

RAVEL La Valse
RACHMANINOV Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

LLOYD Symphony No. 4 in B major "Arctic"

Ealing Symphony Orchestra John Gibbons Musical Director Reuben Moisey Piano

Saturday, 25 November 2023 · 7pm St Barnabas Church, Pitshanger Lane, W5 1QG





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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 Wil-

liams'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' proiect 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.



Programme Notes

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Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

La Valse

Maurice Ravel was born near Biarritz in the Basque country close to the Spanish border, but grew up in Paris. Though not by any means a prodigy, he was a highly musical boy, starting piano lessons at the age of seven. He entered the Conservatoire de Paris in 1889, but not being conservative enough he was expelled in 1895. His maturity as a composer was slow to emerge, his first piece to become widely known being Pavane pour une infante défunte in 1899.

In his composition, he was attracted to dance forms, particularly old ones: pavane, minuet, rigaudon, forlane. In 1911 he wrote a set of waltzes for piano called *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, which he later orchestrated. Already around 1906 he had conceived a tone poem, which he then called *Wien*, to celebrate the Strauss family, the waltz and all it had meant to the city of Vienna. The piece gestated slowly, but the work was interrupted by the declaration of war on France by Germany with the support of Austria-Hungary, which led to World War I. Vienna was now the enemy.

Ravel was keen to participate in the war, but at the age of 39, and with fragile

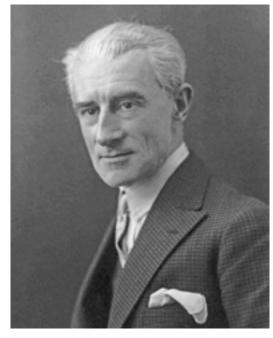
health, he was deemed unfit for military service. Eventually, in 1915 after much insistence, he was allowed to drive trucks for the army, but he was invalided out 18 months later. He suffered the personal tragedies of the death of his mother, and losing friends in battle, to whom he later dedicated the various movements of his piano suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

When the war was over, he returned to *Wien*, spurred on by a ballet commission from Diaghilev for *Ballets Russes*. The world was now a different place: Vienna had more to think about than its waltzes. The tone poem became *La Valse*, now charting the rise and decline of the Viennese waltz, which some have considered to be a metaphor for the destruction of the old order. Vaughan Williams created much the same metaphor, though very differently, with his *Pastoral Symphony*. Ravel, however, put the record straight:

"This dance may seem tragic, like any other emotion ... pushed to the extreme. But one should only see in it what the music expresses: an ascending progression of sonority, to which the stage comes along to add light and movement.

"It doesn't have anything to do with the present situation in Vienna, and it also doesn't have any symbolic meaning in that regard. In the course of *La Valse*, I did not envision a dance of death, or a struggle between life and death — the year of the choreographic setting, 1855, repudiates such an assumption!"

La Valse begins with low rumblings. A mist rises, through which glimpses of dancing couples come and go. Fragments of melody gradually aggregate into a linked sequence of light-hearted waltzes, much as the Strausses had created. Brilliant orchestration conjures up the glitter-



ing ballroom of the Imperial Court. The ball comes to an end and the rumblings begin again. The harmonies are more chromatic now, building portentous tensions again and again. The music is suddenly interrupted by two slow bars in unison, after which the energy level rises to breaking point. Melody, harmony, and rhythm are all in the firing line and the piece, which has been in three-beat waltz rhythm throughout, collapses with a four-beat thud.

Ravel presented the piece to Diaghilev in a two-piano version, but Diaghilev's response was "This is a masterpiece, but it is not a ballet, rather a painting of a ballet". Ravel, feeling insulted, walked out. La Valse eventually received its premiere in 1920 in Paris. Ravel also made a transcription for solo piano, which is quite as virtuosic as anything Liszt produced. Diaghilev was right: it is a masterpiece.

Programme note by Martin Jones.

