

WIGMORE HALL 125

Sunday 26 October 2025
7.30pm

Jonathan Berman conductor

Royal Academy of Music Soloists Ensemble

Björg Pas violin I

Andreas Martinsen violin II

Kristin Pas viola

Catherine White viola

Frida Rogn cello

Will Priest double bass

Efrem Workman flute

Oscar Gillespie oboe

Stefan Bulyha clarinet

Benjamin Atkinson clarinet

Fergus Butt bassoon

Rory McGregor bassoon

Claire Marsden horn

George Brady horn

Sasha Canter trumpet

Edward Pettitt trombone

Ethan Windle timpani

Cherry Ge piano

Jozef Gaszka harmonium

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899)

Kaiser-Walzer Op. 437 (1889) *arranged by Arnold Schoenberg*

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

Symphony No. 2 in C minor (1871-2) *arranged by Anthony Payne*
I. Moderato • II. Andante • III. Scherzo • IV. Finale



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In April 1925, Arnold Schoenberg visited Barcelona to take part in a festival of music named in his honour. The most significant event was a performance of his 1912 melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire*, which the composer conducted. Also on the programme was his First Chamber Symphony, in a transcription by Anton Webern for the five-piece ensemble that accompanies the singer/reciter in *Pierrot*. While preparing for the concert, Schoenberg made an arrangement for the same forces of **Johann Strauss II's** *Kaiser-Walzer* ('Emperor Waltz'). This bon-bon was intended as an encore, and for that reason it is difficult to determine if it was actually performed in Barcelona.

Schoenberg and his modernist circle were by no means impervious to the widespread appeal of the dance music of their home city. In 1921 a concert of arrangements of Viennese waltzes was held in the Austrian capital to support the Society for Private Musical Performances, set up by Schoenberg in 1918 to perform new and unfamiliar music to a select, open-minded public. The arrangers for this fundraiser were Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, who were also among the performers. At the end the signed manuscript scores were auctioned off.

Schoenberg therefore had previous experience of rescoring Strauss's orchestral waltzes for chamber ensemble. Strictly speaking, however, he was enlarging the instrumentation of the score in front of him, since in both 1921 and 1925 he worked from a piano reduction – though he would certainly have heard the originals. For the *Kaiser-Walzer* he added a little embroidery of his own to the texture, interpolating hidden quotations from the *Emperor's Hymn* composed by Joseph Haydn in 1797 (now familiar as the tune of the German national anthem).

Strauss's waltz, considered by many to be among his finest, was composed in 1889 to commemorate the visit of the Austrian emperor Franz Josef to his German counterpart, Wilhelm II. The composer's title was 'Hand in Hand', i.e. a gesture of friendship, but his publisher, Simrock, suggested that *Kaiser-Walzer* had a grander resonance and could apply equally to either statesman. As with most of Strauss's compositions with the singular title 'waltz', we are treated to a procession of several waltzes, in this case preceded with a dignified, march-like introduction and rounded off with a nostalgic coda and final flourish.

In 2012, the Principal of the Royal Academy of Music, Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, asked composer Anthony Payne if he would prepare a chamber version of **Bruckner's** Second Symphony. The stated intention was to revive the spirit of Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performances of 1918-21 – or at least of the chamber-ensemble arrangements of orchestral music heard at these events. In the days before the widespread availability of broadcast or recorded music, versions for reduced forces were sometimes the only way many people could encounter new or less-often performed works.

Arrangements of symphonies by Bruckner (No. 7) and Mahler (No. 4) were included in Society concerts, alongside the latest compositions of Bartók, Busoni, Debussy, Ravel, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky and others, together with Schoenberg's pupils and colleagues Anton Webern and Alban Berg. Payne's arrangement of Bruckner's Second is for a slightly larger ensemble than was customary at these recitals. It was first performed at the Academy on 15 March 2013.

The symphony that Bruckner considered worthy of publication as No. 2 is actually the fourth he completed. The first ideas were reportedly jotted down in 1871 while the composer was in London as one of the performers invited to inaugurate the Royal Albert Hall organ. Composition continued back in Vienna, where Bruckner had recently moved from his native Linz.

With the score finished in 1872, he offered the new symphony to the Vienna Philharmonic, who rehearsed it but found it bewildering. The rehearsal conductor, Otto Dessoff, coldly asked the composer where the main themes were supposed to be. Though deeply sensitive to criticism, Bruckner summoned up the courage and the cash to give a public performance at his own expense, conducting the same orchestra who had declared the symphony unplayable. On that night in October 1873 it was warmly received by the audience.

Nevertheless, well-meaning friends of the composer were quick to suggest cuts and changes, and the symphony was revised by Bruckner and edited by others several times. This is a rabbit-hole not worth entering in present circumstances; suffice it to say that Payne made his decisions on which version to prepare based on empathy with his fellow composer and consideration for the special requirements of the chamber-music medium.

The feature of the score that had most perplexed the players in Vienna was the presence of long silences (for this reason the piece has been nicknamed *Pausensymphonie*). But these are essential to the expanded vision of the work that makes it the gateway to the sound-cathedrals of Bruckner's succeeding symphonies. In the composer's view, they are necessary points of reflection on what has passed and what is to come.

More than either its predecessors or its successors, the Second Symphony has been noted for its Schubertian qualities – especially the lyricism of the first movement, the inner quality of the second and the bucolic vigour of the *Scherzo*. These were the elements which commentators thought were particularly enhanced when Payne's version was first heard. The sonata-form finale includes a quotation from Bruckner's F minor Mass; for him, music making was at all times communication with his maker.

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