

DACORUM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2017

ST JOHN'S CHURCH BOXMOOR

**Reviewer's note**

**Much can be said about music director Tom Loten's expansive approach to his programming of DSOs' regular concerts in our area. The word 'expansive' can have many shades of meaning: it can refer to quality – the phrase "something for everyone" refers to the sparkling variety he always achieves in his programmes – from *baroque* to *modern*. But in this case we must perforce add quantity as no fewer than five substantial items have been included. As space in these reviews is of course limited full comment on two items is omitted (no reflection on their value!). They are (1) Bach's *Andante* from *Suite no.3* – this in memory of Andrew Harvey, a long-standing member of DSO who passed away recently, (2) Mozart's *Serenade in c minor*.**

The word 'Titan' has been applied indiscriminately to many of the world's greatest composers, and in each case, given his stature, with perfect justification. However, if we use superlatives like 'greatest' with comparisons express or implied we may be on less certain ground; whom do we mean, Bach? Beethoven? Wagner? Schubert? This list is not itself comprehensive but it is most certainly controversial. Whose 'greatest' should carry more weight than the others? This is a matter of opinion and Thank Goodness a lively debate on the subject is still in progress – it makes life more interesting!

In our complacent British way we think of Handel as an English composer, overlooking the fact that he was German by birth and upbringing. Born in 1685 he did not arrive in England till 1712 so that by age 27 he had already established his musical mastery in his homeland. The simple explanation for this move is that he was following his Hanoverian master/patron who that year had travelled to England to assume the British Crown. From George's point of view what more natural than that a relationship both fruitful musically and still containing the flavour of his beloved Hanover should be sustained? But artistically the move on Handel's part was shrewd in a broader sense: England's – and especially London's – musical awareness was growing at that time and with it the demand for e.g. opera (especially Italian), oratorio, organ recitals etc. all of which Handel's creative genius was able to satisfy. The Majestic Water Music Suite, composed as part of the celebrations of George II's accession to the British Crown marked his unchallenged dominance of the Baroque Era.

*The Concerto for Flute and Harp* with orchestral accompaniment is surely an example of Mozart's unique mastery of musical expression in any shape or form. How do you balance two such contrasting instruments? Mozart achieved this balance; he gives each instrument its characteristic and individual sound and we can, if we choose, enjoy each separately while recognizing how delightfully the two can be combined in Mozart's hands – cool, clear and joyous, like a mountain stream exuding the Feel Good factor for the weary traveller – and this was how Wesley John (flute) and Mary Reid (harp) made it sound.

The view is frequently held by the British musical public that Germans do not consider us to be a musical nation. There is some truth in this and there is no ignoring the fact that, quite apart from its great and magnificent symphonic ensembles (Berlin Philharmonic, Frankfurt Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Staatskapelle Dresden, Bavarian State, Nuremberg Symphony, to mention only a few) nearly every small town in Germany has its full orchestra, for the most part locally funded. But there

are other sides to the argument – what of (1) German musicians visiting England, and (2) British music performed in Germany? In connection with point (2) the works of leading English composers – Elgar, Britten, Delius, Holst, are frequently and enthusiastically performed in Germany, and on point (1) – great German composers visiting England; we need only mention Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn, - three giants who fell in love with this country and its music. Holst (in spite of his name) was a native Briton, Handel became a naturalized one, and Haydn and Mendelssohn were frequent visitors. Put all these factors together and you have described a warm musical relationship between the two countries.

The second half of this DSO concert was devoted to Haydn with a sprightly performance of his Symphony no. 101 known familiarly as 'The Clock' because of the tick-tock tempo of the second movement. The orchestra have played this piece many times before so that to their obvious enjoyment in rendering this technically undemanding and light-hearted work is a skill born of familiarity. It is worth noting that Haydn paid two visits to England – 1791/92 and 1794/95 – where he and his music were given a rapturous welcome.