

Classical Music
Concert programme

barbican

**Sinfonia of London:
Serenade
Britten, Bliss, Elgar and
Vaughan Williams**

**Wed 22 Oct 7.30pm
Hall**

Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 9.30pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



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Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't ...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



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Looking for refreshments?

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Sinfonia of London: Serenade Britten, Bliss, Elgar and Vaughan Williams

Wed 22 Oct 7.30pm, Hall

Sinfonia of London

John Wilson conductor

Laurence Kilsby tenor

Christopher Parkes horn

Ralph Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a
Theme by Thomas Tallis*

Benjamin Britten Serenade for Tenor, Horns
and Strings

- 1 Prologue
- 2 Pastoral
- 3 Nocturne
- 4 Elegy
- 5 Dirge
- 6 Hymn
- 7 Sonnet
- 8 Epilogue

Arthur Bliss Music for Strings

- 1 Allegro moderato, energico
- 2 Andante, molto sostenuto
- 3 Allegro molto

Frederic Delius *Late Swallows*

Edward Elgar Introduction and Allegro

Interval 20 minutes

Produced by the Barbican

Programme produced by Harriet Smith
All information correct at time of printing



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Tonight we're delighted to welcome back Barbican regulars, the Sinfonia of London together with their charismatic founder conductor John Wilson for a programme that celebrates English string music in all its variety. Alongside works by Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Delius and Bliss we have Britten's much-loved *Serenade*, for which the orchestra is joined by tenor Laurence Kilsby and the orchestra's principal horn Christopher Parkes.

There's something about the sound of string ensembles that has tended to bring out the best in English composers. String consort music, often poised between dancing exhilaration and melancholic introspection, flourished in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, and Henry Purcell provided some striking examples after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Then came a long period in which native English music seemed to take a back seat while foreign names dominated: George Frideric Handel, and later Felix Mendelssohn.

When 20th-century composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams set about recreating a strong national voice in music, it was to this great, and now somewhat remote period that they turned. A hymn by Thomas Tallis provided the starting point for Vaughan Williams's famous *Fantasia* (1910), scored for double string orchestra, creating textures almost as rich as those of Tallis's fabulously beautiful 40-part motet *Spem in alium* ('I have hope in none other') and with, at its heart, a meditative passage for solo quartet in dialogue that evokes the spirit of consort music.

At the same time, it's hard to grasp how audacious Vaughan Williams's *Tallis*

Fantasia must have sounded when it first appeared. At a time when 'modernism' increasingly meant increasing chromaticism and the blurring of traditional tonality, the *Tallis Fantasia* is a radical rediscovery of the power of simple tonal chords – heard right away in the visionary hushed opening – but now related to each other in surprising new ways. If we don't hear the *Fantasia* as 'new' these days, that's partly because it has been hugely influential, and partly because it's so serenely beautiful.

Benjamin Britten made a point of disliking Vaughan Williams's music in public, but in private he seems to have felt differently. There are passages in the *Serenade for Tenor Horn and Strings* (1943) which strongly echo the *Tallis Fantasia*, not least the gorgeous string harmonies in the final song, 'Sonnet'. The use of the horn as a kind of alternative voice, sometimes shadowing the singer, sometimes providing a kind of commentary on his utterances, harks back to the Baroque era – though giving the horn an unaccompanied Prologue and offstage Epilogue was a stroke of unique genius.

Also like the *Tallis Fantasia*, Britten's *Serenade* seems to hover between radiance and more troubling thoughts. For Vaughan Williams, Tallis's hymn had associations with mortality as well as transcendence, and in the songs 'Elegy', 'Dirge' and the final 'Sonnet' we encounter some of the ghosts that haunted Britten. Listening to the Vaughan Williams, you might conclude that transcendence has won. With Britten, though, it's more ambiguous, to say the least.

When Arthur Bliss first started to attract attention as a composer, after the First World War, it was as a provocative young radical, often compared to the group of edgy Paris-based pranksters known as 'Les Six'. But with time he began to soften, and the pastoralism of Vaughan Williams and the patriotism of Elgar became part of his compositional palette too. In some ways, *Music for Strings* (1935) stands on the cusp, stylistically – a dark, tense, moody three-movement piece which acknowledges the increasingly anxious tone of works coming

from the Continent, while aligning itself firmly with Vaughan Williams and Elgar in its use of the string orchestra, and its increasing turn towards lyricism in the last movement.

The music of Frederick Delius now tends to be regarded as English to its core, his lush nostalgic hedonism sometimes dismissed as a symptom of hopeless insularity. But Delius was a German-speaking boy in an English German household. His first attraction was to the Continent, and he had his first successes in Germany, where he impressed Richard Strauss, Bartók, Kodály, and apparently even Schoenberg. It was the First World War that changed all that. *Late Swallows*, an arrangement by Eric Fenby of the slow movement of Delius's String Quartet, first appeared in 1916, in which context it might sound like the purest escapism, were it not for that note of longing and sadness that so often emerges in this composer's music. Is this a hymn to nature, or an elegy?

