

Saturday 21 March 2026, 7.30pm

All Saints Church, Market Place
Kingston upon Thames KT1 1JP



ROMANTIC VISIONS

Schumann *Nachtlied*

Beethoven *Coriolan Overture*

Brahms *Schicksalslied*

Mendelssohn *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht*

Soloists:

Alexandria Moon Mezzo-soprano

Emyr Lloyd Jones Tenor

Ambrose Connolly Baritone

Thames Camerata

Andrew Griffiths Conductor

Registered Charity 261522



Since its formation in 1949, Kingston Choral Society has earned a reputation for concerts of a high standard and for performing a wide range of music. The Society enjoys singing the familiar favourites of the choral repertoire, but is not afraid of tackling ambitious projects and has, for example, performed a spectacular *Venetian Vespers*, featuring music by Monteverdi and his contemporaries.

Kingston Choral Society has over 100 members drawn from southwest London and north Surrey. New members are welcome. The choir performs four concerts a year, usually in All Saints Church, Kingston, and St Andrew's Church, Surbiton. Two of the concerts are with a professional orchestra. Rehearsals are held on Thursday evenings (8-10 pm) at The Hollyfield School, Surbiton, in term-time. Kingston Choral Society also holds regular social and fundraising events and occasional musical workshops.

If you are interested in joining, please talk to any member of the choir during the interval or at the end of the concert. You can also contact the Membership Secretary on 020 8942 2275 or join@kingstonchoralsociety.org.uk for more information and arrange to come to a rehearsal.

~ ~ NEXT KCS CONCERT ~ ~

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Cecilia McDowall - *The Ice is Listening*;

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~ ~ PROGRAMME ~ ~

Schumann: *Nachtlied*

Beethoven: *Coriolan Overture*

Brahms: *Schicksalslied*

~ ~ INTERVAL ~ ~

Mendelssohn: *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht*



SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Robert Schumann was the last of five children born to August, a successful bookseller, author and translator, and Johanna Christiane, the daughter of an army surgeon. They lived in Saxony, moving from Zeitz to Zwickau in 1808, not long before Robert's birth. His father had significant mental health issues, as did his sister, Emilie, who committed suicide. Robert's mother was frequently physically unwell during his childhood, which necessitated him being separated from her and looked after by his godmother.

From the age of six, Robert attended a private preparatory school and, at seven, he began to study music and piano with a local organist. He also had lessons on the flute and cello and acquired a love of literature and poetry, available in ample supply from his father's personal library and shop. Later, he regarded the 'arts' as a singular entity expressed via multiple means - words, music, drama.

A matter of months after his sister's premature death, when Schumann was 15, his father died. Although intermittently suffering from melancholia, his business enterprises had been successful, so the family was left in a comfortable financial situation. At the time, Schumann was trying to decide between a career in literature or one in music. He was a promising pianist with an obvious talent for improvisation, but his mother foresaw no future for her son in either artistic field. She pointed him firmly towards law and Leipzig University.

All the arts flourished in Leipzig and the teenager Schumann was quickly drawn into its society, law studies taking a backseat. It was not until he was 18, however, that he renewed serious musical tuition. Back in Leipzig, after a year at Heidelberg University, he was introduced to Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873) who taught piano and whose daughter, Clara, then aged nine, was already a formidable prodigy on the instrument. (She would be performing internationally at 11).

Wieck, excited by Schumann's speedy progress and the prospect of producing another great pianist, wrote to Johanna. He predicted her son would be able to play, '*with more warmth and genius than Moscheles, and on a grander scale than Hummel.*' In short, her son was all but guaranteed to be a virtuoso pianist. Schumann moved into Wieck's family home where he practised assiduously and received additional tuition in composition from the opera conductor and composer, Heinrich Dorn (1804-1892).

In pursuit of his technical improvement at the piano, via stretching and strengthening his fingers, Schumann devised a mechanical contraption. The nerve damage that resulted from its application, however, produced a partial paralysis that put paid to a musical career as a performer. Surprisingly, perhaps because his fertile mind was full of ideas for his own music, the trauma seemed to cause him relatively little distress. In 1831, aged 21, one of his first compositions was published - a set of variations built around the letters of a girl's name, the *Abegg Variations*. A published composer, his future course was set!

