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**ORAMO CONDUCTS
MAHLER 10 AND
THE LARK ASCENDING**

Friday 24 January 2025

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**Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus**

SAKARI ORAMO
CHIEF CONDUCTOR

Feel the Music

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Barbican

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY, 7.30pm

**Oramo conducts Mahler's
10th and The Lark Ascending**

GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony
No. 10 – Adagio

KAIIJA SAARIAHO HUSH
BBC co-commission: UK premiere

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Toward the Unknown Region
The Lark Ascending

Sakari Oramo conductor
Veneri Pohjola trumpet
Igor Yuzefovich violin
BBC Symphony Chorus

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY, 7.30pm

**Hruša conducts Beethoven
and Shostakovich**

PAVEL HAAS Scherzo triste

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Piano Concerto No. 2

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 11 in G minor,
'The Year 1905'

Jakub Hruša conductor
Jonathan Biss piano

FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY, 7.30pm

**Jacquot conducts
Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto**

AUGUSTA HOLMÈS Roland furieux

FELIX MENDELSSOHN Violin
Concerto in E minor

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD
Sinfonietta

Marie Jacquot conductor
Paul Huang violin

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY, 7.30pm

**Hindoyan conducts Barber's
Violin Concerto**

GABRIELA ORTIZ Kauyumari

SAMUEL BARBER Violin Concerto

AARON COPLAND Symphony
No. 3

Domingo Hindoyan conductor
Tessa Lark violin

SUNDAY 23 FEBRUARY

**Total Immersion:
Symphonic Electronics**

A day-long exploration of
the interface of live musicians
and electronics.

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY, 7.30pm

**Chan conducts Shostakovich's
10th Symphony**

ELIZABETH OGONEK Moondog
UK premiere

BENJAMIN BRITTEN Piano
Concerto

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 10 in E minor

Elim Chan conductor
Benjamin Grosvenor piano

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH, 7.30pm

Stasevska conducts Ravel

BÉLA BARTÓK Cantata profana

MAURICE RAVEL Piano Concerto
for the Left Hand

LEOŠ JANÁČEK Sinfonietta

Dalia Stasevska conductor
Robin Tritschler tenor
Miklós Sebestyén bass-baritone
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano
BBC Symphony Chorus

SUNDAY 30 MARCH

**Total Immersion:
Pierre Boulez**

A centenary tribute to one
of the 20th century's most
iconoclastic composers and
thinkers, and former Chief
Conductor of the BBC SO.

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B B C
**Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus**

SAKARI ORAMO
CHIEF CONDUCTOR

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY 2025

7.30pm, BARBICAN HALL

GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony No. 10 – Adagio 22'

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Toward the Unknown Region 12'

INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

KAIJA SAARIAHO HUSH (Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra) 25'
BBC co-commission: UK premiere

followed without a break by:

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS The Lark Ascending 14'

Veneri Pohjola trumpet

Igor Yuzefovich violin

BBC Symphony Chorus Grace Rossiter chorus-master

Sakari Oramo conductor

RADIO 3 SOUNDS

This concert is being recorded by BBC Radio 3 for broadcast in *Radio 3 in Concert* on Tuesday 28 January at 7.30pm. It will be available for 30 days after broadcast via BBC Sounds, where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

Please ensure all mobile phones and watch-alarms are switched off.

Tonight Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo returns to the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus for a programme that reflects different visions of the beyond.

During the summer of 1910, while working on his final symphony, the Tenth, Mahler made the discovery that his wife Alma was having an affair with the architect Walter Gropius. His despair at the news was imprinted not only in remarks written on the score – such as ‘To live for you! To die for you!’ – but also in the music, anguished yet soaring.

Likewise, Kaija Saariaho’s *HUSH* was her final work before her death in 2023, following treatment for brain cancer. Written for the particular qualities of tonight’s soloist, Verner Pohjola, it explores a range of innovative playing techniques while presenting orchestral textures that are characteristically immaterial and ephemeral.

One of the great works of the British choral repertoire, Vaughan Williams’s warmly rousing *Toward the Unknown Region* contemplates the idea of death and deliverance, while his ever-popular, ever-soaring *The Lark Ascending* traces a flight-path that rises ever heavenwards.

B B C

 **SOUNDS**

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 **iPLAYER**

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GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)

Symphony No. 10 in F sharp major (1910) – Adagio

Mahler's death in 1911 sent shock waves around the musical world. How could this spectacularly energetic man die at the ridiculously early age of 50? Only two years earlier, his career as a conductor had entered a new phase with his appointment as conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Then, in 1910, the premiere of his colossal, heaven-storming Eighth Symphony had stunned the German-speaking world into the realisation that Mahler was not only a great conductor: he was also an outstandingly original composer. It was the triumph he'd longed for all his life, and yet he only had a few months to enjoy it.

