poised for a traditional musical career; but he quickly took a decision to devote himself to a life in business, which inevitably affected the course of his future musical opportunities. Only with the posthumous first performance of his monumental Fourth Symphony in 1965 did the full scale of Ives's precocious imagination and compositional innovations reveal itself internationally.

The Unanswered Question was conceived as a companion piece to *Central Park in the Dark*, the latter's essential light-heartedness (which included surreal ragtime elements) pointedly contrasting with the more serious metaphysics of the former. Both works were initially developed by Ives between 1906 and 1909 and embodied experiments with the layering of disparate musical ideas. They were first performed by graduate students from New York's Juilliard School of Music at Columbia University on 11 May 1946 under the joint direction of Edgar Schenkman and Theodore Bloomfield. *The Unanswered Question* began life under the working title 'A Cosmic Landscape', and in it Ives set out to depict, by contrasts of scoring and musical material, a process of question-and-answer on the daunting theme of the meaning of existence. Muted and luminous strings intone a slow diatonic chorale which represents the blissfully ignorant silence of the Druids, while a solo trumpet repeatedly states the (enigmatically atonal) 'perennial question of existence'. The trumpet's dogged questioning is answered, with increasing animation and perplexed dissonances, by a quartet of flutes – occasionally modified in some performances by the inclusion of other wind instruments – but no solution is reached, and the disparate groupings are never resolved.

© Mervyn Cooke

Oboe Concerto in D minor

Alessandro Marcello (ca.1673-ca.1747)

Alessandro Marcello (1673-1747) was born into a Venetian family surrounded by the arts, especially having his older brother and composer Benedetto Marcello. Unlike Benedetto, Alessandro was not a professional musician and was enthusiastic with all art forms including publishing poetry as well as composing a few pieces of music including his most well-known work being the oboe concerto in D minor.

The concerto for many years was known to be written by Antonio Vivaldi as there are some features of Vivaldi's compositional techniques within this work. The concerto was then associated with his brother until researchers identified copies with Alessandro's name on it to confirm that it belongs to him. Johann Sebastian Bach took interest in this concerto and transcribed the second movement for organ adding in his own ornaments that many oboists use in contemporary times in performance of the work.

The first movement gives this proud statement of the style and tone that Marcello was trying to portray, with call and responses between the oboe soloist and the continuo. The energetic character of the first movement is contrasted with the slow, lyrical and mournful character of the second movement. The third movement is animated with quick passages that are in dialogue between the oboe and strings to culminate for an exciting ending to the concerto.

© Samuel Davis

The Magic Flute: Overture

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Composed in 1791, *The Magic Flute* is the opening to Mozart's final opera, written in the last year of his life. This work was commissioned by actor-manager Emanuel Schikaneder for his theatre in Vienna and premiered on September 30, 1791. The opera, a singspiel combining spoken dialogue with musical numbers, was intended to appeal to a broad audience with its blend of popular humour, mysticism, and Masonic symbolism.

The overture encapsulates the comical opera's themes of enlightenment, morality, and the triumph of reason over chaos. Structured in sonata form, it begins with a majestic introduction featuring solemn chords, possibly alluding to Masonic rituals – a nod to Mozart's involvement with Freemasonry. These are followed by a lively allegro packed with intricate counterpoint, where Mozart seamlessly combines the complexity of learned techniques with melodies that remain light and approachable.

What makes the overture so striking is its blend of serious and playful elements, echoing the opera's mix of drama and humour. The fugal passages reflect Mozart's deep appreciation for Baroque traditions, but their energy and vitality feel entirely his own. Full of optimism and warmth, the overture not only prepares the audience for the extraordinary story to come but also stands as a captivating orchestral work on its own.

© Gretel Auty

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21

Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

Andante cantabile con molto

Menuetto (Allegro molto e vivace) & Trio

Adagio – Allegro molto e vivace

Beethoven wrote nine symphonies, the first heralding the new century in 1800 and the last completed in 1824, three years before his death. The first symphony is perhaps more light-hearted than one often associates with Beethoven symphonies, it being written a year or two before the composer's tortured struggle with his gradual loss of hearing, so powerfully reflected in the later *Eroica* Symphony (No.3). Beethoven's influences of the classical mode of composition are clear in the First Symphony, particularly reminiscent of the style of his teacher Haydn, but there are clear characteristics that mark it as Beethoven's work, such as the frequent use of *sforzandi* and accents.

The light, humorous nature of the Symphony is perfectly exemplified by the very opening of the work – the twelve-bar introduction of the first movement, often considered a musical joke, but possibly more of an experiment by the composer, consisting of a sequence of dominant-tonic chord sequences in the 'wrong' key, so that the true C major tonality only gradually emerges. One critic of the time was sure that 'no one will censure an ingenious artist like Beethoven for such liberties and peculiarities!' Following the elegant and restrained dance of the second movement, the third movement, although written in the traditional 'Minuet and Trio' format has such a vivacious (almost furious!) tempo that makes it a Scherzo in all but name. The fourth movement begins with a humorous series of attempts at a C major scale by the first violins, eventually launching into a playful, bustling finale.

