

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra July 4 complementary content

### **Andrew Manze**

Since 2018, [Andrew Manze](#) has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. A great favourite of Philharmonic audiences, he made his debut with the Orchestra over 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 from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles and is widely celebrated as one of the most stimulating and inspirational conductors of his generation.

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. As a violinist, he has released an astonishing variety of recordings, many of them award-winning.

He was Chief Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie from 2014-2023, and last September he took up his role as Principal Guest Conductor of the [Scottish Chamber Orchestra](#).

### **Jess Dandy**

Cumbrian-born [Jess Dandy](#) is widely regarded as the foremost British contralto of her generation and has been praised for her velvety plangent timbre, and her artistic remarkable immediacy.

She studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Trinity College, Cambridge, and trained at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where she is now a Fellow.

In the current 2025/26 season, [Dandy](#) has made house debuts at the Salzburg Easter Festival as Floßhilde in *Das Rheingold*, at the Bayerische Staatsoper as Lady Toodle in *Die Englische Katze*, and she has just appeared in *Giulio Cesare* at The Grange Festival. On the concert platform, she has performed *The Dream of Gerontius* with the CBSO, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Handel's *Messiah* with the Orchestra of the Age of

Enlightenment, the Irish Baroque Orchestra and the Tampere Philharmonic.

Other recent highlights include her return to the BBC Proms for Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*, Thomas Adès's *Totentanz* with the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with the Bergen Philharmonic, Mahler's *Symphony No.3* with the BBC Philharmonic, Beethoven's *Symphony No.9* with the Boston Symphony and Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra among others.

Recent recital highlights include her return to the Oxford International Song Festival with Keval Shah for the programme *Eternity in an Hour*, a recital at Wigmore Hall with Dylan Perez, and a performance at the University of York with Ben Goldscheider, Fenella Humphreys, and Martin Roscoe, among others.

In 2021, Dandy was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the category of Young Artist.

She is a multi-faceted artist with a keen interest in ecology, body psychology and spirituality, and is the co-founder with Joanna Harries of [SongPath](#), a mental health initiative creating musical walking trails in nature for better mental health. With composer Alex Mills, she developed the Music & Being Collective, an open laboratory space exploring music and our sense of self through interdisciplinary dialogue.

### **Nicky Spence**

Winner of the BBC Musician Magazine Personality of the Year 2022, opera singer [Nicky Spence](#) is an artist and broadcaster of great integrity and one of Scotland's proudest sons.

Spence was made an OBE in the King's Birthday Honours in 2023 for services to music and received the Singer Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2024. A force for good in the classical musical world, he was recently made a fellow of his alma mater, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, which has also now launched a scholarship in his name with the principal aim of easing the path into high-level training for singers from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Spence went to school in Dumfries and Galloway before receiving a scholarship to the Guildhall. During training he won a record contract with Decca before taking a place at the National Opera Studio and latterly a

position at the English National Opera as one of its inaugural Harewood Artists.

He is prized for his portrayal of Janáček roles having recently received the Janáček Memorial medal by the Czech Prime Minister in Brno for his contribution to Janáček's music legacy. In 2020, he won both the BBC Music Magazine Vocal Award and Gramophone's Solo Vocal Award for his critically acclaimed recording of Janáček's vocal work *The Diary of One who Disappeared* with Julius Drake.

More recently he won the same double accolade for his recording in the title role in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Gabrieli Consort. The tenor is a regular featured recitalist at the Wigmore Hall, London though he can mostly be found on the international stages of Opera de Paris, Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Recent operatic successes include title roles in *Peter Grimes* at the WNO; *The Excurisons of Mr Brouček* at Brno Janáček Festival and a return to Glyndebourne Festival and ROH to sing Boris in *Katya Kabanova* and Laca in *Jenůfa* respectively.

Appearances also include important role debuts, as Hauptmann in *Wozzeck* with Sir Simon Rattle in Munich, Finn/Bajan *Ruslan and Lyudmila* at the Hamburg Staatsoper, a world premiere work for the Philadelphia Opera, a return to Opera de Paris in *Satyagraha* - and *Balls*, an opera by Laura Karpman conducted by Marin Alsop at the Royal Festival Hall. Spence is using his space to bring more people to classical music than ever before, presenting an acclaimed run of TV programmes [Anyone can sing](#) and *Sing when you're winning* (Sky Arts) as well as contributing regularly to print and broadcasting both on radio and television.

