



# Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

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

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024, 2.30pm

[www.abergavennysymph.org.uk](http://www.abergavennysymph.org.uk)

# Abergavenny Orchestral Society

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# Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Leader

**Marisa Riordan**

Conductor

**Michael Bell MBE**

*Hänsel und Gretel* – Prelude

Humperdinck

*Dolly Suite, Op.26* [orch. Rabaud]

Fauré

1. *Berceuse*
2. *Mi-a-ou*
3. *Le jardin de Dolly*
4. *Kitty-valse*
5. *Tendresse*
6. *Le pas espagnol*

## ***INTERVAL***

Refreshments are available in the St Michael's Centre.  
Donations to Cafod welcome.

*Scheherazade* – Symphonic Suite, Op.35

Rimsky-Korsakov

Solo violin: Marisa Riordan

1. *The sea and Sinbad's ship*
2. *The Kalendar Prince*
3. *The young prince and the young princess*
4. *Festival at Baghdad - The sea -The ship breaks against a cliff*

## A word from our Musical Director

Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra's Spring Concert brings feelings of great nostalgia for yours truly.

The opera *Hänsel und Gretel* was once a regular feature of the Christmas television schedule in more enlightened times, and I remember being particularly transfixed by a black and white broadcast of the opera at a time when there were only three television channels. The overture that opens our concert contains themes from the opera beginning with the sublime Evening Prayer introduced by four horns.

Fauré's *Dolly Suite*, originally composed for piano duet, performed in our concert in the orchestral arrangement by Henri Rabaud, consists of six movements of the utmost charm and lyricism. More nostalgia here as the opening movement, the *Berceuse*, was used as the signature tune for the fondly-remembered programme *Listen with Mother*. Oh, the memories of being transfixed in front of the wireless!

I think I've mentioned previously that I am an insatiable collector of recorded music. It started with long playing records (LPs) when I was in school, and one of my earliest purchases was a Decca LP... Volume 4 of The World of Great Classics containing Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* performed by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pierre Monteux, that I bought for the princely sum of 99p!

I must have played this record of *Scheherazade* endlessly (I still have it!) so smitten was I by the sheer colour, excitement and joy of the music. It's a spell that was cast then and continues to this day.

I've since purchased other great recordings conducted by Fritz Reiner, Sir Charles Mackerras, Bernard Haitink, André Previn and more, but my guilty pleasure is the sumptuous recording by Leopold Stokowski and the London Symphony Orchestra, issued on Decca's gimmicky Phase Four label. Stokowski can't resist the temptation to occasionally 'enhance' Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration. It's sometimes outrageous, and I shouldn't love it so much, but I do.

I hope you will enjoy our performance of *Scheherazade*, the most prolific and compelling of storytellers, as portrayed by the ASO's wonderful leader, Marisa.

## ***Hänsel und Gretel* – Prelude**

**Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)**

Following recent performances of works by Nicolai and Bruch, we are pleased to continue our devotion to one-hit composers with a performance of the Prelude to Humperdinck's delightful operatic treatment of the children's story *Hänsel and Gretel*. In his day an extremely influential and well-regarded musician, Humperdinck served as assistant to Wagner at Bayreuth before beginning an academic career, leaving a list of famous pupils including Siegfried Wagner, Carl Schuricht and Kurt Weill. He continued composing for the stage – indeed, his involvement with German opera continued literally to the end, since he died while attending a performance of *Der Freischütz* – not, as far as we know, as a result of any theatrical barbarisms perpetrated by the director, who happened to be his own son.

Originally considered a disciple of Wagner, Humperdinck now seems to reach forward to Strauss and even Mahler, particularly in his use of folksong-like melody (the dancing, fanfare-like theme that accompanies the final rejoicing sounds very like a passage from the finale of Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony).

