



Concert programme

London Philharmonic Orchestra



2025/26 season
at Eastbourne's
Congress Theatre



**CONGRESS
THEATRE**
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London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jepsen

Principal Guest Conductor Karina Canellakis supported by Richard Buxton

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Congress Theatre, Eastbourne

Sunday 19 April 2026 | 3.00pm

Sibelius's First

Price

Andante moderato for string orchestra (7')

Barber

Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (16')

Gershwin

Selections from Porgy and Bess (10')

Interval (20')

Sibelius

Symphony No. 1 (38')

Nefeli Chadouli*

conductor

Nadine Benjamin

soprano

**LPO Fellow Conductor 2025/26. The LPO Conducting Fellowship 2025/26 is generously supported by Dunard Fund.*

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The timings shown are not precise and are given only as a guide.

Concert presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in association with
Trafalgar Theatres



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Welcome to the Congress Theatre

Venue Director Neil Jones

Welcome to the London Philharmonic Orchestra, today's conductor and soloists, and most importantly, to all of you in the auditorium.

Whether you're a season regular or this is your very first concert, we're pleased to welcome you to our fantastic venue, unique in its Grade II listed perfect cube design which creates an acoustic environment like no other. If there is anything we can do to improve your visit, please do chat with a member of our team.

As a courtesy to others, please ensure mobile phones are switched off during the performance. Please also note that photography and recording are not allowed in the auditorium unless announced from the stage.

Thank you for supporting classical music – sit back, relax and enjoy your afternoon.

LPO news

BrightSparks Schools' Concert

Tuesday 9 June 2026 sees our next BrightSparks schools' concert here at the Congress Theatre! Local Key Stage 2 students (aged 7–11) are invited to enjoy the sound of the full LPO as we perform 'The Big Enigma': a concert all about codes, puzzles and mysteries hidden in music! Featuring highlights from Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, along with brilliant music by Beethoven, Bacewicz and Brahms, it's sure to be an unforgettable experience.

Tickets are £3 per pupil (accompanying teachers free, support with travel costs available). Includes a free INSET session and written resources for teachers. Booking for schools is open now – for more details visit lpo.org.uk/brightsparks



BrightSparks 2025/26 is generously funded by Rothschild Foundation, Candide Trust, Dunard Fund, Rivers Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, TIOC Foundation, Gill and Julian Simmonds, and Mrs Philip Kan.

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LPO 2026/27 season

Our 2026/27 season of concerts at the Congress Theatre will be announced this **Tuesday, 21 April 2026**. We have another wonderful season of concerts lined up and we hope you'll find plenty to enjoy and discover.



To make sure you're first to receive all the details, sign up to our LPO e-news at lpo.org.uk/signup or scan the QR code.

On stage today

First Violins

Alice Ivy-Pemberton Leader

Lasma Taimina

Chair supported by Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave

Amanda Smith

Alison Strange

Daniel Pukach

Kay Chappell

Rebecca Dinning

Camille Buitenhuis

Alice Apreda Howell

Izzy Howard

Ryo Koyama

Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal

Chair supported by The Candide Trust

Kate Birchall

Nancy Elan

Joseph Maher

Ashley Stevens

Sheila Law

Caroline Sharp

Gabriel Bilbao

Pak Ho Hong

Violas

Rebecca Chambers

Guest Principal

Benedetto Pollani

Jisu Song

Kate De Campos

Terry Nettle

Jenny Poyser

Charles Cross

Anita Kurowska

Cellos

Henry Shapard Principal

Auriol Evans

Leo Melvin

Tom Roff

Helen Thomas

Iain Ward

Double Basses

Hugh Kluger Principal

George Peniston

Catherine Ricketts

Aiyana Rennie

Flutes

Ian Mullin Guest Principal

Stewart Mcllwham*

Piccolo

Stewart Mcllwham*

Principal

Chair supported by The Thompson Family Charitable Trust

Oboes

Tjadina Wake-Walker Guest Principal

Russell Coates

Cor Anglais

Russell Coates

Clarinets

Thomas Watmough Principal

Chair supported by Roger Greenwood

Emily Crook

Isha Crichlow

Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards* Principal

Bassoons

Simon Estell* Principal

Emma Harding

Horns

John Ryan* Principal

Martin Hobbs

Duncan Fuller

Paul Cott

Will Scotland

Trumpets

Paul Beniston* Principal

Chair supported by the Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams

Tom Nielsen* Principal

Trombones

Mark Templeton* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

David Whitehouse

Bass Trombone

Lyndon Meredith Principal

Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Timpani

Simon Carrington* Principal

Chair supported by Victoria

Robey CBE

Percussion

Andrew Barclay* Principal

Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins

Ignacio Molins

Harp

Tamara Young Guest Principal

Piano

Iain Clarke

**Professor at a London conservatoire*

The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose players are not present at this concert:

