

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

### March 24 programme complementary content

The sights and sense of the States are encapsulated in the sounds of the country which are at the heart of this all American programme.

Enjoy some well-known tunes, and discover some lesser-known gems from two fantastic female composers, in one evening of entertainment.

You can learn more about what to expect in our programme notes which this year are being presented in a new and accessible way.

Watch Stephen Johnson talking about the concert programme here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yopd8AGBGik>)

And in addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content which we hope will help shine additional light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

### Ian Buckle interview

**Ian Buckle** (<https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/a.asp?a=A12284>) has been a familiar face on the platform at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall for the best part of 20 years – albeit you will usually find him at a keyboard nestled behind the violins.

“Actually, sitting at the celeste, surrounded by your colleagues giving it everything, and watching everybody doing their stuff, is the best seat in the house,” he says.

On this occasion however Ian is taking centre stage, literally, in an all-American programme which will see him take on the soloist mantle to perform George Gershwin’s *Variations on I Got Rhythm* on the hall’s ‘solo’ Steinway.

He’s no stranger to Gershwin, having performed the *Concerto in F* with the Youth Orchestra in 2018 and *Rhapsody in Blue* with the ‘big orchestra’, as well as recording the lesser-known *New York Rhapsody* with the John Wilson Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall.

The **New Yorker’s composing trajectory** (<https://www.pianistmagazine.com/blogs/george-gershwin-why-his-music-was-the-soundtrack-to-the-optimistic-wor/>) fascinates him, as does the big ‘what if’ that hangs over where it might have taken Gershwin if he hadn’t died prematurely at the age of 37.

Ian explains: “Of all the composers that died really young, Gershwin is the one that you wonder most what he would have done with the rest of a natural lifespan.

“His hit rate as a songwriter was phenomenal. But the detail he writes for the orchestra, that was only ever going to get more and more sophisticated, and it would be fantastic to see how that turned out if he’d lived until he was 50, 60, 70.”

Gershwin of course started his career as a pianist, (<https://www.steinway.com/artists/george-gershwin>) and Ian points out that each of the other composers featured in the evening’s programme are also “fantastic pianists” which has informed their work.

Ian himself started playing when he was five – after his parents saw him drawn to a piano at a family friend’s they “shelled out a fiver” on an instrument at home and later, once they realised it wasn’t just a passing fancy, they invested in an upright Broadwood which the Sheffield-born 50-year-old still owns.

He went on to study at the Royal Northern College of Music where his contemporaries included the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra’s principal horn Tim Jackson who is still a close friend.

In addition to his performing with the Orchestra, Ian teaches at both Leeds and the University of Liverpool, is co-artistic director at Stapleford Granary near Cambridge, and has a busy freelance career as an accompanist, chamber musician and – as in this concert – soloist.

He has also collaborated with poets like Deryn Rees-Jones, Roger McGough and, notably, former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion.

Ian explains: “I put together a programme for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Philip Larkin’s death; I’ve always liked the atmosphere of solo piano and spoken word; they go really well together.

“I just love Andrew Motion’s voice. And he knew Larkin. They were friends and they worked together for a while, and the way he reads Larkin is full of love and understanding. He was my first choice and I asked him – and to my absolute astonishment he agreed to come and do it.”

Music remains Ian’s overriding passion, however.

He says: “I love playing all periods, all styles. Because it’s all music.”

Along with being an integral part of **Ensemble 10/10** (<https://www.liverpoolphil.com/the-orchestra/orchestra-season-2021-2022/ensemble-1010/>) since its inception, he’s also a member of the Zephyr Ensemble and founder and artistic director of chamber music collective **Pixels Ensemble** (<https://pixelsensemble.org/>) which showcases programmes which embrace both ‘traditional’ and contemporary work – most recently performing the world premiere of Tim Jackson’s *Continuo for violin solo with horn and piano*.

Meanwhile on March 25 he releases a digital EP of pieces by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century French composer **Hélène de Montgeroult** (<https://www.staplefordgranary.org.uk/watch-listen->

[and-read/cultural-blog/making-the-piano-sing](#))) who was the first female professor at the Paris Conservatoire.

