

Today's programme focuses on dance and how it celebrates so much of human life - and death.

Danse Macabre is a tone poem for orchestra, reworked in 1874 by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns from his own art-song for voice and piano. It is Hallowe'en; we hear the chimes at midnight. A violin summons the dead from their graves with diabolical tritones and away we go into an increasingly frenetic waltz. This is interrupted in the middle by the Gregorian *Dies Irae*, played in incongruously cheerful staccato by woodwinds while the strings rumble in the background. Eventually the oboe's cockerel-crow signifies dawn, and the dead return to their graves. When "Danse Macabre" was first performed it was not well received and caused widespread feelings of anxiety, but it has since become well-known and is often quoted in popular culture, including "Shrek the Third", "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and the Disney animation "Mickey's House of Villains".

Waltz No. 2, which really deserves a better title, is in fact the third of three waltzes in the Suite for Variety Orchestra No. 1, which was put together in the 1950s by one Levon Atovmjan on the basis of excerpts from Dmitri Shostakovich's ballet, film and theatre music. This one was from the soundtrack of a Soviet film, "The First Echelon", concerning a romance between the secretary of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League and a Kazakh tractor driver. The Suite was first performed in 1988 by the London Symphony Orchestra, and this fabulously sinister waltz in particular achieved further prominence as a result of a bestselling 1994 recording by André Rieu.

The **Bacchanale** features in the third act of Camille Saint-Saëns' opera "Samson and Delilah", which had its premiere in 1877. The scene depicts priests and priestesses of the Philistine god Dagon getting a bit carried away in their celebration of Samson's haircut and capture, further to the treacherous machinations of Delilah. They think they have thereby put an end to an uprising among their Hebrew slaves, but they will get their come-uppance in the end when Samson brings Dagon's temple down on their heads. "Samson and Delilah" had a rocky start due to public doubts about the appropriateness of using a story from the Bible for an opera, but is now the only one of Saint-Saëns' operas to be regularly performed.

The **Hungarian Dances** by Johannes Brahms are a set of 21 lively dance tunes based mostly on Hungarian themes, completed in 1879 and originally set for piano four hands. Number 5 is based on a *csárdás* by Hungarian composer Béla Kéler, which Brahms mistakenly thought was a traditional folksong. The origin of the *csárdás* can be traced back to the 18th century Hungarian *verbunkos*, used as a recruiting dance by the Austrian army. It is characterised by discombobulating variations in tempo. The orchestration we are using was made in 1885 by one Albert Parlow.

The **Radetzky March** was commissioned from Johann Strauss senior to commemorate the victory of Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky von Radetz at the Battle of Custoza, which saw the defeat of an Italian uprising against the Austrian Empire. The central trio is a conversion into march time of a popular folk melody that was sung by Radetzky's soldiers as they returned victorious from the battle. The March was first performed in Vienna in 1848 and is now often used at Austrian football matches, as well as serving as the regimental quick march of the Queen's Dragoon Guards in the UK.

Christopher Fry's 1950 play **Ring Round the Moon** is a frothy confection of mistaken identity and amorous scheming at an elegant country house. It features an offstage ball and therefore requires music for several ballroom dances. New Zealand composer David Farquhar, then on the staff of the music department at Victoria University, was commissioned to provide the music for the New Zealand Players' touring production. That music, including this tango, subsequently took on a life of its own as an orchestral suite which the National Youth Orchestra took on tour to Europe and China in 1975. David Farquhar became Professor of Music at Victoria the following year, retiring in 1993. He was appointed a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to music in 2004 and died in 2007.

The **Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka** was written by the younger Johann Strauss and first performed in Vienna in 1858. *Tritsch-Tratsch* translates as "chit-chat" and probably refers to a popular Viennese farce of the time which featured a heroine of questionable (but happily resolved) parentage, a chorus of chattering milliners and a loquacious, scheming tobacconist.

Argentine tango composer Astor Piazzolla created **Oblivion** in 1982. It was featured in the 1984 Italian film "Enrico IV" in which an actor-historian is knocked out by a fall during an historical pageant and comes round believing himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. The melancholic tune starts out as a slow milonga, a genre of Uruguayan and Argentinian music considered to be a forerunner of tango. We are playing an orchestral arrangement by Robert Longfield, but there is also a song version whose text laments the passing of a grand passion:

It's late. In a mahogany bar somewhere
violins play our song for us again
but I forget, I forget

Tea for Two is a 1924 song composed by Vincent Youmans which became well-known as a result of inclusion in the musical "No, No, Nanette". This was based on a 1919 play called "My Lady Friends" which had been financed by the sale of baseball superstar Babe Ruth by the then-mighty Boston Red Sox to the New York Yankees, following which the Sox did not win another baseball championship until 2004. Anyway, the song was heard in the Soviet Union in 1926, under the title "Tahiti Trot", in a play called "Roar, China!" in which dastardly British, American and French villains brutally oppress the humble but honourable Chinese proletariat. This arrangement for symphony orchestra was put together in 45 minutes by Dmitri Shostakovich to win a bet with fellow composer Nicolai Malko. It quickly became popular in the Soviet Union, but was subsequently condemned by the Communist Party:

The bourgeoisie would like man to live not so much by his head as by his sexual organs. [...] The fundamental element of the foxtrot derives from mechanization, suppressed eroticism, and a desire to deaden feeling through drugs. [...] [W]e do not need that kind of music.

Poor Shostakovich, still only twenty-four, duly renounced the work in 1930, admitting in an article in the journal "The Proletarian Musician" that it gave the incorrect impression that he was a supporter of light music. It was considered lost until Gennady Rozhdestvensky reconstructed it in the early 1980s from orchestral parts presented to him by Malko's widow.

We hope you enjoy the show, and that you have somewhere comfortable to go afterwards.