

BSO

BROMLEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

104th Season 2023 - 2024

Music Director - Adrian Brown

Leader - Andrew Laing



Saturday 9th March 2024

Langley Park Centre for the
Performing Arts

£2.00

PROGRAMME

Franck Symphony in D minor

Interval - 20 Minutes

Refreshments are available in the dining hall

Debussy Jeux

Bizet L'Arlésienne

Suite 1 movements 1 & 4

Suite 2 movements 1, 2 & 4

Unauthorised audio or video recording is not permitted

Adrian Brown - Music Director



Adrian Brown comes from a distinguished line of Sir Adrian Boult's most gifted pupils, studying intensively with him for some years after graduating from the Royal Academy of Music. Sir Adrian wrote: He has always impressed me as a musician of exceptional attainments who has all the right gifts and ideas to make him a first-class conductor. Adrian remains the only British conductor to have reached the finals of the Karajan Conductors' Competition: the Berlin Philharmonic was the first professional orchestra he conducted.

In 1992 Adrian was engaged to conduct one of the world's great orchestras, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic.

In 1998 Sir Roger Norrington recommended him to conduct the Camerata Salzburg. Adrian has also conducted many leading British orchestras including the City of Birmingham, the BBC and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestras, and the London Sinfonietta. He is a great proponent of contemporary music and has given several first performances.

Working with young musicians has been an area where Adrian has made an invaluable contribution to British musical life, as well as abroad. Between 1972 and 2013 he was Music Director of Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra, his tenure honoured with a Celebratory Concert in Cadogan Hall in March 2013. He has frequently conducted both the National Youth Orchestra (working with Sir Colin Davis and Norrington) and the National Youth Wind Orchestra. He regularly runs courses for young musicians, coaches young conductors, and was given the Novello Award for Youth Orchestras at the 1989 Edinburgh Festival. Adrian was one of a hundred musicians presented with a prestigious Classic FM Award at their Tenth Birthday Honours Celebration in June 2002. In 2013 he was awarded the Making Music NFMS Lady Hilary Groves Prize for services to Community Music.

Adrian is particularly highly-regarded for his interpretations of Berlioz and Elgar. In December 2017 he was presented with the Berlioz International Society Medal, and, coinciding with his 70th birthday in October 2019, he was awarded the Elgar Medal.

Adrian founded his own orchestra, the Elgar Sinfonia, in 2018: it has gone from strength to strength, including Elgar's Falstaff in June 2021 and, in October, celebrating the Elgar Society 50th anniversary with Sea Pictures, Polonia and the Crown of India in the presence of Dame Janet Baker. The Sinfonia is currently performing a cycle of the Elgar Symphonies and future plans include The Black Knight and the Bliss Piano Concerto.

Adrian led a moving performance of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in Autumn 2021 with the London Chorus and the Royal Orchestral Society, and conducted the Royal's 150th Anniversary Concert in 2023. He has a 42-year association with Waveney Sinfonia, Suffolk and was delighted to return to Trianon Music Group in Ipswich this Spring. His longest-standing appointment is as Music Director of Bromley Symphony with whom he performed Mahler's Sixth Symphony in early 2023.

César Franck 1822-1890

Symphony in D Minor CFF 130



Franck was already 65 when, following a series of symphonic poems, and egged on by such ardent supporters as Chausson, Duparc and d'Indy, he began his famous late symphony (which he dedicated to Duparc). He was arguably inspired by Wagner as well as by late Beethoven, or – perhaps most of all – Saint-Saëns, whose 'organ' symphony is equally cyclical (important motifs recur throughout the work). Lamoureux famously snubbed an offer to conduct its debut, so the symphony was premiered by conservatoire students and initial reviews were mixed. *Le Figaro* sniped: "The new work of M. César Franck is a very important composition but so dense

and tight that we cannot grasp all its aspects and feel its effect at a first hearing.' Camille Bellaigue denigrated its four-bar theme as 'hardly above the level of those given to Conservatoire students'. *Le Menestrel* found it 'a considerable achievement, worthy of a musician with noble tendencies,' though – perhaps damningly – 'aspiring to a pedestal a little too high for him.' Meanwhile, Ravel bemoaned its orchestration and Gounod summed up the work as 'the affirmation of impotence taken to the point of dogma.' There were also complaints about the addition of cornets – not usual in the period – and even the *cor anglais*, whose role is prominent - while Franck's musically

conservative wife was reportedly uneasy with the symphony's 'morally compromising sensuality'.

Franck, unbothered, was meanwhile laughing all the way to the bank. His symphony rose and rose in popularity – in the first half of the 1900s, even rivalling Beethoven's, and was acclaimed, throughout the late 19th and most of the twentieth century, as a classic. Franck personally described it as an 'energetic, warm' first movement, a 'sweet and melancholy Allegretto, inspired by a vision of a cortège', and a 'radiant, quasi luminous finale.'

