

Music that changed me

Tasmin Little

Violinist

Born in London, violinist Tasmin Little studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School as a child. As a soloist she has played with many of the world's leading orchestras and made the first of many appearances at the BBC Proms in 1990. A champion of British composers, and in particular Delius, she has made a number of best-selling recordings for the Chandos label. She was awarded the OBE in 2012.

From my earliest childhood, music was literally part of the furniture – we had a very beautiful old record player that stood on four spindly legs and I would wake up to the strains of beautiful classical music while my father was making the tea. When I was seven and I hadn't been learning the violin long, my parents took me and my sister to the Royal Festival Hall to hear the London Symphony Orchestra and André Previn in a concert that included **STRAVINSKY's** *The Rite of Spring*. We sat in the choir seats behind the timpani and I remember being exhilarated not just because of the power and full force of the orchestra but the feeling of being inside it. I knew then that I wanted to make music my life.

If I could only choose one composer, it would be **BRAHMS**. I love the richness of everything he writes, whether it's a big orchestral work or a sonata. I came across his Violin Concerto when my parents gave me a set of Jascha Heifetz playing concertos by Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn and Brahms. Heifetz is virtuosic, but my favourite recording is David Oistrakh's. I love his sound – there's a solidity and a technical excellence married to a marvellous sense of musical phrasing. He has plenty of passion and attack, but it's underpinned by lyricism – I've always been influenced by his playing. The Brahms Violin Concerto has wonderful associations for me because I played it for the Gold Medal at the Guildhall School of



The choices

Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring*
Kirov Orchestra/Valery Gergiev
Philips 468 0352

Brahms *Violin Concerto*
David Oistrakh (violin); Berlin Philharmonic/
Otto Klemperer *Warner Classics 574 7242*

Sibelius *Violin Concerto*
Ida Haendel (violin); Bournemouth SO/
Paavo Berglund *Warner Classics 217 6742*

Mendelssohn *Octet*
Hugh Maguire, Neville Marriner etc
Decca 475 7716

Richard Strauss *Four Last Songs*
Jessye Norman (soprano); Gewandhaus
Orchester/Kurt Masur
Philips 475 8507

Music, and I went on to win it; I also made my official debut playing the concerto with the Hallé Orchestra.

The **SIBELIUS** Violin Concerto also has a special place in my heart, especially the recording by Ida Haendel with Paavo Berglund conducting. Haendel was the first female violinist I heard when I was growing up and there weren't many

female solo violinists. I admired her strength, authority and attack and her ability to hold a long slow line with an inexorable intensity to it. The Sibelius is very difficult to play. You have to approach it like you would a wild animal – and Haendel certainly roars back!

When I arrived at the Menuhin School aged just eight, they put me straight into leading a quartet. A lot of chamber music went on at school, and I learnt how to listen and to appreciate the interest and importance of the inner line, which is something I've brought into my playing. In my final year I was asked to play the **MENDELSSOHN** Octet with Yehudi Menuhin and other students at his Gstaad Festival. Menuhin arrived for the first run-through (another student had been playing first violin in rehearsals) and he obviously hadn't played it recently – at one point he wasn't counting and came in at the wrong place. I was playing second violin, and he turned to me and said, 'Am I out?'. When I replied awkwardly 'Only by a bar', he roared with laughter. I loved the fact that someone at his level was able to acknowledge that he wasn't perfect. It was an important lesson for me to learn.

I noticed the same sort of modesty in Kurt Masur, who conducts soprano Jessye Norman on my favourite recording of **RICHARD STRAUSS's** *Four Last Songs*. What I really love about this performance, and find lacking in others, is the ampleness of sonority and the feeling of space. Masur and the orchestra provide a velvet cushion of sound and Norman is not just resting on top – she's within this texture. Masur invited me, as a 21 year-old, to perform with the Gewandhaus Orchestra after we gave a performance of the Delius concerto with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the UK. He was conducting it for the first time and he asked me to teach it to him – another example of a great musician's willingness to learn something new.
Interview by Amanda Holloway