

Ealing Symphony Orchestra @100

TCHAIKOVSKY *Francesca da Rimini*, Op. 32
Grace WILLIAMS Violin Concerto

FRANCK Symphony in D minor

Ealing Symphony Orchestra
John GIBBONS musical director
Fenella HUMPHREYS violin

Saturday, 26 March 2022 · 7.30pm
St Barnabas Church, Pitshanger Lane, W5 1QG

Concert Programme



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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 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 performance of George Lloyd's Fourth Symphony with the Ealing Symphony Orchestra drew an ecstatic review from Simon Heffer in the Daily Telegraph.

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 par-

ticular 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. ||





Photograph by Alejandro Tamagno

Described in the press as “amazing” (The Scotsman) and “a wonder” (IRR), Fenella Humphreys is one of the UK’s most established and versatile violinists. Winner of the BBC Music Magazine’s Instrumental Award 2018, she enjoys a busy career combining chamber music and solo work, performing in prestigious venues around the world. She is frequently broadcast on the BBC, Classic FM, DeutschlandRadio Berlin, West-Deutsche-Rundfunk, ABC Classic FM (Australia), and Korean radio.

Fenella performs widely as a soloist. Her first concerto recording, of Christopher Wright’s Violin Concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch) was released in 2012 to great critical acclaim (“Fenella Humphreys’ performance is a wonder” — International Record Review; “Fenella Humphreys captures the music’s wistful cantabile to perfection, producing a golden tone in all registers with the utmost sensitivity to where every

phrase is moving” — The Strad), and was selected as Orchestral CD of the Month in a 5-star review in BBC Music Magazine.

A number of eminent British composers have written works for Fenella, both in her own right and as a former member of the Lawson Trio. Fenella’s recent ‘Bach to the Future’ project, a set of six new unaccompanied violin works by Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Gordon Crosse, Sally Beamish, Adrian Sutton, Piers Hellawell, and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, was a huge success, garnering performances at acclaimed UK venues including Aldeburgh, St. Magnus Festival, Presteigne Festival, Ryedale Festival, The Forge, Manchester University, and Queen’s University Belfast. The series has now been recorded over two CDs for Champs Hill Records. The first of these discs, released in August 2015, was picked by BBC Music Magazine as October’s Instrumental Disc of the Month, and described as “a radiant recording” with “golden precision and effortless virtuosity” (Five Stars, The Scotsman). The recently released second CD received the same accolade in January 2017’s issue of BBC Music Magazine, and was Editor’s Choice in Gramophone Magazine in February 2017.

Described on BBC Radio 3’s Record Review as an “absolutely exquisite album”, and a Recommended Recording in the Strad Magazine, Fenella’s CD, ‘So Many Stars’ with Nicola Eimer was released on Stone Records in 2019. She then released her ‘Max Richter: Four Seasons Recomposed’ album on Rubicon Classics, which was chosen as BBC Music Magazine’s Concerto Choice, Scala’s Album of the Week, and included in Apple Music’s Classical A-List. Her latest album, which features Sibelius’s Violin Concerto Op. 47 and *Humoresques*

Opp. 87 & 89, was released in April 2021 to great acclaim and was also chosen as Scala Radio’s Album of the Week.

Fenella is a passionate chamber musician, enjoying performances with Ensemble Perpetuo, Counterpoise, and I Musicanti, as well as collaborations with artists including Alexander Baillie, Adrian Brendel, Pekka Kuusisto, Nicolas Daniel, Alec Frank-Gemmill, and Martin Lovett, and is regularly invited by Steven Isserlis to take part in the prestigious Open Chamber Music at the International Musicians’ Seminar, Prussia Cove. Concertmaster of the Deutsche Kammerakademie, Fenella also enjoys guest leading and directing various ensembles in Europe, and can be found playing Tango in duo and larger ensembles with the

great Uruguayan bandoneonist, Héctor Ulises Passarella.

Fenella’s teachers have included Sidney Griller CBE, Itzhak Rashkovsky, Ida Bieler, and David Takeno at the Purcell School, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Robert-Schumann-Hochschule in Düsseldorf, where she was awarded the highest attainable marks both for the ‘Diplom’ exam and the ‘Konzertexamen’ soloists’ diploma. She has taken part in masterclasses with musicians including Thomas Brandis, Lorand Fenyves, Anthony Marwood, Thomas Riebl, and Krzysztof Penderecki.

