

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 11 programme complementary content

Cross the Channel in the company of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir for a night with a distinctly Gallic flavour. Ben Glassberg (current musical director at the Opéra de Rouen) conducts, and lyrical baritone Jacques Imbrailo joins Liverpool Philharmonic's massed forces for a programme which marries Bizet, Dukas and two of Fauré's best-loved works.

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.

Ben Glassberg

Described as conducting with "irresistible panache", the award-winning [Ben Glassberg](#) is fast becoming one of the most sought-after conductors on the international stage.

Born in London in 1994, Glassberg undertook a music degree at Cambridge and studied conducting with Sian Edwards at the Royal Academy of Music. Aged 23, he won the grand prize at the [International Besançon Competition for Young Conductors](#).

He is currently Musical Director of Opéra de Rouen Normandie, Principal Guest Conductor of the Volksoper Wien, a former Principal Conductor of Glyndebourne on Tour and Associate Guest Conductor at Orchestre National de Lyon. As a recording artist he has released a diverse discography including award-winning CDs for Warner Classics with guitarist Thibaut Garcia and mezzo Marianne Crebassa. Last month he conducted *Carmen* at Paris' Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, while future engagements include Bernstein's *West Side Story* at Volksoper Wien and *Scheherazade* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jacques Imbrailo

South African baritone [Jacques Imbrailo](#) is admired for his lyrical voice and charismatic stage presence. Raised on a farm, Imbrailo started singing aged 10 after attending open auditions following a concert by the visiting Drakensberg Boys' Choir School. He studied law at South Africa's North-West University where he also earned a B Mus degree, before going on to train at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

The 45-year-old is a former member of the Jette Parker Young Artists' Programme at the Royal Opera House, and in 2007 won the Audience Prize at the [BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition](#). In 2010 he made his Glyndebourne debut playing the title role in [Billy Budd](#) and has gone on to perform the role with several other leading companies and opera houses, and at the *BBC Proms*.

He has appeared on opera stages – and concert platforms – across the world including Paris, Madrid, Essen, Houston, Washington and Rome as well as in performances with the Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and at Covent Garden. In 2015 he created the role of Joachim Messner in Jimmy Lopez's opera *Bel Canto*, premiered at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

A committed recitalist, he is a founder member of [The Prince Consort](#). This season his engagements include *Don Giovanni* with Malmo Opera, Weinburg's *The Passenger* with the Bavarian State Opera and *The Marriage of Figaro* at Hamburg Staatsoper.

[Read a Q&A](#) with Jacques Imbrailo.

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 Durufle *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

It 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.

This season the Choir welcomes a new chorus master, with [Matthew Hamilton](#) being appointed the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's Director of Choirs.

During this season, the Choir will also sing Poulenc's *Gloria*, and appear in the Classic FM Hall of Fame concert on March 16, as well as in the Spirit of Christmas concert series and the popular annual performance of Handel's *Messiah*.

Georges Bizet

There's an irony in the doomed heroine of [Georges Bizet's](#) *Carmen* working in a cigarette factory. A poster child for the perils of heavy smoking, *Carmen's* 36-year-old composer [died of a heart attack](#) just three months after the premiere of what would become one of the most popular, performed and recognised operas in the world – a roaring success he would never see.

The son of a singing teacher, Alexandre César Léopold Bizet was born in Paris in 1838, and was accepted by the city's Conservatoire at the age of 10. Aged 19, he composed a one-act operetta called *Le Docteur Miracle* which won joint first prize in a competition run by Offenbach.

At the end of his time at the Conservatoire, the promising Bizet even won the prestigious [Prix de Rome](#) scholarship. And yet, at his death, Bizet had few successes to his name.

Carmen, adapted from a novella by Prosper Mérimée, [received its premiere](#) at the Opera-Comique in March 1875 but its plot, with its cast of factory workers, gypsies, smugglers and deserters – and its heroine's violent demise – seemed to shock both its audience and critics.

Three months later, its composer was dead. And yet, by the end of the year, *Carmen* had enjoyed a huge [success in Vienna](#) which set it on its path to become one of opera's most loved and performed works.

Did you know? For what became arguably the most famous song in his most famous opera, Bizet coined a new word – toreador – to mean bullfighter. The correct term in Spanish is torero but that did not have enough syllables for the music.