For Schumann, the subject matter determined the form that his music took. It was not to be constrained by traditional musical structures - the moulds created by past composers. His Opus 2, *Papillons* (Butterflies), was a suite of 12 piano pieces, mainly waltzes, inspired by a novel of Jean Paul (1763-1825). It depicted a ballroom scene from the book and appeared in print in the following year.

At the same point in his career, 1832, Schumann was starting to write about music, providing reviews of concerts for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* and the *Komet* newspapers - combining his twin passions. As a critic, he stressed the positives, especially those inherent in new works. He welcomed novelty and invention, unlike the many conservative reviewers who condemned music that strayed from the straight and narrow paths of classicism.

In 1833, Schumann started his own magazine, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, its first issue appearing the following year, which also marked his declaration of love for Clara Wieck. It was not until 1837, however, that he and Clara became engaged, she being then 18. This sparked a long battle between Schumann and his erstwhile teacher. Clara's father objected to their match in the strongest terms, going to great lengths to smear Schumann's character. He invented all manner of slanders - that he was feckless, a dipsomaniac and much else that was undesirable.

Despite it all, in 1840, as soon as Clara had come of age, her father's consent being no longer needed, the couple married. They remained devoted to one another and to their seven children. They made music together and sometimes toured professionally. Perhaps unwisely, but with Clara's support and encouragement, Schumann made inroads into orchestral music, including the symphonic form. Orchestration not being one of his many strengths, he did gain some positive recognition for his four symphonies, notably, Symphony No. 3 (*Rhenish*).

Schumann's heart and talent lay elsewhere, however, in his powerfully emotive music for piano, for example, his *Fantasie in C major* and the Piano Concerto in A minor, and in beautiful songs, such as, *Widmung*. His song cycles are musical treats. *Liederkreis* (Song Circle) and *Dichterliebe* (A Poet's Love), encompassing Schumann's love of poetry, continue to enthrall modern musicians and audiences.

Sadly, serious and enduring mental illness, which had dogged Schumann's father and sister, also afflicted him. In March 1854, after a serious suicide attempt, he was hospitalised at his own request. This was in a private sanatorium just outside Bonn. During that difficult period of just over two years, Clara was not allowed to visit her husband. The couple therefore depended on their close mutual friend, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), for news of one another. Only a matter of days before Schumann died, on 29 July 1856 was Clara allowed to see him. He is buried in the Alte Friedhof (Old Cemetery) in Bonn. Clara, who outlived him by 40 years, finally rested there alongside him.

NACHTLIED

Schumann had been visited by the poet, Friedrich Hebbel (1813-1863), in 1847, and was moved by one of his poems, *Nachtlied*. He set it to music, completing this work for eight-part mixed choir and orchestra, in the space of one week. It reflects the themes of night, cosmic stillness and the gentle approach of death. He dedicated the piece to its author.

The poem's three stanzas dictate its form. In the first section, the orchestra's slow introduction prepares the way for the lower voices to enter. This sets off echoing phrases from the other voices, an awakening to the vastness of the universe. What follows is a sense of mounting excitement mixed with wonder and mystery but also a hint of incipient danger. A serene choral-like section concludes the work. With sleep comes the promise of a final and welcome release from life's concerns.

In this short piece, Schumann demonstrates his phenomenal talent for translating text into the medium of music and conveying its attendant emotional atmosphere - his personal reaction and response to the poet's words.

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn to Johann and Maria Magdalena. His father sang tenor in the chapel choir of the Archbishop-Elector, where his paternal grandfather was Kapellmeister (musical director). Beethoven's mother, Maria Magdalena, who had been widowed two years before marrying his father, bore seven children in all, only three of whom survived to adulthood, Beethoven being the eldest.

Beethoven's father recognised his son's musical gifts and was determined he should become a child prodigy. He inflicted on him a brutal regime of training as pianist and violinist, as well as requiring him to compose. Beethoven's first compositions were published when he was 13, although his father claimed them to have been written when he was 10, to strengthen the perception of the boy's genius. If not in the same league as the prodigious Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Beethoven was, at 11, deputising for the court organist, CG Neefe (1748-1798). The latter encouraged and supported his musical development, Beethoven becoming officially the deputy court organist while still only 14.