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Reuben first hit national headlines and breakfast TV sofas at the tender age of 11 in the midst of an international playing career already encompassing Malaysia, Dubai, and Romania. It was Scrabble board rather than keyboard which had brought him to the nation's attention following his triumphant victory in the 2019 European under-21 Scrabble tournament, and he has since represented his country four times in World Scrabble Championships. Still one of the UK's top rated under-18 players, he has also featured in an ITV documentary on child genius, beating "Chaser" Ann Hegerty on camera by over 200 points.

But alongside memorising long lists of seven-letter words he was always busy tinkling the ivories. He undertook his first concert tour at the age of 10 when, together with the rest of his family, he cycled from Land's End to John o' Groats, giving recitals along the way to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society. With energy

still to burn, Reuben later completed the 2019 UK swimming marathon of 200 lengths, this time raising funds for Cancer Research UK.

After a few months' rest, during which he achieved Distinction in his ATCL piano diploma aged just 12, he finally swapped Scrabble scores for music scores in 2021, taking up a place at the Royal College of Music Junior Department where he studies with his father Alvin, who has taught him both Scrabble and piano since the age of three. There he immediately made his mark, winning the Ruby White piano prize in his first year, followed in 2023 by the Angela Bull prize, the RCM's top award for pianists. He has appeared in recitals at the College as both soloist and chamber musician, while also having huge success in competitive music festivals across London, winning a total of 21 first prizes.

As the winner of Ealing Festival's Susan Bicknell concerto award in 2022, he made his debut with Ealing Symphony Orchestra in May this year with performances of Prokofiev's First Piano Concerto and Lutosławski's *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, and since then has also appeared with St. John's Festival Orchestra in Chester, playing Mozart's Concerto in D Minor K466.

Unless actually physically chained to his Steinway at home, he can be found at any hour of the day or night on the tennis courts of Bromley honing a fearsome forehand with the help of his current mentor Richard Whichiello, a former coach of Emma Raducanu. Despite his already considerable achievements in the worlds of music, cycling, swimming, and board games, his principal ambition remains to emulate her spectacular achievement in a Grand Slam one day soon. Watch this space!

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

Rachmaninov's music for piano and orchestra spans his lifetime; the First Concerto appeared in 1891 when he was 17, and the *Paganini Rhapsody* in 1934 when he was over 60. The composer wore his heart on his sleeve in the concerti, especially the second; but after he had left Russia for ever in 1917 for the United States, his music became drier and less obviously emotional.

One of Rachmaninov's last works,

(his catalogue ends at Opus 45), this was written at the composer's villa in the summer of 1934. The theme is from Paganini's 24th Caprice for Solo Violin, where it is the subject of variations. It had already received variation treatment from Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms as it would later from Boris Blacher and Lutosławski, not to mention John Dankworth and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Rachmaninov's work is, in fact, a set of 24 variations on the theme (the original title contained the word "variations"). After nine bars of introduction the first variation actually precedes the theme. Thereafter the variations succeed each other mostly without a break. Variations 7, 10 and 24 featured the mediaeval chant of the Dies irae (Day of Wrath) from the Requiem



mass, a theme with which Rachmaninov was preoccupied and which he used in several works. Of the famous big tune variation 18, the composer remarked to Horowitz, "I have composed this one for my manager; well maybe it will save the piece".

The *Rhapsody* was first performed by the composer with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski on 7 November 1934.

Programme note from the Music Bank of Making Music.



Programme Notes

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George Lloyd (1913–1998)

Symphony No. 4 in B major "Arctic"

Allegro moderato Lento tranquillo Allegro scherzando Lento — Allegro non troppo

George Lloyd had perhaps the most extraordinary life history of any composer, certainly in the twentieth century, and overcame horrendous personal circumstances to reach an extraordinary rediscovery late in life.