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MICHAEL COLEBY – CONDUCTOR

Based in London, conductor Michael Coleby has a particular interest in contemporary music and collaborating with composers. At the age of 25 he made his professional debut, conducting the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, at the Berlin Atonal Festival in a performance and shortly afterwards he was invited back to conduct the DSO academy orchestra. In recent years, Michael has worked as guest assistant conductor with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Vladamir Jurowski (2019-22), the BBC Concert Orchestra, the Orquestra Castile y Leon and the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin. In May 2023 Michael was guest assistant to composer & conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen for performances of his new organ concerto with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, acting as cover conductor during the rehearsal period. Michael has conducted the Brandenburger Symphoniker, Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, Sudewestdeutsches Kammerorchester Pforzheim, Sudewestdeutsches Philharmonie Konstanz, Lohja City Orchestra, LEAD Festival Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Orchestre National de Metz and the Janus Ensemble.

Formerly a cellist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, Michael started conducting whilst studying for a degree in Music at the University of Bristol. During his final year at university, Michael conducted Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* under the guidance of Sir Roger Norrington. Michael has taken part in masterclasses with Martyn Brabbins, Atso Almila, Sian Edwards, Sir Roger Norrington, Hanu Lintu, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Esa-Pekka Salonen, Johannes Schlaefli and David Reiland.

PAUL EMMETT – ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR

Currently studying a Master's in Music Composition at the University of Nottingham Paul Emmett has been an active member of the Philharmonia for several years, playing trombone as well as being involved in a number of other university and external ensembles. Last year, he served as one of the conductors of the Blowsoc Concert Band and assistant conductor of the Wind Orchestra.

Beyond the university, Paul works as assistant conductor for Melismata, an early music choir, and occasionally conducts the Sleaford Concert Band. He has also taken part in conducting masterclasses at the Royal Northern College of Music and with the London Musical Theatre Orchestra.

As a composer, Paul is currently working on a diverse portfolio of music for his Master's degree while collaborating on the second project with filmmakers from Nottingham Trent University, the BBC Concert Orchestra and other students and alumni from the University of Nottingham Department of Music.

SAMUEL DAVIS - OBOE

Samuel is an enthusiastic and passionate musician who likes to be involved as much as possible in all aspects of performance. While studying for his Research Master's in Music Performance he performed the oboe in several orchestras with a highlight being a trip to Antwerp to perform in a show with West End Stars. He currently enjoys instrumental teaching to younger musicians and is keen to participate in a wide range of music activities, whether that is through performing, teaching or conducting. He is particularly excited to return to the University of Nottingham to perform with University Philharmonia again, this time in the role of soloist.

UNIVERSITY PHILHARMONIA

Michael Coleby, Conductor
Paul Emmett, Assistant Conductor

Katie Rodgers, Concert Manager
Emma Stafford, Personnel Manager
Florence Keck & Hannah Rieger, Marketing & Publicity Managers
Gretel Auty, Librarian

University Philharmonia is an auditioned symphony orchestra comprising students, staff and alumni from across the University. It performs exciting, varied and challenging repertoire in several concerts annually. Repertoire has included John Adams' *Harmonium*, Holst *The Planets* with members of Zhejiang Conservatory of Music and Stravinsky *Firebird* Suite. Opportunities are provided to talented students to perform a concerto with the orchestra, receive mentoring as assistant conductors and undertake key roles in the management of the orchestra under professional guidance.

Flute

Gretel Auty
Madeleine Bonicel
Alice Stone
Joseph Ward (+picc)

Oboe

Rebecca Weber
Ailish Gray

Clarinet

Caitlin Panks
Jenny Mounsey
Rebecca Green

Bassoon

Sasha Rasmussen
Melanie Godfrey
Joe Gibson

Horn

James Rose
Ian Burton*

Trumpet

Imogen Poole
Daniel Scarlett

Trombone

Paul Emmett
Claire Farmery

Percussion

Emma Stafford

Harpsichord

William Layzell-Smith

Violin I

Chiara Ponticos
Scott Chua
Seohyeon Baek
Jing Xiang Yau
Arya Soni
Annabel Axelrod
Charlotte Waring
Zoe Lam

Violin II

Tara Rodrigues
Nina So
Ai Ling Woolston
Franklin Baron
Ambrose Kersley
Olivia Mason
Sapphire Houston-Ball

Viola

Sara Wang
Fong Shir-Ning
Jonathan Kightley*

Cello

Gruffydd Jones
Hannah Rieger
Charlotte Robinson
Ariella King-Cline
Elisa Empringham

Double Bass

Alex Dorey
Max Wilson

*guest musician