

Ealing Symphony Orchestra @100

NIELSEN *Helios Overture*, Op. 17
Malcolm ARNOLD Viola Concerto, Op. 108

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No.5 in E minor, Op. 64

Ealing Symphony Orchestra
John GIBBONS musical director
Meghan CASSIDY viola

Saturday, 9 October 2021 · 7.30pm
St Barnabas Church, Pitshanger Lane, W5 1QG

Concert Programme



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Symphony (with a completion of the finale by Nors Josephson) with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra on the Danacord label, and William Wordsworth's *Orchestral Works* (Vol. 1) on the Toccata label.

Renowned for his adventurous programming, John has given many world and UK premieres of both new pieces (most recently the *Triple Concerto* by Errollyn Wallen with Kosmos Ensemble and WSO in Chichester Cathedral) and neglected works including the *Third Orchestral Set* by Charles Ives, the *Violin Concerto* by Robert Still, and both the *Second Piano Concerto* and *Violin Concerto* by William Alwyn. His recent performance of George Lloyd's *Fourth Symphony* with the Ealing Symphony Orchestra drew an ecstatic review from Simon Heffer in the *Daily Telegraph*.

John Gibbons is a multi-faceted musician: conductor, composer, arranger, pianist, and organist, who works across musical genres including opera, cathedral music, and recording neglected British orchestral music.

John has conducted most of the major British orchestras including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and, most recently, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

He has recorded orchestral works by Nikos Skalkottas with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the string concertos of Arthur Benjamin with the RSNO on the Dutton Epoch label, four Mozart Piano Concertos with Idil Biret — two with the London Mozart Players and two with the Worthing Symphony Orchestra, Bruckner's Ninth

John recorded Laura Rossi's film score *The Battle of the Ancre* (Pinewood Studios) and conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra in her score to *The Battle of the Somme* at the live screening in the Royal Festival Hall to commemorate the centenary of the ending of this battle.

Overseas work includes Walton's *First Symphony* with the George Enescu Philharmonic as well as concerts with the Macedonian Philharmonic, the Çukurova Symphony (Turkey) the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra, and performances of Malcolm Arnold's *Fourth Symphony* in Latvia and Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* in Worms, Germany.

John Gibbons studied music at Queens' College, Cambridge, the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, winning numerous awards as conductor, pianist and accompanist. He assisted John Eliot Gardiner on the 'Leonore' project and

the recording of music by Percy Grainger, and was Leonard Slatkin's second conductor for a performance of Charles Ives's *Fourth Symphony* with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.

He has conducted numerous opera productions at Opera Holland Park with particular emphasis on Verdi, Puccini and the verismo composers, including Mascagni's *Iris* and Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*. He conducted *La bohème* for the Spier Festival in South Africa, toured *Hansel & Gretel* around Ireland with Opera Northern Ireland and Opera Theatre Company,

and conducted a number of productions for English Touring Opera. John's orchestral reductions include Walton's *Troilus & Cressida* for Opera St Louis, Missouri and Karl Jenkins's *Stabat Mater*.

John, a renowned communicator with audiences, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Vice-Chairman of the British Music Society, and Choral Director at Clifton Cathedral. His own music has been performed in various abbeys and cathedrals as well as at the Southbank, London.

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“Violist Meghan Cassidy stands out [...] with a fine tone, a good feeling for chamber music and a real personality” (Tully Potter, *The Strad*).

Meghan studied the Viola with Garfield Jackson at the Royal Academy of Music, where she graduated in 2010, and was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in Spring 2019. During her time at the Academy she won the Sydney Griller Award and Sir John Barbirolli Memorial Prize.

In 2007 Meghan joined the Solstice Quartet who went on to win the Tillett Trust and Park Lane Group in 2008 and then the Royal Overseas League in 2009. With the Solstice Quartet Meghan has performed at the Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall as well as live on BBC Radio 3.

She continued her studies with Tatjana Masurenko (Leipzig), Nabuko Imai (Hamburg) and Hartmut Rohde at IMS Prussia Cove.

As a sought after chamber musician and soloist she has performed at Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival (Finland), Oxford May Music Festival, Oxford Chamber Music Festival, Highgate International Chamber Music Festival (London), So-NoRo Festival (Bucharest) North Yorkshire Moors Chamber Music Festival, Stiff International Music Festival (Holland), and Kammermusikfest Sylt (Germany).