Not long after his death, Mahler's last two completed works were heard for the first time: the Ninth Symphony and the 'song-symphony' *Das Lied von der Erde* ('The Song of the Earth'). Many were struck by what seemed to be a sustained note of farewell in these works, both of which ended in a kind of ecstatic dissolution. This fitted with what had already been rumoured: the heart condition that had been diagnosed in 1907 that finally proved fatal. As the music of the Ninth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde* bore witness, Mahler had seen his own end coming.

In fact it was more complicated than that. The diagnosis of a heart lesion was by no

means the life sentence some have concluded. As Mahler began to recover from that and, much more importantly, had begun to come to terms with the sudden death of his beloved daughter Maria that same year, he had thrown himself back into his conducting and composing career as determinedly as ever. He might have continued in this manner for years had fate not dealt him what was almost certainly the killer blow in the summer of 1910. While Mahler was at his Alpine retreat, working on a new symphony, his 10th, he made a terrible discovery: his adored wife and muse Alma, whom he had hymned in quasi-religious tones in his Eighth Symphony, had been having an affair with a handsome, brilliant young architect, Walter Gropius. The discovery threw Mahler into the most terrible mental crisis of his life. Although Mahler and Alma were, on the face of it, able to patch things up, the effect on Mahler physically was devastating. His now further weakened heart finally gave way the following May.

News that Mahler had been working on a 10th Symphony spread soon after his death. But what kind of condition was it in? Was any of it performable? It turned out that the first movement, a substantial Adagio, was more or less complete, and one other – a strange, sinister little movement entitled 'Purgatorio' – was at least salvageable. With a little editorial help these were presented to the world, and the Adagio made quite an impression, not least because its harmonic thinking

was more radical, more forward-looking than anything he had composed before. But as to the other three planned movements, all that remained was what looked like a tangled mess of sketches – almost certainly a painful testimony to Mahler’s desperately confused state of mind after his discovery of Alma’s infidelity. Scrawled on some of these pages were heart-rending verbal exclamations, to Alma, to God or the Fates: ‘The Devil dances it with me!’ ‘You alone know what it means! Ach! Ach! Ach!’ Over the symphony’s final huge sigh we find Mahler’s pet name for Alma, ‘Almschil!’

For years it was thought that the 10th Symphony was mostly beyond reconstruction. But, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the musicologist Deryck Cooke (1919–76), we can now see that Mahler had come much closer than previously thought to finishing it. For the most part, harmonies, counterpoints and significant orchestral colours are indicated quite clearly in the sketches. Moreover, Mahler’s orchestral style is so idiosyncratic that, in places, it is only necessary to look at a phrase or chord to know immediately the kind of sound he had in mind. Emboldened by this, Cooke set about producing what he called a ‘Performing Version’ of the sketches – rather than trying to provide a ‘completion’, Cooke’s more modest aim was to give some idea of the state the symphony had reached by the time Mahler died.

The result was revelatory. It showed that the 10th was on its way to being one of

Mahler’s most moving, audacious and magnificently structured symphonies. It also shows that – at least in the first movement – he was moving away from the death-shadowed world of the Ninth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*. The beginning of the first movement – a ghostly, groping, tonally rootless theme for unaccompanied violas – sounds like the voice of a man who has just returned from the abyss. The superb Adagio that emerges from this alternates tortured aspiration with sardonic, deflated dance music. Eventually there is a terrifying, cathartic climax, with an immense piled-up dissonance and a painfully sustained high trumpet note. Yet the coda brings consolation and eventually resolution, as strings and harp ‘rationalise’ the climactic dissonance and lead it back to the warmth of the home major key.

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

Stephen Johnson is the author of books on Bruckner, Wagner, Mahler and Shostakovich, and a regular contributor to *BBC Music Magazine*. For 14 years he was a presenter of BBC Radio 3’s *Discovering Music*. He now works both as a freelance writer and as a composer.

GUSTAV MAHLER

The eldest surviving of 14 children, Mahler grew up in the vibrant Bohemian city of Iglau (then within the Austrian Empire and now known as Jihlava), where his father owned a distillery and tavern. Born to Jewish parents who spoke German at home, Mahler was celebrated locally as a piano prodigy, gaining admission to the

Vienna Conservatory at the age of 15 but ultimately studying composition. Thereafter he enrolled briefly at the University of Vienna to study philosophy and literature – enduring interests that profoundly affected his compositional development.