Lloyd was born in Cornwall in June 1913. He had little formal schooling, yet he began playing the violin at the age of five and writing music at ten. His earliest music training was extremely pragmatic, playing violin in a variety of local chamber groups and orchestras. He briefly attended Trinity

College in London, and studied violin privately with Albert Sammons and composition with Harry Farjeon (the youngest ever professor at the Royal Academy of Music). Lloyd's first symphony was written in 1932 and premiered the following year by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and his second symphony was premiered in Eastbourne, both conducted by Lloyd himself. John Ireland supported Lloyd's third symphony with the BBC, and the composer conducted the premiere with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1935.

Lloyd later explained that both his parents were highly competent amateur musicians. His father in particular had a great enthusiasm for Italian opera, and as a teenager Lloyd saw a great deal of it with his father, so that when a family friend suggested that he try his hand at opera, Lloyd's father wrote the libretto for *lernin*, based on Cornish legend, and George completed the music within 12 months.

The premiere production in Penzance, which opened on 5 November 1934, was seen by Frank Howes, the Times critic, who gave it such an enthusiastic write-up that the work was given in a short season at the Lyceum Theatre in London.

As a result Lloyd's second opera, *The Serf*, was written for Covent Garden and premiered there in 1938 conducted by Albert Coates. During the writing Lloyd married Nancy Juvet, who had been born in Switzerland. Although musically a success, the production was generally considered a disaster. Despite this the opera toured to Liverpool and Glasgow, and Lloyd seemed set to be a major musical figure, until the war intervened.

Lloyd volunteered as a Royal Marines bandsman, doubling as a gunner, and served on the notoriously dangerous Arctic run aboard HMS Trinidad. On an Arctic convoy in 1942 a faulty torpedo homed back on the ship. Thirtv-two men were killed: Llovd saw many of his colleagues die, drowned in oil. The trauma and severe shell-shock caused a complete collapse. Lloyd recovered very slowly from this devastating experience, in Switzerland, supported by devoted nursing from Nancy. Eventually he could return to composing, and subsumed his war-time experiences in his fourth and fifth symphonies (1946 and 1948).

Although not fully recovered, Lloyd submitted to pressure to complete a new opera for the 1951 Festival of Britain, and *John Socman* was the only commission completed on time, although Lloyd felt himself exhausted by the effort. The opera was premiered in Liverpool and toured by the Carl Rosa company, although Lloyd was utterly dissatisfied with the way in which this was done, and after a chaotic presentation in Belfast swore never to go



into a theatre again.

He abandoned composition and settled in Dorset, where he and his wife ran a smallholding growing carnations and mushrooms. Eventually the pull of music became too strong and he returned to composition, working part time in the early mornings, and completed three more symphonies and four concertos, the first for John Ogden, who played it widely. By this time the musical world had moved on: Lloyd's work was regarded as regressive, and was ignored. He recalled that he would send scores to the BBC and they would be returned without comment.

Eventually the conductor Edward Downes discovered Lloyd's music and was fired with enthusiasm. In 1977 Downes broadcast Lloyd's eighth symphony with the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra (although the BBC had accepted it some eight years previously), and the support of Gavin Henderson enabled the Philhar-





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monia Orchestra to present it at the Royal Festival Hall in 1980. Lloyd achieved his only Proms performance in 1981 when his sixth symphony was substituted for a late-arriving commission of another composer. In the same year Downes recorded three of Lloyd's symphonies on LP for the pioneering Lyrita label, making his music widely available for the first time.

This led to Lloyd's discovery by the most influential figure in his revival, Peter Kermani, an American entrepreneur and music lover whose enthusiasm for Lloyd's work led to a new relationship with the Albany Symphony Orchestra from New York State, who commissioned Lloyd's final two symphonies (Nos. 11 and 12), gave many performances, and made many recordings, most conducted by the composer himself. The new audience reached by these recordings received Lloyd's music warmly and eagerly, and in his eighties he found himself widely appreciated. He wrote three late choral works, the Vigil of Venus, the Symphonic Mass, the Requiem, which was his very last work, completed three weeks before his death, and a cello concerto which Lloyd's nephew William believes is a distillation of Lloyd's distinctive voice as a composer.