Meghan has collaborated with the London Conchord Ensemble, Ensemble Midwest, Monte Piano Trio, and Fidelio Piano Trio performing across the UK and Europe. Alongside a chamber music career Meghan is Associate No.2 Viola with The London Mozart Players and Sub-Princi-



Photo by Sam Gregg

pal Viola with The Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra. She has appeared as Guest Principal Viola with Orchestras such as, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera North and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. In 2019 Meghan was the solo violist for Hugh Jackman's UK and European Arena Tour of *The Man The Music The Show*.

Meghan is Founder and Artistic Director of the Marylebone Music Festival, which has raised over £36,000 for Charity. The Festival will enjoy its seventh season in June 2022.

The Marylebone Music Festival, June 2020, released an Album with Air-Edel Besant Hall Records 'Songs from the Marylebone Pleasure Gardens'.

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

Helios Overture, Op. 17

Carl Nielsen was born on the island of Fyn where his father worked as a house painter and labourer. Both his parents were musical; his father played violin and cornet, and was in constant demand for wedding parties, and his mother sang. Carl learnt both his father's instruments well enough to play in village bands and at the age of 14 joined a regimental band in Odense. In 1883 he was admitted to the Copenhagen Conservatory. Among his first public successes as a composer was the *Little Suite for Strings* of 1888; a year later Nielsen joined the orchestra of Denmark's Royal Theatre in Copenhagen as a violinist, to remain for 16 years. In 1890 he received a large grant which made it possible for him to study in Germany. His Opus 3 Piano Pieces date from this period. From Germany, Nielsen travelled on to Paris in the spring of 1891, where he met the Danish sculptress Anne Marie Brodersen: "Cannot remember what I experienced today except that in the evening I met the one for whom I have always nurtured the gamut of feelings and with whom I shall live together, be happy, and never more be in doubt!" On 10 April Carl and Anne Marie were married in Florence.

In 1901 Carl Nielsen was awarded an annual state grant, and at the beginning of 1903 he signed a contract with the music publishers Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen. This meant that he could take leave of absence from his work at the Royal Theatre and he journeyed to Greece with Anne Marie, who herself had received a large travel grant to study Greek sculpture, and was one of the few to receive

permission to copy the reliefs and statues of the Acropolis Museum.

At the conservatory in Athens, the Odeon, Nielsen was given access to a room with a piano, where he could sit and compose while Anne Marie was busy with her sculptures. He noted in his diary, "March 10. Spent the morning from 8:30 until 11 at the Conservatory and started work on the *Helios Overture*. On Kolonos in the afternoon. Unstable weather — with the most fantastic light effects over the mountains. For a moment in the west, the farthest mountains lay in a mist; the sun shun through a cloud on the mountains closer by, so that they looked like large mounds of wheat, shining transparent, golden. But



the mountains nearest us were deep, navy blue.” The last page of the manuscript of the *Helios Overture* shows that Nielsen had completed his work by 23 April.

The great characteristic of Nielsen’s music is its energy and life-affirming quality, especially apparent in the symphonies and also noticeable in shorter works such as this overture. He wrote about that: “The opening is very subdued, a number of long notes on the basses to which more instruments are added, then some French

Horns signal a rather solemn morning hymn... Now the sun rises higher and higher till the vibrating noon light almost dazzles one, and everything is bathed in a flood of light, which makes all creation drowsy and languid; and finally it sinks again and sets slowly and majestically behind the distant blue mountains far out to the west.”

Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006)

Viola Concerto, Op. 108

Allegro con spirito

Andante con moto

Allegro vivace

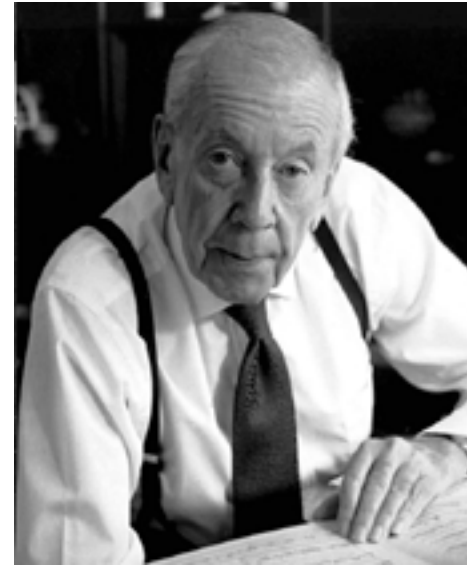
Malcolm Arnold frequently noted that “Music is the social act of communication among people, a gesture of friendship, the strongest there is”; this friendship is reflected in much of his music over his long and varied career, notably in his series of concertos for, among others, Yehudi Menuhin (Concerto for Two Violins), Richard Adeney (Flute Concertos Nos. 1 & 2), Denis Brain (Horn Concerto No. 2), Benny Goodman (Clarinet Concerto No. 2) Julian Bream (Guitar Concerto), eventually seventeen in all. Arnold’s Viola Concerto was a relatively late work written at the end of Arnold’s period of life in Cornwall.

Arnold and his new wife Isobel, with their young son Edward, had decided to make a fresh start outside London and their move to St. Merryn in Cornwall, just outside Padstow, was completed in January 1965. Arnold’s first years in Cornwall were unusually quiet as a composer, though at the

end of 1965 he composed music to two famous and contrasted films, *The Heroes of Telemark* and *The Great St. Trinian’s Train Robbery*, which helped stabilise his finances. In May the following year he completed a set of four *Cornish Dances*, to match the earlier sets of *English and Scottish Dances*, although the success of Arnold’s popular or light music always distracted attention from his serious scores, including the major work of his Cornish years, his Symphony No. 6, completed in 1968.

Arnold’s Viola Concerto was one of the final works of this Cornish period, written in 1971 to a commission from Northern Arts and the Northern Sinfonia for a work for their principal viola, Roger Best.

Arnold had had two very strong models for a viola concerto rooted in his experience; one was the Concerto by his



close friend William Walton, which is the major twentieth century concerto for the instrument, and the other is *Harold in Italy*, which is the major nineteenth-century concerto, by the composer he admired almost above all others, Hector Berlioz.

Although Arnold left no comment about his thought process and the Concerto is not mentioned in his letters, he clearly felt that trying to emulate either of these works by writing a very large-scale work would not be either practical or desirable, and prompted perhaps by the chamber orchestra size of the Northern Sinfonia, Arnold’s Concerto is a small scale compact work lasting around 20 minutes, which nonetheless covers a considerable emotional scale.

Although cast in the traditional three movements, the Concerto is often distinctly untraditional in its approach and harmonic language. The first movement opens with three bold chords and the soloist enters with rushing quavers over

a pizzicato accompaniment which gives way to a characteristic Arnold tune, bright and breezily built from repeated short sections over an offbeat accompaniment. The whole first movement consists of the juxtaposition of the two contrasted thematic passages, each occurring three times, but not identically; the second occurrence of the opening is darkly ominous, trills in the accompaniment rising to climax before the return of the jaunty melody. The third appearance of the opening is more subdued and the final appearance of the jaunty melody over pizzicato quavers has the last word.

The second movement is a slow lament, punctuated by very sour minor key chords from woodwind, as if to dislodge the soloist. The tune reappears in the orchestra bass line, darkly ominous, and subsides as the soloist re-emerges; the bass accompaniment repeats a semitone slip, another characteristic Arnold gesture. The solo line reappears in introverted melancholy, over the same stalking accompaniment, before the orchestral strings finally wrest the melody from the soloist, building to an agonised peak and subsiding, as the viola’s final lament, over the same sour harmonies, appears to wander distracted through a devastated landscape before fading completely.

The brief finale banishes this mood instantly, the soloist having an angular motif over accompanying quavers. When the soloist introduces a new theme, this is accompanied by a regular four-bar figure including a characteristic Arnold glissando, which is repeated. The reappearance of the opening is followed by a very strong nod to the influence of Berlioz, with the return of the soloist’s melody over the glissandos and the final occurrence of the opening cut abruptly short.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

Andante — Allegro con anima

Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza

Valse. Allegro moderato

Finale. Andante maestoso — Allegro vivace

Tchaikovsky himself would have been astonished at the present popularity of his music. He was a relentlessly self-critical composer, who suffered constant doubt about his own ability and the value of his music. He craved the admiration of academic musicians and was willing to put up with considerable hostility from them for occasional scant praise. Even at the end of his life, when his public popularity was enormous (as distinct from his reputation in academic circles) he could not acknowledge the mastery of his final works, constantly believing himself to be written out.

