

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 6 programme complementary content

October marks the 150th anniversary of Ralph Vaughan Williams' birth and this concert opens a series of celebrations from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra throughout the month.

It also marks the much-delayed appearance of Swiss violinist Sebastian Bohren, who was due to join conductor Andrew Manze and the Orchestra to perform Szymanowski's *Second Violin Concerto* at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in October 2020.

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

Andrew Manze

Andrew Manze is Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – a role he has held since 2018 – and a great favourite of Liverpool Philharmonic audiences.

He made his debut with the Orchestra more than a decade ago and has appeared regularly on the Hope Street stage ever since.

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.

He began his career as an Early Music specialist, becoming Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music at the age of 31. Along with a busy conducting career, he also teaches, edits and writes about music and frequently appears as a broadcaster.

He is currently Chief Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie.

He has recorded several of Vaughan Williams' symphonies with the Orchestra including, in 2018, *Symphony No 5 in D major*.

Sebastian Bohren

Sebastian Bohren has been described as having “a varied tone palette which is as beguiling as his technique is striking”.

The 35-year-old Swiss-born violinist studied in Zurich, Lucerne – where he received his soloist's diploma – and Munich.

He has performed across Europe, Asia and South America and has won acclaim, along with awards, for his expressive performances. A versatile chamber musician, he spent seven years as a member of the Stradivari Quartett and he has also appeared at some of the world's leading festivals.

Bohren's repertoire covers both the Classical and early Romantic eras but also includes contemporary composers.

Among his recordings is a 2019 CD featuring the violin concertos of Mendelssohn and Britten which was recorded with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at the Friary.

Bohren plays a Guadagnini violin from 1761, the Ex-Wanamaker-Hart.

Edward Elgar

In May 1889, Edward Elgar got married. He was 31 and had spent most of the previous decade reluctantly teaching violin to Worcester schoolgirls, conducting and composing for various local organisations and playing the organ in the city's St George's RC Church.

But with his career still not really taking off at home, the new Mr and Mrs Elgar decamped to London for the composer to try and make a breakthrough there.

It's therefore ironic that it should be a request from Worcester, for the 1890 Three Choirs Festival which was being held on the banks of the Severn, that would finally start to give Elgar the profile he was striving for.

The commission, which arrived in a letter as the new year was rung in, was for a short orchestral work to be performed in Worcester Cathedral.

Elgar was inspired by the chivalrous tales, knightly valour and courtly love within Sir Walter Scott's 1816 novel *Old Mortality* – and what would become his overture *Froissart* was born.

Karol Szymanowski

Polish composer and pianist Karol Szymanowski was born in 1882 into a wealthy family whose estate at Tymoshivka in Ukraine was lost following the Russian Revolution.

A sickly child who suffered from tuberculosis, he began to compose and play at an early age and at 19, he went to Warsaw where he took private tuition in harmony and counterpoint.

Szymanowski's earliest works were influenced by Chopin.

But extensive travel – living in Vienna and Berlin (where he set up the Young Polish Composers' Publishing Company) and visiting Italy, England, the US, Russia and North Africa – gave him a wider appreciation of other composers' work, which also had an effect on his music. In later years, he was inspired by Polish folk music and Stravinsky.

Szymanowski's *Second Violin Concerto* dates from 1932-3 and was the composer's last major work before his death four years later.

As with his *First Violin Concerto* (1916), it was composed for Odesa-born Polish violinist Pavel Kochański, who premiered the new work at Warsaw's Philharmonic Hall just three months before his own death.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born in the Gloucestershire village of Down Ampney on October 12, 1872.

His father was the vicar there, but when Arthur Vaughan Williams suddenly died three years later, the young family decamped to the maternal family home just outside Dorking in Surrey – an area of outstanding beauty with its woodland, heathland and farmland.

It was here the young Ralph learned the piano and violin, and made his first tentative compositions. His interest in music was nurtured as a pupil at Charterhouse, where aged 16 he staged his own G major Piano Trio, playing the violin.

He went on to study with Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music, and later with Charles Villiers Stanford. While there, he also forged a lifelong friendship with fellow student Gustav Holst.

During a 60-year career he composed everything from concerti, chamber music and choral works to ballet, operas, hymn tunes and film and radio scores. Of course, this was all alongside his many songs and – written over the course of 50 years – his nine symphonies.

This concert includes two of the composer's works from the 1930s and early 1940s. *The Running Set* was composed in 1933 and utilises themes from folk dance tunes, while his *Symphony No 5 in D major* took five years to complete and premiered at the Royal Albert Hall in June 1943 with Vaughan Williams conducting.

Did you know? Through his mother Margaret, Vaughan Williams was a direct descendant of both pottery king Josiah Wedgwood and physician, poet, inventor and naturalist Erasmus Darwin, and a cousin of naturalist Charles Darwin.

