

CLASSICAL MUSIC STUDY 2015

JANUARY 2015: BAROQUE MUSIC

A talk by Ian.

FEBRUARY 2015: VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Brian Thomas gave us a wide ranging introduction to Vaughan Williams in February and played host (together with Jill) as well. Many thanks, to both of you.

The idea of the group is that we take it in turns to research a composer or theme and present to the other members of the group. Despite some early misgivings, it's working really well and we continue to welcome new members. The March meeting will feature Vaughan Williams's great pal, Gustav Holst and will try to answer the question: 'Did Holst write anything else as good as The Planets?'

MARCH 2015: HOLST

It was great to see 14 of us at the meeting. Paul tried to persuade us that Holst did indeed write something (actually a great deal) besides The Planets. I think we were all struck by the range of his writing, his constant attempts to try out new things..... and by the fact that he wrote his first pieces when he was 11 years old.

Thanks to Maggie for producing the coffees and teas. We have a busy programme to look forward to, on the second Monday of the month at 10:00am. If you haven't been before, why not give us a try. Sign-up sheets at every General Meeting or contact the convenor.

APRIL 2015: THOMAS TALLIS

Maggie presented Thomas Tallis. He is one of England's foremost writers of choral music, particularly religious music. Amazingly, he enjoyed the patronage of both Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, despite, in the latter case continuing to profess his Catholic faith. On the other hand, when we listened to some of his music, we could see why his music transcended issues of politics. For many of us this was a first time exploration of Tallis and an inspiring introduction to early modern music.

MAY 2015: EARLY 20th CENTURY MUSIC

JUNE 2015: TCHAIKOVSKY

JULY 2015: ALL AT SEA

Many thanks to Brian for his exploration of music to do with water and the sea. Some pieces were quite familiar, but the Glazunov, Bax and Delius were new to most of us, and it was good to revisit some old favourites.

We have a packed schedule coming up over the next few months, exploring Saint Saens (Ian in August), Choral Singing (Nick in September), Fanfare (Gwen in October), Schubert (Rene in November) and 'The Five' - Russian nationalist music of the late 19th Century (Paul in December). Thanks too, to Brian and Jill for hosting the meeting.

AUGUST 2015: SAINT SAENS

SEPTEMBER 2015: CHORAL SINGING

Our September meeting was on the theme of choral music and was presented by Nick Clark. Nick had sung all the pieces in different choirs and we were enraptured by the range and beauty of the music which ranged from Bach and Tallis to Holst and Rachmaninov. The African Sanctus by Fanshawe was new to all of us, as was the choral accompaniment to Waterloo Sunset sung by Ray Davies (yes, the Kinks' Ray Davies) with which Nick closed. Thanks to David for hosting.

OCTOBER 2015: ORCHESTRAL FANFARES

This month's session blew away the cobwebs as Gwen treated us to a range of fanfares. We were told that a fanfare is a short musical flourish performed on trumpets, brass or percussion, and has been used through history for signal purposes in battles, hunts and court ceremonies.

Gwen also gave us a fascinating history of the trumpet, starting with the two believed to be 3,000 years old, one silver and one bronze, very long and straight. Trumpets only began to be used as musical instruments during the 15th century, when were bent into the shape we now recognise. Valves were not used until the early 19th century.

We were treated to fanfares from many composers, including Britten's Fanfare for St Edmundsbury, John William's Olympic Fanfare Theme, Aaron Copelands Fanfare for the Common Man, John Adam's Short Ride in a Fast Machine and, at the insistence of Gwen's son, the well-known Star Wars theme.

Gwen also let us discover how difficult it is to play the bugle. As it was passed around we produced sounds that ranged from splutters to raspberries! However, Nick earned a round of applause when he showed us all up by playing 'Burma Rifles'.

Thank you Gwen for providing an interesting and fun morning.

Maggie Martinez

NOVEMBER 2015: SCHUBERT

DECEMBER 2015: 'THE FIVE' - RUSSIAN NATIONALIST MUSIC OF THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

We were treated not only to a feast of Russian music, some well-known and some new to many of us, but to a presentation by Paul Martinez which was both scholarly and very entertaining. Although billed as "The Mighty Five" such was the amount of material in part 1 that we actually had the "Mighty Three Fifths": Balakirev, Cui and Borodin.

The tensions in the Russian musical establishment in the early 19th century between classically trained professional musicians like Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky and the likes of Borodin, a doctor and chemist and Caesar Cui, an army officer and engineer were spelled out in great detail, especially in the private letters of Tchaikovsky. On the one hand these gifted amateurs were creatively freed from the conventions of the conservatoire; on the other, they often needed a lot of help to orchestrate their music.

But today, who cares that Borodin's Polovtsian dances were scored by others, the music speaks for itself, even appearing on the American musical stage as Kismet.

David Dobbs