The key turning point in Tchaikovsky's life occurred in 1877, eleven years before the Fifth Symphony was written. That year, Tchaikovsky was briefly, and disastrously, married, and the wealthy patroness Nadezhda von Meck made contact with him, initiating a relationship based on voluminous correspondence with the curious condition that they should never meet. Mme von Meck granted Tchaikovsky a considerable annual pension, which enabled him to resign from his teaching post in 1878 and concentrate his efforts on composition. The next thirteen years were as comfortable as any for the composer, the Fourth Symphony and the opera *Eugene Onegin* serving to distil the emotional turmoil of 1877, and orchestral suites and ceremonial overtures providing a less strenuous outlet for new ideas. *Manfred* (a symphony based on poems of Byron) and



the Fifth Symphony marked the composer's return to full emotional commitment in his music, but in 1891 Mme von Meck's apparently abrupt withdrawal left Tchaikovsky devastated. His final years were marked by increasing personal despair, contrasted with increasing public acclaim. His final work, the Sixth Symphony, reflects much of his complex introverted nature with its conflicting emotions; within ten days of conducting the first performance, on 28 October 1893, Tchaikovsky was dead.

In 1885 Tchaikovsky felt sufficiently settled, after the upheavals of his recent life, to buy his own home for the first time,

and purchased an estate at Maidanovo, sufficiently far outside Moscow to be relatively peaceful, yet still accessible. He seems to have enjoyed life there, and his pattern of restless traveling began to diminish, replaced by more concentrated foreign tours as he last felt sufficiently secure to be a competent conductor of his own works. The first music composed at Maidanovo was the *Manfred Symphony*, and the relative security of his new home seems to have allowed the composer to put more of himself into this work than any of the recent past. *Manfred* is more a collection of symphonic poems than a truly symphonic structure, and Tchaikovsky may have felt after it was complete that he was now ready to face the challenge of writing a fully symphonic work.

He began making sketches for this new piece in 1888 and many of his old doubts resurfaced; he wrote to Mme von Meck "Have I written myself out? No ideas, no inclination..." Despite all this he was able to work relatively steadily and the piece was completed within the year. After it was finished he took a despairing view of the piece, writing, again to Mme von Meck "...what has been written with passion, must now be looked on critically and condensed to fit the needs of form... I have always suffered from a lack of skill in the management of form..." It can't have helped his self-confidence to have been told by the chairman of the Berlin Philharmonic Society, after a conducting engagement the previous year, that he was a fine composer, but that he must leave Russia immediately and put himself in the hands of German musicians to save himself from committing the faults of form and orchestration which flawed all Russian composers. After hearing two performances of the Fifth Symphony his view of it actually worsened: "...I have come to the con-

clusion that it is a failure." One wonders what must have gone through his mind to imagine such things of this music.

The Fifth Symphony is unified by a motto theme, sometimes given the name *Fate*, which is heard at the outset in the lowest register of a solo clarinet, over a string accompaniment. The *Allegro con anima* introduces the main subject of the first movement which is developed gradually to a climax; during this development Tchaikovsky skilfully varies the tempo to maintain the tension. After this first peak has subsided, the strings introduce a new theme which is used to generate tremendous passion and excitement before winding itself gradually down to silence.

The slow movement opens with the famous melody for horn, joined in dialogue by an oboe and followed by solos for clarinet and bassoon. Amid the sudden changes of tempo and mood here, the motto temporarily intrudes before being banished.

The third movement waltz is charming, elegant and superbly orchestrated, a reminder of Tchaikovsky's close links with ballet. The motto is heard briefly — as if in the distance — on woodwind instruments towards the end.

The finale opens with the motto theme transformed into its major key and in the manner of a march; this is succeeded by the dance-like *Allegro vivace* which gradually builds up speed and tension before the final statement of the motto, and the jubilant coda.

Programme notes by Dominic Nudd.



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