

"JUST LISTEN TO THE BLOODY MUSIC"

A concert review by Günther Kögebehn

It happened in Cologne on October 15 2002 when the Cologne Philharmonic a.k.a. Gürzenich Orchestra gave their first ever film music concert. The evening was devised by society member Tobias van de Locht, who also was responsible for selecting the repertoire, writing the text for the programme notes and narrations.

The Gürzenich Orchestra is an excellent orchestra that recorded many CDs with James Conlon for EMI. The Cologne Philharmonic Hall is one of Germany's best concert halls and can entertain an audience of 2000. For a concert on a Tuesday evening a turnout of approx. 1500 is certainly a big success. Some of the audience came from all over Germany and even from the UK (Christopher Ritchie from Scotland).

Scott Lawton was the conductor, he is best known as the chief conductor of the Babelsberg Film Orchestra, furthermore he is a noted conductor of musicals. Sir Malcolm Arnold himself was present and gave the whole affair additional importance.

The programming was quite unique ranging from little known British films, well known Hollywood classics to rejected film scores and gave excellent value for money lasting nearly 3 hours.

After an introduction by the German actor Christian Brückner, the concert started with Sir Malcolm Arnold's Rhapsody "The Sound Barrier". Sir Malcolm himself arranged the thematic material from David Lean's spectacular film. The orchestra gave a fine rendition it, but one missed the sprightliness that Andrew Davis gave the piece at the 1996 BBC proms. It was the German premiere of the Rhapsody to be followed with another German premiere, the suite from Sir William Walton's "Battle of Britain" (with a bit of Malcolm Arnold hidden in it). The orchestra and the conductor had quite a time with and it was very well received.

The Walton/Arnold "Battle of Britain" is an excellent example of a great film score rejected for all the wrong reasons. Attempts to rescue the music from obscurity are as old as the film itself. Laurence Olivier insisted on keeping some of it in the film and succeeded. Sir Edward Heath rescued the written manuscript score from the vaults of United Artists. Bernard Herrmann wanted to record a suite from it as far back as 1975. (Herrmann's untimely death intervened.) Finally in 1985 the plans were realised by Colin Matthews and Carl Davis. And just recently the whole rejected score made it to CD.

Following Alex North's "2001" and Bernard Herrmann's "Hangover Square", the orchestra excelled with a brilliant performance of Sir Malcolm's "Ballad for Piano and Orchestra" from "Stolen Face". The concert suite made in 1999 of the 1952 Hammer production received a world premiere with the tender pianist (Sorina Aust-Ioan) almost crushing under the brilliance of the orchestral playing. After another round of enthusiastic applause the audience dismissed itself to a much deserved break.

After the interval they gave performances of two Hitchcock thrillers Herrmann's "Vertigo" and Ron Goodwin's "Frenzy" followed by a monologue arranged from the German dubbing script of the film. Christian Brückner dubbed the voice of Jon Finch so many years back and had a lot of fun recreating it. The monologue ended with a great comic moment as Mr Brückner was pulled from the stage.

Sadly the suite from Sir Malcolm's "Inn of the Sixth Happiness" was reduced to the prelude because of time reasons, but obviously the orchestra and the conductor enjoyed it. Then Brückner returned for another piece for narrator and orchestra (Herrmann's "Taxi Driver").

The concert was already 2 hours long, but one masterpiece was still to come. In 1957 Sir Malcolm Arnold scored his most famous film David Lean's "The Bridge on the River Kwai". They played the 1991 concert suite containing of the major thematic material (mercifully minus the 'Colonel Bogey'). And what a performance it was. The orchestra and the conductor saved their best for last. It was a spectacular

performance that showed the incredible composition and orchestration skills of Sir Malcolm. A well deserved Oscar winner. For the finale, with the Kwai march, Lawton got even into a higher gear and managed to outdo Richard Hickox' performance on the Chandos CD. The audience gave a standing ovation to the conductor, the orchestra and Sir Malcolm Arnold.

Due to ecstatic applause the conductor gave an encore. The second half of the "Happy Ending" of Arnold's "Inn of the Sixth Happiness" that was axed earlier. This resulted in another standing ovation and after nearly 3 hours one of the most unique film music concerts was over.

Many thanks to the Gürzenich Orchestra, Scott Lawton, Sorina Aust-Ioan and especially our very own Tobias van de Locht for a splendid evening of exciting music.

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