

NEW BEGINNINGS

Live from
Sage Gateshead

RNS: Spring has Sprung
Friday 30 April

Paul McCreesh conductor
Maria Włoszczowska violin
Royal Northern Sinfonia

FREDERICK DELIUS 1862-1934 **ON HEARING THE FIRST CUCKOO IN SPRING**

At first hearing, much of Bradford-born Delius' orchestral music sounds essentially English. His idyllic tone poems easily evoke images of nature in summer and spring, of sunrises and sunsets across a green landscape in his home country. Yet so much of this well-travelled composer's inspiration was stimulated from beyond our shores, in Norway and especially France. Delius never regarded himself as an English composer, and from 1900 most of his works were first performed and published in Germany.

Although Delius spoke of Norway as his spiritual home, France was soon to become his permanent base. In 1897 his wife-to-be, the painter Jelka Rosen, bought a riverside house in rural Grez-sur-Loing, south of Paris, and they lived there for the rest of their lives.

On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring was composed from 1911-12 and originally published in tandem with *Summer Night on the River* as *Two Pieces for Small Orchestra*. They were first performed in Leipzig in October 1913 by the Gewandhaus Orchestra under the direction of Arthur Nikisch and made their English debut the following January in London's Queen's Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg.

On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring makes use of two themes. The first is in the style of an English folk tune and, through a slow three-bar sequence, introduces the two-note cuckoo call, exchanged

initially between the oboe and divided strings, and later sounded on the clarinet.

The second theme draws upon an old Norwegian song, *In Ola Valley*, which Delius' friend Edvard Grieg composed as one of his *Nineteen Norwegian Folk Songs*, Op.66 for piano, published in 1897.

THEA MUSGRAVE B.1928 **GREEN**

Scottish-born Thea Musgrave has lived in the USA since 1972. She studied music at Edinburgh University before winning a scholarship to study in Paris with renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger from 1950-54. She later became one of Aaron Copland's composition students.

She has created more than a dozen operas and music theatre works as well as orchestral concertos. Much of her work reflects her view that no music can be entirely abstract and that every piece has to have a dramatic component.

Musgrave is passionately concerned with nature and, in particular, the cycles of the seasons which demand renewal in art as well as in life. *Green* was among works premiered to mark her 80th birthday in 2008 and in her 90th year it was performed at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms.

While conflicting musical forces are its focus, *Green* has also been seen as a reflection on mankind's destructive effect on the environment.

A lyrical harmonic passage in the key of E, led by the first violin, is persistently interrupted by a dissonant phrase from the double bass, which steadily spreads uncertainty and disruption. The work ends on a high lingering E note on solo violin, which Musgrave has described as either 'a last gasp of despair or a distant voice of hope'.

She adds: 'Many parallels to this conflict can of course be drawn from real life. The title *Green* for me represents either the freshness of youth, or for the plant life in our world on which we all depend'.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS 1872-1958 **THE LARK ASCENDING**

Unfortunately, Jennifer Pike has had to withdraw from this concert due to unforeseen circumstances. We're thrilled that Maria Włoszczowska (Guest Leader) will perform *The Lark Ascending* at short notice.

Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* first took flight as an instrumental piece, for violin and piano. It was brought to life in the peaceful months of 1914 before Europe was swept into a terrible war.

Vaughan Williams prefaced the score with extracts from an 1881 poem by poet George Meredith, which gives the work its title.

*He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.*

*For singing 'til the heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes.*

*'Til lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.*

The work received its first performance as late as 1920, following a revision by the composer, and it was to be another year before it received its premiere as a *Romance for Violin and Orchestra* with Newcastle-born violin virtuoso Marie Hall as soloist, the work's dedicatee.

At the time, London music critics were struggling to get to grips with the new and uncompromising music of Stravinsky and Schoenberg – and when *The Lark* fluttered down into their midst at a concert of contemporary works it ruffled more than a few feathers.

The baffled critic from The Times pronounced it 'showed serene disregard of fashions of today or

yesterday. It dreams its way along'. Fashions change, of course. Today this short but beautiful work, reflecting the pastoral charm of an England now lost, is a delight for concertgoers and musicians alike.

The work begins with the soloist taking wing against muted strings in a passage which Vaughan Williams marked *Andante sostenuto* – 'flowing and sustained' – before the violin is joined by the fuller orchestra in a rich melody.

