

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra March 10 programme complementary content

Nature and the natural world take centre stage in this concert where tender melodies and elemental forces combine in one programme.

The evening also features not one but two soloists – artist in residence Roderick Williams and the talented young violinist Amarins Wierdsma.

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

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.

Roderick Williams interview

When **Roddy Williams** (<https://www.grovesartists.com/artist/roderick-williams/>) agreed to become the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's artist in residence for 2020/21 little did he know he would still be 'in residence' in 2022.

"Goodness me, I mean I feel like a squatter by now!" he laughs on a Zoom call from Brussels where he's singing in the Fauré *Requiem*. "It was no one's fault, that just happened because of the whole Covid thing, and so I feel like I've hardly been there at all.

"But I'm looking forward to making my journeys when I can."

That includes two forthcoming performances at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall – this Lark Ascending concert in March and then singing the role of Jesus in Bach's *St John Passion* just ahead of Easter.

His last official appearance at Hope Street was in October 2020 when he took part in a recital of English music **inspired by Thomas Hardy** (<https://www.artscityliverpool.com/single-post/2020/10/13/review-roderick-williams-in-recital-at-liverpool-philharmonic>), appearing alongside rising star British baritone Gareth Brynmor Jones and pianist Christopher Glynn, performing to a socially distanced audience.

"I remember Sandra (Parr – the Philharmonic's Artistic Planning Director (Orchestra and Ensembles)) being almost giddy because they'd planned the autumn season four times and torn it up four times," he says. "They didn't even know if the whole society was going to survive beyond Christmas, but they did know that the purpose of it was to put on music, so that's what they were doing."

Meanwhile last October, the 56-year-old played a key role behind the scenes of **Beethoven's Ninth** (<https://bachtrack.com/review-hindoyan-sierra-beethoven-royal-liverpool-philharmonic-october-2021>)), being invited to run a workshop with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir's lower voices.

"I'm not a choir trainer and I'm not an amateur and there are some people who do both of those things professionally with great skill," he explains. "I said 'what do you want me to do?' And the message came back – well, kind of whatever you want Roddy!"

He decided to approach the piece with the choir in the way he would approach his own solo work, picking up from the nuts and bolts of learning the music itself and going "to the next level. How do we turn that into a cohesive performance?"

"Not forgetting of course that I am one when I sing a solo, and they are many. So, the combined impact of a discussed single approach to something as a chorus can be overwhelming.

"I described to them what it was like to be in a semi-staged performance of the *St John Passion* and to be at the epicentre of an entire chorus baying for my crucifixion."

This was the acclaimed **Peter Sellars production** (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/apr/03/oaerattlesellars-review-commitment-and-focus-sharpen-bachs-passion>)), staged at the Royal Festival Hall in 2019 with Liverpool's own Sir Simon Rattle conducting and where the acclaimed baritone was bound, blindfolded and dragged across the floor during the performance.

"It was the most extraordinary artistic experience of my career," he admits. "It was the most incredibly harrowing experience of my life as a human being.

"And what I learned is that the power of a chorus as a body of people when focussed...that energy is something you can almost hold. It taught me something about what it is when many human beings join together in almost choreographed, unified purpose."

There's unlikely to be any blindfolding or manhandling when it comes to Mahler's *Rückert Lieder* of course.

Williams, a masterful performer of **lieder** (<https://bachtrack.com/roderick-williams-lieder-interview-january-2016>)), will be going through his usual rigorous preparation - despite Mahler's songs sets being "old friends", and says he is looking forward to getting into rehearsals with the Orchestra to explore them together.

He explains: "Music means something partly because of what you've brought into the room. Sometimes music means something because the thing you've brought into the room is something we can help you leave behind. Performing music and taking an audience elsewhere.

“That happens for us as well. The players will come, and they’re all busy, they’ve all got other things, and they’ll sit down with this music, and in the time we rehearse Mahler can take us somewhere else and we can discover stuff about ourselves.

“Then the audience come in and they change the conversation. How audiences receive what I’m singing to them is important to me. It’s part of the shared conversation.”

One of the conversations Williams had about his artistic residency in Liverpool was about the possibility of composing a piece for musicians and voices to perform.

