



# Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

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

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

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

# Abergavenny Orchestral Society

President: Dennis Simons PhD FRAM

**Honorary Life Members:** Bethan Barlow, Jean Bradley, Ruth Brown, Sally Ellerington, Peter Geraghty, Odette Hutchison, Barbara Price, Sue Rogers

## Friends:

Mr E & Mrs J Anscombe	Mrs EW Milner
Mrs AM Barber	Christine Mullins
Alun Griffiths	Mrs A Muncaster
Mr C Hall & Ms B Hetherington	Susan Norie
Mrs B Hutchison	Dr R Osborne
Mr A & Mrs S Konieczny	Dr CH Poynton
Rev M Large	Carolyn Rees
Mr R Lewis	Dr & Mrs RF Rintoul
Dr J Lloyd	Mr GM Rogers
Mr C & Mrs D Madeley	Mr I Smith
Dr Noel Meeke, MBE	Mrs I Winstanley
Dr Angela Meeke	

Our Friends scheme enables us to benefit from your financial support and to involve you with the Society. For a subscription of £20 per annum you will not only be making a valuable contribution but you will receive newsletters giving details of forthcoming concerts **and other orchestra news.**

For more information, please **contact the Friends' Secretary**, Sue Rogers, on 01291 672170 or [info@abergavennysymph.org.uk](mailto:info@abergavennysymph.org.uk)

Abergavenny Orchestral Society is a Registered Charity no: 1076523

# Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra

Leader

**Marisa Riordan**

Conductor

**Michael Bell MBE**

Saxophone

**Manu Brazo**

*Nabucco* – Overture

Verdi

*Manon Lescaut* – Intermezzo

Puccini

Fantasia on themes from *La Traviata* (orch. Pfeffer)

Lovreglio

*Orpheus in the Underworld* – Overture (arr. Binder)

Offenbach

## **INTERVAL**

*Refreshments available in the St Michael's Centre*

*Donations to CAFOD*

*Lohengrin* – Act III Prelude

Wagner

*Carmen* – Suite

Bizet

*Les Toréadors*

*Prelude to Act 1*

*Aragonaise*

*Intermezzo*

*Seguedille*

*Danse Bohême*

*Cavalleria Rusticana* – Intermezzo

Mascagni

*Prince Igor* – Polovtsian Dances

Borodin

## A word from our Musical Director

The first opera I attended was during my first year at university... Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* in a wonderful WNO production at the New Theatre, Cardiff. As the music unfolded, I thought I'd never heard anything quite so beautiful. I've seen many operas since, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* and Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, to name but a small few, but time after time it has been the music of Richard Wagner that has given me the most memorable evenings. I relished WNO's production of the four operas of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (appropriately sitting in 'the gods'!) at the New Theatre on cramped, hard seats. How we suffered for culture then... but it was so worth it!

In 2013, at the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, I relished concert performances of lots of Wagner... *Tannhauser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal*, and most memorably of all, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* conducted by Daniel Barenboim, one of the greatest musical experiences of my life... thankfully on more comfortable seats!

We go to opera for the drama, and to hear some wonderful singing, but our ASO concert highlights some of the most popular orchestral music from opera, and here there are great riches indeed.

Music by Verdi, Wagner, Borodin, Mascagni, Offenbach and Puccini, the 100th anniversary of whose passing we are marking in this concert. No voices this evening except for the voice of a saxophone in a joyful selection of themes from Verdi's *La Traviata*.

The Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra has rarely played so many unforgettable tunes in one concert!

Best wishes

*Michael*

Michael Bell MBE

---

## **Nabucco – Overture**

**Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)**

After the failure of his second opera, *Un giorno di regno*, and the death of his young wife and children, Verdi lapsed into a state of despair in which he vowed never to compose again. The story then goes that, at the kindly insistence of the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli, he unwillingly took home a libretto, based on the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem, flung it on his table, only for it to fall open at *Va, pensiero*, the Chorus of Hebrew Slaves. And the rest is history – as Verdi wrote late in life: “With this opera it is fair to say my artistic career began.” Milan was at the time under the rule of the Austrian Empire, which had banned encores on the grounds that they could become the focus of pro-freedom demonstrations, but at the 1842 premiere at La Scala, this chorus of an enslaved people had to be repeated several illegal times.

The overture of course includes this famous theme, heard as meditative oboe and trumpet solos rather than in its fully-orchestrated glory – Verdi, the supreme dramatist, is only giving us a taster at this stage – as well as *Dalle genti sii reietto* from the end of Act 1, and *Noi già sparso abbiamo fama* and *Il maledetto non ha fratelli* from Act 2, all march-like themes suggestive of the military splendour of much of the opera, and lending themselves well to exciting Rossinian crescendos.

