dso
DULWICH
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

PROKOFIEV
ROMEO AND JULIET

MAHLER
TOTENFEIER

ALAN TAYLOR
FOR THE CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF WAR

CONDUCTOR: CHRIS STARK
LEADER: PAULA TYSALL

SATURDAY 6 DECEMBER 2025

ALL SAINTS WEST DULWICH

FOR THE CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF WAR
ALAN TAYLOR

A long-serving player in the Dulwich Symphony Orchestra and the Lambeth Wind Orchestra, following earlier work in the arenas of public policy and political activism, Alan began composing music soon after deciding to learn to play it. Describing himself as a proficient clarinet player, and a modest saxophone, percussion, violin and viola player, Alan is moreover an experienced conductor, a dedicated scholar, an innovator in the local music scene and, as we will hear tonight, an accomplished composer – one whose music has been performed in Britain and internationally.

Alan's wide-ranging academic studies include an MMus in Composition at Trinity College of Music, where he won the Halford Prize for piano composition, and an Erasmus Fellowship at ESMUC in Barcelona. Conducting roles have included the London Contemporary Chamber Orchestra and the London Consort of Winds, ensemble playing being central to his musicianship since the first. And indeed, to many of us, it also seems extraordinary that the hugely successful and energetic Herne Hill Music Festival, which Alan conceived and launched in 2011, is already fourteen years old.

The roots of the striking 'For the civilian victims of war' – which we have the honour of premiering here tonight - are to be found two years earlier still. In January 2009, while living in Spain, Alan read an editorial in the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*. It compared the bombing of Gaza taking place at that time to the 1937 bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, when a large number of civilians were killed - the subject of Picasso's most famous painting. Alan explains that his piece reflects a sense of horror at the way civilians have become the main victims of modern warfare.

Alan also takes great care to emphasise that no comment is being passed on the origins of specific conflicts or the motives of those taking part. Rather, his music asks of us – sometimes as a pressing yet still decorous invitation, but often with an insistence whose authority lies in its subject-matter – to take note of that which we might otherwise choose not to witness, and, having noticed, to truly attend.

We are privileged to offer this first performance of Alan's piece, indeed for all civilian victims of war.

Laura Bradley

TOTENFEIER

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)

Totenfeier. A German title, so let's break it down. *Toten* translates as 'the dead'. *Feier* is a celebration. A celebration of the dead? Well, in a way it is, because Gustav Mahler was obsessed with death, especially his own - and we can experience this lifelong 'romance with mortality' traced in his music, from the fratricide in his first major work, *Das klagende Lied* (the song of lamentation), to the funeral drums of his unfinished Tenth Symphony.

Nine of Mahler's siblings had died as infants, and in 1901, after a series of health issues and a near-death experience of his own, Mahler wrote his *Kindertotenlieder* - songs on the death of children. His new wife Alma accused him of tempting fate, and when their frail daughter died after Mahler had written three fatalistic hammer blows into his Sixth Symphony, it felt to Alma like a prophecy fulfilled.

A decade earlier, while Mahler was writing his Second Symphony, his father, mother and sister all died within a few months of each other. Such a different sound world to that of his First Symphony 'Titan', with its visions of nature and renewal, leading to a funeral march and turbulent finale; a hero's journey through life. Mahler called the Second Symphony his 'Resurrection Symphony', writing that it was his attempt to answer those eternal questions: 'Why did you live? Why did you suffer? Is it all nothing more than a huge, terrible joke? We must answer these questions in some way if we want to go on living - indeed, if we are to go on dying!'
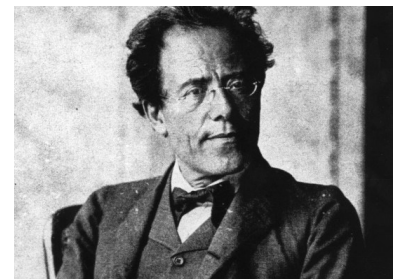
Gustav Mahler

Mahler begins the epic symphonic journey of his Resurrection Symphony by staring into the void to confront our mortality, deploying as its opening movement the separate symphonic poem he had already written, *Totenfeier*, almost unaltered. Probably best translated as 'Funeral Rites', Mahler said of its composition: 'While writing it I had a vision of my own corpse lying in a coffin, surrounded by funeral wreaths.' He later added that it was the hero of his First Symphony that was being buried, the music reflecting his life as though in a clear mirror held high above.

Totenfeier is a harrowing journey, from the hair-raising opening tremolos of shivering strings to the funeral march that emerges with inexorable momentum from within them. But there are also visions of almost pastoral sweetness and tranquility: life before death, perhaps, or a glimpse of eternity beckoning in the yet-to-be-imagined ending of

the Second Symphony. Yet after heavenly sounds from strings and harp, the darkness creeps over us again from below: the funeral procession resumes, and death sounds triumphant in a brass chorale, before a final orchestral descent into the grave and a terminal shudder.

In the Resurrection Symphony's last pages, death is swept aside for a radiant choral affirmation of eternal life. But first came *Totenfeier;* it was to be another six years before Mahler answered his existential questions, and the finished Resurrection Symphony brought our buried hero - the composer himself - back from the dead.

Andrew McGregor

Interval - drinks are available in the church (donations to the orchestra gratefully received)

ROMEO AND JULIET

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

i) Minuet

ii) Death of Tybalt

iii) Montagues and Capulets

iv) The child Juliet

v) Friar Laurence

vi) Romeo at Juliet's before parting

vii) Romeo at the grave of Juliet

Born in 1891 in Sontsovka, Ukraine, in the Russian Empire, Sergei Prokofiev died in 1953 in Moscow, since 1922 the capital of the new USSR. His mother, a pianist, had prioritised his musical studies even when his father's death considerably impacted their finances. Noted for originality, winning the Anton Rubinstein Prize for a performance of his own first concerto, Prokofiev wrote symphonies, concertos, film music, operas, and several ballets.

