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JAMIE WALTON

SHOSTAKOVICH
Cello Concerto No.2

BRITTEN
Cello Symphony

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
ALEXANDER BRIGER conductor

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SHOSTAKOVICH CELLO CONCERTO NO. 2

BRITTEN CELLO SYMPHONY

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 - 1975)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra No. 2 in G, Op. 126

- | | |
|---------------|---------|
| 1. Largo | [14.39] |
| 2. Allegretto | [4.32] |
| 3. Allegretto | [15.41] |

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)

Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 68

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 4. Allegro maestoso | [13.10] |
| 5. Presto inquieto | [3.55] |
| 6. Adagio | [9.43] |
| 7. Passacaglia: Andante allegro | [7.48] |

Total Timings [69.33]

JAMIE WALTON CELLO
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
ALEXANDER BRIGER CONDUCTOR

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Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto and Britten's Cello Symphony make the most likely of bedfellows. These works were written by composers who were pretty much direct contemporaries, who, in their own ways, and within utterly different political climates, composed in an approachable manner which could speak not only to their own homeland, but to the world at large. Both were catapulted into the international limelight as young men (age 27 in Shostakovich's case, 31 in Britten's) by virtue of the phenomenal success of full scale, serious and surprisingly mature operas - *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and *Peter Grimes*. Britten's dark masterpiece, *Grimes*, became the springboard for a glittering career as an opera composer, while after two years of astounding acclaim, Shostakovich's operatic plans were effectively ruined by Stalin's condemnation of *Lady Macbeth*, resulting in the work's speedy disappearance from the Soviet repertory.

The two were also admirers of each other's work and it is hardly a surprise that they became well-met acquaintances in later life. Britten dedicated his church parable, *The Prodigal Son* to Shostakovich, who reciprocated the gesture with his Fourteenth Symphony. As a young man, in 1936, Britten had attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and, on witnessing

the apparent condescension from an older generation of British composers, excoriated them as, 'the "eminent English Renaissance" composers sniggering in the stalls... There is more in a single page of his *Macbeth* than in the whole of their "elegant" output.' Around this time, Shostakovich's occasional influence can be spotted in a number of Britten's works, including the *Sinfonia da Requiem* and Britten continued to be fascinated by Shostakovich's major works over the years, issuing a heartfelt and warm tribute on the occasion of the latter's 60th birthday. Shostakovich, for his part, discovered Britten's art only later in life, but was no less impressed than the student Britten had been of his own, almost 30 years earlier. It can be difficult to weigh-up Shostakovich's articles and speeches as they could easily have been made under some duress. Nevertheless, his mentions of Britten tend to be unremittingly positive. Writing to his close friend and correspondent, Isaak Glikman in 1963:

I have been sent a recording of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*. I am playing it and am thrilled with the greatness of the work, which I place on a level with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and other great works of the human spirit. Hearing the *War Requiem* somehow cheers me up, makes me even more full of the joys of life.

Glikman also reports Shostakovich preferring Britten's *Requiem* to Mozart's and, as early as 1959, named his English counterpart as one of only a handful of the 20th Century's great composers. In an interview in 1968, he praises further still, expressing his desire to see,

More Brittens. Russian ones, and English ones, and German ones. Various. And of different generations. What attracts me to Britten? The strength and sincerity of his talent, its surface simplicity and the intensity of its emotional effect...I think that anyone who takes music seriously ought to try to get to know Britten's works better; they are, by the way, played here very often.

Of course, there were a great many differences between the two men on matters musical and otherwise. Britten had the freedom to tour the world accepting generous commissions, overseeing premieres, absorbing the acclaim and the honours attendant on his status. Shostakovich's own status in the Soviet Union was mutable and often rather less elevated, notably after various official purges on composers and on Shostakovich's music, in particular. Money was not so easy to come by and was supplemented by the odd recital tour and teaching appointments. Far from consorting with the jet set, Shostakovich was sometimes in fear

of his family's safety and, at times, his own life. Only after the partial thaw in the icy Cold War relations in the 1950s could the Russian experience foreign adulation at first hand. Musically speaking, their languages were not so distant, building on their shared admiration of Gustav Mahler and Alban Berg, among others. But, in terms of transmission of the language, Shostakovich is lauded above all for his symphonies and string quartets, whereas Britten's fame leans heavily on his contributions to the operatic, choral and vocal repertoires.

Shostakovich and Britten finally met for the first time at the Royal Festival Hall in London, September 1960, on the occasion of the UK premiere of the Russian composer's First Cello Concerto. Britten accepted Shostakovich's invitation to sit with him in his box only days after being amazed by a radio broadcast of the concerto's soloist and dedicatee, Mstislav Rostropovich. After the concert, Shostakovich introduced Britten to Rostropovich whose years behind the Iron Curtain precluded any thorough knowledge of Britten's output. Rostropovich had heard only the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, which is based on a theme by Purcell. Rostropovich, having not even seen a photograph of Britten, and working purely on this Baroque-flavoured evidence, had assumed Britten was a composer from a previous century and fell into a

fit of laughter on being introduced to him. On realising that this was no practical joke and Benjamin Britten was indeed standing before him, he immediately set about imploring the composer to write something for him.

