

From London to St Petersburg



PROGRAMME

Thursday 19 November 2020

St George's Hanover Square

London
Firebird
Orchestra

Firebird Friends & Benefactors

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Welcome

Dear Friends, In October we organised our first orchestral concert since the UK's first lockdown in March - with a socially distanced audience and lots of safety measures.

That programme had to be changed four times since it was first scheduled around a year ago!

While making our final plans we also reschedule the concert we had to cancel in September to tonight's date in November. Since then, we find ourselves in Lockdown Two!

That means we can play but not perform to a live audience - so tonight we are doing just that. The concert will be filmed so that our supporters can enjoy watching it at home.

For the present time we are focusing on string, keyboard and percussion performances, avoiding wind, brass and singing.

We hope to balance this by increasing the involvement of wind, brass and singing in future programmes.

I hope you enjoy tonight's inspiring and contrasting repertoire - showcasing some of the wonders of string playing.

Our Young Composer's Competition is open to current students or recent graduates of any UK conservatoire or university under the age of

31 years. Candidates are invited to submit a composition of up to 10 minutes in duration to compete for a cash prize of £500 and a live performance of their work.

Tonight's performance would not have been possible without the unstinting support of our Friends & Benefactors Society.

I would like to thank each and every one of our donors who have provided support to the charity.

If you are not yet a member, do please consider joining us as your support would be extremely valuable to the orchestra - particularly in these challenging times. Just join online by visiting our website at www.LondonFirebird.com.

Details of the rest of the concerts of the season are viewable there too. It is also now possible to send a one-off donation via the site too.

We very much hope to see you again soon! Meanwhile on behalf of everyone involved with the orchestra, may I offer you our very best wishes for Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous year in 2020!

Kindest regards,
Marc Corbett-Weaver
Artistic Director & Chief Executive

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

The Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis is work for string orchestra composed and first performed at a festival in Gloucester Cathedral in 1910.

Its British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams was then aged 37 and had yet to achieve fame. Gloucester Cathedral's organist described the piece as a "queer, mad work by an odd fellow from Chelsea".

The work is based on a melody by the Elizabethan English composer Thomas Tallis, which Williams had discovered when he was working on a commission to compile the 1906 edition of the English Hymnal. Tallis wrote it in 1567 as a hymn melody for the Archbishop of Canterbury. The words to which it were set, from Psalm 2:1-2, were:

*"Why fumeth in fight the Gentile's
spite, in fury raging stout?
Why taketh in hand the people
fond, vain things to bring about?
The Kings arise, the Lords devise,
in counsels met thereto,
against the Lord with false accord,
against His Christ they go."*

Williams was agnostic himself but his inspiration was often at its highest when composing on religious themes or in writing church music. The historical connection with the Renaissance and Elizabethan age was also significant.



The Fantasia was written in an age of musical antiquarianism, in which long-forgotten gems of early English music were being exhumed. This fed into a type of nostalgia combined with a patriotic optimism: a sense of drawing on the past in order to pave the way for a better future.

A reviewer for The Times wrote of the piece following its premiere:

"One is living in two centuries at once ... It cannot be assigned to a time or school but it is full of the visions which have haunted the seers of all times."

In structure the Fantasia is based on the Elizabethan form of a 'fantasy', a composition based on the style of improvisation, focusing on a central musical idea, with very flexible structure.

The Tallis theme is played intact just three times throughout the work, appearing first after the dream-like opening chords. The rest consists of elaborate variations the melody's constituent motives or fragments.

Arcangelo Corelli (1653 - 1713)

Concerto grosso in D major, Op. 6, No. 4 (Corelli)

i Adagio - Allegro

ii Adagio

iii Vivace

iv Allegro - Allegro

Arcangelo Corelli published a set of Twelve Concerti Grossi, Opus 6, in 1714. This is the fourth concerto in that set.

They were written for his own concerts, with Corelli playing in the concertino. A concerto grosso is a Baroque form that involves a dialogue between a small group of soloists and the rest of the orchestra.

A joyful energy pervades the concerto. A majestic opening sets a festive tone. The ensuing a fiery allegro has a rich contrapuntal texture.

The adagio slow movement, with its gently drooping melody, offers a lyrical contrast to the pomp of the piece's opening. Corelli expands the concluding fast section into two movements, both of which are marked by transparent textures and a prevailing feeling of lightness.

An elegant melody unfolds over a propulsive bass line in the vivace, and the final allegro is infused with the spirit of dance.



