



WILLIAM GRANT STILL

THRENODY: IN MEMORY OF JEAN SIBELIUS

RAVEL

PIANO CONCERTO IN G

SIBELIUS

SYMPHONY No. 1

DULWICH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Soloist: Antoine Pr at

Conductor: Chris Stark

Leader: Paula Tysall

SATURDAY 23 MARCH 2024 7:30pm

All Saints, West Dulwich

London SE21 8JY

ANTOINE PRÉAT

Franco-Belgian pianist Antoine Prémat has performed in prestigious venues including Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square, Salle Gaveau, Salle Cortot, Paris Beaux Arts Museum and Frederyk Chopin Institute. He has appeared on BBC Radio 3, France Musique, Scala Radio and RTBF Musiq3.

Antoine has performed alongside leading artists and orchestras including Maté Szücs, Miclén LaiPang, Margarita Balanas, Manuel Blanco, Sinfonietta Lausanne, Lesley Hatfield, Robin Ireland, the Centre de Musique de Chambre de Paris, Sainsbury Soloists, Academy Festival Orchestra, University Orchestra of Alicante and London Student Orchestra.

After graduating with honours from the Ecole Normale de Paris where he studied with Liudmila Berlinskaia and Guigla Katsarava, Antoine furthered his studies at the Royal Academy of Music and at the Guildhall School of Music under the tutelage of Tatiana Sarkissova and Ronan O'Hora, while studying harpsichord and fortepiano under the guidance of Carole Cerasi.

Antoine was awarded the first prize of the Concours international d'Ile de France and the Los Angeles Colburn Piano Festival Competition, the honour prize at the New York Début Piano Competition and most recently was a semi finalist at the Clara Haskil Competition 2021.

Passionate about education, Antoine has also been teaching for several years and has been invited several times to teach at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.



THRENODY: IN MEMORY OF JEAN SIBELIUS

WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1871-1915)

If the term 'threnody' evokes a dreary dirge, think again. William Grant Still's interpretation is a brass fanfare leading into a lush lament that alternates with a slow funeral march.

'Threnody' pays homage to Jean Sibelius. Commissioned to celebrate the centenary of the Finnish national hero and composer's birth, it premiered in Miami in March 1965. Still's distinct lyrical voice infuses the piece with melodies influenced by blues and folk traditions – all unmistakably American. His deep admiration for Sibelius is evident in the grandeur and orchestral colour. There are also hints of Ravel – this evening's third featured composer – in his subtle use of texture. Listen out for the divided strings.

Still was a pioneer. Breaking barriers as a conductor, he was also the first African American composer to have an opera performed by a major opera company, and the first to have a symphony performed by a professional orchestra. He also crossed boundaries, working with 'Father of the Blues' W.C. Handy, arranging film music, and playing and recording with the top jazz talent of his day.

Mary Cowlett

PIANO CONCERTO IN G MAJOR

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

i) Allegramente ii) Adagio assai iii) Presto

With this two-year project, completed in 1931, Ravel planned to be the soloist in the concerto's world-wide tour. Whilst other commissions delayed him, his health declined and, despite his determination to get his technique up to the level required, the concerto finally toured Europe with Marguerite Long as pianist and Ravel conducting. He said of this work:

"The opening theme came to me on a train between Oxford and London. But the initial idea is nothing. The work of chiselling then began. Writing music is 75% an intellectual activity. This effort is often more pleasant for me than having a rest."

With a snap, Jack is out of the box and the fun and games begin in this diverting first movement. We are in the creation of a naughty child. The piano, right from the off, contributes to all the comings and goings, into which the first jaunty tune lands. A patchwork of contrasting segments and effects predominate, with Ravel cleverly drawing attention to the joins, and referencing Jazz through blues motifs and ragged syncopations. (He was besotted with what he knew of Jazz!)

In the second movement we are in a world apart. With a timeless tune, the piano possesses its old-time accompaniment, and the melodic lines flow from beginning to end - first the solitary piano travelling its lonely path, then company sympathetically arriving as woodwinds and the rest of the orchestra join the journey. When the cor anglais steps forward for its ethereal melody, the piano decorates with whimsical garlands. Here Ravel acknowledges his deep longing for childhood.

The nerve racking finale brings frenetic urbanism. An agitated piano is integral to the madness as we swing from key to key. Ravel has constructed one of his most unpredictable movements, with trumpet fanfares, shrill clarinet, trombone smears, and grumbling bassoons, whilst the bass drum adds punctuation. Nevertheless, Ravel's sleight-of-hand dodges fatigue!

Frances Barrett

Interval drinks are available in the church.

SYMPHONY NO.1 IN E MINOR

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

- i) Andante, ma non troppo - Allegro energico
- ii) Andante, ma non troppo lento
- iii) Scherzo: Allegro
- iv) Finale, quasi una Fantasia

A solo clarinet emerges from silence...eerily uncertain, with just a distant unsettling rumble of timpani for company. Barely a hint of a home key as it meanders, lost in the dark Nordic forest of Jean Sibelius's musical imagination. It's a highly unconventional way to begin a career as a symphonist, and quite a late start: Sibelius was 33 years old in 1899 when he finished his First Symphony.

