

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
May 31 programme complementary content

With a long Platinum Jubilee Weekend on the horizon, what better way to celebrate 70 years on the throne than with a programme of music from a trio of composers who were all making music during the Queen's lifetime?

Andrew Manze conducts this all-British programme which includes Elgar's elegiac *Cello Concerto* played by soloist Nicolas Alstaedt.

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.

Andrew Manze

Andrew Manze has become a great favourite of Hope Street audiences and has recently extended his contract as Principal Guest Conductor until 2023.

It's now more than 10 years since he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and has been Principal Guest Conductor since 2018.

Last September, he directed the Orchestra in its role supporting the finalists at the Leeds International Piano Competition.

With boundless energy and warmth and an extensive and scholarly knowledge of the repertoire, Manze is in great demand as a guest conductor from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles.

Forthcoming commitments include concerts with the NDR Radiophilharmonie – of which he is the chief conductor, the Salzburg Festival, and conducting Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony with the National Orchestra of Wales at the **BBC Proms**.

Nicolas Alstaedt

German-French cellist **Nicolas Alstaedt**, who makes his Liverpool debut in this jubilee concert, is one of the most versatile and sought-after artists today.

Born in Heidelberg in 1982, the soloist, conductor and artistic director has a repertoire which spans centuries from early to contemporary music and plays on both period and modern instruments.

Alstaedt has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras and as a chamber musician. He is artistic director of the Lockenhaus Chamber Music Festival and the **Haydn Philharmonie**, and as a **conductor** he works closely with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

During his career, Alstaedt has won a host of awards and was a BBC New Generation artist from 2010-12. In 2020, he received the Gramophone Chamber Award for his recording of the *String Trio* by Sandor Veress and Bartok's *Piano Quintet*.

Frank Bridge

Frank Bridge was one of the most accomplished composers and musicians of the first half of the 20th Century.

But he is perhaps best known by audiences today for teaching the young **Benjamin Britten**.

Born in 1879 the ninth child of violin teacher and variety theatre conductor William Henry Bridge and his wife Elizabeth, the young Frank was drilled on the violin by his stern father and after playing in pit bands went on to the Royal College of Music where he studied under Charles Villiers Stanford and became a viola virtuoso.

His 1911 piece *The Sea* became his most popular orchestral work and was often played at Henry Wood's Proms concerts.

Early influences included Brahms, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky while later works, like the 1913 *Dance Poem*, with its vivid orchestral colours, suggested an interest in the music of Debussy and Stravinsky. His music took on a darker tone during the First World War.

Dance Rhapsody for Orchestra comes from earlier in his career and was first performed at the **Royal College of Music** in the summer of 1908.

Did you know? In June 1915, Bridge composed *Lament for Catherine* in memory of nine-year-old Catherine Crompton who had died when RMS Lusitania was torpedoed on her transatlantic voyage from New York to Liverpool. The entire Crompton family perished.

Edward Elgar

In 1900, **Edward Elgar** was introduced to the distinguished German-born, Halle Orchestra cellist (and member of Liverpool's Schiever Quartet) Carl Fuchs after a performance of the Enigma Variations.

Fuchs extracted a promise from Elgar to write a piece for the Brodsky Quartet – of which he was a founder member – and himself a cello concerto.

The string quartet finally came in 1918, dedicated to the Brodsky Quartet but premiered at the Wigmore Hall. But despite Elgar being reminded of his promise in subsequent years, Fuchs' concerto failed to materialise.

It would be the best part of two decades, and in the aftermath of a world war which ended the gilded Edwardian age that he was so associated with, that Elgar would finally put pen to score and map out what became one of his most famous and enduring works – and the final large-scale orchestral piece he would complete.

The *Cello Concerto* **received its premiere** in October 1919 not with Fuchs, but with soloist Felix Salmond who played it with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Did you know? Elgar was a close friend of Mossley Hill-born merchant-turned-musician Alfred E Rodewald. It was Rodewald and his Liverpool Orchestral Society who premiered both *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1* and *March No*

2 at the Philharmonic Hall on October 19, 1901. Elgar dedicated March No 1 to Rodewald and the society.

Vaughan Williams

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of British composer **Ralph Vaughan Williams** at Down Ampney in Gloucestershire.