A young conductor lurching from one job to the next, Mahler was a force of nature in his capacity to learn operatic repertoire and impose high standards. Even with his enormous conducting skill, his strong personality remained a liability. Following appointments at the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest and the Hamburg Municipal Theatre, Mahler converted to Catholicism in 1897, qualifying him for the directorship at the Vienna Court Opera. In a city rife with anti-Semitism, his success at the Court Opera was eclipsed by personal difficulties with singers and the administration. He concurrently directed the Vienna Philharmonic (1898–1901) but orchestra members chafed at his onerous rehearsal demands and revisions to great classics.

Continuing challenges led Mahler to negotiate a contract in 1907 with the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Sharing the podium with Arturo Toscanini the next season (1908–9) displeased him and he resigned, accepting an invitation to direct the New York Philharmonic. Its expanded concert season (1909–10) and touring proved exhausting, compounded by European travel in the summer. The next winter Mahler's defective heart valves

became infected, and he returned to Vienna, where he died at the age of 51.

Mahler's music faced searing criticism because his preferred genre, the symphony, symbolised tradition and morality in Austro-German culture. Favouring a multiplicity of voices that evoked the diverse perspectives of urban and rural life, Mahler rejected the conventions of symphonic unity and of the dominance of melody over accompaniment. With textural expansion and brash colours, he tested the accepted limits of established taste. His first bold innovation was to meld together song (quiet intimacy) and symphony (public grandeur). He incorporated orchestral songs into the first four symphonies (premiered between 1889 and 1901); the Eighth Symphony (composed 1906–7) and *Das Lied von der Erde* ('The Song of the Earth', 1908–9) include vocal text throughout. With the genius and audacity to reinvent and revitalise Austro-German tradition, Mahler left behind a veritable symphonic world (nine numbered symphonies, an incomplete 10th and an early cantata) that drew on orchestral and harmonic colours, spanning the full expressive range from late Romanticism to modernism.

Profile © Karen Painter

Karen Painter is a professor at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on Germany and Austria during the world wars and the Third Reich, and her books include *Symphonic Aspirations: German Music and Politics, 1900–1945* (Harvard UP, 2007) and *Mahler and His World* (Princeton UP, 2002).

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958) Toward the Unknown Region (1904–6)

BBC Symphony Chorus

Throughout his adult life, Vaughan Williams was drawn to religious or mystical writings. Not only did he compose some of the finest hymns in *The English Hymnal*, plus a uniquely calm, luminous setting of the Latin Mass, he returned again and again to the work of the idiosyncratically Christian William Blake and the metaphysical poet-priest George Herbert. Work on his operatic ‘morality’ *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, inspired by John Bunyan’s spiritual classic, occupied him from 1925 until 1952; it also prompted a number of beautiful satellite works, not least the serene Fifth Symphony.

Yet Vaughan Williams’s attitude to religious belief was ambiguous – or, one might prefer, refreshingly honest. He knew that, on some mysterious level, there were deep truths to be found in great mystical texts, yet straightforward belief in an omnipotent loving God was impossible for him. In later life he is said to have been delighted when a friend called him ‘The Christian Agnostic’. Yet he could also confront the possibility of there being no ultimate meaning. His response to Prospero’s vision (in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*) of final dissolution – ‘We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep’ – set out in the

hushed Epilogue of his Sixth Symphony, is one of the bleakest, most comfortless things in 20th-century symphonic music.

Given all this, it isn’t surprising that the young Vaughan Williams should have been profoundly impressed by the poetry of the American Walt Whitman. Whitman’s hatred of hypocrisy and blind tradition, his impassioned conviction of the brotherhood of man and above all his nature-filled mysticism appealed strongly to Vaughan Williams. And in Whitman’s verse there are qualities that would make it a gift for a composer such as Vaughan Williams. As Whitman himself put it: ‘Poetic style, when address’d to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints and even less than half-tints.’ Vaughan Williams’s researches into folk song had introduced him to freer kinds of melody and word-setting than he’d encountered in European classical music. Whitman’s radically free verse, its ‘vista, music, half-tints and even less than half-tints’, would prove another liberating influence, leading away from the Germanic models followed by Vaughan Williams’s great precursor, Edward Elgar.

So it is highly appropriate that Vaughan Williams’s first significant large-scale choral work, *Toward the Unknown Region*, should be a Whitman setting. It begins with a thrilling challenge: ‘Darest thou now, O soul, walk out with me toward the unknown region?’ Vaughan Williams gave a characteristically flippant account of the work’s genesis to Imogen Holst, daughter

of his close friend, the composer Gustav Holst: 'Gustav and I were both stuck – so I suggested we shd. both set the same words in competition – suggesting “Darest thou”. The prize was awarded to me.’ But that version strikingly fails to mention that Vaughan Williams worked on *Toward the Unknown Region* for two years – 1904–6 – and also that composition was overshadowed by the death of a much-admired friend, the historian Frederic William Maitland. (*Toward the Unknown Region* is dedicated to ‘F. H. M.’: Maitland’s widow Florence.)

