

Ealing Symphony Orchestra

Richard STRAUSS *Don Juan, Op. 20*
Martin JONES *Suite: Arctic Adventure*

Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS *A London Symphony*

Ealing Symphony Orchestra
John GIBBONS Musical Director

Saturday, 26 November 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 RSNCO 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 Concertge-

bouw 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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Tonight's programme is one of contrasts. There are links, however. The Orchestra first encountered the Strauss and Jones pieces as we weathered the pandemic period. Then the Jones and Vaughan Williams both paint pictures of places dear to the composers. We hope you enjoy them all as much as we have enjoyed learning them.

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Don Juan, Op. 20

Richard Strauss burst abruptly onto the musical scene at the age of twenty-five with the first performance of his work, *Don Juan*, which caused a sensation. He was well known before then of course: he was after all the son of Franz Strauss, the famous first horn of the Munich Court Orchestra. Strauss's early music, the two student symphonies, the *Serenade*, and *Suite for Wind Instruments* are charming, but display no sign of the mature composer. However, in 1885 he got to know the music of Wagner and Liszt, which shaped his future direction as a composer.

The idea for *Don Juan* had been planted in Strauss's mind in that year when he attended a performance of Paul Heyse's *Don Juans Ende* in Frankfurt. A couple of years later he came across an unfinished verse play from 1844 by Nicolaus Lenau. Lenau died leaving *Don Juan* unfinished, but with the portrait of the hero fully drawn and this sympathetic and probing characterisation appealed to Strauss.

Lenau's *Don Juan* is a frustrated idealist — a man searching for the elusive ideal, the one woman who would embody all that is noblest and wisest, a challenging companion to bring a sense of completeness to his own life. Lenau's *Don*, quite different from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, is sensitive as well as clever and driven, as cynical about his victims as he is about his own life. At



the end, weary of existence without meaning or peace, he provokes a duel with Don Pedro, the Commendatore's avenging son, and allows himself to be run through.

The opening, soaring upwards in a rush of semiquavers, can represent only *Don Juan* himself. The central section of the work depicts two amorous interludes. The first and shorter interlude is light but brief, a mere flirtation. The second interlude is more serious, the expansive main theme introduced by the solo oboe and developed in tender exchanges between violas, cellos, and woodwind. After the *Don* is again disappointed, the music becomes disconsolate, but the adventurer shakes off his depression, characterised by the horns in an unforgettable macho unison, and goes in search of further conquests. The coda depicts the climactic sword-fight between *Don Juan* and *Don Pedro*. In Lenau's poem, *Don Juan* has victory in his grasp, but suddenly allows his enemy to run him through. After a tremendous crescendo, the sudden silence is followed

by a long chord of A minor, violins make a sweeping descent, two trumpets cutting in with a chillingly dissonant F, and violas emit a last shudder recalling the *Don's* dying words:

“It was a beautiful storm that drove me on; it has subsided, and left behind a calm. All of my hopes and desires are seemingly dead. Perhaps a bolt of lightning from the Heaven that I despised has struck down my powers of love, and suddenly my world becomes deserted and dark. And yet, perhaps not — the fuel is all burnt and the hearth is cold.” ||

Adapted from a note by Dominic Nudd.

[Martin Jones writes: During lockdown, the Orchestra attempted to play this piece over the internet together, individually from their own homes. We were linked by sound only and led by John Gibbons playing a reduction on the piano. It was the craziest thing to try, and the results were hilarious, but we didn't do too badly. Now is our chance to play it properly!]