Fenella plays a beautiful violin from the circle of Peter Guarneri of Venice, kindly on loan from Jonathan Sparey. ||

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Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

Francesca da Rimini: Symphonic Fantasy after Dante, Op. 32

After completing his ballet *Swan Lake*, Tchaikovsky took a holiday at Vichy in France with his brother Modest. Modest was keen to push Tchaikovsky in the direction of more opera and proposed *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Francesca da Rimini* as possible subjects. Tchaikovsky was most interested in *Francesca* and Modest put forward an already completed libretto by the theatre and music critic Konstantin Zvantsev. This project proved unworkable. Zvantsev was a fanatic Wagnerian — an enthusiasm not shared by the composer — and insisted his libretto be set in the manner of Wagner’s music drama.

With great irony Tchaikovsky then received an invitation to attend the first Bayreuth Festival, in the autumn of 1876, and reluctantly accepted, agreeing to report the event for the Russian newspapers. Since the Zvantsev libretto had been discarded, Modest gave his brother a copy of the original Dante, Canto V of the *Inferno*, which Tchaikovsky immersed himself in on the train journey. Although he was impressed by the scale of the Festival and the crowds who flocked to pay homage to Wagner, he remained musically uninvolved. “After the last notes of *Götterdämmerung*, I felt as though I had been let out of prison. *The Ring* may be actually a magnificent work, but it is certain that there is nothing so endlessly and wearisomely spun out.” Not the first or last misjudgment of one composer by another.

Dante had excited him much more and during his return journey he wrote, “This evening in my coach I read the IVth Canto of the *Inferno*, and was inflamed with a desire to write a symphonic poem on *Francesca*” (a slip of the pen, he meant the Vth Canto). Tchaikovsky left no description of his

work in progress, but on 26 October 1876 wrote to his brother Anatoly that he was: “... feverishly composing *Francesca*”, and to Modest on the same day he reported: “I have only just finished my new work: a fantasia on *Francesca da Rimini*. I wrote it with love and love has turned out pretty well, I think.” On 30 October, the composer wrote to Eduard Nápravník that the full score would be ready “within two weeks”. In fact the orchestration was completed on 17 November 1876.

Despite this *Francesca da Rimini* was not performed for the first time until 9 March 1877, at the tenth symphony concert of the Russian Musical Society in Moscow, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein, where it was a great success. This was almost the last music which the composer heard in his homeland for some years. His fateful and catastrophic marriage took place in July, after which he fled Russia and heard of the first St. Petersburg performance, nearly a year later on 23 March 1878, only through his brother Anatoly.

Tchaikovsky included a detailed programme note in the score for *Francesca*: Dante, accompanied by Virgil’s ghost, descends into the second circle of the hellish abyss. Here the walls echo with cries of despair. In the midst of the Stygian gloom is a fantastic storm. Violent, hellish whirlwinds carry away tormented souls. Out of the countless spinning earthly spirits, Dante notices two in particular: Francesca and Paolo, who are locked in an embrace. Dante calls out to these tortured souls, and asks them for what terrible crimes they were being punished. Francesca’s spirit, drenched with tears, recounts their pitiful tale. She was in love with Paolo, but



against her will she was forced to marry the hateful brother of her beloved, the hunchbacked, twisted tyrant of Rimini. Despite his violent jealousy, he was not able to wrest Francesca’s heart from her passion for Paolo. Together one day they read the story of Lancelot. “We were one”, recounts Francesca, “and after reading this we no longer felt the fear and confusion that had marked our previous meetings. But that one moment destroyed us. By the time we reached Lancelot’s first chance of love, nothing could now part us. In a moment of weakness, we openly expressed our clandestine love for one another, throwing ourselves in each other’s arms.” [It was at this moment that] Francesca’s husband returned unexpectedly, and stabbed her and Paolo to death. After telling this, Francesca’s spirit, and that of Paolo, were snatched away in the raging

whirlwind. Overwhelmed by the endless suffering, Dante, completely exhausted, falls dead. (In fact Dante merely collapses as if dead.)

Writing *Francesca* so soon after experiencing (or enduring) Wagner’s *Ring* left more of an influence on Tchaikovsky that he felt comfortable with: “The observation that I wrote [*Francesca da Rimini*] under the influence of *The Ring* is very true. I myself felt this while I was working on it. Unless I am mistaken, this is particularly noticeable in the introduction. Isn’t it strange that I should have fallen under the influence of a work of art for which I feel, on the whole, a marked antipathy?”

