

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 14 programme complementary content

Danny Elfman is a legend of movie music, the man whose scores for *Batman* and *Edward Scissorhands* fused rock 'n' roll with orchestral technicolour to dazzling effect. His *Percussion Concerto* is a gripping way to get to know Colin Currie – as one critic put it, “surely the world’s finest and most daring percussionist”. And conductor JoAnn Falletta – an American in Liverpool – delivers a side-order of high-kicking tunes and fascinating rhythms, courtesy of Aaron Copland and George Gershwin.

JoAnn Falletta

Multiple Grammy Award-winning conductor [JoAnn Falletta](#) serves as the Musical Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, and the Connie and Marc Jacobson Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony, Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center and Conductor Laureate of the Hawaii Symphony. She was recently named one of the ‘50 great conductors past and present’ by *Gramophone Magazine* and is hailed for her work as a conductor, recording artist, audience builder and champion of American composers.

As Music Director of the [Buffalo Philharmonic](#), Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American orchestra and has been credited with bringing the Philharmonic to an unprecedented level of national and international prominence. Internationally, Falletta has conducted major orchestras in Europe, Asia and South America.

She is a leading recording artist for Naxos and has a discography of more than 125 titles. Falletta has won two individual [Grammys](#), most recently the 2021 award for best choral performance as conductor of Richard Danielpour’s *The Passion of Yeshua*, while she has also been involved in two other Grammy Award-winning recordings.

Falletta, who has conducted more than 150 world premieres, is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is also a strong advocate and mentor for young professional and student musicians.

Born and raised in Queens, New York, she studied at the Mannes College of Music – initially as a guitar student before becoming interested in conducting, and then at the Juilliard.

Colin Currie

Described by Steve Reich as ‘one of the greatest musicians in the world today’ and by *Gramophone Magazine* as ‘the summit of percussion performance today’, [Colin Currie](#) is a solo and chamber artist who champions new music at the highest level. The soloist of choice for many of today’s foremost conductors, he performs regularly with the world’s leading orchestras and ensembles including the London Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, New York Philharmonic and Cleveland Orchestra.

With a particular focus on contemporary compositions, Currie has developed a close working relationship with many of today’s most renowned composers. He has premiered works by Steve

Reich, Elliott Carter, Louis Andriessen, HK Gruber, Sir James MacMillan, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Helen Grime, Jennifer Higdon, Rolf Wallin, Julia Wolfe and Kalevi Aho.

In addition to his career as a soloist, he is the founder of the [Colin Currie Group](#), the Colin Currie Quartet and Colin Currie Records. He regularly conducts performances with the Colin Currie Group and has also expanded his conducting to work with other ensembles. He is currently Artist in Association at the Southbank Centre.

Currie, who started his musical studies aged five, was a finalist in the [BBC Young Musician of the Year competition](#) in 1994 and graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 1998. In 2000 he received the Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award and Instrumentalist Award in 2014. He was a *BBC Radio 3* New Generation Artist between 2003-5 and received the Bortolotti Award in 2005.

Watch Colin Currie introduce Danny Elfman's [Percussion Concerto](#).

Danny Elfman – *Percussion Concerto*

Film fans will be well-versed with the melodic world of [Danny Elfman](#). The multi-award-winning Los Angeles born composer, singer, songwriter and musician's film work goes back more than 40 years to the musical comedy fantasy *Forbidden Zone*, directed by his older brother Richard. And among his many, many cinematic scores (think *Midnight Run*, *Mission Impossible*, the *Men in Black* series, *Good Will Hunting*, *Somersby* and *Girl on a Train*) he has forged a special working relationship with Tim Burton – scoring no fewer than 17 of the director's films including the enchanting [Edward Scissorhands](#).

But what people may know less about is his classical catalogue. His first commissioned concert work *Serenada Schizophrana* – a suite of six symphonic movements – was performed at Carnegie Hall in 2005, while his *Violin Concerto* was premiered in Prague in 2017. His work also includes a *Cello Concerto*, suite for chamber orchestra, piano quartet and percussion quartet.

