

An illustration of a young boy with black hair, wearing a dark vest over a grey shirt and dark shorts, looking shocked with his hands to his face. In the background, a large grey shark with sharp teeth is breathing fire. The scene is set in a forest with green trees and a bright yellow sun. A small house with a red roof is visible in the distance.

London
Firebird
Orchestra

Firebird for Schools

PROGRAMME

Tuesday 12 May 2026

St George's Hanover Square

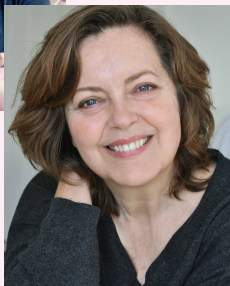


Hello boys and girls!

Welcome to 'Firebird for Schools' - a special concert for schoolchildren presented by the London Firebird Orchestra here at St George's Church in Hanover Square! We are delighted to have you with us today for an afternoon of magical orchestral music. We've got an exciting programme in store designed to help you enjoy hearing a full orchestra play live. So sit back, relax and enjoy the show!

Marc Corbett-Weaver

Artistic Director
London Firebird Orchestra



Programme

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Overture to The Marriage of Figaro K.492

Sergei Prokofiev

Peter and the Wolf, Op.67

Michael Thrift *Conductor*

Greta Scacchi *Celebrity Narrator*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Overture to The Marriage of Figaro K.492

The overture is played at the beginning of Mozart's opera, the Marriage of Figaro, before the curtain rises.

It prepares the audience for the story that is to follow, which is a light-hearted comedy but with some serious parts.

The character of this music reflects the fast pace and funny antics of the characters in the story of the opera.

The music begins with a whispered pianissimo section – meaning very quiet.

This is followed by a loud and grand musical theme.

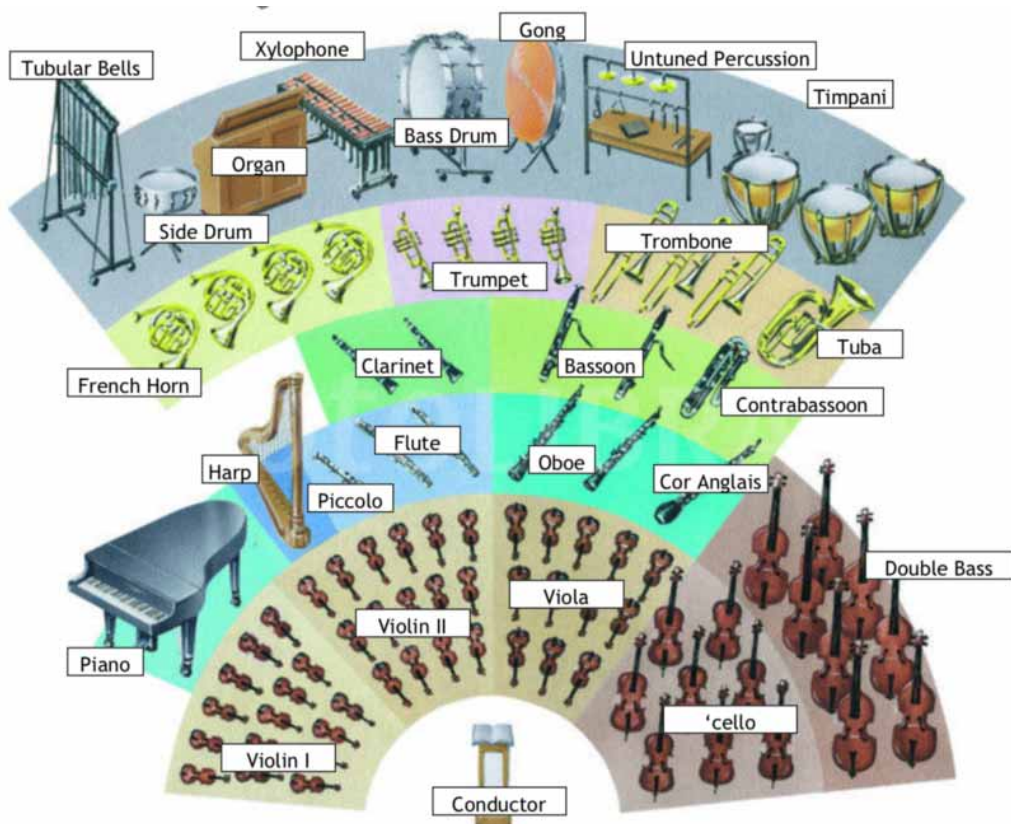
The music then develops into a series of contrasts between louder and quieter themes.

Notice how the music, quite is played fast, creates a sense of humour, fun and anticipation, along with whispered plots and secrecy.



Introducing the orchestra

Here is a picture showing all the instruments in a full size symphony orchestra. Have a close look at the instruments in this afternoon's concert and see how many you can spot:



And here are all the musicians playing in this afternoon's concert.
See how many you can spot!

