

# The Banbury Symphony Orchestra

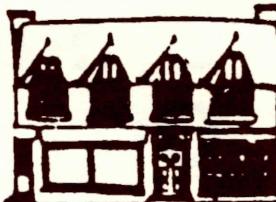


**13th March 1999**  
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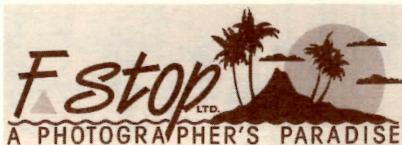
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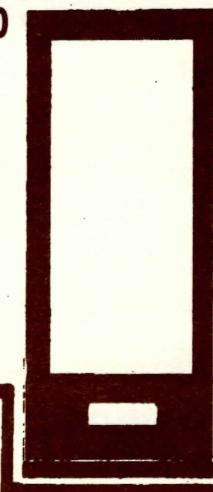
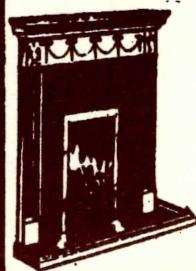
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## **Peter Adams**

Peter Adams was born in London in 1963 and began his musical studies while still at school. At the age of 16 he joined the orchestra of the London Festival Ballet and in 1984 he was made principal cellist with the London String Orchestra and London City Ballet. Since then he has taken lessons and masterclasses with Janos Starker and Paul Tortelier, become the director of the Elizabethan Consort of Viols, and for five years he was a senior lecturer at the London Guildhall University.

Peter is a founder member of the Rogeri Piano Trio, with a host of performances throughout the UK and broadcasts on the BBC and recordings for Meridian Records. In 1996, Peter joined the acclaimed Bochmann String Quartet and in 1997 was appointed to the Principal Chair of the English String and Symphony Orchestras.

## **Paul Willett**

Paul Willett studied the French horn with Ifor James and gained his Performance Diploma from the Royal College of Music at 16.

He read music at The Queen's College, Oxford, on scholarship, and for several years combined teaching and freelance playing. He has given solo recitals and performed concertos throughout the country. He was also a member of The Five Winds for many years, a group which performed both at home and abroad, and also on BBC radio.

His conducting experience includes Oxfordshire Schools Symphony Orchestra and Thames Vale Youth Orchestra. He is currently Head of Music at Fitzharrys School in Abingdon.

**Nicolai  
(1810-49)**

**The Merry Wives of Windsor**

Shakespeare would surely have been flattered had he known that 12 operas were to be written based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. These include versions by Salieri, Dittersdorf, Holst, Vaughan Williams and the seamless masterpiece 'Falstaff' by the octogenarian Verdi.

Truth to tell, until recently in Germany, Verdi's opera had difficulty in rivalling Nicolai's though it is only the Verdi that we hear in Britain. Some idea of German audiences' liking for the Nicolai may be gauged from the tunefulness and deftness of the orchestral writing of the overture alone. In it, following the romanticism recently established by Weber's epoch-making *Der Freischütz*, Nicolai introduces a dreamy atmosphere at the outset, evoking the mood of the final scene where the moon rises over the softly whispering trees of Windsor Forest. By degrees the music becomes more and more animated.

Nicolai composed his *Merry Wives of Windsor* soon after becoming conductor at the Berlin Court Opera in 1848. Its premiere took place there in March 1849 but, sadly, the composer was not to witness its subsequent great success for he died suddenly of a stroke in May the same year.

**Antonin Dvorak  
(1841-1904)**

**Cello Concerto in B minor**

*Allegro*  
*Adagio ma non troppo*  
*Allegro moderato*

This concerto was written between November 1894 and February 1895 during Dvorak's second American visit. The work was written for, and dedicated to, the cellist Hanus Wihan with whom Dvorak had made a concert tour in 1892.

Having at last found a satisfactory way of compressing the first movement plan, Dvorak treats the themes of the opening allegro with great freedom and variation, showing himself to be completely at home with the concerto form. The clarinets begin the movement with an ominous theme which, after a loud restatement, leads to the beautifully expressive horn melody intimating the second subject; it is exquisitely extended by clarinet and oboe. A dramatic change of key heralds the cello, who plays a robust version of the first theme accompanied by interesting woodwind writing. The cello now sings out the second theme before the orchestra and soloist elaborate on the first theme again. The cello, hurtling through an octave passage, leads to a brilliant restatement of the second theme by the full orchestra. Finally, the cello plays some previously heard material and this masterly movement is brought to a triumphant end with a short coda.

The adagio is typically Slavonic in sentiment and contains a wealth of invention. The idyllic first theme is played by the clarinet before it is taken up by the soloist. An effective contrast is found in the dramatic middle section before the opening subject returns, played by the horns in harmony and accompanied by the cello and basses. A short cadenza for the soloist, accompanied by the woodwind, leads to the coda and the movement ends with a feeling of pastoral calm.

The final movement opens with scraps of a tune which, over a march-like tread, builds up to an emphatic but gay subject for the cello. After an episode in which the cello has double-stopping in a high register, a re-statement of the first subject leads, by way of a passionate subsidiary theme, to another episode made up of broken phrases. After development of this material, some lovely dialogue between cello and orchestra is heard in G minor. At this point, most composers would have rounded off their work, but Dvorak continues in a series of codas, which become progressively more dreamy until finally he pulls himself together and brings the work to a brilliant conclusion.

