



**THURSDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2020**  
**ST. JAMES'S PICCADILLY, LONDON**

**Conductor** - Chris Hopkins  
**Violin** – Janice Graham

**Shostakovich**  
Festive Overture

**Walton**  
Violin Concerto

**Interval** – 15 minutes

**Prokofiev**  
Romeo and Juliet, Suite No. 2

# Programme Notes

A very warm welcome to our first concert of 2020 and I'm delighted that we are able to welcome back the fantastic Janice Graham to play one of my favourite concertos: the Walton Violin Concerto. In the second half, we're going to be getting in the mood for tomorrow's Valentine's day (you're welcome for the reminder) with the greatest love story ever told, Romeo and Juliet, as seen through the eyes and ears of Sergei Prokofiev.

## Shostakovich: Festive Overture

First though, we're going to start with a blazing fanfare; a piece that took just three days from commission to premiere and is as vivacious and speedy in its content as in its conception: **Shostakovich's Festive Overture**. Shostakovich was asked by the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra in 1954 to produce a piece to celebrate the 37th anniversary of the October Revolution and, with his friend Lebedinsky by his side, he immediately began to compose: "The speed with which he wrote was truly astounding. Moreover, when he wrote light music he was able to talk, make jokes and compose simultaneously, like the legendary Mozart. He laughed and chuckled, and in the meantime work was under way and the music was being written down."

For all the frenzy of the writing, there is no hint of rush or carelessness in the piece itself. A rousing fanfare opens our concert which, modelled on the ever popular 'Ruslan and Lyudmila Overture' by Glinka, opens into a fast main section alternating two themes: a frantic one and a lyrical (though still slightly hysterical) one. It all gets more and more out of control before running headlong into another fanfare. This one is even more over the top than the opening, with more than a hint of 'Shostakovich, Master of Musical Irony' (having lived under the shadow of mortal danger for two decades, he hadn't shed any tears over Stalin's death the previous year). With all the swaggering brilliance for which he had been famous since his student days, here, 30 years later, Shostakovich had dashed off an enduring piece full of infectious exuberance.

## Walton: Violin Concerto

- Andante tranquillo
- Presto capriccioso alla napolitana - Canzonetta
- Vivace

Back in 1936, the greatest virtuoso of the day (indeed perhaps of all time), Jascha Heifetz, took William **Walton** out for lunch and for a fee of 300 pounds, commissioned him to write a **Violin Concerto**.

Walton was a composer of extraordinary versatility; from film scores to royal ceremonial occasional music, epic romantic pieces to experimental ultra-modernity. Opinion in the press veered from 'relentless cocophony', 'naggingly memorable' and 'harmless' to 'a born genius' and 'Those who experienced the tremendous impact had full justification for feeling that a great composer had arisen in our land, a composer to whose potentialities it was impossible to set any limits'. By the mid-30s he was flying high, getting regular commissions and attaining significant success even with uncommissioned works such as the First Symphony which had great success in the USA as well as here in the UK. Walton's Viola concerto had been a big hit a few years previously, as had his monumental *Belshazzar's Feast*. He was earning enough from composition to be financially independent from his long-term support from the Sitwell household (he'd been lodging in Edith Sitwell's Chelsea house for nearly 15 years), which was just as well, as he had fallen in love with Viscountess Alice Wimborne who disliked the Sitwells as much as they disliked her.

The commission from Heifetz was a great honour and Walton was both delighted and slightly apprehensive; his main concern being how would he make a solo part elaborate enough to be worthy of the great violinist. Lady Walton recalled: "Eventually he was satisfied that he had exhausted the possibilities of what one could do on a violin. Yet he always thought of it as a rather intimate piece, a bit like the Elgar concerto; as a matter of fact it is in the same key."

There is an Italianate (Walton had spent much time in Italy before the war) warmth about the piece; it is a declaration of love. The opening theme is a particular favourite of mine; brooding, rich, warm, and totally gorgeous, it sets the underlying poetic mood for a piece which is so full of technical virtuosity elsewhere. Having established this atmosphere, it is then shattered by a vicious orchestral outburst, leaving Janice to try to calm the mood and restore a measure of tranquillity. This first movement ends as exquisitely as it begins.