Portrait by Hugh Howard (1697)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

St Paul's Suite, Op 29, No 2



i Jig: Vivace

ii Ostinato: Presto

iii Intermezzo: Andantes con moto

iv Finale (The Dargason): Allegro

Gustav Holst was employed by St Paul's Girls' School in Hammersmith, from 1905 to 1934, as its head music master.

In 1912, a new music wing of the school was opened, and Holst spent time in its rooms composing. The St Paul's Suite was the first work that he wrote there, hence its name.

Arranged for a string orchestra, Holst also wrote extra parts for when a full orchestra was playing at the school.

Like many contemporary English composers, Holst took inspiration from traditional British folk songs, and this influence is prominent in this Suite.

The first movement is in the form of a jig which features a lively musical conversation between two melodies. The second movement continues with the fast pace, with the second violins playing the opening theme. This theme is passed around the orchestra until a solo viola interrupts.

In the third movement, a quartet of soloists come to the forefront. It starts with a solo violin and viola, playing a duet, on top of pizzicato chords from the orchestra. Holst initially lulls the listener into a false sense of security, as the beginning of the movement is in the style of a typical slow movement of a suite. But there is increasing energy and dynamics as the movement develops.

The final movement features a melody in the style of a dargason – a traditional English country dance. The theme is passed around the whole orchestra. Later, Holst introduces an arrangement of Greensleeves, which the lower strings lead. The two melodies are blended together for the ending of the Suite.



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Serenade for Strings in C major, Op 48

*i Pezzo in forma di sonatina: Andante
non troppo Allegro moderato*

ii Valse: Moderato — Tempo di valse

iii Élégie: Larghetto elegiaco

*iv Finale (Tema russo): Andante —
Allegro con spirito*

Tchaikovsky had rediscovered Mozart's Magic Flute in the summer of 1880. He said that the Serenade, written shortly after, was inspired by Mozart's graceful style, in particular in the elegant first movement, though the music is very original and not mere Mozart imitation.

The second movement, a waltz, is a popular piece in its own right and contains one of the

composer's best-loved melodies.

The deeply felt third movement elegy begins with the same ascending scale that launched the waltz tune.

The finale draws on two folk songs, one featuring in the introduction, and the other as the main theme in the allegro.

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Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Arcangelo Corelli (1653 - 1713)

Concerto grosso in D major, Op. 6, No. 4 (Corelli)

i Adagio - Allegro

ii Adagio

iii Vivace

iv Allegro - Allegro

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

St Paul's Suite, Op 29, No 2

Jig: Vivace

ii Ostinato: Presto

iii Intermezzo: Andantes con moto

iv Finale (The Dargason): Allegro

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Serenade for Strings in C major, Op 48

i Pezzo in forma di sonatina: Andante non troppo — Allegro moderato

ii Valse: Moderato — Tempo di valse

iii Élégie: Larghetto elegiaco

iv Finale (Tema russo): Andante — Allegro con spirito

Michael Thrift conductor

Michael Thrift

In 2020 Australian-British conductor Michael Thrift continues his long-standing relationship with the London Firebird Orchestra, having conducted them during the past several seasons. In addition to tonight's concert, Michael will lead two concerts later in the season, as well as workshops with the University of Middlesex, and work with the winner of Firebird's Young Composer Award.

In addition to his symphony work, Michael is a fervent conductor of opera. In 2014 he joined the team at Fulham Opera for Verdi's *Falstaff*, returning to lead Puccini's *Il Tabarro* in 2015. Since then, he has conducted the revival of *Falstaff*, as well as new productions of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo*, and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. This year Michael will lead a new Production of Strauss' seldom-performed *Die Ägyptische Helena* with Fulham. For Ormond Opera, he has conducted Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Bizet's *Carmen*.

In 2017, Michael conducted several works at the Blue Danube Opera Conducting Competition at the Rouse State Theatre, Bulgaria, leading the company's forces in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* and Saint-Saens *Samson et Delilah*. Elsewhere, Michael has lead productions of Wagner's *Parsifal*, as well as performances of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. He will close 2020 with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

Educated in Sydney, Michael undertook studies in composition at Sydney University, alongside conducting. Notable achievements



include winning the Young Composer of the Year Award in 2001 (ASME) and performances by the Adelaide Symphony and the Sydney University Symphony Orchestra. A passionate advocate for new music, he is an active part of the London new music scene. In 2013, he helped to inaugurate the Composer's Academy at the Cheltenham Festival and has worked with the Dr. K Sextet in both Cheltenham and London. He returns to work with composition students from the University of Middlesex after successful collaborations with them and LFO in 2018 and 2019

An unabashed love of sci-fi literature provides escapism. Michael regularly lives a vicarious, alternative existence through the Australia cricket team, though his duties to music inevitably snap him back into reality.

