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Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Programme Notes Online

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Special
Classic FM: Celebrating 25 Years
Thursday 7 September 2017 7.30pm

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685-1759)
Zadok the Priest, HWV 258

No one could soundtrack an event like Handel. From boat parties to firework extravaganzas, the German composer successfully established himself following his move to England as the go-to guy for pomp and circumstance. *Zadok the Priest* has remained very much ‘in service’ in recent times, whether as the basis for Tony Britten’s UEFA Champions League theme, or as an inaugural fanfare for the UK’s first commercial classical radio station some 25 years ago.

Handel had conceived the anthem in 1727 for an even grander occasion: the coronation of King George II in Westminster Abbey. Though the composer’s setting would thereafter become a permanent fixture in the crowning of British monarchs, the text itself had already featured in coronations for more than seven centuries. Adapted from the biblical account given in the first chapter of 1 Kings, it references the anointing of Solomon by Zadok, first High Priest of Jerusalem’s new temple. An undercurrent of strings and woodwind softly sets the scene before blazing trumpets and timpani herald the entry of the choir, majestic sustained figures soaring above the orchestra. A gear-shift to a buoyant triple metre preludes the effervescent final section, choir and orchestra firing on all cylinders to deliver a jubilant conclusion.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)
The Young Prince and the Young Princess from Scheherazade

Rimsky-Korsakov knew a thing or two about storytelling. A glance through his oeuvre reveals an artist well-versed in setting a scene; from operas to concert overtures, the composer rarely missed an opportunity to transport his audiences to musical landscapes far and near. Relying solely on the evocative power of the orchestra, this four-movement symphonic suite, written in 1888, numbers among his most beloved works; perhaps it is no coincidence that it in turn concerns a storyteller.
Based on *The Thousand and One Nights*, the well-worn collection of Arabian folk tales, *Scheherazade* concerns its eponymous heroine, a reluctant bride to the tyrannical sultan, Shahryar. The despot presides over his own bloodthirsty tradition, marrying women only to have them executed the next day. The resourceful Scheherazade, however, manages to offset her fate; spinning a perpetual series of folk tales, she curtails each evening—in true soap-opera-style—with a cliffhanger, thus buying herself another 24 hours. The third movement of the suite finds Scheherazade in full flow, a meandering string theme evoking the love story that she is recounting. Intermittent woodwind flutterings urge the music onwards as twinkling percussion introduces a lilting waltz rhythm. A violin solo of intoxicating finesse represents the storyteller herself, inducing a flourishing climax that gives way to a wistful postlude.

**Classic FM 25th Birthday Commissions**

To celebrate Classic FM’s 25th Birthday, the UK’s largest classical music radio station has teamed up with the Royal Philharmonic Society to commission seven new works by composers who are no older than the station itself. Seven young composers, all born on or after 7 September 1992, were chosen from over 300 entries by a panel of judges including royal composer Paul Mealor and Classic FM’s composer in residence Debbie Wiseman. Each work will be premiered by Classic FM’s partner orchestras, including the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and broadcast to its 5.6 million listeners across the UK. Classic FM and the Royal Philharmonic Society gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Boltini Trust.

Two other Classic FM commissions are performed by Liverpool Philharmonic:

**Thursday 5 October, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall** Jack Pepper *Signal*
**Wednesday 11 October, St George’s Hall Concert Room** Alexia Sloane *Elegy For Aylan*

**DANI HOWARD (b.1993)**

*Argentum* world premiere

Often praised for her fresh and accessible approach to contemporary classical music, British composer Dani Howard has been heard internationally in countries including Italy, France, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Netherlands, Romania and Brazil as well as across the UK and USA. In 2015-16 she was named winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, and was invited as a composition fellow to the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, California. Recently she won 1st Prize in the Breaking The Fourth Wall 1st International Competition, and other competition successes include 3rd prize of the International Antonín Dvořák (both the 5th and 6th editions), and 10th International Chengdu Sun River Competition (China). She was finalist at the International A. Rendano (Italy), Alba Rosa Vietor (Netherlands) and ISCM World Music Days Festival (Slovenia), and winner of the Royal College of Music Concerto Competition 2015. Dani graduated from the Royal College of Music where she received a first class BMus Honours Degree. She was a Rose Williams scholar supported by the Henry Wood Trust, and studied composition under Jonathan Cole. [www.danihoward.com](http://www.danihoward.com)

The composer writes:

*Argentum* (Latin for ‘silver’) is a short, vibrant and fun, yet reflective piece centred around celebration. Not only was it commissioned by Classic FM for its silver anniversary, but it is dedicated to my two great friends Chris Oakley and Steven Christie in commemoration of their marriage earlier this year.