When he was 16, Beethoven's mother, Maria Magdalena, died from tuberculosis. This coincided with his father's loss of employment, probably due to his alcohol dependence being worsened by grief. Consequently, Beethoven was under pressure to assume financial responsibility for the family, which included two younger brothers, Kaspar and Nikolaus. Beethoven's ambition to study with Mozart in Vienna was thus thwarted.

Beethoven eventually moved to the Austrian capital five years later, in 1792. Initially, he studied composition with Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) but the latter's lengthy trip to England resulted in him seeking tuition elsewhere. He obtained lessons in counterpoint and fugue from JG Albrechtsberger (1736-1809) and knowledge of the Italian vocal style via A Salieri (1750-1825). It was not long before Beethoven established a reputation as a concert pianist within Vienna's fashionable salon society.

Among others, he made the acquaintance of Prince Lichnowsky and the Brunswick family. He also formed liaisons with several women but, despite a passionate nature and an expressed longing for marriage, he never wed. He had been taken to the hearts of the Viennese aristocracy despite his rudeness, quickness of temper and refusal to defer to their social superiority. Unusually for the time, he wished to make his way without formal patronage. Sadly, he was not always able to sustain this ideal, even having become a recognised piano virtuoso.

Had Beethoven been ready to trust others more with the management of his financial affairs, he might have lived more comfortably from the proceeds of his many performances and publications. From 1794-1806, on and off, he lived in the house of Prince Lichnowsky. At one point, out of desperation, he was almost forced to take up the salaried post of Kapellmeister in Westphalia, a territory he strongly disliked due to its association with Napoleon. Fortunately, four aristocratic friends pledged funds to support him to stay.

During this period, not yet 30 years of age, Beethoven was gradually becoming deaf. Its effect was devastating. In the summer of 1802 he confided to one of his brothers that he was in the depth of despair and, at times, contemplating suicide. Inevitably, his performing career, other than as piano soloist, suffered directly. He did not perform in public again after 1814 but struggled on, as conductor, for a further eight years.

Beethoven could still compose but more family tragedy struck. His brother Kaspar was diagnosed with tuberculosis and, in 1815, died from it. Thereafter, for several years, Beethoven became embroiled in a bitter legal battle with his brother's widow, Johanna, over the guardianship of her son, Karl. Kaspar had named both his older brother and his wife as co-guardians but Beethoven was claiming sole custody. He doubted her trustworthiness as he knew she had embezzled in the past. He paid a high price for their wrangling in court, not only financially but also due to it draining his time and mental energy to compose.

Beethoven's composing career is regarded as occupying three periods. An early period is characterised as covering his mastery of the Viennese styles of Haydn and Mozart, while finding his own 'voice'. Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2, the first three piano concertos and the piano sonatas, *Pathétique* and *Moonlight*, are representative outputs. A middle period, 1803-1814, sometimes referred to as 'heroic', reflects his early struggles with incipient deafness, during which he delivered works of a grander scale and of greater emotional impact and energy. Symphonies No. 3 (*Eroica*), No. 5 and No. 6 (*Pastoral*), the *Appassionata* piano sonata and his Piano Concerto, No. 5 (*Emperor*) are exemplars.

The late period, concurrent with Beethoven's almost complete deafness, contains his most intensely personal and introspective works. He was exploring experimental and unconventional forms and harmonies, some of which can still sound alien to the modern listener and yet exert profound emotional effects. Among these works are Symphony No. 9 (*Choral*), his *Missa Solemnis* (Solemn Mass), the final five piano sonatas (including *Hammerklavier*) and the late string quartets (including *Grosse Fuge*).

Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna, 26 March 1827, at the age of 56, from liver disease of unknown cause. There was a great outpouring of grief, as thousands joined the funeral procession. He was buried in the suburban cemetery of Währing. Later, in 1888, his remains were exhumed and moved to a place of honour in the Vienna Central Cemetery.

