

Plymouth Symphony Orchestra



Soloist
Benjamin Baker

Wednesday 14th March 2018
Plymouth Guildhall, 7.30pm

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PROGRAMME

Conductor
Anne Kimber

Leader
Catherine Smith

Ride of the Valkyries - Wagner

Sadko - Rimsky-Korsakov

Suite from Things to Come - Bliss

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso - Saint-Saëns

INTERVAL

Fratres - Arvo Pärt

Suite from Swan Lake (excerpts) - Tchaikovsky



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Conductor
Anne Kimber



Anne has been connected with the PSO for many years, first as a player and subsequently as conductor (only the sixth in the 139 years of the orchestra's existence).

As a flautist her musical activities have ranged widely in the South West, performing with groups such as the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, the Birmingham Royal Ballet, Opera South West, New Devon Opera, the South West Sinfonietta and many others.

She also manages the Dartington Festival Orchestra as part of the Dartington International Summer School and has been a mentor for the renowned South West Music School.

As conductor of the PSO she has helped to draw performances of real power and vibrancy from the players, enabling it to become the most accomplished group of its kind in the South West.





Soloist Benjamin Baker



Photograph: Kaupo Kikkas

Baker's was a finely observed interpretation, with a perfectly proportioned cadenza and a soulful Canzonetta showcasing the burnished tone of his 1709 Tononi instrument.

NZ Herald / Auckland
Philharmonia Orchestra
(Tchaikovsky Concerto) / October
2016

Baker brings to every track an attractive, sonorous quality of tone and expression, demonstrating an impressive talent.

Classic FM review / The Last Rose
of Summer (Champs Hill Records)
/ April 2015

Over the last year Benjamin has won 1st Prize at the 2016 Young Concert Artists auditions in New York and 3rd Prize at the Michael Hill Competition in New Zealand, establishing a strong international presence.

Engagements this season include debut recitals at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Merkin Concert Hall in New York, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany and 3 Palaces Festival in Malta. He returns to Wigmore Hall and appears as soloist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, National Children's Orchestra, Sinfonia Cymru and the Antioquia Youth Symphony Orchestra. Further afield he gives recitals in Colombia, Canada, China, Argentina and Chile.

Highlights during 2016/17 included appearances as soloist with the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, Auckland Philharmonia, English Chamber, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Sinfonia Cymru, Orchestra Sinfonica Abruzzese L'Aquila in Italy and Maui Pops Orchestras. He premiered a new Concerto Stranded by Matthew Kaner for Europe Day at St. John's Smith Square and returned as Fellow to the Steans Music Institute in Ravinia.

Benjamin has given recitals at festivals across Europe including the Pärnu, Steirisches Kammermusik, Gstaad, Klosters, Salisbury, Bath, Cheltenham, Buxton, Northern Chords and East Neuk Festivals. He has appeared as soloist with the Royal New Zealand Ballet Company and toured throughout New Zealand. In 2015 he released his first CD for Champs Hill Records which immediately went to No.12 in the Classical Charts.

Born in 1990 in New Zealand, Benjamin studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music where he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Rose Bowl. He was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust in 2013 and in the same year won 1st Prize at the Windsor International Competition.

Hugely popular in New Zealand Benjamin returns whenever he is able, to give concerts and appear on radio and television. He moved to the UK in 1998 with his family to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School, on the recommendation of Nigel Kennedy. He is very grateful to be awarded Honorary Membership of the Rotary Club of Port Nicholson for his commitment to children's charities.

Benjamin plays on a Tononi violin (1709) on generous loan from a private individual. He is grateful for support from the Wallace Foundation and The Carne Trust.



ycat

Young Classical
Artists Trust

Leader
Catherine Smith



Cath was born and brought up in Havant, near Portsmouth. Her father Tony is a keen amateur cellist, so she grew up surrounded by music. Cath took up the violin at the age of 9, starting initially with weekly lessons at school in a group of four. She 'got the bug', largely due to the enthusiasm of her teacher Graham Frewer who introduced her to the joys of ensemble playing.

Cath was fortunate to benefit from many other musical opportunities including membership of the Hampshire County Youth Orchestra, and chamber music coaching whilst she was still at school, which have provided a great foundation for her ongoing musical exploits. At 18, Cath left home for Birmingham to study Medicine, and managed to keep up her playing by joining the Birmingham Philharmonic orchestra. Qualifying as a doctor in 1995, after junior doctor jobs in Birmingham and Nottingham, Cath moved to Plymouth in 1997 and soon managed to track down the PSO. After playing for a couple of seasons, unfortunately on calls and medical exams meant that she was unable to keep up her PSO commitment. For the next decade her only sorties into classical music were to lead the annual Peninsula Doctors Orchestra concerts.