Conductor

Michael Thrift

Celebrity Narrator

Greta Scacchi

Leader

Calyssa Davidson

Violin I

Jessica Meakin (*Sponsored by Michael & Helen Brown*)
Kiana Garvey (*Sponsored by Dr David Daniels & The Late Mrs P M Daniels MBE*)
Victor Caparnagiu (*Sponsored by Michael Manning Clark*)

Violin II

Victoria Marsh (*Sponsored by Anatoly Savin*)
Ana-Lavinia Vlad
Qintong Zhou
Wilmien Janse van Rensburg

Viola

Cameron Howe
Athalie Armon-Jones
Danya Rushton

Cello

Daniel Yiu (*Sponsored by Philip & Suzy Rowley*)
Paula Skulte (*Sponsored in Memory of Herc & Oeschka Hefer*)

Bass

Adam Churchyard (*Sponsored by David & Ellis Baty*)

Flute

Nika Pinter

Oboe

Polly Bartlett

Clarinet

Nelson Sinclair-Strong (*Sponsored by Ken Watters & Robin Wilkinson*)

Bassoon

Hugh Woolley

Horn

Lucas Boardman (*Sponsored by Amanda Clack*)
Amelia Lawson
Jacob Moorhouse

Trumpet

Isaac Holt (*Sponsored by Professor Thomas Hale & Dr Sam Webster*)

Trombone

George Winter

Timpani

Charlie Hodge

Percussion

Tobias Engelbrektsson

Stage Manager

Francesca Padovani

London Firebird would like to acknowledge the complete set of Chair Benefactors, including those not listed above as follows:

Jenny Jones (*First Violin*)
Luke & Liza Johnson (*Cello*)



Sergei Prokofiev

Peter and the Wolf, Op.67

The Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev wrote this music as a “symphonic fairy tale for children”. The narrator tells a story, while the orchestra illustrates it.

Peter lives in his grandfather’s house in a forest clearing. One day, Peter goes out into the clearing, and leaves the garden gate open. The duck that lives in the garden walks through the gate, to go for a swim in a nearby pond. The duck starts arguing with a little bird, about which is better – flying or swimming. Peter’s cat creeps up on them quietly. The bird, warned by Peter, flies to safety in a tall tree, and the duck swims safely to the middle of the pond.

Peter’s grandfather sees what is happening and is angry with Peter for being outside in the meadow alone. “Suppose a wolf came out of the forest?” – he says. “Boys like me are not afraid of wolves” – says Peter. His grandfather takes Peter back inside and locks the gate.

Soon after, a big wolf comes out of the forest. The cat runs up a tree, but the duck, who has jumped out of the pond, is caught by the wolf and swallowed up.

Peter fetches a rope and climbs over the garden wall into the tree. He asks the bird to fly around the wolf’s head to distract him, while he lowers a noose and catches the wolf by his tail. The wolf struggles to get free, but Peter ties the rope to the tree and the noose only gets tighter.

Some hunters, who have been following the wolf, come out of the forest ready to shoot him, but Peter gets them to help him take the wolf to a zoo in a victory parade that includes himself, the bird, the hunters leading the wolf, the cat, and his grandfather.

In the story’s ending, the listener is told: “If you listen very carefully, you’ll hear the duck quacking inside the wolf’s belly, because the wolf in his hurry had swallowed her alive.”

Conductor

Michael Thrift



... Michael conducted with an equally steady hand, notably poised in the dying moments of Stef Conner's *The Ruin*." – **The Guardian**

Australian-British conductor Michael Thrift works across symphonic repertoire, opera, and new music. Known for combining '... textural clarity with a strong sense of musical line...' his work reflects a balance between structural insight and expressive freedom.

Michael is Principal Guest Conductor of the London Firebird Orchestra, with whom he leads multiple projects each season. His recent work with the orchestra has included performances of Brahms' Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, a recording of Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1, a number of collaborations with emerging composers through the University of Middlesex, and tours to Oxford.

In opera, Michael's recent engagements include conducting Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the 2025 Grimeborn Festival. He previously served as Associate Conductor at Regents Opera, where his work encompassed productions of Verdi's *Falstaff*, Puccini's *Il Tabarro*, and new stagings of *Simon Boccanegra*, *Don Carlo*, and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Internationally, he has conducted at the Rousse State Theatre in Bulgaria, leading performances of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*. Other credits include Wagner's *Parsifal*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Britten's *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Originally from Sydney, Michael studied composition and conducting at the University of Sydney, later continuing his training in Vienna and Graz, where immersion in the Austro-Germanic musical tradition helped to shape his affinity for the core symphonic repertoire.

His early work as a composer included receiving the ASME Young Composer of the Year Award in 2001, with performances by ensembles including the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

He remains a committed advocate for new music, and has been involved in a range of initiatives supporting emerging composers, including helping to inaugurate the Composer's Academy at the Cheltenham Festival, and Firebird's own Emerging Composer Performances.

