

# Appalachian Awakening



## PROGRAMME

*Thursday 24 June 2021*

*St George's Hanover Square*

London  
Firebird  
Orchestra



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## Welcome

Dear Friends, Last autumn our orchestra performed twice, in October to a socially-distanced audience and in November without a live audience. Both concerts were filmed and released online. We focused on music for strings.

Then in May we started to play again, on a similar basis, but with wind, brass and percussion.

Tonight, we are delighted to be able to present our second concert of the calendar year now that COVID restrictions are gradually easing.

We are very pleased to welcome a socially-distanced live audience. Once again the performance will be filmed, to be enjoyed by others at home.

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](http://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 look forward to announcing details of our autumn programme soon.

We very much hope to see you there.

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

Programme notes by Michael Manning Clark

*Aaron Copeland (1900 - 1990)*

# Suite from Appalachian Spring

*Original version for 13-piece chamber ensemble*

The American composer, Aaron Copland's ballet music *Appalachian Spring* is often performed as a stand-alone orchestral piece as in tonight's concert. It was composed in 1943-1944 and premiered in the Library of Congress, Washington DC, in October 1944. Copland composed the piece for the famous dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who provided the choreography and danced the lead role at the work's first performance.

The ballet depicts a wedding day celebration at a Pennsylvania farmhouse in the early 19th century. Martha Graham wrote in the programme notes for the first performance:

*'Spring was celebrated by a man and woman building a house with joy and love and prayer, by a revivalist and his followers in their shouts of exaltation, by pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land.'*

It opens at dawn with a gentle theme for the strings and wind sections. The characters are introduced: a revivalist preacher, a pioneer woman, the couple to be married, and the preacher's followers.

There is group dance, then a prayer, and then a dance by the young couple. The wedding is

then celebrated, with joyful dancing. Counterbalancing the merriment, is a more sombre undertone, conveying the couple's apprehension about their new life.

They are provided assurance, however, by their wedding guests, including older neighbours, and by the faith of the revivalist meeting.

In the concluding part, the bride and groom stand in their new home. The music finishes as serenely as it began, ending the day with the same chords with which dawn was heralded.

The music of the *Appalachian Spring* is rich in wide-open, disjunct intervals, a style that became identifiable as an 'American sound' and which because much imitated by American composers in ensuing years.

It has also been taken up in commercial music, inspiring many movie and television soundtracks, in a sentimentalised form. Copland himself appears to have been aware of the dangers of sentimentalism and nostalgia in the work, as in later years he would write:

*'I have often admonished orchestras, professional and otherwise, not to get too sweet or too sentimental with it.'*

The orchestral suite is divided into eight sections. Copland describes each scene thus:

**1. Very slowly**

Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light.

**2. Fast/Allegro**

Sudden burst of unison strings in A major arpeggios starts the action. A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene.

**3. Moderate/Moderato**

Duo for the Bride and her Intended – scene of tenderness and passion.

**4. Quite fast**

The Revivalist and his flock. Folksy feeling – suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.

**5. Still faster/Subito Allegro**

Solo dance of the Bride – presentiment of motherhood. Extremes of joy and fear and wonder.

**6. Very slowly (as at first)**

Transition scene to music reminiscent of the introduction.

**7. Calm and flowing/Doppio Movimento**

Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme. The theme, sung by a solo clarinet, was taken from a collection of Shaker melodies compiled by Edward D. Andrews, and published under the title *The Gift to Be Simple*.



The melody borrowed and used almost literally is called *Simple Gifts*.

**8. Moderate. Coda/Moderato – Coda**

The Bride takes her place among her neighbours. At the end the couple are left "quiet and strong in their new house." Muted strings intone a hushed prayerlike chorale passage. The close is reminiscent of the opening music.

*Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 -1809)*

# Symphony no. 60 in C

## *Il Distratto*

*i Adagio – Allegro di molto*

*ii Andante*

*iii Menuetto – Trio*

*iv Presto*

*v Adagio di Lamentatione*

*vi Finale: Prestissimo*

Haydn's 60th symphony, composed in 1774, is the most overtly theatrical of all of his symphonies, and one of the best examples of his characteristic sense of humour. It unconventionally consists of six movements, taken and adapted from music that Haydn had written to accompany Jean François Regnard's comedy play *Le distrait*, the 'absent minded man'.

The music humorously depicts absent-mindedness. The first movement probably served as the overture to the play, and the forgetfulness of the play's leading character is mimicked by the violins as they lose their place continuously.

The second theme goes into a daydream before a rude awakening from the full orchestra, while the development plunges into the music of the composer's Farewell symphony as if Haydn was pretending to forget which symphony he was writing.

The second movement's colourful changes of mood and theme are often seen as depictions of the play's vivid characters.

The courtly and pompous minuet third movement is contrasted by the reappearance of the absent-minded main character in the

trio, which features an elaborately wandering, rising and falling theme played over a bagpipe-like drone. There is a dark middle section which may be a tune from Balkan folk music.

The frenetic C minor fourth movement is an East European folk-song medley, while the following movement uses a theme reminiscent of Gregorian chant interspersed with quirky little fanfares.

Soon after the start of the final movement Haydn directs the violin section to tune their bottom string one note lower to F. Everything stops to give the violins a chance to retune – again depicting dithering confusion.

The tuning put right, the movement then skips off to a brilliant finale, with French, Hungarian and Balkan folk tunes thrown into the mix.