Tchaikovsky depicts Dante’s descent into hell; in a gloomy slow introduction, *Andante lugubre*, the music surges forward into a furious, syncopated *Allegro* in E minor as Dante witnesses the spinning tempest of souls. The central *Andante cantabile*, introduced by a plaintive clarinet solo, presents Francesca’s tale and Tchaikovsky paints her with one of his most spacious melodies. The second theme is heard on the cor anglais, and the harp leads towards the climax as the souls are swept up in the tempest and hurled away from the poet in an electrifying coda.

Francesca da Rimini remained one of the most popular and highly regarded of Tchaikovsky’s works in his own lifetime. When he approached Tchaikovsky with a request to donate the autograph scores of some of his best works to the Public Library, Vladimir Stasov wrote: “You are such a prominent Russian composer, that the manuscripts of your finest works should be preserved in their originals in our public collections, alongside those of Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, et al.” Among the scores which Stasov requested for the Public Library was *Francesca da Rimini*. ||

Programme Notes

Grace Williams (1906–1977)

Violin Concerto (1950)

Liricamente

Andante sostenuto

Allegro con spirito

Regardless of the fact that she was a woman, Grace Williams was one of Wales', and therefore Britain's, most significant composers, although being a woman has consistently hindered a thorough appreciation of her work.

The eldest of three children, Williams was born in Barry, Glamorgan, where her parents were both teachers, and her father was a highly regarded amateur choral director who did not believe in teaching music to his children in the traditional manner. Instead he simply opened his extensive library of music scores to them, an act which enabled them to explore and discover them on their own. She also broadened her knowledge of orchestral music through recordings, which her father collected avidly. Talented from an early age, Grace often played the piano for her father's choir rehearsals, and the violin in a trio with her brother Glyn, a cellist, and her father who was then the pianist.

In 1923, she entered University College, Cardiff on a scholarship, though she found the music programme "deadly" for a would-be composer. After graduation in 1926, she moved to London to attend the Royal College of Music where one of her teachers was Ralph Vaughan Williams, and her friends included Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994), Dorothy Gow (1893–1982), and Imogen Holst (1907–1984), the daughter of Gustav Holst.

In 1930, Grace Williams won the prestigious RCM Octavia Travelling Scholarship which enabled her to study in Vienna with Egon Wellesz (1885–1974). Here she was able to indulge herself in the whole late

Austro-German Romantic tradition. Hearing the music of Gustav Mahler aroused little enthusiasm, but it would later influence her own music.

On her return to London in 1931, the 25-year-old composer became music master at Camden School for Girls and visiting lecturer at Southlands College of Education. *Hen Wallia*, an orchestral overture based on folk tunes including the lullaby *Huna Blentyn*, composed in this period, became her first work to receive frequent performances. The *Elegy* for string orchestra (1936) contains hints of the highly individual music of later years.

The large-scale orchestral work *Four Illustrations for the Legend of Rhianon* (1939) is based on the *Mabinogion*, and in 1941 her brilliant *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes* (1940) was broadcast by the BBC, and repeatedly well received in public performances throughout Wales. More orchestral works followed: *Sinfonia Concertante for Piano and Orchestra* (1941), *Symphonic Impressions* [later *Symphony No. 1*] (1943), and *Sea Sketches* (1944), a highly evocative five-movement work for string orchestra, but by 1945 the difficulties Williams experienced trying to earn a living and using her limited free time for composing had left her in poor physical health and she hinted to friends that she might give up composition altogether. In 1947, doctors suggested that she return to Barry where she could be properly cared for by her parents.

The move provided a change that Grace Williams needed, and she never returned to live in London. Wales was then expand->

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ing as a centre for the arts. The BBC had set up a Welsh Broadcasting Region while Welsh National Opera, the Welsh Office of the Arts Council, and several music festivals had been established. Williams began writing incidental music for radio plays and wrote scripts for BBC schools broadcasts. In 1948, she became one of the first women, maybe the very first woman, to write music for film with her score for *Blue Scar*.

Grace Williams continued composing, including this Violin Concerto (1950), the same year she was appointed to the Welsh College of Music and Drama. She composed with equal skill for choirs and vocal ensembles. Her last completed works (1975) were settings of Kipling and Beddoes for the unusual combination of SATB, harp, and two horns.

For her contribution to music, she was offered the OBE in 1966, but turned it down. On her seventieth birthday in 1976, she received greetings from around the world and the Welsh BBC broadcast a programme of her music. Three months later, she experienced the first signs of

what would prove to be a fatal illness. On 25 January 1977, two weeks before her death, she wrote a farewell letter to Elizabeth Maconchy to tell her "... all along I've known this could happen and now it has I'm quite calm and prepared and can only count my blessings — that I've had such a run of good health, able to go on writing — and just being me with my thoughts and ideas and sensitivity. From now on it won't be so good but even so there are sunsets and the sea and the understanding of friends."

