



THURSDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2019
ST. JAMES'S PICCADILLY, LONDON

Conductor – Chris Hopkins
Soprano – Nadine Benjamin

Williams/Ottman arr. Lopez: concert selections from
'Superman Returns'

Strauss: Four Last Songs (Vier letzte Lieder)

Frühling

September

Beim Schlafengehen

Im Abendrot

Interval

Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra

Programme Notes

A very emotionally, if not actually, warm welcome to our last concert of 2019 and I'm delighted that we have waiting for you this evening a feast of assorted delights.

Williams/Ottman arr. Lopez: concert selections from 'Superman Returns'

We're going to start, as has become traditional for this concert, with some film music and one of the great John Williams film scores: Superman. It barely needs introduction I'm sure, but just to say that in this 'concert suite' arrangement there's something for everyone. Whether you are a fan of the 2006 iteration with Brandon Routh or, like me, only have eyes for Christopher Reeve's Superman in the 70s and 80s, hopefully the themes in this suite will resonate.

For me, the title music of the original John Williams score (as starts tonight's piece) is the most evocative of tunes; the Superman March as it is known (by people who talk about it outside of Orchestra of the City concerts), closely followed by the 'love theme', which you will also hear. Whether by design or by accident, the latter seems to me to be not unreminiscent of the 'transfiguration' theme (as the soul leaves for "the infinite reaches of heaven") from Strauss' tone poem Death and Transfiguration, which Strauss himself quotes at the very end of his Four Last Songs ('Ist dies etwa der Tod?': 'Is this, perhaps, Death?'). You will hear this shortly. Whether purposeful or not, I think we can all agree it leads to a particularly satisfying bit of first-half concert programming, if I say so myself...

Anyway, these two themes are pure John Williams, from the first Superman film in 1978. They were reused vigorously by Ken Thorne and Alexander Courage in the following three films. The other themes you will hear are by John Ottman who scored the 2006 Superman Returns, which he said were a homage to, as opposed to a rip-off of, Williams' original.

Strauss: Four Last Songs (Vier letzte Lieder)

From the ridiculous to the sublime, and I'm so delighted that we are joined tonight by the sensational Nadine Benjamin to sing perhaps the greatest songs ever written: Richard Strauss' **Four Last Songs (Vier letzte Lieder)**.

Strauss had largely withdrawn from public life by the time of the Second World War, which he spent mostly at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the lovely Bavarian Alps. Spared the physical ravages of the conflict, he was nonetheless deeply wounded by the loss of many friends and by the bombing of Dresden, Munich and Vienna. His relationship with the authorities is nothing if not complex, and I'm afraid would take more space than we have here to even begin to unpick. Suffice it to say that, despite his relative safety during the war, his public loyalty to his persecuted friends and colleagues and his horror at the arrest of his Jewish daughter-in-law and her family (Alice was released, but many of her family were taken to Terezín; Strauss in fact travelled there himself to try to use his influence to have them released, to no avail) and the horror of the entire period was not lost on him. Though increasingly feeble during his Swiss sojourn after 1945, his mind was clear, and he continued to compose - a Concerto for Oboe, the *Duet Concertino* for Clarinet, Bassoon and Strings, and these surpassingly beautiful *Four Last Songs*. For all the complexities of his situation, one thing we can be sure of is that we can still marvel at music in which beauty, truth and humanity seem to defy any other judgement.

At the end of 1946, Strauss read Eichendorff's poem *Im Abendrot* in which an aged couple, having moved together through the world for a lifetime, look at the setting sun and ask, "Is that perhaps death?" The words matched precisely Strauss' feelings of those years and he determined to set the poem for soprano and orchestra. The first sketches for the song appeared early in 1947 and the piece was completed by May 1948. During that time a friend sent Strauss a volume of poems by Hermann Hesse, and from that collection he chose four verses to form a five-song cycle with the Eichendorff setting. The Hesse pieces were composed between July and September 1948, making them the final works that Strauss completed (he never finished the last of the Hesse songs). He died quietly at his Garmisch home exactly one year later.

