

# Welcome

Welcome to our orchestra's wonderful home of St Mary-le-Bow for this evening's concert. The orchestra is always delighted to perform on 'home turf' and especially as part for the LIVE at St Mary-le-Bow festival which is taking place all week - please do look at the list of other events.

Tonight's programme of 20<sup>th</sup> Century music for strings is a feast for the ears, featuring one of my all-time favourite works, Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. Written when he was only 24, the work was one of his early masterpieces that catapulted him to international fame. The variations, each representing different aspects of his teachers' personality, parody musical forms and other composers, and within themselves each contain a myriad of orchestral colours. The work has an undercurrent of angst running throughout it with even its most expressive moments retaining a restrained sentimentality, something that becomes a trademark of Britten's music.

The orchestra are delighted to be joined tonight by soloist Izy Cheesman to perform Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and Strings. As an oboist myself I've been lucky enough to play next to Izy on many occasions. Her expressive sound and stellar musicianship make her a delight to play alongside and also the perfect soloist for this repertoire, so I'm especially pleased she is able to join us tonight.

Tonight marks the last concert in our 2023/24 season. The past year has seen some incredible concerts, the highlight of which has to be our performance of Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* with 140-piece choir at St John's Smith Square. We have been busy planning our next season, which can be seen on the back of this programme and it's filled with exciting repertoire for both orchestra and audience. Upcoming concerts include a number of well-loved classics including Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* (performed with narrator) and Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, as well as some lesser-known works such as Bartók's arresting *Miraculous Mandarin* and Tchaikovsky's dreamy first symphony.

Alex Fryer  
(Academy of St Mary-le-Bow Artistic Director)

# Programme

## Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

Benjamin Britten  
(1913 - 1976)

Introduction and Theme  
Variation I: Adagio  
Variation II: March  
Variation III: Romance  
Variation IV: Aria Italiana  
Variation V: Bourrée Classique  
Variation VI: Wiener Waltzer  
Variation VII: Moto Perpetuo  
Variation VIII: Funeral March  
Variation IV: Chant  
Variation X: Fugue and Finale.

## Concerto for Oboe and Strings

Ralph Vaughan Williams  
(1872 - 1958)

I. Rondo Pastorale (Allegro moderato)  
II. Minuet and Musette (Allegro moderato)  
III. Scherzo (Presto - Doppio più lento - Lento - Presto)

## Romanian Folk Dances (Arr. Arthur Willner)

Béla Bartók  
(1881 - 1945)

I. Jocul cu bâță (Stick Dance)  
II. Brâul (Sash Dance)  
III. Pe loc (In One Spot)  
IV. Buciumeana (Dance from Bucsum)  
V. Poarga Românească (Romanian Polka)  
VI. Măruntel (Fast Dance)

There will be no interval during the concert.  
We warmly invite you to join us after the concert in the  
churchyard for drinks with the orchestra.

# Programme Notes

## Benjamin Britten

### Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

“To F.B. A tribute with affection and admiration.” These are the words written on Benjamin Britten’s finished score dated July 12, 1937, dedicating the work to his teacher, Frank Bridge, with whom he had begun taking composition lessons from 10 years earlier. Bridge was a well-regarded composer and a viola player (Britten, also a violist, greatly admired Bridge’s playing), but his greatest contribution was arguably in his role as a teacher.

In May 1937, English conductor Boyd Neel commissioned the 24-year-old Britten to compose a new work for a programme of British works at the Salzburg Festival that same summer. Britten subsequently composed a set of variations based on the second of Bridge’s *Three Idylls for String Quartet* (1906). The work is cast in a free variation form, each movement a separate vivid character sketch, with the link to Bridge’s theme at times hardly decipherable. Many of the movements parody traditional movements or dances, such as a Bourrée or Waltz.

Each of the movements describes a different aspect of Bridge’s personality that Britten so much admired. In the Introduction and Theme, which is described as ‘Himself’ (Bridge), after a dramatic introduction Britten states Bridge’s melancholy theme using a solo quartet. The music continues without a break into the next variation, the Adagio (‘his depth’), where, alternating with dark, troubled chords derived from Bridge’s harmony on the lower strings, the violins play an impassioned melodic line. A quick March (‘his energy’) follows, then a Romance (‘his charm’). In the Aria Italiana (‘his humour’), the first violins soar above the stave, accompanied by the strumming pizzicati in the rest of the ensemble who are instructed to play like a guitar. In the lively Bourrée Classique (‘his tradition’) there is a prominent violin solo, whilst the Wiener Walzer (‘his enthusiasm’) signals his admiration for two giants of Viennese composition, Mahler and Berg.