The second movement starts with a shriek and catapults us into a 'tarantella' dance, partly perhaps echoing the rowdy side of Italy, but also apparently a nod to Walton having been bitten by a tarantula shortly before writing it! As suddenly as it begins, the music turns, falling into a slow waltz, laced with irony (this is after all a movement headed 'alla Napolitana', in Neapolitan style) and then lurches again into a 'Canzonetta' (a reference to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian style) before the tarantella returns. It's a rip-roaring pyrotechnic 'Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure' tour of Italy, in other words.

The last and longest movement is another flavour altogether. It could be a rondo, with the busy and fiddly opening coming back around four times, but it's not that obvious. It veers between gorgeously lyrical and annoyingly relentless. It has both an abundance of new musical ideas and reminiscences of the

previous movements, orchestral outbursts and solo cadenzas. It's hinting at Elgar, or is it Shostakovich, or Stravinsky, or Ravel: above all, it is Walton in characteristically unpredictable mood and it's a whirlwind of ideas and emotions, ending this magnificent concerto in a bravura final flourish. I have loved this piece for almost 20 years and I hope that if you don't already, tonight you might begin to feel the lure of this wonderful music.

## Interval

### **Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet, Suite No. 2**

- The Montagues and the Capulets
- Juliet – the little girl
- Friar Laurence
- Dance
- Romeo and Juliet Before Parting
- Dance of the Maids from the Antilles
- Romeo at Juliet's Grave

It would be putting it mildly to say that the beginnings of **Prokofiev's** seventh ballet score, **Romeo and Juliet**, were inauspicious. A 1934 commission from Leningrad fell through when new company management pulled the plug on a piece that composer and director had spent months working on. They took the project to Moscow's Bolshoi, where he completed the score in 1935, before the Bolshoi too decided to pull the plug. The Ensemble called his complicated rhythmic structures 'undanceable' and complained that in the more subtle passages they couldn't hear the orchestra at all (Prokofiev, having been convinced to sit on stage for some rehearsals, did rectify this shortly after). The composer's change of ending, in which Juliet wakes up in time to save Romeo from committing suicide (Prokofiev's argument being that living characters dance better than dead ones) was considered to be inappropriate at best and thankfully this was also changed.

Undaunted, Prokofiev decided to transcribe the ballet into piano miniatures and also into two concert suites (later adding a third), and this is how the piece was first heard in public: tonight's Suite No. 2 had been performed in 1937 before the premiere of the full ballet the following year in Brno. What is clear from this turbulent beginning, is that Prokofiev isn't simply writing music to underscore a drama through dance, but writing music which itself conveys every emotional and psychological nuance of the story, uncompromising in its authenticity to this cause, and thoroughly engaging concert music because of it.

Tonight we will be playing the Second Suite, which is the most satisfying, both because it contains really great numbers and because it has a kind of underlying plot thread from the Capulet ball of Act 1 to the intensely emotional final scene. Seven very contrasted movements which I think stand on their own musical interest, but for those of you with nagging narrative urges, correspond to:

1: The Montagues and Capulets: This comes from the ballroom scene at the home of Juliet's family in Act One. It's a famous and unforgettable portrait of the lovers' feuding families. The quieter middle section shows Juliet dancing with her fiancé, Paris. Lord Sugar is thankfully nowhere to be seen.

2: Juliet - The Young Girl: This portrait of the teenaged Juliet begins by conveying her girlish sense of mischief. She sees herself in a mirror and suddenly realizes that maturity is coming. Growing more wistful, the music suggests the possibility of the deeper problems and emotions that subsequent events will stir within her.

3: Friar Laurence: This characterizes the gentle, bassoon-loving, understanding monk who sympathizes with the lovers and helps them. He is a pretty laid back guy, but he does hate cellists.

4: Dance: Does what it says on the tin. A vigorous frolic from the street carnival in Act Two, no more, no less.

5: Romeo and Juliet Before Parting: This killer movement evokes the lovers' sweet, rapturous feelings on the morning after their first declaration of love; the post-party rendezvous on the balcony of Juliet's house. It's passionate and prophetically tragic in equal measure.

6: Dance of the Maids from the Antilles: This sultry number is performed by a group of young women in Act Three, but tonight the fires are stoked first instead by our scintillating viola section.