Strauss' years in Switzerland were ones of reflective meditation - re-reading Goethe, composing a little, studying again the beloved score of Wagner's *Tristan* - during which he put the finishing touches on what he called an "eighty-year, industrious, honourable and good German artistic life." Each of the magnificent *Four Last Songs* treats the approach of death metaphorically - through images of rebirth in spring, autumn, rest and sunset - by returning one final time to the soprano voice, for which he had written so much glorious music throughout his career. In these moving creations, Strauss left what Neville Cardus described as "the most consciously and most beautifully delivered 'Abschied' ['farewell'] in all music." As though bringing round full circle the sum of his life's work, as I mentioned above, Strauss quotes in the closing pages of *Im Abendrot* a theme from his tone poem *Death and Transfiguration*, written six decades earlier, in 1889. It is the greatest farewell in music, but it is happiness, or at least contentment and acceptance of the transfiguration to come, and not sadness which pervades these wonderful pieces.

Strauss Four Last Songs, translations:

Frühling (Spring)

In shadowy crypts
I dreamt long
of your trees and blue skies,
of your fragrance and
birdsong.

Now you appear
in all your finery,
drenched in light
like a miracle before me.

You recognize me,
you entice me tenderly.
All my limbs tremble at
your blessed presence!

September

The garden is in mourning.
Cool rain seeps into the flowers.
Summertime shudders,
quietly awaiting his end.

Golden leaf after leaf falls
from the tall acacia tree.
Summer smiles, astonished and
feeble,
at his dying dream of a garden.

For just a while he tarries
beside the roses, yearning for
repose.
Slowly he closes
his weary eyes.

Beim Schlafengehen (Going to sleep)

Now that I am wearied of the day,
my ardent desire shall happily
receive
the starry night
like a sleepy child.

Hands, stop all your work.
Brow, forget all your thinking.
All my senses now
yearn to sink into slumber.

And my unfettered soul
wishes to soar up freely
into night's magic sphere
to live there deeply and
thousandfold.

Im Abendrot (At sunset)

We have through sorrow and joy
gone hand in hand;
From our wanderings, let's now rest
in this quiet land.

Around us, the valleys bow
as the sun goes down.
Two larks soar upwards
dreamily into the light air.

Come close, and let them fly.
Soon it will be time for sleep.
Let's not lose our way
in this solitude.

O vast, tranquil peace,
so deep in the evening's glow!
How weary we are of wandering –
Is this perhaps a hint of death?

**Interval
(20 minutes)**

Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra

1. Introduzione
2. Presentando le coppie
3. Elegia
4. Intermezzo interrotto
5. Finale

“The musical term “concerto” derives in part from the classical Latin verb *concertare* meaning to contend, to skirmish, to debate, or to dispute, combined with the Italian language meaning to arrange, to agree, or to get together. Both etymologies are evidenced when applied to music. The initial compositional format featured separate vocal choirs, extending the idea...”

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Wakes up

I may be wrong, but I sometimes feel at times, when writing about certain music, that there is a tendency toward purely academic description, or at least over-analysis. While we might be more inclined to describe Mahler, Brahms or Beethoven in emotional terms, Bartók, Stravinsky, Schoenberg and so on sometimes suffer from too much investigation into the mechanics of a piece, rather than the effect of it. Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra has from time to time been subject to this treatment, so I'll try to avoid that below.

I personally don't think the title has too much bearing on what we make of it as a piece of music, except to say that perhaps it hints at the importance of every player in the orchestra and what their individual personalities bring to the piece. In a sense everyone is like a concerto soloist such is the independence and virtuosity of all the parts.

In terms of raw structure, it might be worth noting the general shape of the piece, since Bartók had a particular interest in palindromes and arches. The middle movement (whose emotional portent I'll discuss in a sec) is a haunting elegy, around which sit two lighter movements: a flippant and joking second movement titled 'Play of the couples' and an 'interrupted intermezzo' for the fourth movement. Around those movements sit the big first and last movements: the extra-thick bread on this intriguing sandwich.