It didn't take long for the ebullient, irrepressible Rostropovich and Britten to form a close and lasting personal and professional relationship. Communicating in their own bastardised form of German which came to be known as 'Aldeburgh Deutsch', Britten wrote his Op.65 Cello Sonata, three cello suites and the Cello Symphony for Rostropovich. Britten, his partner the tenor Peter Pears and Rostropovich's wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, appear to have enjoyed a free and easy friendship, meeting socially and often performing recitals. Aside from the cello works, Britten also wrote his song set, *The Poet's Echo* for Vishnevskaya, and the solo soprano part in his *War Requiem* was written expressly for her voice.

After a short illness in 1962, Rostropovich wrote: 'Dear Ben and Peter, if you want me to recover completely I ask you to see the doctor whose address is: The Red House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Only he can bring me to life by composing a brilliant cello concerto.' On receiving the first movement, Rostropovich replied that it was 'the

very top of everything ever written for the cello'. After a successful Russian sojourn the previous year, Britten was invited by the Soviet authorities to conduct the premiere of the *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra Op.68* on 12 March 1964, in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with Rostropovich as soloist and Shostakovich in the third row. The Cello Symphony, as the name implies, is a dialogue between orchestra and cello rather than a conventional adversarial concerto. The first movement is turbulent, mysterious and intricate, while the following *scherzo*, marked *Presto inquieto* is suitably unsettling, featuring macabre effects from the strings. The eloquently elegiac *Adagio* leads into the *Finale* where a confident passacaglia theme is introduced - a response to Rostropovich's exuberant personality, according to some. After the performance, Britten secured a deal with the Soviet Minister of Culture to grant exclusive performance rights to Rostropovich until the end of 1965 - adding yet another string to the cellist's bow.

By this time, Shostakovich and Rostropovich had known each other for over 20 years. They first met at the Moscow conservatory where the cellist (then also a budding composer) entered Shostakovich's composition class in 1943. Their good friendship seems to have remained tinged with a master-pupil relationship, though Shostakovich was not

short on kindnesses such as helping to fund the young man's first concert suit. That both of Shostakovich's concertos were written specifically for Rostropovich is testimony enough to the esteem in which the composer held the cellist. Rostropovich, in interviews, speaks of his older friend with a mixture of awe and admiration. On his days spent as a student playing duets and learning composition from Shostakovich he opines, 'That was a real musical university for my life.' And in interview after interview similar emerges Shostakovich's 'deep humanity towards everything - in life, in his relationships and in his art.'

Judging by the composer's surviving letters, the Second Cello Concerto was originally planned as a symphony, but became what Shostakovich wrote of as 'the Fourteenth Symphony with a cello part'. Like Britten, Shostakovich was reluctant in the extreme to show others his incomplete scores, but did send a draft of the concerto to Rostropovich who has reported his delight that his own suggestions for the third movement cadenza were incorporated into the final score. Britten himself broke his own no-show taboo by showing Shostakovich his own sketches for his final opera, *Death in Venice*.

Struck low by a heart attack in May of 1966, just as celebrations to commemorate his 60th birthday

were underway, it was unclear as to whether Shostakovich would be in good enough health to attend the premiere of the concerto on 25 September 1966. In the event, he was greeted with a rapturous ovation when, just two years after Britten's Cello Symphony premiere in the same Moscow Conservatory hall, he took his seat to witness Rostropovich and the USSR Symphony Orchestra perform his *Cello Concerto No.2 Op.126* under the baton of Evgeny Svetlanov. The concerto itself, completed in a sanatorium in Yalta, opens with an intimate, introspective *Largo* movement which, like Britten's work, unveils no great Romantic hero battling against orchestral might. Indeed the exchange between the cello and the shuddering booms of the bass drum suggest quite the opposite. The remaining two movements are both marked *Allegretto*; a *scherzo* attempts to throw a little sardonic light on the brooding mood while the *Finale* is notable for its extended cadenza and the attenuating orchestra finally giving way to the cello's final, resigned utterance.

After a year headlined by poor health and exhausting public celebrations, it might have been something of a relief for Shostakovich to welcome back two recently acquired and undemanding friends - Britten and Pears - and to bring in the New Year of 1967, at home, in the company of these sympathetic bedfellows.

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BIOGRAPHIES

JAMIE WALTON

Jamie Walton is a rising international soloist with a distinctive voice of his own and is now being compared by critics to some of the great cellists of the past. He has appeared throughout much of Europe, the USA and the UK in some of the world's most prestigious concert halls and festivals. These include radio broadcasts and numerous festivals including Montpellier, Lucerne, Brighton, Harrogate, Ansbach, Schwabach, Schloss-Elmau, Chichester, Cheltenham, Three Choirs, International Newbury Spring Festival, the International Warwick Festival and the Manchester International Cello Festival. He has also given regular appearances and broadcasts in chamber music, concertos and recitals in Vienna.