CORIOLAN OVERTURE

Beethoven composed this overture in 1807 for a tragic play *Coriolan* (Coriolanus) written by HJ von Collin (1771-1811) in 1804. Austria's 1805 defeat of the Austrian army by the French was still fresh in the composer's mind. At the time Austria was reforming its army to renew the war but was also undergoing serious internal unrest. The piece was premiered in 1807 at the home of Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz (1772-1816), an Austrian nobleman who served as the Head of Household of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria.

The hero, Coriolanus, is a Roman general and statesman. Having been feted by Rome for his military prowess and as a politician, the populus had turned on him. In retaliation, he defected to one of Rome's former enemies and took command of their army, vowing to attack the city.

Coriolanus' resolve for revenge, in Beethoven's hands, is represented by the initial, menacing and warlike, C minor theme. However, this is matched by a tender counterbalancing theme in E-flat major, standing for Coriolanus' mother, exhorting him to abandon his perilous and treacherous mission. Emotionally conflicted, with no room to manoeuvre, Coriolanus opts to take his own life. The music, reflecting the plot of Collin's tragedy, fades away to nothing.

BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, the second of three children. Johann Jakob, his father, was a talented musician, who earned meagre wages playing in the city's waterfront dance halls and taverns. His mother, Johanna Christiane, 17 years her husband's senior, worked as a seamstress. While she strove to manage the family's finances, her husband spent extravagantly.

Brahms received his first music lessons from his father, learning the cello and horn. Increasingly drawn to the piano, his prodigious talent was soon evident. He graduated to piano lessons from a prominent local musician, before being tutored by the esteemed pianist and composer Eduard Marxsen (1806-1887). He introduced Brahms to the major works of JS Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, all of which influenced the future direction of Brahms' own compositions.

By the age of 10, Brahms was performing as a pianist and playing chamber music by Beethoven and Mozart. At 13, having left middle school, he was earning money by providing piano lessons to supplement his family's finances. His musical talents were also deployed in some of the same seedy venues where his father worked, the pay being poor and the working hours often long and anti-social. By 15 Brahms was also being paid to arrange dance numbers and compose light music for theatre bands. Only in his limited spare time could he produce music to his own liking.

By 1853, entering his 20s, Brahms had produced several major piano works. Sometimes lacking grace and charm, they were recognized as products of a serious musical mind, there being something monumental about them. In his third decade, he started to tour beyond Hamburg, accompanying Eduard Reményi (1828-1898), a talented Hungarian violinist. As well as becoming acquainted with Hungarian music, he met other prominent musicians. Among them was Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), arguably the finest violinist of the 19th century. The two formed a close and long-term friendship, Joachim championing some of Brahms' compositions and bringing him to the attention of other composers, including Robert Schumann (1810-1856).

Schumann was impressed by Brahms, extolling his musical virtues in an article for the music periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. He predicted a wonderful future for the young composer. The two had quickly struck up a friendship, Brahms being invited to stay with the Schumann family in Düsseldorf. Having spent Christmas with his own family back in Hamburg, Brahms received the shocking news of Schumann's mental breakdown and subsequent hospitalisation. Early in 1854, therefore, he returned to Düsseldorf to support Schumann's wife, Clara, and her seven children, remaining there for the next two years.

Although Brahms' performing activities were inevitably curtailed, he continued to compose. He produced several works for piano, no doubt inspired by living under the same roof as Clara, by then the foremost pianist of her generation.

During the period of her husband's mental decline, she had not been permitted to visit him. Consequently, Brahms had become, in effect, their go-between. While occupying that role, he may have fallen in love with her, notwithstanding she was 14 years older than him. That they were close is beyond doubt, the two sharing much in common. As well as their love and respect for the late composer, they held very similar musical ideals. After Schumann's death, Brahms briefly toured with Clara to Switzerland. Following this, however, he took up a part-time post as musical director at the Court of Detmold, many miles from Düsseldorf and from her.

