

Icons
presented by Tom Robinson



Humour, the test of gravity
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The week has started well for humour. The excellent short series *Icons* ended on Sunday with Tom Robinson talking to the horn player Michael Thompson about his hero, Dennis Brain: an endearing portrait with some wonderful playing from Brain, famed for his performances of Mozart and Britten.

We heard the anecdote of Karajan stopping a rehearsal and giving spontaneous thanks for at last hearing Brain make a rare slip; this reflected Brain the consummate professional. But two musical pieces here above all told us what kind of man he must have been. We heard the legendary performance of the third movement of Leopold Mozart's 'Concerto for Hosepipe and Strings' at the 1956 Hoffnung Festival, with Brain's spectacularly virtuosic playing of a garden hosepipe. Tom Robinson's laughter was genuine and infectious as he talked about it.

The second work was the one-minute encore piece by Marin Marais, *Le Basque*: 'a little French dance, which also happens to be the shortest piece I know', we heard Brain describe it to an audience. Light and amusing, with a spring in its step, it spun us quickly away from the contemplation of the night in 1957 when, driving back from a concert, Brain 'didn't make it home'. He was 36; and Hoffnung himself, architect of his own barmy musical fun palace, died two years later, aged 34.

