

RLPO October 24 programme complementary content

Join the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra on a Sunday afternoon trip to the Northern Lights – with a brief detour to soak up some Spanish sun.

It's a musical journey which embraces a trio of Scandinavian soundscapes.

You can learn more about it in our programme notes which this year are being presented in a new and accessible way.

And in addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content which we hope will help shine additional light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Cormac Henry interview

Cormac Henry spent three months last autumn preparing to perform Carl Nielsen's flute concerto – only to find the country plunged into a post-Christmas lockdown that put paid to his plans.

But good things come to those that wait.

And now nine months on the work, originally programmed as part of a January concert, is finally coming to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall stage.

In the meantime, the hiatus caused by Covid has allowed Cormac not only to rehearse the concerto but to research it too.

As part of that research he made contact with Emily Beynon, principal flute at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and who also sits on the panel of the Nielsen competition.

“It's the big one I think in the flute repertoire so I really wanted to do as much as I could, and of course there was time,” he explains.

“Emily has got a copy of the original score, and she was able to show me things from that. She has a huge amount of knowledge about Nielsen and the concerto, so that was really brilliant.”

One key piece of background Beynon shared wasn't music but a photograph – or rather a series of photographs taken of the young Nielsen and featuring him pulling a variety of different faces.

Cormac admits: “I was a bit scared of the piece in college because it changes so quickly in character.

“Emily had a similar experience; she didn't play it when she was in college. Then reading about it she came across this picture and it suddenly made sense.”

So what, in his opinion, makes the 1926 concerto ‘the big one’ in the flute repertoire?

Cormac considers: “A lot of flute repertoire, and a lot of orchestral flute parts, are a little lightweight maybe and a little filigree on top of something heavier, and this has

some of that – you can't get away from the fact it's a flute concerto! But there's a lot of musical depth to it I too."

Will that surprise listeners who haven't heard it before?

"Yes, I think so," he says. "It's not very linear, so there's really contrasting sections, you have to click your fingers and completely change character. And in the first movement in particular I think there's a lot that's actually quite profound. Especially how it ends."

Next year marks Cormac's 20th anniversary at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

The native of County Kerry had only recently completed his studies at the Guildhall and in Stuttgart when he joined the Orchestra, and over the past two decades he has had the chance to appear as a soloist many times.

In 2012 he premiered a new flute concerto specially commissioned for him from Kurt Schwertsik – whom he suggested for the commission after earlier playing another piece by the Austrian composer (Instant Music) with Ensemble 10/10.

Most recently he performed Chaminade's Concertino for flute and orchestra.

"My youngest son was only 10 days old," Cormac recalls of the Concertino concerts in 2019. "It's the only time I've ever asked for something in terms of a dressing room, and I asked for the dressing room which had the sofa in it so I could have a sleep!

"It was a bit of a blur."

During the last 20 years he has also performed with a host of other orchestras and ensembles including the Concertgebouw and the Bavarian State Opera, and as a regular member of the John Wilson Orchestra.

"To me that's always really important, and I think that's recognised in the Orchestra as well," he says.

"There isn't a feeling that you shouldn't or can't be doing other things, which is a really healthy attitude to have because it makes you better at doing your job here."

Being allowed to spread his wings is perhaps one reason Cormac has remained in Liverpool, but so is the atmosphere here at Hope Street as well.

"In my experience there's a different atmosphere in this orchestra to other ones that I've played in," he suggests. "I think the Orchestra takes its work very seriously - and doesn't take itself so seriously."

Carl Nielsen

Carl Nielson's father, a housepainter, was well known locally as a folk fiddle player on the Danish island of Funen where the young Carl was born into a large but poor family in June 1865.

After some time in a military band, **Nielsen** studied the violin and for some years made his living as an orchestral violinist and then as a conductor.

His six symphonies, composed between 1892 and 1925 (when he had a serious heart attack), are among his best-known works outside his native Denmark.

It was the year after that heart attack when Nielsen composed his **Flute Concerto** which he wrote for and dedicated to leading Danish flautist Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, a member of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet.

Watch some footage of Carl Nielsen with family and friends in Copenhagen in 1926

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsMMNOaAD8A>

Listen to a performance of the Flute Concerto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVAsGdIzgOo>

Andrew Manze

Andrew Manze has become a great favourite of Hope Street audiences, so it was welcome news earlier this summer that he was extending his contract as Principal Guest Conductor until 2023.

It's now 10 years since he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and has been Principal Guest Conductor since 2018.

In September, he directed the Orchestra in its role supporting the finalists at the Leeds International Piano Competition.

And along with this concert, and its Wild Swans sister concert on Thursday, he is also due to conduct **Messiah** in January and return for a programme of **English music** on May 31.

Sibelius Symphony No 5

What do you do to mark a national hero's big '5-0'?

Jean Sibelius's birthday had already been declared a national holiday in his beloved Finland before the government hit upon the idea of commissioning the composer to write a new symphony.

The finished work – **Symphony No.5 in E-flat Major** – was premiered on the big day itself, December 8, 1915, with the birthday boy conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.

Swans in flight over the Finnish countryside are said to have inspired the famous horn motif in the symphony's final movement.

In his diary for April 1915, Sibelius recorded an encounter with the birds near Ainola, his secluded retreat at Järvenpää, writing: "Today at ten to eleven I saw 16 swans.

One of my greatest experiences! Lord God, what beauty! They circled over me for a long time. Disappeared into the solar haze like a gleaming silver ribbon.”

Find out what the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic’s principal oboe Jonathan Small has to say about Symphony No.5.

<https://www.jonathansmalloboe.com/writings/2018/1/2/sibeliuss-5th-symphony>

Did you know? In 1908 Sibelius, always a committed smoker and drinker, was diagnosed with throat cancer. He was operated on and made a full recovery, living for another 46 years and later saying: “All the doctors who wanted to forbid me to smoke and drink are dead.”

Watch a documentary about Sibelius’s later years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agkg89pqA8w>

Strauss Don Juan

Literature’s legendary libertine Don Juan was brought colourfully to life by Richard Strauss in a work which would **make the 24-year-old’s name**.

Strauss, whose father Franz was one of Germany’s leading horn players, had begun composing at the age of six. He also played the piano and violin.

He conducted the premiere of the famous tone poem in Weimar in 1889 where he was the kapellmeister and would return to the piece throughout his long six-decade career, first recording it as early as 1917, and again in an acclaimed 1929 recording with the **Berlin State Opera Orchestra**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoGl7U8OPYY>

Listen to a recording of Richard Strauss conducting Don Juan in 1944, an occasion marking his 80th birthday.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sa4auTQmas8>

Dag Wirén

The son of a roller blind manufacturer, pianist and composer **Dag Wirén** was born in 1905 at Striberg in central Sweden.

He studied at the Stockholm Conservatory and later in Paris where he met Stravinsky and was exposed to the music of the Montparnasse-based ‘Les Six’ – Ravel, Poulenc, Honegger, Mimhau, Auric and Durey.

It was when he returned to Sweden in the mid-1930s that he composed what would become his most famous work, the spirited **Serenade for Strings (1937)**.

Did You Know? Wirén wrote the music for Absent Friend, Sweden’s entry in the 1965 Eurovision Song Contest – the first song in the

competition NOT performed in the singer's native tongue. It finished 10th out of 18 entries.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrPiw8gILOY>