He has always **written music** (<https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/roderick-williams-composer-lockdown-limitations-can-adapt/>), from being a boy at home playing recorder with his two brothers to time as a choral scholar at Oxford – where as a member of a cappella vocal group the Balfour Gardiner Festival Chorus he penned a Valentine’s jingle to “sing for hard cash”, to his previous life as a music teacher.

Other composing commissions mean he’s now booked up for 2022 - but watch this space.

Meanwhile, there are his appearances with the Orchestra to look forward to, in a world which finally seems to be returning to some semblance of normality after two years of pandemic.

“One of the things about music is that it’s designed to be shared in a real-life space,” he says. “And some of the most unbelievably moving performances that I’ve been lucky to be a part of in the last two years is because people have connected in a shared space.

“And much as we’d like to Zoom them and stream them around the world so people in other countries can see them, and that is great – it’s lovely.

“But it’s the people in the room who have felt the air vibrate, and that have really had something to talk about.”

Listen to Roderick Williams performing Schubert’s *An die Musik*.

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

Mihhail Gerts

Mihhail Gerts (<https://www.mihhailgerts.com/about/>) makes a welcome return to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall to conduct this Thursday evening concert.

Gerts made his Liverpool debut in 2019 when he **stepped in at the eleventh hour** (<https://imgartists.com/news/mihhail-gerts-jumps-in-to-make-liverpool-debut-sunday-7->

[april/](#)) to lead the Orchestra in a programme of Stravinsky and Ravel in concerts which also featured a previous artist in residence, the harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani.

The conductor and pianist was born in Estonia in 1984, studying at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and later in Berlin. He was conductor of the Estonian National Opera from 2007-14, and from 2013-17 he was a part of the German Music Council's Dirigentumforum programme.

Along with being in demand for his opera, ballet and orchestral work, he has also conducted musicals including productions of **Cabaret**, **Grease** and **Rent**.

((<https://www.emic.ee/?sisu=interpreedid&mid=59&id=180&lang=eng&action=view&method=biograafia>))

Watch Mihhail Gerts conduct an excerpt from Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bytdj1gtlMI>

Amarins Wierdsma

Dutch-American violinist **Amarins Wierdsma**

((<https://www.amarinsmwierdsma.com/about>)) was born into a musical family in Utrecht – her father was conductor, pianist and composer **Oane Wierdsma**

((<https://www.fryskmuzykargyf.nl/oane-wierdsma.ashx>)) and her mother is the clarinettist Nancy Braithwaite.

Wierdsma started learning the violin at two, and as a child and teenager she studied with the late Jacoba 'Coosje' Wijzenbeek at the Royal Conservatoire in the Hague.

The multi award-winning musician – who plays a 250-year-old Guadagnini violin - moved to London in 2013 where she gained her masters, artist diploma and fellowship at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

As a soloist, she has appeared performed in venues across Europe as well as in the United States and Indonesia, while she is also first violinist in the **Barbican Quartet**

((<https://www.barbicanquartet.com/>)) which was formed at the Guildhall in 2014.

Wierdsma has a YouTube channel on which she broadcasts lessons on how to play the violin as well as chronicling her life as a professional musician.

Watch a day in the life of Amarins Wierdsma.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOoDf2jTFaE>

Franz Schubert

Franz Schubert (<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/schubert/>) was 17 and a somewhat reluctant teacher at his father's school when he started work on his **Second Symphony** (<https://www.allmusic.com/composition/symphony-no-2-in-b-flat-major-d-125-mc0002371103>) at the tail end of 1814.

It was a fertile creative time for the Goethe-inspired teenager who, over the 24 months of 1814 and 1815, not only worked full time but also composed his *Mass in F* along with four stage works, two symphonies and 145 songs including *Heidenröslein* and the ballad **Erlkönig**. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Erlkonig>)

After his death in 1828, his *Second Symphony* was all-but forgotten and wasn't publicly performed again for 50 years.

The four-movement work opens with a sunny fanfare and a lyrical largo section before bursting into a lively, playful allegro with nods towards Schubert's contemporary, Beethoven.

Its andante is composed as a set of five variations on a theme which is first introduced through the strings, while the third movement is a menuetto which announces itself with a tutti blast before a second contrasting theme emerges through pared back woodwind, violins and pizzicato bass.

And the symphony concludes with a deft, virtuosic presto vivace which embraces dashing melodies and moments of high drama.

Did you know? Schubert stood 5ft 1in tall and was prone to plumpness which garnered him the nickname Schwammerl – which translates as 'little mushroom'.