Watch Philip Rhodes perform [the Toreador song](#) from Bizet's *Carmen* with the Welsh National Opera.

Gabriel Fauré

The year 1887 was a prolific one for the 42-year-old French composer [Gabriel Fauré](#). It was a decade since the organist and piano teacher had seen his first major piece – his *Violin Sonata No 1* – performed, publicly and to great success, at a concert of the [Société Nationale de Musique](#).

While Fauré had retained his ‘day job’ as choirmaster and deputy organist at La Madeleine, supplementing it with teaching roles, he also continued to compose, particularly the vocal works which would see him become the undisputed master of French song.

And so, to 1887, which could be considered a golden year – certainly in terms of the creation of some of his most memorable works.

It started with the premiere, in January, of his *Piano Quartet No 2* at the Société Nationale de Musique and continued with the birth of his greatest song [Clair de Lune](#), composed to words by poet Paul Verlaine.

Decamping to the exclusive Parisian suburb of Le Vésinet for the summer, Fauré wrote [Pavane](#) – initially as a piece for orchestra, but later adding an invisible chorus, perhaps for his patron the socialite Elisabeth, Countess Greffulhe, to whom it’s dedicated.

And then, at some point during the year, he began what would become the [Requiem](#). Although it would not reach its final version until the turn of the 20th Century, Fauré had completed five of the work’s seven sections by the start of 1888 and they received their first performance at La Madeleine for a funeral mass, sung by a chorus of 40 male voices.

Listen to Fauré’s [Requiem](#).

Paul Dukas

Scholarly and intensely self-critical, describing himself as a teacher who composed, one can only hazard a guess at what [Paul Dukas](#) might have felt about his musical legacy. Because despite the Frenchman’s other compositional output, such as the ballet *La Péri*, opera *Ariadne and Bluebeard* and his *Symphony in C major*, it’s just one piece that he really remains known for.

Dukas was born in 1865 and taught himself music theory, starting to compose at the age of 14 while convalescing after an illness. He entered the Paris Conservatory at 16 and in 1888 he gained second place in the prestigious Prix de Rome.

Disappointed with not winning, he later left the Conservatory and after completing compulsory military service he continued composing but also forged a busy career as a teacher at his old alma mater (his students included Duruflé and Messiaen, who wrote [Pièce pour le tombeau de Paul Dukas](#) after his death) and as a respected but often cutting music critic.

[The Sorcerer’s Apprentice](#) dates from 1897 when Dukas was 32 and came in the wake of his *Symphony in C major*. The symphonic scherzo was based on a century-old poem of the same name by Goethe and follows the events in the verse.

Although already hugely popular in concert programmes during his lifetime, it was Disney’s decision five years after his death to include it as one of eight animated shorts based on classical music in the film *Fantasia* which really sealed its fame, with Mickey Mouse playing the eponymous apprentice.

Watch [The Sorcerer’s Apprentice](#) from Disney’s 1940 film *Fantasia*.

About the Music

Georges Bizet (1838-75) *Carmen Suite No 1*

Composed: 1873-4

First Performed: 3 March 1875, Paris, Opéra-Comique, cond. Adolphe Deloffre

1. Prélude (Act I, Prelude – ‘Fate Motive’)
2. Aragonaise (Interlude before Act 4)
3. Intermezzo (Interlude before Act 3)
4. Séguedille (Act 1, Carmen: ‘Près des remparts de Séville’)
5. Les Dragons d'Alcala (Interlude before Act 2)
6. Les Toréadors

For most of his short career, Bizet had to struggle for recognition. *Carmen*, one of the most perfect achievements in the operatic repertoire, was the last thing he finished, and he only just lived to see its first few performances. But – with cruel irony – his sudden, premature death seems to have swung opinion round in his favour. The same critics who'd roundly denounced *Carmen* now hailed it as a masterpiece and the audiences roared their approval. How could they have missed it before? The characterisation – the leading roles and the crowd scenes – is wonderfully flavoursome, the Spanish-influenced (but never pastiche-y) melodic writing is of the kind that lodges itself forever in the memory, and the working out of the plot (coloured by the wonderfully sinister ‘Fate Motive’, heard in the first movement of this Suite) has a compelling urgency even Verdi might have admired. Tchaikovsky was simply blown away, as was Wagner's former disciple, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

The First *Carmen* Suite was put together after Bizet's death by his friend Ernest Giraud. It's closely faithful to Bizet's orchestration, but it doesn't follow the order of events in the opera. Giraud's priority was to showcase the best tunes in the most effective musical context, and it works!