Any celebration is a perfect opportunity to bring people together and experience joy, and it also offers the chance to look back at the journey and reflect on the hurdles and milestones that have brought us to that moment. Almost serving as a musical soundtrack, my aim with this piece is to encompass all of the emotions that any relationship, whether personal or professional, might experience in a journey of development and discovery; thematic ideas that are introduced in isolation at the beginning begin to intertwine as the piece progresses, building into a climatic finale, offering a clear sense of happiness and pride for what has been accomplished. I would like to thank Classic FM and the Royal Philharmonic Society for this commission, and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for their kind support throughout the process.
MAX BRUCH (1838-1920)
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op.26

Vorspiel: allegro moderato / Foreword: moderately fast
Adagio / Slow
Finale: allegro energico / Finale: fast, with energy

It is hardly surprising that it was this work that emerged as the reigning champion of Classic FM’s ‘Hall of Fame’ for the first five years of the poll. Though it lasts little over 20 minutes, Bruch packs his concerto with a blend of pathos and passion that rarely ceases to thrill. And whilst the popularity of most pieces may grow and wane with time, this one has remained in favour with audiences ever since its 1868 premiere. Such success did not come easily to the German composer, however. The concerto had a lengthy gestation period, with sketches dating back to 1857 whilst Bruch was still in his teens. The work was even aired in a prototype version in 1866, only reaching its final form following an extensive collaboration with famed violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim.

Joachim became something of an ambassador for the work, later proclaiming it the “richest” and “most seductive” of the great concertos. The piece certainly offers a great deal of expressive potential for its soloist; the brooding prelude sets the scene for a mercurial opening movement, tender sincerity contrasted with tempestuous outbursts. This turbulence eventually subsides ahead of the central Adagio, the soloist gently unveiling a heartfelt theme that is gradually taken up by the full ensemble with increasing fervour as the violin becomes increasingly agitated. In the wake of an expansive climax, motoric rhythms resurface to signal a breakneck finale; an exuberant violin theme provides the launchpad for a series of full-throttle exchanges with the orchestra, inspiring a fanfare-capped conclusion.

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)
Finlandia, Op.26

“It is not intended to be sung. It is written for an orchestra. But if the world wants to sing it, it can’t be helped,” Sibelius reluctantly admitted. Even he was unable to deny the contagious character of the hymn-like tune at the heart of his tone poem. The theme swiftly became the subject of choral adaptations, most significantly in 1941 with text by poet Veikko Antero Koskenniemi in an arrangement that remains one of Finland’s most beloved patriotic songs. Such nationalistic associations were far from misplaced; the piece began life in 1899 within a musical tableau protesting press censorship imposed by the ruling Russian authorities. Developing from it a more substantial orchestral work, Sibelius initially had to placate the authorities with alternative titles, including the wry Beethovenian nod ‘Happy Feelings at the Awakening of Finnish Spring’. The fervour of the music itself, however, is unmistakable. The menacing brass chords that open the work give way to softer ruminations in the woodwind and strings before storm clouds build once more. What emerges, though, is more hopeful, cymbal-capped heralds giving way to the tranquil hymn that grows in confidence ahead of a rambunctious final blaze of fanfares.

WILLIAM WALTON (1902-1983)
Crown Imperial

The second work on tonight’s programme to be written for a British coronation is a more recent affair; Walton was approached in 1936 to produce a march for the crowning of King Edward VIII on 12 May the following year. Whilst the performance did indeed go ahead at a coronation on that date, the monarch in question had been subject to change; Edward had since abdicated and it was his younger brother that took to the throne as King George VI. Walton was presented with an opportunity to revise the piece further ahead of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II just over 16 years later. Marking a break from his frequently more veiled style, the march finds Walton on notably ceremonial form, with its construction recognised by many as a nod to Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance marches. Whilst the expansive rolling theme at the heart of the work exhibits undeniably Elgarian qualities, the dynamism of the incisive string opening and the way in which its rhythmic ‘quick march’ figures spread infectiously throughout the ensemble are redolent of Walton’s high-octane orchestral approach.
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Ave verum corpus