An anonymous donor
Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton
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London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has been celebrated as one of the world's great orchestras since Sir Thomas Beecham founded it in 1932. Our mission is to create unrivalled orchestral experiences on stage and cultivate human connections beyond it, which we accomplish through live performances, online, and an extensive education and community programme, cementing our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You'll also find us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour worldwide. In 2024 we celebrated 60 years as Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the Grammy-nominated London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems for every medal ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, our iconic recording with Pavarotti that made *Nessun Dorma* a global football anthem, or closing the flotilla at The Queen's Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant. And you'll almost certainly have heard us on the soundtracks for major films including *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sharing the wonder worldwide

We're one of the world's most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month. We're the most followed UK orchestra on Instagram, the most followed orchestra globally on TikTok, and overall the third most followed globally across all social platforms. In 2024 we featured in a TV documentary series on Sky Arts: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA. During 2025/26 we're once again working with Marquee TV to broadcast selected live concerts to enjoy at home.

Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included great historic names like Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2021 Edward Gardner became our 13th Principal Conductor, and Vladimir Jurowski became Conductor Emeritus. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin our Composer-in-Residence.

Next generations

We're committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers: we love seeing the joy of children and families experiencing their first musical moments, and we're passionate about inspiring schools and teachers through dedicated concerts, workshops, resources and training. Reflecting our values of

Alice Ivy-Pemberton

Leader

collaboration and inclusivity, our OrchLab and Open Sound Ensemble projects offer music-making opportunities for adults and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Today's young instrumentalists are the orchestra members of the future, and we have a number of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme leads the way in creating pathways into the profession for young artists from under-represented communities, and our LPO Young Composers and Foyle Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. We also recently launched the LPO Conducting Fellowship, supporting the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2025/26 season

This season's theme, *Harmony with Nature*, explores humanity's bond with the natural world through works by Beethoven, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Elgar and Dvořák; masterpieces of an era that saw nature as a mirror of human emotion. Closer to our own time, we hear from composers as diverse as Duke Ellington, John Luther Adams and Anna Thorvaldsdottir, who have all found a source of creative energy in the processes of nature.

Highlights with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* to end the season. We also welcome back Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as guest conductors including Robin Ticciati, Kirill Karabits, Mark Elder and Kahchun Wong. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Himari; cellist Nicolas Altstaedt; and pianists Yefim Bronfman, Alexandre Kantorow and Tomoko Mukaiyama. The season features nine world and UK premieres, including Tan Dun's choral 'Ode to Peace' *Nine*, and *A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)* by jazz icon Terence Blanchard.

This season also sees tours to South Korea and across Europe, as well as a wide range of performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.



Alice Ivy-Pemberton joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Co-Leader in February 2023.

Praised by *The New York Times* for her 'sweet-toned playing', Alice has performed as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician to international acclaim. While growing up in New York City and studying with Nurit Pacht, Alice made a nationally televised Carnegie Hall debut aged ten, and was a finalist at the Menuhin International Competition at the age of 12.

Alice earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Itzhak Perlman and Catherine Cho as a fully-funded recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. During her studies she won Juilliard's Violin Concerto Competition, performed extensively with the New York Philharmonic and The Philadelphia Orchestra, and led orchestras under the baton of Barbara Hannigan, Xian Zhang and Matthias Pintscher. Upon graduating in 2022 she was awarded the Polisi Prize and a Benzaquen Career Advancement Grant in recognition of 'tremendous talent, promise, creativity, and potential to make a significant impact in the performing arts'.