~  
*INTERVAL*

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**Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky  
(1840-93)**

**Symphony No 5 in E minor**

*Andante – Allegro con anima*

*Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza – Moderato con anima*

*Valse (allegro moderato)*

*Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace*

In 1888, 10 years after composing his fourth symphony, Tchaikovsky felt himself able at last to return to the form of the symphony as a medium for his compositional gifts. The intervening period had been one of much soul-searching and self-doubt. It is true that he had composed *Manfred* in 1885, but, although designated a symphony, it hardly counts as a true example of the genre, and posterity has not accepted it as such. However, *Manfred* may have helped to hasten his return to symphonic composition, if only because he felt that he had something to prove. Just as he was starting work on the fifth symphony, Tchaikovsky, who had lost confidence in his own reputation and abilities, wrote to his benefactress Mme Nadyezhda von Meck: ‘I am exceedingly anxious to prove to myself and to others that I am not played out as a composer.’

Tchaikovsky worked on the symphony through the summer of 1888 in the congenial, wooded surroundings of his house at Maidanovo, between Moscow and the nearby town of Klin. He was just back from a strenuous but successful foreign tour of France and England and was tired. Aged just 48, he already had the physical appearance of a man in his sixties. Nevertheless, he threw himself into the symphony, completing the score with a sense of relief and renewed energy by the end of August.

Tchaikovsky conducted the first two performances of the new symphony the following November. The public loved it, but the critics were less enthusiastic. Because of their reaction, Tchaikovsky again became beset by fears of failure and of having been misunderstood. In the end, as he told his nephew ‘Bob’ Davydov, he came to like the piece, but in the meantime his confidence had taken another blow it did not need.

The fifth is, in fact, the most unified and one of the most straightforward of all Tchaikovsky’s symphonies. But it also contains elements of intensity that

look forward to the emotionally draining sixth symphony. It opens with a solemn and forbidding theme, presented by the clarinets in low register and by bassoons. Tchaikovsky described this slow introduction as 'complete resignation before Fate, or ... the inscrutable predestination of Providence.' The material presented in this introduction - the Fate motif - is the unifying factor in the E minor symphony: it crops up in several guises throughout the piece.

The *Allegro con anima* that follows contains four distinctive themes. The first starts out as a kind of *danse macabre*, jig-like in rhythm but with a boiling intensity. The second, in B minor, is full of Tchaikovskyan pessimism. The harmonies blossom outwards from a unison F sharp into a yearning melody. The third theme, prefaced by a playful pizzicato arpeggio, is a rustic 'call and response' passage for woodwinds and strings that forms a natural link into the fourth theme, a luscious, passionate melody, sunny in mood, but the feeling is surely that of a wistful memory. The four themes just described undergo extended development, and after the recapitulation there is a long coda based on the first theme. The first movement descends into the bass section of the orchestra as the strains of the *danse macabre* die away.

The slow movement opens with a series of chords in the low strings. Then comes one of Tchaikovsky's most familiar tunes, a love-song-like theme in D major given to the principal horn. A second melody, a theme of airy lightness, is presented by the oboe in F sharp and echoed by the horn. After a link passage, lower strings take up the horn's first theme, and the music builds in intensity before subsiding again. The violins pick up the slow movement's first theme, and then the haunting sound of clarinet and bassoon present a third theme upon which the strings begin to build. Emotional intensity rises to a climax, to be interrupted by a brass passage based on the Fate motif from the first movement. This passage ends with a pizzicato figure that generates the accompaniment for a return of the original horn theme, heard this time in the violins. Once more the emotion builds to an exultant mood with the recapitulation of the slow movement's second theme. Again the brass crash in with their statement of the Fate motif. The movement subsides with a final reference to the horn theme and at last falls silent.

In place of a scherzo, Tchaikovsky presents us with one of his most beautiful waltzes, lyrical and lilting. The tune, in A major and marked *con grazia*, is launched immediately by the first violins, then is passed around the orchestra and developed. The trio section, in F minor, ensues, more texture than melody, for it is made up of a delicate tracery of demisemiquavers. The first waltz theme returns, but the movement closes with a reminder of the Fate motif. But if we think this reference is an ominous one, Tchaikovsky has a surprise for us.

For the finale, the fifth symphony opens with a majestic statement of the Fate motif in E major announced by the lower strings, an amazing transformation. The Fate theme is fully developed in this metamorphosis into something transcendent. Out of its final cadence emerges a brisk, bold and very Russian dance, the music of which presents four main melodic ideas, each distinctive and highly idiomatic. In the course of the movement, which is thoroughly nationalistic in character and contains much contrapuntal interest and some interesting tempo changes, the Fate motif makes two returns, the first time being presented by brass supported by a swirling string accompaniment, the second - after a pause following the recapitulation - in the form of a triumphant march heard in brass and wind over tripletized string figures. In a final fast and furious passage, a reminder of the start of the Russian dance closes the work on a real 'high'.

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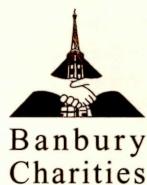
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