

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra The Silent Planet programme notes

Stevens & Pound is made up of award-winning BBC Radio 3 presenter Delia Stevens and three-time BBC Radio 2 Folk Musician of the Year nominee Will Pound. The duo present this collaboration with the youth-led global climate non-profit organisation, Force of Nature. Alongside members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), they will mark Holst's 150th anniversary with a reimagining of his iconic *Planets* suite, adding an additional movement which Holst chose to silence as “astrologically insignificant” – *Earth*. The piece platforms young climate activists from Force of Nature giving key-note speeches accompanied by orchestral improvised soundscapes based on Holst's planetary characters.

### Delia Stevens

[Delia Stevens](#) is a percussionist at the forefront of her generation – a pioneer of future-facing ideas, visionary of sound and generous collaborator with “burning chops and a cosmic imagination”. The award-winning *BBC Radio 3* presenter is co-founder of the [Aurora Percussion Duo](#) and world-folk collective Kabantu. Both groups have won the £10,000 Royal Overseas League Competition and tour prolifically. Kabantu performed at Heswall Hall on June 30 to close this year's [Wirral Chamber Music Festival](#).

While studying at the Royal Northern College of Music, Stevens won the Gold Medal Competition – the highest award for soloists – and the Concerto Competition, and as a teenager she was twice a category finalist in the [BBC Young Musician of the Year](#). She has worked with the National Youth Orchestra and National Children's Orchestra of Great Britain as a tutor, and also held roles as a senior lecturer in percussion and reflective practice at Leeds Conservatoire.

In 2022 Stevens was made an artist in residence at Leeds University, and last year she was co-guest director with Symphonia Cymru and violinist Sammy Singh, reimagining Vivaldi's [Four Seasons](#). She also presented her own *BBC Radio 3* series *Music and Machines*, toured China with the Aurora Percussion Duo, played a water dam in [Hebden Bridge](#) as a percussion instrument with wild swimmers, and formed a new duo with Will Pound.

Watch Delia Stevens perform Avner Dorman's [Frozen in Time](#) with the RNCM Symphony Orchestra.

### Will Pound

One of the finest harmonica and melodeon players of his generation, [Will Pound](#) has pushed boundaries, working on and with a number of projects and musicians. These have included Will Pound and [Eddy Jay](#), Stevens & Pound, [Jenn Butterworth](#), Dame Evelyn Glennie, Liz Carroll, Martin Simpson, Guy Chambers, Concerto Caledonia, Robbie Williams and, in 2012, the Hillsborough charity single *He Ain't Heavy* as part of The Justice Collective.

He has travelled across most of Europe and as far as Australia for his music, delighting audiences with awe-inspiring performances. Nominated three times for the *BBC Radio 2* Folk Musician of the Year Award, he was named *FATEA Magazine* Instrumentalist of the Year in 2013 and 2014, *Spiral Earth Magazine* Musician of the Year in 2015, and also nominated for a *Songlines Magazine* best newcomer. He released his solo debut album, *A Cut Above*, in 2013. His other recordings include *Through the Seasons* (2018) and *A Day Will Come* (2020).

Pound started playing harmonica at the age of ten to help with his breathing after two operations.

Listen to a Harmonica Happy Hour podcast [interview](#) with Will.

## **Phoebe Hanson**

[Phoebe Hanson](#) is a multi-award-winning advocate and public speaker who focuses on democratising climate solutions, bridging the gap between young people and policymakers.

She co-ordinated [Mock COP26](#), a virtual youth climate conference convening more than 800 young people from 140 countries to form policy proposals and collaborate with leaders such as the COP26 President and UN Youth Envoy. Working to enact the Mock COP policy proposals, she supported the UK Presidency in creating a joint event of education and environment ministers at COP26, facilitating pledges from 25 countries, going on to advise the Department for Education on their Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and Natural History GCSE.

At COP27, Hanson was an organising partner of the first Children and Youth Pavilion at a COP, working to promote the interests of young people at a global level. She works with the Esmee Fairburn Foundation, designing and testing ways to involve young people in their work.

Hanson, who has a first-class degree in Politics from Lancaster University, also established the [Dais Speakers Agency](#) at [Force of Nature](#), training and platforming young changemakers.

## **Clark Rundell**

With a repertoire spanning centuries, continents and styles, [Clark Rundell](#) has established himself as a champion of music ranging from the 18th century to the current day, and from large, multidimensional projects to music of complexity and intricacy.

