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# UNIVERSITY PHILHARMONIA

Sunday 26 February, 7.30pm  
Great Hall, Trent Building

## PROGRAMME

Overture to *Athalie*, Op.74

**Felix Mendelssohn**  
(1809-1847)

3 *Épigraphes antiques*

1: *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* ('To invoke Pan, god of the summer wind')

4: *Pour la danseuse aux crotales* ('For the dancer with crotales')

6: *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* ('To thank the morning rain')

**Claude Debussy**  
(1862- 1918)  
(orch. Sackman)  
(b.1950)

*Gli uccelli* (The Birds)

1. *Preludio* (Prelude, after Bernardo Pasquini)

2. *La colomba* (The Dove, after Jacques de Gallot)

3. *La gallina* (The Hen, after Jean-Phillipe Rameau)

4. *L'usignolo* (The Nightingale, after an unknown 17<sup>th</sup>-century English composer)

5. *Il cuccù* (The Cuckoo, after Bernardo Pasquini)

**Ottorino Respighi**  
(1879 - 1936)

Interval

Symphony No.5 in D

*I. Preludio*

*II. Scherzo*

*III. Romanza*

*IV. Passacaglia*

**Ralph Vaughan Williams**  
(1872-1958)

## PROGRAMME NOTES

Overture to *Athalie*, Op.74

Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn's overture to *Athalie* is a stunning example of the composer's skilful orchestration and ability to create dramatic musical landscapes. The piece was written in 1845 as the overture to a play of the same name, which was based on the biblical story of Queen Athaliah of Judah. The play and overture were well received at the time, and the overture has since become a staple of the orchestral repertoire.

The overture begins with a sombre and mysterious introduction, featuring a slow, ominous theme played by the lower strings and brass. This theme sets the stage for the drama to come, hinting at the impending conflict and turmoil of the story. As the introduction builds, the theme is taken up by the entire orchestra, gradually growing in intensity and volume until it reaches a thunderous climax.

The mood then shifts to a more lively and spirited section, featuring a lively and dance-like theme in the strings. This theme is playful and joyful, seeming to represent the hope and optimism of the people of Judah after Athaliah's defeat. Mendelssohn masterfully weaves this theme throughout the rest of the overture, contrasting it with the darker and more menacing themes that came before.

The final section of the overture is a triumphant and celebratory coda, featuring a majestic and soaring theme played by the full orchestra. This theme is rich and full, representing the victory of the people over Athaliah and the establishment of peace and order in the land. The coda builds to a thrilling climax, with the entire orchestra coming together in a final, triumphant statement.

Harriet Lowe

3 *Épigraphes antiques*

Claude Debussy (orch. Nick Sackman)

1: *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* ('To invoke Pan, god of the summer wind')

4: *Pour la danseuse aux crotales* ('For the dancer with crotales')

6: *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* ('To thank the morning rain')

Nos. 1, 4, and 6 orchestrated by Nicholas Sackman

1: *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* ('To invoke Pan, god of the summer wind')

4: *Pour la danseuse aux crotales* ('For the dancer with crotales')

6: *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* ('To thank the morning rain')

Debussy composed his Six *Épigraphes Antiques* in July 1914, originally for piano duet; it was his only composition of that year. The six pieces are short, evocative, and impressionistic paintings which, in their piano-duet form, glitter with pianistic precision; in the present

orchestration of three of the Epigraphes – nos. 1, 4, and 6 – the many colours of the orchestral instruments provide a more varied tonal canvas.

‘Crotales’ were pairs of small metal discs – tiny cymbals – which were held by a loop of string around the performer’s thumb and first finger on each hand.

Gli uccelli (The Birds)

**Ottorino Respighi**

1. *Preludio (Prelude, after Bernardo Pasquini)*
2. *La colomba (The Dove, after Jacques de Gallot)*
3. *La gallina (The Hen, after Jean-Phillipe Rameau)*
4. *L’usignolo (The Nightingale, after an unknown 17<sup>th</sup>-century English composer)*
5. *Il cuccù (The Cuckoo, after Bernardo Pasquini)*

Respighi's *Gli Uccelli (The Birds)* is a delightful and colourful orchestral suite that depicts the world of birds through music. Composed in 1928, the piece is based on five different birdsongs and features Respighi's characteristic lush and imaginative orchestration.

The suite begins with the ‘Prelude,’ a shimmering and impressionistic depiction of a bird-filled forest. The music is light and airy, featuring trilling woodwinds and delicate harp arpeggios that suggest the fluttering of wings and the rustling of leaves.

