



ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

Spotlight on the Harp

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

The Harp in Concert

Our last concert constructed a brightly spotlighted stage to show the exuberance of modern brass instruments, focusing on the trombone. This concert embraces, in an altogether gentler fashion, an instrument with a five-thousand-year history and a name that's a by-word for sonic delicacy – although it must be said that a modern orchestral harp can roar like a lion when required.

Our programme tonight includes three works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that all involve the harp and, taken together, have near-magical powers to charm, soothe, rouse, caress, entertain and disarm the human soul.

Debussy's languorous and exquisite setting of Stéphane Mallarmé's Symbolist poem depicts a mythological faun (half man, half goat) dreaming and day-dreaming in the hot sun, mainly about nymphs.

Tailleferre's *Concertino for Harp and Orchestra* is luminous, subtle and playful by turns: our soloist tonight also has a key role in the other two works and you can find his biography later in this booklet.

Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* has, at one level, a directness, simplicity and charm that differentiates it from all his others, but it also has haunting undercurrents of mortality. Its final movement sets, for solo soprano voice, a children's song entitled 'Life in Heaven' from the folk-derived song collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (Youth's Magic Horn). The child's naïve, cheerful but thoughtlessly cruel vision of heaven ("We dance and we leap, we skip and we sing! ... St John lets the little lamb out, and Herod the Butcher lies in wait for it") can amuse and disarm even the most cynical; but Mahler does not intend us to forget that life and death are inseparably intertwined.

Welcome, then, to a concert that's truly designed to tug at the harpstrings.

Note by Jeremy Cook



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The 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

Saturday 13 June 2026 7pm

Smith Square Hall

Debussy *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*

Tailleferre *Harp Concertino*

INTERVAL

Mahler *Symphony no. 4*

Llywelyn Ifan Jones (*Harp*)

Ellie Neate (*Soprano*)

Royal Orchestral Society

Leader **Stephanie Waite**

Rebecca Miller (*Conductor*)

Claude Debussy (1841-1904)

Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune

Between 1892 and 1894, at the same time as he was writing his String Quartet, Debussy composed *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, a masterpiece so personal, so free of the ordinary indices of derivation, so distinctive in feeling and colouring, so unlike any music of the past or of its own era — a piece that introduced the world to Debussy's mature, "impressionistic" style.



Originally, the work was to be in three movements: "Prélude", "Interlude" and "Paraphrase finale." However, when Debussy made his final revision of the *Prélude*, he discarded sketches for the last two movements, and on December 22, 1894, the audience of the Société Nationale heard the premiere of a one-movement symphonic poem.

Similar to concurrent "symbolist" poetry and "impressionist" painting, Debussy deals deliberately in vagueness; his music suggests rather than depicts. With its unusual combinations of tone colour, the *Prélude* is something of a study in the play of light and shadow. Its general form is clear (A-B-C-A), but the design is characteristically non-symphonic, and its outlines are hazy.

The diffused storyline of Stéphane Mallarmé's famous eclogue, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, concerns a mythological faun (half man, half goat). The faun is playing a double reed flute and falls asleep. He dreams sensuously of two nymphs, but when he awakens, he finds reality the same as before. He then tries to re-live the dream in his mind.

Debussy described his *Prélude* as "a very free illustration of Mallarmé's poem . . . to evoke the successive scenes in which the longings and desires of the faun pass in the heat of the afternoon."

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983)

Concertino for Harp and Orchestra

Tailleferre was a French impressionist composer. She was the only female member of the famed group "Les Six" who aimed to transform the French music scene and succeeded. Her music is lyrical, tuneful, and yet just out of reach somehow.



Sadly, we hear nothing of her compositions now, preferring Satie or Poulenc. Both Satie and Poulenc can be 'heard' in her music but there is also a definite feminine touch there too, and her compositions are original and not in any way derivative. Her sounds are refreshing and creative.

The *Concertino for Harp and Orchestra* dates from 1926-27, when Tailleferre was living in the United States with her husband Ralph Barton, New Yorker cartoonist and caricaturist, to whom she dedicated the score. They had married very soon after meeting, though the relationship proved short-lived and ended in divorce. (Barton, pining over his previous wife—who later married the playwright Eugene O'Neill — would commit suicide in 1931.)

While she was working on the *Concertino*, Tailleferre and Barton became something of a power couple in New York: Tailleferre's fame at the time actually eclipsed that of her husband. Serge Koussevitzky led the Boston Symphony in the premiere, with Marcel Grandjany as the harpist.

