



ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE

Tuesday 15 December 2020

English Miniatures

English Sinfonia



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Janice Graham - violin
Nick Bootiman - viola
Julia Graham - cello
Chris Hopkins - piano

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The Lark Ascending*

**Celebrating 100 years since its premiere on 15 December 1920*

Frank Bridge (1879 -1941)

Miniatures for Piano Trio (1910)

Romance

Intermezzo

Saltarello

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)

Piano Trio in E minor (1893)

Moderate - Allegro

Scherzo

Finale (con furiant)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

String Trio in G minor (1894)

Allegro Agitato

Vivace

Sir Arnold Bax (1883-1953)

Piano Quartet in One Movement (1922)

PROGRAMME NOTES

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The Lark Ascending (c.1914-1920)

For 100 years, The Lark Ascending has been a mainstay of programmes all over the world. There have been over 150 recordings from virtually every violinist of note, it has topped Classic FM's Hall of Fame nine times and yet, now on the day of its 100th birthday, its popularity seems still only to be rising. In many ways though, for all its accessibility and simple charm, it is a piece layered in juxtaposition: a paean to peace in a time of deep conflict; an organised fantasy; sophistication and craft masquerading as simplicity. These are all qualities and contradictions that still speak to us today. They are all brilliantly brought together by a unique composer who looked not only over his shoulder to Tallis and Byrd, to Shakespeare and Bunyan, but also forwards; studying with Ravel, finding a new and unique voice, and ultimately transforming the landscape of British symphonic writing.

Inspired by George Meredith's poem of the same name, with its soaring melodies and pastoral images, it is unmistakably in the folk-song-drenched language of Vaughan Williams. This directness of expression through seeming simplicity of melody and harmony undoubtedly contributes to its enduring popularity but more than that, and war-connections aside, it offers a space for reflection and meditation that is feels just as important and necessary now as ever.

The version we are playing today, with piano rather than orchestra, is the very same that was heard in the first performance by Marie Hall and Geoffrey Mendham on 15th December 1920.

Frank Bridge (1879 -1941)

Miniatures for Piano Trio (1910)

Romance

Intermezzo

Saltarello

Bridge turned out to be one of Charles Stanford's more radical students at the Royal College of Music, although that trait was only to emerge when he was in his 40s. These 'Miniatures' were written in the preceding two decades and so, while not being in any way radical, they still show his craftsmanship, gift for melody, and his affinity with string instruments.

Bridge had initially learnt violin as his primary study at the RCM, and after leaving was a viola player with a number of quartets, notably the English String Quartet. He wrote a total of nine of these 'Miniatures', divided into three equal sets, the second of which we are playing today. Interestingly, Bridge wrote the work for a violin student of his and her sister, so we have a very authentic touch to this performance!

A sad and heart felt 'Romance' is followed by a jaunty 'Intermezzo', and finally a furious 'Saltarello' dance rounds off the set, relishing in salon-style interplay (sisterly competition perhaps?) between violin and cello.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)

Piano Trio in E minor (1893)

Moderate - Allegro

Scherzo

Finale (con furiant)

With the exception of Bax, as with all the other composers in this concert Samuel Coleridge-Taylor studied under Charles Stanford at the Royal College of Music. This work was composed when he was just eighteen years old in what proved to be a prolific year as he also wrote the fine Piano Quintet, a Nonet, and a Suite for Violin and Piano.

This Piano Trio is in a sense also a miniature in all but name. Three short and driving movements keep the energy high: after a brief thoughtful, and exploratory introduction the first movement takes off unmistakably in E minor. A couple of beautiful lyrical diversions along the way, with soaring melodies for violin and cello supported by some fantastic piano writing, and eventually the movement finds its way back the first E minor theme, this time even more energised by its journey.

The second movement is a short Scherzo, with barely even time for a trio, far less a sentimental one; as a middle-movement it's high-octane stuff. Then to the finale, again with a brief introduction before exploding into dazzling interplay between the players. It is also not without brief forays into some beautiful lyricism and a reminiscence of the first movement, before a last frantic dash to the finishing line. A piece that should be heard more often, and if we have anything to do with it, will be!

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

String Trio in G minor (1894)

Allegro Agitato

Vivace

Born into a musical family, Gustavus Theodore Von Holst had initially wanted to be a pianist like his Swedish father, Adolph, but a neurological problem with his arm led to him to take up the trombone instead on which he became extremely proficient and resulted in him playing on one occasion under the baton of Richard Strauss.

