

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
April 11 programme complementary content

Alexander Borodin worked as a scientist but dreamed in music and his wonderful Second Symphony is exactly as stirring, as tuneful and as lush as you'd expect from the composer of the *Polovtsian Dances* – and it's a real favourite of our Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze.

Young Artist in Residence Johan Dalene, meanwhile, is crazy about the raw energy of Nielsen's powerful *Violin Concerto*. The concert opens with Ruth Gipps' gorgeous instrumental *Song for Orchestra* with the oboe leading the way.

Andrew Manze

[Andrew Manze](#) is Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – a role he has held since 2018 – and 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 teaches, edits and writes about music and is in demand as a broadcaster. He is currently Chief Conductor of the [NDR Radiophilharmonie](#).

Johan Dalene

Winner of the 2019 prestigious [Carl Nielsen Competition](#) and 2022 Gramophone Young Artist of the Year, 23-year-old Swedish-Norwegian violinist [Johan Dalene](#) has performed with leading orchestras and in celebrated recital halls both at home and abroad. His ability to 'make his Stradivarius sing like a master' (*Le Monde*), coupled with his musicality and his engagement with musicians and audience alike, has won him countless admirers.

[Dalene](#) was born into a musical family – his father is a cellist and mother a pianist. He started learning the violin at the age of four and made his professional debut three years later. In 2018 he was accepted onto the Norwegian Crescendo programme where he worked with mentors Janine Jansen, Leif Ove Andsnes and Gideon Kremer.

He was a [BBC New Generation Artist between 2019 and 2022](#) and was chosen as an ECHO Rising Star for the 2021-22 season. He records exclusively on the BIS Records label, including an award-winning recording of the [Sibelius and Nielsen Violin Concertos](#).

Alongside being Young Artist in Residence in Liverpool, this season Dalene is also Artist in Residence with Sweden's Gavle Symphony Orchestra. In February he performed Korngold's *Violin Concerto* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Forthcoming engagements include the Bruch *Violin Concerto* in Kendal, Trondheim and Oslo, and concerts in Munich, Gavle, Reykjavik and Kristiansand in Norway.

Listen to Johan Dalene perform the [Praeludium](#) from Nielsen's *Violin Concerto*.

Ruth Gipps

The multi-talented 20th Century British composer, conductor, oboist and teacher [Ruth Gipps](#) was born into a family of musicians. Her businessman father Bryan, a trained violinist, and her Swiss mother H el ene, a piano teacher, had met while studying at a conservatory in Frankfurt before the First World War, while both her elder siblings were violinists.

Gipps, born in 1919, was a child prodigy who performed her first composition at a music festival aged eight. Aged 18 she entered the Royal Academy of Music where she studied oboe with Liverpool-born virtuoso [L eon Goossens](#) along with piano, and composition – latterly with Ralph Vaughan Williams.

When an injury ended her performance career in her early 30s, Gipps became instead a prolific composer. Among her many works were five symphonies, a wide range of concertos, orchestral, chamber and choral pieces and vocal works. Her tone poem [Song for Orchestra](#) dates from 1948 and is exquisitely lyrical, with a heartfelt solo for oboe.

[Gipps](#) worked for much of her career with the London Repertoire, a semi-professional orchestra she founded in 1955, and was conductor/musical director of the City of Birmingham Choir. She also founded the Chanticleer Orchestra which specialised in contemporary British music and nurtured young talent. A 21-year-old Julian Lloyd Webber gave the first London performance of Bliss' [Cello Concerto](#) with the Chanticleer in 1972. Gipps was appointed chairwoman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain in 1967 and was made an MBE for services to music in 1981.

Listen to Ruth Gipps' [Song for Orchestra](#).

Carl Nielsen

[Carl Nielsen](#) was born in 1865 on the Danish island of Funen, where his housepainter father played folk fiddle. Nielsen himself studied the violin at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, and for some years made his living as an orchestral violinist and then as a conductor. In later years he also took up a teaching post at the Academy.

As a composer, Nielsen's first work was a *Suite for Strings* which was premiered at the Tivoli Hall in 1888. He went on to [compose](#) in a variety of genres, including six symphonies, 290 songs and hymns, three concertos and two operas – one being his popular comedy [Maskerade](#).

His [Violin Concerto](#) dates from 1911, coming shortly after his Third Symphony. Unusually, it has just two movements. He started work on the concerto – which was inspired by the Danish violinist Peder M oller – at [Troidhaugen](#) (the Bergen villa and composing retreat of Edvard Grieg) after an invitation from Grieg's widow Nina to summer there. Completed that autumn, it was premiered in Copenhagen on February 28, 1912, with M oller as the soloist and Nielsen conducting, in a concert which also unveiled his Third Symphony.

Did you know? While a second violinist in the Royal Danish Orchestra, Carl Nielsen played in the Danish premieres of both Verdi's *Falstaff* and *Otello*.

Listen to Carl Nielsen's [Concerto for Violin and Orchestra](#).

Alexander Borodin

If Edward Elgar was a composer who dabbled in chemistry, [Alexander Borodin](#) was the opposite – a chemist who composed as a hobby.

Born in St Petersburg in 1833, as a child Borodin built a laboratory at home, and at 17 enrolled in the city's Medical-Surgical Academy, where after graduation – and following a year as an army surgeon – he returned to take up a role as professor of chemistry. He also later worked in research at Heidelberg University and in Pisa.