The Prelude begins with perhaps the best-known theme from the opera, later sung as the Evening Prayer by the children when lost in the Ilsenstein Forest, before they are lulled to sleep by choirs of angels. The first theme of the main *Allegro* is made up of two ideas associated with the witch - the opening perky motif to which she sings her spell *Hokus pokus Holderbusch*, followed by a surging melody to which the children sing *Der Wind, der Wind*, trying to dismiss the thought of having heard the witch's voice. The second theme, rising and falling lyrically, is first associated with the Dew Fairy who wakes the children after their night in the forest, then being heard in the final rejoicing scene; its second, dancing, strain is also heard in this scene, when the gingerbread children are restored following the death of the witch.

*Hänsel und Gretel* enjoyed a very distinguished performance history, being first conducted in 1893 by Strauss and the following year by Mahler, while in 1931 it became the first opera to be broadcast complete from the New York Metropolitan Opera.

## **Dolly Suite**

**Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)**

Fauré might almost be thought of as a French Elgar, not just because of the two men's remarkable physical resemblance, but because both continued composing in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century style which yet incorporated a very 20<sup>th</sup>-century expressiveness and sensibility. Both men also enjoyed numerous love-affairs – apparently all platonic in Elgar's case, whereas Fauré became known even in his student years for his many romantic conquests. One long-term lover was the singer Emma Bardac, later the second Mme Debussy, whose daughter Régina-Hélène, nicknamed Dolly, became a great favourite of the composer, and for whom he wrote a series of short pieces commemorating birthdays or illustrating other aspects of family life. Originally for piano duet, this *Dolly Suite* was orchestrated by Henri Rabaud, Fauré's successor as director of the Paris Conservatoire.

The opening *Berceuse* presents a flowing melody, rather reminiscent of Elgar's *Chanson de Matin*, over a murmured 4-note accompaniment, with a central section that drifts into a gentle minor-key melancholy so typical of Fauré. The second movement's title, *Mi-a-ou*, has nothing to do with cats, but represents Dolly's attempts to pronounce her brother Raoul's name. Written for her second birthday in June 1894, this delightfully skittish little number might well be a portrait of the lively two-year-old. *Le jardin de Dolly*, a new-year present for 1895, shows Fauré's harmony developing into the elusive manner of his later compositions. The following *Kitty-valse* again has no feline connections; *Ketty (sic.)* was the Bardacs' dog, and, at the risk of over-stressing the Elgarian parallels, it is worth noting that the *Enigma Variations*, composed a couple of years later, also characterise two of their subjects through a speech impediment (Dorabella) and through the behaviour of a dog (G.R.S.). *Tendresse*, originally dedicated to the composer Adela Maddison (possibly another of Fauré's lovers) is no mere romantic trifle but sounds like a heartfelt and elegiac lament for lost love, a little consolation being provided in a central section with oboe and horn in canon over a harp accompaniment. The final *Pas espagnole* brings the suite to an end in a riot of Spanish colour.

## ***Scheherazade***

**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)**

Rimsky-Korsakov composed *Scheherazade* in a burst of creativity between June and August 1888, a period that also saw the completion of the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*. The Orient had been a subject of fascination for Russian artists for some time – the members of the group known as “The Five” had already produced a number of works showing Eastern or Middle-Eastern influence, including *Islamey* and *Tamara* (Balakirev), *The Saracen* and *The Mandarin’s Son* (Cui), *Salammbô* (Mussorgsky), *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (Borodin), as well as Rimsky’s own *Antar*.

In his autobiography, *My Musical Life*, Rimsky does not mention how he became acquainted with the *Thousand and One Nights*, the collection of Arabian tales on which *Scheherazade* is (loosely) based – presumably it was well-known to cultivated Russians – only that he conceived the idea of a composition based on “certain episodes” from it. He initially provided titles for each movement, before removing these from later editions, preferring merely that the listener “should carry away the impression that it is... an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonder”.