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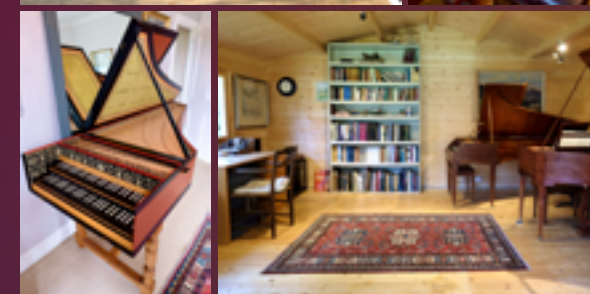
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Martin Jones (1947-)

Suite: Arctic Adventure

Martin Jones joined the cello section of Ealing Symphony Orchestra in 2015. He also plays double bass with the Windsor and Maidenhead Symphony Orchestra and accompanies the Parenthesis Choir of Reading on piano. He has composed throughout his life, but performances were rare until, following retirement from a scientific career, he joined London Composers Forum, since when several works for small forces have been presented. His long years of orchestral experience as a player have served him well in creating this Suite for full orchestra.

In May 2001 Martin travelled on business to Svalbard (at 79°N, halfway between the north of Norway and the Pole) and vowed to return one day. In April 2013 he took his wife, Frances, there to experience this awesome landscape and enjoy being on top of the world. Longyearbyen



is the main town, named after Richard Longyear who opened up the coal mining industry in Svalbard. From there they took excursions by dog sled (taking in a descent into a crevasse – the “Ice Cave”) and by snowmobile.

This Suite is adapted from the music composed to accompany their holiday video *Return to Svalbard* (<https://youtu.be/SnNMKnG71YA>). It aims to portray Svalbard as a wonderful place: to celebrate the cold, the emptiness, the beauty of the snow-covered mountains and glaciers, the continuous daylight, the buzz of the main town, and the pleasure its inhabitants take in living there.

Arrival: First Impressions

First sight of a snowy landscape: the delight of being there after a long journey.

Longyearbyen

The main town bustles with shops, hotels, a restaurant, a concert hall, a university, and a bar. Dry snow blows around on a keen sub-zero wind.

Dog Sled

Meeting some lovely dogs. Harnessing them up to the sled gets them so excited. Then we're off!, heading for the...

Ice Cave

Between the edge of the glacier and the rock is a narrow passage you can squeeze into and descend to the bedrock. It's a beautiful, icy world. Then the dogs are woken up for the return journey.

Scooting through the Frozen Land

An 80-mile day out by snowmobile, crossing a frozen fjord, stopping to gaze at the snout of a glacier and climbing the glacial moraine to the icecap. There's a stop at the top for a moment to wonder at the unspoilt scenery, then a return past a geological oddity called a “pingo” which oozes liquid water despite the cold.

Back to Town, Time to Leave

The week is nearly over – so quickly. There was just one snowy day, the rest with glorious arctic sunshine. Will we ever return? ||

[Martin writes: During a car journey I mentioned this suite to John Gibbons and he asked to see the score. We had the opportunity to try it out, without concert pressure, as we resumed socially-distanced rehearsals after Lockdown. I am so grate-

ful for the appreciative remarks I received afterwards, to John for programming the suite tonight, and to the Orchestra for their enthusiastic engagement with my music. I'm honoured to share a programme with Strauss and Vaughan Williams!]



Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

A London Symphony

I. Lento — Allegro risoluto

II. Lento

III. Scherzo: Nocturne

IV. Finale: Andante con moto — Maestoso alla marcia — Allegro — Lento — Epilogue

This year is the sesquicentenary of one of Britain's favourite composers. Ralph Vaughan Williams was born to a well-to-do family with strong moral views and a progressive social life. Throughout his life he sought to be of service to his fellow citizens, and believed in making music as available as possible to everybody. He wrote many works for amateur and student performance. He was musically a late developer, not finding his true voice until his late thirties; his studies in 1907–1908 with the French composer Maurice Ravel helped him clarify the textures of his music and free it from Teutonic influences.

A London Symphony was Vaughan Williams's second symphony of nine, his only earlier journey into symphonic form being his 1909 choral work *A Sea Symphony*, based on Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. It is dedicated to George Butterworth who had first suggested that Vaughan Williams compose a fully orchestral symphony. Butterworth's suggestion prompted him to bring together some sketches he had made for a symphonic poem about London and recast them in symphonic form. Throughout this process Butterworth acted as a sounding-board and critic of Vaughan Williams's ideas.

