

# BRISTOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Stefan Hofkes  
Leader: Lisa Orton  
Soloist: David Lewis

## CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 1st July 2023 7:30pm  
Frenchay Parish Church  
Bristol

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## **St Paul's Suite op. 29 no. 2**

**Gustav Holst (1874-1934)**

*Jig: Vivace - Ostinato: Presto - Intermezzo: Andante con moto: Vivace - Finale (the Dargason): Allegro*

Gustav Holst was an English composer of Swedish descent. His fame rests chiefly on his startlingly original orchestral suite *The Planets* (1914-17) and on the familiar melody from "Jupiter" that was later used as the hymn "I vow to thee, my country". He was born in Cheltenham, where his childhood home is open to the public and makes a rewarding visit.

For the last half of his life he was Director of Music at St Paul's Girls' School in London, and was much loved as an inspirational teacher. The string suite we play tonight, written for his pupils there, is cleverly designed to display their abilities, with intriguing rhythms, harmonies and techniques, while avoiding making excessive demands.

The four movements are interestingly varied and inventive. The Finale is based on a 16c English country dance tune (the "Dargason") ingeniously interwoven with "Greensleeves", another 16c melody, thought by some to be by Henry VIII.

## **"Summer" and "Winter" from The Four Seasons Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)**

Vivaldi, the son of a brilliant violinist, was ordained a priest but did not say Mass after the first two years, owing to severe asthma. Instead, for nearly 40 years, he taught at a high-class orphanage for girls, the Ospedale della Pietà, in his native Venice, writing what is probably his best-loved composition, *The Four Seasons* violin concertos (1725), for his most gifted pupils there.

Tonight we play two of these four concertos, all of which are in three movements; fast-slow-fast. Each was closely based on a different sonnet, perhaps by himself, depicting in vivid detail the characteristics of each season in turn. They form the first known example of "programme music", i.e. instrumental music that tells a story or evokes visual scenes. Lines in the poems are given identifying letters which appear correspondingly in Vivaldi's music manuscript.

"Winter" conjures up bitter cold and biting winds, shivering, and chattering teeth. A lyrical passage on the solo violin accompanied by pizzicato strings suggests warmth indoors as raindrops fall on windows. People venture out on to the ice, slipping and falling as the ice breaks. The winds compete in a storm, but finally contentment returns.

"Summer" begins in the languorous mood of hot days, and the voices of cuckoo, turtledove and goldfinch are heard. First comes a gentle breeze, but then a strong north wind brings a summer storm with thunder and lightning. Swarms of flies and hornets descend, and the farmers watch with trepidation as hailstones batter the crops.

## **Little Suite op. 1**

**Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)**

*Praeludium (Andante con moto) - Intermezzo (Allegro moderato) - Finale (Andante con moto-Allegro con brio)*

After Norwegian Grieg and Finnish Sibelius, Carl Nielsen is arguably the most important Scandinavian composer. He gained some notoriety for his innovatory 4th symphony, nicknamed "The Inextinguishable", composed in 1915 at the height of

WWI, in whose finale two timpanists are instructed to compete to drown out the rest of the orchestra. In its evocation of the deafening clamour of warfare it offers an interesting comparison with its exact contemporary, "Mars, the Bringer of War" in Holst's *The Planets*.

His Little Suite op. 1, composed in 1888, was successfully premiered while he was still a student at the Copenhagen conservatoire. Its three movements had evocative subtitles: "The Danaïdes", "Dance of the Charites" and "The Bacchus Procession". The Danaïdes were fifty ill-fated sisters in Greek mythology who, all except one, were forced by their father to murder their husbands on their wedding nights and were then forever punished in Hades. The Charites, also from classical Greek, are better known as the Three Graces. Bacchus is familiar as the Greco-Roman god of wine and festivity, often depicted crowned with grapes and looking rather lecherous.