Having settled into her post as a consultant radiologist, and started a family, Cath was able to rejoin the PSO in 2013. 'I missed playing with the PSO – our programmes are varied, interesting and there is usually something to challenge and stretch us. The players are friendly and support each other. It's also a great way to unwind from my day job.'





Ride of the Valkyries Wagner (1813-1883)



The Ride of the Valkyries (1856) is the popular term for the beginning of Act III of 'Die Walküre', the second of Wagner's four-opera 'Ring' cycle, the only ensemble piece in the first three operas, and now one of the composer's best-known pieces. The complete opera was first performed in 1870 and, by January of the next year, Wagner was receiving requests for the Ride to be performed separately, but wrote that such a performance should be considered 'an utter indiscretion', and forbade 'any such thing'. However, the piece was still printed and sold in Leipzig, Wagner subsequently writing a complaint to the publisher Schott.

It has frequently since found a place in film-making and television productions, such as D W Griffith's 'The Birth of a Nation' (1915) and, more recently, in Chuck Jones's animated short cartoon in the 'Merrie Melodies' series, 'What's Opera, Doc?' (1957). In Francis Ford Coppola's war-film, 'Apocalypse Now' (1979), set during the Vietnam War and starring Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen, it is used to accompany the 1/9 Air Cavalry Regiment's assault on a Vietnamese village, blasted out via the helicopters' external-mounted loudspeakers, both to scare locals, and to motivate men on their own side.

Sadko – Musical Picture Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)



Rimsky-Korsakov's sixth opera, 'Sadko', was completed in 1896 and first staged in Moscow two years later. The libretto by the composer was derived from traditional heroic ballads and is set first in Novgorod. Sadko, a psaltery player and singer, offends the gathering of Novgorod merchants. Exiled through jealousy of his ambitions, he charms the Sea King's daughter, Volkhova, with his music. Sadko's entertainment led Princess Volkhova to give him a reward. She told Sadko that he would catch three golden fish, the source of his future success, after

various adventures. These last include a visit to the realm of the Sea King and marriage to Princess Volkhova, before she is finally transformed into a river and Sadko, now a rich man, can return to his wife.

Rimsky-Korsakov's first treatment of the legend was in a symphonic poem, allegedly the first of such in Russia, written in 1867 and bearing the title Episode from the Legend of Sadko. The composer revised the work two years later, publishing it as Sadko - Musical Picture and made a final revision for further publication in 1892, before the composition of his opera on the same subject, completed in 1896. The narrative programme of the tone-poem is a simple one. It opens with a depiction of the sea. In a second section Sadko is cast adrift and descends to the realm of the Sea King. This is followed by the celebration of the marriage of Sadko and Volkhova, the revelry provoking a storm. The work ends with the sea calm, once more.

Suite from Things to Come Bliss (1891-1975)



Bliss studied with Stanford, Vaughan Williams and Holst, and served in the army during World War I. During the immediately-ensuing years his output suggested that a daringly experimental talent had been born in Britain. His Colour Symphony (1922), based on the heraldic symbolism of primary colours, was also striking, but Bliss's later works revealed a change of direction. The independence and vigour of expression were still there, but were now related rather to the English romantic tradition. His knighthood in 1950 and his appointment as Master of the Queen's Music in 1953 seemed to consolidate his conservatism.

The music from which this suite of six movements is formed was written in 1935 for H G Wells's film, 'Things to Come'. In the film the author envisaged our present civilisation destroyed by a world war, and showed a saner and finer world built on the ashes of the old. Bliss skilfully composes music which both enhances the visual effect of the film, whilst successfully evoking these same pictures when heard alone in the concert-hall, for example at

***First Violins***

Catherine Smith
Dave Adams
Petra Stephenson
Sandra Sutton
Eva Axelby
Elena Sidman
Nathan Broomhead
Jonathan Stromberg
Margaret Sampson
Sharon Evans
Andy Clarkson

Second Violins

Jessie Welbourne
Alan Thomas
Maggie Willmott
Pam Pinder
Lorna Groves
Lyndsey Pengelly
Gill Healey
Stephen Macro
Vanessa Tyler
Doris Hildick
Chantal Whitfield
Jasmine Whiteleaf

Violas

Dawn Ashby
Roger Waterfield
Rosalind Turner
Colin McKay
Rob Kellagher

Cellos

Emma Batley
Alicia Stolliday
Celina Cox
Debbie McMurrin
Robert Taylor
Denise Hasshill
Kate Whyman
Richard Toll
Ian Tunbridge

Double Basses

Judy Whitlock
Andy Tunbridge

Flutes

Kristy Marcer-Griffiths
Lucy Annetts

Piccolo

Cathy Quinlan

Oboes

Carolyn Haynes
Tracy Senior

Clarinets

Patrick Saunders
Hannah Epps

Bassoons

Ben Morrow
Helen Simmonds

French Horns

Sue Durant
Patrick McClaughry
Simon Keates
Debby Cotton
Catherine Garland
Rachel Strange
Emma Bell
Adam Haynes

