

Queen Elizabeth Hall

GENERAL MANAGER: JOHN DENISON, C.B.E.

Monday 27 November 1967 at 7.30

Bach *Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, in G major*

Haydn *String Quartet in C major, Op. 76, No. 3*
(*Emperor*)

INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante in E flat major, for violin,
viola, and orchestra* (K. 364)

Britten *Nocturne, for tenor, seven obbligato instruments,
and string orchestra*

Peter Pears (tenor)

Norbert Brainin (violin)

Peter Schidlof (viola)

Amadeus String Quartet

English Chamber Orchestra

Leader, Emanuel Hurwitz

Benjamin Britten

Conductor

In accordance with the requirements of the Greater London Council:

I. The public may leave at the end of the performance or exhibition by all exit doors and such doors must at that time be open.

II. All gangways, corridors, staircases, and external passageways intended for exit shall be kept entirely free from obstruction, whether permanent or temporary.

III. Persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways.

SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM

HANS KELLER, BENJAMIN BRITTEN, AND THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONCERT SEASON OF THE EUROPEAN BROADCASTING UNION

ALISON GARNHAM

On 27 November 1967 at 7.30 pm, Benjamin Britten walked onto the stage of the newly-built Queen Elizabeth Hall in London to conduct the opening concert of the very first International Concert Season of the European Broadcasting Union. It was a significant moment for international radio broadcasting and had been years in the planning. Broadcasters across Europe had come together, not only to share some of their own programmes with listeners abroad, but to pool their resources and plan jointly a series of concerts that no one radio station could afford on its own – and broadcast them live all over Europe. Millions of listeners across the continent were thus given simultaneous access to some of the greatest performances of the time and music was celebrated as a truly international language.

‘This is really what *broadcasting* was intended to be there for,’ said the German delegate on the concert planning committee, speculating wistfully on what more might have been achieved to help ‘nations speak peace unto nations’ (to quote the BBC’s motto) had not the early history of radio been so dominated by war. The first International Broadcasting Union, set up in the 1920s, had been compromised by Nazi control during the Second World War, and efforts to establish a new organisation after 1945 had foundered similarly on fears of Soviet control, as the Cold War took hold.

Although the European Broadcasting Union as eventually launched in 1950 represented only Western Europe at first (with the Soviet bloc forming its own separate union), the EBU concert planners of the 1960s tried from the start to include Eastern artists. Polish radio hosted the second concert of the opening season, and one of the early highlights originally planned featured the cream of Soviet performers – Emil Gilels, David Oistrakh and Mstislav Rostropovich – playing concertos and chamber music together. Unfortunately on this occasion the arrangements with the Soviet authorities broke down at the last minute and this particular highlight never reached the airwaves – just one example of the way in which multinational planning was fraught with difficulty. Indeed, looking back at all the many technical, political and practical obstacles the EBU faced in those days, the success of the first Concert Season was outstanding. The whole season was broadcast live to millions of listeners in 14 countries (twice the number of countries as had originally agreed to participate) and it was a popular and critical triumph – and it even came in under budget.

Much of the credit for this is due to one remarkable individual – Hans Keller of the BBC – who chaired for 14 years the small EBU Working Party that planned the Concert Season. Born in Vienna, Keller was part of the wave of European talent with which Hitler inadvertently blessed post-war Britain. He arrived in London at the end of 1938, having narrowly escaped with his life after being caught up in the 9 November pogrom. Deeply immersed in Viennese chamber music, he knew little of English music until he heard the première of Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes* in 1945 – an event that changed the course of his life. Until that point, Keller had been pursuing a career as a psychologist, but he now turned to writing about music, combining his psychological and musical knowledge to produce unique insights in an inimitable style. He joined the BBC in 1959 and

during the 1960s and 1970s he was the best-known writer and broadcaster on music in the country – a profound influence on creative musicians and ordinary music-lovers alike. Many were the composers and performers who flocked to him for advice: as the composer Hugh Wood once put it, ‘He taught a whole generation of us. Only a lucky few of us formally, the rest by this process of friendly, undogmatic osmosis of a remarkable personality into one’s own.’

Keller arrived at the BBC at a time of rapid expansion and musical revolution. He was the first of several new staff that the newly-appointed Controller of Music, William Glock, brought into Music Division, and Glock moved him rapidly around the department (putting him in charge first of music talks, then chamber music, then orchestral and choral music), knowing he could rely on Keller to ‘stimulate, disturb, incite and generally to help impart vitality to our huge and sometimes sluggish empire.’ Keller was a man of boundless energy and a highly original thinker, who combined a relentless tenacity of purpose with an endless flow of stimulating musical ideas.

The idea of a Europe-wide Concert Season, however, was not originally Keller’s – though he was soon alert to its potential. It was Richard Marriott (head of the BBC’s European Liaison office when the EBU was founded in 1950) who first came up with the suggestion that all the broadcasters of Europe should pool their resources in one centrally-planned series of high-quality concerts. And it was also Marriott who realised that such a vast enterprise could only succeed if it was run by the smallest possible group of people. The EBU’s music committee at the time had 30 delegates, who inevitably brought a wide variety of conflicting agendas to the table. When the idea of an EBU Concert Season was first raised, naturally every country wanted to have its own representative involved in the planning and running of the concerts they were committing themselves to broadcast. It was not easy to get national broadcasters to cede control over the new venture, but eventually the impracticality of having so many cooks spoiling the broth was accepted, and a small Working Party of just three members was agreed, with Hans Keller in the chair.