Away from the podium, Michael enjoys sharing in the joys of South Australian red wines (while remaining quietly sceptical of New Zealand whites), escaping into science fiction, and following the fortunes of the Australian cricket team – albeit at a distance when rehearsals and performances intervene. He lives in Manchester with his wife and two sons.

www.michaelthrift.co.uk

IG: @ConductorThrift

Celebrity Narrator

Greta Scacchi



Born in Milan, Greta spent much of her childhood in Sussex where her mother ran a ballet school. In her teens, she migrated with her family to Western Australia where she began her career in the theatre.

Soon after graduating from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, she starred in James Ivory's *Heat & Dust* - the success of which led to many lead roles in international films including in *White Mischief*, *Presumed Innocent*, *The Player*, *Jefferson in Paris* and *The Browning Version*.

For her performance in *Rasputin* opposite Alan Rickman and Ian McKellen, Greta won the Emmy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1995 and, for *Broken Trail* opposite

Robert Duvall, she was nominated by the Screen Actors Guild in 2006. More recently, she played Countess Rostova in the BBC's *War & Peace*.

Greta played Phoebe opposite Kenneth Branagh's Archie Rice in *The Entertainer* at the Garrick. Last year, she was Mrs Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* at The Orange Tree and, earlier this year, Bette Davis in *Bette & Joan* at The Park Theatre.

Greta stars opposite Bryan Brown in the popular Queensland-set, crime series *Darby & Joan*.

She has recorded various audio books and appears regularly on BBC Radio.



Leader

Calyssa Davidson



Award-winning American violinist Calyssa Davidson is a versatile artist whose wide range of interests has led her to perform throughout the world with major orchestras, bands, in musicals, and record solo violin for several feature and independent films as well as television including for the BBC.

Along with performing in renowned venues such as the Royal Albert Hall, Windsor Castle, and several theatres on the West End, this past year Davidson has toured the Netherlands, Norway, and the United States. Most recently, she was invited back to New York City to perform with Andrea Bocelli on NBC's *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

Davidson has led recording sessions at Abbey Road, Air Edel, and Angel Studios and has been featured on soundtracks for numerous feature films, video games, podcasts, trailers, adverts and pop songs including Dermot Kennedy's chart-topping 'Something to Someone'.

Davidson has recorded the solo violin score for the BBC Two documentary series *The Story of China* and wrote and recorded the solo violin scores for the BBC Two documentary *Normandy '44: The Battle Beyond D-Day* and BBC Four documentary *Shakespeare's Mother: The Secret Life of a Tudor Woman*. She can also be heard on

the *Harry & Meghan: A Royal Romance* soundtrack from the Lifetime original movie with the same title.

Davidson has also performed alongside Grammy-award winner Rick Springfield, Alfie Boe, and Rick Wakeman, and can be seen in Springfield's music video, *Christmas With You*.

Originally from California, Davidson moved to London to attend the Royal College of Music where she earned her Master's Degree in Violin Performance and Composition for Screen and Bachelor of Music Degree in Violin Performance where she was supported by an Alice Templeton Scholarship and a Robert McFadzean Whyte Award Scholarship.

Whilst at the RCM, Davidson studied with former Associate Leader of the Philharmonia Orchestra and former Co Leader of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Adrian Levine, and film and television composers Maurizio Malagnini (*Call the Midwife*, *The Paradise*) and Howard Davidson (*Death Games*, *The Battle for Malta*).

Amongst others, Davidson has also studied with world-renowned violinists Ivry Gitlis, Gilles Apap, LA Phil Concertmaster Martin Chalifour and former BBC Concert Orchestra Leader Cynthia Fleming.

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Luke & Liza Johnson *(Cello)*
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Thank you

London Firebird Orchestra would also like to thank The Hyde Park Place Estates Charity and two anonymous donors for supporting today's concert



Now celebrating its 14th Anniversary Season, the London Firebird Orchestra was founded in 2012 ` with Dame Judi Dench as Patron and Marc Corbett-Weaver as Artistic Director.

The orchestra supports extraordinary talented musicians of the younger generation who have either recently graduated or are still studying at one of the major London conservatoires, by enabling to perform in orchestral concerts and outreach projects.

The orchestra performs regularly at its main home venue St George's Hanover Square. Every two years it performs at Kings Place and SJE Arts Oxford and it also has a residency at Middlesex University. Firebird for Schools – the orchestra's tailor-made concert for school children – takes place annually. Firebird has also performed on several occasions at the Royal Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Cadogan Hall, St Paul's Covent Garden and the Bath Pump Room.

Performances have been received fantastic reviews in *The Times*, *Evening Standard*, *Classical Music Magazine*, *Musical*

Opinion Magazine, *Seen & Heard International* and BBC Radio London.

The orchestra has collaborated with many internationally-renowned soloists including Jamal Aliyev, Martin James Bartlett, Thomas Gould, George Harliono, Aleksei Kiseliov, Jennifer Pike, Yury Revich, Leonard Schreiber and Raphael Wallfisch. Each Season,

Firebird showcases a small number of prize-winning conductors of the younger generation. 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. Angela Slater is among the recent prize-winners.

Over the years, Firebird players have moved on by securing places in leading orchestras across the UK and beyond, including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the Philharmonia, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the Orchestra of Opera North among many others.



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.**