

TIDBITS FOR 13/12/2008

Weber: Overture to Der Freischütz

Died aged just 39.

Clarinetists and bassoonists are grateful to him for his concertos for those instruments. We played the bassoon concerto a few years ago.

The successful premiere of *Der Freischütz* on 18 June 1821 in Berlin led to performances all over Europe; it remains the only one of his operas still in the regular repertoire. The colourful harmonies and orchestration, use of popular themes from central European folk music, and the gloomy (*gothic*) libretto, complete with an appearance of the Devil in a nocturnal forest, have all helped to ensure its popularity.

This overture is the first in which unreserved use of melodies from the opera is made.

After the beautiful horn quartet comes a passage which in the opera when the forester Max senses the passage of Samile (a wild huntsman = the devil) ... it all gets quite supernatural. Then we have the joyful music of lovers approaching each other. There's a shooting match for the hand of a beautiful woman, a supernatural wolf's glen, magic bullets and ... well, it's an opera!

Most of all enjoy the tunes!!

Handel: Water Music (arr. H Harty)

Some years ago I did a concert of Handel's Water Music and Fireworks music. There was a long interval and I decided to read the programme, where I discovered that Handel had written the music in return for a modest 'fee'. What a difference an L makes!

Sir Herbert Hamilton Harty (his first name just had to begin with an H ...!) was a composer and conductor. Harty was largely responsible for the Halle orchestra becoming one of the country's best.

Handel's Water music consists of 3 sets of music, each containing several movements, running to about to almost an hour of music. Harty took a handful of these movements and arranged them to fit a modern orchestra better. In other words he added parts for a number of wind instruments (principally the clarinet and trombone) which weren't used by Handel. One thing that is interesting to note is that Harty inserts markings to the music (Handel's scores, as common at the time, were which are very similar to ways in which modern 'authentic' performance practice research suggests is correct. He was some half century ahead of his time!

Dvorak: Symphony No.8

While the Seventh symphony is a stormy romantic work, the Eighth is cheery and draws much of its inspiration from the Bohemian folk music that Dvořák loved. Weber's Freishutz, by the way, was set in Bohemia.

That some critics feel it necessary to promote this symphony as "better than the Ninth" shows how the immense popularity of the Ninth has overshadowed the earlier works. Is it better than the Ninth? Only you can decide!