

Cecil Forsyth (1870-1941)
Concerto for viola and orchestra in G minor

I *Appassionato, Allegro con spirito*
II *Andante un poco sostenuto*
III *Allegro con fuoco*

Cecil Forsyth was a British composer, musicologist and violist. He started his studies at the University of Edinburgh and later studied with Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music, London. Stanford and Forsyth are joint authors of *A History of Music*, published in 1916. Some of Forsyth's other works include a treatise on English Opera (1911), a comprehensive manual *Orchestration* (1914), *Choral Orchestration* (1920) amongst others.

He composed and arranged numerous songs including variations on the nursery rhyme *Old King Cole* and a three part song *The Snow Fairies*. He also composed two comic operas *Westward Ho!* and *Cinderella*.

Apart from his composition and musicological education, he was also an accomplished violist and played in the viola section of the Queen's Hall Orchestra until he emigrated to America after the outbreak of the First World War.

Two of his instrumental compositions for viola include *Chant celtique* for viola and orchestra as well as his *Concerto* for viola and orchestra in G minor. Forsyth dedicated his viola concerto to Lionel Tertis, who was not keen on performing it. Instead the concerto was premiered by Emile Ferir at the London Proms in 1903.

A unique feature in this concerto is the solo viola beginning with a *recitativo*-like passage. This opening sets the scene for the drama, creating space and tension. Forsyth uses extreme expression markings to achieve this atmosphere throughout the opening such as *appassionato, lento dolce, meno mosso ad libitum, molto allargando*. The main body of the movement introduces a theme initially in the first violins alternated by the solo viola, which is supported by an almost consecutive triplet accompaniment-figure in the bassoons. The second subject is a thoughtful and sweet melodic material with rich harmonic support and counterpoint within the orchestral score. The cadenza explores the full range of the viola, leading the listener through lovely harmonic sequences and rich melodies hinting at sections from the exposition. Although the thematic material in the first movement is quite varied, from *appassionato* to *con forza* to *dolce*, Forsyth manages to keep the overall atmosphere one of stormy mixed emotion.

The second movement consists of three main sections, with the first and third encapsulating an expressive and almost choral-like nature. The middle section *Feroce* is more urgent, vibrant and driven, particularly with the addition of demi-semi quavers to the dotted rhythms. In this movement, Forsyth explores with the wide variety of tone colour and depth the viola has to offer. The movement ends in a tranquil D major.

The main theme of the third movement is introduced by the horns, frequently alternated with the solo viola and sometimes even appearing together. This movement is more rhythmic in nature and for the first time in this concerto Forsyth uses the indication *molto ritmico*. A cadenza-like passage rather different from the

recitativo start to the first movement also appears with the solo viola and orchestra alternating chords in a bridge passage launching straight into the recapitulation. The *concerto* ends in a joyful G major. This *concerto* is brilliantly orchestrated and requires true ensemble playing between orchestra and solo viola.

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