

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra May 19 programme complementary content

‘Transformations’ is the theme of Thursday evening’s lively concert programme at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall.

Superstar clarinettist Julian Bliss joins Domingo Hindoyan and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for a night of infectious and buoyant melodies.

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

Domingo Hindoyan

Domingo Hindoyan was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme, El Sistema.

He studied conducting at **Haute école de musique in Geneva**, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor’s Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to **Daniel Barenboim** at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as successor to Vasily Petrenko in 2020, taking up this position last September.

Of this concert, he says: “As the title says, it’s about transformations. It’s all about this beautiful music, not a big symphony in there but brilliant pieces - and Julian is just an absolutely brilliant player.”

Julian Bliss

Julian Bliss was born in Hertfordshire in 1989. He started to play at the age of four when his parents took him to a music shop, and he picked out a plastic **Lyons C clarinet** specially designed for children.

At five he appeared on television and aged six, he was invited to play at Buckingham Palace. He returned to the palace in 2002 to perform in the Proms at the Palace as part of the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Bliss studied at the Purcell School for Young Musicians and was 12 when he earned his postgraduate artist's diploma at Indiana University. He went on to study in Germany under Sabine Meyer.

In 2010, inspired by Benny Goodman, he formed the **Julian Bliss Septet** (<https://www.julianbliss.com/septet>), which has become renowned for its jazz-fuelled shows that captivate audiences across the globe.

Bliss is in demand as both a soloist and recitalist, and has played with the world's leading orchestras and chamber groups. In 2020, he launched Bliss Music, through which his arrangements of pieces for clarinet and piano have been made available as digital sheet music.

Benjamin Britten

The man described as the finest British composer of his generation was born **Edward Benjamin Britten** in Suffolk in 1913. His father was a dentist.

Britten began composing at an early age and attended the Royal College of Music, as well as studying privately with composer and conductor **Frank Bridge**, who accepted the talented 13-year-old as his only pupil.

After leaving the RCM, he initially made his living writing music for documentary films, theatre and radio. He composed 40 scores, including the music for the GPO's 1936 documentary **Night Mail** which featured a 'verse commentary' by his friend WH Auden.

Britten was a committed pacifist. In April 1939, he and his future partner (the tenor Peter Pears) left for America where, when war broke out, they were advised to remain as 'artistic ambassadors'.

It was there that Britten came across the work of Suffolk poet, George Crabbe, which would inspire his opera **Peter Grimes**. This work became his first international success.

The verse also made Britten homesick, and in 1942 he and Pears returned to Britain, later applying for conscientious objector status. Conceived in America, *Peter Grimes* was gestated in Suffolk and premiered by the Sadler's Wells Opera a month after VE Day.

Did you know? Britten composed his popular Christmas choral work *A Ceremony of Carols* on his dangerous wartime transatlantic crossing

from America to Britain. His ship sailed as part of convoy HX 183, which arrived in Liverpool on April 15, 1942.

Aaron Copland

The son of Russian Jewish immigrants who ran a neighbourhood department store, **Aaron Copland** was born in Brooklyn in 1900. He would become one of the most important American musical voices of the 20th Century.

Copland's mother, Sarah, had grown up in Texas. She would sing Western folk songs to her youngest child, who would later compose 'cowboy' music like *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*.

As a **young composer**, however, he was initially influenced by Stravinsky, and studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris for three years.

Copland's early works were written in modernist style and included jazz elements. Although his style would develop in a more populist direction, his world and the jazz world came together again in 1948, when renowned American 'King of Swing' **Benny Goodman** approached him to compose a *Clarinet Concerto* for him.

Did you know? Copland's father travelled to New York from Lithuania via Glasgow, where he lived before completing his emigration to the New World in 1882. It's thought it was there that the family name could have morphed from Kaplan to Copland.

Johannes Brahms

For many, **Johannes Brahms** has become inexorably entwined with Robert and (particularly) Clara Schumann.

The talented, young Hamburg-born composer was first introduced to the Schumanns by the great violinist **Joseph Joachim** in 1853. Robert Schumann was astounded by the 19-year-old's compositions and hailed him as 'the young eagle' and 'the chosen one'.

Within just a few months, Schumann would be committed to an asylum, leaving Brahms without a patron but with a new sense of purpose – to act as a protector to Clara and the Schumanns' children.