The Moto Perpetuo (‘his vitality’) is a burst of energy with tremolo strings rushing from the highest to the lowest registers. In the Funeral March (‘his sympathy’), the falling 5th of the theme is transformed into the beat of drums in the double basses over which the rest of the

orchestra play a sorrowful lament. The eerie Chant ('his reverence') is heard in the divided violas offset by harmonics. This provides a moment of stasis and calm prior to the Fugue, which weaves other themes by Bridge into the solo quartet above a tutti fugal texture, followed by a rich emotional D major outpouring in the Finale.

# Vaughan Williams

## Concerto for Oboe and Strings

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born in Gloucestershire. He studied at Trinity College Cambridge and with Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music, where he would later teach composition. Vaughan Williams served in the army during WW1, an event which greatly shaped his life. His musical output helped to create a new English style that broke away from the German-dominated musical language of the 19th century.

Vaughan Williams began composing his oboe concerto rapidly after completing his fifth symphony in 1943, using sketches for the scherzo that he had initially discarded. Very few oboe concertos had been written since the days of Mozart, and Vaughan Williams' concerto became one of several new works for the instrument, re-instating the modern oboe as a solo instrument. After convincing Henry Wood that the concerto was worthy to be premiered in the Royal Albert Hall at the Proms, the concert was cancelled due to the Luftwaffe bombing of London with V-1 flying bombs. As a result, the work was first performed in Liverpool in September 1944 with soloist Leon Goossens (to whom the work is dedicated), and it did not receive its Proms debut for well over 40 years.

Much like the composer's fifth symphony, the music is based heavily on modes and pentatonic scales, creating a folky, pastoral sound world. In the first movement, the oboe weaves in and out of the orchestra with flowing solo cadenzas. The lilting second movement moves from a minuet into a musette. The musette is a dance characterised by a drone accompaniment, which, in this movement, is held by the oboe. The finale opens with jaunty flourishes exchanged between the soloist and strings, which, via a folky middle section, culminates in beautifully expansive *Più lento* towards the end of the movement, before the final flashy cadenza brings the work to a close.

# Béla Bartók

## Romanian Folk Dances

Béla Bartók's music is heavily influenced by the traditional music of his homeland of Hungary and is characterised by the use of asymmetric rhythms. Bartók spent years travelling across the countryside to collect melodies; first from Magyar folk music, and later from many further communities across present-day Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. The Romanian Folk Dances performed this evening are based on traditional Romanian tunes that would have been played on a fiddle or shepherd's flute. Bartók originally composed the work for solo piano but the arrangements for violin and piano or string orchestra have become very popular. The moods of the dances vary drastically from movement to movement, with the final two dances (performed without a break in between) providing a frenzied conclusion to the work.

Programme notes by Natalie Bevan, Clare Everson and Alex Fryer.

# Oboe

## Izy Cheesman

Izy completed both her Bachelor of Music and Master of Performance at the Royal College of Music in London, winning a scholarship place in 2015 and graduating in 2021 with Distinction. Izy studied oboe under the tuition of John Anderson, Juliana Koch, Olivier Stankiewicz, and Fabien Thouand, and cor anglais with Christine Pendrill and Jane Marshall.

Izy is on trial for the position of Principal Oboe with the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, and in the last year with them has played Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and Jewels at venues including the Bristol and Birmingham Hippodromes, and the Royal Opera House in London. Izy was a member of the Southbank Sinfonia fellowship for 2022/23, and currently freelances in London and beyond with orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, Suffolk Philharmonic Orchestra, London Firebird Orchestra, Orchestra for the Earth, Orion Orchestra, and Brixton Chamber Orchestra. Izy has also played alongside members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra after winning places on side-by-side schemes during her time at the RCM.

Izy is an enthusiast of theatre, opera, and musicals, and has played for Oxford Opera Company's La Traviata in 2023, Hampstead Garden Opera's Hansel and Gretel in 2023 and The Marriage of Figaro in 2021,

and Green Opera's Bluebeard's Castle in 2022. Since 2024 she has been a deputy for the oboe/cor chair on Back to the Future at the Adelphi Theatre. Izy has also played with Southbank Sinfonia for ABC's The Lexicon of Love UK Tour in 2024, and with Siegfried Camerata in A Tribute to Queen in 2021.