He and his pianist Daniel Grimwood appear regularly at Wigmore Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham where their debut was a recital of Chopin for the Chopin festival, sharing the evening with Krystian Zimerman. These led to concertos there with the English Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Welsh National Opera. They have also appeared in recital at the



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Bridgewater Hall, Fairfield Hall, Cadogan Hall and St John Smith's Square regularly as well as at the Chateauville Foundation, Virginia—a personal invite from Maestro Lorin Maazel.

His CDs have regularly been selected into the Telegraph Top 10 of the year and CD of the week and his recording of the Saint-Saëns cello concertos (Philharmonia/Alexander Briger - Quartz records) was also voted onto Radio 3's listening booth going on to receive ecstatic reviews

including Classic FM magazine who described his Saint-Saëns as “The finest around”. Developing a strong rapport in both performance and recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra, future recordings include the Shostakovich and Walton concertos and sonatas from Grieg and Rachmaninoff. February 4th 2008 saw the release of the Elgar and Myaskovsky concertos with the Philharmonia on Signum Classics to unanimous international acclaim, comparing him to Rostropovich (International Record Review) and Tortelier.

He studied at Wells Cathedral School and the RNCM with Margaret Moncrieff before taking private tuition with William Pleeth who wrote of Jamie: “He is a cellist of outstanding performance ability. Combining warmth of tone with a technical command that reaches dazzling proportions, he leaves little doubt as the success that lies ahead of him—he is a musician of great integrity whose performance gives great pleasure.”

His debut with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra was hailed by the press and subsequent radio broadcasts and recitals followed. This led to radio broadcasts and concertos with the Lucerne Festival of Strings Orchestra and the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. Also passionate about chamber music, he joined the Wihan Quartet for

their 20th Anniversary concert at the Rudolfinum in Prague, now available on DVD. A live DVD of a recent recital at Wigmore Hall 2007 is also available.

Jamie plays on a 1712 Guarneri.
www.jamiewalton.com

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor Christoph von Dohnányi, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. In 2007/08 the Orchestra is performing more than 200 concerts, as well as



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presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. For more than 12 years now the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK and International Residency Programme, which began in 1995 with the launch of its residencies at Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank Centre. During 2007/08 the Orchestra not only returns to the refurbished Royal Festival Hall, but celebrates its 11th year as Resident Orchestra of De Montfort Hall in Leicester, its eighth year as Orchestra in Partnership at the Anvil in Basingstoke and the first year of a major new residency in Kent and the Thames Gateway, based in Canterbury. The Orchestra's extensive touring

schedule this season also includes a week long residency at the Musikverein in Vienna, and appearances at more than twenty of the finest international concert halls.

Throughout its 60 year history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in 2007 audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education

website launched in 2005, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange), which is now visited by almost 2 million people a year. In 2005 the Philharmonia became the first ever classical music organisation to be shortlisted for a BT Digital Music Award, and in the same year the Orchestra presented both the first ever fully interactive webcast and the first podcast by a UK orchestra. In September 2005 computer games with Philharmonia scores were at No. 1 and No. 2 in the national charts, while the Orchestra's scores for the last two Harry Potter computer games have both been nominated for BAFTA Awards. Recording and live broadcasting both also continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities: since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.



ALEXANDER BRIGER

Born in Australia, Alexander Briger studied in Sydney and Munich and won 1st prize at the International Competition for Conductors in the Czech Republic in 1993. He later worked closely with Sir Charles Mackerras and Pierre Boulez and made his debut with Opera Australia in 1998 conducting *Jenufa*. Operatic work has since

included *Madama Butterfly*, *Così fan tutte*, *Cunning Little Vixen* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Opera Australia), *The Rape of Lucretia* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden), *Die Zauberflöte* (Glyndebourne Festival), *Rigoletto* and *Makropulos Case* (English National Opera), *Cunning Little Vixen* (Aix-en-Provence), *Bartered Bride* (Royal Swedish Opera), *La Bohème* (State Opera of South

Australia), *Bartok ballets* (Opéra du Rhin) as well as the premiere of Simon Holt's *Who put Bella in the Wych'elm* for the Aldeburgh Festival.

He has performed regularly with the Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, opening their 2003 'Friday Series' in London and touring with them to China in 2003/4; and the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, with whom he made his BBC Proms and Berlin Festival debuts.

He has also worked with the Orchestre de Paris for the opening of the 2004 "Musica Festival", Scottish Chamber Orchestra, with whom he conducted the final concert of the 2004 Edinburgh Festival, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester, BBC Symphony Orchestra,

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Salzburg Mozarteum, Salzburg Camerata, Ensemble InterContemporain, London Sinfonietta, collaborating with Peter Sellars and pianist Hélène Grimaud for the premiere of Arvo Pärt's *Lament Tate*, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Japanese Virtuoso Symphony.

Future engagements include debuts with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, WASO, Royal Danish Opera (*Tales of Hoffmann*), Opera of Luxemburg (*Carmen*) as well as returns to the Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

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