Another livelier sequence, marked *Quasi andante* follows. Then, as the opening theme returns, the orchestral sound ebbs away to leave the violin, like the lark, solitary and soaring ever higher until lost in the silence.

ROBERT SCHUMANN 1810-1856 **SYMPHONY NO.1 IN B FLAT, OP.38, 'SPRING'** *Andante poco maestoso; Allegro molto vivace* *- Larghetto - Scherzo: Molto vivace - Allegro animato e grazioso*

Schumann, already a master of the piano, first made sketches of a symphony in the early 1830s yet lacked confidence in developing it any further.

But when, in 1841, he heard the first performance, under the baton of Felix Mendelssohn, of Franz Schubert's 'Great' C major symphony – which Schumann himself had unearthed at the Vienna home of the deceased composer's brother – he was at last inspired to embark on a symphony of his own.

In four days towards the end of January he'd sketched out the work, the orchestration took less than a month after that, and his good friend Mendelssohn was putting it through rehearsals with the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra on March 28. Three days later Mendelssohn conducted its premiere.

There is certainly a Spring-like character to the work – energetic, lyrical and colourful, shedding winter gloom and embracing nature's green resurgence.

Schumann's inclusion of a humble triangle within the orchestra's ranks in the first movement raised a few scholarly eyebrows, and the introduction of an extra trio in the third movement was also considered daring.

The fanfare opening is truly majestic and bears characteristics of the introduction to Schubert's C major masterwork. This triumphant theme is transformed within the melodically inventive and highly rhythmic *Allegro molto vivace* section.

Heavy brass are sidelined in favour of expressive strings in the serene, song-like *Larghetto*. A sombre passage for trombones and bassoons then links us with hardly a pause to the lively *Scherzo*, which only

breaks its spirited pace for those brief contrasting trio sections

The optimism of spring is gleefully expressed in the dance-like finale, with some sparring between

strings and winds before a sturdy theme establishes itself and sweeps onwards to the symphony's climax.

Programme notes © Richard C Yates

PAUL MCCREESH CONDUCTOR

Paul McCreesh is the founder and Artistic Director of the Gabrieli Consort & Players which he established in 1982 and with whom he has toured world-wide and made many award-winning recordings. McCreesh is well-known for the energy and passion that he brings to his musicmaking and is especially enthusiastic about working with young musicians and broadening access to classical music; he works regularly with youth orchestras and choirs and is active in building new educational initiatives whenever possible.

In 2019/20, he conducted Mendelssohn's *Symphony No.2* and excerpts from Schubert's *Rosamunde* with the New Japan Philharmonic, Haydn's *Creation* with Royal Northern Sinfonia, Handel's *Messiah* with the Casa da Música Baroque Orchestra & Choir, Haydn's *London Symphony* & Beethoven's C Major Mass with Filharmonia Poznanska, with whom he conducts again this season.

In the previous season, he conducted works by Elgar, Haydn and Brahms with the Kammerakademie Potsdam, a programme of Elgar, Britten and Mendelssohn with the Bamberger Symphoniker, he returned to the Filharmonia Poznanska for some Rossini and Britten, and conducted performances with the MDR Sinfonieorchester at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and the Basel Chamber Orchestra.

McCreesh has guest conducted many of the major orchestras and choirs across the globe, including most recently the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Bremen Philharmonic, Prague Philharmonia, Arctic Chamber Orchestra, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Bergen Philharmonic, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, Verbier Festival orchestras, and Berlin Konzerthausorchester. McCreesh also enjoys regular and ongoing collaborations with Saint Paul and Basel Chamber Orchestras.

From 2013-2016 he was Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser of the Gulbenkian Orchestra (Lisbon) with whom he conducted a wide range of music from the classical period through to the nineteenth and twentieth century, focusing in particular on symphonic repertoire, oratorio and opera in concert, working closely with the world renowned Gulbenkian Choir.

McCreesh has established a strong reputation in the opera house and has conducted productions at the Teatro Real Madrid, Royal Danish Opera, Opera Comique, Vlaamse Opera and at the Verbier Festival, and most recently he conducted Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Bergen Opera, and returned to Vlaamse Opera for a production of *Idomeneo*.