An avid chamber musician, Alice has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Anthony Marwood, Gil Shaham and members of the Belcea, Doric, Juilliard and Brentano string quartets, and performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Festival appearances include Music@Menlo, Moritzburg and Yellow Barn. Also a passionate advocate for new music and its social relevance, Alice created *Drowning Monuments*, a noted multimedia project on climate change that brought together five world premieres for solo violin.

Nefeli Chadouli

conductor



© Danaï Kavoura

Greek conductor Nefeli Chadouli is a Fellow Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra for 2025/26 and an Associate Fellow of the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship for 2024–26. In 2026, she was selected as a semifinalist of the La Maestra International Conducting Competition in Paris. Since 2023, she has served as Conductor of the Babylon Orchestra Berlin, an ensemble specialising in accompanying silent films, and in 2024 she was appointed Music Director of the Berlin-Brandenburgisches Sinfonieorchester.

In September 2024, Nefeli made her debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 2 as part of the 'Bold Tendencies' series. She has since led renowned ensembles including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Philharmonic, Staatsorchester Braunschweig, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Brandenburg Symphony, Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie Konstanz, Leipzig Symphony Orchestra, Sächsische Bläserphilharmonie, and the City Symphony Orchestras of Thessaloniki and Athens. The 2026/27 season will feature her first appearances with the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, the Bamberg Symphony and the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Nefeli has gained valuable experience as an assistant conductor with major institutions, including assisting Edward Gardner on London Philharmonic Orchestra concerts this season, as well as with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. She has worked under the guidance of leading mentors including Marin Alsop, Steven Sloane and Matthias Foremny in both symphonic and operatic repertoire,

and has participated in masterclasses with Johannes Schlaefli, Michael Sanderling and Vittorio Parisi, among others.

Born in Athens, Nefeli began her musical training in piano and violin. She earned her piano diploma with the highest honours, receiving the Grand Prix and the 'Krino Kalomiroi Prize' from the National Conservatory of Greece. She holds a Master's degree in Musicology from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and a Bachelor's degree in Conducting from the University of Music and Theatre 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy' in Leipzig. In 2024, she completed her Master's degree in Conducting at the Berlin University of the Arts.

Last month, Nefeli conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra's BrightSparks schools' concerts at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, and on 17 May she returns to conduct them in a FUNharmonics family concert. Today is her full symphonic concert debut with the Orchestra.

The LPO Conducting Fellowship

The LPO Conducting Fellowship was launched in 2023 to promote diversity and inclusivity in the classical music industry by developing outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds currently under-represented in the profession.

Guided by the LPO's Principal Conductor, Edward Gardner, two successful applicants each season become fully immersed in the life of the LPO, working intensively with the Orchestra over a period of 6–8 non-consecutive weeks. The Fellowship includes opportunities to conduct the Orchestra in various settings including at LPO residencies, educational programmes, and ensembles of its Rising Talent programmes; opportunities to assist Principal Conductor Edward Gardner, and mentorship sessions with him; and full immersion into the life of the Orchestra, aiming to form the basis of a longer-term professional relationship. Further opportunities are tailored to the needs and interests of the Fellow Conductors.

lpo.org.uk/conductingfellowship

The LPO Conducting Fellowship 2025/26 is generously supported by Dunard Fund.

Nadine Benjamin

soprano



© Teresa Elwes

British soprano Nadine Benjamin is a charismatic and versatile artist who is in increasing demand on both the operatic stage and the concert platform. She made her Royal Opera House debut in 2020 as soloist in *New Dark Age* featuring works by Missy Mazzoli, Anna Meredith and Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and her Glyndebourne Festival Opera debut in 2021 in the title role of *Luisa Miller*. Nadine spent two seasons as an English National Opera Harewood Artist, where her roles have included Clara (*Porgy and Bess*), Laura (*Luisa Miller*), Gerhilde (*The Valkyrie*), Mimì and Musetta (*La bohème*), and Mother (*Jeanine Tesori's Blue*).

Operatic engagements include Amelia (*Un ballo in maschera*) with Chelsea Opera Group, Elle (*La Voix humaine*) with Pegasus Opera, Desdemona (Marina Abramović's *The Seven Deaths of Maria Callas*) and Moira (Poul Ruders's *The Handmaid's Tale*) for English National Opera, the title role in *Tosca* with Opera Australia, and Elvira (*Ernani*) at the Buxton Festival.