Lloyd was emphatic that he wasn't a symphonist in the English tradition of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, or Bax. He considered himself to be an opera composer, and that if he had not had such a disastrous experience with *John Socman* he would have gone on to write further operas. He was much influenced by summer seasons of Italian opera at the Old Vic and Covent Garden, and revered middle-period Verdi in particular, which imbued Lloyd with a strong lyrical and melodic sense, and the ability to write "the big tune".

Lloyd was reluctant to talk in any detail about his experiences in the war and in particular about the terrible experience on HMS Trinidad; he was both mentally and physically devastated, and came very close to death. After being rescued Lloyd was unable to speak for nearly a year. He did acknowledge that he felt the need to write music as part of the process of recovery, and the fourth symphony was the outcome, written very slowly over a period of two years.

Having been completed in 1946, the symphony had to wait until 1981 for a first performance, when it was taken up by the Cheltenham Festival, this despite Lloyd having been recognised and commissioned by the Festival of Britain in 1951, and having his work toured. For that hugely belated premiere Lloyd wrote this note:

"On the title page of my Fourth Symphony I wrote '... a world of darkness, storms, strange colours, and a far-away peacefulness'. That for me was the Arctic; during the winter of 1941–1942 I had seen some of its terrifying aspects, its violence and immensity so overwhelming that even men's barbarity to each other seemed to become less horrifying than it was.

"In 1945 I started to try to compose again; my impressions and experiences in the Arctic had become something of an obsession, and they gradually formulated themselves into a symphony ... where the music, the sea, an orchestra, my own anguish, all became mixed up together.

"The work has four movements. The first concerns itself with the storms and the darkness, with only an occasional glimpse of light.

"But not everything inside the Arctic Circle is black thunder and roaring seas; the second movement is peaceful, and while writing it I was as if living nine years earlier when I had travelled up the Norwegian coast as far as the North Cape; then I saw only the gorgeous colours of the midnight sun, and the magnificent snow-capped mountains coming down to the sea, and I >



Programme Notes

felt what then seemed like a remote world far from all our troubles.

"The third movement is a scherzo and trio. Here I was trying for the first time to produce an effect of brilliance without using any brass instruments.

"The finale starts with a slow introduction leading to the main part, which is mostly nothing but a series of quick march-like tunes; I don't think they ever had much to do with life in the Arctic — perhaps I was trying to end the symphony by re-affirming the old convention that when the funeral was over, the band plays quick cheerful tunes to go home."

Lloyd's note considerably underplays the impact of the symphony, which lasts for around an hour, and includes some highly turbulent music.

A timpani roll launches the expansive, good-natured introduction, into which brass interject something far more sinister. The return of the timpani roll heralds a rise in tension — surging violins underpinned by ominous bass pizzicato - culminating in a trumpet-led climax which dissolves into something mysterious, solo oboe and clarinet over trickling harp, the stillness uneasy and unresolved. Fragments of oboe melody are interrupted. and the music becomes more turbulent until it reaches a bold brass statement. which is interrupted by an anguished cello line and the return of the good-natured opening. The turbulence remains close to the surface and bursts through until an abrupt cut-off. As the music restarts the unease grows, repeated trumpet fanfares presaging a disturbed climax punctuated by massive timpani strokes and a shattered withdrawal as fragments of melody are passed back and forth, ending in a brief coda.

The slow movement is withdrawn, melancholic, and meditative. Despite Lloyd's assertion in his own note that the music is peaceful, his slow movements frequently find something darker, not explicitly stated, but often running beneath the surface. The remote world Lloyd evokes and the peace he clearly strives for remain distant.