In 2011, McCreesh launched his own record label, Winged Lion, in collaboration with the Gabrieli Consort & Players, Signum Classics and the Wratistavia Cantans Festival, where he was Artistic Director between 2006 and 2012. To date they have made seven recordings, most recently Haydn *The Seasons*, released in spring 2017 and lauded by critics: 'the communal sense of joy is infectious' (Financial Times) and 'Glorious' (Guardian). Other highlights include Britten *War Requiem* (BBC Music Magazine Award 2014), Mendelssohn *Elijah* (Diapason d'Or Award 2013), Berlioz's gargantuan *Grande Messe des Morts* (BBC Award 2012), and a reworking of his earlier Gabrieli disc, *A New Venetian Coronation 1595* (Gramophone Award 2013). The Winged Lion recordings build on his large catalogue of recordings with Deutsche Grammophon, which includes the Gramophone Award-winning Haydn *The Creation*.



Paul McCreesh © Ben Wright

MARIA WŁOSZCZOWSKA

VIOLIN

We'd like to thank Maria for stepping in at short notice to replace Jennifer Pike who had to withdraw from this evening's performance due to unforeseen circumstances.

Polish violinist Maria Włoszczowska performs as a soloist, chamber musician and guest concertmaster worldwide. She is recognised for her versatile musicianship, having won the First Prize and Audience Prize at the XXI Leipzig International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition in 2018, as well as numerous prizes at the XV International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition.

The 2020/21 season sees several UK and international engagements including projects leading the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Northern Sinfonia, violin concertos by Sibelius and Bruch, as well as performances at international chamber music festivals including Musikdorf Ernen in Switzerland, IMS Prussia Cove, Festival Resonances in Belgium, North York Moors Festival, Lewes Chamber Music Festival, Budleigh Festival, The Enghien International Musical Encounters, New Paths Festival in Yorkshire as well as chamber concerts in Scotland and the Wigmore Hall with members of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Maria gave her debut recital at the Wigmore Hall with pianist Alasdair Beatson in 2016. She has appeared as soloist with several international ensembles since, including the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, Concerto Budapest, Pauliner Barockensemble and several of Poland's symphonic and chamber orchestras.

She regularly performs at festivals around Europe where her chamber music partners have included Robert Levin, Philippe Graffin, Nobuko Imai, Amy Norrington, Paolo Giacometti, Bengt Forsberg, Alasdair Beatson, Dinis Sousa, Susan Tomes, Philip Higham and the Doric String Quartet amongst others.

She is also a recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Emily Anderson Prize, the Hattori Foundation Senior Award and Poland's Minister of Culture and National Heritage Prize.



FIRST VIOLIN

Maria Włoszczowska

The Huntington Chair

Kyra Humphreys

The Christine Swales Chair

Iona Brown

The Voigt Chair

Alexandra Raikhlina

Jane Nossek

Sarah Roberts

Jens Lynen

Liz Rossi

SECOND VIOLIN

Gaëlle-Anne Michel

The Anonymous Chair

Jenny Chang

The BA Summers Chair

Marie Schreer

Sophie Appleton

Alanna Tonetti-Tieppo

Gemma Bass

VIOLA

Michael Gerrard

The Rossiter Family Chair

Malcolm Critten

The Merle Rewcastle Chair

Tegwen Jones

James Slater

CELLO

Steffan Morris

The Share Family Chair

Daniel Hammersley

The Freeman Chair

James Craig

Gabriel Waite

The Manning Family Chair

DOUBLE BASS

Philip Nelson

The Anonymous Chair

Siân Hicks

FLUTE

Flona Kelly

Rob Looman

OBOE

Henry Clay

Michael O'Donnell

The Sylvia Fuller Chair

CLARINET

Jernej Albreht

Jessica Lee

The Bragg Family Chair

BASSOON

Stephen Reay

The Pyman Family Chair

Lawrence O'Donnell

HORN

Peter Francomb

The Friends of RNS Chair

Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans

The Richardson Family Chair

Dave Tollington

Pete Richardson

TRUMPET

Richard Martin

The Alan Johnson Chair

Marion Craig

TROMBONE

Tom Berry

Elizabeth Bateman

Simon Minshall

TIMPANI

Adrian Bending

PERCUSSION

Rich Cartlidge