



Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church
Pen-y-Pound, Abergavenny

Sunday 28th November 2021, 2.30pm

www.abergavennysymph.org.uk

Abergavenny Orchestral Society

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Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Leader

Helena Todd

Conductor

Michael Bell MBE

St Paul's Suite for string orchestra, Op.29 no.2 Gustav Holst
Jig – Ostinato – Intermezzo – Finale (The Dargason)

Serenade for strings in E minor, Op.20 Edward Elgar
Allegro piacevole – Larghetto – Allegretto

INTERVAL

Suite no.2 for military band, Op.28 no.2 Gustav Holst
March – Song without Words – Song of the Blacksmith –
Fantasia on The Dargason

Lincolnshire Posy Percy Grainger
Lisbon – Harkstow Grange – The Lost Lady Found

Fugue in G minor, BWV.578 J.S. Bach

Suite no.1 for military band, Op.28 no.1 Gustav Holst
Chaconne – Intermezzo – March

A Word from the Chairman

After the disappointment of having to cancel all our 2020 concerts, and the silence and isolation of lockdown, it is a tremendous pleasure to be back in Our Lady and St. Michael's, playing for you once again. From the onset of Covid until May 2021 we were only able to arrange one face-to-face meeting, a string sectional in December, but like the rest of the country we kept in contact through Zoom quizzes. In late 2020 and early 2021 we moved on from quizzes to some recording projects, with players recording and uploading their own parts – this was interesting and challenging, in both the literal and euphemistic senses of those words! One of these projects was to record a piece specially composed by our own Iestyn Harding, and I am hoping that we can feature this in a live concert in the future – it deserves to be heard. Another piece of Iestyn's was due for its debut in the June 2020 concert, and like the other works we had planned we would love to reschedule it, but at the moment it is still not possible to plan out full orchestra concerts. Our rehearsal and concert venues are too small to allow the whole orchestra to meet with any social distancing. We are continually monitoring the Covid situation, and examining alternative possible venues (we've looked at nearly 20 so far). We hope that in 2022 we will be able, once again, to perform for you as a full symphony orchestra. You can follow our plans on our website or Facebook, or subscribe to our mailing list by e-mailing us at info@abergavennysymph.org.uk.

We are also delighted to be welcoming Michael Bell as our new Music Director. The orchestra, and our audience, have already had the pleasure of Michael's appearances as guest conductor in several of our previous concerts, and over the last six months or so he has provided us with much needed inspiration and enthusiasm in finding ways of playing again in the time of Covid. We are privileged to have him officially on board now in this vital role, and we're looking forward to working with him to continue to build on the musical foundations established by Dennis and his predecessors.

Thank you for support, and enjoy the concert!

Programme Notes

St Paul's Suite, Op.29/2

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

1934 was a cruel year for English music, seeing as it did the deaths of Elgar, Holst and Delius within a space of five months. Of the three, it is perhaps Holst whose music, with the obvious exception of *The Planets*, has gained the least public acceptance. Yet his multi-faceted genius touched every sphere of composition, from orchestra to opera, chamber music to chorus, pieces for amateurs and schoolchildren, ranging from hearty English Morris-dance tunes to works inspired by Christian and Hindu mysticism. This suite was composed for his pupils at St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, where he was Director of Music for nearly 30 years.

The piece begins with a vigorous *Jig* which, despite ending up in C, has a very D minor/Dorian feel. The second movement is a fleet-footed *Ostinato*, in which the repeated pattern is given mainly to the second violins, against which the rest of the strings have to execute some fairly tricky rhythmic passages – Holst's pupils must have been good at counting. The third movement, *Intermezzo*, contrasts a gentle, rather Arabic-flavoured theme – a reminder that the suite's companion piece, the Oriental (*sic.*) Suite *Beni Mora*, Op.29/1, was inspired by a holiday in Algeria – with an energetic passage which Holst would later use for the *Dance of the Spirits of Fire* in his opera *The Perfect Fool*. The finale, *The Dargason*, begins with the tune of that name taken from John Playford's *Dancing Master*, after which Holst makes the delightful discovery that it fits perfectly against perhaps the most famous English tune of all (no plot-spoilers in these programme notes, of course).

Serenade in E minor, Op.20

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

E minor seems to have been a key with particular significance for Elgar, being shared by three of his late masterpieces, the Cello Concerto, Violin Sonata and String Quartet, as well as this wonderful early Serenade, the first of his works with which he expressed complete satisfaction. He was 34 at the time of its composition, but had yet to

make any sort of a name for himself; the première was given privately by the Worcester Ladies' Orchestral Class, and it had to wait another 7 years for a complete public performance in Britain. Since then it has gone on to become one of Elgar's best-loved works.

