

# Bringing the music to life, by the conductor and musicologist Edward Peak



Edward Peak at Parkgate Proms 2017

Once again the Orchestra dell'Arte will be setting off on yet another year of fantastic music, beautifully played by some of the North West's top musicians.

Going to an orchestral concert is a real piece of theatre – the players come on to the platform in their concert dress, they tune up (always a wonderful moment), and then there is a breathless hush. After a pause of exactly the right length, the maestro comes on the platform, the orchestra are brought to their feet to acknowledge the applause and we are off on another amazing musical experience.

Over just the next few months the orchestra will be playing music from grand opera, the symphonic repertoire and the Vienna of the Strauss family all the way to music from famous film scores and television!

This incredible range of music relies solely on just one thing... not the players, not the conductor, but the availability of the sheet music that the players have on their music stands. For the standard concert repertoire, there is not really a problem. From the time that the great composers wrote their works, publishers have taken up options on the music and have produced sets of parts for performance since before the days of Mozart. An orchestra needs two sorts of music: a full score for the conductor and a set of individual parts for the players.

The full score is a wonderful thing to behold. In it appears every instrument in the orchestra with every note for each of those instruments. In a complex work this means that the full score can be hundreds of pages long and can contain many thousands of notes! This is a sort of complex 'road map' by which the conductor can see exactly who has what notes and this enables him to safely navigate the music, pausing here, quickening up there, and putting all the necessary expression into the music.

The players don't need to see any other notes apart from those that each of them play, so the first violins will only have their own notes, similarly the cellos, flutes and all of the other players.

There is a vast amount of music available for orchestras to play. Consider the hundreds of works written by the great composers alone – just five of them, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Vivaldi and Haydn between them composed more than 3,300 works! Fortunately, most of the output of the many composers who have written for orchestras is still readily available.

The earliest sets of orchestral music will have looked very different from how they are now. For the first performances of works by the great masters, the scores and parts would probably have been handwritten, a gigantic task for the person who had to copy out eight first violin parts, seven second violin parts, etc., etc., there being no handy photocopiers in those days.

The Orchestra dell'Arte concert at St George's Hall on Sunday 25 February has the intriguing title 'The Two Richards: Strauss and Wagner'. We chose this coupling as Strauss and Wagner were two musical luminaries who changed the face of classical music forever. They both wrote in a dynamic and incredibly colourful style, different emotions chasing each other as the music progresses. In our concert we are going to play the delightful second waltz sequence from Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. This opera is a real operatic pantomime, with comic characters, a principal boy played by a female singer, and a host of ravishing tunes. To balance this work with something of Wagner's proved difficult as there wasn't anything obvious to pair it with.

Fortunately, a few years ago I had written a symphonic picture based on the opera *Götterdämmerung*. This is the rather formidable title of the final work of Wagner's huge four-opera cycle *The Ring*. There are many sections of this opera just for orchestra and they are all scintillating and glorious. The challenge was to link them together to produce a logical whole. The result worked so well that we performed it to great acclaim and it is a pleasure to be able to revisit this wonderful music on 25th February.

Once again, we shall be playing in the giant marquee at Neston Cricket Club on 6 July for the Parkgate Proms. This is always a very jolly occasion with an audience of many hundreds sitting in glorious surroundings, enjoying their picnics and listening to great music – hurry and book as this event sells out very quickly!

One of the main challenges posed for an arranger is that it is rare to have carte blanche to write for whatever instruments and voices that might be ideal. Often the musical palette is restricted to just a limited range of instruments to suit the occasion.

For this concert we take a medium-size orchestra. This means that sometimes I will have to rewrite a piece to work properly with the slightly different musical forces available. In addition, there are usually a few completely new arrangements which are premiered at this event. This year will be no exception as our theme this time is 'Stage and Screen', and I have already started to score some new pieces.



Ron Goodwin

In my early days as an orchestral arranger I was fortunate to work closely with the great film composer Ron Goodwin. Ron had written the scores for films including *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines*, *633 Squadron*, *Where Eagles Dare*, and nearly a hundred others. He was always very encouraging, but was never averse to giving me a sharp word if he thought that I was writing in a lazy style. Ron had a huge fund of wonderful stories which he

delivered in his distinctive slow, measured way. The ultimate Ron story was to do with a section from his score for *The Battle of Britain*. Ron had written a wonderful German-style march for the scene in which Hermann Göring's train pulled into the station – all brass and glockenspiel and very authentic-sounding.

Sometime after the film was released, a phone call came to Ron. A very well-spoken gentleman at the other end introduced himself as the director of music for the Brigade of Guards. He asked Ron if he '...could use your splendid march for the forthcoming Trooping the Colour at Horseguard's Parade in the presence of HM the Queen'.

Ron, of course, was very happy to give permission. The well-spoken gent then asked '...what is the title of your splendid march...?' Ron replied, in his wonderful laid-back way, that the title was the 'Luftwaffe March'. There was then a VERY long silence at the end of the phone after which the gent said: '...er, could we get back to you about this...'. The upshot was that Ron gave the march the honorary title of 'Aces High'. It was under this title that it was performed and is still performed at concerts today.

It was great moment for me when Ron phoned one day to ask if he might use one of my arrangements on his new CD recording of film music. Ron Goodwin asking permission from me – WOW! The result was amazing and is still a great source of pleasure when I hear it.

Edward Peak has frequently contributed as broadcaster and producer for the BBC, dealing with a range of issues concerning music and the arts. He has appeared as presenter and conductor on television specials and is well known as a musicologist and arranger, with his works being played by every major symphony orchestra in the UK, all over Europe, the Far East and the USA. Edward can also be seen as arts presenter on TV. Many arrangements have been recorded, notably for the Chandos and Naxos labels.