Away from the laboratory however, music was a passion he pursued in his spare time. In 1862, **Borodin** started learning composition with Mily Balakirev, the driving force behind the influential Russian composing group known as '**The Five**' which consisted of Balakirev, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Cesar Cui. Balakirev went on to conduct Borodin's First Symphony at its premiere in 1869, the same year his former student started work on his ***Symphony No.2 in B minor***.

With his scientific work taking priority, the symphony wasn't completed in orchestral form until 1877 – and after a not altogether successful premiere in March that year, its composer revised it further, thinning out the brass orchestration, before it was performed again in 1879 where it was met with acclaim.

Did you know? After the Tsar passed legislation in 1872 allowing women to take advanced medical courses, Borodin – a keen promoter of education in Russia – founded the School of Medicine for Women in St Petersburg where he lectured until his sudden death in 1887.

Enjoy listening to Borodin's ***Symphony No.2 in B minor***.

About the Music

Ruth Gipps (1921-99): *Song for Orchestra*

Composed: 1948

Formidable, combative, with a tremendous appetite for life, Ruth Gipps was able to defy conventional attitudes to what women 'should' do and compose an impressive legacy of orchestral works, including five symphonies and seven concertos. But she had difficulty establishing herself as a composer, despite encouragement from her teacher Ralph Vaughan Williams. Gender-prejudice had a lot to do with this, but she had a tendency to rub people up the wrong way, and her outright rejection of continental modernism told against her increasingly in the 1950s and 60s.

The short, but in content substantial, *Song for Orchestra* begins by acknowledging a debt – the distinctly pastoral oboe tune has a touch of her mentor Vaughan Williams (a quality that would soon become highly unfashionable on the London musical scene). But it's only a touch, and it's soon clear that Gipps is her own woman. Darker, more elemental presences declare themselves as we build to the climax, especially when the bass brass join in, but in the end, Gipps' generous, natural lyricism prevails.

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931): *Violin Concerto*

1. Praeludium: Largo – Allegro cavalleresco
2. Poco adagio – Rondo: Allegretto scherzando

Composed: 1911

First Performed: 28 February 1912, Copenhagen, Old Fellow's Mansion, Royal Danish Orchestra, Peder Møller (violin), cond. Nielsen

Like his exact contemporary, the Finn Jean Sibelius, Nielsen is best known today for his symphonies and his single Violin Concerto. But his origins were significantly different. Sibelius came from a cultured middle-class family, and like many other privileged Finns at that time, he

had to learn the Finnish language (his family spoke Swedish) and discover its indigenous culture. Nielsen grew up in a poor rural family and folk music was in his blood from the start – his father was the village clarinettist. So, unlike many other nationalist composers, whenever he needed a folkish theme he didn't have to borrow one, he could simply create one himself. The result is that for many his music 'breathes' his native Denmark. Many of the tunes in this delightful Violin Concerto have that sense of being rooted deep in Danish soil.

Nielsen was also an excellent orchestral violinist, so it was almost inevitable that he would tackle the form at some stage. But although it's splendidly conceived for the violin, there is no sense of its being overshadowed – or even much influenced – by any of the great concertos of the past. Typically, Nielsen opts for a highly individual form: two big parts, each dividing into a pensive slow section linked to a lively fast one. The opening has just a suggestion of Bach's great solo violin sonatas and partitas, but this soon melts into a lovely, easy-going, very hummable melody shared between soloist and orchestra. Then the aptly subtitled 'Cavalier-esque' Allegro unleashes the fireworks, most of all at the thrilling ending. The Poco adagio brings a touch of melancholy, but this is dispelled by the dancing Rondo. Nielsen had a wonderful sense of naughty humour, and there's more of a hint of it in this final section – don't be caught out by the ending!

Alexander Borodin (1833-87): Symphony No.2

1. Allegro moderato
2. Scherzo: Molto vivo
3. Andante
4. Finale: Allegro

Composed: 1869-75

First Performed: 4 March 1879, St Petersburg Free School, cond. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Alexander Borodin was a busy man. An eminent research chemist, a champion of women's rights, not to mention a dedicated adopter of abandoned cats, it's a wonder he had any time for composing at all. Recognizing that music might turn out to be his most important legacy, his friends tried to encourage him to devote more time and energy to it, but it still took him a long time to finish anything big (six years in the case of this relatively compact symphony), and at his early sudden death, crucial scores were left unfinished, most disastrously his opera *Prince Igor*.

Fortunately for us, however, he did persist right through to the end with this brilliant, colourful and generously tuneful symphony. Borodin was proud of his part-Georgian ancestry, and the strong, vivid colouring of Caucasian folk music left its mark on this score, most strikingly in the stark unison opening theme. The driven, rhythmically muscular first movement is followed by a rapid, airborne Scherzo, with a slower, oboe-led central trio section, with scintillating points of light from harp, horn and triangle. Singing clarinet and horn lines, with a strummed accompaniment from harp, suggest a legendary Russian bard preparing to tell a magical tale. Then the finale evokes a wild celebration, with Slavic, Caucasian and middle Eastern elements contending on equal terms. The accelerating ending is tremendously exciting – perhaps we can even sense Borodin's own joy and relief on finally finishing this splendid score.