Having visited London and Paris just before the outbreak of WWI to learn about new developments in music, Prokofiev was exempt, as the only son of a widow, from military service. He furthered his skill on the organ, giving concerts in Moscow and beyond.

After the 1917 revolution, Prokofiev lived in the United States, Germany and Paris, finally returning to the Soviet Union in 1936. Due to complications and collapses in plans to stage *Romeo and Juliet* (including a rejection from Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet after its dancers claimed the music was impossible to dance to), Prokofiev converted the ballet score into two orchestral suites, first performed in 1936 and 1937. The ballet itself premiered in 1938 in Brno, in the now Czech Republic.

You may know the play, the music, both, or neither. I find the second remarkably faithful to the first.

World premiere at the Mahen Theatre, Brno, 1938

In how the music was effectively pre-released before the ballet was staged, we might draw a parallel with the astonishing prologue to the play – a plot overshare that today might place popular success at risk. Far from this, the audiences of both artists hungrily stayed (and returned) for more – and both Shakespeare and Prokofiev, during the 'traffic' of their respective stages, hold us precariously but precisely in a convicting hope that death cannot and will not have the last word.

The play can be viewed as an exploration of the consequences of an Elizabethan code of honour that required men to defend a household's good name as much its members' lives, with attack a scarcely inappropriate form of defence. Through the integrity of Juliet, the impulsive heroism of her Romeo, and the sincerity of their love, we become keenly invested in how this code plays out among the upper echelons of society, where female input into strategic decisions (especially the politically loaded one of whom one's daughter should marry) might sometimes be sought, but need never be overly considered. The wider ramifications of clashing ideals - not just for the lovers and their families, reconciled in desperate grief, but for all the state's citizens, long suffering at the hands of brawling 'enemies to peace' - land amidst the ache and unacceptability of young death: avoidable; tragic.

Throughout, Prokofiev's bittersweet dissonance is faithful to Romeo's famous oxymorons: this is indeed brawling love; loving hate; heavy lightness; serious vanity.

Try listening for the escalation of violence leading to Tybalt's death; the backdrop of barely contained 'low-level' conflict; a peaceful and pragmatic young Juliet; the tenderness of the lovers' one and only night together; and finally the stillness, mounting outrage, and quiet, private loyalty of a suddenly grown-up Romeo, prostrate at what will indeed become the tomb of Juliet.

Laura Bradley

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 a co-founder of the RPS Award Winning Multi-Story Orchestra, he has conducted all 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, English Touring Opera and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Committed to community music, he is principal conductor of the Ernest Read and Blackheath Halls Symphony Orchestras. He has recorded for NMC and broadcast with both Multi-Story and the Aurora Orchestra.

Paula Tysall studied violin at the Centre for Young Musicians, 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, and also has performed in many operas, shows, and chamber music concerts.

She leads the Blackheath Halls Orchestra and recently took over shared running of the Minehead Orchestral Festival and is delighted that Chris Stark has become their new Musical Director.

Paula teaches at Westminster School and has just a few private pupils.

Violin 1
Paula Tysall
Helen Bartholomew
Chris Burns
Tessa Crilly
Ruth Holton
Emma Owen
Nancy Simpson
Dan Sullivan
Ted Thornhill
Kate Vineall

Violin 2
Jane Howard
Gillian French
Andrew Fryer
Virginia Kennedy
Victoria Kershaw
Charlotte Mann
Andrew McGregor
Ishani O'Connor
Christopher Shone
Fiona Treharne

Viola
David Lawes
Joe Berry
Liz Cleary
Jennifer Green
Will Lawrence
Sophia Swanepoel
Sally Winter

Cello
Nicky Jackson
Russell Ashley-Smith
Sarah Bort
Laura Bradley
Fiona Clarey
Emma Geoghegan
Nikolay Gromov
Catherine Johnson
Annabelle Juritz
Celia Kent

Double Bass
Sylvain Letall
Dominic Haldane
Zeynep Smith
Sam Wise

Flute
Alison Gill
Sam Purser

Piccolo
Linda Penn

Oboe
Louise Simon
Nicky Mitchell

Cor Anglais
Ian Finn

Clarinet
Alex Fleming
Claire Richards

Bass clarinet / saxophone
André Stryger

Bassoon
Jeremy Crump
Sebastian Till

Contrabassoon
Ethel Livermore

French Horn
Mary Cowlett
Henry Osmond
Wilf Redmond
Henry Smith Unwin

Trumpet
John-Paul de Soissons
Susan Emmons
Tom Scaife

Trombone
Frances Barrett
Charles Mackworth-Young
David Syer

Tuba
Martin Oxenham

Percussion
Stefan Beckett
James Crook
Tom Lee
Ethan Skuodas

Harp
Alis Huws

Celeste / Piano
Sally Zimmerman

Saturday 28 March

Fauré
Pavane

Sibelius
Violin Concerto
Soloist: Elisabeth Turmo

Dvorak
Symphony No. 6

Saturday 27 June

Emilie Mayer
Overture No. 2

Beethoven
Piano Concerto No. 4
Soloist: Sofia Sacco

Vaughan Williams
Symphony No. 5

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7:30 pm
All Saints, West Dulwich