“Montgeroult is fantastic,” he enthuses. “I found her by just looking for some more interesting sheets for my students at uni. And you find yourself in these corners of the internet and this fantastic music popped out. And I wanted to record it.”

Ahead of that there is this latest concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and one he has been thinking about and preparing for some time.

He considers: “My approach to Gershwin is to treat it with the same respect that you treat other classical music, and not try and play it like jazz. The harmony is sometimes associated with jazz, but actually, the structure of the music – even in *Rhapsody in Blue* – what he’s written is concert music which is influenced by jazz harmony.”

Ian is just the latest member of the Liverpool Philharmonic ‘family’ to be given the solo spotlight, something that has become an integral part of season programmes.

“And they’ve taken it one stage further and have been commissioning pieces from composers specifically for team players,” he points out.

So if he was given the opportunity to have a piece commissioned specially for him, who would he like the composer to be?

“Tim Jackson,” he says firmly. “Because of the close friendship we’ve had ever since we were at college. I was best man at his wedding, and he’s written music for me before and it’s always an absolute pleasure to play.

“And the sincerity and the thought and the absolute high standard of work is just inspiring to engage with.”

Listen to Ian Buckle play Gershwin’s *New York Rhapsody* with the John Wilson Orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOAgNEIVSg8>

## **Sarah Hicks**

Japanese-American conductor **Sarah Hicks** (<https://www.sarahhicksconductor.com/bio>) makes her Liverpool debut leading this all American programme of music.

The Honolulu-raised Hicks, who also plays viola and **piano** (<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-orchestra-s-sarah-hicks-talks-pop-stars-and-onstage-metoo-moments/478205983/>), studied music at Harvard and at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music where she is a staff conductor.

She is also an educator, writer, speaker and arranger, and her career has seen her collaborate with a range of artists from Hilary Hahn to Rufus Wainwright, Sting and Smokey Robinson.

Hicks is principal conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra's **Live at Orchestra Hall series**. (<https://www.minnesotaorchestra.org/press-room/press-releases/sarah-hicks-extends-contract-2021/>)

In addition, she is a specialist in **film music** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL\\_oDlnxtTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL_oDlnxtTQ)) and the film concert genre, and in demand as a guest conductor with orchestras across the world.

Watch Sarah Hicks conduct the Danish National Symphony Orchestra playing Bernard Herrmann's *Vertigo*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnuyYmv41t8>

## Joan Tower

Composer, conductor and pianist **Joan Tower** (<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/composer/1605/Joan-Tower/>) has been one of the world's foremost women composers for more than 50 years.

You can read more about Tower, her award-winning career and her approach to composition in this interesting BBC piece.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2BykmkFvLN8TDfb63ytgH3/joan-tower-america-s-best-kept-secret>

Her *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* takes its inspiration from Aaron Copland's 1942 *Fanfare for the Common Man* (incidentally premiered by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under Liverpool-raised **Sir Eugene Goossens**)

([https://www.boosey.com/pages/cr/composer/composer\\_main?composerid=2808&ttype=BIOGRAPHY](https://www.boosey.com/pages/cr/composer/composer_main?composerid=2808&ttype=BIOGRAPHY)), and uses the same instrumentation as Copland.

The work is actually comprised of not one but six individual fanfares, composed between 1986 and 2016, with Tower describing it as being "dedicated to women who take risks and are adventurous".

The first fanfare was premiered by the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1987 and was dedicated to **American conductor Marin Alsop** (<https://www.classicfm.com/artists/marin-alsop/>). In fact, each of the fanfares is dedicated to a woman who has played a significant role in classical music, either on stage or behind the scenes.

Watch a performance of the first *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_UtCfH4LOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_UtCfH4LOs)

## Amy Beach

American pianist and composer **Amy Beach**

((<https://www.amybeach.org/about/biography/>)) was born Amy Cheney in New Hampshire in 1867.

She made her debut as a pianist aged 16 but after marrying two years later, she retired from professional performing for more than a quarter of a century, only returning to the stage twice a year for charity performances and then more regularly after being widowed in 1910.

However, Beach – who had composed since early childhood and published her first piece in 1883 – was ‘permitted’ to **continue composing**. ((<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/amy-beach/>))

Her works include a *Mass in E flat*, *Violin Sonata*, *Piano Concerto* and the opera *Cabildo* as well as choral works and an extensive catalogue of pieces for the piano.