It was the revival of interest in Baroque music, and particularly in the *concerto grosso* (in which a team of soloists is pitted against a larger ensemble), which set Edward Elgar thinking in terms of a work for string quartet and string orchestra. The title, *Introduction and Allegro* (1905), might sound abstractly formal but, as so often with Elgar, private inspiration played a defining role. Not long after the grandly sonorous opening, there comes a change of perspective, as the solo viola sings a wistful folk-like melody, apparently a half-remembered memory of a Welsh song. Elgar had recently moved to his house 'Plas Gwyn' (Welsh for 'White House') in Hereford, which then commanded a splendid view across the River Wye into the Welsh borderlands.

After this comes the bracing *Allegro*, full of muscular regular repeated rhythms that embody Elgar's delight in cycling around the country around his home. At its heart is a bracing contrapuntal section Elgar called 'a devil of a fugue', but at the end it is the 'Welsh' tune that sings out in triumph, a glorious homecoming after a bracing excursion.

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Benjamin Britten
Serenade for Tenor, Horns and Strings
1 Prologue (Horn Solo)

2 Pastoral

The day's grown old; the fainting sun
Has but a little way to run,
And yet his steeds, with all his skill,
Scarce lug the chariot down the hill.

The shadows now so long do grow,
That brambles like tall cedars show;
Mole hills seem mountains, and the ant
Appears a monstrous elephant.

A very little, little flock
Shades thrice the ground that it would
stock;
Whilst the small stripling following them
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

And now on benches all are sat,
In the cool air to sit and chat,
Till Phoebus, dipping in the West,
Shall lead the world the way to rest.

Pastoral by Charles Cotton (1630–87)

3 Nocturne

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes
flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying,
dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying,
dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes
flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying,
dying.

from *The Princess* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson,
1809–92

4 Elegy

O Rose, thou art sick;
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark, secret love
Does thy life destroy.

The Sick Rose by William Blake (1757–1827)

5 Dirge

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
Every nighte and alle,
Fire and fleete and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

When thou from hence away art past,
Every nighte and alle,
To Whinnymuir thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gav'st hos'n and shoon,
Every nighte and alle,
Sit thee down and put them on;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If hos'n and shoon thou ne'er gav'st nane,
Every nighte and alle,
The winnies sall prick thee to the bare
bane;
And Christe receive thy saule.

From Whinnymuir when thou may'st pass,
Every nighte and alle,
To Brig o' Dread thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

From Brig o' Dread when thou may'st pass,
Every nighte and alle,
To Purgatory fire thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gav'st meat or drink,
Every nighte and alle,
The fire sall never make thee shrink;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If meat or drink thou ne'er gav'st nane,
Every nighte and alle,
The fire will burn thee to the bare bane;
And Christe receive thy saule.

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
Every nighte and alle,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

(Lyke Wake Dirge, Anonymous, 15th century)

6 Hymn

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
Now the sun is laid to sleep,
Seated in thy silver chair,
State in wonted manner keep:
Hesperus entreats thy light,
Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade
Dare itself to interpose;
Cynthia's shining orb was made
Heav'n to clear when day did close;
Bless us then with wishèd sight,
Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
And thy crystal shining quiver;
Give unto the flying hart
Space to breathe, how short so-ever:
Thou that mak'st a day of night,
Goddess excellently bright.

from *Cynthia's Revels* by Ben Jonson
(1572–1637)

6 Sonnet

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting with careful fingers and benign
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from
the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O soothing Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the "Amen," ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me, or the passèd day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,—
Save me from curious Conscience, that still
lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a
mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oilèd wards,
And seal the hushèd Casket of my Soul.

To Sleep by John Keats (1795–1821)

7 Epilogue (Horn Solo)



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John Wilson

John Wilson is in demand at the highest level across the globe, having conducted many of the world's finest orchestras over the past 30 years. In 2018 he relaunched Sinfonia of London: described as 'the most exciting thing currently happening on the British orchestral scene' (The Arts Desk), Wilson and the Sinfonia's much-anticipated BBC Proms debut in 2021 was praised as 'truly outstanding' (*The Guardian*) with its 'revelatory music-making' (*The Times*). They are now highly sought-after across the UK, regularly returning to the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh Festival and here at the Barbican, among other venues.

John Wilson's large and varied discography with Sinfonia of London has received near universal critical acclaim, and in the autumn of 2025 they released their 24th album since 2019. Their recordings have earned several awards, including numerous *BBC Music Magazine Awards* for recordings of Korngold's *Symphony in F sharp* (2020), Respighi's *Roman Trilogy* (2021), Dutilleux's *Le Loup* (2022), *Oklahoma!* (2024) and a disc of works by Vaughan Williams, Howells, Delius and Elgar which won both the Orchestral Award and Recording of the Year. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as 'Massive, audacious and vividly played' and *The Times* declared it one of the three 'truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy' of all time, after those by Toscanini (1949) and Muti (1984).