Enjoy the menuetto (allegro vivace) from Schubert's *Symphony No 2 in B-flat major*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZRTm8uZT7g>

Gustav Mahler

While Liverpool audiences have enjoyed cycles of **Gustav Mahler's** (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/29/mahler-where-to-start-with-his-music>)

symphonies over the past decade, the Austrian was also a renowned composer of songs or 'lieder'.

And of course, he composed for voices in four of his symphonies too.

His *Rückert Lieder* (<https://mahlerfoundation.org/mahler/compositions/ruckert-lieder/ruckert-lieder-introduction/>) is a song cycle of five lieder for voice and either chamber orchestra or piano and dates from 1901-2 when Mahler wrote them at his summer villa in Carinthia.

They are based on a set of poems by German romantic poet and professor Friedrich Rückert but were not originally designed to be a formal song cycle despite sharing the same writer and themes.

Mahler himself conducted at the premiere of the first four songs in Vienna in 1905, while the fifth - *Liebst du um Schönheit* was orchestrated after his death.

The composer described Rückert's verse as 'lyrical poetry from the source' (<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/mahler-s-ruckert-lieder-which-recording-is-best>) and these songs are all enchantingly lyrical.

Watch a trailer for Ken Russell's 1974 film Mahler starring Robert Powell as the composer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GC6KnOoPJA>

Ralph Vaughan Williams

This autumn marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of **Ralph Vaughan Williams**.

(<https://rvwsociety.com/>)

And this most British of composers has left us with a rich collection of works influenced by traditional folk song and early English music.

The Lark Ascending (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/08/the-lark-ascending-ralph-vaughan-williams-classical-chart-topper-jennifer-pike>) – inspired by a poem of the same name by George Meredith - was composed in 1914, but the outbreak of war meant its premiere was delayed...by more than six years.

Audiences eventually heard the piece at Shirehampton Public Hall in Bristol in December 1920, when **Marie Hall**, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvotFZJvckM>) the violinist Vaughan Williams dedicated it to, performed with piano.

The first performance with an orchestra came in June 1921 when Hall joined the British Symphony Orchestra and Adrian Boult in a concert at the Queen's Hall in London.

One reviewer wrote: "This is indeed one of the happiest things that the composer has ever done – a trifle long drawn out, maybe, and hardly catching, perhaps, all the ecstasy of Meredith's poem, but full of melody and grace, of ease and spontaneity, and in its way delightful."

It's certainly delighted listeners over the last 100 years and has been consistently voted the nation's favourite piece of classical music in the **Classic FM Hall of Fame**.

((<https://www.classicfm.com/radio/hall-of-fame/lark-ascending-uk-favourite-pieces-classical-music-2021/>))

Did you know? Vaughan Williams was naturally left-handed but like many children of his generation was forced to write with his right instead. His handwriting was often barely legible.

Listen to Nicola Benedetti perform *The Lark Ascending*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLhpkvQLDt0>

Jean Sibelius

Gustav Mahler famously told **Jean Sibelius** ((<https://www.classical-music.com/features/articles/sibelius-a-life-in-10-masterpieces/>)) that a symphony must "be like the world...it must embrace everything."

But the Finn's own vision of the symphonic form was what he described as one of "profound logic and inner connection among all the motifs", and over the course of his career he refined that vision until he arrived at his single movement ***Seventh Symphony***.

((<https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2014/mar/18/sibelius-seventh-symphonic-scream>))

The symphony was completed in 1924 and would be the composer's last.

It was premiered in Stockholm in March 1924, when it was described as *Fantasia sinfonica No 1*. It wasn't until it was published the following year that the score was titled *Symphony No 7 in C major*.

While the work may only last a little over 20 minutes, it is full of epic drama carried along on waves of varying tempo from the mysterious opening, articulated by timpani and rising strings, to its radiant final bars.

The symphony has three main sections – adagio, vivacissimo and allegro moderato – and is dominated by a theme which is introduced in the adagio and then explored, in variations, throughout the piece. Listen out for the theme being announced by solo trombone.

Did you know? Sibelius had no time for music critics saying: “Pay no attention to what the critics say – no statue has ever been put up to a critic.”

Watch a performance of *Symphony No. 7 in C major* at the BBC Proms.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEDrO35p7Hs>