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924): *Pavane*, Op 50

Composed: 1887

First Performed: 25 November 1888, Concerts Lamoureux, cond. Charles Lamoureux

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the dance known as the Pavan caught on throughout western Europe, but it found special favour at the Spanish court. It was a slow dance, in two-time, with a refined, stately character. Fauré appears to have the Spanish regal form particularly in mind when he wrote his *Pavane* in 1887, originally as a solo piano piece, though it's in his later orchestral version that it's become widely loved. Fauré's verdict on it was characteristically self-deprecating: ‘elegant, assuredly but not particularly important’. How unjust! *Pavane* is simply a lovely, lightly balletic meditation, set in motion by a hauntingly melancholic flute solo. Every time the flute melody returns, the harmonies are subtly changed in ways that suggest deeper feelings behind the exquisitely masked and mannered surface. Fauré was a master of the art of *nuance*, as this seemingly modest miniature reveals at almost every turn.

Paul Dukas (1865-1935): *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

Composed: 1897

First Performed: 18 May 1897, Paris, cond. Dukas

The French composer Paul Dukas was his own most exacting critic. He abandoned or destroyed a frightening amount of his own music, and only allowed his finished works out in public when he'd scrutinised them carefully from every possible angle. But perhaps it was worth it. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* is a marvel – as was quickly recognised. It's a gloriously colourful, exciting orchestral piece in its own right, but once you've even a basic outline of the Goethe poem it's based on, its story-telling power is irresistible. It became hugely popular outside the concert hall when Walt Disney included it in his animated film *Fantasia* (1940), in which Mickey Mouse plays the role of Goethe's wizard's assistant who, left alone to do the household chores, decides to use magic to save himself the effort. Of course, it all goes horribly wrong – as the music makes very clear! In the end the Sorcerer returns just in time and sets things in order, as well as issuing his pupil with a stern telling-off.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924): Requiem

Composed: 1887-90, rev. for full orchestra 1900

First Performed (revised vers.) 12 July 1900, Paris, Trocadéro, cond, Paul Taffanel

1. Introit et Kyrie (Introduction & Lord have mercy)
2. Offertory
3. Sanctus (Holy)
4. Pie Jesu (Good Lord Jesus)
5. Agnus Dei (Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world)
6. Libera me (Deliver me from eternal death)
7. In Paradisum (Into Paradise)

The most famous settings of the 'Mass for the Dead', the *Requiem* – Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi and Britten – tend to be vividly, almost operatically theatrical. Fauré's *Requiem* is very different, and not just in tone and expression. Fauré omitted almost the whole of the traditional 'Dies irae' ('Day of wrath') section of the liturgy: this violent, blood-and-thunder medieval evocation of the terrors of the Day of Judgement was not for him (Fauré was no orthodox believer). He also included the prayer 'In Paradisum' from the burial service, a prayer many have found particularly touching, symbolising the moment when the bereaved take their final farewell of the departed soul. At its first performance in 1888, the *Requiem* was scored for much smaller forces than in the familiar revised version of 1900. The revision is more sumptuous in tone, yet something of the intimate, chamber-like character of the original score is retained. This is music one can imagine being performed in a side chapel of a great cathedral, to a congregation of family and close friends, without any of the pomp or theatre of a grand public funeral.

Fauré concentrated on what he saw as the purely human significance of death. Was Fauré himself attempting to come to terms with the deaths of both his parents in the mid-1880s? The *Requiem* was certainly begun soon afterwards. But his own account contains a characteristic touch of gently irony: 'Everything I managed to entertain by way of religious illusion I put into my Requiem, which is moreover dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith in eternal rest'. There is no need to believe in a god to sustain 'faith in eternal rest'. It is music that speaks of loss across sectarian and cultural divides, and which offers consolation in – what? Perhaps the answer is human love and music. Fauré certainly believed in both of those.