

City of Sheffield Youth Orchestra
at St John's Smith Square

Thursday 29th July 2021, 7pm



ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE



Walton Cello Concerto
Matthew Barley - Cello

Interval (30 minutes)

Elgar Symphony No.1 in Ab Major, Op. 55

Andante. Nobilmente e semplice — Allegro

Allegro molto

Adagio

Lento — Allegro

William Walton - Cello Concerto (1957)

Soloist - Matthew Barley

Commissioned by the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, Walton's Cello Concerto explores the instrument and its role in a unique and interesting way. The music embraces the cello's much-loved lyrical and sonorous qualities while also often juxtaposing this against stark harmonic and rhythmic characteristics, especially in the orchestra. The result is a deeply thoughtful piece full of instrumental, harmonic and rhythmic colour in which the cello interacts with an orchestral part that endlessly gives new context to its musical activity. Re-contextualisation occurs throughout the piece on both the small scale (harmonic and melodic) and the large scale (structural). The cello's capabilities of range and tone are paired with various sections of the orchestra, creating a wide range of textures and timbres. In a sense then, the piece explores the cello's relationship to the orchestra just as much as it exists to showcase the cello itself.

Moderato

The piece opens with a theme that, if the listener does not know the piece, cannot be anticipated and yet feels entirely natural and expressive. The subtle 'ticking clock' of the orchestral accompaniment soon transforms into a commentary on, and then a conversation with the cello. This develops with harmonies which shift, expand and contract in a typically 'Walton-esque' fashion. The movement ends with a descent through the register of the cello as the reliability of the orchestra's ostinato-driven accompaniment begins to falter.

Allegro Appassionato

Ambiguous in tonality from the outset, the second movement contains expressive gestures in both the cello and orchestral parts which interact, sitting at a crossroads between monologue and dialogue. The cello motors ahead with its vivacious outpourings, mirrored and supported by the orchestra in a way in which arguably allows the music to maintain its reflective nature even at its most energetic.

Tema ed Improvisazioni (Theme and Improvisations)

The third and final movement consists of four 'improvisations' on a theme which, unusually for the final movement of a concerto, generally explore the cello at its most reflective. The second of these improvisations is for the solo cello only, substituting the standard cadenza. This is followed immediately by a sparkling orchestral tutti by means of reply. The movement ends with a reprise of the first movement's themes, here perhaps heard somewhat differently given the musical journey that has occurred since they first appeared. Is this final coda a reflection, conclusion, or perhaps an unanswered question?

Benjamin Jackson - cellist, CSYO alumnus

Edward Elgar, Symphony No.1 in Ab Major, Op. 55

Sir Edward Elgar's Symphony no. 1 in A flat major may have been premiered in December 1908, but its first breaths were drawn before the turn of the twentieth century. The idea of writing a symphony had played on Elgar's mind as early as 1898, inspired by Major-General Charles Gordon, whose campaigns in China, Egypt and Sudan (where he lost his life in service) won him widespread admiration back home. However, the plans for an 'Eroica'-like work were abandoned as Elgar could not find a commission that would allow him to write it. When the symphony began its journey onto manuscript, likely during the summer of 1907, Gordon was no longer the focus of his musings. Instead, Elgar wrote about it that "there is no programme beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity and a massive hope in the future."

A key figure in the legacy of Elgar's First Symphony is the conductor Hans Richter; in 1900 he led the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, which went poorly and nearly doomed the piece on premiere. Subsequent performances convinced the public and critics of the music's worth, but Elgar felt a great pity towards Richter, and wanted to offer him a chance to redeem himself. Richter eventually became the dedicatee for the symphony, and conducted the premiere in Manchester with the Hallé. During the preparations, Richter proclaimed "'Gentlemen, now let us rehearse the greatest symphony of modern times, written by the greatest modern composer – and not only in this country.'" Universal acclaim upon premiere backed up his evaluation. In the year after its premiere, it was performed on average once every three days, such was the clamour to hear it.

To the music then. The first movement showcases Elgar's agility across the staves, taking the opening theme in A flat major and then transitioning through a tritone modulation to D minor; whether this was meant to represent dualling aspect of Elgar's personality or merely the result of a bet that Elgar could not write in two keys at once is a source of academic debate.