In this new and more tranquil environment Brahms taught, performed and composed - chamber music, piano pieces, songs and waltzes. He even became engaged, albeit briefly, to Agathe von Siebold. Brahms' relationship with women was complex and conflicted. According to some biographers this was rooted in his early exposure to Hamburg's bawdy bars and taverns. He obviously had some insight into his ambivalent relationship with women. In a letter to a friend, he wrote '*I could not bear to have in the house a woman who has the right to be kind to me, to comfort me when things go wrong*'. Having expressed a similarly unsettling sentiment to Agathe, regarding his inability to be tied down in marriage, their engagement was broken off. Unsurprisingly, he never married or settled with a partner.

Even in ordinary social situations Brahms could be extremely insensitive and provocative to the point of rudeness. Close friends were not exempt from the lashes of his sharp tongue. Hundreds of surviving letters written or received by him, however, attest to his many firm and enduring friendships, with both men and women. These speak to a genuine warmth that lay behind his gruff exterior.

In 1863, Brahms moved to Vienna to make it his home and was soon installed as conductor of the city's 'Singakademie', a fine choral society. He left the position after only two years, however, to concentrate on composing and performing. On a visit home in the following year, finding his parents' marriage close to breakdown, he attempted to bring about some reconciliation. Unsuccessful, the couple separated in June 1864. Only months later, February 1865, his mother was dead. Affected deeply by this loss, Brahms still maintained a relationship with his father and the young stepmother who was soon on the scene.

Following his mother's death, Brahms worked on several large choral works - *Ein Deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem), the *Alto Rhapsody*, and *Schicksalslied* (Song of Destiny). Later, between 1872 and 1875, he was the Music Director of Vienna's '*Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*' (Society of Friends Music), conducting its orchestra and chorus. Unfortunately, audiences experienced these concerts as excessively serious and intellectually demanding. Disappointed by this reception Brahms resigned from the post. Thereafter, he favoured composing and touring, performing as piano soloist, accompanist or conductor of his own works.

The successful premiere of Brahms' long-gestated Symphony No. 1 in C minor (1876) seemed to unleash a torrent of other great works. Among them are the Violin Concerto (1879), B-flat Piano Concerto (1881), Symphony No. 3 (1883), Symphony No. 4 (1885) and Concerto for Violin and Cello (1887). His total creative output was huge and varied. As well as the four symphonies, he composed concertos for a variety of instruments, many other orchestral works and much chamber music. There are very many pieces for pianoforte and for voice - more than 200 songs for solo voice and piano and 117 German folk songs for four-part chorus!

In Brahms' last works there is a hint of melancholy, perhaps anticipating his own death. His 1896 composition *Vier ernste Gesänge* (Four Serious Songs), was inspired by his beloved Clara's worrying ill health. At her funeral, in June of that year, Brahms said '*Today, I have buried the only person I truly loved*'. He was himself slowly wasting away from a cancer that had affected his liver. In the following March, Brahms left his sickbed to listen to his Symphony No. 4 being performed under the baton of Hans Richter (1843-1916). He thus witnessed the tumultuous ovation it received. Within a month, however, he was dead. Brahms is buried in the Vienna Central Cemetery.

SCHICKSALS LIED

Brahms completed *Schicksalslied* in 1871. It is a choral setting of a poem by JCF Hölderlin (1770-1843), with orchestral accompaniment. The poet and philosopher was preoccupied with the reconciliation of humankind with the natural world and a spiritual vision that transcended mere belief in a deity. In *Schicksalslied*, the gods dwell in perpetual bliss, indifferent to the humans who suffer and die without redemption. Although Brahms was attracted to the poem its pessimistic conclusion did not sit comfortably.

The music begins with a stately orchestral prelude, evoking the majesty and blissful ease of the world of the gods who, '*walk on high in the light*'. By contrast, humanity's tragic fate is portrayed as a pitiful and meaningless struggle unto death. It is driven by a blind destiny, '*like water flung from crag to crag, plunging for years in the unfathomable deep*'. Brahms' rendition displays dissonant harmony, jarring rhythms and fractured melody. Contradicting Hölderlin's fatalistic conclusion, however, he settles for a serene musical resolution. Brahms' orchestral postlude, without voices, is a revisiting of the work's introductory theme but in the uplifting key of C major.