He is past president of the Independent Society of Musicians, an official Ambassador for charity Help Musicians UK, on the sounding board at London's National Opera Studio and patron for the Grasmere Song at Ambleside. He also gives masterclasses Internationally and is a visiting professor at both the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music.

### **James Platt**

Lancastrian bass [James Platt](#) was educated at Chetham's School of Music and went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music and the Opera Course of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He was a

member of the Jette Parker Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden from 2014–2016.

This season he made his house and role debut at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl as Titirel in *Parsifal*. Other recent engagements include Swallow in a new production of *Peter Grimes* for the Dutch National Opera, *The Creation* with La Nuova Musica under David Bates, and *Messiah* with the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Matthew Halls.

A regular guest at major international houses, Platt has appeared as Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Il Re (*Aida*) at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) in new productions at both Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Grange Festival; and Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*) at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

Other operatic roles have included Crespel (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*), Basilio (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Il Commendatore (*Don Giovanni*), Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Ortel (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), and First Soldier (*Salome*), with appearances spanning houses such as Deutsche Oper Berlin, Welsh National Opera, Teatro alla Scala Milan, Dutch National Opera and Opéra de Lille.

Notable concert appearances include Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra/Edward Gardner at the BBC Proms, Zacharie (*Le prophète*) with the LSO/Sir Mark Elder at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and Hunding (*Die Walküre*) with the Philharmonie Zuidnederland/Hartmut Haenchen.

Further highlights include Handel's *Messiah* with the Hallé/Christian Curnyn, Verdi's *Requiem* with the Orchestre National de Lyon/Leonard Slatkin, Dvořák's *Requiem* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra/Jiří Bělohlávek, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* at the BBC Proms with the BBC Singers/David Hill and Mahler's *Symphony No. 8* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vasily Petrenko.

Platt was both a finalist in the GSMD's Gold Medal Competition and was awarded the Silver Medal by the Worshipful Company of Musicians. He also won the Richard Van Allan Prize and the Independent Opera Scholarship.

He combines a busy international career with a [thriving private teaching studio](#) and is currently writing a PhD in voice science.

## **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. [The Choir](#) added 'royal' to its title in 1990. The Choir is led by Matthew Hamilton, who was appointed as Director of Choirs and Singing in October 2023. Under the direction of Matthew, the Choir boasts an impressive schedule of concerts every season. In recent years, the Choir has performed Brahms' *A German Requiem*, Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, Mahler's *Symphony No.3*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* and alongside annual performances at the Spirit of Christmas and Handel's *Messiah*.

Although maintaining an amateur status, the Choir strives for high professional standards which has led to frequent recordings and broadcasts. The Choir's 2024/25 performances of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* were broadcast on *BBC Radio 3* as part of their *BBC Radio 3 in Concert* series.

## **Sir Edward Elgar**

The most important English composer since Purcell, [Sir Edward Elgar](#) was born at Lower Broadheath, a small village just outside Worcester, on June 2, 1857 – the middle child of seven children.

Elgar's father William was a piano tuner who ran a music shop in the city's High Street. Yet although the family would 'live above the shop' as the young Edward grew up - influenced by his mother Ann, a farmer's daughter from the Forest of Dean, he always retained a love of the rolling English countryside, particularly the nearby Malvern Hills which he captured, famously, in his music.

While he had piano and violin lessons as a child, Elgar never had any formal musical training. He taught himself to compose, and his early career was spent as a freelance musician and as a violin and music teacher at the Worcester High School for Girls (a job he reputedly detested). He was also bandmaster at the Worcester City and County Pauper Lunatic Asylum at Powick.

He was associated with the [Three Choirs Festival](#) for more than half-a-century, from the age of 24, when he played second violin in the orchestra, to a year before he died. As a boy, he had attended concerts and his father and uncle had performed in the festival themselves. Elgar's earliest compositions included a *Gloria*, written while still a teenager, *Mass for Choir and Organ* and *Romance for Violin and Piano*.

His 1888 work *Salut d'Amour* was written as an engagement gift for his future wife (Caroline) Alice, while the 1892 *Serenade for Strings* was based on a melody he had actually written much earlier in his life.

His most famous and enduring works date from the mid-1890s onwards, including the [\*Enigma Variations\*](#) – premiered in London in June 1899 with Hans Richter conducting, *Dream of Gerontius* (1900), his *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1* (1901), *Symphony No. 1* (1908), *Violin Concerto* (1909-10), and his 1919 masterpiece the *Cello Concerto*.