Holst, along with Coleridge-Taylor, Bridge and Vaughan Williams (with whom he became a lifelong friend) studied composition at the RCM and it is here that he wrote this String Trio in G minor.

Though he was still young, the work shows great maturity nevertheless and would be worthy of its place in the string repertoire if it had one; as yet, it is still unrecorded. Despite its qualities, audiences had to wait until 1984 until the first public performance, some ninety years after its composition. An unusual structure to this piece supports its sense of experiment and discovery: a relatively short first movement gives way to a longer and more exploratory second movement, with radically different musical ideas sitting alongside each other.

Sir Arnold Bax (1883-1953)

Piano Quartet in One Movement (1922)

Interestingly or not, Bax differs from this concert's other composers in that he studied at the Royal Academy of Music. Whilst Holst, Vaughan Williams, Coleridge-Taylor and Bridge were all tutored by the very traditional Charles Stanford, Bax learnt with Frederick Corder and in part due to his comparative wealth Bax was able to freely experiment and not need to conform to certain principles of composition in order to secure paying engagements. There is something incongruous about this non-conformist figure, liberated by a survival that didn't depend on teaching or commission being not only knighted, but also made Master of the King's Musick. In a sense, of all the music in today's programme, this Quartet encapsulates a composer so apart from the Establishment; someone who can celebrate summer as keenly as he can see the coming storm. Violence sits side-by-side with woodland idylls; dark moods and glimpses of nightmarish gales open up to the world of faeries and mysticism. Here in a quartet, we can still feel a composer obsessed with sound-colour and it feels throughout like he is creating a bigger world, an almost orchestral scope from these limited forces.

Various landscapes and cultures influenced Bax, most notably Ireland with both its folksong and literature inspiring works such as his Celtic Song Cycle and orchestra tone poem 'In The Faery Hills'. In this, the final piece in the programme, whilst not so specific in location, we hear Bax creating equally vivid pictures and a compelling story; an incredible amalgam of lush, temperamental, brutal, sumptuous, delicate, charming writing, and all in all a very forward-thinking piece.

Programme Notes: © Philip Harmer & Chris Hopkins, English Sinfonia

BIOGRAPHIES



The **English Sinfonia** is one of the earliest established chamber orchestras in the UK and well-known for their expert and engaging interpretations of British music. Under the leadership of distinguished violinist Janice Graham, today's orchestra is a versatile and flexible ensemble, formed of a core group of well-established players each at the height of their career, who as individuals perform music of many genres in a variety of settings, from symphonic and chamber music, opera and ballet to commercial music and film/tv soundtracks. Spanning almost six decades, the orchestra's discography is rich in 19th and 20th century music, including both familiar and lesser-known works by Holst, Butterworth, Vaughan Williams and Bridge. With its 60th anniversary on the horizon and Chris Hopkins as its newly appointed Principal Conductor, English Sinfonia continues its commitment to explore, discover and bring to life the musical landscape of the British Isles. With a fresh focus on innovative programming and championing new and unduly neglected works, the orchestra will deliver live and recorded performances all to the exceptional musical standards it is known for.

"with a musician like Graham at its helm, it's no wonder the English Sinfonia has earned such a prominent place on the international music scene."

— The Strad

www.englishsinfonia.org.uk



Janice Graham (violin)

Janice Graham has been the Leader of English Sinfonia since 1995 and was appointed Artistic Director in 2005. Janice studied at the Purcell School and at GSMD with David Takeno. She was the Gold medal winner of the LSO/Shell competition, won the string prize of the Royal Overseas League Competition and was awarded English Speaking Union and Julius Iserlis scholarships to study at Juilliard with Glenn Dicterow. For 13 years she was Leader of the ENO orchestra and with them performed Meditation at Kenwood. Notable Opera productions include Jenufa, Rosenkavalier and Lulu. Her collaboration with Chris Hopkins at ENO led to her performing the Berg, Beethoven and Walton violin concertos with the Orchestra of the City in St James's Piccadilly. Whilst Leader of BBC National Orchestra of Wales her solo appearances on radio 3 included the Britten, Neilson and Mendelssohn concertos, Mozart Sinfonia Concertante and the Lark Ascending. As

Assistant Leader of the London Symphony Orchestra she took part in their Barbican chamber series appearing with Andre Previn and Yuri Bashmet. She has also appeared as guest leader of most of the UK's orchestras. Her solo recordings include Dochnanyi's second violin concerto (ASV) Delius first and second violin sonatas and Walton sonata (EMI) and Holst Song of the Night and double violin concerto (Naxos) She was a professor at the RCM from 1995-2010 and is currently a professor at the GSMD and a Governor of the Purcell School.



