



ROS | ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

DUKE'S HALL

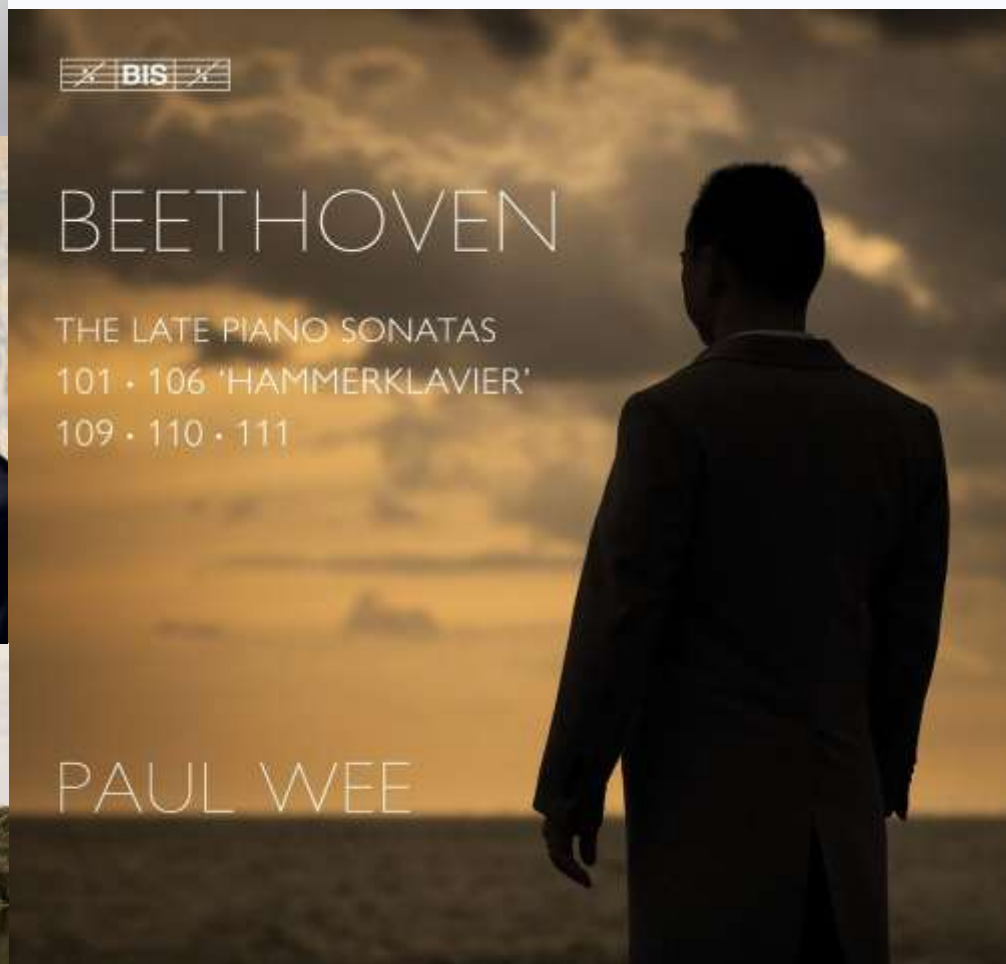
Royal Academy of Music

Sunday 7th December 2025



Paul Wee's latest recording

Released 25 November 2025



Sunday 7th December 2025 7pm

Duke's Hall, Royal Academy of Music

Schumann *Manfred Overture*

Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto no. 3*

Paul Wee (*Piano*)

INTERVAL

Saint-Saëns *Symphony no. 3 (Organ)*

Jem Lowther (*Organ*)

Royal Orchestral Society

Leader Christian Halstead

Rebecca Miller (*Conductor*)

ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY was founded in 1872 by Queen Victoria's second son, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, an enthusiastic amateur musician. At the time it was the only London orchestra apart from the Royal Philharmonic Society.