Other recent roles include the title role in *Aida*, Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly*), Countess (*The Marriage of Figaro*) and Nadia (Tippett's *The Ice Break*) for Birmingham Opera Company; Desdemona (*Otello*) and the title role in *Tosca* with Everybody Can! Opera; Mother/Witch (*Hansel and Gretel*) for Scottish Opera; the title role in *Tosca* and Countess (*The Marriage of Figaro*) for English Touring Opera, Ermytrude (Mascagni's *Isabeau*) and Amelia (*Un ballo in maschera*) with Opera Holland Park, and Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*) with Iford Arts.

Nadine made her LPO debut in November 2022 in Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* under Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall and Saffron Hall, alongside Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*. A recording of the Tippett performance was later released on the LPO Label (LPO-0136).

In concert Nadine has also performed Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Poulenc's *Gloria*, Berg's *Seven Early Songs*, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, Schubert's Mass No. 5, and the soprano solos in Handel's *Messiah* and Mahler's Symphony No. 4. Further performances include Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*, Dvořák's *Te Deum* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Recent engagements include Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with the English Chamber Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with the Northern Chamber Orchestra, and Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Sinfonia Viva.

Nadine made her BBC Proms debut in 2019 in Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* and has performed frequently with Chineke! Orchestra, as well as with Warwickshire Symphony Orchestra, Norfolk Symphony Orchestra, West London Sinfonia and the Waynflete Singers. For the London Festival of American Music, she has performed song-cycles by William Bolcom, Peter Child and Samuel Barber, the European premiere of John Harbison's *Milosz Songs*, and a programme of works by female American composers.

Nadine has recorded the role of Mrs Waters in Ethel Smyth's *The Boatswain's Mate* for Retrospect Opera, which was released in 2016 to critical acclaim and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. In collaboration with Nicole Panizza, Nadine recorded *Emergence*, a selection of songs setting poems by Emily Dickinson, which was released in 2019 and nominated in the vocal category at that year's International Classical Music Awards. Nadine's debut solo CD, *Love & Prayer*, was released in 2018, and she features alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra and BBC Singers on *Maltworms and Milkmaids*, an album of Peter Warlock's orchestral works. An Ambassador for the charity Music Masters, Nadine was 'highly commended' at the Aviva Women of the Future Awards, and has been invited to both Buckingham Palace and 10 Downing Street in recognition of her work as a mentor and singer. Nadine is the Winner of Best Opera Performer Award at the Black British Theatre Awards 2023 and Winner of Future Classical Music Awards 2023. She is also a Trainee Metaphysical Minister and was made an MBE in The Queen's Birthday Honours 2021.

Programme notes

Florence Price

1887–1953

Andante moderato for string orchestra

1929/2020



Florence Price grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas at the turn of the century; the daughter of a music teacher and the only African American dentist in a community that was still riven with racial prejudice. She gave her first piano recital at the age of four, and as a teenager won a place at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where more liberal attitudes prevailed. Even here, though, she initially described herself as a Mexican: it simply made life easier, she said, at a time when racism in the Southern states of the USA frequently escalated into murderous violence. In 1927 she left Arkansas for Chicago, where she played the organ in churches and cinemas across the city. Her First Symphony (1932) won first prize in a nationwide competition, and its premiere the following year by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra marked the first time a symphony by a woman of African American heritage had been performed by a major US orchestra.

In common with many composers who worked in a tonal Romantic tradition, Price's music was neglected after her death in 1953, and the full scope of her achievement is only now being celebrated. 'Music, like religion, goes deep', she said, and she made many friends and allies during her career in Chicago. She composed her First String Quartet in the city, completing the score on 9 December 1929, though no record survives of any performance in her lifetime, and it lay unpublished until 2017. This version for string orchestra of its second movement was created by Peter Stanley Martin, a scholar of Price and Charles Ives, and was premiered in 2020. Broad, lyrical paragraphs frame a lively, dancing *Allegretto* central section before the movement (and the whole quartet) sinks to a peaceful close.