Grace Williams died on 10 February 1977, just nine days before her seventy-first birthday. In a tribute to her, it was said: "She had brought the music of Wales to the world."

BBC Radio 3 devoted their "Composer of the Week" segment to her during August 2006, the year of the centenary of her birth. This resulted in several new performances of long-unperformed works, including her Violin Concerto (1950) and her Sinfonia Concertante for Piano and Orchestra (1941), and March 2016 saw



Llandaff, with Jones and the BBC Welsh Orchestra conducted by Mansel Thomas.

The first movement opens mysteriously, with harp chords sounding over string tremolos, and the solo violin entering immediately and presenting a long, introspective lyrical theme. This melody unfolds with great intensity in a single unbroken line supported by richly textured orchestra accompaniment. The mood gradually becomes more acerbic, violin and orchestra rising together to an abruptly cut-off peak. The violin sets out a long passage of rhythmic flexibility which is taken up by the orchestra while the soloist continues with the melodic line. The music again rises to a climax and is cut off. The mood of intersection is carried into the final broad climax after which the soloist is given an expressive cadenza and the music fades.

The pastoral slow movement opens with a reflective oboe solo over a rocking accompaniment. The soloist then takes this up, dueting with woodwinds and then trumpets. The melodic line undulates slowly, rocking back and forth like the ebb and flow of the sea, finally ebbing into silence.

The finale opens with a sprightly theme, bold and striding, which then relaxes and moves forward again. The soloist sets out new material, more agitated than before and this is built to a major climax, dominated by trumpets. The mood cannot be sustained and the confidence evaporates, the orchestra falls silent and the soloist meditates on a fragment of the earlier theme until the orchestra re-enters boldly like the surging tide. The soloist is supported by tremolo strings and solo horn as the music unwinds in martial retreat to be closed by a single decisive chord. ||

both the premiere modern performances of her large-scale *Missa Cambrensis* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra (1971) and of her symphonic suite *Four Illustrations for the Legend of Rhiannon* (1939–1940). Despite this focus of interest, few of her major works have been recorded.

Grace Williams's Violin Concerto was completed in 1950 for Granville Jones, who had a wide-ranging career at the time. He was subsequently leader of the London Symphony Orchestra (1954–1955), and was a member of the Fleming String Trio, with Amaryllis Fleming and Kenneth Essex. He was one of the original players of the Delmé Quartet, with Jurgen Hess, John Underwood, and Joy Hall. He also appeared as a session musician on at least one Beatles LP.

The first performance took place on 30 March 1950, at Broadcasting House,

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César Franck (1822–1890)

Symphony in D minor

Lento – Allegro non troppo

Allegretto

Allegro non troppo

César Franck spent most of his professional career in obscurity and only emerged as a composer in the final ten years of his life. His father was a prosperous banker who, finding his son musically precocious, wanted to present him as a child prodigy and forced his education. Having studied in Liège in his native Belgium Franck was sent to the Paris Conservatoire in 1837, at once winning first prize for piano. Perhaps fortunately the young man's potential as a touring pianist faded very quickly and instead he took up the organ, winning the organ prize in 1841.

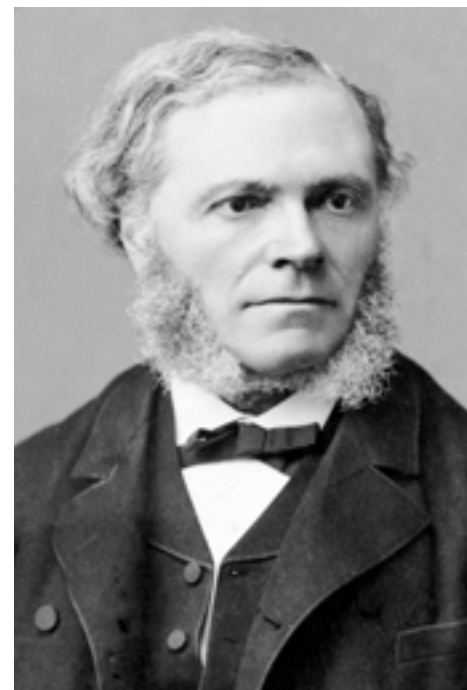
Franck was appointed organist, first at Saint-Jean-Saint-François-au-Marais, then, from 1858 until his death, at Sainte-Clotilde, where he acquired a great reputation as an improviser, and was acclaimed by Liszt. Franck was appointed professor of organ at the Paris Conservatoire in 1872. The following year he was naturalised as a Frenchman and his oratorio *Redemption* attracted the attention of a number of musicians who became enthusiastic pupils and advocates, including Vincent d'Indy and Ernest Chausson. Their encouragement gave Franck the confidence to compose on a broader canvas and he began a series of major works, including the choral *Les Béatitudes* (1880), perhaps his greatest work; Symphonic Poems: *Les Éolides* (1876), *Le Chasseur maudit* (1883), *Les Djinn*s (1884), and *Psyché* (1888); the Symphonic Variations (1885); the D minor Symphony (1889); a Piano Quintet (1880); and, the Violin Sonata (1886).

