

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
November 24 programme complementary content

He's known for his luscious operatic melodies, but Puccini himself came from a dynasty of church musicians – and in this concert you can hear what happened when the youthful composer married the two together.

His little-performed *Messa di Gloria* is joined on the programme by two key symphonic works from that painter of beautiful musical pictures, Debussy.

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.

Domingo Hindoyan

Domingo Hindoyan was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme, El Sistema.

He studied conducting at Haute école de musique in Geneva, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor's Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to Daniel Barenboim at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as successor to Vasily Petrenko in 2020, taking up this position last September.

Jesús León

It's a warm welcome back to Liverpool for the popular Mexican tenor Jesús León, who proved a big hit when he performed in the Spirit of Christmas concerts in 2012 and again in 2017.

One of the acclaimed 'bel canto' singers of his generation, León grew up in the Mexican city of Hermosillo, learning guitar from the age of ten and taking singing classes at 14. He also started his own rock band called Garage.

After studying opera at the University of Sonora, he went on to study at the UCLA Opera Centre, the Solti Accademia di Bel Canto and Boston Opera Institute.

His wide repertoire includes Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*, Nadir in *The Pearl Fishers*, the Duke of Mantova in *Rigoletto* and Ismaele in *Nabucco*, while recent appearances include Romeo in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Opéra Comique in Paris.

He also has a busy career as a concert performer with leading orchestras in Britain and Europe, and in 2015, he recorded his debut CD – Bel Canto – with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Toby Purser.

Adam Kutny

Polish baritone Adam Kutny was born in Poznan in 1992 where he attended the Jerzy Kurczewski choir school, later studying at the Pacific Boychoir Academy in Oakland, California.

He received scholarships from both the Polish Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture.

Since 2017 he has been a member of the international opera studio of the State Opera Unter den Linden.

As an ensemble member of the Staatsoper Berlin, his recent engagements have included Der Heerfuhrer des Königs in *Lohengrin*, Schaunard and Marcello in *La Bohème*, Masetto in *Don Giovanni* and Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*.

He also has a busy career on the concert platform with appearances with leading orchestras including the Warsaw National Philharmonic and Lodz Philharmonic.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

When the Liverpool Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840, it saw the birth not only of an orchestra but of a chorus too.

The Choir added 'Royal' to its title in 1990.

In recent years, the Choir has performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B minor*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mahler's *Symphony No.2*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan's *St John Passion*, the Duruflé *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

The Choir has also appeared in many of the UK's major concert venues – including the Royal Albert Hall – and has sung on a number of foreign tours.

It's a busy season for the Choir. Along with this concert, they will also perform Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

Claude Debussy

While he eventually became one of the most influential composers of his generation, it took Claude Debussy many years to achieve fame outside France.

This programme includes two symphonic sketches which were composed on either side of his breakthrough work, the 1902 opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

The innovative symphonic poem *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* takes its name from an erotic work by 19th Century French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

Its premiere in Paris in December 1894 is now regarded as one of the most significant moments in the history of modern music.

A decade on from his *Prélude*, and with *Pelléas* having proved a success, Debussy produced what would become his most popular and widely performed concert piece, the seascape soundscape *La Mer* – his third orchestral triptych, and one inspired not directly by the sea, but by the tones and textures in works by artists such as Turner and Hokusai.

It took him 18 months to compose the work. It was finally completed in early 1905 and proofed while the Frenchman was on holiday at Eastbourne's Grand Hotel.

Did you know? While writing as a music critic, Debussy used the nom de plume Monsieur Croche which later became an alter ego, one he described as an ‘anti-dilettante’.

Giacomo Puccini

Giacomo Puccini came from a long line of musicians and singing masters, so it’s perhaps no surprise he followed the family tradition. He would make the name Puccini famous not for the church music performed by his forebears though, but for his sparkling operas.

Born in the northern Italian city of Lucca in 1858, the sixth of nine children, the young Giacomo was a member of the boys’ choir at the Cattedrale di San Martino, where he also played the organ.

His father having died when he was six, he studied with his uncle Fortunato Magi at Lucca’s Istituto Musicale Pacini, before continuing at the Milan Conservatory.

Puccini was still a youthful 21 when he composed his *Messa* as a graduation exercise from the Istituto Musicale Pacini, and it would turn out to be his only mass.

It was premiered in July 1880 as part of a church service for the feast of Lucca’s patron saint St Paolino.