Keller was by all accounts a dominant chairman, pouring forth ideas before others had even drawn breath, and many of the concert programmes bear his personal stamp quite clearly. The opening concert is a case in point – first, in its unusual combination of chamber and orchestral music – something that Keller considered a valuable function of radio concert planning, since it ‘opens up perspectives on the relationships between different types of creativity utterly concealed by normal concert life’. Keller was particularly keen to include such a programme in the EBU series, moreover, because it was apparently ‘a type of programme construction unknown to many European stations’.

The choice of one of Haydn’s quartets as the chamber work was also characteristic of Keller, to whom Haydn was not only the founding genius of the string quartet, but also the prophet of everything that was to come after him in this form. He was, said Keller, ‘the first and last comprehensive master of the string quartet’, having written ‘45 profound and profoundly different, absolutely flawless, consistently original master quartets, each a violent, multi-dimensional contrast to any of the others.’ In comparison with Mozart and Beethoven, Haydn had been relatively neglected in recent concert planning and it was one of Keller’s aims to restore his quartets to their rightful place: ‘There may not be any other creator, in any art, in any genre of any art, who can equal Haydn’s achievement in the sphere of the string quartet’.

It was of course typical of Keller that he should have offered the central role in the opening concert to Benjamin Britten, whose genius as both composer and performer Keller had been proclaiming since he had first encountered him in 1945. Britten reciprocated later by dedicating his Third String Quartet to Keller, who he thought ‘knows more about the string quartet, and understands it better, than anybody alive, composers and players included.’

Interestingly, although he revered Britten as a musician, Keller did not quite see eye to eye with him on the subject of broadcasting. Indeed, in his programme note for the EBU concert that Britten was to conduct, Keller decided to write about his and Britten's different views on radio. He took as his starting point a much publicised speech that Britten had given in 1964 (shortly before Keller's EBU Working Party started its work), during which Britten had talked of his doubts about the validity of broadcast music. Radio, he said, was only a 'substitute' for true experience – and 'dangerous because deluding':

If I say the loudspeaker is the principal enemy of music, I don't mean that I am not grateful to it as a means of education or study, or as an evoker of memories. But it is not part of true musical experience.

'One of the unhappiest results of the march of science and commerce,' thought Britten, was that a work like Bach's *St Matthew Passion* could be torn away from its roots in church liturgy and 'at the turn of a switch, [be] at the mercy of any loud roomful of cocktail drinkers – to be listened to or switched off at will, without ceremony or occasion.'

Keller agreed with Britten that recorded music had its dangers – because its endless repeatability fixed in stone what should be a unique experience. (He used to win a lot of bets at BBC auditions by detecting correctly which gramophone record each candidate had at home.) But live broadcasting was quite a different matter. Keller's programme note for the first EBU concert gives a wonderfully eloquent defence of radio that is worth quoting at length, showing as it does how important Keller considered the EBU's new enterprise to be:

*Of course radio can be misused; so, for that matter, can a public concert, especially when you snore through it or, alternatively, find the sight of the performer more gratifying than the sound of the music. But for me, the fact remains that one of my greatest experiences was when, as a small boy sick in bed, I heard the *St Matthew Passion* for the first time [on the radio]. There was no question of a 'substitute', of 'education or study or an evoker of memories': I didn't have any memories. But now I have: I could tell Mr Britten the details of phrasing in the part of the Evangelist, sung by that great artist, Julius Patzak (who will be seventy next year, when he will take on the speaker's part in the *Gurrelieder* in the European Broadcasting Union's sixth international concert from the Radio Concert Hall in Copenhagen). And if I hadn't heard the *St Matthew Passion* then, who knows when I would have heard it first?*

That is the basic point about responsible mass communication – the availability of great music, great performances. Many millions of listeners in fourteen different countries will be listening to tonight's concert. We here in the hall are at the centre of the musical experience which, in Mr Britten's words, 'needs three human beings at least ... a composer, a performer, and a listener'. But I'm not quite sure why he thinks it follows that the listener always has to be there; after all, the composer isn't always there either. Tonight, for instance, Mr Britten is here, whereas Bach, Haydn and Mozart supervise proceedings through metaphysical microphones. Seriously, though, there is this hard fact that what promises to be an outstanding concert could not be 'audible in any corner' of Europe but for this decision on the part of quite a number of radio stations to plan and promote concerts together, and relay them conjointly. No doubt there will be listeners all over Europe who will misuse tonight's concert – use it as background music, talk into it. Equally, however, there will be little boys who will hear Benjamin Britten's music for the first time and who, without this event, might not have heard him conduct it for a long time to come. There will even be listeners, all over Europe, who will be more passionately involved in the concert than one or the other listener

here in the hall. Mr Britten must be aware of the importance of the listener remote in space and close in spirit – otherwise he would not have accepted our invitation to conduct the opening concert of what, one hopes, will become an annual series.

As one becomes ever more deeply involved in the planning of these international concerts, one begins to feel that they are not, or should not be, 'extraordinary' – that so far as the one international language is concerned, the European Broadcasting Union can develop, within itself, a tiny, unofficial, but culturally powerful 'European Broadcasting Corporation'. When frontiers have been transcended, the terms 'mass media', 'mass communication' acquire a rather different ring, don't they?

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Alison Garnham is the author of *Hans Keller and the BBC: The Musical Conscience of British Broadcasting, 1959-79*.

Hans Keller's words are quoted by kind permission of the Cosman-Keller Art and Music Trust.