The dark-toned opening, with its sombre funereal tread, underlines the strong implication that the ‘unknown region’ of the title is death. When this material returns not long afterwards, at the words ‘I know it not, O soul ... all is a blank before us’, the connection seems obvious. In which case the ecstatic hymn that forms the work’s final climax could be seen as the soul’s deliverance and survival after death – as in Richard Strauss’s *Death and Transfiguration*. But Whitman seems to have something else in mind: the possibility of spiritual death and rebirth in this life. The idea wasn’t new: Mahler in his ‘Resurrection’ Symphony (1888–94), Ibsen in his play *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) and Tolstoy in his novel *Resurrection* (1899) had all opted for a symbolic interpretation of the archetypal death–resurrection story. Surely that, rather than comforting notions of the soul’s immortality, is the message behind Vaughan Williams’s ringingly affirmative

conclusion? That message is still more explicit in the composer’s next Whitman setting, *A Sea Symphony* (1903–9), and in many works to come. In fact, as his biographer Michael Kennedy said, ‘toward the unknown region’ might stand as a motto for Vaughan Williams’s whole life’s work.

Programme note © Stephen Johnson
Surtitles operated by Damien Kennedy

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, the son of a clergyman and descended from the illustrious Darwin and Wedgwood families. He studied at the Royal College of Music under Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Vaughan Williams’s music is deeply rooted in English folk traditions, which he avidly collected. This interest is evident in works such as the first *Norfolk Rhapsody* (1905–6) and the *English Folk Song Suite* (1923), in which he used folk melodies to create a distinctly English musical voice. Although over his long career he continually reinvented himself, his style is generally characterised by modal harmonies, lush orchestration and a strong sense of lyricism and pastoralism.

One of his early major works, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910), showcases his ability to create rich, modal textures inspired by Renaissance music. This work remains a cornerstone of the string orchestra repertoire, bringing together ancient and modern, and experimenting with contrasting string forces.

His nine symphonies form the backbone of his orchestral output, each reflecting different facets of his musical and philosophical outlook. *A London Symphony* (No. 2, 1912–13) captures the spirit and atmosphere of the city, while the *Pastoral Symphony* (No. 3, 1921) is a gently elegiac post-war lament, inspired in fact by the fields of France during the First World War, although often assumed to take its cue from English pastoral scenery. His later symphonies, such as the *Sinfonia antartica* (1949–52) and the Ninth Symphony (1956–8), incorporate greater dissonance and more complex textures as he absorbed the musical developments of his younger colleagues and blended them with his own distinctive voice.

Vaughan Williams was also a master of choral and vocal music. *A Sea Symphony* (1903–9), which sets texts by Walt Whitman, and *Dona nobis pacem* (1936), a powerful anti-war cantata, highlight his skill in blending music with literary texts to create profound emotional narratives. His hymn tunes, including *For All the Saints* and *Come Down, O Love Divine*, have become staples of Anglican worship.

Beyond composition, Vaughan Williams was a dedicated educator and advocate for British music. He taught at the Royal College of Music and influenced a generation of composers. His work in editing *The English Hymnal* (1906) and *The Oxford Book of Carols* (1928) helped to revive and preserve English choral traditions.

Vaughan Williams's legacy is marked by his deep connection to English musical traditions, his innovative compositions across various genres and his influential role in British music education. His works continue to resonate for their emotional depth, lyrical beauty and unique blending of folk and classical elements, securing his place as a pivotal figure in the history of classical music.

Profile © Kate Kennedy

Kate Kennedy is Associate Director of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing and Weinrebe Fellow in Life-Writing at Wolfson College. She has published widely on the music and literature of the First World War, is a regular broadcaster and speaker, and has written a biography of the composer Ivor Gurney (Princeton University Press, 2021).

INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

KAIJA SAARIAHO
(1952–2023)

**HUSH (Concerto for Trumpet
and Orchestra) (2023)**

BBC co-commission: UK premiere

- 1 Let the thin air sing**
- 2 Dream of falling**
- 3 What ails you? –**
- 4 Ink the silence**

Veneri Pohjola trumpet

The next item, Vaughan Williams's 'The Lark Ascending', will follow without a break

HUSH was written for the trumpet player Veneri Pohjola, whose rich musical background and taste for extended techniques, experimentation and improvisation have inspired me. During the writing of this piece we met on a regular basis and Veneri has enlightened me as to the technical possibilities of the trumpet. Each concerto is in a way a portrait of the soloist for whom it was written, and so this one is his.