The first concert was conducted by Sir Arthur Sullivan in the Royal Albert Hall in 1873, and the orchestra went on to perform with Pablo Casals, Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, Jacques Thibaut, Dame Clara Butt, and Sir Edward Elgar. After the war, until his death in 1992, the orchestra was directed by the internationally famous conductor Arthur Davison, followed by Anthony Hopkins, Timothy Redmond, Stuart Stratford and Orlando Jopling. In 2023, Rebecca Miller was appointed principal conductor

Repertoire has included symphonies by Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich, Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* and *Viola Concerto*, Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* and *Sea Interludes*, Holst's *Planets* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Choral works have included Verdi's *Requiem* and Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* and *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, all with the late Ronald Corp's excellent choir *The London Chorus*. In 2012, we performed Prokofiev's iconic cantata *Alexander Nevsky* to an edited edition of Eisenstein's film for which it was written, displayed on screens in the auditorium.

In November 2014 we performed Britten's *War Requiem*— our first concert in Cadogan Hall. 2017 brought our first opera — *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bartók — followed by Wagner's *Die Walküre, Act 3* in 2019.

In 2023, as part of our 150th anniversary celebrations, we performed Mahler's gargantuan *Symphony No. 3* at Cadogan Hall.



The Royal Orchestral Society at the Queen's Hall in 1896



ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

Patron Dame Judith Weir DBE Hon FRSE

Former Master of the King's Music

Committee

Chairman Francis Norton

Hon Secretary Rosemary Cook

Hon Treasurer Anthony Melhuish FCA

Dame Geraldine Andrews DBE Paul Blaker Brian Coffey

Derek Holland Richard Slater Joe Smouha KC

Independent Examiner of the Society's Accounts Judith Ball ACA

www.royalorchestralsociety.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 261421



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK
facebook.com/RoyalOrchestralSociety



ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Manfred Overture, op. 115

Schumann's father was a bookseller and publisher who fostered in his son an affinity for the glories of literature. That love would inform everything Robert Schumann did for the rest of his life. Music was introduced to him rather informally, and although he learned to play the piano, it would take some years for him to decide upon music as a career. When he did, however, literature and writing remained equally important to him.



One of the most heralded romantic writers in Schumann's day was (Lord) George Gordon Byron (1788 – 1824). Byron's writings seemed to epitomize the romantic spirit, especially in the German literary movement known as "*Young Germany*." These were the German romantics who, as Schumann's biographer Martin Geck wrote, "*...were convinced that their own fates were exceptional, they sought to lead lives that were a mixture of grandiosity, world weariness, lovesick repining, disgust with life, and an entanglement with black magic.*" No other work captured this pathos as intensely as Byron's *Manfred* (1817). It was a dramatic poem-play (or, a "closet play" that was typically written in dialogue but not meant to be performed on stage) describing the torments of one who has made himself outcast. Manfred, the hero, retreats from society to the Alps, tormented by a guilt which is never explained in the poem. Alone, he wanders the mountains and searches his heart and psyche; his conscience tortured, he summons witches to make him forget his transgression, which revolves around his great love, Astarte. The witches cannot help, and Manfred throws himself to his death.

Schumann was deeply moved by *Manfred* and wanted to bring it to the stage. He wrote an impressive series of incidental music for its performance, including chorus, songs and monastic chanting, and it was premiered with the help of Liszt as "*Dramatic Poem in Three Parts with Music*" in 1852.

The entire work is rarely performed today, except for its superb Overture, one of Schumann's finest orchestral works. His talent for sublime melodic invention is maybe best captured in the love theme for Astarte. The flute, over light string and horn accompaniment, plays this very chromatic theme – a string of falling and rising notes – a testament to his genius.

SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

Piano Concerto no. 3 in D minor, op. 30

For pianists, Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto stands as the ultimate challenge. Its herculean technical demands, titanic scale, and emotional richness scared off such seasoned virtuosi as Joseph Lhévinne, Arthur Rubinstein, and Sviatoslav Richter.



It was written at Ivanovka, Russia, in the summer of 1909. Rachmaninov himself was soloist for the premiere on November 28, 1909, with the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch.

The themes of the entire work are presented in the first movement. A dotted rhythmic motif serves as the motor for the whole concerto. The opening *Allegro* begins in the orchestra, and the piano overlays the melancholic but dignified first theme. Fragments of the second theme are introduced by the horns, clarinets, trumpets, oboes, and piano, then it is fully stated in the strings, a staccato-figure variation that evolves into a sweet, singing tune. The development consists of a long crescendo and *accelerando* in which the two themes seem to morph into one as the orchestra and soloist hand them back and forth, repeating, expanding and folding them together. Rachmaninov wrote two versions of a cadenza for this movement. The longer, more chordal, and more difficult "ossia" version was written first; the shorter, more slippery version was the one Rachmaninov played. The original, uncut version was brought into fashion by Van Cliburn at the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition, and is the one which we shall be hearing tonight.

