

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 9 programme complementary content**

In this Sunday afternoon programme, two much-loved classical pieces which premiered a century apart are paired with a musical gem from a neglected British talent.

It's as if Orchestra recordings have come to life in this concert. Today's soloist, Sebastian Bohren, has played – and recorded – Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra before, while Andrew Manze and the Orchestra are acclaimed for their recording of Vaughan Williams' *Fifth Symphony*.

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.

### **Andrew Manze**

Since 2018, Andrew Manze has served as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and he's a great favourite of Philharmonic audiences.

He made his debut with the Orchestra more than a decade ago and has appeared regularly on the Hope Street stage ever since.

With boundless energy and warmth – and an extensive and scholarly knowledge of the repertoire – Manze is in great demand as a guest conductor from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles.

He began his career as an Early Music specialist, becoming Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music at the age of 31. Along with a busy conducting career, he also edits, teaches and writes about music and is a respected broadcaster.

He is currently Chief Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie.

He has recorded several of Vaughan Williams' symphonies with the Orchestra including, in 2018, *Symphony No 5 in D major*.

### **Sebastian Bohren**

Sebastian Bohren has been described as having “a varied tone palette which is as beguiling as his technique is striking”.

The 35-year-old Swiss-born violinist studied in Zurich, Lucerne – where he received his soloist's diploma – and Munich.

He has performed across Europe, Asia and South America and has won acclaim, along with awards, for his sensitive and expressive performances. A versatile chamber musician, he spent seven years as a member of the Stradivari Quartett and he has also appeared at some of the world's leading festivals.

Bohren's repertoire covers both the Classical and early Romantic eras but also contemporary composers.

Among his recordings is a CD featuring the violin concertos of Mendelssohn and Britten which was recorded with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at the Friary and released in 2019.

Bohren plays a Guadagnini violin from 1761, the Ex-Wanamaker-Hart.

## **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was fêted during his short career but has fallen off the radar since – until a recent, welcome resurgence of interest in the man and his music.

Born in 1875 in London to an English mother and a father from Sierra Leone, Coleridge-Taylor was brought up in Croydon. Showing an early aptitude for music and particularly the violin, at 15 he entered the Royal College of Music where he studied with Charles Villiers Stanford.

By the time he was 21, he was already gaining a reputation as a composer.

Publisher August Jaeger (of *Enigma Variations* fame) declared Coleridge-Taylor a genius, and Edward Elgar (who called him “the cleverest fellow going”) helped secure a commission for him from the Three Choirs Festival, which premiered his *Ballade in A minor* in 1898.

It was his trilogy of cantatas – *The Song of Hiawatha* – inspired by Longfellow’s epic poem and composed between 1898 and 1900, which would really make Coleridge-Taylor’s reputation however. He would also name his only son Hiawatha.

In 1899, Coleridge-Taylor heard American spirituals sung by the touring Fisk Jubilee singers and it spurred an interest in African-American song.

*Symphonic Versions on an African Air* dates from 1906 and is based on the African-American song *I’m Troubled In Mind*. A Coleridge-Taylor Society was formed in America and the composer and conductor paid three visits to the United States during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1904, he was even received by President Roosevelt at the White House.

Sadly, his career was cut short in September 1912 when he died of pneumonia at home in London. He was only 37.

Did you know? Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was a good friend of John Archer, the Liverpool-born first Black mayor in Britain. The pair were both delegates at the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London.

## **Felix Mendelssohn**

The second half of the 1830s were a time of real change in Felix Mendelssohn’s short life.

In 1835, the 26-year-old accepted the post of director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, while in November that year his father Abraham died.

A banker and philanthropist, he had always been an encouraging figure in his son’s career, and Mendelssohn wrote to his friend Pastor Julius Schubring after Abraham’s death that: “I was devoted to him with my whole soul”.

It was his father who urged him to complete his oratorio *St Paul*, which was premiered in Düsseldorf in May 1836. Its British premiere came at Liverpool's triennial Music Festival a few months later.

1836 was also the year Mendelssohn met **Cécile** Jeanrenaud, the teenage daughter of a French Reformed church clergyman. The pair married the following March.

Then, in 1838, Mendelssohn started work on a new concerto, composing it with his friend and Leipzig concertmaster Ferdinand David in mind.

Unlike many of his other compositions, what became his only *Violin Concerto* would take six years to complete. It was finally premiered in Leipzig in March 1845.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams**

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born in the Gloucestershire village of Down Ampney on October 12, 1872.

His father was the vicar there, but when Arthur Vaughan Williams suddenly died three years later, the young family decamped to the maternal family home just outside Dorking in Surrey – an area of outstanding beauty with its woodland, heathland and farmland.

It was here the young Ralph learned the piano and violin, and made his first tentative compositions. His interest in music was nurtured as a pupil at Charterhouse, where aged 16 he staged his own G major Piano Trio, playing the violin.