He has worked with Liverpool Philharmonic's contemporary group Ensemble 10:10 since its inception and has conducted many projects with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra including collaborative concerts with Elvis Costello, OMD, Wayne Shorter, Ian Broudie and Toumani Diabate, as well as recordings with the Orchestra which have included many UK and world premieres. He works regularly with orchestras and ensembles around the world, including all the BBC orchestras.

Originating from Minnesota, Rundell studied conducting at Northwestern University in Chicago with John Paynter before coming to the UK on a Junior Fellowship to study with Timothy Reynish at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Deeply committed to new music, he has given world premieres of works by composers such as Steve Reich, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Django Bates, James MacMillan, Tansy Davies, Gary Carpenter, Grace Evangeline Mason and Julia Wolfe. He has also conducted orchestral projects with artists including Abel Selaocoe and Tim Garland, and as a highly versatile musician has performed with artists like John Dankworth, Cleo Laine, Andy Sheppard and Victor Mendoza.

Rundell is well known as an arranger, specifically for collaborations with Louis Andriessen on *Vermeer Pictures*, a suite from Andriessen's opera *Writing to Vermeer*, which was performed at Het Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. He is a specialist in cross-genre collaboration and has conducted extensive orchestral projects with artists like Esperanza Spalding, Brad Mehldau and Gwilym Simcock.

## **Ian Gardiner**

Composer, orchestrator and arranger [Ian Gardiner](#) works in a variety of media including contemporary concert pieces, scores for silent films and TV, and collaborations with pop, jazz and world musicians. His [composition](#) accolades include the Prix Italia and Sony Award for his work for radio, *Monument*, and the British Composer Award for his *Toccata, Canzona, Ricercare* for symphonic wind and brass.

His music has been played by the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Symphony Orchestra of Wales, BBC Concert Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, with which he has close ties. He has also written for soloists including John Harle, Andrew Zolinsky, Sir Willard White and Dame Evelyn Glennie. He is an experienced percussionist, having directed and played in the new music group [George W Welch](#) for eight years.

In 2011, he ‘recycled’ Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* for an orchestra of instruments made from scrap materials, performing at the BBC Proms for *BBC4’s Scrapheap Orchestra* documentary. And in 2019, he [arranged](#) David Bowie’s ‘Space Oddity’ for the Proms which was described as ‘a glorious encore, the orchestra joining David Bowie in the heavens’.

Gardiner previously taught at the University of Liverpool and also helped to establish an innovative programme in popular music at LIPA. He is currently a lecturer at [Goldsmiths, University of London](#) where he was head of the music department from 2015-18.

## **Andreas Ashikkis (2nd year Masters)**

Andreas Ashikkis is a Cypriot conductor with a remarkable musical journey. He graduated first of his class in Orchestral Conducting from the Ionian University before pursuing further studies at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava through Erasmus+. In Greece, he conducted the university Symphony Orchestra and Choir and served as an assistant conductor at the Philharmonic Society of Corfu. Andreas also founded and directed a youth orchestra focused on film music. In Manchester, he has collaborated with esteemed orchestras like The Hallé, Manchester Camerata, and New Sinfonia through RNCM partnerships. He has had the privilege of assisting conductors such as Jon Storgårds, Juanjo Mena, and Martyn Brabbins, with the BBC Philharmonic and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Notably, Andreas conducted an adaptation of “Miss Havisham’s Wedding Night” during the RNCM Lab Week, using music to raise awareness about mental illness, love, and disappointment.

## **Matteo Dal Maso (2nd year Masters)**

Matteo Dal Maso is an Italian conductor and clarinetist who graduated from the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory of Turin. Prize-winner in more than ten international music competitions, in 2023 he won the First prize at the Athens International Conducting Competition and the Audience Prize of the Peter Maag International Conducting Competition. Matteo was invited to the Järvi Academy Masterclass in Estonia and during his first year in Manchester participated in masterclasses with the Hallé and Manchester Camerata, working with teachers such as Sir Mark Elder, Antony Hermus, Ludovic Morlot and Jorma Panula. As a conductor, he has with the Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto, Romanian Chamber Orchestra, Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, Athens Philharmonia Orchestra, Beogradski Simfoničari, Romanian Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto, Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria, and Dallas Winds. As an orchestral player, Matteo has worked with many Italian orchestras including the Teatro Regio of Turin, and has a composer his works have been performed in the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, the Bernie Wohl Center in New York, and the Teatro Comunale in Bologna.