The two grew close with Clara, in turn, continuing to offer support to Brahms, programming his works as part of her recitals. She supported him in finding some gainful employment (as a court musician at Detmold), while he continued to compose.

By 1863 he had settled in Vienna, and his *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* dates from 1873. It was originally performed in a two-piano form – by Brahms and Clara Schumann – at a private party in Bonn. The orchestral version was premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic later that year, with Brahms conducting.

Carl Maria von Weber

Carl Maria von Weber born in Schleswig-Holstein in 1786, was a key figure in the growth of the Romantic movement in Germany and helped encourage interest in German operas – subsequently influencing composers like Richard Wagner.

Weber studied with Joseph Haydn's younger brother **Michael** in Salzburg and Georg Joseph (Abbé) Vogler in Vienna. In his later 20s, with six operas already under his belt, he moved to Prague to take up an appointment at the opera there.

During a three-year stay, he performed more than 60 operas by almost three dozen composers, and subsequently he was made Royal Saxon Kapellmeister in Dresden. He was asked to help develop German national opera in reaction to Italian opera, which was dominating European music.

It could therefore be seen as somewhat ironic that a play by an Italian, Carlo Gozzi, formed the background of his *Overture for Turandot* – though Weber was responding to Friedrich Schiller's somewhat more **symbolic version**

Paul Hindemith

Paul Hindemith dominated Germany's music scene between the end of the First World War and the demise of the Weimar Republic in 1933.

Juggling busy composing and performing careers – he was in demand both as a solo violist and in a string quartet – the young Hindemith was seen as something of an 'enfant terrible' for **scandalising conservative audiences**. Some of his more controversial works included a trio of one-act operas with provocative sexual themes, and a ragtime based on a theme by Bach.

Some Nazis also weren't keen on him and in 1934, minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels denounced Hindemith as an "atonal noisemaker". Two years later, Hindemith's music was banned, although there was some support for his compositions within the party.

Hindemith took up a role creating a new music school in Istanbul and in 1938 he emigrated to Switzerland. Two years later, he travelled to America, where he taught at Yale and Cornell among other institutions.

It was in America that he composed his ***Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Weber***. Initially, it was planned as a series of movements for a ballet choreographed by Léonide Massine.

Hindemith became a US citizen in 1946, but in 1953 he returned to Europe, making his home in Switzerland once again. He died in Frankfurt in 1963.

About the Music

Benjamin Britten (1913-76): Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*

Composed: 1941-3

First Performed: Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, 7 June 1945, cond. Reginald Goodall

The sea has long been a powerful elemental symbol in British culture, and it forms the backdrop for Benjamin Britten's breakthrough opera *Peter Grimes* – so much so, that you could almost describe it as a character in its own right. Four of the sea's very contrasting moods are depicted brilliantly and atmospherically in the opera's four orchestral interludes, which Britten later extracted and formed into a suite that has been hugely popular ever since. There's magic and wonderful poetic illustration in this music, but it's also hard to miss a note of underlying menace: the sea takes no prisoners.

'Dawn' depicts a cold, grey early morning: leaden skies, the sound of waves on shingle, and the sense of deep dangerous currents on low brass. 'Sunday Morning' reveals a happier scene: the invigoration of fresh, salty air, the sounds of church bells chiming, the heart expanding as sunshine bounces off the moving waters. 'Moonlight' is still, with more play of light on water, but apprehension and anguish stir here too. Finally, there's the thrilling 'Storm' – terrifying to the opera's fisherfolk, but for its strangely solitary hero, exhilarating.

Aaron Copland (1900-90): *Clarinet Concerto*

Composed: 1947-9

First Performed: NBC Radio Broadcast (New York), 6 November 1950, cond. Fritz Reiner

The American jazz clarinetist, Benny Goodman, was keen not to treat jazz as a musical 'ghetto'. Noting how many modern classical composers were impressed and influenced by jazz, he commissioned several of them to write concert works for him. The most immediately successful of these was the Clarinet Concerto by Aaron Copland. Goodman paid handsomely ('two thousand dollars and that's real money'), and he gave Copland virtually free rein. Nevertheless, the sound and style of Goodman's playing left a strong imprint on the Concerto, especially in the long, mostly unaccompanied solo cadenza between the two main movements, and in the wild, dance-like finale.

