

## UNDERSTANDING CLASSICAL MUSIC – Report by Ian Royston

July marked the final episode of Howard Goodall's Story of Music, "The Popular Age" where he looked at music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to the present day.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw two massive innovations in music: the gramophone, which, though limited to about two minutes for a wax cylinder and 10 minutes for a 12" 78rpm record, allowed music lovers to at last hear their favourite music as often as they wished without recourse to the concert hall. And, by the end of the first quarter of that century concerts from all over the country and indeed from other countries could be heard over the wireless, directly into one's own parlour. The demand for orchestras had never been greater.

Ironically, though classical music was now more available to more than ever before these same two media also allowed for a greater explosion in popular music and by the 1930's music quickly found a new outlet in the guise of the 'talkies' a motion picture with voice and music.

During these times more classical music was being heard and played more than at any time in history though we imagine there being a decline in classical works as the proportion being recorded and broadcast was undoubtedly in the minority.

However, it was not dead, indeed far from it as composers such as Gerschwinn, de Falla, Saint-Seans and Copland gained worldwide popularity and though some 'experimental' music may be difficult for those attuned to conventional themes, composers such as Philip Glass appear to have bridged the divide.

Many composers have found rewarding outlets in film scores and it is in these that some major modern works have emerged, many as complex and layered as the symphonies of past times.

In the second part of the meeting Simon Callow continued the story of J S Bach when he arrived in Leipzig in 1723 as Thomaskantor (director of church music) at St. Thomas's Church School and became Kapellmeister at no fewer than four churches in the city. This was the happiest and most productive time of his life.

Before leaving Leipzig, Callow reminded us of another musical director of that city, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy who lived there in his latter years when he spent his time between Germany and Britian, prior to his early, tragic death.

We plan to continue with the History of the Symphony and explore other musical cities next month at 10:00 on 22 August and 25 September at Startforth Community Centre.