

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 15 programme complementary content**

This week marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ralph Vaughan Williams' birth, and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra are celebrating the great man with a very special evening of his music.

At its heart is a screening of the 1948 British film *Scott of the Antarctic* – the stirring and tragic tale of the ill-fated Terra Nova expedition to the South Pole – filmed in full colour and tonight, with Vaughan Williams' evocative score performed under the expert baton of Andrew Manze.

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 also currently Chief Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie.

He has recorded several of Vaughan Williams' symphonies with the Orchestra.

### **Thelma Handy**

Violinist Thelma Handy studied with Jaroslav Vanáček at the Royal College of Music (where she won several prizes), and later with Franco Gulli in Indiana.

She spent eight years with the English Chamber Orchestra early on in her career and has played with many other leading symphony orchestras. She is also a member of the John Wilson Orchestra.

Handy has given solo and concerto performances too, including playing Mozart's A minor Concerto with the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra in Brisbane.

She joined the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra as Associate Leader in 1995 and was made Joint Leader 10 years later. Since 2018, she has been Leader of the Orchestra.

Handy is also co-founder of the annual Wirral Chamber Music Festival.

## **Katie Coventry**

Award-winning Scottish mezzo-soprano Katie Coventry attended Royal Holloway, University of London, where she was a choral scholar, and the Royal College of Music International Opera School where she studied with Tim Evans-Jones as an Independent Opera Voice scholar.

An ENO Harewood Artist, she made her debut there in 2017 playing Edith in *Pirates of Penzance*. Her other roles have included Rosetta in *Manon*, Cherubino in *Marriage of Figaro*, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, all at the Salzburg Landestheater. She's also performed Cherubino in the ENO's *Marriage of Figaro*, Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at the Bridgewater Hall and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* at the Waterperry Opera Festival.

Earlier this year she appeared in *Giulio Cesare* at the Nederlandse Reisopera, and she arrives in Liverpool after a six-week season at Glyndebourne.

She is in demand on the concert platform and has appeared at leading national and international venues including the Royal Albert Hall and Riga Dom.

## **Sopranos and Altos from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir**

When the Liverpool Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840, it saw the birth not only of an orchestra, but of a chorus too.

In recent years, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir has performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B minor*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mahler's *Symphony No.2*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan's *St John Passion*, Duruflé *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

The Choir has also appeared in many of the UK's major concert venues, including the Royal Albert Hall, and has sung on a number of foreign tours.

It's a busy season for members of the Choir. Along with this concert, they will also perform Puccini's *Mass*, Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams**

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

When Arthur Vaughan Williams suddenly died three years later, the young family moved to the maternal family home just outside Dorking in Surrey – an area of outstanding beauty with its woodland, heathland and farmland.

The young Ralph showed an early interest in music which was nurtured at school. From there, he went on to study with Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music, and later with Charles Villiers Stanford.

During a 60-year career, Vaughan Williams 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.

Three works which cover more than 30 years of his long and prolific career come together in this Saturday concert programme.

*Serenade to Music* was composed in 1938 as a tribute to the co-founder of the Proms, conductor Sir Henry Wood.

Audience favourite *The Lark Ascending* – 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 until 1920.

And it was in 1947, after another war, that Vaughan Williams was approached by Ealing Studios and asked to compose the music for a new film directed by Charles Frend, produced by the great Michael Balcon and starring a cast led by John Mills.

The film was *Scott of the Antarctic*. Elements of the score Vaughan Williams created for it would later appear in his Seventh Symphony – the *Sinfonia antarctica*.

Did you know? Between the ages of 18 and 21 Herbert Ponting, Captain Scott's Terra Nova expedition photographer and cinematographer, was employed as a clerk in a Liverpool bank. It was in Liverpool that he bought his first cameras.

## About the Music

### **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Music for *Scott of the Antarctic***

One of the most remarkable things about Vaughan Williams is the way that he kept on developing throughout his long life. How many other composers could have started a new career as a film composer as they were approaching their seventies – and gone on to do it so well? Vaughan Williams wrote 11 film scores, but the project that fired his imagination most powerfully was the score he provided for director Charles Frend and producer Michael Balcon's 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*, which told the story of the doomed British expedition to the South Pole in 1910-12.

When the commission came through in 1947, Vaughan Williams soon found that the subject was giving him 'very definite ideas'. He dug out everything he could find about Scott's expedition, and the music began to flow before he'd seen anything of the script. The challenge to evoke an unimaginably strange landscape inspired him to enrich his orchestral palette as never before: piano, celesta, organ, harps, a large percussion section including gong, bells, vibraphone and wind machine, and wordless women's chorus with solo soprano. These sounds are combined to create unforgettable sound images: xylophone tremolos, brittle piano chords and muted brass

create glittering ice formations; shuddering strings register stabs of cold as the voices wail like malignant Antarctic sirens, while the music for the ascent of the Beardmore Glacier is awe-inspiring in its elemental coldness.

It was all so stimulating that Vaughan Williams actually composed far too much music, and even some of that had to be adapted to fit the film sequences. Listeners who know some of this music from the work he later fashioned from the score, *Sinfonia Antartica* (Symphony No 7, 1952), may be surprised when what seems to be familiar doesn't do quite what they expect it to. So, was it simply a matter of Vaughan Williams, like Balcon, being 'inspired by the heroic deeds typical of British greatness'? Looking at the film as a whole, it's striking how little part the music plays in the sections portraying life at home in Britain. It's when the explorers arrive in the fantastically strange Antarctic landscape that the music really begins to work its weird, disturbing magic. While something of the story's terrible human pathos can be felt in *Sinfonia Antartica*, in the film, it is pitiless nature that holds musical sway. Vaughan Williams does provide a morale-boosting musical send-off at the end of the film, but after what we've just experienced it may strike some listeners as emotionally 'tacked-on' and, significantly, he didn't incorporate it in the *Sinfonia*.

Watching the film today is still a moving experience and Vaughan Williams' music is the major player when it comes to the film's atmosphere and emotional impact, but the original audio quality sounds limited and dynamically compressed today. Hearing it played live should heighten its impact, as well as enhancing our awareness of the 76-year-old composer's extraordinary orchestral wizardry.