The first movement, in which the clarinet is accompanied by just strings and harp, conveys something of the spirit of the blues, but there is little that sounds jazz-like here. At times, it recalls the 'wide-open spaces' nature poetry of Copland's ballet *Appalachian Spring*. But in the cadenza, and still more in the finale (where the piano enters for the first time), elements of Tin-Pan-Alley and Dixieland jazz fuse with Copland's love of Latin American dance music

to produce something gloriously abandoned and un-‘classical’. The Concerto was a hit at its first performance, and it’s been a favourite ever since.

Johannes Brahms (1833-97): *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, Op 56a

Composed: 1873

First Performed: 2 November 1873, Vienna Philharmonic, cond. Brahms

Though he presented an impressive, sometimes forbidding, exterior to the world, in private Johannes Brahms was nervous, shy and inclined to depression. As a young composer he suffered terribly from a lack of self-confidence, despite the passionate encouragement of his hero Robert Schumann and Schumann’s wife, Clara. The thought of tackling major orchestral works daunted him – it took him the best part of two decades to finish his First Symphony – and, somewhat cautiously, he composed the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* first for two pianos, before dressing it up in orchestral colours.

Brahms revered Haydn at a time when most of Haydn’s work was neglected, and he learned a great deal from him. So it’s slightly awkward that this glowing tribute to the older composer should be based on a theme, for wind band, that turns out not to be by Haydn at all (the current educated guess is his younger contemporary Ignaz Pleyel). Even so, Haydn’s playful sense of humour, his endless ability to surprise, and the strange nocturnal poetry of some of his minor-key slow movements, all left their mark on Brahms’ *Variations*. There are eight variations followed by a grand finale, in which the music is built up over the ‘Haydn’ theme repeated in the bass – a form called ‘passacaglia’ or ‘chaconne’. The work was a huge success at its premiere in Vienna – exactly the morale booster Brahms needed to finish his First Symphony, at long last, three years later.

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826): *Overture to Turandot*

Composed: 1805

First Performed: Württemberg Court Theatre, 1809, cond. Franz Danzi

In 1801, the hugely influential German Romantic thinker, poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller produced his play *Turandot*, based on the comedy by Carlo Gozzi – later the inspiration for Puccini’s last opera. Quite independently, the young and still largely unknown German composer, Carl Maria von Weber, wrote his *Overture on a Chinese Theme*, based on a melody included in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous *Dictionary of Music*. It was in 1809, when Weber was asked to provide music for Schiller’s play, that he realised that his *Overture* had found its true home. However, much Rousseau may have adapted his ‘Chinese’ theme, it does seem (to western ears at least) to contain Asian influences. Part of the fun of Weber’s *Overture* is in the way he tries to ‘westernise’ it, giving it 19th century European harmonies, while providing what was then regarded as ‘oriental’ percussion colouring. It is fun though, and it would have made a rousing curtain-raiser for a theatrical comedy.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963): *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber*

Composed: 1943

First Performed: New York, 20 January 1944, cond. Artur Rodzinski

Despite its (definitely ironic) cumbersome title, Paul Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis* is tremendous fun. Having annoyed several leading Nazis – and later becoming banned by Hitler's regime – Hindemith fled his homeland before the outbreak of World War Two and arrived in the USA in 1940. The *Symphonic Metamorphosis* was his first major composition on American soil, and throughout the four movements, it's possible to hear Hindemith's relief at escaping the Third Reich. Significantly, he takes a less than reverent attitude to Weber, one of Germany's leading musical icons. Each of the four movements takes a theme from one of Weber's instrumental works and transforms it into something that would have astonished its composer, decking it out in spectacular or luscious orchestral colours and adding spicy, sometimes subversive, harmonies to create something that sounds utterly twentieth century.

A wild, rambunctious Allegro first movement, heavily folksy in character, is followed by a distinctly modern, playful take on Weber's 'Chinese' theme from *Turandot*, which transforms into a superb jazz fugue. The gently melancholic, pastoral Andantino perhaps suggests more tender memories of Hindemith's homeland. Then comes the terrific March, moving from what sounds like a parody of the funeral march from Mahler's Sixth Symphony to a raucous celebration – if the rugby fans amongst you are reminded of 'Roll me over in the clover', I don't think Hindemith would have minded in the least.