Rimsky is generally considered to be at his best in works of a programmatic character, such as the *Capriccio espagnole*, *Antar* and *Scheherazade*. He was not a natural symphonic thinker; it soon becomes apparent in his symphonies that, having stated his themes, he has no idea what to do with them except to re-state them. In works unremarkable for their orchestration, this quickly becomes tedious, whereas in a dazzling orchestral showpiece like *Scheherazade*, the development of ideas through varied instrumentation makes for thrilling listening. (Rimsky, incidentally, did not like being hailed as a brilliant orchestrator, claiming rather that his works were brilliantly *written for the orchestra*.)

The programme of this “Symphonic Suite” concerns the Sultan Shahryār, personified in the stern unison motif which opens the first and last movements, and his wife Scheherazade, the last in a long line of wives whom he has had killed after their wedding-nights in revenge for

the infidelity of his first. Scheherazade's genius for telling stories ending in nightly cliff-hangers ensures the indefinite postponement and final cancellation of her execution, after which Shahryār is transformed from mass-murdering tyrant into model husband. She is represented throughout by the solo violin, beginning with a languorous descending theme. (The dynamic between husband and wife is nicely illustrated by the similar contour of their two themes, Shahryār's spelling out a descending diminished fifth and Scheherazade's a perfect fifth.)

The first movement is largely concerned with developments of the two themes, Shahryār's becoming associated with Sinbad's ship and Scheherazade's turning into a whirling triplet accompaniment perhaps illustrating the wind and waves – Rimsky had been a naval officer, so knew what he was writing about. In the second movement, the Kalendar Prince (disguised as a wandering beggar) tells a tale of visions of veiled women and genies. Despite its oriental subject, the opening section, a series of statements of a theme first heard on solo bassoon, seems to rise direct from the soul of Mother Russia. We are not far here from the Stravinsky of *The Firebird*, despite the ex-pupil's claim to have learnt nothing from Rimsky. Jagged interruptions from the trombones usher in a series of woodwind cadenzas over thrumming strings. A lively section incorporating variants of both Shahryār's and Scheherazade's motifs leads to a climactic return to the main theme.

The third movement tells a love-story of Prince Ibrahim and Princess Jemilah, in which a yearning opening theme is given a lively central variation to the accompaniment of pattering percussion. The finale returns to serious business: Sinbad first returns from his voyages to a wild festival in Baghdad, illustrated by the most rhythmically adventurous music in the whole piece, then, driven by the spirit of adventure, goes to sea once again only to lose everything in a shipwreck. At the movement's climax, where the ship runs aground, the Sinbad/Shahryār and Scheherazade themes, already combined in the first movement, appear again in an apotheosis of almost Brucknerian grandeur, before the music winds down to a peaceful conclusion with the last word given, of course, to Scheherazade.



**MICHAEL BELL** MBE was born in Neath. After graduating from Cardiff University, Michael formed the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted the orchestra since CPO's inaugural concert in June 1982.

Michael has conducted an enormous and wide-ranging repertoire with CPO, in more than 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, and many more besides.

Michael has always had a great enthusiasm for film music, and in 1994 introduced A Night at the Movies as an annual feature of CPO's repertoire. The concert in December 2017, celebrating the music of John Williams, was performed to the highest audience figures at St David's Hall for thirteen years.

As well as being Music director for Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra, Michael is now also the regular conductor of Brecknock Sinfonia and Hereford Symphony Orchestra.

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

**MARISA RIORDAN** is originally from Cardiff and has been involved in music-making from a young age. She graduated from Cardiff University in 2010 and was awarded the Elizabeth Griffiths prize for outstanding contribution to the department. With a master's degree in teaching from UCL, she is an experienced teacher of music who currently works in the Performing Arts Department of Monmouth Comprehensive School.

Marisa has played in many ensembles across South Wales and previously led the Cardiff University Symphony Orchestra in 2010 and the Rhondda Symphony Orchestra in 2015. She joined Abergavenny SO as Leader at the beginning of 2022.