### **Simple Symphony**

*Boisterous Bourrée – Playful Pizzicato – Sentimental Sarabande – Frolicsome Finale*

### **Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)**

Benjamin Britten, widely regarded as the greatest British composer since Purcell, lived most of his life by the sea in his native Suffolk. He began composing prolifically aged five; at nine he wrote an oratorio which included an aria for God in C minor, the key he hoped the Almighty would like best. He wrote in a variety of genres, but always with the human voice in mind. Opera was his chief love, and in 1944 *Peter Grimes* brought him immediate success and fame. In due course he received numerous honours and in 1975 was created a life peer as Baron Britten of Aldeburgh, the first British composer ever to be so honoured. His passionate pacifism led to the composition of the *War Requiem* (1961), and for children he composed the popular *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1946), which is made up of variations on a theme by Purcell.

The *Simple Symphony* was written in 1933 at age 20 using melodies composed in his early teens. This much-loved piece has great charm and lacks the astringency characteristic of much of his later work.

### **Chanson de Matin**

### **Edward Elgar (1857-1934)**

Elgar became a practising musician early on but was largely self-taught as a composer. His breakthrough came with the performance of the *Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma)* in 1899. The stately "Nimrod" variation is often played on solemn occasions. However, what made him a household name was his Pomp and Circumstance Marches, especially No. 1, whose trio was later set to the words "Land of Hope and Glory" – a fact that distressed him greatly, as he considered them jingoistic.

He was equally gifted at writing melodious and well-crafted miniatures. *The Chanson de Matin* is amongst his most charming pieces in this genre. It was composed in 1897 for violin and piano but later orchestrated.

*Programme notes by Celia Skrine*

**Stefan Hofkes**, born in the Netherlands, studied piano and conducting at Utrecht conservatoire, concluding with the coveted solo-recital diploma. He continued his conducting studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, winning the Ricordi conducting prize in 1996. Later he received valuable coaching and support from the much-loved Bernard Haitink and a chance for work experience at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Stefan now has an established international career. As a conductor he fulfils engagements throughout Europe, working with distinguished orchestras, and also directs an annual opera festival in the Netherlands. In Britain he already directs the Bristol Concert Orchestra and the Reading Symphony Orchestra. As a pianist he has worked with many prominent international soloists and has performed at venues including the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, London's Wigmore Hall, and St George's Bristol. As an accompanist to singers Stefan has made many CD recordings.

He has developed a special relationship with the Royal Netherlands Embassy in London, leading to engagements to conduct and record major Dutch compositions at a variety of prominent concert venues. He also attaches great importance to working with young people.

**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.

**David Lewis** has led the Cambrensis Orchestra from its beginnings over two decades ago. He studied at the Royal College of Music, London and is an experienced and versatile performer.

The early part of his career was spent with the orchestra of the Welsh National Opera, and he has been a guest leader with miniature opera companies such as Operabox, Crystal Clear Opera and New London Opera. A parallel career in the world of Early Music has seen him perform baroque violin in Europe and further afield with groups such as the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, London Handel Orchestra and the Cambridge Baroque Camerata.

He is leader and director of the 18th Century Concert Orchestra. His film and theatre credits include "The Madness of King George" and the "Shipwreck Trilogy".

David holds a diploma from the London School of Theology and is a lay preacher in the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

**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, Emily Bell, Susan Burdock, Anne Harding, Jenny Heathcote, Eloise Massett, Alasdair Price, Iona Ramsay, Julia Smyth.

**2nd Violins:** Bob Pinniger, Conrad Brimacombe, Wendy Gillman, Philippa Heather, Morven Ringrose, Celia Skrine, Scarlett Sullivan, Caroline Trow-Poole, Erica Wright

**Violas:** Vanessa Pinniger, Edna Cause, David Jewell, Rebecca O'Brien, Claire Prince.

**Cellos:** Anne Tyler, Carolyn Little, Peter Soothill, Catherine Tayler.

**Double bass:** Martin Sanders, Alison Coaker.

**Harpsichord:** Stefan Hofkes.

**Next concert of Bristol Chamber Orchestra:**

Saturday 9th December 2023

Trinity Henleaze United Reformed Church