## **Manon Lescaut – Intermezzo**

**Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)**

*Manon Lescaut's* 1893 premiere was yet another first success for its composer, and its plot bears more than a passing resemblance to that of *Carmen* (although Manon herself is originally bound for a convent, not a place ever likely to have attracted Carmen). The Intermezzo is heard between Acts 2 and 3, when Manon, being deported at the command of her elderly lover Geronte, is pursued to Le Havre by des Grieux, the man she really loves. The music weaves together motifs from the Act 2 love duet *Oh, sarò la più bella*, while also looking forward to Manon's death (*Sola, perduta, abbandonata*) in an unbroken Wagnerian outpouring of passion, incorporating at its climax the grim Beethovenian hammering at the door by the arresting soldiers.

### **Fantasia on themes from *La Traviata* Donato Lovreglio (1841-1907)**

Lovreglio was a virtuoso flautist from Bari in southern Italy. Noteworthy mainly as a teacher (he published methods for all the woodwind instruments) and performer (his friend Alexandre Dumas *père* claimed that the sound of Donato's flute could even soothe the pain of a lanced carbuncle), he also composed numerous concert fantasies on operatic themes, mostly for his own instrument with piano, but also for clarinet – from where it is a short step to the saxophone. This particular one has become something of a favourite with wind players, although it would be stretching the description to call it a real *Fantasia*; Lovreglio's imagination appears not to have extended to doing anything creative with pre-existing material. Instead, what we have is a series of themes – *Un dì felice eterea*, *Ah fors'è lui* and (of course) *Libiamo* from Act 1, *Amami*, *Alfredo* from Act 2 – each of which is followed by a single variation of staggering virtuosity.

### ***Orpheus in the Underworld* – Overture Jacques Offenbach (1819-80)**

There is no better indication of the passing nature of celebrity than the following story: when the organisers of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia set out to hire the most famous musician in the world to conduct their concerts, they chose not Verdi, Wagner or Dvořák, but Offenbach. Since he had neglected to provide his hilarious send-up of Greek mythology (his Orphée is a country violin-teacher who is only too glad to see the back of Euridice) with an overture, a local musician, Carl Binder, thoughtfully provided one for the Viennese premiere in 1860, consisting of a mash-up of all the work's most famous tunes – exactly as every opera composer from Weber onwards would have done.

### ***Lohengrin* – Prelude to Act III Richard Wagner (1813-83)**

Wagner remained fascinated by Arthurian legend to the end of his life, when elements of the Grail story, along with ideas from Christian and Buddhist theology, came together in his final transcendent music-drama *Parsifal*. *Lohengrin* comes from much earlier in his career: this tale of the Grail Knight, sent by God to defend the kingdom of Brabant and the innocent maid Elsa, was composed in Dresden between 1845 and 1848. Performance plans had hastily to be abandoned after Wagner fled into

exile from the abortive Socialist uprising in 1849, in which he had got involved. It was eventually premiered in Weimar in 1850, conducted by Wagner's friend and future father-in-law Liszt.

This Prelude does not quote music from elsewhere in the opera, but serves as an introduction to Elsa and Lohengrin's wedding procession, which is accompanied by the famous Bridal Chorus *Treulich geführt*. There is perhaps no other composer who is as good as Wagner at representing sexual desire, and the vigour and joyfulness of this prelude leave no doubt as to the thoughts in the married couple's minds – thoughts which are due to be disappointed after Elsa inadvisedly asks Lohengrin his name, which she is forbidden to know.

On stage, the Prelude leads quietly into the Bridal Chorus; the triumphal ending to the concert version was arranged by Arturo Toscanini.

## **Carmen – Suite**

## **Georges Bizet (1838-75)**

Bizet's *Carmen*, thanks to its depictions of low life, sexual immorality, lawlessness and on-stage murder, scandalised Paris at its 1875 premiere, and it was not until international productions led to its Paris revival in 1883, eight years after Bizet's death, that it was acclaimed as one of the greatest of all operas. One of its more unlikely admirers was Brahms, who said that he would have gone to the ends of the earth to embrace Bizet. The two suites of orchestral music were arranged by Ernest Guiraud, who also composed recitatives in place of Bizet's spoken dialogue to conform to the rules of the Paris Opera. Our selection this evening makes use of movements from both suites.

The Prelude to *Carmen*, like the opera itself, explodes into life with the famous Toreadors' March, followed by a passage introducing the "Fate" motif, representing Carmen herself as well as her tragic destiny. We follow this with a lively *Aragonaise*, which serves as the Prelude to Act 4, then the peaceful flute-and-harp prelude to Act 3, evoking the mountain refuge where Carmen and José have taken refuge. The selection ends with the wild *Danse bohème* or Gypsy Dance from Act 2.

### ***Cavalleria Rusticana* – Intermezzo**                      **Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945)**

The first performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* was equally dependent on happy chance: Mascagni had written the piece in two months as an entry for a competition for young unperformed composers (at 27 he was exactly Verdi's age when *Nabucco* was composed), but became unhappy with it and hid it in a drawer, where his wife found it and helpfully sent it off. Not only did it come first out of 73 entries, but brought the house down at its premiere in Rome in 1890, when the composer was curtain-called 40 times. The *Intermezzo*, which makes use of the *Regina caeli* hymn sung earlier by villagers in the church, is scored mostly for strings and harp; it provides a moment of repose, and yet brims with the passion that drives Alfio and Turiddu to the fight-to-the-death which concludes the opera.