Programme notes

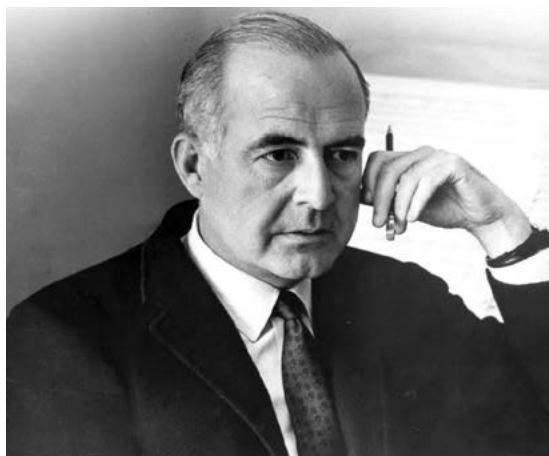
Samuel Barber

1910–81

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

1948

Nadine Benjamin *soprano*



The text is on the next page.

Samuel Barber spent his boyhood in West Chester, Pennsylvania, not Knoxville Tennessee, and being born in the spring of 1910, he wasn't in a position to remember much about the summer of 1915. But when, in 1947, he read James Agee's 1938 prose poem *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, he felt an immediate connection. Agee (1909–55) had spent his earliest years in Knoxville; now, in an essay that he compared to 'improvisation in jazz', he tried to recreate that mood – and that world – in words. The unnamed narrator seems at first to be a nostalgic adult, but in recollecting the past they become, once again, a child in a sleepy Midwestern town, experiencing anew the sights and sounds of a long-forgotten summer day. Barber was entranced. 'It reminded me so much of summer evenings in West Chester, now very far away', he wrote to his uncle, Sidney Homer.

'My musical response that summer of 1947 was immediate and intense. I think I must have composed *Knoxville* within a few days', Barber later explained in a radio interview. 'You see, it expresses a child's feeling of loneliness, wonder, and lack of identity in that marginal world between twilight and sleep.' He never met Agee before setting his words to music (he described the piece as a 'Lyric Rhapsody') but they made contact shortly afterwards and discovered that they had a startling amount in common:

'We both had back yards where our families used to lie in the long summer evenings, we each had an aunt who was a musician. I remember well my parents sitting on the porch, talking quietly as they rocked. And there was a trolley car with straw seats and a clanging bell called "The Dinky" that travelled up and down the main street.'

Knoxville: Summer of 1915 was premiered in April 1948 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Serge Koussevitsky, with the soprano Eleanor Steber as soloist. It became an instant American classic. And beyond that, there's not much to say – Barber's music responds so immediately and poetically to Agee's words and images, that you only really have to listen, and let your mind travel with the music to a half-remembered childhood more than a century ago on the other side of the world. The only introduction needed is the one that Agee wrote and which Barber didn't set to music – but printed, nonetheless, at the top of the score:

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child ...

There's one further line, printed just above the title: 'In memory of my father.'

Text

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

It has become the time of evening
when people sit on their porches,
rocking gently and talking gently
and watching the street
and the standing up
into their sphere of possession of the trees,
of birds' hung havens, hangers.
People go by; things go by.
A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music
on the asphalt;
a loud auto; a quiet auto;
people in pairs, not in a hurry,
scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking
casually,
the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry,
pasteboard and starched milk,
the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared
with clowns in hueless amber.

A streetcar raising its iron moan:
stopping, belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and
raising again its iron increasing moan
and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past
and past and past,
the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a
small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks;
the iron whine rises on rising speed;
still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell;
rises again, still fainter, fainter, lifting, lifts, faints forgone:
forgotten.

Now is the night one blue dew.
Now is the night one blue dew,
my father has drained,
now he has coiled the hose.
Low on the length of lawns,
a frailing of fire who breathes ...
Parents on porches: rock and rock.
From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient
faces.
The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air
at once enchants my eardrums.
On the rough wet grass of the backyard my father and
mother have spread quilts.
We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt,
and I too am lying there ...
They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet,
of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of
nothing at all.
The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile
of great sweetness, and they seem very near.

All my people are larger bodies than mine, ...
with voices gentle and meaningless like the voice of
sleeping birds.
One is an artist, he is living at home.
One is a musician, she is living at home.
One is my mother who is good to me.
One is my father who is good to me.
By some chance, here they are, all on this earth;
and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth,
lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening,
among the sounds of the night.
May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my
mother, my good father,
oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble;
and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed.
Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her:
and those receive me, who quietly treat me,
as one familiar and well-beloved in that home:
but will not, no, will not, not now, not ever;
but will not ever tell me who I am.