Trumpets

Ben Dawson
Bruce Fox
Ivan Sidgreaves

Trombones

Mark Trewin
Andrew Oldfield
Frank Robinson

Tuba

Matthew Watkinson

Timpani

Michelle Hiley

Percussion

Noelle Boucherat
Mark Hambly
Roger Bews

Keyboard

Paul Foster

Players interested in joining the PSO should contact the
Musical Director, Anne Kimber on 01803 732550



the opening of Pestilence, or in the incessant drive of Machines. The film begins with a children's party at Christmas time; among the toys are tin soldiers, trumpets and drums (Ballet for Children). The enemy attack from the air without warning (Attack). After years of fighting, disease ravages mankind (Pestilence). A new hope is born (Reconstruction). New and powerful machines build the new world (Machines). The final movement is simply entitled March.

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)



Like many composers who write concertos for instruments they do not play, Saint-Saëns welcomed the advice of the great Spanish violinist, Pablo de Sarasate, when he composed music for solo violin. They met when Sarasate was just fifteen, and Saint-Saëns twenty-four, and at the beginning of a long and productive career. His exceptional gifts as an organist and composer were already winning him distinguished and influential friends, including Gounod, Rossini, and Berlioz. Sarasate, equally talented and audacious, had approached Saint-Saëns hoping that he would compose something for him to play. 'Fresh and young as spring itself,' was how Saint-Saëns remembered the violinist – 'the faint shadow of a moustache scarcely visible on his upper lip – and already a famous virtuoso'. Saint-Saëns was immediately flattered and charmed by Sarasate's request, and agreed at once, the first work he composed, and completed the same year, being his A major violin concerto.

Four years later, he wrote his Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, a brief work with a reflective opening, almost like an operatic recitative, and a dazzling aria full of fireworks, tailor-made to show off Sarasate's famed technique. Straightaway it became standard virtuoso fare, and, after Georges Bizet arranged it for violin and piano, mandatory for any talented and daring violinist.

Fratres Pärt (born 1935)



Arvo Pärt stopped writing music in 1968. During the next eight years, after turning away from composing the dramatic twelve-tone works for which he was well-known in his native Estonia, he began to study medieval music. This self-imposed exile brought about one of the most remarkable stylistic changes a composer can undergo. When Pärt finally broke his silence in 1976, it was with a tiny, astonishingly spare piano piece, Für Alina, a quiet and unassuming score of extremely high and low notes, sounding like distant bells. The music that has followed – and made him a cult figure – is austere and meditative, suffused with a stillness and a gentle strength that set it apart not only from his earlier work ('It's as if it's by another person,' he says), but from almost any music ever written. Because he uses so few notes and so much repetition, in a largely tonal context, he often has been labelled a minimalist. But Pärt's quiet, nuanced, and deeply emotional voice has little in common with the bracing urban sound-world of such composers as Philip Glass or Steve Reich. ('Am I really a minimalist?' Pärt long ago asked, with customary detachment. 'It's not something that concerns me.')

Instead, Pärt has picked his own word, tintinnabuli, from the Latin for 'bells', to label his work.

In 1977, Pärt composed two of his signature works, Tabula Rasa, and the first in an extended family of pieces called Fratres ('Brothers'). This original version was scored for quintets of winds and strings, for the Estonian early-music ensemble Hortus Musicus. On a commission from the Salzburg Festival, he wrote variations on this work for violin and piano in 1980, and has meanwhile continued to prepare editions of the work for different combinations. The present version – for solo violin, strings, and percussion – dates from 1992.

All the members of the Fratres family share the same essential elements: a low-lying open fifth is sustained like a drone throughout the piece, while higher instruments play variations on an austere theme; the variations, which grow to a climax and then gradually recede, are separated by tiny episodes of single,



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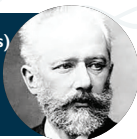
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percussive notes or chords, like the ticking of a clock or a heartbeat. In the version to be heard here, a solo violin begins the piece with a prelude of arpeggios and then offers soaring lines of commentary above the hymn-like theme. Sound eventually gives way to silence, but the music's heartbeat continues.

Suite from Swan Lake (excerpts)
Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)



Scene – Valse – Dance of the Swans – Hungarian Dance (Czardas) – Spanish Dance – Neapolitan Dance – Mazurka

The story of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* is woven around two girls, Odette and Odile, who resemble each other so closely one can easily be mistaken for the other. Originally their roles were entrusted to two separate dancers, but as there is only one brief fleeting moment when they are seen simultaneously, it has long been customary for a single prima ballerina to perform both parts, differentiating them by characterisation and general style. The action takes place in Germany in the distant past.

