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# MISO

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## AN AFTERNOON AT THE PROMS

24 MARCH 2018

## CONCERT PROGRAM

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Melbourne Symphony Orchestra



**Melbourne Symphony Orchestra**  
**Sir Andrew Davis** conductor  
**Tasmin Little** violin

*Elgar In London Town*  
*Vaughan Williams The Lark Ascending*  
*Vaughan Williams English Folksong Suite*  
*Britten Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*  
*Wood Fantasia on British Sea Songs*  
*Elgar Pomp and Circumstance March No.1*

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**Running time 2 hours, including interval**

*In consideration of your fellow patrons, the MSO thanks you for dimming the lighting on your mobile phone.*

*The MSO acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are performing. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be in attendance.*

**Melbourne  
Symphony  
Orchestra**

mso.com.au

## **MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**



Established in 1906, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is an arts leader and Australia's longest-running professional orchestra. Chief Conductor Sir Andrew Davis has been at the helm of MSO since 2013. Engaging more than 3 million people each year, the MSO reaches a variety of audiences through live performances, recordings, TV and radio broadcasts and live streaming.

Sir Andrew Davis gave his inaugural concerts as the MSO's Chief Conductor in 2013. The MSO also works with Associate Conductor Benjamin Northey and Assistant Conductor Tianyi Lu, as well as with such eminent recent guest conductors as Tan Dun, John Adams, Jakub Hruška and Jukka-Pekka Saraste. It has also collaborated with non-classical musicians including Elton John, Nick Cave and Flight Facilities.

## **SIR ANDREW DAVIS**



Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Sir Andrew Davis is also Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Lyric Opera of Chicago. He is Conductor Laureate of both the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony, where he has also been named interim Artistic Director until 2020.

In a career spanning more than 40 years he has conducted virtually all the world's major orchestras and opera companies, and at the major festivals. Sir Andrew's many CDs include a *Messiah* nominated for a 2018 Grammy, Bliss's *The Beatitudes*, and a recording with the Bergen Philharmonic of Vaughan Williams' *Job/Symphony No.9* nominated for a 2018 BBC Music Magazine Award.

With the MSO he has just released a third recording in the ongoing Richard Strauss series, featuring the *Alpine Symphony* and *Till Eulenspiegel*.

## **TASMIN LITTLE**



*Courtesy B Ealovega*

Tasmin Little has performed in prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Concertgebouw, Barbican Centre and Suntory Hall. Her career encompasses performances, masterclasses, workshops and community outreach work.

Already this year she has appeared as soloist and in recital around the UK. Recordings include Elgar's Violin Concerto with Sir Andrew Davis and the Royal National Scottish Orchestra (Critic's Choice Award in 2011's Classic BRIT Awards) and, recently, Szymanowski and Karłowicz concertos with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner. Tasmin has premiered many contemporary works. Her awards include a Gramophone Award for Audience Innovation for her outreach program, *The Naked Violin*. She is an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). She plays a 1757 Guadagnini violin.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### EDWARD ELGAR

(1857-1934)

*Cockaigne*: Overture, Op.40  
(*In London Town*)

From the turn of the 20th century onwards, radical social change began to make its presence felt in the imaginations of European composers. In Britain, as the British Empire began to crumble and as political developments in Europe pointed toward the end of an era, composers (who could not rely on television to do it for them) set out to document the sights and sounds of their national capital as they had known it. Elgar began the trend with his *Cockaigne* Overture in 1901, and in the decades which followed, Vaughan Williams wrote his *London* Symphony, Gustav Holst composed *Hammersmith*, John Ireland offered his *London* Overture and Eric Coates completed two *London* Suites.

In Elgar's case, the composition of the *Cockaigne* Overture (which is not an 'overture' as such, but a freestanding tone poem) was written not just in response to the passing of an era, but also, in some sense, the passing of Elgar's career! Written in February and March of 1901 after the notorious failure of *The Dream of Gerontius* premiere, Elgar at the time of its composition professed himself to be suicidal.