## **Royal Northern College of Music**

The [Royal Northern College of Music](#) was founded in 1973 through the merger of the Royal Manchester College of Music (opened in 1893) and the Northern School of Music which dated from 1920. It is recognised as one of the world's most forward-thinking conservatoires.

The college is home to more than 900 students from 60 countries and is dedicated to providing an outstanding education which propels students into careers as inspiring and versatile musicians, fully equipped for exciting futures both on and off the stage.

Additionally, the college is home to the Junior RNCM, a vibrant community of gifted young musicians aged eight to 18. Every Saturday during term time they study with exceptional tutors, perform with like-minded people, learn transferable skills for life and create a solid platform for further study at conservatoire or university.

## **The Silent Planet**

When [Gustav Holst](#) composed *The Planets* during the turbulent years of the First World War, one assumes he would never have imagined his orchestral suite would one day be reimaged as a triple concerto for percussion, harmonica/melodeon and climate activist.

But not only is that exactly what Stevens & Pound have done in their new collaboration *The Silent Planet*, receiving its world premiere performance with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Northern College of Music, but they have added an additional planet to the work – that of the missing Earth.

Holst, who was fascinated with astrology, left our [home planet out](#) of his much-loved galactic odyssey because he considered it astrologically 'insignificant'. Although it's also been suggested that the composer was as inspired by myths and legends as he was by astrological signs.

[The Silent Planet](#) marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Holst's birth. Mars, Mercury, Venus and Jupiter have all been reimaged by [Stevens & Pound](#), with orchestration by Ian Gardiner and speeches by climate activist. Mars 'the bringer of war' includes a speech on how human conflict affects climate change, while Mercury 'the winged messenger' talks about the effect of climate change on insects and birds. In Venus 'the bringer of peace', the audience will hear about how human solutions affect the climate, and in Jupiter, 'the bringer of jollity', about the role of hope and activism. All the climate speeches are accompanied by improvised soundscapes devised by the duo and Orchestra.

Meanwhile, the additional movement *Earth* – co-written with Force of Nature – stresses the urgency of listening to our planet and amplifying unheard voices in the conversation around the climate.

## About the Music

### **Gustav Holst (1874-1934): *The Planets* (First four movements)**

1. Mars, the Bringer of War
2. Venus, the Bringer of Peace
3. Mercury, the Winged Messenger
4. Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity

Composed: 1914-17

First Performed: 29 September 1918, London, Queen's Hall, cond. Adrian Boult (private), 15 November 1920, Queen's Hall, London Symphony Orchestra, cond. Albert Coates

**Earth:** Stevens & Pound with Force of Nature, orchestrated by Ian Gardiner (world premiere)

It was astrology – ‘my private vice’, as he called it – that first set Holst’s mind working in terms of an orchestral suite based on the then-known planets. ‘It grew in my mind slowly’, Holst recalled, ‘like a baby in a mother’s womb’. Composing *The Planets* was slowed down by his demanding duties as a teacher and by worsening neuritis in his right arm. But something had clearly gripped him beyond the symbolism of the horoscope. A mystic from early youth, Holst studied Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Gnostic scriptures. It all confirmed for him that ‘everything in this world ... is just one big miracle. Or rather, the universe itself is one.’ When *The Planets* was first heard, a few voices were raised against Holst’s audacious musical innovations, but most recognised that something hugely significant, and not just for British music, had been born.

*The Planets* begins with a massive bombshell. Mars, the Bringer of War is one of the most terrifying portrayals of modern industrialised warfare in music. Mars is a march, but the orchestral colouring is harsh and brutally powerful, while the rhythm is five beats to a bar – what human or animal being marches in five-time? Venus then offers maximum contrast – here peace, not love, as in ancient Roman mythology, though there are suggestions of erotic longing in the unusually romantic middle section. Mercury is a scurrying, nimble symphonic scherzo – truly ‘mercurial’ – with more than a hint of English folksong in its climatic middle section. Jupiter embodies the adjective ‘Jovial’. In the words of Holst’s astrological table, it stands for ‘abundance of life and vitality’, and it’s packed with good tunes, including one which became popular as the nationalist hymn ‘I Vow to Thee, My Country’ – to the embarrassment of its passionately socialist creator. The ending is roof-raising!

For this performance, Stevens & Pound have composed an extra ‘Earth’ movement, assisted by the environmental youth organisation Force of Nature, blending classical orchestral sounds with folk styles from across the world. As a pioneering collector of folk music Holst would no doubt have approved of the folk element, and as a profound admirer of nature, well aware of humanity’s destructive powers, he would surely have endorsed the environmental message too.