Perhaps the two apparently irreconcilable elements in the poem mirrored the contrary aspects of Brahms' personality: his brusque and abrasive persona and the sensitive nature of his soul and his music. Composed not very long after his mother's death, he may have required a more hopeful destiny for her, if not for himself and humanity.

MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg into a prestigious family. Moses Mendelssohn, his paternal grandfather, was a famous German-Jewish philosopher, who provided a rationale and blueprint for his fellow Jews to engage more fully with European culture and its Enlightenment ideals, while not forsaking their faith. His father, Abraham, a successful banker, ignored important Jewish traditions. His sons were not circumcised, and he arranged for his four children, including Felix aged seven, to be baptised into the Lutheran faith. This was via a private ceremony and conducted in a Berlin apartment.

Six years later, and in another distant city, Abraham and his wife, Lea, also converted. This was at the urging of her wealthy brother Jakob Ludwig Bartholdy. The latter's non-Jewish surname was added to their own, while his two first names were added to that of his nephew, Felix. This was all in aid of the family's greater acculturation into German society. Ironically, Felix and his older sister, Fanny, also a musical prodigy, were home-schooled by their mother, thereby minimising their contact with a peer group.

Their school day (Monday to Saturday) was long, starting at 5am, and its curriculum broad, reflecting the rise of rationality and relative demise of a pervasive religious influence in schooling following the Enlightenment. As well as musical studies, their education spanned foreign languages, sciences, art classes, gymnastics and horse-riding. Felix emerged fluent in three foreign languages, including English, and a talented sketcher and water colourist. Later, piano lessons were delivered by the esteemed piano teacher, Ludwig Berger (1777-1839), and composition taught by CF Zelter (1758-1832), director of the Berlin *Singakademie*.

As a friend of the famous polymath, JLV von Goethe (1749-1832), Zelter introduced his 12-year-old pupil to the great man, which resulted in a protracted correspondence between the two, despite their 60 years' age gap. In 1825, the 16-year-old Felix performed in person at Goethe's own keyboard, playing at sight some of the latter's original autograph scores. Amazed at Mendelssohn's musical skills and intellectual maturity, Goethe confided in Zelter that his pupil outshone even Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whom he had seen perform and whose early compositions he knew well.

Many suggest that Mendelssohn's best works include some of his youthful creations. His Symphony No. 1 in C Minor was written at the age of 15 and the String Octet in E flat major at 16. His well-loved and oft-performed overture, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was also penned as a teenager, in 1826. Popular in Mendelssohn's lifetime, all remain firmly in the repertoire of modern ensembles and orchestras, which testifies to the maturity of such compositions, confirming Goethe's opinion.

In his 20s, with his father's financial support, Mendelssohn embarked on a three-year European tour, beginning in Britain. Based in London, this included a visit to Scotland that provided inspiration for later works, notably, *The Hebrides* overture and his Symphony No. 3 in A minor, (colloquially, the *Scottish Symphony*). In all, Mendelssohn made 10 visits to Britain, in the process being favoured by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

In 1831, Mendelssohn's grand tour had delivered him to Rome, the year that Pope Gregory XVI was elected. The standard of music-making was patchy. The papal singers, for example were, in his estimation, '*almost all unmusical*'. His views were expressed at some length in letters to his erstwhile teacher, Zelter. Sadly, the latter died not long afterwards, and Mendelssohn was disappointed not to succeed him in directing the prestigious *Singakademie* in Berlin. Consequently, he moved to Düsseldorf, albeit continuing to tour abroad, as performer and conductor.

Mendelssohn's strong work ethic, instilled by his strict and rigid upbringing, meant he readily accepted an increasingly heavy teaching and conducting load, on top of his composing and performing activities. From Düsseldorf he moved to Leipzig to take up a conducting position with Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra. However, around that time, in 1835, the death of his father plunged him into a deep depression. Fanny, being greatly alarmed by her brother's mental state, determined that he should take a wife. Whether or not under her influence, two years later he was in love and married Cécile Jeanrenaud. She was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman and, although 10 years his junior, a stabilising influence. The couple produced five children.