Late in life, after the Austrian Empress expressed a wish to hear the symphony again, Haydn dismissed it as "den alten Schmarrn", – that 'old tosh'. Nevertheless, others have looked on it more favourably than the modest composer himself. *Il Distratto* was a runaway success at the time, and it has aged well.

The conductor Kenneth Woods has noted how forward-looking and modern the symphony is:

*'Haydn uses most of the 20th-century 'isms' in this piece—surrealism, absurdism, modernism, poly-stylism, and hops effortlessly between tightly integrated symphonic argument and rapid-fire cinematic jump-cutting. This is Haydn at his absolute boldest—he undermines every expectation, and re-examines every possible assumption about music.'*





*The Joseph Haydn bust in Philadelphia*

## PROGRAMME

# Appalacian Awakening

Thursday 24 June 2021  
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### **Aaron Copland (1900-1990)**

Suite from Appalachian Spring  
*Original version for 13 piece chamber ensemble*

### **Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)**

Symphony no. 60 in C *Il Distratto*  
i Adagio – Allegro di molto  
ii Andante  
iii Menuetto – Trio  
iv Presto  
v Adagio di Lamentazione  
vi Finale: Prestissimo

**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.

# Samantha Wickramasinghe

Samantha Wickramasinghe arrived in the UK in 2000 from her native Australia after winning a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music.



She studied with Lydia Mordkovitch, former assistant of David Oistrakh. She has since gone on to work with almost all of the country's major orchestras, and today is a regular guest of the London Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, amongst others.

She has worked under the baton of many great conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Valery Gergiev, Sir Colin Davis and Sir John Elliot Gardiner.

A big opera fan, Samantha has had the good fortune to work with the likes of Bryn Terfel,

Jonas Kauffman, Placido Domingo, Joyce Didonato and Angela Gheorghiu at the Royal Opera House, exploring the depths of monumental works such as *The Ring Cycle* and many Strauss and Mozart operas.

She has been the recipient of awards from the Park Lane Group, Royal Overseas League, Musician's Benevolent Fund and Tunnell Trust.

As a chamber musician she has appeared at the Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room and toured widely with the LSO and BBC orchestras.

Samantha has recorded for USK, NMC, UMC and LSO Live labels including recording extensively for some of the later Harry Potter films.

She enjoys a wide variety of music, and whilst her first love is classical music, she has appeared alongside Elton John, Rod Stewart, Ed Sheeran and Paloma Faith; from big arenas such as the O2 to Abbey Road and Pinewood Studios to a stage in a sold out club in Ibiza!

A passionate teacher, she holds a position at Wycombe Abbey School, and also runs a busy private teaching practice.

Educational outreach work as a solo, chamber and orchestral musician is a huge priority, and she has taken part in schemes from the furthest reaches of Scotland to the East End of London, coaching all ages from beginner children to young professionals out of music college at the beginning of their careers.

Samantha plays on a 1746 Carcassi violin, purchased with the generous support of the Tillett Trust.

# Concert programme 2021

*Watch these concerts online at [londonfirebird.com](http://londonfirebird.com)*



## From London to St Petersburg

This concert recorded live in September 2020 features the following programme:

Corelli Concerto Grosso op. 6 no. 4  
Holst St Paul's Suite in C, Op. 29 no. 2  
Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings in C, Op. 48



## String Fling

This concert recorded live in October 2020 features the following programme:

Vaughan Williams Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus  
Elgar Serenade for Strings, Op. 20  
Mahler Adagietto (from Symphony no. 5)  
Grieg Holberg Suite, Op. 40



## Welcome the Spring

This concert was recorded live in May 2021 and features the following programme:

Frederick Delius On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring  
Richard Wagner Siegfried Idyll WWV 103  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Symphony no. 36 in C, K.426

# London Firebird Orchestra

## **Conductor**

Michael Thrift

## **Leader**

Samantha Wickramasinghe

## **Violin I**

Juliet Lee

*(Sponsored by Michael & Helen Brown)*

Ben Paulden

*(Sponsored by Jenny Jones)*

Melissa Hutter

Tayfun Bomboz

## **Violin II**

Victoria Marsh

*(Sponsored by Anatoly Savin)*

Isabella Fleming

Emma Curtis

Thibault Pesnel

## **Viola**

Tetsuumi Nagata

Anastasia Sofina

Vanessa Hristova

## **Cello**

Charlotte Kaslin

*(Sponsored by Philip & Suzy Rowley)*

Ruth Hallows

*(Sponsored by Stephen & Susan Yarnold)*

Elia Benhamou

*(Sponsored by Jarrod Henderson & Sue Sinclair)*

## **Bass**

Owen Nicolaou

*(Sponsored by David & Ellis Baty)*

## **Flute**

Camilla Marchant

## **Oboe**

Izy Cheesman

*(Sponsored by Trevor & Elizabeth Gore)*

Olivia Fraser

## **Clarinet**

Nelson Sinclair-Strong

*(Sponsored by Ken Watters & Robin Wilkinson)*

## **Bassoon**

Antonia Lazenby

## **Horn**

Helena Jacklin

*(Sponsored by Rory Graham)*

Lizzi Tocknell

## **Trumpet**

Louis Barclay

*(Sponsored by Professor Thomas Hale &*

*Dr Sam Webster)*

Lewis West

## **Timpani**

Lewis Blee

## **Piano**

Fionnuala Ward

*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 today to become part of our family and help us continue to grow?

Sign up today at [www.londonfirebird.com](http://www.londonfirebird.com)  
or speak to one of our team.