He went on to study with Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music, and later with Charles Villiers Stanford. While there, he also forged a lifelong friendship with fellow student Gustav Holst.

During a 60-year career he composed everything from concerti, chamber music and choral works to ballet, operas, hymn tunes and film and radio scores. Of course, this was all alongside his many songs and – written over the course of 50 years – his nine symphonies.

*Symphony No 5 in D major* took Vaughan Williams five years to complete. It premiered in the midst of war at a June 1943 Prom concert in the Royal Albert Hall with Vaughan Williams conducting.

Critic Neville Cardus described it as “the most benedictory and consoling music of our time”.

Did you know? During the Second World War, Vaughan Williams chaired a board which sought to aid foreign-born musicians who had been interned in Britain as enemy aliens.

## About the Music

### **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912): Symphonic Variations on an African Air, Op 63**

Composed: 1905

First Performed: 14 June 1906, London Philharmonic Society, cond. Coleridge-Taylor

By the time he came to conduct the premiere of his *Symphonic Variations*, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was an international star. Since the huge success of his choral-orchestral *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* in 1898 his star had continued to rise – in America they were soon calling him 'the African Mahler' (in fact, Coleridge-Taylor was British born, of mixed-race parentage). The *Symphonic Variations* is based on an African-American song, 'I'm Troubled in Mind', whose melancholy phrases are sounded by trombones at the beginning. The variation process is ingenious and full of lovely imaginative strokes – one can see why Elgar admired and encouraged this composer. It's worth remembering that when Coleridge-Taylor died at just 37, he was younger than Elgar was when he scored his first big hit with his *Enigma Variations*. What might he have achieved if he'd lived just a decade longer?

### **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847): Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64**

1. Allegro molto appassionato -
2. Andante -
3. Allegretto non troppo - Allegro molto vivace

Composed: 1838-44

First Performed: 13 March 1845, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Ferdinand David (violin), cond. Mendelssohn

Sometimes Mendelssohn composed at lightning speed, at other times it was more a case of hard labour. The famous E minor Violin Concerto took him six years, during which time he fired off letter after letter to his friend, the violinist Ferdinand David, imploring his advice. Even David's help and reassurance wasn't enough: soon Mendelssohn had drawn in another leading composer, the Dane Niels Gade. 'Please don't laugh at me too much! I'm truly ashamed of myself, but I can't help it. I'm just groping around here.'

From the music alone, you would never guess that Mendelssohn had suffered such agonies in composing it. The famous opening is not only very beautiful and superbly conceived for the violin, but it also imperiously scorns concerto tradition, abandoning the usual lengthy orchestral introduction and having the soloist sweep straight in with its long, soaring melody. The dramatic first movement passes without a break into the slow movement, which begins with another glorious long melody, and the sense of continuously unfolding instrumental song is sustained right through to the end. Immediately the violin starts again with a wistful new idea, in a slightly faster tempo. Is this the finale, or some kind of intermezzo? Then the finale proper races into action, with a display of technical fireworks leading to a joyous, thrilling conclusion.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Symphony No 5 in D major**

1. Preludio. Moderato
2. Scherzo Presto misterioso
3. Romanza. Lento
4. Passacaglia. Moderato

Composed: 1938-43

First Performed: 24 June 1943, Royal Albert Hall, London, London Philharmonic Orchestra  
cond. Vaughan Williams

After the startlingly violent Fourth Symphony (1934) and the sombre, war-haunted choral work *Dona nobis pacem* (1936), received opinion was that Vaughan Williams had abandoned the contemplative, folk-inflected language of his younger days. The Fifth Symphony, however, represented not so much a return to the old ways as an enrichment and development of them. The pastoral tone is unmistakable, but the many gorgeously evocative passages acquire extra power through the way Vaughan Williams expertly 'places' them within a subtle and cogent symphonic argument. The first movement has its shadowy moments, especially the faster build-up towards the climax, and the climax itself is a radiant revelation, but the beginning and ending are hushed and ambiguous with mysterious, haunting horn calls. A fleeting, ghostly Scherzo follows, scored with great delicacy in its outer sections, but suggesting something more heavy-footed in the central trio section.

Then comes the Romanza, unmistakably the heart of the symphony. Some of the ideas of this movement stem from Vaughan Williams' major ongoing operatic project *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Vaughan Williams was no conventional believer, but he turned repeatedly to religious themes in his music. Clearly, he found *some* kind of transcendent meaning in John Bunyan's famous tale of the Christian Pilgrim and his spiritual journey. He distils its essence movingly in this movement, offering it as a word of comfort and encouragement to a country then involved in a colossal struggle of its own. The final movement is a 'Passacaglia': a movement built up over a constantly repeated bass theme. This builds eventually to a grand climax at which the symphony's opening horn calls return on the full orchestra in great waves of sound. The splendour fades, yielding to radiant tranquil counterpoint led by strings, recalling a choir singing an Elizabethan anthem in a great cathedral, its ending coming as near to perfect peace as any twentieth century symphony.