Though he had always been industrious, Mozart’s final year was characterised by remarkable productivity; in addition to concertos and chamber works of stunning quality, he found the time to complete two operas: The Magic Flute and La clemenza di Tito. It was in June 1791, while he was immersed in writing the first of these stage-works, that he took time out to produce this setting of the Catholic Eucharistic text for his friend Anton Stoll, church music director in the spa town of Baden, south of Vienna. Scored for choir, strings and organ, the short hymn is threaded with an exquisitely constructed theme that combines small stepwise motions with more substantial leaps. Whilst this melodic ebb and flow provides the contour of the piece, a simple but effective harmonic bed enables an emotional impact far greater than its brevity (just 46 bars) might imply.

KARL JENKINS (b.1944)
Palladio: first movement

Allegretto / Quite fast

The first movement from Palladio has undoubtedly taken on a life of its own; called upon by television producers and event organisers the world over, often as a symbol of impending drama, the piece has become familiar to millions, even if they might not all be able to recall its creator. It was in fact Karl Jenkins himself that started the work on this journey, providing his incisive motifs for a De Beers diamond commercial in 1993. Indeed, it was only after this, in 1995, that the Welsh composer developed a full three-movement suite for string orchestra, casting his initial ideas in the form of the Baroque ‘concerto grosso’ in which material is developed alternately by an ensemble and by soloists from within it. Jenkins’ inspiration was the harmony and equilibrium found in the work of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. This sense of balance is echoed in the opening Allegretto in which earthy bass punctuations are weighed against angular repetitions in the upper strings; momentum gradually builds over the course of several minutes ahead of a galloping finish.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Symphony No.6 in F, Op.68 ‘Pastoral’: first movement

Allegro ma non troppo: Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande / Fast but not too fast: Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside

Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony was not as quick to capture the popular imagination as the Fifth, alongside which it was premiered in 1808. Its somewhat stifling launch party can hardly have helped (think four unrelenting hours of radical, under-rehearsed contemporary music in an unheated theatre in mid-December). Nevertheless, the enchanting character of this piece, and its unique status within its composer’s output, has since made it a firm concert-hall favourite.

Whilst it is the only one of Beethoven’s nine symphonies to evade the standard four-movement form, it is also the only one to which he gave a subtitle: ‘Recollection of Country Life – More an Expression of Feeling than Painting’. Indeed, this is a work that seeks not always to portray aspects of the countryside directly, but more often evokes its composer’s emotional reaction to it. Although he spent much of his life in the buzzing metropolis of Vienna, Beethoven was a keen lover of the great outdoors; indeed, it was while on a medically advised summer sojourn at Heiligenstadt in 1802 that the composer first began to sketch the ‘Pastoral’. It opens with uncharacteristic delicacy, strings hesitantly tracing an arching theme; growing in confidence, they enjoin the oboes who soon set the opening movement upon its winding course. This is Beethoven at his most unreservedly upbeat, horns capping gloriously sunny textures, with even the occasional cloud in the vibrant development section failing to dampen spirits.
Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)

Polovtsian Dances

Dance of the Young Girls –
Wild Dance of the Men –
General Dance –
Dance of the Slaves –
Khan Konchak to Prince Igor –
Dance of the Boys –
Dance of the Men –
Dance of the Young Girls –
Dance of the Boys –
Dance of the Men –
General Dance

Despite the fact he had been working on it intermittently for the best part of two decades, Borodin’s only opera Prince Igor remained unfinished when he died. But then his compositional career had always been something of a gradual affair. Indeed, it was in the field of organic chemistry that Borodin principally made his name, having followed up his teenage interest in the subject with extensive study at the St Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy, eventually accepting a professorship there in 1862. His childhood love of music at no point fell by the wayside, however, and he continued to perform and write whenever possible, garnering plaudits for his orchestral pieces. Following the exploits of the 12th-century Russian prince Igor Svyatoslavich in his final unsuccessful military campaign against the neighbouring Polovtians, the subject of Borodin’s opera gave him the perfect opportunity to infuse his orchestrations with folk styles and dazzling exoticism. Nowhere is this more evident than in these colourful dances that round the second act of the opera. Meandering woodwind introduce the lyrical opening theme before a rustic accompaniment urges the orchestra onward through motivic flurries into a boisterous waltz of towering proportions. An anxious galloping episode ensues, before the return of the whirling figures helps to propel the full ensemble headlong towards a breathless finale.

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