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Celebrating Democracy – Winchester Cathedral – Saturday 4 February 2017

What enjoyment and what honour to attend, for the second time, a performance of a major work of our century, *Turning Points*, in six movements, by David Owen Norris, which I had heard for the first time at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, London, on October 1st, 2015. It is a *Celebration of Democracy* especially referring to three dates and emblematic events of the English history: 1215 for *Magna Carta*, 1415 for Agincourt, and 1815 for Waterloo. The libretto takes us back to singular personalities: the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-1796), the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Martin Luther King (1929-1968), as well as Yousafzai. Hearing this work in the Cathedral at Winchester, energetically conducted by the composer, was for me very meaningful. Indeed, the beautiful and complex idea of democracy, often embodied with power in an abstract way, is



Owen Norris's work. Immediately, I thought of the intelligence which motivated John Adams (1735-1826), the second President of the United States, whose writings completely correspond to the conception of *Turning Points*. A similarity to the great French composer Albéric Magnard (1865-1914) seems to me very obvious, both being linked by the same epic tone. When I evoke an identity between Magnard and Owen Norris, I mean an imaginative one, thanks to a manner of thought which overtakes all conventions. But their style or language are not similar: these two composers are unique. Magnard found his strength in Beethoven, whereas Owen Norris comes from the particular tradition of *Englishness*, a concept which I especially admire. I particularly appreciated the fact that David conducted his own music, because he is as much an inspired interpreter as a composer of genius.

The day before the concert, at Southampton, I had attended a rehearsal (pictured) with the dynamic *Southampton University Symphony Orchestra* and its admirably energetic Leader, Kath Roberts. Before attending the concert on the Saturday, I walked for a long time in Winchester, whose rich history takes us back to King Alfred the Great (849-899). Striking personalities stayed there: the composer Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) who was organist of the Cathedral between 1849 and

1865, and the poet John Keats (1795-1821) who wrote *To Autumn* there during the summer of 1819. Jane Austen died there on July 18th, 1817, in College Street. Walking in this city and its surroundings provided a mystic and pastoral experience which paved the way for focusing on the concert: a truly exceptional occasion. Hearing it, appreciating specially the magnificent *You'll get there* (1912) of Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918), admiring the various performers, among them *The Waynflete Singers, Hampshire County Youth Band*, the organist George Castle, etc., created rich memories which will sustain me for a long time.

I sincerely believe that *Turning Points* as well as Owen Norris's *Symphony* and Piano Concerto should be played at the *Proms* in London. It would do justice not only to unmistakably original and moving music, but also to the intelligence of a rare mind indeed. Thank you for having given us so much spiritual joy.

James Lyon