### ***Prince Igor* – Polovtsian Dances**                      **Alexander Borodin (1833-87)**

When Borodin died suddenly at the age of 53 – appropriately, for such a gregarious and lovable man, while dancing in full Russian dress at a party – he left behind a muddle of manuscripts and unfinished works for his friends Lyadov, Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov to sort out. Music was, in any case, merely a hobby – he considered his most important work to be his day job as a professor of chemistry, in which he developed several industrial processes that are still in use today.

The opera *Prince Igor*, on which Borodin had worked on his days off from 1869 until his death, was largely orchestrated by Rimsky and Glazunov, the latter famously reconstructing the overture from sketches and from his own memory of the composer playing it. It tells the story of the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Prince Igor Svyatoslavich and his military campaign against the Polovtsian tribes of Central Asia. While in captivity, Igor is entertained by slave-girls who sing of the glory of Konchak, the Polovtsian king. The dance falls into two parts: a slow prelude in which, in the opera, the chorus sings *Fly on the wings of the wind*, and the warlike song of the Polovtsy, *Poyte pesni slavy khanu!* (Sing songs to the glory of the Khan!). Rimsky's orchestration is as dazzling as we might expect, the oriental cast of the melodies and rhythmic frenzy no doubt congenial to a composer who had just completed *Scheherazade*.



**MANU BRAZO** was born in Seville and started to play the saxophone at the age of 9. After studying in Spain, he entered the Royal College of Music where he graduated with a Master in Performance and Artist Diploma with Distinction and won numerous awards. He made his UK concert debut in 2016, in 2017 performed Tansy Davies' Saxophone Concerto with the London Sinfonietta and made his Proms debut in 2018 with the Britten-Pears Orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop. Since then, his international career has taken him to the Philharmonie Berlin, Wigmore Hall, Royal Opera House, St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Presidential Hall in Ankara, as well as to many appearances in his home country. His first recording, "Solo Dialogue", which was released in June 2020, was showcased on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM (which described his playing as "amazing and 100% colossal"). In line with his wish to redefine the concept of the classical musician, he has also opened at a concert by Sir Cliff Richard. In 2023, Manu made history as the first Spanish artist to win the Prince of Wales Prize, securing the Audience Award. His 2024 projects encompass performances in Spain and the UK, including the premiere of a new saxophone concerto by José Elizondo.

**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.

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

**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.

## **Our next concert**

**Sunday November 2024, 7.30pm**

Our Lady and St Michael's Church

Khatchaturian – Waltz from *Masquerade*

Weber – Clarinet Concerto No 1

*soloist Robert Watson*

Smetana – Vltava

Borodin – Symphony no.2

## **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  
Roger Evans  
Jane Leney  
Tessa Lewis  
Elizabeth Macfie  
Judith Morrey

## **2nd Violin**

Helena Todd  
Anita Bromley  
Hannah McCormick  
Simon Marr-Johnson  
Bethany Piper  
Sally Roberts

## **Viola**

Simon Large  
Carys Cronin  
Anna Moloney  
Gavin Stoddart  
Angi Turnbull

## **Cello**

Stephen David  
Clare Fisher  
Helen Fowles  
Laura Kostoris  
Rohan Lewis  
Sue Rogers  
Andy Summers

## **Bass**

James Leney  
Will Stephens

## **Flute**

Bethan Barlow  
Andy Edwards

## **Oboe**

Malcolm James

## **Cor Anglais**

Martin Bailey-Wood

## **Clarinet**

Robert Watson  
Cherryll Moseley

## **Bassoon**

Chris Poynton  
Becky Rogers

## **Horn**

Peter Geraghty  
Robert Kilgour  
Hannah Stonelake  
Andi Straw

## **Trumpet**

Paul Kelly  
Paul Jones

## **Trombone**

Iestyn Harding  
Chris Gardener  
Julian Kerrell

## **Tuba**

Chris Baker

## **Timpani**

Judith Pendrous

## **Percussion**

David Fraser  
Wren Fraser  
Sally Halls  
Chris Morgan

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

## Local Concerts coming soon...

### **Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra** / Michael Bell

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June, 7:30pm, BBC Hoddinott Hall

Bernstein: *Candide* Overture, Elgar: Cello Concerto (soloist Rosie Biss),

Shostakovich: Symphony no.10

### **Hereford Concert Band**

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July, 7:30pm, Christian Life Church, Edgar Street Hereford

A Summer Concert, raising money for Natalya's Fund

### **Gwent Bach Choir**

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 7:30pm. St. Mary's Priory Centre, Abergavenny

Partsongs by Stanford, Elgar, Holst, Richard Rodney Bennett, Rutter, Whitacre, MacMillan

### **Brecknock Sinfonia** / Rob Evans

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July, 7:30pm, Brecon Cathedral

'The Armed Man' – a Mass for Peace by Karl Jenkins  
with the Brecon Singers and Festival Chorus