The wintry *Intermezzo* is introduced by the orchestra, and after 32 bars the piano storms in and dissolves into stillness. The theme is developed in the remote key of D-flat, alternately brooding and calm. In the middle section, the mood brightens considerably with a waltz in 3/8, outlining the tune in the context of fluttering triplets.

The sullen mood returns, and one last grand gesture explodes into the *alla breve* Finale. Here again are variations on those initial two themes; it's the velocity, the rhythmic ferocity, and hammering staccato that create variety and interest. A middle *scherzando* section presents decorative piano variations on the second theme over a calm orchestra scene. The return of the previous tempo brings the concerto to a close with furious drive, the piano playing thick chords in a percussive staccato.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)

Symphony no. 3 in C minor, op. 78 (Organ)

Saint-Saëns was an organist himself, winning first prize in organ at the Paris Conservatory in 1851. His "Organ" Symphony, however, is no virtuoso vehicle (the nickname is not his). Rather it is a remarkable example of scoring for keyboard instruments including piano four-hands in a symphonic context.



Saint-Saëns was hugely popular in England as a conductor and pianist as well as a composer. (He eventually received honorary doctorates from both Cambridge and Oxford, and was made a Commander of the Victorian Order after composing a coronation march for Edward VII in 1902.) He first travelled to England in 1871, playing for Queen Victoria and studying Handel's manuscripts in the Buckingham Palace library. In 1886 the Philharmonic Society commissioned his Third Symphony, and Saint-Saëns conducted the premiere in London.

Although Saint-Saëns came to be considered a conservative, if not reactionary, composer, his Symphony No. 3 is highly original and innovative in many ways, including form and thematic development as well as instrumentation. The typical symphony, as received from the Classical era, had four movements: an opening in the so-called "sonata" form, contrasting and developing themes and tonal levels; a slow movement that was often a type of orchestral song; a quick scherzo, usually a humorous dance; and a finale commonly composed as a sonata-rondo, a lively and lighter embodiment of sonata form principles.

In his Third Symphony, Saint-Saëns condensed these movements into two, eliminating sections that would have repeated material. After a brief, slow introduction, his opening movement begins as a sonata form. But at the point where a typical sonata movement would have begun recapitulating the original thematic materials, Saint-Saëns instead moves directly into a slow movement in the remote key of D-flat major. This may sound dauntingly technical, but in sound the moment is impossible to miss, as the organ makes its first entrance, soft and low, and the strings slide in with lyrical bliss. Serenity replaces neurotic urgency as the movement grows to euphoric heights.

Saint-Saëns does something similar with the second half of his Symphony. His scherzo section seems well articulated, aggressively driven strings giving way to lighter, quieter music mostly in woodwinds, with ascending scales and broken chords in the piano. But just as the pattern of formal repetition seems clear, chaos breaks in and the music finds its way to a haunted recollection of the blissful string chorale. This dwindles to another point of dissolution, and again Saint-Saëns uses the organ to signal a major architectural pillar, this time with a loud C-major chord. The finale builds with aspiring brilliance to the apotheosis of C major in a gloriously over-the-top coda.

Saint-Saëns dedicated the Symphony to the memory of Franz Liszt, who died in June of 1886. Liszt promoted the concept of cyclical thematic transformation, the extended development and variation of a single motivic source across all the movements or sections of a work, and Saint-Saëns was much influenced by the idea. He uses it in the Third Symphony with great imagination and flair. The gradual transformation of the Symphony's motto, from its initial nervy appearance to its full climactic glory, gives the work its keenly felt unity and sense of questing direction.

Paul Wee is hailed as a *totally astonishing pianist* (BBC Radio 3 Record Review), who *plays the unplayable* (The Spectator) and *who can equal and, indeed, surpass the musical and technical accomplishments of the biggest names in the profession* (International Piano). He is internationally acclaimed for his *transcendental technical prowess* (ClassicsToday), *dazzling virtuosity* (BBC Music Magazine), and *consummate musicianship* (Gramophone).