The *Concertino's* first movement shows Tailleferre's links to the Neoclassical aesthetic of Igor Stravinsky but also her characteristic humour, casting the soloist in multiple roles — including a lengthy cadenza. The middle movement is touching, gently pierced by a mysterious melancholy, and the finale recalls the bustling, animated crowd scenes of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. The Boston audience immediately loved the piece — including Charlie Chaplin, who was in attendance.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony no. 4 in G major

The *Fourth* is Mahler's most lyrical symphony, and at about 54 minutes his shortest: a place to pause before the onslaught of the massive works that follow. Here, Mahler looks at the world through the lens of a child, borrowing ideas from his earlier song cycle, *Youth's Magic Horn*. He imagined the *Fourth* as a surreal dream, from which a child awakes in the final movement to express the delights of Heaven through song. And in doing so, he raises some very dark thoughts indeed about life, death, and human behaviour upon Earth.



Mahler said of his symphony “*In the three first movements, there reigns a serenity of the highest realm; a realm strange to us, oddly frightening, even terrifying. In the finale, the child tells us what it all means.*” He cast the music in classical four-movement symphonic form, condensed from a larger six-part blueprint and trimmed of the excesses found in his preceding symphonies. To create a lighter, brighter sound, he dispensed with the usual rank of trombones but expanded the percussion section, beginning with the jingling sleigh bells that open the work.

But the first movement doesn't stay either light or bright. Full of sharply changing themes and plunging climaxes, it takes listeners into swirling, dangerous waters, and we even hear a fading trumpet echoing the opening notes of the yet-to-be-composed *Fifth Symphony*.

A dark *Scherzo* follows, with the orchestral leader playing at times on a violin that has been tuned up a tone to create the country sound of the fiddle—the instrument that the Devil plays when luring lost souls away to Hell. This swaggering movement has two *Trios*, also powerfully reminiscent of peasant dances.

A lengthy *Adagio* serves as the work's anchor. “*This is a peaceful, stoic world. Toward the end of this movement, the heavens open, the orchestra blasts forward, and the singer enters. It is rapturous music.*” We recall, with a jolt, that 'rapture', in its original sense of a soul's ascent to heaven, is what closes this earthly life.

In the finale, Mahler introduces the awakened child, who gleefully embraces “*This Heavenly Life*”. Based on an old German folk song, 'Heaven is Full of Violins', the soloist sings of the bounty of food and how no music on earth can compare with that of the angels. But, as you follow the English text on the next page, ask yourself what this child might have seen during This Earthly Life to evoke such thoughtless cruelty.

Das himmlische Leben (aus Des Knaben Wunderhorn)

Wir genießen die himmlischen Freuden,
D'rum tun wir das Irdische meiden.
Kein weltlich' Getümmel hört man nicht im Himmel!
Lebt alles in sanfterster Ruh'.
Wir führen ein englisches Leben,
Sind dennoch ganz lustig daneben;
Wir tanzen und springen, Wir hüpfen und singen,
Sankt Peter im Himmel sieht zu.

Johannes das Lämmlein auslasset,
Der Metzger Herodes d'rauf passet.
Wir führen ein geduldig's, Unschuldig's, geduldig's,
Ein liebliches Lämmlein zu Tod.
Sankt Lucas den Ochsen tät schlachten
Ohn' einig's Bedenken und Achten.
Der Wein kost' kein Heller im himmlischen Keller;
Die Englein, die backen das Brot.

Gut' Kräuter von allerhand Arten,
Die wachsen im himmlischen Garten,
Gut' Spargel, Fisolen und was wir nur wollen.
Ganze Schüsseln voll sind uns bereit!
Gut' Äpfel, gut' Birn' und gut' Trauben;
Die Gärtner, die alles erlauben.
Willst Rehbock, willst Hasen, auf offener Straßen
Sie laufen herbei!

Sollt' ein Fasttag etwa kommen,
Alle Fische gleich mit Freuden angeschwommen!
Dort läuft schon Sankt Peter mit Netz und mit Köder
Zum himmlischen Weiher hinein
Sankt Martha die Köchin muß sein.

Kein' Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden,
Die unsrer verglichen kann werden.
Elftausend Jungfrauen zu tanzen sich trauen.
Sankt Ursula selbst dazu lacht.
Kein' Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden,
Die unsrer verglichen kann werden.
Cäcilia mit ihren Verwandten sind treffliche Hofmusikanten!
Die englischen Stimmen
Ermuntern die Sinnen, daß alles für Freuden erwacht.

The Heavenly Life (from Youth's Magic Horn)

*We enjoy heavenly pleasures
and therefore avoid earthly ones.
No worldly tumult is to be heard in heaven.
All live in greatest peace.
We lead angelic lives,
yet have a merry time of it besides.
We dance and we spring, We skip and we sing.
Saint Peter in heaven looks on.*

*John lets the lambkin out,
and Herod the Butcher lies in wait for it.
We lead a patient, an innocent, patient,
dear little lamb to its death.
Saint Luke slaughters the ox
without any thought or concern.
Wine doesn't cost a penny in the heavenly cellars;
The angels bake the bread.*

*Good greens of every sort
grow in the heavenly vegetable patch,
good asparagus, string beans, and whatever we want.
Whole dishfuls are set for us!
Good apples, good pears and good grapes,
and gardeners who allow everything!
If you want roebuck or hare, on the public streets
they come running right up.*

