

CA 3 : April/May 2007 Classical Source Editorial:

### **'Too Much Mahler ... And Not Enough Overtures'**

By Colin Anderson

I write as a lover of Mahler's music, but also with concern at the number of times his symphonies turn up in concerts, certainly in London, the Fifth especially. Are we, listeners and performers, in danger of taking this once-unfamiliar and complex music for granted?

But concert-hall repertoire, for the most part, is relatively narrow ... so many fine pieces are only available through recordings and broadcasting. With the latter, though, one notices a wonderful commodity that is in short or no supply: silence. Classic FM even starts music *while* the presenter is talking! Might such 'presentation' influence those who chatter, and applaud into silence, when in the concert hall?

But 'continuous noise' is now the order of the day – whether one likes it or not. Go into certain hotels, shops and banks and the same old pop-music spews out – the customer is given no choice; yet it is a pointless 'accessory' when so many people have their own sources of 'entertainment' – as those all-too-sharing 'personal' ear-pieces relate!

Imagine standing in a bank queue (HSBC and Halifax, say!) while a pop-song wails out (for that is the only music known to the producers it seems) in conflict with those people also queuing who are 'listening' to something similar through an *iPod*. (It happens!) At least in Boots or WH Smith is, to name two further offenders, one can make an early escape and not buy anything.

Those who have become desensitised to sound wouldn't miss the pap that such retailers foist upon us (or indeed the racket that broadcasters often underpin trailers, programmes and even news with); but, for anyone musically sensitive, it is a scourge, "a danger to the health" as Daniel Barenboim identified in one of his BBC Reith Lectures last year.

Complain and the responses are revealingly bland. However, there are groups standing up against such irritations – one is called "Pipedown". Neither this writer nor Classical Source has affiliation to this organisation: we're just glad it is there!

As for the overtures ... some concerts still include them (by the 'usual' composers) although it's quite common today for a concerto to begin the evening (there is something very unsatisfying about a soloist playing 'cold' like this). But it's also that certain beautifully crafted pieces hardly ever appear now – to name four: Sullivan's Overture di ballo and the overtures to Hérold's "Zampa", Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and Reznicek's "Donna Diana" – each a terrific *entrée*. Hopefully such

gems, and others, will return to our concert halls. Demand one, if the programme has an obvious 'hole' in it, when you 'shell-out' your 'hard-earned' for an expensive seat plus booking fee!

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