After a number of early appearances, including a concerto début in London's Royal Albert Hall aged 12, he continued his studies in New York City at the Manhattan School of Music Pre-College division with Nina Svetlanova. After deciding not to pursue a full-time conservatory education or a primary career in the arts, Paul studied law at the University of Oxford, obtaining his BA (Jurisprudence) and BCL from Keble College. He was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in 2010, and attempts to balance his love for the piano alongside the demands of a busy practice at the Bar.

Paul's recordings for BIS Records have received much critical acclaim. His 2019 debut recording of *Alkan's Symphony for Solo Piano* and *Concerto for Solo Piano* was shortlisted for a Gramophone Award and Limelight's Recording of the Year in the Instrumental category, and received a Gramophone Editor's Choice (November 2019) and a Diapason d'Or (January 2020). His 2020 recording of *Thalberg's L'art du chant* met with similar praise, being selected as an Instrumental Choice by BBC Music Magazine (January 2021) and a Limelight Editor's Choice (December 2020). His 2022 recording of Liszt's transcription of *Beethoven's Eroica Symphony* and *Alkan's transcription of Mozart's D minor Piano Concerto* was also shortlisted for a Gramophone Award, as well as being Gramophone's Recording of the Month for December 2022 and ClassicsToday's Disc of the Year for 2022. His most recent recording, of *Piano Concerti by Henselt and Bronsart* with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Michael Collins, was also selected as a Gramophone Editor's Choice (June 2024).

Paul continues to perform as and when his professional commitments permit, as a recital soloist, concerto soloist, and chamber musician, both in his current home city of London and internationally. Recent concert appearances have included his solo recital debut at London's Wigmore Hall (June 2024), and Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 3 with the Fidelio Orchestra conducted by Raffaello Morales at St John's Waterloo (June 2025).

Our principal conductor, California-born **Rebecca Miller**, has earned international acclaim for her compelling, insightful, and energetic presence on the podium and for her ability to communicate with audiences of all ages. She spreads her work between professional, amateur and youth orchestras and choirs, and is passionate about music's relevance to our society, artistic citizenship, and championing unduly-neglected female composers. She is currently Director of Orchestras at Royal Holloway University, Principal Conductor of Royal Orchestral Society, Principal Conductor of Bishop's Stortford Sinfonia, and Principal Guest Conductor of Orchestra of the Swan. She most recently served as Chief Conductor of the Uppsala Chamber Orchestra in Sweden from 2019-2023.



Her guest conducting includes the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Gävle Symphony, Västerås Symphony, Dalasinfoniettan, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, London Mozart Players, and London Philharmonic Orchestra. Rebecca is passionate about her work with young musicians – she works regularly with the National Children's Orchestra and LSO Discovery, and has also guest conducted the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, Wales, and Great Britain.

Previously, Rebecca served as Resident Conductor of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and American Conducting Fellow of The Houston Symphony, and Assistant Conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. She holds a BMus. in Piano Performance from Oberlin Conservatory, an MMus in Orchestral Conducting from Northwestern University, and for two years was the Paul Woodhouse Junior Fellow in Orchestral Conducting at London's Royal College of Music.

"It is not possible to see the sparks, but you can certainly hear them" - The Financial Times

THE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1

Christian Halstead
Geraldine Andrews
Caroline Cox
Prasanthi Matharu
Jackie Burwell
David Coltman
Mike Malone
Shoko Kurebayashi
Sophi Lomidze
Martin Anthony Burrage

Violin 2

Katie Lander
Philip Burwell
Jeannie Okikiolu
Jen Tillier
Adrienne Freeman
Mark Isherwood
Katie Kinnear
Ange Levesque

Violas

Rosemary Cook
Karen Mason
Jeremy Cook
Deborah Miles-Johnson
Louise Kamill
Mike Short
Matk Denza

Cellos

Hugh Larsen
Daniel Ivens
Maximilian Gross
Nicholas Warren
Francis Norton
Brian Coffey
Dirk Wong
Geraldine Isherwood