Franck's music was well known for his penchant for frequent modulations (even

changes from one key to another) and he passed on his individual grasp of harmony to his pupils, who mostly remained dedicated to his ideals, though Claude Debussy recalled an afternoon spent in Franck's composition class where an older man tried in vain to persuade his pupil to modulate in the approved manner and was answered "... but why should I modulate, I am happy where I am."

Franck's only Symphony highlighted his determination to follow his own path in composition and ignore the weight of tradition where he found it unrewarding. The formal orthodoxy of the time required four movements; Franck presented a symphony in three movements, scored for an usually large orchestra, which dispensed with any poetic inspiration, as in the *Romeo et Juliette* Symphony of Berlioz, yet avoided the classicism of early Saint-Saëns or Gounod. The chromaticism of Franck's harmonies, along with his extensive use of cyclical form (in which a single theme recurs in each section of a work, often modified or transformed), confused audiences of his day, though the effect on musicians was far-reaching, Debussy's *La Mer* for instance owes much to the form and content of Franck's Symphony.

The premiere in 1888 was not a success. In rehearsal the musicians of the Conservatory orchestra were sullen and barely cooperative, and the resulting performance sub-standard. The Symphony was ridiculed by eminent authorities and coldly received by the public. But when Franck was asked about it, according to Vincent d'Indy, his pupil and biographer, his face



glowed and he answered happily, "Oh, it sounded well, just as I thought it would."

The opening of the Symphony, mystical and tender, announced by cellos and basses, is the basis of Franck's cyclic treatment of his material across all three movements. A second theme, more sensuous, is given on strings, leading to a majestic motif from

solo trumpet. These themes are developed over shifting chromatic harmonies until a Gothic restatement on full brass in canon leads to an agitated passage and a final statement of the opening three notes as if carved in granite.

The second movement opens like a religious meditation, on chromatic harmonies of harp and strings, with a contemplative melody on the cor anglais, contrasted with a warm melody in the cellos. The strings have a scherzo-like interlude which is banished with the return of the cor anglais melody and finally the woodwind respond to the strings with a brief chorale to close the movement.

The finale, which opens without a break, is both dramatic and spectacular. The jubilant opening quivers with light, and the cellos' melody is overtaken by urgent brass motifs. The cor anglais melody from the slow movement returns in triplet figuration across the full orchestra, followed by the trumpet theme from the first movement in woodwinds and then low strings, before the Symphony begins a long ascent with sweeping harps and horn-calls towards a final climax lit by shafts of shining brass.

Programme notes by Dominic Nudd.



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Rainer Hersch
David Smith*
Hilary Potts
Catherine Barlen
Francesca Landauer
Álvaro Rebón*

Cellos

Rachael Bucknall
Alice Laddiman*
Deborah Lovell
Paul Robinson
Emma Wakeling
Tessa Watson
Heather Humphreys
Martin Jones
Mark Walker
Richard Bolton
Barbara James

Basses

James Trowbridge
Clara Nissen

Flutes

Peter Robertson
Caroline Swan
Paul Darling

Oboes

Rachel Wickham
Mike Phillips
Richard Partridge*

Clarinets

David Weedon*
Felicity Bardell
Barbara James

Bassoons

Gary Walker*
Steve Warrington*

Horns

Pamela Wise
Mary Saunders
Catherine Fox
Paul Jefferson

Trumpets

Fergus Pateman
Nelson Falcó Cordes
Alice Godfrey
Will Lyons

Trombones

Felix McGonigal
Hywel Walters
David Fletcher

Tuba

Tom Torley

Percussion

Andrew Barnard
Matthew Fletcher
Liam McCloud
André Camacho

Harp

Deian Rowlands

* Committee members



We are always happy to hear from potential new members! Rehearsals are on Thursdays near Ealing Broadway. To find out more, please visit our website: ealingso.org.uk/join, or write to us at contact@ealingso.org.uk.



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