NAXOS

BARTÓK

The Wooden Prince

(Complete Ballet)

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Marin Alsop

Béla

BARTÓK

(1881-1945)

The Wooden Prince

(A Dancing-Play in One Act)

1	Opening: Molto moderato	4:19
2	First Dance: Dance of the Princess in the Forest	2:46
3	The Prince Meets the Fairy and Sees the Princess	2:25
4	Second Dance: Dance of the Trees	5:07
5	The Fairy Enchants the Stream – Third Dance: Dance of the Waves	4:11
6	The Prince Builds a Wooden Prince	4:29
7	The Princess Spies the Wooden Prince	2:22
8	Fourth Dance: Dance of the Princess with the Wooden Prince	5:44
9	The Prince is in Despair – The Fairy Comforts Him	5:18
10	Great Apotheosis	3:26
11	Fifth Dance: The Princess Prods and Encourages the Wooden Prince to Dance	2:57
12	Sixth Dance: With an Alluring Dance, the Princess Tries to Appeal to the Prince	1:39
13	Seventh Dance: Alarmed, the Princess Hurries After the Prince, But the Forest Keeps Her Back	5:00
14	The Prince and Princess Embrace – Long Kiss – Slow curtain	3:56

Bela Bartok (1881-1945)

The Wooden Prince

During the years before World War I, Béla Bartók worked hard to establish himself as a leading Hungarian modernist composer. Having already asserted himself as a prominent young pianist in Budapest, a reputation solidified by his international concert appearances and appointment in 1907 to the piano faculty at the Liszt Conservatory, by 1909 he began to move more decisively into the public realm through prominent local performances of the large-scale works he was beginning to accumulate in his composition portfolio. The two orchestral suites were both given complete performances in Budapest in that year. The *First String Quartet* had its highly regarded première in 1910. While Bartók continued to produce shorter works throughout these early years, especially for the piano, one sees in his compositional choices a deliberate push to writing increasingly larger works destined for more public venues. Gleaming like a sacred temple at the end of this journey was the Hungarian Royal Opera House, whose full seasons of opera and ballet represented highly visible targets for aspiring young Hungarian composers.

In 1911 Bartók would begin writing the first of his three stage works, *Bluebeard's Castle*, followed in 1914-16 by his ballet *The Wooden Prince*. With these two works he should have been able to present himself to the Budapest public as an accomplished young writer for the stage. Unfortunately, as Franz Schubert had discovered a century earlier, when he, too, lay siege to the world of opera with only passing success, the opera house's management had other priorities. Bartók's opera could wait. When the tentacles of wartime unrest tightened ominously around the institution, the leaders of the Royal Opera House continued to look elsewhere for their repertory. Finally, through the advocacy of Count Miklós Bánffy and several other individuals who wanted to see Bartók's work produced on stage, *The Wooden Prince* received its première at the Royal Opera House on 12th May, 1917, under the direction of Italian conductor Egisto Tango. The relative success of this venture encouraged the Opera House's leadership to schedule *Bluebeard's Castle* for the following season. Bartók's opera received its première on 24th May, 1918, on a double bill with *The Wooden Prince*. The ballet would go on to be published in score and parts by Universal Edition in 1924. Although Bartók would write one further work for the stage, he had discovered that writing an opera or a ballet was one thing; getting these works produced was another. For the rest of his life he preferred to write in genres where the outcome was more predictable, at least in terms of initial performances.

The Wooden Prince is a fairy tale ballet of around 45 minutes' duration. The original story was written by Bartók's literary acquaintance Béla Balázs, who had also written the libretto to *Bluebeard's Castle*. Balázs published the ballet scenario in the Christmas 1912 issue of the literary journal *Nyugat*. Set in a distant time and place, amid a forest whose trees rustle to life during the story, the ballet runs continuously as a series of seven dances, with connecting music and several recurrent musical themes. Though outwardly sunny in its subject matter, *The Wooden Prince* has a mystical side that may explain Bartók's attraction to the story. At first glance the ballet appears to be a routine fairy tale story of a prince and princess falling in love despite obstacles placed in their path. When the curtain goes up, the handsome prince sees the beautiful princess playing alone in the forest. An all-knowing fairy nearby, however, has other plans for him. She wishes him to remain alone in the forest, in her magical world. She brings the forest to life, then a river, in an unsuccessful attempt to turn his heart away from the princess, who by now sits oblivious in her castle, spinning yarn. The prince, despairing of getting the princess's attention, fashions a wooden dummy that he can hold above the trees. The dummy comes to life. When the princess spies the dummy, she rushes to it and promptly falls in love with the prince's facsimile. Inevitably – this is a

fairy tale – the dummy breaks down. The princess now spies the real prince for the first time and consoles his wounded pride. They fall in love. As the curtain falls, the two lovers stand gazing quietly into each other's eyes.

As the stage directions make clear, though, the central moment in this fairy tale occurs not when the lovers finally unite, but earlier, when the prince, alone on stage with the fairy, feels the weight of his sorrow after the princess appears to have abandoned him for the dummy. After asking all the trees, flowers, and waters to pay homage to the agonized man before them, "the fairy takes the prince's hand," it reads in the score, "and leads him to the hill. Triumph, radiancy and splendour. 'Here you will be King over everything!'" The prince realises the folly of pursuing love. All nature embraces him in his splendid solitude. Bartók's music emphasizes this moment of apotheosis, soaring in arcing gestures over a fortissimo chord in C sharp minor. Love, the ballet seems to say, is not the ideal humans sometimes make it out to be. The highest solution for lonely souls is to lay down one's burdens on the forgiving breast of Nature, where no questions are asked and all is forgiven.

