



# U3A MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

14<sup>th</sup> NEWSLETTER – November/December 2009



## **Franz Krommer**

Wendy introduced us to the music of Franz Krommer (1759 - 1831), who is not well-known except to wind players. In fact he was a prolific composer. He was born František Vincenc Kramář in Kamenice in Moravia. He studied violin and organ and served as an organist, studying music theory and composition on his own. At the age of 26, he decided to try his luck in Vienna, but spent a year or so there without finding steady work. Eventually he obtained a post as violinist in a court orchestra in Hungary, later becoming music director, and then became music director at Pecs Cathedral.

In 1795 he returned to Vienna, where he eventually entered the service of Emperor Franz I and succeeded Leopold Koseleuch as court composer and director of chamber music, in which post he remained until his death, aged 72, in 1831. His string quartets were held in particularly high esteem by his contemporaries, some of whom compared them with those of Haydn. During the years of fame and fortune as a composer in Vienna, he adopted the German spelling of his name: Franz Vinzenz Krommer.

In the decades following his death his reputation faded. But since 1985, contemporary wind soloists have made an important contribution to the revival of his forgotten musical treasures. Their efforts to rescue him from a posthumous oblivion continue.

Wendy selected three excerpts from two of Krommer's bassoon quartets Op.46. Together the Allegro, Adagio and Minuetto movements demonstrated the range of the bassoon and its ability to convey cheerfulness, beauty and humour.



## **Sir Hubert Parry's Rise to Prominence**

Keith read the biography of Sir Hubert Parry by Jeremy Dibble earlier this year. In this presentation he covered the period from Parry's birth in 1848 to the first performances of his third symphony in 1889. We learned the sad story of the death of Parry's mother only 12 days after his birth, and of the young Parry's struggle to make a career in music in spite of opposition from his father and his potential in-laws. Fortunately, George Grove commissioned many articles from Parry for the original version of his famous *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. This income enabled Parry to extricate himself from a career at Lloyds. Grove, Edward Dannreuther and Charles Villiers Stanford also encouraged Parry in his early compositions.

Keith mainly concentrated on the first three symphonies. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century British composers had produced some worthwhile and attractive symphonies, but these were not very original in style, owing much to Haydn, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. It was in Parry's Symphony No.1 in G (1882) and other Parry works of this period that "an individual English musical voice made its first appearance since the death of Henry Purcell". In the same year, Parry became a Professor at the new Royal College of Music

(with Grove as Director) and received a commission for his Symphony No.2 in F (the “Cambridge”), the theme of which is the life of an undergraduate. This work confirmed Parry’s gift for counterpoint (the coherent combination of distinct melodic lines – often in Parry’s music you will hear three-part counterpoint) and foreshadowed the expressive language of Elgar.



Keith also featured the Piano Concerto (1880), the Bridal March from *The Birds* (1883), and short extracts from two major choral works: *Blest Pair of Sirens* (1887) and *Judith* (1888). The enormous success of these two choral works put Parry in a quandary. Keith suggested that many of Parry’s best works are orchestral rather than choral. Yet most of the subsequent continual stream of commissions were for choral works. Parry felt unable to say “No” to these.

Consequently, his Symphony No.3 in C “The English” (1889) was his last major orchestral work until the *Symphonic Variations* in 1897. This melodious symphony won immediate favour, creating considerable excitement among critics. Some say that this is Parry’s orchestral masterpiece on a large scale – an exuberant English equivalent of Mendelssohn’s *Italian* symphony or Schumann’s *Rhenish* symphony. For the next 20 years, this was the most frequently performed symphony by any British composer.

### ***An Unusual Version of Concierto De Aranjuez***

Colin brought us well and truly into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a track based on the Adagio from Rodrigo’s famous guitar concerto. Rodrigo was amongst the most significant Spanish composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. His approachable style, with its echoes of Spanish folk music, changed little throughout his long career, but his influence was significant. Although he composed in many genres, he is remembered mainly for his guitar music.



Blind from childhood, his prodigious output was composed in Braille.

Inspired by the beautiful Gardens of the Rococo palace at Aranjuez, this work is certainly the most famous concerto in the guitar repertoire, and one of the best-known pieces of Classical music of the 20th Century. The two outer movements are full of dance rhythms, while the gorgeous second is a masterpiece of subtle scoring.

Unusually, Colin chose a jazz version of this wonderful piece of music by the Jim Hall Sextet. This was arranged and conducted by Don Sebesky and recorded in 1975.

## Future Sessions

Date	Provisional Programme
17 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♪ Jean Sibelius, 1865-1957 (Jay). Although Sibelius lived for 91 years he stopped composing in 1926. He was originally influenced by Tchaikovsky and Russian composers, but after Finland gained sovereignty his music became more nationalistic and very much a style of his own. He wrote many tone and symphonic poems, seven wonderful symphonies and an excellent violin concerto. It is quite easy to confuse the music of Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven; confusing Sibelius's music with anyone else's is much more difficult.</li> <li>♪ A variety of Christmas music and "humour" (Keith, Brian, Roy), along with some seasonal treats and refreshments.</li> </ul>
21 Jan 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♪ Max Bruch (Keith). Bruch is best known now for his famous Violin Concerto, which is Number 1 in the Top 100 most popular classical works according to musica.co.uk. We'll hear an excerpt from this, and Keith will also introduce some of his other works, including his rarely performed Concerto for Two Pianos, and an excerpt from his Third Symphony.</li> <li>♪ The Clarinet from Baroque to Modern Music, including Jazz (Brian).</li> </ul>
18 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♪ Schubert (Wendy)</li> <li>♪ Russian Nationalism and "The Mighty Five" - from Glinka to Rimsky-Korsakov (Brian)</li> </ul>

Please note the above dates in your diary. We look forward to seeing you at (or soon after) 9.45am on 17 December.

## Concerts

Local concerts in the next few weeks include:

- ♪ Wooburn Singers Christmas Concert, 7.30pm on 12 December, All Saints Church, Marlow.
- ♪ Marlow Choral Society - Charity Christmas Carol Concert, 7.00pm on 12 December. Guest presenter Sarah Wilmshurst. Shelley Theatre, Court Garden.
- ♪ Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, 6.30pm on 20 December, All Saints Church, Marlow
- ♪ Amersham Concerts - Corelli, Vivaldi, Besozzi, Rossini. 8pm on 15 January at St.Mary's Parish Church, Amersham.
- ♪ Sarah Williamson (clarinet)/Danny Driver (piano) - Verdi, Rachmaninoff, Poulenc, Messager, Weber, 7.45pm on 16 January 2010, Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road.

Contact the Theatre Group if you would like to attend the Valentine's Day concert by the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall (Sun 14 Feb 2010 at 3pm). This includes music by Tchaikovsky, Bruch, Khachaturian, Dvorak and Bizet.

Happy listening!

Brian (484099, brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com) and Keith (891507, keithrachel@hotmail.com)

P.S. Don't forget that you can view what we have done at previous sessions at our web site: <http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>