Double Basses

Olive Chan
Arwin Ivey
Ka Man Chan
Brooke Simpson

Flutes

Jo Felton
Alex Chantrell
Fran Hall

Oboes/Cor anglais

Marissa Pueschel
Julia Philpott
Christina East

Clarinets

Joe Smouha
Sarah Bowden
James Wolfe

Bassoons

Fiona Cairney
Richard Griffiths
Ethel Livermore

Horns

Phil McGuire
Richard Slater
Margaret Douglass
Owen Mortimer

Trumpets

Kieran Booker
Sam Thackery
Christian Kiely-Charalambous

Trombones

Luenwah Tse
Freddie Onslow
Sam Howells

Tuba

Martin Oxenham

Piano (Saint-Saëns)

Paul Wee
Gabriel Williams

Timpani

Sana Abu-Jabir

Percussion

Elinor Mason
Anna Fyl

Jem Lowther is a choral director, educator, and keyboard player based in Northamptonshire. Following a music degree at Oxford, Jem took up the position of Director of Music at All Saints' Northampton. Since his appointment in 2015 he has built on the excellent work of his predecessors, raising the music programme to new heights, overseeing the restoration of the organs, and leading the choir on several foreign tours. In 2024, the choir was broadcast live for an hour on BBC1 television. As a recitalist, he is often to be heard in collaboration with other keyboard players, singers, and instrumentalists.



Outside All Saints', Jem is a Musician in Residence with the David Ross Education Trust, which sees him working with primary and secondary school children across Northamptonshire and beyond. He is also the repetiteur for the Northampton Bach Choir and works with his family in running a historic house and agricultural estate. In his spare time, Jem is a keen climber and mountaineer. He holds a diploma in solo piano performance and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists.

**THE ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY GRATEFULLY
ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF ITS BENEFACTORS**

Benefactors

The Coral Samuel Charitable Trust
The Aspinwall Educational Trust
The Ian Fleming Charitable Trust

Lifetime Associate Members

Mr. Peter Fineman	Mrs. Amanda Norton
Mr. Anthony Hyman Isaacs	Mr. Michael Norton
Mr. Daniel J. Jacoel	Ms. Sophie Prett
Mr. Peter Loveday	

Associate Member Benefactors

Antoinette and Michael Ferraro	Hana Smouha
Mr. and Mrs. Jon Foulds	Mrs. Lucy Smouha
Lady Heller	Lillian Valchar

Associate Members

Mr. Nick Gadsby	Mr. Anthony J. Melhuish
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Garland	Mrs. Jane Prevezer
Mrs. L. Mahmud	Mr. & Mrs. S. Raperport

PLEASE SUPPORT THE ORCHESTRA
and help us to keep up the improvement and standard of our concerts.

Our list of associate members has considerably declined over the past few years, so your support will help us seek out exceptional young performers and give them early solo experience.

If you would like to help, please use the contact form on our website www.royalorchestralsociety.org.uk or speak to a member of the orchestra and we will contact you.



Britten's War Requiem
with James Gilchrist, Ashley Riches &
Geraldine McGreevy, Cadogan Hall,
November 2014



Peter and the Wolf
the first children's concert
St Mary's, Stoke Newington, April
2013



Britten's Young Person's Guide
St John's Smith Square



Walton's Belshazzar's Feast
Cadogan Hall, November 2016



Bartók's Bluebeard's Castle
With Janice Watson and Andrew Greenan
Village Underground, Shoreditch

FOR YOUR DIARY



 **ROS | ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY**

dvořák
carnival overture

dani howard
trombone concerto

sibelius
symphony no.2

Peter Moore (trombone)
Rebecca Miller (conductor)

Sunday 29 March 2026 7.00pm
Duke's Hall, Royal Academy of Music NW1 5HT

Tickets £20 stalls - £12 gallery
Concessions under 25. £12
boxoffice@ram.ac.uk
020 7873 7300 (10am -12 noon termtime)



 **ROS | ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY**

Debussy
prelude à l'après midi d'un faune

Tailleferre
harp concertino

Mahler
symphony no.4

Llywelyn Ifan Jones (harp)
Rebecca Miller (conductor)

Saturday 13 June 2026 7.00pm
Smith Square Hall SW1P 3HA

 Tickets £20, £16 Concessions for under 25 £12
Book online at www.sinfoniasmithsq.org.uk
Booking fees apply
Booking Helpline: 020 7222 1061