While his contemporaries attested that Elgar was at times guilty of excessive self-dramatisation, there can be no doubt that he was genuinely devastated by the negative response to his great Oratorio. He was also in desperate financial trouble and he protested in letters (perhaps a little melodramatically) that he might have to become a tradesman to make ends meet.

And yet for all that, the *Cockaigne* Overture remains one of Elgar's sunniest pieces. He described it in a letter to Hans Richter as 'honest, healthy, humorous and strong but not vulgar...extremely cheerful like a miserable unsuccessful man ought to write'; and in a letter to Jaeger ('Nimrod' of the Enigma Variations) he called it 'cheerful and Londony – stout and steaky'.

He said that the idea for a descriptive piece about London occurred to him 'one dark day in the Guildhall: looking at the memorials of the city's great past and knowing well the history of its unending charity, I seemed to hear far away in the dim roof a theme, an echo of some noble melody'. That 'noble melody' now forms the second theme of the *Cockaigne* Overture, with its characteristic marking of 'nobilmente' (nobly) above it in the score.

'Cockaigne' is an archaic, humorous term for London – the modern word 'cockney' derives from it – but so as to avoid any confusion Elgar provided the subtitle 'In London Town'. While not being programmatic in the strict Straussian sense, the overture nevertheless conjures up the sights and sounds of turn-of-the-century London, including the quiet squares, the chirpy street-vendors and the processions of military and brass bands.

Each passage is marked by its distinctive orchestration, with passages where bells chime, woodwinds snatch pointillistic figures, cornets add an edge of brashness, and a solo horn against accompanying strings provides an element of romance and nostalgia. All of these themes merge seamlessly, one into another, giving the work a broad impressionistic unity rather than a strict classical development.

From its quiet but busy and bustling opening theme, to the triumphant return of the 'nobilmente' second subject at the end of the work, the *Cockaigne* Overture has never failed to please audiences. It was premiered by the Royal Philharmonic Society at the Queen's Hall, London, in June 1901 with the composer conducting, and after meeting immediate success it was performed again at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester in the September of that year.

Martin Buzacott © Symphony Australia

*The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra first performed Elgar's Cockaigne Overture on 21 August 1939 under the baton of conductor Sir Malcolm Sargent, and most recently on 7 May 1999, conducted by Jonathan Grieses-Smith.*

### RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

(1872-1958)

*The Lark Ascending*

**Tasmin Little** violin

*The Lark Ascending* has undoubtedly become Vaughan Williams' most popular work. It was fully drafted in 1914 as a work for violin and piano, but the composition had to be set aside due to the outbreak of the First World War. Vaughan Williams' professional musical life ceased completely for the next four years, as he served as an ambulance driver during the war, shuttling wounded and dying soldiers from the battlefield to temporary field hospitals in France and Greece. It was only after the war ended that he was able to return home to England and to his compositional work. One of his first tasks was to revise *The Lark Ascending*. It was eventually premiered in its violin and piano form in December 1920 by the English violinist Marie Hall, to whom

the work is dedicated. The orchestration of the score was completed in early 1921, and Hall gave the first performance of this, the more frequently played version, shortly afterwards in London's Queen's Hall with the British Symphony Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult.

Despite the work's lengthy gestation period and the harrowing, life-changing experiences endured by the composer at the time, none of the terror or anguish of war is evident in the music. It is, in fact, an ideal example of Vaughan Williams' contemplative and nostalgic musical style. The solo violin spins unbroken arches of melody and swirling arabesques almost continually throughout, and there is no contrasting material or abrupt formal changes to disturb the organic unfolding and rapturous atmosphere. The orchestration is restrained, gently supporting the solo violin for most of the work's duration. The 'Romance' of the subtitle, perhaps a reference to Beethoven's two violin Romances, alludes to Vaughan Williams' long-standing love and adoration of nature.