It's worth reproducing Bartók's own notes for the premiere in 1944:

The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last

one. The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single instruments or instrumental groups in a concertant or soloistic manner. The "virtuoso" treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato sections of the development of the first movement (brass instruments), or in the perpetuum mobile-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and, especially, in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.

Early in the 1940s, with the War raging in Europe, Bartók emigrated to the United States where he had a position doing research on recordings of eastern European folk songs at Columbia University. He had all but given up composition during the preceding years, depressed by the state of Europe and by his own financial insecurity. Worse, he had begun to have a series of irregular high fevers that the doctors were unable to diagnose, but which turned out to be the first indication of leukaemia. By early 1943 the state of his health and the fact that Americans showed little interest in his music brought him to a low point. He insisted that he never wanted to compose again.

Violinist Joseph Szigeti had told conductor Serge Koussevitzky of Bartók's situation, warning him that the proud composer would not accept anything remotely smacking of charity. Koussevitzky therefore offered work: \$1,000 to write a new orchestral piece with a guarantee of a performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The commission was a tonic for the ailing composer; at once he was filled with ideas for a new composition, which he composed in just eight weeks while resting under medical supervision at a hospice in New York. His wife Ditta wrote to Joseph Szigeti to tell him of the change in her husband: "One thing is sure: Béla's 'under no circumstances will I ever write a new work' attitude has gone."

What he wrote is surely one of the great masterpieces of the 20th Century. It is a piece that has everything: beauty, charm, suspense, excitement, absurdity, tragedy and so on, within a general lifting (as Bartók suggests) from sternness to joy.

The first movement begins with this austerity, but contrast fuels the opening movement. A slow introduction, based on very pure intervals which increasingly start to pile on top of one-another, is followed by some very fast and sometimes abrasive counterpoint. It's like stumbling across a party full of larger-than-life characters vying for attention: there's the excited youngster, the clumsy blusterer, the quiet and thoughtful philosopher, the hopeless romantic and so on. They're all given their moments in the spotlight, but the pace barely lets up; no character lingers long enough to outstay their welcome.

The second movement, the one titled 'The play of the couples', is by contrast very transparent and playful. It's the equivalent of a ballroom dancing-

competition, each 'couple' taking their turn to do a turn over the rhythm provided by the side drum: first the bassoons at arms-length, then oboes in a tighter hold, clarinets, flutes whirling away and finally trumpets in a close embrace. Then, by way of an interval, a little brass chorale, before the dancing resumes, this time the two becomes a threesome of bassoons; oboes, clarinets and flutes all play with each other; leaving the trumpets as the only remaining couple by the end.

The third movement is a haunting "Elegy" which recalls the slow introduction and is really the heart of the Concerto. A world away from the superficial flippancy of the second movement, this is a tragic outcry: a desperate call back to his beloved homeland and its culture that he had had to flee in fear of the Nazis just a couple of years before.

The fourth movement ("Interrupted Intermezzo") plays with clichés of "innocent" folk music as an antidote to the Elegy, while the very rude "interruption" is often claimed to represent Shostakovich, whose Seventh Symphony (the "Leningrad") had recently become a popular rallying cry of resistance to the invading Germans. (The music that is allegedly being parodied was itself intended by Shostakovich as a savage parody of the forces of totalitarianism). Other interpretations, however, have challenged that longstanding view of Bartók's intent. To be discussed in the pub... (but it's definitely not a quote from 'The Merry Widow').

In any case, the supercharged Finale, with its madly whirring strings and brass fanfares, urges the Concerto on to a thrilling conclusion in Bartók's inimitable style. After some frenetic excitement at the beginning, the trumpets come up with an idea for a theme, which is gradually taken up by the whole orchestra, sometimes obviously, sometimes opaquely, but in the end it breaks forth in full glory as we charge to a hopefully joyous Christmas 2019!