As a soloist, Izy has performed Strauss' Oboe Concerto with Somerset County Orchestra and Orpington Symphony Orchestra in 2023, and the Vaughan Williams Oboe Concerto with Bridport Chamber Orchestra in March 2024. Izy has given many recitals at venues across London including at the V&A Museum. Izy has been invited to play world premieres of new commissions for oboe; for the Farm Street Singers' 2020 album Bread from Heaven, for REVE's Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition in 2020, and most recently, Jericho Wood's Siren for Solo Oboe, dedicated to her and premiered in 2023. Izy played cor anglais on the soundtrack for the short film, The Bower (2022).

## Conductor

### Alex Fryer

Alex enjoys a varied freelance career as an oboist, conductor, singer, and music leader. He read music at the University of Southampton where he was assistant conductor to both the University Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. After graduating, he pursued a postgraduate degree at the Royal College of Music in oboe performance, studying with Olivier Stankiewicz, Fabien Thouand, John Anderson and Christine Pendrill, graduating with distinction in 2016.

Alex has played at the BBC Proms and been broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He has played principal oboe/cor anglais under conductors including John Wilson, Nicholas Colon and Diago Mason, in venues across the UK and abroad including the Barbican Centre, Royal Festival Hall and Royal Albert Hall. Alex was a member of Southbank Sinfonia 2019.

As a conductor Alex has worked with ensembles including Southbank Sinfonia, Southern Sinfonia, Hertfordshire Chamber Orchestra, Cambridge Youth Opera and he is the regular Musical Director of the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow.

Recently Alex has enjoyed taking part in the Pathway Scheme at the Wigmore Hall, working with neurodiverse teenagers and adults with memory loss, and the Trainee Music Leader Scheme with Spitalfields Music for education and participation work in schools. Alex works with the Music in Secondary Schools Trust as an orchestral tutor.

# The Orchestra

## Violin I

Patrick Bevan  
Ellen Dunn  
Sean Choi  
Ermos Chrysochos  
Anahita Falaki  
Sergei Batishchev  
Samy Okuma-Chin\*

## Violin II

Harri Caddick  
Chloe Rush  
Alycia Jewes  
Gemma Cselko  
Conor Carleton  
Jess Cselko

## Viola

Rachel Lunt  
Will Emery  
Ed Daley  
Daisy Richards\*

## 'Cello

Giulia da Cruz  
Grace Dunn  
Jaeho Bae  
Natalie Bevan

## Bass

Will Priest\*  
Eleanor Roberts

\* Denotes guest player

# Become a Friend

Joining the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow Friends Scheme costs just £50 a year. All funds go towards the running of the orchestra which allows us to put on an exciting and varied programme of events. In return, Friends receive a number of benefits including:

- Entrance into a prize draw to win free concert tickets
- 2 discounted tickets per concert (if you don't win the draw)
- A free drink per concert
- A special acknowledgement in our programme
- Reserved seating (upon request)

If you're interested in becoming a friend, please visit our website or email [friends@academyofstmarylebow.com](mailto:friends@academyofstmarylebow.com)

Martine and Paul Allard, Julia Caddick, Charles Durose, Stephen and Jackie Fryer, Anne Harvey, Janet High, Steve and Nandita Nelson, Gareth and Lise Bevan, Tom Walford, Geraldine Evans, Angela Pozzuto.

# Our 2024/25 season

5 October 2024 – 7:30pm  
St James's Sussex Gardens

Bartók: The Miraculous Mandarin  
Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade (with narrator)  
Conductor: Alex Fryer

30 November 2024 - 7:30pm  
St John's Waterloo

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 1 in G minor, 'Winter Daydreams'  
Rachmaninov: Symphonic Dances  
Conductor: Alex Fryer

8 February 2025 – 7:30pm  
Holy Trinity Sloane Square (TBC)

Mahler: Blumine  
Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major, K. 488  
Mahler: Symphony No. 1 in D major 'Titan'  
Conductor: Maxime Tortelier  
Piano: Roelof Temmingh

April/May 2025 (Date TBC) - 7:30pm  
Venue TBC

Mozart: Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622  
Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 'Pastoral'  
Director/Leader: Ali Caldon  
Clarinet: Peter Sparks

June 2025 - 7:30pm  
St Mary-le-Bow

The orchestra perform as part of the 'LIVE at St Mary-le-Bow' festival.  
Conductor: Alex Fryer