*The Lark Ascending* could be described as a musical reflection upon the poem of the same name written by the English novelist George Meredith in 1881. Only selected lines from the poem are printed in the musical score and the poetic content is used as a point of stimulus for the composer's lyrical reverie. The solo violin clearly embodies the spirit of a bird singing and taking flight (with occasional bird calls also provided by the woodwind instruments), whilst the sustained chords, played by the strings, could be understood as the aural depiction of a flat pastoral landscape.

The form of the work is rhapsodic, with lengthy ornamental solo cadenzas beginning and concluding the piece. These are notated without bar lines and in no strict tempo, thus giving the interpreter considerable freedom and liberty in interpretation. The floating quality of the harmony is partly due to Vaughan Williams' characteristic use of a pentatonic (five-tone) mode, which weakens the strong directional pull of conventional tonality. This modality continues in the central dance-like section, which is initiated by the woodwinds. Throughout his life, Vaughan Williams collected and studied English folk music, and although no specific folk tune is directly quoted here, its strong influence is apparent.

© James Cuddeford 2017

*The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra first performed The Lark Ascending at a Vaughan Williams Festival on 24 May 1950 with Colin Campbell Ross and soloist Bertha Jorgensen, and most recently in August 2016 with Sir Andrew Davis and Richard Tognetti.*

## **RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS** (1872-1958)

**arr. GORDON JACOB**  
(1895-1984)

*English Folk Song Suite*  
*March: Seventeen Come Sunday*  
*Intermezzo: My Bonny Boy*  
*March: Folk Songs from Somerset*

In 1893, Vaughan Williams was shown one of the few English folksongs then in print: *Dives and Lazarus*, which elaborates Jesus' parable (in Luke 16) of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, and God's judgement on them. Vaughan Williams' famous response to the tune was 'Here's something which I have known all my life, only I didn't know it!'

And, like colleagues such as Gustav Holst, Percy Grainger and Béla Bartók, Vaughan Williams became an active collector of folk songs in, as it were, the wild – or, in the case of the first song he notated, *Bushes and Briars*, at an 'old people's tea party' in 1903 where a shepherd sang a 'song which set all my doubts about folk song at rest'.

Vaughan Williams held what were then (and are again) unfashionably progressive views about the place of music, arguing that 'the composer must not shut himself up and think about art, he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of his community'. So, it was natural for him to agree to write a piece for the student bandmen of the Royal Military School of Music in 1923, and to base it on folk music. And it was characteristic of his generosity that he commissioned his talented but impecunious student Gordon Jacob to score the piece for full orchestra the following year. One reviewer of the original noted that 'the good composer has the ordinary monger of light stuff thoroughly beaten'; another, approving the unbuttoned atmosphere of the piece, was pleased that Vaughan Williams was 'game to write something for the pier', a slightly backhanded compliment given that this was the period of challenging works, like *Flos campi*.

Despite the movements' titles, the piece uses a number of tunes in each, but mostly avoids illustrating their texts and modifying the tunes to suit the character of the music at any given time. The first movement begins with a jaunty *Seventeen come Sunday* that contrasts with the lyrical *Pretty Caroline* (a 'happy ever after' song), introduced by the clarinet. We then hear *Dives and Lazarus* in the bass, as the upper parts play the standard rhythmic patterns of marching music.

The slow movement uses two tunes: *My Bonny Boy* who seems to have left his beloved for 'another girl he loves better than me' and then, as the solo violin suggests the girl's grief, the more energetic *Green Bushes*, here given the character of a shanty.

The finale is a melange of four tunes from the county of Somerset: *Blow away the morning dew*, given first to clarinet, leads seamlessly into *High Germany* a farewell from a soldier marching to war. The contrasting trio section, in a sprightly 6/8, is based on *The trees so high*, which tells of a woman married to a mere boy, with the tune in high winds in octaves. This gives way to a statement of one of the many variants of *John Barleycorn*.