Programme notes by Chris Hopkins



Chris Hopkins – Conductor

Chris is enjoying a busy season in a wide range of projects, with opera and symphony concerts alongside concertos, solo and chamber recitals. Following from the success of his ENO debut last season conducting Cal McCrystal's *Iolanthe*, this season he returned to conduct Simon McBurney's production of *Magic Flute* and is conductor for the

legendary Jonathan Miller production of *The Mikado* in the 2019/20 season at the London Coliseum. He has also worked recently on record with the English Chamber Orchestra, as Music Director for Hampstead Garden Opera, with Garsington Opera, Grange Festival Opera, BBC Young Musician (assistant to Mark Wigglesworth), concerts at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wigmore Hall as well as live and recorded on BBC 1, Radio 3 and Radio 4. Previously he has worked with companies including WNO, NI Opera, Holland Park Opera, Wide Open Opera, Opera Danube, Glyndebourne, Presteigne and Aldeburgh Festivals, London Mozart Players, Crash Ensemble, Corinthians Chamber Orchestra, Royal Ballet Sinfonia. He continues into an eleventh season as Musical Director of Orchestra of the City. Chris was honoured in 2013 to be made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

Romy Shioda – Leader

Romy studied violin at The Julliard School Pre-College in New York City. She received her Bachelor's in Mathematics and Computer Science, followed by a Master's and Ph.D. in Operations Research, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she was the concertmaster of the MIT Symphony Orchestra and received the Epstein Award for distinguished service and musical contribution to the orchestra.

Romy then joined as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), where she was one of the co-founders of the orchestra@uwaterloo, performing as concertmaster for several years. Romy joined the Orchestra of the City in 2011, after moving to London, where she currently works in the financial industry.



Nadine Benjamin – Soprano

British lyric soprano Nadine Benjamin is a charismatic and versatile artist who is in increasing demand on both the operatic stage and the concert platform. She is also developing great renown as an exponent of song, in particular Verdi, Strauss, Berg and contemporary American song. Nadine is an English National Opera Harewood Artist and made her debut with the Company in 2018 as Clara (Porgy and Bess), followed by Musetta (La bohème). During the 2019/20 season she will appear with ENO as Laura (Luisa Miller) and First Nymph (Rusalka), as well as in performances for Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Opera Holland Park and Theater an der Wien. Nadine has had many principal roles to date and has also performed extensively in concert; too many to list here, although some of you may have seen and heard her BBC Proms debut in August of this year.

Nadine created the principal role of Imoinda in the UK premiere of *The Crossing*, an opera by the Cuban-American composer Odaline de la Martinez, at the 5th London Festival of American Music in 2014. She has a long-running relationship with LFAM and at the 6th Festival in 2016, led a programme of works by female American composers, accompanied by Susanna Stranders. Nadine recorded the role of Mrs. Waters in Dame Ethel Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate for Retrospect Opera*, also under the baton of de la Martinez, released in 2016 to critical acclaim and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. In collaboration with pianist Nicole Panizza, Nadine recently recorded 'Emergence', a selection of songs set to the poems of Emily Dickinson, which was released in autumn 2019.

In 2015 Nadine founded 'Everybody Can!' to provide a platform to encourage others to believe in themselves and to support them in recognising that whatever they envision can be achieved. She has both produced and sung principal roles in *Otello* and *Tosca* for Everybody Can! Opera. Nadine was "highly commended" at the 2016 Aviva 'Women of the Future Awards' and invited to both Buckingham Palace and No. 10 Downing Street in recognition of her work as a mentor and singer.

Hailed by 'Opera Now' magazine as one of their favourite top ten sopranos in "a new generation of sopranos who are destined to have impressive careers", Nadine won the inaugural Fulham Opera Robert Presley Memorial Verdi Prize in 2015. Nadine's debut solo CD 'Love & Prayer' was released in 2018.

Orchestra of the City

Orchestra of the City was founded in April 2003 by Benjamin Bayl and made its debut at St John's Smith Square in July of that year. In June 2010 Classical Music Magazine listed the Orchestra of the City as one of the top five non-professional orchestras in London. The Orchestra gives talented and enthusiastic voluntary musicians the opportunity to play in an orchestra of the highest standard with challenging repertoire, and is noted for its active and friendly social culture.