The second movement, ‘The Dove,’ is a gentle and peaceful tribute to the cooing of the titular bird. The music is warm and expressive, with lush strings and woodwinds blending together to create a sense of tranquillity.

‘The Hen’ is a playful and upbeat scherzo that captures the clucking and pecking of a group of hens. The music is full of energy, with lively woodwind and brass figures intermingling with bustling string passages.

‘The Nightingale’ is perhaps the most famous and well-loved movement of the suite. Respighi's orchestration captures the bird's distinctive trills and flourishes, weaving them into a gorgeous and evocative musical tapestry. The music is sensual and emotional, with soaring string lines and ethereal woodwind solos.

Finally, ‘The Cuckoo’ brings the suite to a lively and spirited close. The music is dance-like, featuring a jaunty melody played by the woodwinds and brass. As the movement progresses, the cuckoo's call is heard in various keys and registers, creating a sense of whimsy and playfulness.

Harriet Lowe

## Symphony No.5 in D

Ralph Vaughan Williams

*I. Preludio*

*II. Scherzo*

*III. Romanza*

*IV. Passacaglia*

Vaughan Williams was one of the first English composers to turn away from the German nineteenth-century tradition (of Elgar) to explore and harness the rich musical universe of the English folk and choral traditions. He felt that English folk music liberated him from foreign styles, as he explained in a lecture:

In the days when Elgar formed his style, English folk song was not 'in the air' but was consciously revived and made popular only about thirty years ago. Now what does this revival mean to the composer? It means that several of us found here in its simplest form the musical idiom which we unconsciously were cultivating ourselves. It gave a point to our imagination. The knowledge of our folk songs did not so much discover for us something new, but uncovered something which had been hidden by foreign matter.

He studied at the Royal College of Music with Stanford and Parry and then with Maurice Ravel in 1908. In his words 'I came to the conclusion that I was bumpy and stodgy, had come to a dead end, and that a little French polish would be of use to me'. Once this polish was applied Vaughan Williams' output was prolific. Up until 1935 he produced three symphonies, an opera and much other work all within the folk idiom.

1935 marked a change with the composition of his Fourth Symphony. The work reflects his agitation over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and is violent, dark and dissonant. Of it he would comment 'I don't know whether I like it, but this is what I meant'. While often misinterpreted, the Fifth Symphony also holds some tension so apparent in the Fourth.

The Fifth symphony was premièred in a Promenade concert while the Second World War raged on 24 June 1943. Speculation to its meaning was wide and diverse. Vaughan Williams was 75 at the time and it was suggested that this was the summation of his life's work, that he had found peace following the violence of the Fourth. The music is actually based extensively on material Vaughan Williams had begun work on in 1906 for an opera based on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. When war broke out in 1939 he transferred much of the material into symphonic form.

The work explores much of the trial and tribulation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim*. An air of expectation rests over the Preludio as the horns set the scene for the musical journey. The Scherzo is the darkest movement containing completely original material. We hear the Opera's 'hobgoblin and foul fiend' (oboe and cor anglais) and the conflict between dark and light rages throughout.

The Romanza is the heart of the symphony. Above his own manuscript Vaughan Williams wrote 'He hath given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death' and the line is transferred with the opening theme into the opera. At the end the work's religious connotations become apparent as a whisper of 'Alleluia' is left hanging in the stillness.

The Passacaglia explores themes from the other movements that weave in and out above a repeated bass line. In conclusion the string section broadens out into ten-parts to descend through 'Alleluia' before fading to nothing. The effect is nothing short of breathtaking.

The music of the Fifth symphony should not alone be understood in relation to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. While much of the material grew out of and was used in the opera the Symphony has its own unique colour and emotion. The Second World War was a powerful influence. While the violence of the Fourth symphony and the sheer impact of the Sixth Symphony in F minor explicitly illustrate his horror of war it is not entirely inappropriate to suggest that this was Vaughan Williams' call for peace. Understanding the work's relationship to Bunyan's *Pilgrim* and to the War should allow us to appreciate the depth and complexity of a work that is so often misunderstood. Vaughan Williams was particularly fond of a quotation of Gustav Stresemann: 'The man who serves humanity best is he who ... is able to give something to the whole of humanity.' It is up to the individual listener to decide whether he achieved this goal.