As the solo trumpet played an important part in my violin concerto *Graal Théâtre* (1994), which was my first concerto, I was drawn to revisiting that material in my last concerto. I was also inspired by another kind of revisitation: Aleksis Barrière's text *Not a Knight*, written in 2018 to be spoken around and within *Graal Théâtre* as a form of illuminated marginalia to the music. The titles of *HUSH* and of its four movements come from this text, where the Grail

legends resonate as a personal and collective quest of making music, and leaving an imprint into the silence.

The first movement, 'Let the thin air sing', is an exposition that presents most of the material, including the title-word 'hush'. Starting from a low A flat, it moves upwards to the higher register.

The second movement, 'Dream of falling' explores glissandos on the solo trumpet, alone and in association with various sections of the orchestra, from the piccolos to the double basses, ending with a low B growl that is one of the trumpet's lowest sounds. (This was workshopped with Veneri improvising on the idea of a sound falling down the sides of a well.)

The third movement, 'What ails you?', is dramatic but cold, insofar as I refrained from using any accelerandos and rallentandos, and the rhythm stays strictly mechanical. This maddening rhythm was inspired by the monthly scans I underwent in MRI machines during my illness.

The last movement, 'Ink the silence', is an accompanied trumpet solo moving forward through an orchestral landscape. When the movement stops, we understand that it was the landscape that was moving and not the traveller, and we peek beyond the facade of illusions, into a silence that we have loaded with memories.

I am indebted to Nastaran Yazdani and Anssi Karttunen for their assistance in

notating music when my illness impaired my motor skills. The support of many people has been instrumental to the making of this piece, and I have dedicated individual movements to them: Vernerri Pohjola, my husband Jean-Baptiste Barrière and my doctors Dimitri Psimaras and Myriam Kirstetter. The piece in its entirety is dedicated to the family I leave behind on my own journey to silence.

Programme note © Kaija Saariaho

KAIJA SAARIAHO

Kaija Saariaho dedicated her life to music; her music was her identity. This internal compulsion made her strive to train as a composer in Helsinki and Freiburg, after which she developed her skills in computational sound-analysis and processing at IRCAM, the computer-music research centre in Paris. There she met her future husband, composer Jean-Baptiste Barrière. Their children have worked on her music – Aleksis (born 1989) as a dramaturg and Aliisa (born 1995) as a conductor. Saariaho lived in France until her death in 2023 from brain cancer. She donated a large amount towards a concert hall organ for Helsinki's Music House – perhaps as a mark of gratitude for the Finnish grant system that allowed her, at the beginning of her career, to work as a full-time composer. Also a gifted visual artist, she designed the organ's sculpturally impressive outer pipework.

Saariaho's compositional style grew out of detailed computational analyses of sounds, which, together with live electronics and synthesised sounds, continued to play important roles in her music. Her works are 'music for the ears' that breathe and whose central element is timbre. While her use of melodic and rhythmic material increased over the years, vast, reverberating orchestral textures remained. Many works evolved from an abstract sensation provided by a visual, filmic, literary or poetic impulse, from a natural or bodily experience or a specific sound quality. For instance, her international breakthrough work *Lichtbogen* (1985–6) responds to the Northern Lights and combines electronics with acoustic instruments. Saariaho experienced synaesthesia: as she said, 'different senses, shades of colour or textures and tones of light, even fragrances and sounds, blend in my mind'. This closeness to human sensation also enables listeners of Saariaho's works to immerse themselves in flows of pure emotion and intensive events transformed into music.

Saariaho composed in a great variety of genres, although she is best known for her operas. Following the breathtakingly beautiful musical longing for distant love *L'amour de loin* (premiered at the Salzburg Festival in 2000), *Adriana mater* (2005) concerned the aftermath of a wartime rape; and two further operas, *La Passion de Simone* (2006) and *Émilie* (2008),

portray exceptional French women: the mystic, mathematician and philosopher Simone Weil and the 18th-century natural philosopher and mathematician Émilie du Châtelet. *Only the Sound Remains* (2015) combines two operas inspired by Japanese Noh dramas, whereas *Innocence* (2018) reflects upon the traumatic effects of a violent act on a group of people. They have all received highly acclaimed stage productions around the world.

Saariaho's fellow composers named her one of the greatest living composers of all time in a *BBC Music Magazine* survey in 2019. Her work received widespread recognition, including the Grawemeyer Award and Polar Music Prize, and two Grammy Awards.

Profile © Pirkko Moisala

Pirkko Moisala is a Professor Emerita at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her biography of Kaija Saariaho was published in 2009 (Univ. of Illinois Press).