The *Symphony* was first performed in 1914. Shortly afterwards, Vaughan Williams sent the score to conductor Fritz Busch in Germany, where it was lost in the turmoil of the start of the war. With the aid of Butterworth and others, the score



was reconstructed and performed again a year later. The composer was not fully content with the *Symphony* at that time and prepared revisions in 1918, 1920, and finally in 1933. The 1933 version, published in 1936, is the one generally heard. It is some twenty minutes shorter than the original.

Vaughan Williams displayed considerable ambiguity about the nature of *A London Symphony*. On the one hand, he said that it was to be heard and to "stand or fall as absolute music" and that "Symphony by a Londoner" might better describe the work. On the other hand, he gave many indications of the images which had prompted the music. Whilst the images may have suggested the music, he apparently did not intend the music to be descriptive.

The first movement puts one in mind of the River Thames, swathed in mist at dawn. The Westminster chimes echo in the distance. The movement becomes one of hustle and bustle, interspersed with quieter interludes. >



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Programme Notes

The second movement is described simply by the composer "Bloomsbury Square on a November afternoon". The mood is generally sombre and wistful. A solo viola takes up the call of a street vendor "Sweet lavender, who will buy sweet lavender?" The harness of Hansom cabs jingles in the background.

The scherzo of the third movement is again best described by the composer. "If the listener will imagine himself standing on Westminster Embankment at night, surrounded by the distant sounds of The Strand, with its great hotels on one side and the New Cut on the other, with its crowded streets and flaring lights, it may serve as a mood in which to listen to this movement". Street songs and a mouth- (or

barrel-) organ are suggested.

The fourth movement has many moods; a solemn March precedes a recollection of the busy first movement before the Westminster chimes are heard again. An epilogue quietly takes the city from our hearing. This fading away was described by Vaughan Williams with a quotation from H.G. Wells in which a ship is steaming slowly down the river. "England and Kingdom ... glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass — pass". We are leaving the city in the few quiet hours before daylight next illuminates the mists of the river. ||

Note by Rod Berrieman, courtesy of the Making Music Music Bank.

Programme notes by Martin Jones.

Malcolm Gerrella Piano Tuning

(A.I.M.I.T. — M.I.A.M.)

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Musician Spotlight



The ESO is no different to other amateur orchestras in relying on a team of volunteers to keep its activities running smoothly. In some cases, the volunteering comes in the form of assuming specific responsibilities as part of the committee. In other cases, it is generally helping out with whatever needs doing. Our spotlight this evening falls on two members who are stalwarts of the latter type of volunteering.

Angela and Adrian (aka 'The Hailstones') have been members of the Orchestra for over 45 years. They first met through their love of music, finding themselves sitting as desk partners in their university orchestra. On joining the ESO, Angela initially found the scrutiny of former conductor Maurice Miles somewhat intimidating, but nevertheless she encouraged Adrian to join as well when he moved to London.

Both Angela and Adrian have remained regular members of the Orchestra, despite some absences that can be explained by a period working overseas (Adrian), and the small matter of bringing up a family of four

children. The couple are grateful to ESO conductors over the years who were highly tolerant of the young Hailstones running around in churches and halls during Saturday afternoon rehearsals and sitting wriggling near the front during performances. At a later stage their children were able to join in with the music making, atoning for their earlier mischief!

In recent years Angela has taken it upon herself to ensure that biscuits and cake are provided at break time, ensuring hungry musicians keep their energy levels up during exhausting rehearsals. Both Angela and Adrian are inevitably the first to volunteer their services in helping transport the various items of kit that need to be moved for ESO concerts, and they are a consistent presence in the team of helpers that clear up and rearrange the church at the end of a concert.

The loyalty and dedication of the Hailstones are instrumental in the ESO's success, and we are immensely grateful to them for all that they do. ||



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Thank you all.

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