

# Symphonic Prelude 'PROMETHEUS UNBOUND' Granville Bantock

This subject has to do with old Mythology. We are told that Prometheus (pronounced pro-me-thuse) made men of clay, and stole fire from Heaven, so as to put life into them. For this offence, he was chained by Zeus, the Grecian Jupiter, to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where an eagle preyed daily on a part of his body. In this work, the composer has not made an attempt to depict every incident in the gruesome story, but to give a general impression of the epic-poem written by Shelley. Prometheus is looked upon as the fabled god who was capable of producing fire, and this is the idea around which the musical structure is built. I should advise all who can to secure a copy of the poem and thoroughly study it, so that the various moods and passions there expressed may be better understood.

The composer has been very careful in his markings, so that it only remains for the performer to use his intelligence as freely as possible. It is rather unique in its way, but there is a reason for that: in any other form, it would have been alien to the spirit of the text. You should really know a little about Shelley in order to place you in the best possible position for appreciating this work. Prometheus is perhaps the type of the highest form of moral and intellectual nature inspired by the truest motives, and the highest ideals. There is a dignity and refinement about the music which fits in admirably with the text, and in no mistaken terms makes Prometheus appear as a real poetical character. Study the music, and you will discover that this is really so.

The opening movement constitutes the prelude to "Prometheus Unbound." The effect should be solid, weighty, massive and imposing. Give each note its full value by letting the articulation be instantaneous. Observe the *tenuto* signs when the full band joins in, and see that the octave tunings between soprano, horns and euphonium are true. Look to the balance, and blend in bars 6 and 7. Round about fig. 1, play the descending chromatic passage with expression; hold the tied notes well out, and let the cross rhythms be clearly defined. While this is proceeding, the euphonium and basses play the opening subject in the same *pesante* style as before. The *dim* which occurs here must be evenly carried out, and the tone reduced to "p." The groups of quavers for the horns should all be articulated, and a good "f" made, while the notes forming the persistent bass figure should be as broad as possible. Full value should be given to the dotted semibreves in the cornets, and a correct balance obtained. From 3 bars before fig. 2, the *dim* must be observed. This is followed by a gradual building-up of the tone. The horns still require the same treatment as before. The two bars previous to the double bar are very significant. A good healthy *cres* is required, while the top cornets with a mighty chromatic rush dash into the next movement. This quaver passage will require study, as some of the notes are at the bottom extremity of the instrument. They will have to use the soprano as their tuning fork.

**Con sforza.**—This strong and virile subject represents an irresistible force carrying everything before it. The attack must be smart and the tune values of the notes well observed. Care must also be taken with the tuning: the horns and E flat basses must watch the high notes. At fig. 3 the detached semiquaver must be smartly played so as not to interfere with the rhythm of the whole group: these will require a little rehearsal. While the theme is being repeated, the chords supporting it must be played with full ponderous tone. The *rit* should be played with a broadened effect.

**Animando.**—Here the idea of "aspiring to the heights" must be given. Notice the two slurred quavers followed by the two staccato ones. This might suggest the little obstacles encountered on the way. The *rit* bar with its quick *dim* gives one the impression of a sigh. This will be rendered more effective by a good balance between the 2nd and 3rd cornets.

**Poco lento.**—Here there is an entire change of mood, sympathetic, expressive and gracious. The E flat basses, euphonium and horns must obtain a good balance, and make an effective *dim*. Solo cornet must not predominate in the duet. Notice the *staccato* crotchet in the middle of each bar: this is of some significance.

**Sostenuto molto.**—This should be given in a solemn organ-like manner, as softly as possible, and the discord in the 2nd trombone part resolved with taste.

**Largamente.**—The expression here broadens to one of pity for a fallen majesty. This is a real inspiration! The imitation by the various groups of instruments is most impressive, and must appeal to the artistic temperament of the players. The accompaniment throughout must be broad, sympathetic and restrained. The grouping of the notes forming the theme should be observed, otherwise the effect produced will not be the desired one. At the 3rd bar after fig. 5, the tone should broaden, and the style become more dignified; get the proper *duo* effect between horns and baritones, and let the trombone harmony be full but not obtrusive. The entry of the euphonium and E flat bass must be gentle, yet human. Much can be made in a quiet way two bars before fig. 6, where euphonium and B flat bass enter with the subject in the minor key. When the cornets, etc., enter, there is a growing in intensity, with the canonic imitation in the bass enhancing its effect. The various entries, although subdued, should be firm and clear, and also of good tone. At the 6th bar after fig. 6 there is a desire to be "free from the bonds that confine"; this is admirably represented by the syncopation, and the few notes reminiscent of the theme which occurs three bars before fig. 3. The different dynamic marking here should be thoroughly studied and contrasted. These few bars contain a world of emotions.

**Lentando.**—The cross rhythms here call for careful and studied treatment. Great restraint is necessary here, the bass notes being little more than mere shadows.

**Piu lento.**—The solo phrases here require to be played with a calm, expressive feeling, and the long accompanying chords given with good organ-like effect. There is a fine tonal contrast between bars 1-3 and 4-6, and two beautiful examples of tone-colouring. When no drum is being used, as at a contest, the basses will have to try and represent one: they must try and alternate exactly alike, but this should be easy, as they will only have one finger to use. Do it slowly at first, and then increase the tempo until the proper effect is obtained. At fig. 8 we return again to the power of "forceful energy." The broken groups of semiquavers must be given in such a way as not to impair the rhythmic flow, and the same heavy style adopted as before with this theme.

**Piu moto.**—The sentiment here is one of striving to free and reaching upward for help. The upward jump of a 7th depicts this splendidly. Do not make too much tone here, expressive treatment is the most important thing to be observed. The entries must be made with confidence and precision.

