

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra March 16 programme complementary content

The *Classic FM* Hall of Fame is the definitive countdown to the music we just can't get enough of. So what better way to spend an evening than hearing some of our favourite pieces performed live by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the marvellous massed voices of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir?

Conductor David Parry is in charge of the tunes, and *Classic FM's* Aled Jones presents an unmissable programme which includes works by Handel, Elgar, Mozart and Morricone.

David Parry

Conductor [David Parry](#) is an inspirational champion of a vast range of operatic, concert and symphonic repertoire. He is known both for the re-appraisal of important lesser-known compositions and for a consistently fresh approach to established repertoire.

He studied at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, and after being encouraged to try conducting by the late [Audrey Langford](#), he went on to study with Sergiu Celibidache in Spain.

Significant credits include the world premiere of Jonathan Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (for both Opera North and Staatstheater Stuttgart), *Der Fliegende Hollander* (for Portland Opera), *Madama Butterfly* (in Anthony Minghella's ENO production which won him an Olivier Award), *Così fan Tutte* and the premiere of Dove's *Flight* (for Glyndebourne Festival Opera) and *Maria Stuarda* (for Stockholm Royal Opera).

Much in demand both in the UK and further afield, he is a regular conductor of orchestras including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, CBSO, Royal Philharmonic and Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Aled Jones

[Aled Jones](#) was a 12-year-old boy soprano from Wales when he made his professional debut singing the role of the Angel in Handel's Oratorio *Jephtha* on *BBC2*. Three years later, Christmas 1985, the teenage chorister became famous when his recording of Howard Blake's *Walking in the Air* reached the top 5 in the UK charts.

He performed countless concerts across the world, including at the Hollywood Bowl, and by the time his voice broke a year later he had recorded 16 albums, sold six million records and sung for Pope John Paul II and the Queen. He went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, before being asked to play the title role in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Other theatre roles include Caractacus Potts in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and Bob Wallace in *White Christmas*, which meant he spent the 2011 festive season at the [Liverpool Empire](#).

In 2004 he took part in [Strictly Come Dancing](#), reaching the semi-final.

He is both a performer and a presenter, both on television (including *Songs of Praise*) and radio where he has presented *Good Morning Sunday* and *Friday Night is Music Night* on *BBC Radio 2*, and *BBC Radio 3's The Choir*. He has presented programmes on *Classic FM* for 20 years, and can currently be heard from [7-10am every Sunday](#).

Watch a teenage Aled Jones singing [Walking in the Air](#).

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.

Recent appearances on the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall stage have included Beethoven's *Mass in C* and choral pieces by Brahms. In addition to this concert, during the 2023/24 season the Choir has also sung in Fauré's *Requiem*, the Spirit of Christmas concerts and the popular annual performance of Handel's *Messiah*. They return on April 20 for Poulenc's *Gloria*.

Handel – *Zadok the Priest*

Perhaps there was something in the stars, because the year 1685 was an auspicious one for music. While Henry Purcell was busy composing an anthem for the Westminster Abbey coronation of King James II, across the Channel, 1685 saw the birth of three (other) great composers – Bach, Scarlatti, and first, on March 5 in the German city of Halle, [Georg Frideric Handel](#).

After working in Hamburg and Italy, Handel became kapellmeister to the then Elector of Hanover in 1710. He made his first visit to London, the city which – unbeknown to the young composer – would become his home for more than 45 years. In fact, Handel and his music was greeted so warmly, he moved to London two years before his employer became the new George I.

[Zadok the Priest](#) was one of four anthems Handel composed for the coronation of George's son, George II, in October 1727, a ceremony which featured around 200 singers and musicians. The popular anthem has been performed at every coronation since.

Did you know? In February 1727, Handel petitioned Parliament to become a British citizen. It enabled him to be appointed a composer of the Chapel Royal.

Enjoy the Westminster Abbey choir singing [Zadok the Priest](#) at King Charles III's coronation.

Vaughan Williams – *The Lark Ascending*

It may have been beaten into second place in last year's *Classic FM* Hall of Fame (by Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto), but Ralph Vaughan Williams' elegiac masterpiece remains a real favourite.

[The Lark Ascending](#) was inspired by a poem of the same name by [George Meredith](#) and composed for solo violin and piano in 1914, in the dying sunlit moments of a pre-war Britain.

War intervened, and that early version wasn't performed before an audience until December 1920 when [Marie Hall](#), the violinist Vaughan Williams dedicated it to, performed with piano at [Shirehampton Public Hall in Bristol](#).