Nicholas Bootiman (viola)

Nicholas attended the Purcell School, Royal College of Music, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and the New England Conservatory where his teachers were Kim Kashkashian, Milan Skampa, Ian Jewel and Andriy Viytovych. Nicholas is frequently invited to guest lead viola sections throughout the country and abroad. As such he has appeared with Munich Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony, Aurora, and Royal Scottish National Orchestras, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Britten Sinfonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia and City of London Sinfonia. He currently plays as principal viola of Le Cercle de L'Harmonie, a Paris-based classical/romantic period instrument orchestra. Concerto performances include Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante with Zsolt-Tihamer Visontay and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and Penderecki's Viola Concerto with Boston Modern Orchestra Project. On disc he is a featured artist on a Grammy nominated recording of "Four Hymns for Tenor, Viola and Strings" by Vaughan Williams with Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Paul Daniel and Andrew Kennedy, which was also selected as Recording of the Year by John France on MusicWeb International and Album of the Week for ClassicFM. As a chamber musician, Nicholas often participates in festivals around UK and Europe, and has performed with Pinchas Zukerman, Julian Rachlin and Alexander Sitkovetsky. As conductor, Nicholas has worked as assistant to Jérémie Rhorer on opera productions at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.



Julia Graham (Cello)

Julia studied as a music scholar & prize winner at the Purcell School, Royal Academy of Music & then the Royal College of Music, learning with Dame Florence Hooton, David Strange and Steven Doane, respectively. As well as being a long-standing member of English Sinfonia, Julia Graham has been the principal cellist for Matthew Bourne's productions since 2015. She's also principal of The London Concert

Orchestra, with whom she's performed many solos, most notably the famous solo by Tan Dun from the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Chamber music is where Julia's heart lies having performed with a range of groups in many venues including The Wigmore Hall & The Purcell Room, and with artists including Alison Balsom (trumpet), Vasko Vassilev (violin) and Alexei Volodin (piano). In the 2007 Brighton Festival, Julia's performance of the Brahms cello sonatas with pianist Yoko Ono was nominated for the Best Classical Music Act. Julia's first position was with English National Opera before moving onto be the No.3 cello with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. She then enjoyed some time in the world of the West End where she was the lead cellist for many shows including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Evita* & *Miss Saigon*.



Chris Hopkins (Piano)

Equally at home on the concert stage as in the pit, conductor and pianist Chris Hopkins is engaged on a wide range of projects across many disciplines. Recently appointed principal conductor of the renowned English Sinfonia, he is also a frequent face at the London Coliseum: following from the success of his ENO debut conducting *Iolanthe*, he has since returned to conduct the *Magic Flute* and last year for the most recent revival of the legendary production of *The Mikado* ('faultlessly conducted by the excellent Chris Hopkins', *London Theatre Reviews*). Previously he has recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra, worked at the Royal Opera House and Glyndebourne Opera, with Opera de Paris, Grange Festival Opera, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Crash Ensemble, WNO, NI Opera, HGO, Opera Holland Park, Wide Open Opera, Garsington Opera, Grange Park Opera, Opera Danube, London Mozart Players, and appeared at many festivals including Aldeburgh, Presteigne, and Latitude. He has performed throughout the UK, in the US, Asia and extensively in Europe as well as live and recorded appearances on BBC 1, Classic FM and BBC Radio 2, 3 and 4.

A long-term advocate for British music, Chris was the first post-graduate from the Centre for the History of Music in Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth (CHOMBEC) before continuing his studies at the Royal Academy of Music with Leverhulme and Elton John scholarships. He has premiered works by composers including Colin Matthews, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, David Matthews, Rob Keeley, Thomas Hyde, Detlev Glanert, Gilad Hochman and the Pet Shop Boys. He continues into a twelfth season as Musical Director of Orchestra of the City. Chris was honoured in 2013 to be made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

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