Growing up in Surrey, Vaughan Williams studied at the Royal College of Music where his tutors included Hubert Parry and – like Frank Bridge, as well as Arthur Bliss and friend Gustav Holst – **Charles Villiers Stanford**.

It was lessons with **Ravel in Paris** however that the composer would credit with helping establish his own distinctive style, which was also greatly influenced by early English music and traditional folk songs and dances.

But while he is most readily identified with the ‘pastoral’, Vaughan Williams compositions actually covered a much wider range of styles – seen in works like his one-act ballet *Job: A Masque for Dancing* which was premiered in 1931 by the **Vic-Wells Ballet** with choreography by Dame Ninette de Valois.

About the Music

Frank Bridge (1879-1941): *Dance Rhapsody*

Composed 1908

First Performed: Royal College of Music, London, 21 July 1908, cond. Bridge

Like his older contemporary Elgar, Frank Bridge blossomed as a composer in Edwardian England. His works from that period tend to be ripely or delicately late-romantic. Also like Elgar, Bridge was horrified by the First World War, but instead of giving up composing he began to write in a much darker, more modernist style reflecting his growing pacifist convictions, which only succeeded in alienating his audience. *Dance Rhapsody* is very much ‘first period’ Bridge, luscious and finely perfumed, with a light, buoyant balletic touch of its own. Just occasionally however one can hear hints of the more exploratory, inward-looking nature that was to emerge so strikingly in the post-war works, and which were such an inspiration to Bridge’s most famous pupil, Benjamin Britten.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934): *Cello Concerto in E minor, op 85*

Composed: 1919

First Performed: London Symphony Orchestra, cond. Elgar, Felix Salmond (cello)

Elgar’s Cello Concerto was the last major work he finished, even though he still had another 15 years to live. Though he was too old to serve in World War One, reading and hearing about it disturbed him profoundly, and when it was over, Elgar realised that, as a representative of the Edwardian ‘Old World’, he was going rapidly out of fashion. The death of his wife and in some ways mother-substitute, Alice, in 1920, seems to have been the final blow. It’s hard to miss the sense of an ending in the Cello Concerto, along with a nostalgia which, though sometimes tender, can also swing closer to grief.

All of this might be hard to take if it wasn't for the fact that the Concerto is also so hauntingly beautiful. Though there's quite a bit of challenging virtuoso writing for the soloist, it is as a singing instrument that the cello really shines – and remember that cello concertos were still a rarity at this time. The four linked movements take us through a kaleidoscope of moods, but it's the melancholic lyricism of the first that sets the tone, pouring out again in the tender 'song without words' of the Adagio, and even more in the heartrending slow music towards the end of the finale. Elgar's music is always personal, but in his Cello Concerto he records the end of an era, not just for himself, but for his country and the world he knew.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): *Job: A Masque for Dancing*

Composed: 1927-30

First Performed: Cambridge Theatre, London, 5 July 1931, Vic-Wells Ballet, cond. Adrian Boult

Vaughan Williams's *Job*, the first all-British ballet, was inspired by William Blake's exquisite but disturbing illustrations to the biblical Book of Job, which tells how a virtuous man is put to a terrible test by God after being challenged by Satan. Blake's 'take' on the story is typically original. In allowing this torment, does God himself will evil? Or are God and Satan really – as Blake put it elsewhere – 'the two contraries of the human soul'? Blake's vision had a strong appeal for Vaughan Williams who, though he was deeply drawn to religious texts, found the idea of an all-powerful loving God hard to take, especially after his traumatic experience as a medical orderly in the trenches in World War One. At the same time, the unique, visionary textures and colours of Blake's illustrations inspired him to enrich and refine his orchestral palette to new levels.

The scenes are linked, so the music is continually evolving, telling the story so seductively and powerfully that it needs no stage action to get its message across. The introduction is luminous and serene, but harsher colours begin to intrude as Satan presents himself before God and his angels. Then the ordeal begins as God departs and Job's ordeal begins. Job's false 'comforters', brilliantly depicted by an oily saxophone, only manage to rub salt in his wounds. At this, Job snaps, curses the day he was born, and has a horrific vision of Satan seated on God's throne (full organ, fortissimo). The ballet omits God's 'answer' – even for some Christians this classic parental 'because I say so' is troubling. Instead we have the vision of the lovely youth Elihu (solo violin), which begins the healing process. Satan is banished, then we see Job humbled and restored, as the music weaves a touching final benediction.