About the Music

Edward Elgar (1857-1934): *Froissart* Concert Overture, Op 19

Composed: 1890

First Performed: 9 September 1890, Worcester, cond. Elgar

Froissart was Elgar's first large-scale work for orchestra. He was 32, full of ambition, but as yet failing to make much of a name for himself outside his native West Midlands. His move to London the year before had been a failure and he'd returned to Worcester in a state of deep gloom. But then came a commission, from the Worcester Festival, for a short orchestral piece. In Walter Scott's novel *Old Mortality*, set during the English civil war, a young royalist soldier's imagination is fired by the writings of the 14th century writer Jean Froissart on the subject of knightly chivalry. Those words set Elgar's imagination working at full stretch too. *Froissart* almost overflows with good tunes and the orchestral writing is full of panache and delicacy. Years later Elgar (a severe self-critic) recognized the worth of this 'chivalrous' Overture when he described it as 'shameless in its rude young health'.

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937): *Violin Concerto No 2*, Op 61

Composed: 1932-3

First Performed: 6 October 1933, Warsaw, Paweł Kochoński (soloist)

As a young man, Karol Szymanowski was seduced by the gorgeous, erotically heated music of Wagner and Richard Strauss. It was a language that suited him well: Szymanowski was a man much given to the pleasures of the senses. Two things however led him to enrich and expand his

musical language much further: one was the poetry and art of the Islamic Middle East, the other the sharply flavoured folk music of his native Poland. It's that potent second influence that leaves the stronger imprint on Szymanowski's Second Violin Concerto, his last major completed work. He wrote it in the Polish mountain resort of Zakopane, where his old friend, the violinist Paweł Kochański joined him to help plan this concerto. (Kochański had given the premiere of the First Violin Concerto in 1916, and had composed its cadenza).

The First Concerto had been wild, extravagant, exotically perfumed and expressively highly charged, its one-movement structure evolving like a weird dream. The Second can be pretty intense and gorgeous too, but the manner is more classical, and the folk elements give the music an exhilarating out-of-doors freshness. The Second Concerto is also in one continuous movement, but this time four distinctive sections can be made out: an ardent, lyrical Moderato leads to a deeply soulful slow movement, then a solo cadenza introduces a much faster dance section. The slower final section builds magnificently to an ecstatic climax, then with a flourish the concerto ends. Shocked by the death of his friend in 1934, Szymanowski dedicated the Second Concerto to Kochański's memory.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): The Running Set

Composed: 1933

First Performed: London, Royal Albert Hall, 1934

Vaughan Williams wrote this short 'fantasia on jig-rhythms' for the 1934 National Folk Dance Festival. The title refers to a kind of folk dance form that Vaughan Williams may have encountered in his younger days as a collector of folksong (he managed to record or note down more than 800 songs), though by the time he came to compose this lively and appealing piece it appears to have died out in England. A 'running set' would usually combine several tunes in sequence, so here Vaughan Williams runs together four folk tunes he knew well: 'Barrack Hill', 'The Blackthorn Stick', 'Irish Reel' and 'Cock o' the North'.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Symphony No 5 in D major

1. Preludio. Moderato
2. Scherzo Presto misterioso
3. Romanza. Lento
4. Passacaglia. Moderato

Composed: 1938-43

First Performed: 24 June 1943, Royal Albert Hall, London, London Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Vaughan Williams

After the startlingly violent Fourth Symphony (1934) and the sombre, war-haunted choral work *Dona nobis pacem* (1936), received opinion was that Vaughan Williams had abandoned the contemplative, folk-inflected language of his younger days. The Fifth Symphony, however, represented not so much a return to the old ways as an enrichment and development of them.

The pastoral tone is unmistakable, but the many gorgeously evocative passages acquire extra power through the way Vaughan Williams expertly 'places' them within a subtle and cogent symphonic argument. The first movement has its shadowy moments, especially the faster build-up towards the climax, and the climax itself is a radiant revelation, but the beginning and ending are hushed and ambiguous with mysterious, haunting horn calls. A fleeting, ghostly Scherzo follows, scored with great delicacy in its outer sections, but suggesting something more heavy-footed in the central trio section.

Then comes the Romanza, unmistakably the heart of the symphony. Some of the ideas of this movement stem from Vaughan Williams' major ongoing operatic project *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Vaughan Williams was no conventional believer, but he turned repeatedly to religious themes in his music. Clearly, he found *some* kind of transcendent meaning in John Bunyan's famous tale of the Christian Pilgrim and his spiritual journey. He distils its essence movingly in this movement, offering it as a word of comfort and encouragement to a country then involved in a colossal struggle of its own. The final movement is a 'Passacaglia': a movement built up over a constantly repeated bass theme. This builds eventually to a grand climax at which the symphony's opening horn calls return on the full orchestra in great waves of sound. The splendour fades, yielding to radiant tranquil counterpoint led by strings, recalling a choir singing an Elizabethan anthem in a great cathedral, its ending coming as near to perfect peace as any twentieth century symphony.