When Benjamin Bayl was appointed Assistant Conductor of the Budapest Festival Orchestra in September 2006, the orchestra worked with a number of guest conductors, including Nicholas Collon, Robert Tuohy, Dominic Grier and Sam Laughton. Chris Hopkins was then appointed as the new Music Director of Orchestra of the City, taking up the role in September 2008.

Performing up to 6 concerts per year at London venues including St. John's Smith Square, St John's Waterloo and its regular home, St James's Piccadilly, the orchestra thrives on a diverse range of challenging repertoire including Mahler's Symphony No.5, Walton Symphony No.1, Holst's The Planets, Shostakovich's Symphonies 5 & 10, Bartok's 2nd Violin Concerto, Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet, Beethoven's 7th Symphony and Haydn's The Creation.

Committed to the advocacy of contemporary classical music, in April 2014 the orchestra performed the world premiere of Nedudim ("wanderings") Fantasia-Concertante for mandolin and string orchestra by emerging Israeli composer Gilad Hochman, with mandolin-player Alon Sariel.

Over its formative decade, the orchestra has developed a policy of working with exciting young soloists at the outset of their careers, including Benjamin Grosvenor, Oliver Coates, Gweneth-Ann Jeffers and Charlie Siem, as well as established artists such as Piers Lane, Simon Preston, Guy Johnston and Craig Ogden.

In July 2013, Orchestra of the City celebrated its 10th Birthday at St James's, Piccadilly, with a thrilling programme including Bernstein's Overture from Candide and Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 3. The celebrations continued into their tenth season, which saw an exciting collaboration with Opera Danube - a semi-staged production of Lehar's The Merry Widow at St John's, Smith Square – and a succession of orchestral greats including Brahms's Symphony No. 2, Smetana's Ma Vlast and Strauss's Death and Transfiguration. Orchestra of the City is now 15 years old and still going strong.

We would like to thank the following for their continued support of Orchestra of the City:
Our helpers on the door and everyone at St. James's Piccadilly



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Orchestra of the City

First Violins

Romy Shioda
Matthew Pay
Louise Del Pero
Daisy De Lisle
Tom Claydon
Eve Rahmani
Nerys Richards
Pete Davies
Adam Williams
Anna Sadnicka
Catherine Gilfedder

Second Violins

Caroline Ferry
Mary Gough
Eglantine Grego
Ilana Cravitz
James Mulligan
Sam Lambert
Antonia Lyne
Ellie O'Connor
Rebecca Saunders
Liz Littlewood
Dan Murphy

Violas

Edward Shaw
Melissa Danny
Rosy Henderson
David Coates
Robin Weil
Johanna Thoma
Doug Oram

Cellos

Tom Parker
Maddy Cundall
Lottie McVicker
Larissa Koehler
Ellie Fletcher
Andrew Skone James

Double Basses

Phil Austin
Jakub Cywinsky

Flutes

Pauline Savage
Deborah Fether
Chris Gould
Ami Lodge

Oboes

Collin Beynon
Emma Brown

Cor Anglais

Flic Cowell

Clarinets

Antonia Stoneman
Helen McKeown

Clarinet & Bass Clarinet

Kara Settle

Bassoons

Alex Platt
Claire Goddard

Bassoon & Contra Bassoon

Richard Vincent

Horns

Matthew Sackman
Mick Nagle
Pamela Wise
Kevin Daly

Trumpets

Evan Champion
Anna Hughes
Richard Salthouse

Trombones

Alexia Constantine
Andy Moser
Andrew Ross

Tuba

Dave Carter

Timpani & Percussion

Ben Martin
Richard Souper
Andrew Barnard

Harp

Olivia Jageurs
Elizabeth Green



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Thank you!



UPCOMING CONCERTS

13th February 2020

Programme to include:

Walton: Violin Concerto

Prokofiev: Romeo & Juliet Suite

Conductor: Chris Hopkins

Violin: Janice Graham

24th April 2020

10th July 2020

At St James's Church Piccadilly