These were turbulent times for the Grand Duchy of Finland, ruled by the Russian Empire. A strong nationalist movement had been growing in the late 19th century, with the Finnish language gaining more widespread recognition, achieving equal status with Swedish as late as 1892. Folklore too: Finland's national epic the Kalevala was published, a rich source of inspiration for Sibelius's first orchestral pieces. Russia reacted to this burgeoning sense of Finnish identity with a clampdown. Tsar Nicholas II issued 'The February Manifesto' in 1899, suppressing Finnish autonomy by Imperial decree, just as Sibelius was completing his new symphony.

But despite Sibelius's increasing identification with Finnish nationalism, his First Symphony isn't 'about' anything; there's no programme as such. There had been, but he'd discarded it...references to the opening being 'A cold, cold wind blowing from the sea', and a third movement called 'A Winter's Tale'... but given what we know about the orchestral music that followed, it's hard not to hear the influence of the natural world: the quality of Nordic light, the dark forests, the long, cold winters, and the natural processes that seem to underpin the development of Sibelius's themes and orchestral textures.



Jean Sibelius

After the uncertain opening, the rest of the orchestra plunges us into an energetic Allegro, before harp and flutes take us into the melancholy world we might have encountered in Sibelius's earlier tone poems. The orchestration is already so original; rumbling basses, numerous solos, blazing wind and brass chords, the pizzicato propulsion.

The second movement caresses us with silky strings, a rich melody that could almost be Tchaikovsky, before the winds take over in pairs, crawling bassoons, hypnotic flutes, then passionate romantic proclamations.



Sibelius Monument, Helsinki

The third movement is a bristling, nervously energetic Scherzo that owes something to Bruckner, but the way the theme is distributed between timpani, strings and winds is pure Sibelius, and the slower trio section has an almost folk-like simplicity.

If we had any doubt about the integration of Sibelius's themes and musical ideas, they're banished by the last movement, which unites them in an explosive creation that's been described as a devastated landscape, and ends like the first movement, with two bare pizzicato chords. An astonishingly original first symphony, and when you check in with the musicologists, it turns out that almost everything is linked to and develops from that meandering solo clarinet right at the start. Not so aimless after all...

Andrew McGregor

Please switch off all mobile phones and electronic devices. Photography and the use of recording equipment is not permitted during the performance.

Chris Stark is based in South East London. He began as a cellist, turning to conducting whilst a choral scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge.

As co-founder of the RPS Award Winning Multi-Story Orchestra, he has conducted all of the Orchestra's car park performances since their inception with The Rite of Spring in 2011, including celebrated performances at the BBC Proms.

Away from Multi-Story, he works mostly in opera, for organisations that include Glyndebourne, Oper Köln, Garsington, ETO, OAE and Gurzenich Orchestra.

Committed to community music, he is principal conductor of Ernest Read and Blackheath Halls Symphony Orchestras.

He has recorded for NMC and broadcast with both Multi-Story and Aurora. Chris was appointed conductor of DSO in December 2022.



Paula Tysall studied violin at the Centre for Young Musicians, where she was awarded the Associated Board's Silver Medal, the Royal College of Music and the National Centre for Orchestral Studies.

As a member of the New London Orchestra she has recorded for Hyperion Records, made broadcasts for the BBC and Classic FM, appeared at the Proms and in Matthew Bourne's award winning Swan Lake. She has played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia and English National Ballet.

She teaches at Westminster School and is a member of the Ashington, Beaufort and Allenby String Quartets.

Violin 1

Paula Tysall
Helen Bartholomew
Chris Burns
Tessa Crilly
Ruth Holton
Emma Owen
Piers Patten
Ingalo Thomson
Kate Vineall

Violin 2

Jane Howard
Gillian French
Stephen Holt
Virginia Kennedy
Andrew McGregor
Ishani O'Connor
Christopher Shone
Jessica Smith
Miranda Townsend

Viola

David Lawes
Joe Berry
Liz Cleary
Janet Davies
Sophia Swanepoel
Alan Taylor
Imogen Tedbury
Ivo Tedbury
Sally Winter

Cello

Nicky Jackson
Sarah Bort
Karen Bowman
Laura Bradley
Emma Geoghegan
Catherine Johnson
Annabelle Juritz
Celia Kent

Double Bass

Chris Bond
Sylvain Letall
Sam Wise

Flute

Alison Gill
Sam Purser

Oboe

Ian Finn
Louise Simon

Clarinet

Kelly Fisher
Claire Richards

Bassoon

Jeremy Crump
Hilary Dodd

French Horn

Mary Cowlett
Alex Johns
Henry Osmond

Trumpet

John Paul de Soissons
Susan Emmons
Christina Perrin

Trombone

Frances Barrett
Peter Whitehouse

Tuba

Martin Oxenham

Harp

Olivia Jageurs

Percussion

Tristan Butler
Gosia Kepa
Theo Francis-Crossley

Korngold

Theme & Variations

Grace Williams

Violin Concerto

Mussorgsky/Ravel

Pictures at an Exhibition



Saturday 29 June 2024

7:30 pm

All Saints, West Dulwich