Elfman's [Percussion Concerto](#) dates from 2021. It was written for Colin Currie, who plays it here in Liverpool, and jointly commissioned by the London Philharmonic and Saka Performing Arts Centre. The work received its world premiere at the Royal Festival Hall in March 2022.

Enjoy the [second movement](#) of Danny Elfman's *Percussion Concerto* with its DSCH motif.

Did you know? After graduating high school, Elfman spent some time as a street performer for which he learned to breathe fire.

Aaron Copland – *Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo*

Four years after his cowboy ballet *Billy the Kid*, American composer [Aaron Copland](#) found himself back in the saddle. Copland was approached by the [Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo](#) to create a work for its dancers, again set against the backdrop of a ranch.

The composer had been suggested for the work by Agnes de Mille. The New York-born dancer and choreographer was the daughter of film director William de Mille and niece of the rather better-known Cecil B de Mille. But she also had the Mersey coursing through her veins courtesy of her paternal grandmother, the redoubtable play broker and screenwriter [Matilda Beatrice](#)

Samuel who had been born in Liverpool in January 1853, emigrating to the United States with her family as a teenager.

Although Copland wasn't initially keen to take on another cowboy story, the forceful de Mille had her way, and the result was *Rodeo*. The ballet, which has the subtitle *The Courting at Burnt Ranch*, tells the story of a cowgirl who arrives at the eponymous ranch and tries to win the affections of its head wrangler.

It was premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in October 1942. Along with choreographing the work, de Mille also played the leading role of the cowgirl and was rewarded by more than 20 curtain calls. The role of champion roper, meanwhile, was played by Liverpool-born **Frederic Franklin**. It was from that work that Copland created his ***Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo***, utilising *Buckaroo Holiday*, *Corral Nocturne*, *Saturday Night Waltz* and *Hoe-down* from his longer ballet score. The subsequent orchestral suite was first performed in Boston and New York in 1943.

Listen to a performance of Aaron Copland's ***Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo***.

George Gershwin - *An American in Paris*

In the spring of 1928, **George Gershwin** and his brother Ira travelled to Europe for a three-month visit. The trip came in the middle of an intensive period of writing for the siblings, who were taking Broadway by storm one musical at a time. The previous year they had written *Funny Face*, which had opened in November starring Fred and Adele Astaire, and shortly before leaving for Europe they had rushed to complete their musical ***Rosalie*** which Florenz Ziegfeld premiered at New York's Amsterdam Theatre.

George Gershwin had previously visited the French capital in 1926 in the wake of his success with *Rhapsody in Blue*, and while he was there, what would become the main theme of ***An American in Paris*** had started to take shape, inspired by the city's energy and street sounds including honking taxis. His return to the scene of that earlier inspiration helped the 29-year-old to complete what he called 'a rhapsodic ballet'.

An American in Paris was premiered by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall in December 1928 and became Gershwin's first purely orchestral piece. **The performance** featured four taxi horns brought back from Paris by the composer.

Listen to a contemporary recording of ***An American in Paris*** with Gershwin on celeste.

About the Music

Danny Elfman (b. 1953): Percussion Concerto

1. Triangle
2. D.S.C.H
3. Down
4. Syncopate

Composed: 2022

First Performed: 25 March 2022, London, Royal Festival Hall, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Colin Currie (percussion), cond. Ludwig Wicki

It was new wave pop music that first brought Danny Elfman to public attention, as lead vocalist in the band Oingo Boingo. But it was an invitation to compose music for the surreal comedy film *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* in 1985 that set him on the course for which he's best known today. He later described hearing his music played by a full orchestra for the first time as one of the most thrilling experiences of his life. Since then, he's composed over 100 cinema scores, including *Edward Scissorhands*, *Spider-Man*, *Men in Black* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, as well as the TV scores for *Desperate Housewives* and, most famously of all, *The Simpsons*.