Act I begins with a glittering musical introduction, and the first scene is set in a splendid park, with a fairy-tale castle in the background. Prince Siegfried and his friends are seated, drinking, and peasants enter to congratulate him on his coming of age; meanwhile, his tutor Wolfgang encourages them to dance for the young Prince's entertainment. A messenger announces the arrival of the young Prince's Mother. She follows to pronounce that her son should now marry, choosing a bride from the young women to be presented to him at a ball the following evening. She leaves and the rustic dancing resumes until darkness suddenly falls and a flock of swan appears. The Prince has an idea of shooting one of the noble birds and, armed with a crossbow, sets off with his friends and makes for where the swans are heading.

Act II opens by the banks of a lake by moonlight, a flight of swans glide past, led by their own Queen. The Prince's friends are eager for the chase, but he begs them to leave him, and whilst he is alone the Swan Queen comes to him in the human form of Odette and tells her story. She is under the spell of an evil magician, Von Rothbart, and reveals that by day she and her friends are turned into swans.

Also persecuted by her stepmother, that subjection will only end when she marries; until then she has only her crown to protect her. The whole swan group arrives and they reproach the Prince for attempting to deprive them of their beloved leader. Odette intercedes and the Prince discards his crossbow.

He and Odette dance, professing their love. The entire flock joins in; and the act ends as an owl (the wicked stepmother) flaps heavily above.

Act III continues the following evening, and in a luxurious hall in the Prince's castle, where preparations are underway for the feast. Wolfgang orders the servants around; guests start to materialise; and finally, the Princess-Mother and her entourage. A sequence of turns commences until the Princess asks her son which of the women he favours. "None", he replies, to her annoyance. At a sudden fanfare Baron Rothbart enters with his daughter Odile, whose resemblance to Odette strikes the Prince. Odile herself dances enticingly, followed by an elaborate sequence of national dances by the company. The Princess-Mother is pleased to see that Odile has caught her son's favour. The young couple themselves conjoin together and the Princess-Mother and Rothbart advance to centre-stage to announce a betrothal. With that, the scene ominously darkens, an agitated version of the principal swan theme is heard; a window flies open noisily and through it can be seen a white swan replete with crown. Horrified, the Prince pushes Odile away and rushes out amid general confusion.

Act IV starts as the girls, including Odette, gather around the lake. Odette is heartbroken. Prince Siegfried finds them consoling each other. He explains to Odette the trickery of Von Rothbart and she grants him her forgiveness. It isn't long before Von Rothbart appears and tells the prince that he must honour his word and marry his daughter or both he and Odette will die. Prince Siegfried refuses. A fight follows; Odette and Siegfried die in each other's arms. Von Rothbart's evil spell is broken by the power of Odette and Siegfried's love for each other and Von Rothbart is destroyed by the swans, who are thus released from their enslavement. Tchaikovsky arranged various excerpts from the score to form his *Swan Lake Suite*, from which seven varied numbers will be heard on this occasion.

Programme Notes by Philip R Buttall
www.philiprbuttall.co.uk



Plymouth's own Symphony Orchestra has been central to the musical life of the city for 139 years, and continues to perform challenging music, ranging from the traditional to the contemporary.

In 1875 a local teacher of music, Dr Samuel Weekes, brought together a group of musician friends and founded what was then known as an Orchestral Society: their first concert was presented in the graceful Tea Rooms of Plymouth's old Royal Hotel. The renamed Plymouth Symphony Orchestra can claim to be one of the longest-established orchestras in the country, with an amazing record of continuity: the founding conductor was succeeded by his son; his grandson, John Weekes, was a vice-president until recently! The present conductor, Anne Kimber, is only the sixth in 139 years.

The members of the orchestra travel from as far afield as Tiverton and Wadebridge to attend weekly rehearsals, although none receive payment for playing in the orchestra.

In its choice of programmes the orchestra aims to achieve a balance between established

masterpieces and an adventurous selection of less familiar music. Among the contemporary pieces performed in recent years have been several specially commissioned from local composers, including Judy Whitlock, who leads the double bass section.

Many distinguished soloists have played concertos with the orchestra, including Nigel Kennedy, Peter Donohoe, the late Jack Brymer, Julian Lloyd Webber, Priya Mitchell, Anna Markland, Ralph Kirshbaum, Noriko Ogawa, Craig Ogden, Guy Johnston, Tasmin Little, Thomas Gould, Joanna MacGregor and BBC Young Musician of the Year, Jennifer Pike.

In addition to making appearances in Plymouth, an important feature of the orchestra's work is to present concerts in other centres which professional symphony orchestras rarely, if ever, visit, such as Liskeard, Totnes, Dartington, Christow and Buckland Abbey. But the purpose of Samuel Weekes in founding the orchestra has remained central to all its activities: to bring friends together once a week to make music.

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