The ***Gaelic Symphony in E minor*** ((<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/amy-beach/>)), written in 1894 and premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in October 1896, hold the distinction of being the first symphony composed and published by an American woman.

**The symphony** ((<https://classicalexburns.com/2020/12/03/amy-beach-gaelic-symphony-exploring-european-traditions/>)) is full of juicy harmonies and sweeping melodies and while its formal title is *Symphony in E minor* it received its ‘Gaelic’ moniker through its use of folk songs as thematic material, with Beach particularly inspired by the traditional music brought to Boston by Irish communities which had made the city their home.

**Did you know? Amy Beach wasn’t the only female composer of her time? Her contemporaries also included Margaret Ruthven Lang, Mabel Wheeler Daniels and Mary Carr Moore.**

Listen to the allegro con fuoco from Amy Beach’s *Gaelic Symphony in E minor*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59vpSxakMeo>

## George Gershwin

As a teenager, **George Gershwin**

((<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/gershwin/guides/gershwin-facts/>)) worked a song plugger in a sheet music shop in New York’s Tin Pan Alley.

Little would his customers have guessed that within a decade this talented young pianist would have become a successful songwriter in his own right – and the composer of increasingly sophisticated orchestral music.

While he was inspired by the latest musicals he had seen on stage in London and elsewhere in Europe, Gershwin was also keen to secure a more formal musical education.

He produced *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924 and wrote *An American in Paris* while staying in the French capital.

He reportedly asked to study with both Ravel and Nadia Boulanger ((<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/women-in-music/nadia-boulanger-composer-conductor-music-teacher/>)). Both turned him down – with Ravel apparently asking: “**Why become a second-rate Ravel when you’re already a first-rate Gershwin?**” ((<https://thelistenersclub.com/2017/07/19/gershwin-and-ravel-share-the-blues/>))

Gershwin’s *Variations on I Got Rhythm* – based on the hit song from his earlier musical *Girl Crazy* – was premiered in January 1934, and later that summer he started work on his opera *Porgy and Bess* which contained some of the most complex music he would ever write.

The symphonic suite *Catfish Row*, ((<https://www.allmusic.com/composition/catfish-row-symphonic-suite-from-porgy-and-bess-opera-mc0002427753>)) which uses musical themes from the opera, was finished in 1936 and was one of the final works Gershwin completed before dying from a brain tumour the following year at the age of just 38.

**Did you know? Katherine Hepburn and Joan Crawford were among the audience at the Broadway premiere of Porgy and Bess in 1935.**

Listen to George Gershwin talk about and play his *Variations on I Got Rhythm*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV62aaWu590>

## Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein ((<https://www.leonardbernstein.com/about/composer>)) said: “I can’t live one day without hearing music, playing it, studying it, or thinking about it.”

And the late American conductor, composer and pianist certainly lived up to his words.

The Harvard and Curtis Institute and Tanglewood-educated Bernstein got his big conducting break in 1943 when the 25-year-old was appointed assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic and was asked to take over in a concert at short notice.

That was the year after he composed his *Symphony No 1* – known as the ‘Jeremiah’, and the year before he wrote his first Broadway musical *On The Town*.

((<https://www.leonardbernstein.com/works/view/8/on-the-town>))

The show was based on Jerome Robbins’ ballet *Fancy Free* which the choreographer had set to music by Bernstein, and at its heart was a trio of sailors (Ozzie, Chip and Gabey) given 24-hours’ shore leave in New York during which they went sightseeing, met girls and got into a series of scrapes.

MGM bought the rights for a film before the musical was **even given its Broadway premiere**. ((<https://www.classical-music.com/features/articles/guide-bernsteins-town/>))

The concert suite *Three Episodes from On the Town* features a trio of dances from the musical; *Dance of the Great Lover*, *Pas de Deux* and *Times Square Ballet*.

**Did you know? The 1949 Hollywood film version of On The Town dispensed with all but four of Bernstein's original songs.**

Watch Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin sing *New York, New York* in the film version of *On The Town*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7C1gWZTdgw>