Marisa has really enjoyed the challenge of performing Scheherazade. It has taken her out of her comfort zone, and she is grateful to the orchestra and to Gillian Bradley and Katherine Miller for their support in the lead-up to this performance.

## **Our next concerts...**

### **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, 7.30pm**

Our Lady and St Michael's Church  
Great Orchestral Music from Operas  
including Verdi – *Nabucco* Overture  
Mascagni – *Cavalleria rusticana* Intermezzo  
Puccini – *Suor Angelica* Intermezzo  
Bizet – *Carmen* Suite  
Borodin – Polovtsian Dances

### **Sunday 17th November, 2.30pm**

Our Lady and St Michael's Church  
Programme to be confirmed

### **Sunday 8th December**

Family Concert – to be confirmed

## **New members**

If you would be interested in joining the orchestra, please contact us at [info@abergavennysymph.org.uk](mailto: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.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of **Llanarth Village Hall Committee** for provision of our rehearsal venues;

The **Performing Arts Service** at Monmouthshire Libraries for providing music.

# Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

## **1st Violin**

Marisa Riordan  
Kathryn Clarke  
Romilly Cook  
Caspian Cook  
Roger Evans  
John Jenkins  
Elizabeth Macfie  
Diana MacPherson  
Derek Pike

## **2nd Violin**

Selina Hamilton  
Jane Anscombe  
Anita Bromley  
Adrian Cook  
Hannah McCormick  
Simon Marr-Johnson  
Freya Piper  
Stephen Shaw

## **Viola**

Simon Large  
Anna Moloney  
Gavin Stoddart  
Rachel Tucker  
Angi Turnbull

## **Cello**

Stephen David  
Clare Fisher  
Helen Fowles  
Laura Kostoris  
Rohan Lewis  
Tessa Lewis  
Hannah Poulson  
Sue Rogers

## **Bass**

Will Stephens  
Richard Mynors  
Roger Levett

## **Flute**

Bethan Barlow  
Andy Edwards  
Heather Thornton

## **Oboe**

Malcolm James  
Martin Bailey-Wood

## **Clarinet**

Robert Watson  
Ian Hall

## **Bassoon**

Janet Lloyd  
Chris Poynton  
Becky Rogers

## **Horn**

Peter Geraghty  
Hannah Stonelake  
Andi Straw  
Robert Kilgour

## **Trumpet**

Paul Kelly  
Mark Perry

## **Trombone**

Iestyn Harding  
Salvatore Frusteri-  
Chiacchiera  
Julian Kerrell

## **Tuba**

Chris Baker

## **Timpani**

Judith Pendrous

## **Percussion**

David Fraser  
Alex Brown  
Sally Halls  
Odette Hutchison  
Chris Morgan

## **Harp**

Emily Harris

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

## Local Concerts coming soon...

### Hereford Symphony Orchestra / Michael Bell

'Spring Serenade'

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 3:00pm, St Peter's Church, Hereford HR1 2DL

Strauss: Serenade for wind, Op.7, Dvořák: Serenade for strings,

Brahms: Serenade no.1

### Gwent Bach Choir

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April, 7:00pm, St Mary's Priory, Abergavenny

Handel: Coronation Anthems, Mozart: Coronation Mass

### Royal Forest of Dean Orchestra

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April, 7:30pm. St. Peter's Church, Newnham GL14 1AD

Boulanger: *D'un matin de printemps*, Elgar: Serenade for strings,

Copland: *Quiet City*, Brahms: Symphony no.4

### Crickhowell Festival 2024

Friday 3<sup>th</sup> – Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May

Including Purcell: Ode for St Cecilia's Day 1692, CPE Bach: Magnificat, JS

Bach: Cantata no.34, 'O ewiges Feuer'

### Monmouth Choral Society

'A Love of Nature'

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May, 7:30pm, St Mary's Priory, Monmouth

Haydn: The Creation (Part 1), Britten: Rejoice in the Lamb,

Eloise Gynn: Wye