James Agee (1909–55)

Programme notes

George Gershwin

1898–1937

From *Porgy and Bess*:

Summertime

My Man's Gone Now

1935

Nadine Benjamin *soprano*



It took a long time for George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* to overcome the prejudices that greeted its premiere in Boston on 30 September 1935. 'With a libretto that should never have been accepted on a subject that should never have been chosen, a man who should never have attempted it has nonetheless written a work that is of some power and importance', pronounced the critic Virgil Thomson – struggling with the notion that Gershwin's tragedy of African American life on the Charleston waterfront was actually exactly what its composer said it was: an opera.

That was just the first of many misunderstandings, above and beyond Gershwin's insistence (enlightened to the point of being controversial in the USA of the 1930s) that his masterpiece must be performed by a black cast, or not at all. Gershwin had been fascinated by DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy* since 1928, and he immersed himself in its world. The setting is Catfish Row, a decaying waterside tenement in Charleston, South Carolina: in reality, home to a community of African American fisherfolk known as the Gullahs.

The plot, meanwhile, has the power and pathos of Greek drama, as the crippled Porgy's desperate devotion to another outsider, Bess, brings him first hope, and then tragedy. 'Summertime' is the opening number; a lullaby of still waters and sticky heat, sung by the young mother Clara as the curtain rises on Catfish Row. Catastrophe soon strikes; a craps game turns violent and the fisherman Robbins lies stabbed on the waterfront, leaving his wife Serena to sing a passionate lament: 'My Man's Gone Now'.

Programme notes

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Symphony No. 1 in E minor

1899

1. Andante, ma non troppo – Allegro energico

2. Andante (ma non troppo lento)

3. Scherzo: Allegro

*4. Finale (Quasi una fantasia): Andante – Allegro molto – Andante assai –
Allegro molto come prima – Andante (ma non troppo)*

Before Sibelius's famous *Finlandia* – a potent symbol of Finnish nationalism – there had been the composer's First Symphony. Plenty of disgruntled Finns heard the first performance of the Symphony in April 1899 as a rallying cry against Russian occupation. But is that really how the composer conceived the piece? Yes and no. Initially, it was planned as a 'storytelling' symphony, focusing on Finland's history and geology. But seven years after the success of Sibelius's *Kullervo*, based on Finnish folklore, friends were urging the composer to think more symphonically. What Finland needed, they said, was a symphony that stood its ground without recourse to storytelling.

In his student days in Vienna and Berlin, Sibelius had learned how to continuously shape and sand his musical themes, like a sculptor might, until they were fit for purpose. In the First Symphony, we begin to hear Sibelius handling his material in that distinctive way.

The First Symphony's misty opening on a lonesome clarinet, for example, doesn't just prepare us for the energetic shock of the movement's fast *Allegro* that follows; it infiltrates the work's musical ideas fully. The shape of that clarinet theme can be traced in numerous fragments and melodies right up to the Symphony's final notes. The last movement launches with a transfigured version of it on thrusting strings.

In that gesture is another key to what made Sibelius's symphonic conception so different – his response to the capabilities of the orchestra. The Germanic approach to developing a symphony's conversation was largely about the notes; it could be mapped out on a piano before being literally distributed to orchestral instruments on paper. Sibelius, meanwhile, allowed the character of his instruments to dictate the form and progress of his music. He let orchestral conversations and colours move the music forward, not just harmonic and melodic building blocks. That might have led the critic Ernest Newman to write that 'every page of [the First Symphony] breathes of another manner of thought, another way of living, another landscape and seascape.'

Newman wasn't alone. The Finnish musicologist James Hepokoski has described the First Symphony as a work in a 'stubbornly separatist, regionally resonant musical idiom'. We hear that best in Sibelius's finale. The organic treatment of themes continues, but in the end, the tension created by Sibelius's strange combination of energy against stasis throws up a rousing, hymn-like tune. It has the distinct character and shape of the rune songs through which Finnish folklore was recounted.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

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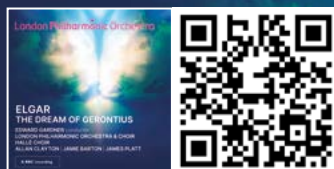


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