Anna Blackmur

Anna Blackmur studied as a Royal College of Music scholar under Maciej Rakowski, completing her BMus with first class honours (2010) and her Masters in Performance with Distinction (2012).

In 2015, Anna was appointed Section Principal Second Violin with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, having previously appeared as Assistant Concertmaster with the orchestra.

She has also appeared as guest principal with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera and principal or co-principal with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields (with whom she has toured extensively, directed by Joshua Bell, Sir Neville Marriner and Murray Perahia), and Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Anna is in constant demand as a recording artist, playing on multiple film and television sessions.

She is also in high demand as a coach/mentor and chamber musician, playing



with, amongst others, the Covent Garden Soloists and Aronowitz Ensemble.

As an artist in residence, she has attended numerous international festivals including the BBC Proms, the Saronic and Aims Festivals.

Concert Programme 2021



From the New World

Sunday 21 February 2021

Join the London Firebird Orchestra with pianist Marc Corbett-Weaver and conductor George Jackson for this concert in Oxford featuring Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 in E minor; From the New World.



B Minor With Love

Thursday 10 June 2021

This concert will feature Dvorak Cello Concerto in B minor, the world premiere of new work from the winner of the Firebird Young plus Tchaikovsky's Symphony no. 6 in B minor.



Northern Lights

Thursday 23 September 2021

Music by Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Sibelius are on the programme for this concert conducted by George Jackson and featuring talented violinist Yury Revich.

London Firebird Orchestra

Conductor

Michael Thrift

Leader

Anna Blackmur

Violin I

Ben Paulden

(Sponsored by Michael & Helen Brown)

Victoria Marsh

Olivia Ziani

Melissa Hunter

Bella Fleming

Violin II

Soh-Yon Kim

(Sponsored by Anatoly Savin)

Claire Edwards

Adriana Cristea

Iona Allen

Sherry Shen

Viola

Tetsummi Nagata

Anastasia Sofina

Vanessa Hristova

Morven Graham

Caterina Silva

Cello

Charlotte Kaslin

(Sponsored by Philip & Suzy Rowley)

Ruth Hallows

(Sponsored by Stephen & Susan Yarnold)

Samuel Ng

Lavinia Rae

Bass

Owen Nicolaou

(Sponsored by David & Eillis Baty)

Daniel Tancredi

The London Firebird Orchestra would like to acknowledge the very generous support of Chair Benefactors not listed above, who have sponsored woodwind and brass chairs not included in tonight's performance. Their support is invaluable to the orchestra.

A complete list of Friends & Benefactors can be found on page 2 of this programme.



London Firebird Orchestra is an orchestra of young musicians comprising talented orchestral players who are making the journey from study into the profession. Through Firebird's annual season of concerts, players perform core repertoire at central London concert venues, while collaborating with renowned soloists, composers and conductors of the younger generation. By providing this experience, Firebird offers a helpful platform at the crucial early stages of professional life.

The orchestra has collaborated with many renowned soloists, including Mathieu van Bellen, Thomas Gould, Aleksei Kiseliov, James Meldrum, Jennifer Pike, Yury Revich, Leonard Schreiber and Raphael Wallfisch. Each Season, Firebird showcases a small number of prize-winning conductors of the younger generation who conduct the concerts.

The orchestra also organises an annual composition competition for young composers, with a cash prize and live performance for the composer of the winning work.

Outreach is an important part of Firebird's mission. Since 2013, the orchestra has held a residency at Middlesex University, involving large-scale concerts, conducting and composition workshops, ensemble and dance performances. The 2018/19 season saw the launch of a new outreach project for the orchestra "Firebird for Schools" – a tailor-made children's concert for London schoolchildren.

London Firebird Orchestra operates as a registered charity, governed by a Board of Trustees. The orchestra is supported by Dame Judi Dench as Patron, the Firebird Friends & Benefactors Society and a series of generous sponsors.



SUPPORT US, BECOME A FRIEND

At the heart of our orchestra is the Firebird Friends & Benefactors Society. Launched at the orchestra's inception in 2012 and now with around 100 members, the Friends & Benefactors Society is a growing association of supporters forming the core of our audience.

Members commit an annual donation to the charity, providing a vital bedrock of funding for the orchestra. Without this vital income stream, the orchestra's concerts would not be possible. Why not join to today to become part of our family and help us continue to grow?

Sign up today at www.londonfirebird.com
or speak to one of our team.