7: Romeo at Juliet's Grave: This is the ballet's final scene. Once Juliet's family has departed from the tomb after her funeral, Romeo appears. Not knowing that the poison Juliet took wasn't fatal, he stabs himself in torment. She awakens moments later. Finding his lifeless body drives her to kill herself. Happy Valentine's Day! It closes simply in pure C major: the lovers are united in death (it's the closest to 'and they all lived happily ever after' that he could get).

*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.



## **Rebecca Saunders – Leader**

Rebecca began learning the violin at the age of four and won a specialist music scholarship to Wells Cathedral School three years later. She subsequently studied at the Junior Department at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where she was leader of the Junior Guildhall String Ensemble, winner of the Principal's Prize, and a finalist in the Lutine Prize competition. She also performed with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and the National Youth Chamber Orchestra.

Rebecca studied Economics at Cambridge University, where she led Cambridge University Chamber Orchestra and performed Wieniawski's Concerto No.1 with Cambridge University Symphony Orchestra. Following university, she joined Orchestra of the City as a founder member and co-Leader.

In 2006, Rebecca moved to New York to pursue an MBA at Columbia University and became Principal Second Violin in the Musica Bella Orchestra of New York, with whom she performed the Bruch Violin Concerto. She has been the leader of Orchestra of the City since returning to London in 2008. Rebecca works as a retail consultant and is a Trustee of Orchestras Live.



### **Janice Graham - Violin**

Janice Graham is Leader of the English National Opera Orchestra and Leader/Artistic Director of English Sinfonia. She studied at the Purcell School, the Guildhall School with David Takeno and at the Juilliard with Glen Dicterow.

From 1996-2002 Janice was Leader of BBC National Orchestra of Wales and performed many concertos with them including the Nielson and Britten. From 1993-2000 she was Assistant Leader of the London Symphony Orchestra participating in its Barbican Chamber series with Bashmet and Previn. She has appeared as guest leader of most of the UK's symphony and opera orchestras.

Her recordings include Dohnanyi's *2nd violin concerto* (ASV) Holst solo violin works (Naxos) Walton *Sonata* and Delius *Sonatas 1 and 2* (EMI)

Janice was a Professor at the Royal College of Music from 1995 and became a professor at the Guildhall School in 2010.

## 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 in its late teens 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

Rebecca Saunders  
Romy Shioda  
Tom Claydon  
Nerys Richards  
Pete Davis  
Eglantine Greco  
Ellie O'Connor  
Daisy de Lisle  
Eve Rahmani  
Gretel Scott  
Racem Triki  
Matt Pay

## Second Violins

Mary Gough  
Caroline Ferry  
Ashleena Deike  
James Mulligan  
Patrick Brennan  
Sarah Trotter  
Isobel Smith  
Adam Williams

## Violas

Edward Shaw  
Rosy Henderson  
Melissa Danny  
David Coates  
Robin Weil  
Johanna Thoma  
Jess Bishop

## Cellos

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

## Double Basses

Jamie Parkinson  
Alex Verster  
Jack Cherry

## Flutes

Pauline Savage  
Deborah Fether

## Piccolo

Chris Gould  
Deborah Fether

## Oboes

Collin Beynon  
Emma Brown  
Flic Cowell

## Cor Anglais

Flic Cowell  
Emma Brown

## Clarinets

Helen McKeown  
Kara Settle  
Quentin Maxwell-Jackson

## Bass Clarinet

Quentin Maxwell-Jackson

## Tenor Saxophone

Eileen McManus

## Bassoons

Alex Platt  
Miles Chapman

## Contra Bassoon

Richard Vincent

## Horns

Matthew Sackman  
Mick Nagle  
Martin Priestley  
Jonathan Stoneman

## Trumpets

Evan Champion  
Anna Hughes  
Lukas Geiger

## Trombones

Alexia Constantine  
Andy Moser  
Andrew Ross

## Tuba

Nathan Mansel

## Timpani & Percussion

Johanna Wadsley  
Ben Martin  
Catherine Hockings  
Richard Souper

## Harp

Olivia Jageurs

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## **UPCOMING CONCERTS**

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Fanny Mendelssohn: Overture in C major  
Shostakovich: Piano Concerto No. 2  
Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3

Conductor & Piano: Chris Hopkins

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020

At St James's Church Piccadilly