*Should a fast day come along,
all the fishes at once come swimming with joy.
There goes Saint Peter running with his net and his bait
to the heavenly pond.
Saint Martha must be the cook.*

*There is just no music on earth
that can compare to ours.
Even the eleven thousand virgins venture to dance,
and Saint Ursula herself has to laugh.
There is just no music on earth
that can compare to ours.
Cecilia and all her relations make excellent court musicians.
The angelic voices
gladden our senses, so that all awaken for joy.*

Llywelyn Ifan Jones MA BMus (Hons) DipABRSM

Winner of the 2020 Camac Harp Competition at the North London Festival, semi-finalist at the World Harp Competition, and recipient of a Gold Award at the 2026 Vienna International Music Competition, Llywelyn has built an international career across solo performance, orchestral work, theatre, commercial collaborations, and immersive recital programming.

Classically trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg, he has performed throughout the UK and Europe, appearing at the World Harp Congress in Vancouver and Cardiff, Mozart Week in Salzburg, and alongside organisations including the Royal Opera House, British Sinfonietta, Southern Sinfonia, and the British Philharmonic Concert Orchestra. In 2026, he joined the touring production of *The Carpenters Story*, further expanding his work into large-scale theatrical performance.

A passionate advocate for Welsh music and culture, Llywelyn was awarded the title of **Pencerdd Cymru** (*Chief Musician of Wales*) in 2013 in honour of Welsh harpist and composer John Thomas. His work explores themes of identity, landscape, storytelling, and heritage through recital programmes that challenge traditional expectations of the harp.

Recent projects include *Water: A Force of Nature*, an immersive recital experience exploring the emotional, political, and cultural significance of water through music by Philip Glass, Bedřich Smetana, David Watkins, Amy Beach, and Mared Emlyn. His work has also attracted coverage from Classic FM and wider media outlets.

Upcoming engagements include performances with Kristiansund Opera in Norway, and a solo recital tour across Scandinavia.



Hailed as a “*rising star*” by The Guardian, **Ellie Neate** is a soprano and 2022 opera course graduate from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and was a Help Musicians Sybil Tutton and Fishmongers’ Company scholar.

Ellie has performed at Opera Holland Park as Sylviane in *The Merry Widow*, at Opera North as Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* at the Waterperry Opera Festival and Teatro Lorenzo da Ponte, Vittorio Veneto in the Da Ponte Opera Festival.

Ellie is currently performing Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, with Wild Arts in several various country venues throughout the summer, and at Opera Holland Park on August 22nd.



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 to 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 B.Mus. in Piano Performance from Oberlin Conservatory, an M.Mus. 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

Stephanie Waite
Geraldine Andrews
Caroline Cox
Jackie Burwell
Nicola Bedwin
Marc Wood
Mike Malone
Teresa Coakley
Anna Gorczyńska-Bacon
Anya Hancock

Violin 2

Katie Lander
Philip Burwell
Jeannie Okikiolu
David Coltman
Adrienne Freeman
Jeremy Cook
Mark Isherwood
Peter Steele
Katie Kinnear
Ange Levesque

Violas

Rosemary Cook
Matthew Newton
Mollie Koenigsberger
Mark Denza
Jenny Arundell
Louise Kamill
Juleka Nwankwo
Sonia Tuttiet

Cellos

Antoine Kaiserman
Hugh Larsen
Daniel Grace
Geraldine Isherwood
Francis Norton
Brian Coffey
Naoki Aso
Alina Maries-Reim

Double Basses

Olive Chan
Susan Moss
Ka Man Chan
Aidan Platts

Flutes / Piccolo

Jo Felton
Fran Hall
Alex Chantrell
Helen Xinwei Chen

Oboes / Cor anglais

Michal Rogalski
Paul Blaker
Lisa Stonham

Clarinets / Bass Clarinet

Katie Horten-Middleton
Jess Sullivan
Luke Allen

Bassoons / Contrabassoon

Fiona Cairney
Jeremy Crump
Ethel Livermore

Horns

Phil Maguire
Richard Slater
Jay Sewell
Owen Mortimer

Trumpets

Kieran Booker
Sam Thackery
Christian Kiely-Charamboulos

Timpani

Richard Souper

Percussion

Sana Abu-Jabir
Shesh Abu-Jabir
Charlie Shortt
Filippo Ferrugiarra

Harp

Llywelyn Ifan Jones

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Britten's War Requiem

with James Gilchrist, Ashley Riches &
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Peter and the Wolf

Our first children's concert
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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

ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

Conducted by Rebecca Miller

Soloist: T.B.A.

Sunday 29th November 2026

Duke's Hall
Royal Academy of Music

Programme

Dorothy Howell – Lamia

Grieg – Piano Concerto

Elgar – Enigma Variations

Please save the date – programme to be confirmed

Join us for an evening of dramatic and iconic orchestral music.