Its composer had already reworked the piece for violin and orchestra by then, and the first performance of what we would recognise today came in June 1921 when Hall joined the British Symphony Orchestra and Adrian Boult in a concert at the [Queen's Hall in London](#).

Listen to Tasmin Little play Vaughan Williams' [The Lark Ascending](#).

Smetana – *Vltava* from *Má vlast*

Born in a town to the east of Prague in 1824, [Bedřich Smetana](#) was the son of a brewer (and amateur violin player) and a dancer. The young Smetana gave his first performance on the piano at the age of six, and he also started to compose simple pieces.

At school he befriended the future Czech revolutionary poet Karel Borovský, following him to Prague in 1839. Smetana himself became a revolutionary (albeit briefly), manning the barricades on the Charles Bridge when, in 1848, the Czechs attempted to overthrow the Habsburg Empire.

[Smetana](#) earned his early living mostly from teaching, continuing to compose on the side. In 1856 he moved to Sweden where he worked as a conductor. His first major success as a composer came in 1867, courtesy of his second opera, *The Bartered Bride*.

Má vlast (or My Fatherland) is a set of six nationalistic, symphonic poems, dating from 1874-9. [Vltava](#) – named after the longest river in the Czech Republic – is the second and most famous.

Listen to Smetana's [Vltava](#) from *Má vlast*.

Fauré – *Cantique de Jean Racine*

[Gabriel Fauré](#) has three pieces feature in the 2023 *Classic FM* Hall of Fame. [Cantique de Jean Racine](#) is the earliest of those compositions. The work – dedicated to César Franck – was written in 1865 during its composer's final year at Paris' [École Niedermeyer](#), and it won the 20-year-old first prize for composition. Camille Saint-Saëns was one of the judges. It is also notable as being the first such work the French composer wrote in a long career noted for choral and sacred music, such as his *Requiem*.

With its beautiful, full choral sound layered over a more simple accompaniment, *Cantique de Jean Racine* has echoes of that later masterpiece. The work received its premiere in 1866, with Franck conducting and Fauré playing the organ. Originally scored for four-part chorus and organ, this miniature beauty was revised for chorus and chamber orchestra in 1906.

Listen to [Cantique de Jean Racine](#) by Gabriel Fauré.

Verdi – *Triumphal March and Chorus* from *Aida*

As the greatest Italian opera composer, perhaps it's no surprise that Egyptian ruler Khedive Ismael approached [Giuseppe Verdi](#) to compose a work for the opening of his new opera house. Unfortunately, while the [Khedivial Opera House](#) opened as planned in 1869, *Aida* was not ready. *Rigoletto* was instead slotted in to fill the space, and it wasn't until [Christmas Eve 1871](#) that *Aida* was finally staged at the venue.

Set in Ancient Egypt, *Aida* tells the story of a captive Ethiopian princess who is in love with General Ramades, and he with her. But when Ramades is chosen to lead a war against her home country, Aida has a terrible choice to make – with terrible consequences.

Aida is renowned for its sumptuous sets and huge chorus. The *Triumphal March* – arguably the best-known part of the opera – takes place when (spoiler) Ramades returns victorious from battle.

Watch the [Triumphal March and Chorus](#) performed at New York's Metropolitan Opera.

Handel – Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah

[Handel](#) composed 29 oratorios over the course of fifty years – early works from his time in Italy to later pieces (including *Belshazzar*, *Solomon* and *Jeptha*) which were premiered in London.

But the most famous of them all, and in fact of all oratorios, remains [Messiah](#). It's also the only one of Handel's oratorios which was composed in London but not premiered in the capital. Instead, the work – completed over three weeks in the summer of 1741 and with a text by Oxford-educated Shakespeare scholar Charles Jennens – received its first performance in [Dublin](#).

Handel's works were performed in two concert series at the city's New Musick Hall. The second series finished on April 7, 1742, and just [six days later](#) Handel unveiled his *Messiah* at the same venue. It was [a triumph](#), and one which was repeated in London the following spring in a concert conducted by Handel himself. Over the years, *Messiah* has become synonymous not with Easter, but with Christmas, and is one of the most widely performed choral works in the world.

Watch a 600-strong choir sing the [Hallelujah Chorus](#) in Sydney Opera House.

Beethoven – First Movement from Symphony No.1

While his *Eroica*, 'Fate' (Fifth) and *Choral* symphonies tend to dominate any list of [Beethoven](#) favourites, these symphonic giants stand on the shoulders of the composer's [First Symphony](#).