But during the 1980s and 1990s, its popularity began to slip, and now it's a concert rarity – whether through over-familiarity, a change in the zeitgeist, or some sense that the age of Franco-Germanic passion has passed. This is deeply unfair, because Franck's D minor is as exuberant, fresh and tuneful as ever. The opening theme is a foreboding, questing echo of the phrase in Beethoven's final string quartet to which Beethoven famously appended the words, 'Muss es sein?' ('Must it be?'). This explodes into the Allegro, with harmonies shifting like quicksand before string tremolando ushers in a light and lovely second theme. There are two climaxes and divine solos for solo horn and flute before the development explores the introduction's Beethovenian theme. This, transformed with rampant brass and timpani

powerfully into the major, has the last, triumphant word.

The middle movement embodies an unusual concept: a combination of slow movement and scherzo. At its opening, harp and pizzicato strings support a glorious cor anglais theme (aided by horn) probably inspired by the ancient hymn 'Veni, Veni, Emmanuel' ('Come, come, Emmanuel'). Ghostly flute and violin figuration lead the transition into the scherzo, which takes a while to simmer to the boil. The cor anglais returns, but shares the spotlight, and the movement ends dreamily.

Bassoons introduce the joyously uninhibited finale, during which Franck chooses to remember bits of the entire work, using the finale's irresistibly catchy Allegro non troppo as linking device. As he wrote, 'The finale takes up all the themes again, as in [Beethoven's] Ninth. They do not return as precise quotations, however; I have elaborated them and given them the role of new elements.' Whether it's the lower strings with their ominous symphony introduction or the 'cor anglais' notable reluctance to relinquish its theme, the Allegro keeps irresistibly bubbling up, at one point riding the brass storm like a ship in full sail. Near the end a wistful clarinet persuades the highest violins into the cor's second movement hit tune, but there's no squelching the ultimate triumph of the Allegro non troppo, with jubilant trumpets in the vanguard.

Claude Debussy 1862 - 1918

Jeux



'Music is the expression of the movement of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes. Music is the silence between the notes'
- Claude Debussy

Jeux, a work of mature genius and astonishing ingenuity, is to this day the most rarely performed and deeply misunderstood of Debussy's orchestral works.

There are several likely reasons. First, Jeux had the misfortune of being premiered by the Ballet Russes at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on May 15, 1913 – only a fortnight before the scandalous near-riot following their premiere of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring on May 29. Secondly, it is astonishingly difficult, not only to play, but also to pull off musically.

Also, Nijinsky's choreography apparently failed to convince.

Debussy himself wasn't very keen, in the beginning. Jeux's origins lie in a combination of Debussy's cancer, his ensuing penury, and the ill luck of his second wife – Emma Bardac, a singer – having been disinherited upon her marriage. Debussy found himself not only obliged to accept commissions he detested but also to conduct (which he detested still more). Dubious about Diaghilev – whose choreography of his L'après-midi d'un faune, Debussy had thought 'ugly' – he took some persuading even to meet for lunch.

And with some reason. Set painter Jacques-Emile Blanche described the original concept thus: 'There should be no corps de ballet, no

ensembles... only boys and girls in flannels and rhythmic movements... a game of tennis interrupted by the crashing of an airplane!' Debussy loathed the idea but needs must and, once Diaghilev had doubled his fee and agreed to lose the plane crash, the deal was done.

Here then, is the (plane crash-free!) final version of *Jeux*. At dusk, a tennis ball is lost in a garden. A young man and two young women search for it. Under the fantastical rays of the electric lights, the trio play hide-and-seek, quarrel, sulk, flirt, and kiss. Suddenly, a second tennis ball is thrown in – by some person unknown. The unnerved trio flee into the night. Or in Debussy's words: 'After a very slow prelude, a scherzando appears, interrupted by the return of the prelude. When the scherzando resumes, a tennis ball falls on stage. After the young man has danced with the first girl, jealousy causes the second girl to begin an ironic and mocking dance in 2/4. The young man then invites her to a waltz. The first girl, abandoned, wishes to leave, but the second girl prevents her. Then all three dance, more and more quickly, to the moment of ecstasy, which is interrupted by another stray tennis ball, causing all three young people to flee. A few more notes slide furtively, and that is all!'