It was during one of his film sessions that Elfman met the international star percussionist Colin Currie, and soon they were talking about creating a piece together. Elfman had been fascinated by percussion instruments since his teens, especially after a trip to West Africa when he was 18. But sharing the creation of the new concerto with Currie turned out to be liberating. Currie's personality and experience are as important to the music as were the virtuoso clarinetist Anton Stadler's in the works Mozart wrote for him. The scoring is unusual: apart from the soloist there are four orchestral percussionists, plus a timpanist, a piano doubling celesta, and strings. The range of percussion instruments is dazzling, but the virtuosity is in Elfman's music as much as in Currie's playing. You could enjoy it as pure sound, or revel in it imaginatively as cinema of the mind.

Aaron Copland (1900-90): Four Dance Episodes from *Rodeo*

1. Buckaroo Holiday
2. Corral Nocturne
3. Saturday Night Waltz
4. Hoe-Down

Composed: 1942

First Performed (as part of ballet): 16 October 1942, New York, Metropolitan Opera, cond. Copland

The devastation and terror of the Second World War drove quite a variety of artistic people and groups to the United States. One of these was the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, formed after the death of the legendary impresario Serge Diaghilev (founder of the original Ballet Russe) under the direction of the American choreographer Agnes de Mille. De Mille had seen Copland's Wild West ballet *Billy the Kid* (1938) and had been deeply impressed by it, so she approached Copland for another American-themed score. At first Copland resisted – not 'another cowboy ballet', he grumbled.

But de Mille insisted that she wasn't looking for a straightforward sequel. The story line would be much simpler, and authentic folk dance would be the primary focus – it turned out she'd already been instructing her impressive international cast in the dance styles and mannerisms of American cowboys. In the end Copland couldn't resist, and the result was one of the defining masterpieces of popular American classical music. (If you think you don't know *Rodeo*, wait till you hear 'Hoe-Down'.) The action centres on the rivalry between the Champion Roper and the Head Wrangler (livestock manager) for the hand of the Rancher's Daughter. Eventually the Roper wins. But that's all rather incidental to the parade of brilliant, flavoursome folk dance, which is what *Rodeo* is really about. To form this Suite from the ballet, Copland simply removed one movement ('Ranch House Party') and made a few minor adjustments to the last two. As a concert piece it has been a huge success ever since.

George Gershwin: *An American in Paris*

Composed: 1928

First Performed: 13 December 1928, New York, Carnegie Hall, New York Philharmonic, cond. Walter Damrosch

According to legend, it was the sound of Maurice Ravel's harmonies, steeped in the aura of sophisticated Parisian jazz, that lured George Gershwin to France, hoping to study with that uniquely refined Gallic master. Ravel met him, then politely informed Gershwin that he could do nothing for him: 'Why be a second-rate Ravel when you could be a first-rate Gershwin?' Later he got more or less the same reaction from the famous French teacher Nadia Boulanger: 'What could I give you that you haven't already got?'

Apart from such glowing affirmation from two of Europe's leading pedagogues, Gershwin came back with a cornucopia of vivid impressions of Paris itself, and before long he was thinking in terms of a jazz-inspired symphonic poem, a sequel to his triumphant *Rhapsody in Blue*. This time however Paris was firmly in the frame rather than his native New York, and the orchestra was bigger and more colourful, including three saxophones, celesta and taxi horns. (Gershwin liked the sound of the Parisian taxi horns so much that he brought four back specially for the work's premiere.) For all his initial excitement, Gershwin found Walter Damrosch's conducting depressingly slow and heavy, so much so that he walked out of one early performance. But the audience loved it, and several of the critics proclaimed it his best orchestral work. But how 'classical' was it, asked one? Gershwin felt the need to respond:

'It's not a Beethoven Symphony, you know... It's a humorous piece, nothing solemn about it. It's not intended to draw tears. If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of impressions musically expressed, it succeeds.'

An American in Paris does precisely that – as do quite a number of orchestral pieces labelled 'classical' today. And nearly a century later its brilliant, wonderfully alive jazz-classical fusion is still profoundly influential.