Despite the death of his mother, in 1842, Mendelssohn continued to pursue his hectic working schedule, still punctuating it with trips abroad to perform or conduct. In the following year, active as ever, he founded and directed the Leipzig Conservatory, inviting his friend, Robert Schumann, to oversee teaching composition and piano.

Mendelssohn's huge workload, however, coupled with the responsibilities of a growing family, had adversely affected his mental well-being. Prominent irritable moods and dramatic angry outbursts became more frequent. The image of him painted by some biographers, that of a mild-mannered and placid gentleman composer, may never have been an accurate depiction!

In April 1847, Mendelssohn was again in London, to conduct the first performance of his revised Oratorio, *Elijah*. This was the first of six such performances in just 15 days! However, in May that year, news of Fanny's sudden death landed a shattering blow on the already beleaguered and ailing composer. Hearing that dreadful news caused him to collapse with a series of strokes. Unable to attend her funeral, he spent a period of convalescence in Switzerland, with his younger brother. It was September before he returned to Leipzig and was able to visit Fanny's grave. During this period of mourning, he composed the *String Quartet No. 6 in F minor*, an uncharacteristically dark work, in loving memory of his sister.

In the autumn of 1847, Mendelssohn had been due to conduct *Elijah* on 3 November in Berlin and on 14 November in Vienna. He did not honour these engagements, however, having suffered a further stroke on 1 November that left him partially paralysed. Three days later, the composer, arranger, performer, conductor, teacher and musical administrator was dead. He was 38. Felix Mendelssohn's funeral service was conducted in Leipzig, at the Paulinerkirche. He was buried at the Dreifaltigkeit Cemetery in Berlin, where he joined his sister and parents.

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DIE ERSTE WALPURGISNACHT

Mendelssohn's secular cantata, *Walpurgisnacht*, is based on what Goethe described as his '*dramatic ballad*'. The poet intended it to be extended into a large choral work by his close friend, Carl Friedrich Zelter. In the event, the composer was not content with his early drafts for the music and eventually abandoned the project. Subsequently, the baton was taken up by his former pupil, Mendelssohn.

Goethe's text is self-consciously symbolic. It embodies timeless issues, in his own words, '*the old, founded, tested, reassuring is pressed by emerging innovations, pushed, displaced and, if not extinguished, at least crammed into narrow space.*' His saga is situated in medieval times in the Harz mountains of central Germany. The pure flame of the Druids' nature-based beliefs and traditions is at risk of being doused by the dominant but intolerant early Christian church.

The plot entails the Druids' determination to celebrate the arrival of spring on the eve of May Day, '*Walpurgisnacht*', which the Christian authorities had forbidden. The women in the Druid community question the wisdom of the men's intention to ignore the ban, but one of their priests exhorts them to stand up and be counted for their beliefs - to welcome spring and ensure fertility of the land in the traditional manner.

To defy their persecutors, a Druid guard suggests they dress up as the Devil, spirits and demons and, in the darkness of night, '*come with prong, and come with fork, like the devil of their talk ... [to create] a wildly rattling sound*'. This cunning plan succeeds against the odds. The Christians are spooked and scared off by the ruse and the Druids' Mayday celebration takes place.

Walpurgisnacht is scored for four soloists (contralto, tenor, baritone and bass), chorus and orchestra. Its long orchestral introduction paints a picture of the slow transition from cold winter to long-awaited spring. The solo voices herald the unfolding scenes of the drama, while the chorus, as a unit or separate lower and upper voices, features as the plot demands. Goethe's dramatic text receives Mendelssohn's operatic treatment, in line with the poet's original intention.

Saint Walpurga, after whom *Walpurgisnacht* is named, was an Anglo-Saxon nun and missionary. She was born in Crediton, Devon (c. 710) and died in Heidenheim, Baden-Württemberg (c. 778). She was canonised on Mayday (c.870) by Pope Adrian II. Her remains are in Eichstätt, at the Abbey of St. Walpurga, which is a major pilgrimage site. She is recognised as the patron saint against many ills and for warding off witchcraft and evil spirits. Might she be turning in her grave?