**Lento Sostenuto.**—Now there is a change to a mood of calm, confident hope in the ultimate release from bondage. The first thing that strikes one here is the motion of the notes. They mostly move from one to the next in the scale (conjunct motion): this in itself suggests sustained treatment. The tied minims should on no account be "clipped," and where breathing is a necessity, it should be done rapidly. Here again the subdued entries should be made with great care: there should be no "bursting in," but all the same the articulation should be clear. At bar 4 the euphonium and baritones should be able to obtain a charming effect. The various melodic figures in this movement should be thoroughly welded together in a uniform style. This is a really "hopeful" picture, and the more it is studied the better will the bandsmen admire it.

**Meno Moto.**—We now change from the beautiful picture of hope to something quite different. Here Prometheus arouses himself in a spirit of revolt, and angry passions are evident. The dynamic effects here are most thrilling, if the theme is played with grim determination.

**Poco largamento.**—Here Prometheus contemplates with superb disdain the awful majesty of Jupiter, the tyrant. This is serious music, and there must be no flimsiness in its treatment. The *tenuto* chords should be dwelt upon a little longer than usual by way of emphasis. The trumpeting by the soprano, flugel and horns in bar 3 must be rhythmically treated, and made to contrast with the sustained notes in the other parts.

**Stringendo.**—Here strong emotions again prevail with a determination to conquer. Two bars before fig. 13 the tempo should gradually increase as with renewed energy.

**Con Moto.**—The theme by horns and the imitation by the basses should be announced with great force and clearness. Note again the slurred quavers, followed by two detached ones. In the 8th bar following fig. 13 we have a little summary, as it were, of things that have gone before: these various themes, though only in part, must be played with their characteristic flavour, and great clearness must be exercised so as not to impair the effect when played simultaneously. The two bars before fig. 14 should be played emphatically. Try the effect first without cornets when the required treatment must be obvious.

**Piu animando** (more warmth and fire).—From here to fig. 18 we are engaged in building up a glorious climax, in which some of the previous matter is used over again with fine effect. The tone should gradually broaden as well as get heavier. The entries should be firm, and the subtle effects, of which there are many, should be carefully studied: it is not sufficient to merely read the notes correctly. In order to phrase correctly and give the proper *sostenuto* effect, care should be taken with the breathing. Some bands which do not realise the importance of a correct style of breathing may get into difficulties at times. Two bars before fig. 15 the Soprano will notice that the rhythm changes as far as he is concerned; the slurring of the triplets will tell him *that*. He can work up a little *cres*. here with advantage. The climbing up of baritones in a chromatic manner is very suggestive. While this is proceeding, the long sustained notes by the horns, etc., should be held on without break.

**Con fuoco.**—The idea here is one of pressing forward with greater insistence, as if a goal were in sight. The bass figure is very significant. Notice the type of articulation required. The part for horns in unison should stand out effectively, and the cornet, flugel and 2nd cornet parts are important. The part for the soprano is not easy: the player will have to break a time or two during the 11 bars. It consists of 24 notes per bar, and should be as continuous as possible. You may take breath every two bars at first, but there are players who could do it all in one breath, or at least take breath in such a way as not to be noticed. The entry of the baritones and euphonium in the 5th bar must be strong and incisive. On each side of fig. 16 there is much bustle by the conflicting rhythms, but this must not be allowed to make the general playing unsteady. The idea here is that of striving to burst the bonds asunder, and thus regain freedom. Broad, majestic and clear part-playing is what is required. At the 4th bar after fig. 16, every note must have its full value and weight, and the clashing discords well marked. Do not try to soften the rugged effect.

**Alfrettando.**—Here things must be speeded up in approaching the climax. The different groups of quavers must be made to fit together so as to produce a sense of continuity. In the 2nd bar after fig. 17 the soprano and solo horn must combine in style and spirit in their section of quavers, which are powerful factors in the picture. The section here in crotchets commenced by the trombones, then taken up by the horns, etc., and finally handed over to the cornets, must be played in a uniform style, so as to suggest one idea, as opposed to a number of small ones. The *staccato* treatment is not wanted here, every crotchet must tell. This represents the final effort for freedom. The rushing quaver movement of the soprano, which should be accompanied by the gradual broadening of the other notes, brings us to the climax which we have been building up from fig. 14.

Prometheus has now gained his freedom, and this happy state is heralded by the trombones, euphonium and B flat basses with the higher instruments putting on the finishing touch. It must be played in a broad majestic manner, with the maximum amount of expression and time values. This marks the climax of the whole conception, and can be summed up in the one word "Victory." Bandsmen, whose emotions are excitable, can do no other than play this effectively.

**Calando.**—Here we reach the anti-climax. The great struggle is over, and the goal won, naturally a state of repose must now follow, and well-earned sleep.

**A piacere** (as you like).—This represents how love comes as comforter, and the treatment must be of the most expressive nature. Round about fig. 20 the playing must be organ-like (the soft swell organ) in exact time, except the last bar, where a slight *rall* may be made.

**Maestoso.**—Here the memories of the past gradually fade from the mind. The rising bass figure must be played rather heavily, though "p," at the beginning of each appearance: bars 3 and 7 must be played "f" throughout, but a decided "dim" must be made in bars 4 and 8. At fig. 22 the music implies that the ultimate goal of life is "Peace." After the "sfz" note, the tone dies away to the faintest whisper, which makes a most effective ending to this remarkably original composition. This work is a fine study in rhythm apart from its æsthetic qualities. There are just a few places where the technique of some players might be taxed at first, but the work is a very playable one, as all the difficulties can be overcome by practice.