About the Music

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune

Composed: 1892-4

First Performed: 22 December 1894, Paris, cond. Gustave Doret

According to the arch-modernist composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, ‘modern music began with the *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*’. Imagine hearing it in a context where ‘modern music’ meant Mahler, Richard Strauss, even Tchaikovsky, and much of it does seem way ahead of its time. The delicate, voluptuous harmonies may owe something to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, but here they acquire a new ambiguity – faintly unsettling and strangely calm at the same time. Then there are the supple, free-floating rhythms, creating the effect of timeless, ecstatic improvisation. Then there are the fabulous orchestral timbres – take the very opening with its mesmerising, languorous flute solo, where the pitch and sound-colour feel as though they have been born simultaneously.

Instead of looking to traditional forms for a musical framework, Debussy takes as his creative starting point a poem by the French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, which depicts a faun – a sensual but benevolent goat-like being of Roman mythology – who dreams lazily of sexual gratification in the full heat of the Mediterranean sun, before finally surrendering to sleep. Phrases, images and feelings in Mallarmé’s poem are transformed into music that rises and falls, ebbs and flows with an extraordinary lifelike freedom – an effect close to the ‘stream of consciousness’ in twentieth century modernist novels. Yet despite its profound and far-reaching newness, the *Prélude* was an instant success. As the conductor Gustave Doret recalled, ‘I felt behind me... an audience that was totally spellbound. It was a complete triumph, and I had no hesitation in breaking the rule forbidding encores.’

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): La Mer

1. De l'aube à midi sur la mer (Dawn to midday on the sea)
2. Jeux de vagues (Games of the waves)
3. Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue between the wind and the sea)

Composed: 1903-5

First Performed: 15 October 1905, Paris, Orchestre Lamoureux, cond. Camille Chevillard

As a boy, Debussy loved the sea, but when he came to write his orchestral masterpiece *La Mer* ('The Sea'), he did the opposite of what we might expect, withdrawing inland and concentrating instead on artistic distillations of the oceans in literature and the visual arts. *La Mer* is full of wonderful evocations of the moods and colours of the sea: the play of light on the surface and in the depths, the motion of tiny ripples and giant waves, the sense of elemental currents and cross currents. But the subtitle, 'Trois esquisses symphoniques' ('three symphonic sketches'), points to something else. For many French composers, the symphony was above all a Germanic form and therefore regarded with suspicion, even hostility. On one level, *La Mer* is a uniquely atmospheric piece of sound-painting, but on another it has the purposeful thinking and integration of dramatic contrasts typical of post-Beethovenian symphony, with a few tiny, pregnant motifs developed into a constantly evolving stream of striking ideas.

A grey, cold dawn breaks over a moody, fretful sea at the start, but as the sun rises above the horizon, a horn theme sounds warmly through rippling string and harp textures. At the end, a colossal wave rises, crests and breaks spectacularly. 'Jeux de vagues' is the symphonic scherzo: a ballet of sea-spray, tossing white horses, wild eddies and surging surf, and then at the end a sudden luminous calm. Finally, the sea turns angry as storm winds goad and agitate the waters, culminating in a thrilling surge and a great shout of triumph.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924): Messa di Gloria

1. Kyrie (Lord have mercy)
2. Gloria (Glory to God in the highest)
3. Credo (I believe in one God)
4. Sanctus – Benedictus (Holy – Blessed is he)
5. Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

Composed 1878-80

First Performed, 12 July 1880, Lucca

Italy was the birthplace of opera, and it has remained its natural home ever since, despite increasingly strong competition from Austria, Germany, France, and later Russia. Not surprisingly, most of the great Italian composers have concentrated on opera, in the case of Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, Verdi and Puccini, almost to the exclusion of all else. But there was always the church – a different kind of theatre perhaps, but one in which music was equally

valued. Rossini, Verdi and Puccini all left impressive religious works, and in Puccini's case it's striking that the *Messa di Gloria* was his first major work, composed when he was still a student. It was to be another three years before Puccini tackled his first opera, *Le Villi*, but in the *Messa* one can already hear the potential: the vocal writing is wonderful, especially for the two male soloists, and far from being an austere ritualised setting, the music is dramatic, sensuously immediate and often intensely emotional.

Is it also an expression of faith? Puccini was ambiguous about his beliefs, political as well as religious, but it seems more likely that, like the avowedly atheist Verdi, he was moved by religious music and ritual as an expression of profound human longing: for safety in a threatening, unpredictable world, for peace (expressed poignantly in the *Agnus Dei*), and – an instinct often denigrated today – for something or someone to praise beyond oneself. Surprisingly, Puccini made no effort to get the *Messa* published, but he thought well enough of it to rework some of it in his operas. It was never heard again in his lifetime. Almost certainly, however, he would be delighted to see it back on the stage today.