Elgar was knighted in 1904, and the following year was made a Freeman of Worcester and became the first Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham. He received the Order of Merit in 1911, was made a KVCO in 1928 and in 1931 was given a baronetcy, taking the title Lord Elgar of Broadheath. From 1924-34 he was [\*Master of the King's Musick\*](#). Elgar died in Worcester on February 23, 1934. He was buried in the churchyard at St Wulstan's RC Church in Little Malvern.

**Did you know? When Elgar's song cycle *Sea Pictures* was premiered at the Norwich Festival in 1899, with its composer conducting, the statuesque 6ft 2in English contralto Clara Butt appeared dressed as a mermaid.**

## About the Music

### Edward Elgar (1857-1934): The Dream of Gerontius

Composed: 1899-1900

First Performed: 3 October 1900, Birmingham Town Hall, cond. Hans Richter

Today, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* is a national monument, but at its first performance it was thought by some to be outlandishly modern, while its subject matter was viewed in other quarters with suspicion verging on paranoia. The text of *The Dream of Gerontius* - by the English Roman Catholic convert, Cardinal John Henry Newman - is full of doctrine which for many Protestants would be dangerous heresy. When *Gerontius* was proposed at the 1902 Three Choirs Festival, there were objections from several quarters (including the Bishop of Worcester!), and performance in the Cathedral was only permitted once the text had been purged of 'popish' elements – references to Purgatory,

prayers to saints, and of course anything that hinted at the 'cult' of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As to the music, Elgar was a Wagnerian; and for many English concertgoers in 1900, Wagner was still very challenging – 'modern'. After seeing the score of Part One, Elgar's close friend and musical confidant August Jaeger (the 'Nimrod' of the *Enigma Variations*) was also struck by the work's Wagnerian character and ambitions: 'Since *Parsifal* nothing of this mystic, religious kind of music has appeared to my knowledge that displays the same power and beauty as yours. Like Wagner you seem to grow with your greater, more difficult subject and I am now most curious *and* anxious to know how you will deal with that part of the poem where the Soul goes within the presence of the Almighty. *There* is a subject for you!' But at that very point Elgar's Wagnerian nerve temporarily failed him. Elgar fought hard against Jaeger's suggestions, but fortunately for us he eventually gave in. The end result is perhaps the most original moment in the whole score. As Gerontius goes to be 'consumed, yet quickened, by the glance of God', there is an awe-inspiring *crescendo*; then the full orchestra, with organ and four percussionists, delivers a lacerating discord - but only for a split second: Elgar marks it *fffz-p*. The effect is like a blinding flash of light, infinitesimally brief, but leaving the eyes and brain reeling. Now we understand why Gerontius cries 'Take me away' – the music has made that absolutely clear.

Elgar learnt another important lesson from Wagner. Before Wagner, operas and oratorios tended to be arranged in 'numbers': arias, duets, ensembles, choruses - all more or less detachable from the larger dramatic context. Wagner found a way of making dramatic works evolve continuously, seamlessly, like huge symphonies. Elgar achieves something very similar in *The Dream of Gerontius*. Early in Part Two, Gerontius's disembodied soul describes how 'a uniform and gentle pressure tells me that I am not self-moving but borne forward on my way.' Elgar's music conveys the sense of that 'uniform and gentle pressure' with subtle power. That process – slow but inexorable – can

be felt at the very beginning of the shadowy, anguished orchestral Prelude. This leads without a break into Gerontius's first words; 'Jesu, Maria...' Elgar's music registers movingly the dying man's wavering between hope and dread. Other voices join with him: souls on earth and in heaven, praying for his deliverance. There is an impassioned declaration of faith ('Sanctus fortis'), more choral prayers, then the moment of death: 'and I fain would sleep, the pain has wearied me'. Then the voice of the Priest sends Gerontius's newly released soul on its journey into the next world.

Then in Part Two comes the meeting with the Angel, the encounter with demons, the massed angelic hymn, and the spiritual thunderbolt when Gerontius has his split-second encounter with God. With sure dramatic instinct, Elgar reserves the most beautiful of all the melodies of *Gerontius* - the Angel's consoling 'Softly and gently' – for the very end. More than a century after *Gerontius* was almost denied entry to Worcester Cathedral, this music is now loved by Christians of many denominations, as well as by music-lovers with no particular faith. Surely even the most hardened atheist can understand the longing in Elgar's final heartfelt expression of loss and hope in the face of death: 'Farewell, but not for ever!'