Composed at the turn of the 19th Century, this first foray into the symphonic canon looks both back – to the music of contemporaries like Mozart and Haydn – and forwards, giving audiences a [hint of what was to come](#). Since he had settled in Vienna eight years before, Beethoven had accrued a substantial body of work – mostly chamber music and pieces for piano.

He had, in fact, started on a symphony in 1796, but it was only completed in the dying months of the 18th Century. It was finally premiered at Vienna's Burgtheater on April 2, 1800, in a benefit concert where its composer also played one of his own piano concertos.

Beethoven dedicated the work to his patron and supporter, Dutch diplomat [Baron Gottfreid van Swieten](#), who had also played those roles for Haydn and Mozart.

Listen to the [first movement](#) of Beethoven's *Symphony No.1* played on period instruments.

Mozart – Lacrimosa from Mozart's Requiem

[Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart](#) spent much of 1791 working on a new opera (which would become *The Magic Flute*) and the score for *La Clemenzia di Tito*. But in July, he also received a visit from a [mysterious messenger](#) with a commission from an anonymous nobleman for a requiem mass.

Following the premiere of *The Magic Flute*, he finally started to compose the [Requiem](#). While the prolific composer had always worked fast, on this occasion time wasn't on his side. Despite feeling depressed, and increasingly unwell, he managed to complete 100 pages of manuscript. But then, on December 5, Mozart died, aged just 35. Of those 100 pages, there were just eight bars of its *Lacrimosa* committed to manuscript. *Lacrimosa*, and the remainder of the *Requiem* we know today, was completed by his pupil [Franz Xavier Süssmayr](#).

Listen to the [Lacrimosa](#) from Mozart's *Requiem*.

Ennio Morricone – *Gabriel's Oboe* from *The Mission*

Nominated for an Oscar, and named in the Top 25 Best American Film Scores of All Time, [Ennio Morricone's](#) soundtrack to [The Mission](#) sits in 20th position in the *Classic FM* Hall of Fame.

Morricone, born in 1928, studied trumpet, choral music and composition at Rome's St Cecilia Conservatory. His early career saw him juggle classical compositions and work for the theatre. His [prolific film career](#) started in 1954, albeit mainly as an arranger and 'ghost' writer. His first full film score was for the 1961 Italian movie *The Fascist*.

Morricone came to wider notice for his score for Sergio Leone's 1964 Spaghetti Western *A Fistful of Dollars*, and the 1966 epic *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*. The last was a new entry on the Hall of Fame in 2023, joining *Cinema Paradiso*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *The Mission* – from which you will hear the haunting *Gabriel's Oboe*.

Despite being nominated six times, surprisingly Morricone only won one Oscar for best original score – for the 2016 Tarantino movie [The Hateful Eight](#) – although he also received an Honorary Academy Award in 2007.

Listen to [Gabriel's Oboe](#) from *The Mission*.

Holst – *Jupiter* from *The Planets Suite*

In 1913, [Gustav Holst](#) was enjoying a holiday when he and his companions – including fellow composer Arnold Bax – had a conversation about astrology. It stayed with Holst, and the following year started what was to become his [most famous work](#).

There's a certain irony, given that the suite was composed over the first three years of the Great War, that it opens with *Mars, the Bringer of War*. Although hot on Mars' heels is *Venus, the Bringer of Peace*, which must have seemed a very long way away in the year of the Somme.

Holst himself described the suite as 'a series of mood pictures'. And even in the midst of conflict, there was clearly room for one of those moods to be exuberance, with *Jupiter, The Bringer of Jollity*, having this in abundance. Clearly influenced by Holst's love of folk music, it's bursting with lovely, spirited melodies. Of course, on top of that, the piece contains one of classical music's most exquisite and poignant themes – one perhaps most people know better as the hymn [I Vow to Thee My Country](#) which Holst adapted to a poem by Cecil Spring Rice in 1921.

Did you know? Holst's brother Emil acted under the stage name Ernest Cossart. He had a successful career on the West End, Broadway, and in Hollywood, appearing in films such as *Bringing Up Baby*, *Tom Brown's School Days* and *Kitty Foyle*.

Enjoy [Jupiter](#) from Holst's *The Planets Suite*.

Carl Orff – *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana*

When looking for inspiration for a new cantata in 1935, German composer [Carl Orff](#) turned to a collection of 800-year-old Medieval Latin poems called *Carmina Burana*. Choosing 24 of the more than 200 verses, the result became Orff's most well-known [composition](#) and a favourite with not only audiences, but also film-makers, advertisers and contemporary musicians.

