

BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Tim Harrison
Leader: Lisa Orton
Soloist: Leah Leong

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 9th April 2022 7:30pm
St. Mary Magdalene Church
Stoke Bishop

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Divertimento for string orchestra

Gareth Walters (1928-2012)

Welsh composer Gareth Walters began composing while still at school, and was fortunate early on to receive guidance from Benjamin Britten. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, the Paris Conservatoire, and later in Siena. In 1956 he joined the BBC as a classical music producer, a post he held until retirement, and taught composition in the junior department of the RAM. He also arranged many concerts in London and South Wales “to bring music to people”. His works have been recorded extensively on LP and CD and widely performed in concerts and broadcasts.

Concerto Grosso op. 6 no. 12 in B minor

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Largo – Allegro – Aria: Larghetto – Largo - Allegro

Handel is described as a German-born British composer. Born in Halle, he moved in 1710 to London, where he remained for the rest of his life, soon becoming famous, initially for his Italian operas but later for his oratorios, a genre which he made his own with brilliant success: above all with *Messiah* (1741). In London he moved easily in high society, though retaining his thick German accent. A generous pension from Queen Anne enabled him to live comfortably in Brook Street, W1, in a house which is now the Handel museum.

A concerto grosso (“grand concerto”) is an early form of the concerto proper, usually in five well varied movements, as here. In it a small solo group of strings (the *concertino*) is heard in alternation, contrast or combination with a larger body of strings (the *ripieno*), to pleasingly colourful effect. Handel’s twelve concerti grossi were composed in 1739-40 and intended for performance between parts of oratorios. Tonight’s is both genial and grandiose.

Cello Concerto no.1 in C

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Moderato – Adagio – Allegro molto

In 1761, after some precarious early years, Haydn was appointed vice-Kapellmeister to the wealthy, music-loving Esterházy family in their palace at Eisenstadt, where he finally had a settled existence for the next thirty years and produced a vast range of high-quality compositions.

This concerto, dating from about 1765, was composed for Haydn’s friend Franz Joseph Weigl, principal cellist at the Esterházy court, who was obviously an impressively gifted performer. It was lost until its rediscovery in 1961.

The orchestra’s assertive opening chord followed by a jauntily dotted, upwardly-moving phrase sets the mood for the whole opening movement, and is taken up joyfully by the cello, entering after the exposition. A cadenza gives the soloist the opportunity for a dazzling virtuoso display. The lyrical slow movement exploits the sweet-sounding upper register of the cello as it weaves some long legato phrases. Another cadenza gives the soloist free rein. The finale combines frequent re-appearances of a perky little opening motif and upwardly rushing scale passages for both soloist and orchestra. Throughout the work, Haydn’s cheerful inventiveness never flags.

Interval

Two Elegiac Pieces: *Heart's Wounds* and *Last Spring*

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Grieg's great-grandfather Greig was a Scot who changed the spelling of his name when he emigrated and took Norwegian nationality. Edvard studied in Leipzig, Copenhagen and later Rome, where Liszt performed his Piano Concerto from the manuscript at sight. He was already famous when his incidental music to Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt* elevated him to the status of national treasure in Norway.

He also became a great favourite in England, where in 1894 he was awarded an honorary degree by Cambridge University along with Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky. An early photograph shows his diminutive figure solemnly clad in doctoral cap and gown.

These very atmospheric pieces are adaptations by himself of two of his songs.

Serenade for Strings op. 48

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Pezzo in forma di Sonatina: Andante non troppo: Allegro moderato – Walzer: Moderato Tempo di Valse – Elégie: Larghetto elegiaco – Finale. Tema russo: Andante: Allegro con spirito

Tchaikovsky has sometimes been underrated precisely because he has such an exceptionally fluent melodic gift, but he was in fact a thorough professional. "I start work at 9 each morning," he once said, "and I expect the Muses to turn up on time."