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS


The Lark Ascending (1914, rev. 1920)

Igor Yuzefovich violin

Without doubt Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* is a supremely poetic evocation of the song and flight of one of Britain's most popular birds. The inspiration came partly from a poem by George Meredith. In fact there are times when the music of Vaughan Williams's 'romance' seems to spring directly from the words of Meredith's poem. After the hushed opening harmonies from muted strings and wind, the violin evokes the poem's first lines with a vitality and refined sweetness that might have surprised the poet himself:

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

Unmistakably English pastoral imagery abounds in the central section, especially the folk-like melody introduced by solo flute (and continued by clarinet). This sounds as though it must be an original folk song – perhaps one from the composer's own collection – but it turns out to be pure Vaughan Williams. Then, at the end, the lark's soaring cadenzas return, now spiralling upwards into silence, just as in the poem the bird is slowly 'lost on his aerial rings / In light ...'



But there is another possible strand of meaning. The violin's free-floating birdsong, the exquisite swaying melody that emerges from it and the flute-led folk song at the heart of the piece are all formed from the same basic musical material. The violin's very first notes – gradually spelling out a rising figure D–E–A–B–D – are seminal; equally important is the tiny two-note 'dying fall' with which the violin's first ethereal outpouring comes to rest, and on which the work ultimately fades into nothingness. For many listeners there is something intensely poignant at the core of all this, as though Vaughan Williams were saying that the songs of both men and birds are expressions of the same thing: of the joy and terrible sadness of life – of the glory of natural beauty and, equally, its painful fragility.

The date of composition has to be significant. *The Lark Ascending* was written in 1914, on the eve of the catastrophe of the First World War. The centuries-old folk-song tradition and the rural way of life it enshrined would soon be gone, along with many thousands of the young men who sang those ancient songs. Did Vaughan Williams sense this, like his friend Gustav Holst, who at the same time was working on the terrifyingly prophetic 'Mars' movement from *The Planets*? On one level *The Lark Ascending* is unequivocally a celebration of life; yet in the end it can sound uncannily like an elegy.

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

SAKARI ORAMO

CONDUCTOR

Sakari Oramo studied conducting with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy (1989–92). He was Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (1998–2008), Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (2003–12), Principal Conductor of West Coast Kokkola Opera (2004–18) and Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (RSPO, 2008–21). He has been Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra since 2013 and next September he also becomes Artistic Partner of the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne.

In recent seasons he has conducted the Berlin and Czech Philharmonic orchestras, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony orchestras and the Staatskapelle Dresden. Last summer he conducted four BBC Proms concerts, including the Last Night, with repertoire ranging from Mozart, via Holst and Elgar, to Saariaho and two world premieres.

Sakari Oramo's recordings include Nielsen's First and Third symphonies with the RSPO, which won *BBC Music Magazine's* Orchestral Award, Langgaard's Second and Sixth symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic, which won a Gramophone Award, and Busoni's Piano Concerto with Kirill Gerstein and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which won an International Classical Music Award.

VERNERI POHJOLA

TRUMPET

Trumpeter and composer Verner Pohjola started playing the trumpet at the relatively late age of 15. His enthusiasm for music began with rock and jazz, as well as film music. He studied at Helsinki's Pop & Jazz Conservatory, the Örebro School of Music and the Sibelius Academy; he graduated from the last with a Master's degree in 2012.

He came to wider attention through the bands Ilmiliekki Quartet, Quintessence and Q-Continuum. His Emma Award-winning debut album *Aurora* (2009/2011) was well received in Europe and the USA.

With the album *Ancient History* (2012) Pohjola established his place as one of Europe's most respected jazz musicians. Since then he has released a series of solo albums, the latest of which is *The Dead Don't Dream* (2020).

In 2023 he gave the premiere of Kaija Saariaho's *HUSH*, with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Susanna Mälkki.

His accolades include a nomination for the Nordic Council Music Prize in 2021, the Yrjö Award (Finland's highest award for a jazz musician) in 2017 and the Emma Award for the best jazz album of the year for *Bullhorn* in 2015.

IGOR YUZEFOVICH

VIOLIN

Russian-born Igor Yuzefovich studied at the Gnessin Music School, Moscow, and the Peabody Institute, Baltimore. He joined the BBC Symphony Orchestra as Leader after holding the role of Concert-master with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. Prior to this he was Assistant Concert-master with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to a busy orchestral schedule, Igor Yuzefovich continues to be an active chamber musician, often reuniting with the Monument Piano Trio, which he co-founded in 2004. The trio made its debut in the USA to critical acclaim and has since performed across the USA and in China. Its debut recording, featuring works by Brahms, Shostakovich and Paul Schoenfield, received high praise from critics and audiences alike.

Igor Yuzefovich's concerts and recitals have taken him from Carnegie Hall to the Cairo Opera House, across Europe and throughout Asia. He has been equally committed to educating the next generation of musicians as a member of the Artist Faculty at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, Singapore, and leads solo and chamber-music masterclasses around the world.