Bartók had a lifelong proclivity for the outdoors, which he revered as a source of healing and spiritual restoration. The inner story of *The Wooden Prince*, layered thickly with Romantic *Waldeinsamkeit*, would have held a strong appeal for him.

The ballet's opening pages have often been compared to the opening of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* for their similar use of a near pulseless, triadic sound that slowly pushes higher into the orchestral registers, gaining power and motion as it grows. Bartók's music is wholly triadic and tonal at first; C major is quietly asserted through a low pedalpoint and successive gentle waves of rising triads. The effect is as if Nature itself is coming to life.

At the time of the première Bartók described the ballet as "a kind of elaborate symphonic music, a symphonic poem to be danced to". The music pulses with energy in the more vivid dances. The grotesque dance of the princess with the puppet has a robust vigor drawn from the *verbunkos* dance music style that Bartók, as a Hungarian, knew well. The other dances offer vivid orchestral images of the action on stage. The coquettish princess is introduced by a sly clarinet tripping lightly over a pizzicato waltz accompaniment. The *Dance of the Trees* rumbles to life with low waves of sound that build up to a folk-inflected rhythmic gesture. The majestic heart of the score lies in the glorious music Bartók wrote to accompany the prince's apotheosis. Unlike some of the other, more coloristic dances in the score, which sometimes show the strong influence of Stravinsky, here the passionate music, agonizing *and* beautiful, retreats from the folkloric style to the intensely chromatic, utterly distinctive sound-world that Bartók forged for himself in the 1910s. As the ballet closes, the forest slowly loses its enchantment and the gentle C major sonorities heard half an hour earlier, when the curtain went up, slowly return. The music fades away. The story has come full circle, returning us again to the splendid peace of Nature.

Carl Leafstedt

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

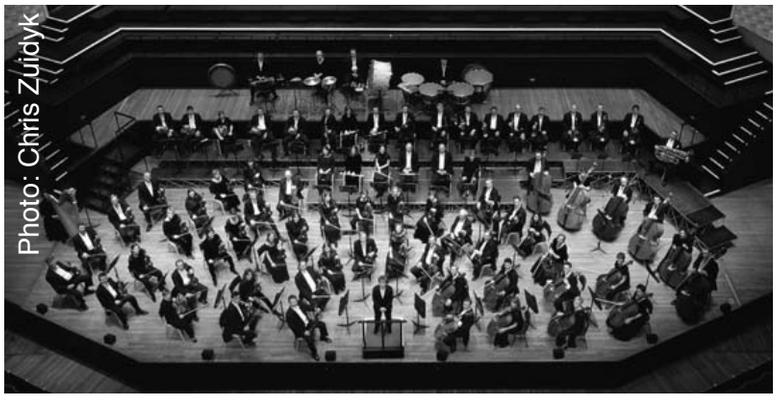
Photo: Chris Zuidyk

Founded in 1893 by Sir Dan Godfrey, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has had among its Principal Conductors some of the finest musicians in the world, including Rudolf Schwarz, Constantin Silvestri, Sir Charles Groves and Paavo Berglund. More recently Andrew Litton raised the orchestra's standards to new levels, crowning its centenary season with a triumphant début tour of the United States in April 1994, followed by Yakov Kreizberg and débuts at the Musikverein, Vienna, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall, New York. Marin Alsop took up the position in October 2002 and has already helped raise the profile of the BSO still further, including concerts at the Philharmonie, Berlin, and in Madrid, Prague, Bruges and a return trip to Vienna. The name of the orchestra is internationally known through over three hundred recordings, including the award-winning Naxos release of Anthony Payne's sketches for Elgar's *Symphony No. 3* (8.554719) with Paul Daniel, the symphonies of Vaughan Williams with the former Chief Guest Conductor Kees Bakels and Paul Daniel, and recordings of works by Philip Glass (8.559202), Leonard Bernstein (8.559245), and John Adams (8.559031) under Marin Alsop for Naxos, this last chosen as Editor's Choice in the November 2004 issue of *The Gramophone* Magazine. The Naxos BSO/Serebrier Mussorgsky recording (8.557645) reached No. 2 in the top twenty Classical Chart, and was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2006. In addition to its recording and international touring commitments, the BSO is dedicated to providing orchestral music across the South and West of Britain, enhanced by a programme of educational and community projects, and makes regular appearances in major festivals and concert-halls throughout the United Kingdom.

Marin Alsop

Photo: Grant Leighton

Marin Alsop is Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony from the 2007/08 season, and has been Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra since 2002. She won the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year award in 2002 and Radio 3 Listeners' Award in 2006, and was named *The Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year in 2003. She regularly conducts the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Los Angeles Philharmonic, and recent guest engagements include the Boston Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Marin Alsop studied at Yale and at the Juilliard School and won the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at Tanglewood, where she studied with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. Her recordings for Naxos include the Brahms *Symphonies* and *Overtures* with the London Philharmonic, the complete orchestral works of Samuel Barber with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and many acclaimed recordings with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, notably *Carmina Burana* (8.570033) and works by Adams (8.559031), Bernstein, Glass (8.559202), Takemitsu (8.557760), Weill (8.557481) and Bartók (8.557433).

Also available:

8.660928

8.570534

NAXOS

BARTÓK: The Wooden Prince

8.570534

The Wooden Prince is a fairy tale ballet with an original story by Bartók's literary acquaintance Béla Balázs, who had also written the libretto to *Bluebeard's Castle* (available on Naxos 8.660928). Though outwardly sunny in its subject matter, *The Wooden Prince* has a mystical side that may explain Bartók's attraction to the story. The ballet's opening pages have often been compared to the opening of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, and the majestic heart of the score lies in the glorious music Bartók wrote to accompany the prince's apotheosis.

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra ENDOWMENT TRUST

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Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (Leader: Duncan Riddell)
Marin Alsop

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53:38

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