The Serenade for Strings was written concurrently with the "1812 Overture" in 1880. The Overture had been commissioned for an industrial exhibition in Moscow and also to celebrate Russia's victory over Napoleon's invading French army in 1812. Yet he thoroughly disliked it from the start: "The overture will be very loud and noisy, but as I wrote it with no warm feelings of love, it will have no artistic merit whatever." The Serenade, however, was composed "from inner conviction. It is a heartfelt piece, so I dare to think it is not lacking in real qualities."

The Serenade is cast in four fully worked-out contrasting movements. The opening movement, in fast tempo after the stately extended introduction, is intended as a tribute to his idol, Mozart. The string sections are often *divisi* or double-stopped, creating a sumptuous texture. The introductory theme recurs toward the end of the faster main section.

The captivating second movement, a lilting Waltz, was encored at the work's premiere and remains a firm favourite. The slow third movement is hushed and pensive. The fourth movement, based on two contrasting Russian folksongs, concludes with the reappearance of the opening theme of the first movement, speeding up ingeniously to blend in as the finale reaches its close.

Leah Leong grew up in a musical family and was introduced to the cello by her mother, before studying with Bruno Schrecker, former student of Pablo Casals. She later received a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Under the tutelage of Josephine Knight, she graduated in 2021 with Distinction and was awarded a DipRAM for an outstanding final recital and the Sir John Barbirolli Memorial Prize.

She has performed extensively throughout the UK and abroad. Recent highlights include a recital at St James's Piccadilly and a tour of the major cities in China. She was the principal cellist in the Young Musicians Symphony Orchestra from 2017-2021 and has also performed with the Royal Academy of Music Symphony Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, the Czech Philharmonic and the Nash Ensemble in venues such as the Royal Festival Hall and the Royal Albert Hall. Crossing genres, she is established as a session musician and has performed alongside artists such as Stormzy, Burna Boy and Dodie.

Leah was a founding member of the Amanzi Piano Quartet, who were Concordia Foundation Artists for 2019/20 and winners of the Audience Prize in the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Chamber Music Competition.

Tim Harrison hails from Neath, South Wales and first came to Bristol to study music at the university, specialising in performance, composition and orchestration. He progressed to a masters degree in performance on the viola at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff and following this, continued as a post-graduate training conductor, gaining a PGDip with Distinction for his performances. Now living in Bristol and teaching music in a secondary school, he is in demand as a conductor throughout the wider Bristol area.

Lisa Orton began playing the violin at the age of eight, going on to study with Ralph Holmes at the Royal Academy of Music. After working with both the Welsh National Opera and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras, she joined the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House where she played for 30 years until her retirement. Since then she has enjoyed working with pianist Marianne Szurma as the Lima Duo and, since moving to Bristol, with the Bristol Chamber Orchestra. She is also currently leader of the Portishead Sinfonia.

The Bristol Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1963, has several professionally qualified players amongst its members, and gives five or six public concerts a year, occasionally combining with other instrumentalists to perform concertos and chamber symphonies.

1st Violins: Lisa Orton, Susan Burdock, Wendy Gillman, Jenny Heathcote, Trevor Jennings, Celia Skrine, Scarlett Sullivan, Hilary Wilcox.

2nd Violins: Bob Pinniger, Nan Akrill, Philippa Heather, Ebony Love, Eloise Massett, Iona Ramsey, Erica Wright.

Violas: Vanessa Pinniger, Edna Cause, Catharine Deam, David Jewell, Rebecca O'Brien.

Cellos: Anne Tyler, Alison Bell, Carolyn Little, Peter Soothill.

Double bass: Martin Sanders.

Next concerts of the Bristol Chamber Orchestra:

Saturday	25th	June 2022	Parish Church Frenchay
Friday	1st	July 2022	St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Failand
Saturday	26th	November 2022	Trinity Henleaze United Reformed Church, Bristol