Its first and final sections, called *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*, which translates as Fortune, Empress of the World, start with the choral work's most rousing and famous theme, *O Fortuna*, which gives thrilling voice to the 'wheel of fortune'.

Carmina Burana was premiered at the Frankfurt Opera in 1937, going on to become [the most performed piece of new music](#) in Nazi-controlled Germany.

Did you know? Orff was conscripted into the German army in WW1 but almost died when a trench caved in on him. He was then declared unfit for active service.

Watch the [Old Spice aftershave advert](#) which used *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana*.

About the Music

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Orff *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana*

Musical snobs may grumble about what the conductor Thomas Beecham called the 'appalling popularity' of certain pieces of classical music but, as this line-up shows, some music becomes popular for very good reasons. It's not at all surprising that George Frideric Handel should have two entries in the *Classic FM* Hall of Fame. No composer had a better instinct for how to put the musical seal on an important event. *Zadok the Priest* was composed for the Coronation of George II in 1727, and the opening orchestral build-up is a demonstration of how to instil a sense of awe and majesty. No wonder it's been heard again at every British coronation since then, not to mention being reworked in 1992 as the UEFA Champions League Anthem. The *Hallelujah Chorus* was the outstanding hit from Handel's oratorio *Messiah* (1742), which tells the story of Christ's birth, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection in both transcendent and very human terms. The story goes that at one performance, George II was so moved by *Hallelujah* that he stood up, and audiences have done the same ever since.

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote a violin concerto, but it is *The Lark Ascending* (1914) that violinists and audiences have taken to heart. The lark's ecstatic soaring is echoed from earth by folk-like tunes from the orchestra. There's something strangely poignant about the joy expressed here. Is it that the sweetly carolling bird is so small and fragile, or could the fact that it was written on the eve of World War I have influenced the music?

The river Vltava, running through Czech woods and fields and the centre of Prague itself, is evoked beautifully by Czech music's great father figure Bedřich Smetana. *Vltava* (1874) begins with tiny droplets of water forming the stream and flows on, sweeping through Prague to its confluence with the river Elbe.

In more recent years, Gabriel Fauré's choral music has come to rival Handel's in popularity, but he couldn't be much more different. Handel was a master of musical monuments; Fauré preferred to speak softly, intimately. His gorgeous *Cantique de Jean Racine* is a setting of a hymn by the great French dramatist Racine, which could have inspired grandeur and fireworks. Instead, Fauré's setting is a model of restraint and luxurious charm. Verdi's *Triumphal March and Chorus*, from his smash-hit opera *Aida* (1871), is at the other end of the scale. It neatly balances a tragic love story (the lifeblood of grand opera) with a thrilling evocation of the grandeur and splendour of Ancient Egypt.

Unlike the staggeringly precocious Mozart, who was writing symphonies at eight, Ludwig van Beethoven waited till he was 30 before giving the world his First Symphony (1800). Though it's conceived on a relatively modest scale, especially compared with later epics like the *Eroica* and *Choral* symphonies, the first movement is a display of Beethoven's superb flair for musical drama, unpredictable right from the first chord, through to the thrilling ending. From Beethoven's first we move to Mozart's last: the magnificent *Requiem* ('Mass for the Dead') was the last thing Mozart composed, left incomplete at his dreadfully untimely death at just 35. The heartrending *Lacrimosa* tells of 'weeping' at the Day of Judgement, but it could just as easily be a portrayal of grief in the here and now.

Conceived as the main theme for Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986), Ennio Morricone's Golden Globe Award-winning *Gabriel's Oboe* has with time upstaged the film itself. The oboe in question belongs to Father Gabriel, a Jesuit missionary at work in South America, and it comes to a sad end when it's destroyed. But the spirit of the tune continued to haunt the film and, nearly forty years later, it's still as touching as ever.

Gustav Holst was still relatively unknown when his brilliant and powerfully atmospheric *The Planets* (1914-17) had its triumphant premiere, but it made his name for good. Astrological symbolism guided Holst's hand, according to which *Jupiter* is 'the bringer of jollity'. This movement is a glorious demonstration of extrovert good-humour, with several splendid tunes – including one which will be familiar even to those who don't know *The Planets*.

Finally comes the one big hit of the German composer Carl Orff, *Carmina Burana*, a rousing, wickedly humorous setting of texts by medieval Bavarian monks (who evidently weren't that bothered about entertaining 'impure' thoughts). The splendid *O Fortuna* is a hymn to pitiless fate, awestruck at first, but ending with an explosion of joy in life.