John Wilson was born in Gateshead, and studied composition and conducting at the Royal College of Music where, in 2011, he was made a Fellow. In March 2019, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious ISM Distinguished Musician Award for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.



© Ben Reason

Laurence Kilsby

British tenor Laurence Kilsby is rapidly gaining international recognition for his vivid stage presence, expressive musicianship and wide-ranging repertoire.

This summer he made his Glyndebourne Festival debut as the Novice in *Billy Budd*, sang Lurcanio (*Ariodante*) at Opéra de Versailles and returned to the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo. This season he performs

the *St Matthew Passion* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Klaus Mäkelä and makes his US concert debut with the Orchestra of St Luke's in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony conducted by Raphaël Pichon.

He also continues his regular collaboration with Pichon and Ensemble Pygmalion, joining them for a tour of the *St Matthew Passion* and performances at the Adelaide Festival. He additionally tours Handel's *Theodora* with Jupiter Ensemble and appears in recital with pianist Ella O'Neill at both Madrid's Fundación Juan March and the Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris. His debut album with O'Neill, *Awakenings*, was released last season.

Recent highlights include appearances at the Opéra national de Paris, Opéra national du Rhin, Opéra Comique and the Aix-en-Provence and Innsbruck Early Music festivals, as well as performances with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

Laurence Kilsby is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and was an ABRSM Vocal Scholar at the Royal College of Music. He was a member of the Opéra national de Paris studio in 2022–23. He won First Prize at both the Wigmore Hall/Bollinger International Song Competition (2022) and the Cesti Competition, and was earlier awarded the Kathleen Ferrier Society Bursary for Young Singers.



He has appeared as a soloist with the London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Aurora Orchestra, among others, under conductors such as Daniel Harding, John Wilson, Klaus Mäkelä and Gianandrea Noseda.

In 2022 he released a recording of Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* with Andrew Staples, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Daniel Harding, following it in 2023 with *Diagonal Music*, a recording of trios for horn, violin and piano by Brahms and Britta Byström.

Christopher Parkes studied at Chetham's School of Music and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

Christopher Parkes

Christopher Parkes is currently solo horn of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and principal horn of Sinfonia of London. He was previously solo horn of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and third horn of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He is also a member of the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra. He performs regularly as principal horn with orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker, London Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Sinfonia of London

Sinfonia of London is an award-winning orchestra, led by its Artistic Director, conductor John Wilson.

Often described as a 'super-orchestra' (The Arts Desk), it brings together outstanding musicians from the UK and abroad, creating exceptional musical experiences for audiences either through live events or via an ever-growing catalogue of recordings.

Launched in 2018, Sinfonia of London revived the legendary studio orchestra of the same name, founded in 1955. It made its live debut at the 2021 BBC Proms and has appeared there on an annual basis since. It has subsequently appeared throughout the UK, including at here at the Barbican Centre and at the Aldeburgh Festival. In April 2025 it was named as an Artistic Partner of the Glasshouse, Gateshead. It makes its international debut this autumn at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.

The orchestra has quickly built a celebrated range of over 25 recordings on the Chandos

label, covering a wide range of music from composers such as Bliss, Dutilleux, Fuchs, Korngold, Respighi, Ravel, Strauss, Rachmaninov, Britten, Walton, Bliss, and Rodgers & Hammerstein, with the orchestra's most recent release being Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*.

BBC Music Magazine declared: 'Wilson and his hand-picked band of musicians continue to strike gold with almost anything they turn their hands to' while *The Mail on Sunday* pronounced the album of English Music for Strings 'dazzling ... some of the finest string playing ever put on disc by a British orchestra'.

Alongside outstanding reviews, the orchestra has received five *BBC Music Magazine* Awards in five years, and, in 2022, a *Gramophone* Award.

The orchestra is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, BBC Four, iPlayer and Marquee TV.

Find out more about the orchestra and forthcoming concerts and recordings at sinfoniaoflondon.com



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Sinfonia of London

violin I

Charlie Lovell-Jones *
John Mills
Ciaran McCabe
Beatrice Philips
Andrew Harvey
Katerina Nazarova
Julia Ungureanu
Dan-Iulian Drutac
Samuel Staples
Jack Greed

violin II

Michael Trainor *
Jens Lynen
Victoria Gill
Zahra Benyounes
Greta Mutlu
Michael Jones
Steven Wilkie
Charis Jenson

viola

Edgar Francis *
Vicci Wardman
James Heron
Lydia Northcott-
Lowndes
Matthew Quenby
Luca Wadham

cello

Jonathan Aasgaard *
Tim Lowe
Jessie Ann Richardson
Maxim Calver
Hugh Mackay
William Clark-Maxwell

double bass

Philip Nelson
Will Duerden
Evangeline Tang

** solo quartet in Vaughan
Williams and Elgar*

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**Bavarian Radio Symphony
Orchestra/Sir Simon Rattle**
Wed 12 Nov, Hall



**Consone Quartet X
Chiaroscuro Quartet**
Thu 4 Dec, Milton Court



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