© Gordon Kerry 2018

*The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra first performed this suite in June 1953 on a regional schools tour conducted by Clive Douglas, and most recently on 22 June 1979 with Henry Krips.*

## **BENJAMIN BRITTEN** (1913-1976)

*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Op.34

Britten had long been a devotee of Henry Purcell, admiring Purcell's 'ingenuity and colour' in setting English to music. He and his partner the tenor Peter Pears included Purcell's songs in their recitals since the late 1930s. This interest was further stimulated in 1945 when England celebrated the 250th anniversary of Purcell's early death with works such as Britten's String Quartet No.2. The quartet, though, was also a by-product of Britten's intense and tragic opera *Peter Grimes*. By contrast, when Britten was asked to 'write a short film for

the Education Ministry' called *Instruments of the Orchestra*, he returned to Purcell for thematic material which allowed him to write one of his most emotionally unencumbered works.

Britten called the piece *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and was infuriated when the BBC preferred to use the more pompous subtitle *Variations and Fugue* on a theme of *Henry Purcell*. He insisted that it was exactly what he called it – a piece offering young people a way of hearing and identifying the different instruments and instrumental groups. The concert version of the piece therefore retains a sense of the film's exploration of one group at a time, though this has led to misguided criticism of the work as simplistic.

The theme is the Rondo from a suite composed by Purcell for the play *Abdelazar, or the Moor's revenge*. Britten's variations systematically explore each group of woodwinds and strings, the harp, brass and finally percussion, treating the tune in a way which is perfectly idiomatic to its instrument, or group, each time (compare the harp's variation with the trombones', for instance). Britten then puts the orchestra back together in that most integrated of forms, the fugue, with each group re-entering the texture one by one, gradually building to a powerful climax.

© Gordon Kerry 2006

*The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra first performed The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra on 16 December 1947 under the baton of Sir Bernard Heinze, and most recently on 25-26 May 2012 with Bramwell Tovey.*



## SIR HENRY WOOD

(1869-1944)

### *Fantasia on British Sea Songs*

Sir Henry Wood, who was permanent conductor of the Proms concerts from their foundation in 1895 until his death, composed his *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* for a 1905 concert commemorating the centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar. He included it in the final concert of the following year's Proms, establishing the Last Night tradition. The maritime songs in Wood's medley are of diverse origin, from the traditional sailor's hornpipe *Jack's the Lad* to 'See, the conquering hero comes', from Handel's Oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*. Not to mention, of course, Thomas Arne's anthem to British naval power, *Rule, Britannia!* as the finale.

© Symphony Australia

*The MSO's first performed Fantasia on British Sea on 16 April 2016 and most recently on 25 March 2017, both under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis.*

## EDWARD ELGAR

(1857-1934)

### *Pomp and Circumstance, Op.3g, March No.1*

Of his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches Elgar commented:

*I did not see why the ordinary quick march should not be treated on a large scale in the way that the waltz, the old-fashioned slow march and even the polka have been treated by the great composers; yet all marches on the symphonic scale are so slow that people can't march to them. I have some of the soldier instinct in me and so I have written two marches of which, so far from being ashamed, I am proud.*

Elgar went on to write another three, however it is *March No.1* that is the best-known of the series. Written in 1901 during the Boer War, the tune proved so popular at its first London performance that Sir Henry Wood had to play it three times 'merely to restore order'. Elgar knew he had a tune that would 'knock 'em flat', and apparently Edward VII agreed: according to the composer, it was the King who first suggested that the trio section of *March No.1* would make a great song. A.C. Benson's words were added the following year when Elgar recycled the tune as the finale of his *Coronation Ode*, and as *Land of Hope and Glory* gained a life of its own, a secondary British national anthem was born.

© Symphony Australia

*The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra first performed Pomp and Circumstance, Op.3g, March No.1 on 9 May 1940 with Antal Doráti, and most recently on 25 March 2017 under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis.*

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