Nicholas Hill

## **JONATHAN TILBROOK**

Jonathan Tilbrook is a versatile conductor of repertoire ranging from the 14th to the 21st century, whose career has included performances at major venues throughout the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, New Zealand and the Far East. Highlights have included appearances with the Croatian Radio Symphony Orchestra (on the concert platform and in the recording studio) and the Croatian National Theatre, Zagreb (Tchaikovsky *Nutcracker*); Symphony Hall, Birmingham (with the Birmingham Philharmonic); London's Barbican Hall and the Bromsgrove Festival with the English Chamber Orchestra, Handel's *Xerxes* (British Youth Opera) at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, critically acclaimed performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *St John Passion* in France with *Florilegium*, Walton's *Façade* at the Albert Hall, Nottingham with *Lady Susanna* Walton and musicians from *Sinfonia Viva*, appearances with the contemporary music ensemble *One Voice* in Edinburgh, and a performance of Machaut's *Messe de Nostre Dame* and Tarik O'Regan's *Scattered Rhymes* with the *Orlando Consort*.

Early achievements included his appointment as Assistant Conductor with the *Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic* (Zlín, Czech Republic), and invitations to guest-conduct the *Janáček Philharmonic* and *Košice State Philharmonic* orchestras. He has since worked with a wide range of ensembles including the *Martinů Philharmonic*, *Moravian Philharmonic*, *Olomouc and Kroměříž chamber orchestras* (Czech Republic); *Košice State Philharmonic* (Slovak Republic); *Hong Kong Sinfonietta*; *Sinfonia Viva*; contemporary music groups *Gemini*, *One Voice*, and *Mephisto Ensemble*, and the early music ensemble *Florilegium*. He has conducted the *BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra* and *Nash Ensemble* at the *Orkney Conductors' Masterclass*, and has also been invited to work as assistant conductor with *Welsh National Opera*. Opera productions have included *Don Pasquale*; *Die Fledermaus*; *La Bohème*; *Carmen*; *Madama Butterfly*; *Cavalleria Rusticana*; *I Pagliacci*; *Le nozze di Figaro*; *Don Giovanni* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, at major UK festivals including *Brighton*, *Cheltenham*, *King's Lynn* and *Holland Park*.

Jonathan is Head of *Orchestral Studies* at *Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance* in London, and the *Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Fellow* at the *University of Nottingham*.

# UNIVERSITY PHILHARMONIA

University Philharmonia is an auditioned symphony orchestra comprising students from more than 20 academic disciplines from across the University. It performs exciting, varied and challenging repertoire in several concerts annually. Repertoire has included John Adams' *Harmonium*, Holst *The Planets* with members of Zhejiang Conservatory of Music and Stravinsky *Firebird* Suite. Every year opportunities are provided to talented students to perform a concerto with the orchestra, receive mentoring as Assistant Conductors or work with the Lakeside team as Arts Administration Trainees.

**Jonathan Tilbrook**

Conductor

**Alex Jones**

Assistant Conductor

**Harriet Lowe & Hannah Thomas**

Arts Administration Trainees

## **Violin I**

Daniel Seow  
Ai-Ling Woolston  
Nina So  
SoLee Jung  
Hazel Cooper  
Grace Kent  
Sophie Norwood  
Abigail Snow  
Philippa White

## **Violin II**

Adam Bennett  
Molly Young  
Wern Syuen Ng  
Joey Johnston  
Kim Jeffs  
Louise Marshall  
Ambrose Kersley

## **Viola**

Zi (Sara) Wang  
Jess Kelly  
Louise Boynton  
Kylie Szeto

## **Cello**

Jacob Dean  
Archer Sarner-Howard  
Charlotte Robinson  
Kate Girdlestone  
Hannah Thomas  
Alan Gurung-Lama  
Julia Irvine

## **Bass**

Walter Mann  
Max Wilson

## **Flute**

Gaia Rogers  
Freya Sage

## **Oboe**

Samuel Davis  
Rebecca Weber

## **Clarinet**

Alex Jones  
Lauren Phillips

## **Bassoon**

Joe Gibson  
Luc Tucker

## **Horn**

Matthew O-Reilly  
Alex Raison

## **Trumpet**

Ollie Cowling  
Becky Brundrett-Hall

## **Trombone**

Paul Emmett  
Emily Shell  
Tom Parker  
Tim Downing

## **Timpani**

Rosie Clark

## **Harp**

Cedar Wilson

## **Celeste**

Phoebe Stimpson