The violas have their moment of glory at the start, introducing the skipping 6/8 rhythm that runs through the movement. The main theme of the second movement, noble, melancholy and consoling, is one of the most perfect ever to come from Elgar's pen. The finale, now in E major, is based largely on an arching theme of very similar contour to that of the first movement, so it is no surprise when at the end Elgar casts a wistful glance back to the material of the opening.

Suite in F for military band, Op.28/2

Gustav Holst

The two suites for military band were completed in 1909 and 1911, although the reason for their composition is not clear; possibly Holst, as a professional trombonist, had become dissatisfied with the standard band repertoire of arrangements and popular tunes, and wanted to provide something more substantial.

The second suite is perhaps the less "serious" of the two in that it uses actual folk-songs, but in both the level of inspiration and skill in the use of instrumental colours are extraordinarily high. The opening movement is a March making use of three traditional tunes: the Morris dance *Glorishears* in the opening lively section, *Swansea Town* (also known as the Irish song *The Holy Ground*) for the following euphonium solo and, in the minor-key trio, *Claudy Banks*. The second movement, scored without heavy brass or percussion, is a gentle treatment of the song *I'll love my love*. The following *Song of the Blacksmith* features the song *A blacksmith courted me*, and includes a part for a very Wagnerian anvil. And observant members of the audience will notice that the Finale, *Fantasia on The Dargason*, bears more than a passing resemblance to the corresponding movement in the *St Paul's Suite*.

Lincolnshire Posy

Percy Grainger (1882-1961)

Grainger was very much the naughty boy of 20th-century music; his private life was spicy, to say the least, and, although inspired by English folksong, his outsider's viewpoint (he was an Australian who spent most of his life in the USA) seems to have encouraged him to use his material in irreverent and sometimes wildly experimental ways. His eccentric cast of mind is nowhere better illustrated than by his own evaluation of music history: he considered Bach the greatest composer of all, but second and third on his list were Delius and Ellington, with P.A. Grainger in a disappointing ninth place (although still ahead of such second-raters as Mozart and Tchaikovsky).

The suite entitled *Lincolnshire Posy*, of which we will be playing 3 of the 6 movements, is based on songs collected in that county during 1905-6, Grainger's pioneering use of electric recording equipment allowing him to notate precisely the irregular metres of the original performances. Consequently, Grainger intended his settings as character-sketches of the singers as well as reworkings of the tunes. The first movement, *Lisbon*, sets a simple 6/8 melody to which Grainger adds a touch of weirdness by harmonising it entirely in major triads. The song was collected from Mr Deene in Brigg Workhouse, who became so emotional that the matron feared for his health; "*I thought he might as well die singing it as die without singing it,*" was Grainger's sardonic comment. *Harkstow Grange* (subtitled *The Miser and His Man – a local tragedy*), despite its gentle, long-breathed melody, tells of a fight, possibly leading to murder, between a waggoner with the remarkable name of Steeleye Span and his miserly employer. Finally, in *The Lost Lady Found* a girl, stolen away by gypsies, is eventually rescued by and married to her lover. Grainger had the tune from his fellow song-collector Lucy Broadwood, to whom it was sung by her nurse, Georgina Hill of Stamford. Here, after the refined scoring of the previous movements, the whole band is finally allowed to let rip, including any and every tuned percussion instrument that may be available.

The first performance of *Lincolnshire Posy* was given in 1937 in Milwaukee by the combined, and entirely sober, forces of the Blatz Brewery Band and the Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer Factory Workers' Band.

Fugue in G minor, BWV.578

J.S.Bach (1685-1750)

This 4-part fugue, one of Bach's earliest known compositions, probably dates from his time as organist of the Blasius Church in Mühlhausen from 1706-08, making it contemporary with the cantatas *Gott is mein König* and *Christ lag in Todes Banden*. Although still showing the influence earlier composers, particularly Buxtehude and Corelli, the piece is already completely characteristic of its composer – indeed, the grand and solemn fugue subject is probably one of Bach's best-known tunes. His music has of course been arranged for everything from full symphony orchestra to jazz trio and rock band, so this little piece works perfectly well in this wind-band arrangement.