The second and third movements are highly contrasting – a brisk, fearsome allegro and an iridescent, melancholy adagio – yet they share the same theme, first heard in F sharp minor for the second movement and then through a seamless transition into D major for the third.

The final movement opens in D minor again, before calling on material and techniques from the second and third movements as it fights through to return to A flat major once more and a nobilmente restating of the original theme. The cyclical nature of the work coupled with the bombastic writing creates a truly profound effect upon reaching its climax – truly, Elgar did have a massive hope for the future.

Lucas Ferguson - violinist, CSYO alumnus

City of Sheffield Youth Orchestra

The CSYO was established in 1980 and now has about 80 members with an age range of 13 - 21. It meets three times a year, in each of the vacation periods with an intensive course, often residential, followed by concert performances. In July 2005, the orchestra toured Croatia, playing Swan Lake with the Royal Russian Ballet to an audience of 4,000, a concert televised in seven countries. The orchestra recorded the backing track of John Lennon's last song at Abbey Road Studios in London. They have also toured in the Czech Republic, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, France, Spain, Poland and Italy. One of their more recent tours followed an invitation to take part in the prestigious Pablo Casals International Music Festival in Spain; the only amateur body to be so honoured.

There have been many conductors, always professionals, in the last 29 years including such names as Adrian Leaper, and Martyn Brabbins. Chris Gayford is the current 'resident' conductor and has established a unique and productive working relationship with the players.

Soloists have included famous names such as John Lill, Martin Milner, Anna Markland, Nigel Kennedy, Peter Donohoe, Lesley Garrett, Ronan O'Hora, Eleanor Bron, Matthew Barley, and Natalie Clein and Peter Cropper. The orchestra has an enviable esprit de corps due largely to the staff members who, besides their musical roles, care for the members in a pastoral way. All members are looked after by an excellent mentoring system. The resulting high morale has led to some memorable performances, which we hope will be evidenced in this concert.



Christopher Gayford, Conductor

Christopher Gayford studied at the Royal College of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music with Timothy Reynish. He has worked with many major orchestras and opera companies, including the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra as assistant conductor, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera North and Scottish Opera.

A founder member of the new music group Psappha, he was involved in education project work that now forms one of his chief areas of interest. He has conducted CSYO since 1994. From 2000 until 2003 Christopher worked on a project called Feeling Sound, hosted and partially funded by Trinity College of Music and led a series of three Feeling Sound concerts at the Barbican with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, conducting Mozart's last three symphonies. Internationally, he has taken part in master classes with Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Ilya Musin and Peter Eotvos and competed in two international conducting competitions, winning second prize In Cadaques and joint first in Besancon. This year he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of the Arts, Kharkiv, Ukraine.

Of his debut with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, the Wiener Zeitung commented: "in Elgar's Serenade for Strings, he showed how it is possible to produce elegant music in an apparently effortless manner, with precisely the right degree of tension and masterly shaping of the sound: a beautiful performance".

Matthew Barley, cello

Matthew Barley's musical world has no geographical, social or stylistic boundaries. His activities in performance, improvisation, cross-disciplinary projects, composition, and pioneering community programmes have developed to form a uniquely eclectic international career. He has been described as 'the world's most adventurous cellist' and is as comfortable with core-classical repertoire and improvisation as he is in a night-club or the Amazon rainforest. 'Deeply fortunate to be doing what I love, I am a magpie, finding a way to play whatever music I love - so I collaborate, improvise, juxtapose, arrange and rearrange.'



His studies were at the Guildhall School in London, and the Moscow Conservatoire, and he is a passionate advocate of lifelong learning – constantly seeking to evolve and develop the art of being a travelling musician living in a vibrant community of family and friends. He has played in many of the world's great concert halls, given premieres by Pascal Dusapin, James MacMillan, Thomas Larcher, Dai Fujikura, Detlev Glanert and Nitin Sawhney; performed with Amjad Ali Khan, Matthias Goerne, the Labeque Sisters, Dima Slobodeniouk, Marin Alsop, Jon Lord (Deep Purple), Martin Frøst and Avi Avital, and records for Signum Classics.

Matthew is married to Viktoria Mullova with whom he loves to make music, lives in London and they have three children. He plays a Cesare Gigli cello from Rome, c.1750