BBC
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FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 7.30pm

Hrůša conducts Beethoven and Shostakovich

PAVEL HAAS Scherzo triste

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto
No. 2

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 11,
'The Year 1905'

Jonathan Biss piano
Jakub Hrůša conductor

'Whirlwinds of danger are raging around us ... on with the fight, for the cause of humanity!' Shostakovich's massive 11th Symphony was inspired by a revolution that failed and, from the roar of the crowds to the thunder of gunfire, it's never seemed more relevant, or more urgent. Guest conductor Jakub Hrůša understands the power of history, making this a timely – and thrilling – climax to a concert of contrasts.

Because after all, music doesn't get much more elegant and exuberant than Beethoven's sunlit Second Piano Concerto – a young genius out to make a serious splash. Who better to play it than Jonathan Biss, the masterly American pianist who describes Beethoven's music as 'truly one of the greatest gifts to my life'? Hrůša opens the concert with a rediscovery from Pavel Haas: a burst of jazz-age wit from one of Czech music's silenced voices.

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BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For over 90 years the BBC Symphony Orchestra has been a driving force in the British musical landscape, championing contemporary music and giving voice to rarely performed and neglected composers. It plays a key role in the BBC Proms, performing regularly throughout each season, including the First and Last Nights.

The BBC SO is Associate Orchestra at the Barbican, where it presents a distinctive season of concerts. Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo has a long-standing and widely acclaimed relationship with the orchestra. His concerts this season include four Mahler symphonies, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with Sir Stephen Hough, Doreen Carwithen's Concerto for Piano and Strings with Alexandra Dariescu and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the BBC Symphony Chorus, dedicated to the memory of the late Andrew Davis. The BBC Symphony Chorus also joins the BBC SO in Haydn's 'Nelson Mass' under Hannu Lintu and Bartók's *Cantata profana* conducted by Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevska. Carolyn Kuan conducts the UK premiere of Huang Ruo's opera *M. Butterfly* and Total Immersion days are dedicated to Pierre Boulez and

to electronic music. *Wild Isles* features highlights on the big screen from the BBC nature documentary series.

The BBC SO makes appearances across the UK and internationally, and gives free concerts at its Maida Vale studios. You can hear the vast majority of the BBC SO's performances on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds, with all 2024 BBC Proms currently available on BBC Sounds and Proms including the First and Last Nights available to watch on BBC iPlayer.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Proms – offer innovative education and community activities. Together they play a lead role in the BBC Ten Pieces and BBC Young Composer programmes, including work with schools, young people and families in East London ahead of the BBC SO's move to its new home in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford.

Keep up to date with the BBC Symphony Orchestra

To find out more about upcoming events and broadcasts, and for the latest BBC SO news, visit bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra.

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Chief Conductor

Sakari Oramo

Principal Guest Conductor

Dalia Stasevska

Günter Wand Conducting Chair

Semyon Bychkov

Creative Artist in Association

Jules Buckley

First Violins

Igor Yuzefovich leader
Cellerina Park leader
(The Lark Ascending)