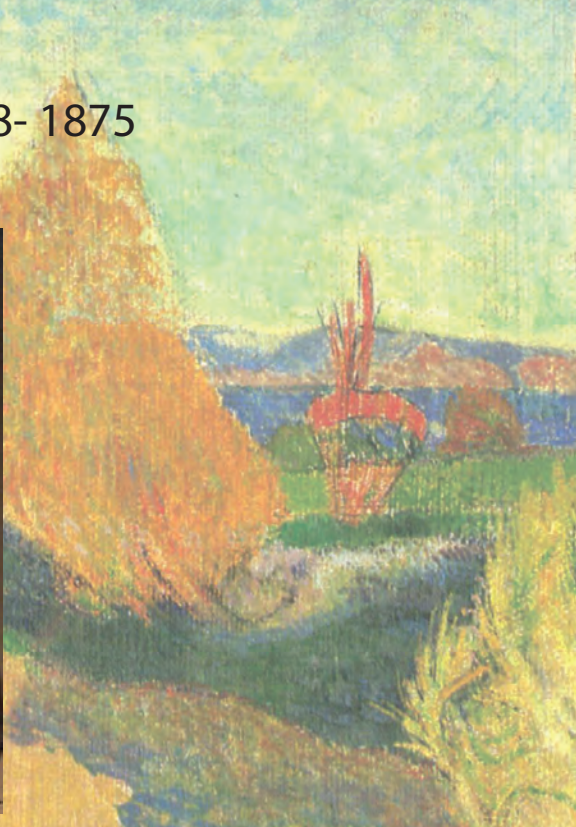
The 'furtively' is interesting, for *Jeux's* trademark is fluidity. Here, musical form is in free-fall: harmonies, mood, fragments, orchestral colours... There are roughly sixty different tempo markings – yes, someone has counted! – within this fifteen-minute

work, and only a few snatches of melody for the audience to catch hold of. Instead, fragments of sequences and particles of orchestral colour soar like wayward breezes across a tennis court. As Debussy wrote, 'I'm thinking of that colour which seems to be lit from behind, of which there are such wonderful examples in *Parsifal*.'

Debussy took only about a month to compose the work but refused to share it with Diaghilev and Nijinsky until it was orchestrated, 'not wishing these barbarians to poke their noses into my experiments in personal chemistry!' Thus, when Debussy later objected that Nijinsky 'with his cruel and barbarous choreography... trampled my poor rhythms underfoot like weed' – we should in Nijinsky's defence acknowledge that the *Rite of Spring* absorbed most of the available rehearsal time, and that Debussy's late delivery of a wispy and complex score can't have made its choreography an easy ask. The brass is used sparingly, but even the winds rarely sound en masse. Timpani, triangle, tambourine, xylophone and cymbals overlap rather than coalesce with celesta and a pair of harps. The result is evanescent and transitory, fantastical and dreamlike. Debussy told André Caplet that he needed 'to find an orchestra 'without feet' for this music'. It's a work like nothing else that even Debussy himself ever conjured – and not a crashing plane in sight!

Georges Bizet 1838- 1875

L'Arlésienne



L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1, Op. 23 (1872)

- I. Ouverture
- IV. Carillon

L'Arlésienne Suite No. 2 (1879: by Bizet, arranged by Guiraud)

- I. Pastorale
- II. Intermezzo
- IV. Farandole

'L'Arlésienne' is the title of an 1869 short story set in Provence by Alphonse Daudet. Later, Daudet decided to turn it into a melodrama, with incidental music by Bizet between each scene. The tale is the

(true) story of a young peasant of Provence who falls in love with a girl from Arles. A huge engagement party is organised, but the bride fails to show and is then discovered to have been unfaithful. Her lover, sinking into



madness, leaps to his death from a high window.

Bizet was inspired to use bits of local colour, including the tamourin (a Provençal drum) and a folksong from the region – Èr dóu Guet. He also quotes 'March of the Kings', an Avignon Christmas carol supposedly composed by Lully.

The Suite's premiere took place on 30 September 1872 in the Théâtre du Vaudeville – with Bizet personally messing about on the harmonium – due to being an under-rehearsed last-minute substitution for another play, it closed after a few weeks. As its playwright mourned, 'It was a resounding flop amid the prettiest music in the world.' For Bizet, however, there was some consolation. It was

suggested that a suite arranged for full symphony orchestra would work in the concert hall – and the opening night in 1872 proved such a triumph that the Minuetto was encored, and the Adagietto could have been.

In fact, L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1 turned into such a hit that its publisher commissioned a second suite from Guiraud, Bizet's friend and colleague, four years after Bizet's death (though the Minuet was actually lifted from Bizet's *La jolie fille de Perth*, instead). Light, ear-wormy, and riddled with French flair, both suites have remained in the orchestral repertoire ever since.

Bromley Symphony Orchestra

Bromley Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1918 by Miss Beatrice Fowle and Miss Gwynne Kimpton, teachers at Bromley High School for Girls. Over the years, it has earned a high reputation for concerts of professional standard and has worked with many famous soloists and conductors. Sir Adrian Boult conducted regularly in the 1940s and in 1952 Norman Del Mar took over. Internationally renowned soloists who have performed with the orchestra include Paul Tortelier, John Lill, Dennis Brain, Kathleen Ferrier, Ralph Holmes, Hugh Bean, Emma Johnson, Leslie Howard and Sir Donald McIntyre.

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The BSO gratefully acknowledges the generosity of its Patrons, who provide the orchestra with an important and much valued source of funding. Patrons are entitled to two complementary guest tickets per season.

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NEXT CONCERT

Saturday 11th May 2024 7.30pm

Wagner Flying Dutchman Overture

Haydn Symphony 85 La Reine

Wagner Götterdämmerung, Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey,
Siegfried's Funeral, Immolation Scene - Soloist Zoe South

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