Suite in E flat for military band, Op.28/1

Gustav Holst

The first suite opens with a Chaconne, a set of variations over a stately bass theme, the rhythm of whose first phrase is the same as that of the medieval *Agincourt Song*. The variations themselves move from the gentle meditation of the opening, through militaristic sections and *Brillante* passages of extreme virtuosity for upper woodwind, to a grand conclusion. The second movement, *Intermezzo*, begins with a sparkling solo for cornet, oboe and clarinet (using the same 3 opening notes as the Chaconne theme), with a half-speed middle section in which the clarinet plays more or less the same tune, now sounding like a medley of several English folksongs. The final *March* uses two themes, a perky one given to the upper instruments and a smooth folksong-like melody which is no more than an ornamented version of the *Chaconne* theme, and which also turns out to fit perfectly in counterpoint against the main March tune in the riotous final pages.

MICHAEL BELL was born in Neath and studied music at Cardiff University.

After graduating, Michael formed the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra in 1982 and has conducted the orchestra for 39 years. Michael has conducted an enormous and wide-ranging repertoire with CPO, in over 350 concerts, including symphonies by Mahler, Richard Strauss, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Vaughan Williams, Elgar and Shostakovich, as well as major orchestral works by Stravinsky, Ravel and Prokofiev.

In 2010 Michael was invited to conduct the Brecknock Sinfonia at Brecon Cathedral, and has since become the orchestra's regular conductor. He was invited to conduct the Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra in its summer concert in 2017 and has since returned a number of times to conduct the ASO.

In November 2019 he made his debut with the Hereford String Orchestra and will be returning to conduct the HSO in its next season.

Michael was awarded an MBE for services to music In the New Year's Honours 2018.

In Memory of Brighid Jones

Today's concert is the first we have performed since we lost our much loved colleague and friend, Brighid Jones, at the end of 2019. Brighid was a mainstay of the orchestra for many, many years, and died unexpectedly without the chance for us to say a proper farewell. She was the welcoming and friendly face of the orchestra to generations of new players, and a fine musician. She is deeply missed, and although it is nearly two years now since she passed away, she is certainly not forgotten. We will be thinking of her in this concert.

Other local concerts coming soon...

December 4th - Unicorn Singers

Advent Concert – A Light in Darkness

8pm at Our Lady & St Michael's RC Church, Abergavenny

December 4th – St Woolos Sinfonia

Christmas Concert

7pm at St Deiniol's Church, Itton, Chepstow

December 23th - Unicorn Singers

Noël, Noël!

7.00pm in Llangynidr Village Hall

unicornsingers.co.uk/

Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

1st Violin

Helena Todd
Romilly Cook
John Jenkins
Jane Leney
Tessa Lewis
Diana MacPherson
Liz Macfie
Derek Pike
Erin Morgan

2nd Violin

Selina Hamilton
Jane Anscombe
Simon Marr-Johnson
Lynne Pollitt
Stephen Shaw
Anita Bromley
Lizzy Judd

Viola

Simon Large
Rachel Menna Hamlyn
Gavin Stoddart
Rachel Tucker
Rose Graham

Cello

Stephen David
Laura Kostoris
Rohan Lewis
Sue Rogers
Hannah Poulson
Nikita Ko
Kiera Morgan

Bass

James Leney
Richard Mynors

Flute

Bethan Barlow
Paul Woods

Oboe

Malcolm James
Martin Bailey-Wood

Clarinet

Robert Watson
Ian Hall
Hannah Parry
Francis Clarke

Bassoon

Janet Lloyd
Chris Poynton
Becky Rogers

Saxophone

Chris Poynton
Becky Drysdale
Louise Alexander

Horn

Peter Geraghty
Rod Paton
Hannah Stonelake

Trumpet

Paul Kelly
Mark Perry
Jon Mudd

Trombone

Iestyn Harding
Mike Standley
Chris de Lloyd

Tuba/Euphonium

Chris Baker
Eilir Alexander

Percussion

David Fraser
Odette Hutchison

New members

If you would be interested in joining the orchestra, please contact us at info@abergavennysymph.org.uk. You can check our website for details of the rehearsal schedule.

Acknowledgements

Abergavenny Orchestral Society is grateful to the staff and members of **Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church** for allowing us to use this beautiful church for our concert. AOS is affiliated to **Making Music**, which represents and supports amateur music societies throughout the UK, and gratefully acknowledges the support of **Dance Blast** for provision of our rehearsal venue and The Music Parts Service at **Liverpool Libraries** for lending us music.

Abergavenny Orchestral Society is a Registered Charity no: 1076523

The orchestra is grateful for the support of non-members who have augmented various sections for this concert.