Philip Brett

Jenny King

Celia Waterhouse

Colin Huber

Shirley Turner

Ni Do

James Wicks

Stuart McDonald

Djumash Poulsen

Sarah Thornett

Mitzi Gardner

Gaia Ramsdell

Victoria Gill

Cindy Foster

Second Violins

Heather Hohmann

Dawn Beazley

Rose Hinton

Vanessa Hughes

Danny Fajardo

Lucy Curnow

Tammy Se

Caroline Cooper

Victoria Hodgson

Nihat Agdach

Iona Allan

Ruth Funnell

Gareth Griffiths

Shelia Law

Violas

Eivind Ringstad

Philip Hall

Joshua Hayward

Nikos Zarb

Michael Leaver

Carolyn Scott

Mary Whittle

Peter Mallinson

Matthias Wiener

Zoe Matthews

Adrian Smith

James Flannery

Cellos

Tim Hugh

Tamsy Kaner

Graham Bradshaw

Mark Sheridan

Michael Atkinson

Morwenna Del Mar

George Houlst

Ghislaine McMullin

Alba Merchant

Maya Kashif

Double Basses

Nicholas Bayley

Richard Alsop

Michael Clarke

Beverley Jones

Elen Pan

Lewis Reid

Lucia Polo-Morena

Daniel Molloy

Flutes

Sirius Chau

Fergus Davidson

Piccolo

Kathleen Stevenson

Oboes

Alison Teale

Imogen Smith

Cor Anglais

Emily Cockbill

Clarinets

Adam Lee

Jonathan Parkin

Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards

Bassoons

Paul Boyes

Lorna West

Horns

Martin Owen

Michael Murray

James Pillai

Nicholas Hougham

Mark Wood

Trumpets

Philip Cobb

Joseph Atkins

Martin Hurrell

Niall Keatley

Trombones

Helen Vollam

Dan Jenkins

Bass Trombone

Robert O'Neill

Tuba

Sam Elliott

Timpani

Antoine Bedewi

Percussion

Alex Neal

Fiona Ritchie

Joe Cooper

Harps**Elizabeth Bass**

Rachel Wick

Celesta

Elizabeth Burley

The list of players was correct at the time of going to press

Director

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Emma Gait

Orchestra Manager

Susanna Simmons

Orchestra Personnel Manager

Murray Richmond

Orchestra and Tours Assistant

Lydia Rogers

Concerts Manager

Marelle McCallum

Tours Manager

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Music Libraries Manager

Mark Millidge

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Nadim Jauffur

Chorus Manager

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Charley Douglas

Learning Trainees

Shah Hussain

Nairobi Nomura

BBC SYMPHONY CHORUS

Founded in 1928, the BBC Symphony Chorus is one of the UK's leading choirs. It performs, records and broadcasts a distinctive range of large-scale choral music with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and internationally acclaimed conductors and soloists.

The BBC Symphony Chorus makes regular appearances at the BBC Proms, with performances last summer including the First and Last Nights, Fauré's *Requiem* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Stéphane Denève and Holst's *The Cloud Messenger* with the BBC SO under its Chief Conductor, Sakari Oramo.

Highlights with the BBC SO at the Barbican this season include Haydn's 'Nelson Mass' under Hannu Lintu and Bartók's *Cantata profana* under Dalia Stasevska.

Most of the chorus's performances are broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and it has also made a number of commercial recordings, including a Grammy-nominated release of Holst's First Choral Symphony and a Gramophone Award-winning disc of *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Andrew Davis. Recent releases include premiere recordings of Vaughan Williams's *The Future* and *The Steersman* conducted by Martin Yates and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* conducted by Davis.

Director

Neil Ferris

Deputy Director

Grace Rossiter

Accompanist

Michael Higgins

Vocal Coach

Carris Jones

Sopranos

Katharine Allenby

Elizabeth Bird

Georgia Cannon

Louise Clegg

Jenna Clemence

Ellen Coleman

Erin Cowburn

Natalie Dalcher

Josceline Dunne

Christine Evans

Stella Guardì

Kuan Hon

Elizabeth Howard

Beverley Howard

Karan Humphries

Jackie Hunt

Helen Jeffries

Helen Jorgensen

Mackenzie Kavanagh

Rei Kozaki

Christine Leslie

Sue Lowe

Sarah Mainwaring

Katie Masters

Olivia Middleton

Ellie Parker

Francesca Richards

Rebecca Rimmington

Nicola Robinson

Madelon Shaw

Maxine Shearer

Anne Taylor

Magdalena Ulanowicz

Esther Wang

Lusine Yeghoyan

Altos

Stella Baylis

Hannah Bishay

Helen Brice

Theresa Browne

Rachael Curtis

Sue Daniels

Danniella Downs

Alison Grant

Kate Hampshire

Pat Howell

Matilda Jackson

Laura Jolly

Tomoko Kigaku

Ruth Marshall

Carolyn Nicholls

Charlotte Senior

Hilary Sillis

Mary Joy Simmonds

Elisabeth Storey

Jayne Swindin

Helen Tierney

Deborah Tiffany

Charlotte Tomlinson

Tenors

Andrew Phillip Castle

Alex Denisenko

Richard Garratt

David Halstead

Ian Hensman

Stephen C. Horsman

Naveen Kanamarlapudi

Simon Lowe

Sam Lyons

Tony Madgwick

James Murphy

Simon Naylor

Andrew Oliver

Simon Pickup

Bill Richards

Fionn Robertson

Richard Salmon

Greg Satchell

Toby Schneider

Orlando Vas

David Willcock

Jonathan Williams

Leonard Wong

Basses

Malcolm Aldridge

David Allenby

James Barker

Laurence Beard

Alex Britton

Sam Brown

Vicente Chavarría

Tony de Rivaz

David England

Quentin Evans

Jonathan Forrest

Tom Fullwood

Mark Graver

Richard Green

Alex Hardy
Michael Harman
Simon Herbert
Kevin Hollands
Peter Kellett
Rob Little
Michael Martin
John McLeod
Tim Miles
Andrew Money
Nigel Montagu
Jonathan Ngai
Amos Paran
Mark Parrett
Simon Potter
Philip Rayner
Richard Steedman
Joshua Taylor
William Thompson-Hare
Robin Wicks

*The list of singers was
correct at the time of
going to press*

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- Isata Kanneh-Mason
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