The scherzo begins with a very jaunty tune, followed by another which sweeps up repeatedly to a charming hesitation, before sweeping on. A side-drum announces a brief, more robust, episode before the trio is introduced, which is slower and gentler, highlighting woodwind soloists over restrained string accompaniment. Strings take up the tune, and woodwind soloists return over soft violins, sounding even more wistful. The return of the scherzo recalls the earlier music, building to a boisterous climax and a brief reprise of the trio for string soloists before the scherzo bursts in for an emphatic coda.

The finale opens slowly and softly, in an ambiguous mood, woodwind, horns, and harp taking solo lines, before swelling into a march tune. A solo clarinet takes the lead followed by a trumpet, and the strings take up the march; in happier times George Lloyd had written a march for HMS Trinidad which became the ship's official march. A brief passage for strings recalls the disturbed mood of the first movement, swelling with agitated brass over string accompaniment, expanding like an alarming vision into an agitated climax, and then shaking off the agitation to restate the jaunty march tune led by flute and piccolo. This grows into an emphatic climax. Lloyd's determination to put his experience behind him is manifest in the bold, striking coda.

Adapted from a programme note by Dominic Nudd.

This performance is the fourth in our annual cycle of George Lloyd Symphonies. We look forward to playing the fifth next year.

Keel Watson (1964–2023)

Members of the Orchestra were shocked and profoundly saddened on 8 November to learn of the sudden and untimely death of opera singer, Keel Watson, at the age of 59. Keel first performed with the ESO as a soloist in 2016 in a performance of excerpts from Puccini's operas. His thundering appearance as the menacing Scarpia, walking from the back of St Barnabas to the stage, is one of those spine-tingling musical moments that, once heard, is never forgotten. He returned a couple of years later to perform the role of Porgy in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, which is also a treasured memory for all those involved.

Keel was a cherished member of the ESO family, having also performed with us on several occasions in our trombone section. This afforded him a special mention in the ESO@100 Centenary Story, which you will find below.

Tributes have been pouring in from around the classical music world and beyond, showing both enormous affection for his warm and generous character as well as tremendous admiration for his operatic talents. Our thoughts are with his family and friends, who will be feeling his loss most deeply.

The Orchestra is planning to dedicate a performance of Scriabin's Third Symphony as a tribute to Keel at our concert on 18 May 2024.

I had heard of the Ealing Symphony Orchestra long before I even thought of ever joining its esteemed ranks. I knew John Gibbons in the days of Opera Lirica. The day came to 'bite the bullet' and do a concert with the ESO, performing the concert version of *Porgy and Bess* as one of the principal singers, but once at the rehearsal, the memories of being in an orchestral setting again grew like a Phoenix from the flames, and I was already hooked on the idea of going back into the melee of a band. My chance eventually came about two years later when I was invited by John to do Scriabin's Third Symphony.

Meeting 'The Crew' (Martin, Felix, Hywel, David, and Alan) was a very major learning curve for me to integrate into the scheme of things. I have enjoyed the notion of being the 'Nanki-Poo' player (check *The Mikado*) and the best concert for me was being in the trombone section when Sheku Kanneh-Mason came and performed the



Elgar Cello Concerto (his first public gig of the piece). I look forward to so many more concerts with the ESO (work permitting) and hope I can live up to the expectations of the Orchestra.

Keel Watson, bass-baritone & trombone

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David Way Clare Barker James Greener* Mike Frost Catherine Barlen Álvaro Rebón* David Smith* Janet Robinson Matthew Newton

Cellos

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Alice Laddiman
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Emma Wakeling
Deborah Lovell
Martin Jones
Tessa Watson
Paul Robinson
Richard Bolton
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Basses

Jonny Hayward Dominic Nudd Tom Amigoni Kevin Wei

Flutes

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Rachel Wickham Mike Phillips Richard Partridge*

Clarinets

David Weedon* Charlotte Swift Felicity Bardell Barbara James Anna Schmidtmann

Bassoons

Gary Walker* Steve Warrington* Nick Epton

Horns

Pamela Wise Mary Saunders Catherine Fox Joey Walker

Trumpets

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