Programme notes courtesy of Kingsley Norton

NACHTLIED

*Quellende, schwellende Nacht,
Voll von Lichtern und Sternen:
In den ewigen Fernen,
Sage, was ist da erwacht?*

*Herz in der Brust wird beengt;
Steigendes, neigendes Leben,
Riesenhaft fühle ich's weben,
Welches das meine verdrängt.*

*Schlaf, da nahst du dich leise,
Wie dem Kinde die Amme,
Und um die dürrtige Flamme
Ziehst du den schützenden Kreis.*

SCHICKSALSIED

*Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!
Glänzende Götterlüfte
Rühren euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
Heilige Saiten*

*Schicksallos, wie der schlafende
Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
Keusch bewahrt
In bescheidener Knospe
Blühet ewig
Ihnen der Geist,
Und die seligen Augen
Blicken in stiller,
Ewiger Klarheit.*

*Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruh'n;
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab.*

THE GENTLE APPROACH OF SLEEP

Rising and burgeoning night,
full of lights and stars;
in the eternal far-away distance
tell us: what has been awakened?

Heart and chest are tightening,
ascending, declining life;
I feel its gigantic web
weaving to displace me.

Sleep, now you come near me softly
like the nursemaid to the child,
and around the sparse flame
you draw a guarding circle.

SONG OF DESTINY

You walk on high in the light
On airy ground, ye blissful seraphim!
Breezes celestial and radiant
Caress you as lightly
As the harpist's fingers brushing
The sacred lyre.

Doomless, like infants in slumber,
Breathe the divinities:
Chastely wrapt
In humble buds,
Their indwelling spirit
Eternally flowers,
And their blissful eyes
Gaze on in silent and
Eternal clarity.

And yet – for us
There is no resting place.
An anguished mankind
Reels and plummets
Blindly from one
Hour to the next,
Like water flung
From crag to crag,
Plunged for years in the unfathomable deep.

DIE ERSTE WALPURGISNACHT

Ein Druid

*Es lacht der Mai!
Der Wald ist frei
Von Eis und Reifgehänge.
Der Schnee ist fort;
Am grünen Ort
Erschallen Lustgesänge.
Ein reiner Schnee
Liegt auf der Höh';
Doch eilen wir nach oben,
Begehn den alten heil'gen Brauch,
Allvater dort zu loben.
Die Flamme lodre durch den Rauch!
So wird das Herz erhoben.*

Die Druiden

*Die Flamme lodre durch den Rauch!
Begeht den alten heil'gen Brauch,
Allvater dort zu loben!
Hinauf! Hinauf nach oben!*

Einer aus dem Volke

*Könnt ihr so verwegen handeln?
Wollt ihr denn zum Tode wandeln?
Kennet ihr nicht die Gesetze
Unsrer harten Überwinder?
Rings gestellt sind ihre Netze
Auf die Heiden, auf die Sünder.
Ach, sie schlachten auf dem Walle
Unsre Weiber, unsre Kinder,
Und wir alle
Nahen uns gewissem Falle.*

Chor der Weiber

*Auf des Lagers hohem Walle
Schlachten sie schon unsre Kinder.
Ach, die strengen Überwinder!
Und wir alle
Nahen uns gewissem Falle.*

THE FIRST WALPURGIS-NIGHT

A Druid

*Sweet smiles the May!
The forest gay
From frost and ice is freed;
No snow is found,
Glad songs resound
Across the verdant mead.
Upon the height
The snow lies light,
Yet thither now we go,
There to extol our Father's name
Whom we for ages know.
Amid the smoke shall gleam the flame;
Thus pure the heart will grow.*

The Druids

*Amid the smoke shall gleam the flame;
Extol we now our Father's name,
Whom we for ages know!
Up, up, then, let us go!*

One of the People

*Would ye, then, so rashly act?
Would ye instant death attract?
Know ye not the cruel threats
Of the victors we obey?
Round about are placed their nets
In the sinful heathen's way.
Ah! upon the lofty wall
Wife and children slaughter they;
And we all
Hasten to a certain fall.*

Chorus of Women

*Ay, upon the camp's high wall
All our children loved they slay.
Ah, what cruel victors they!
And we all
Hasten to a certain fall.*

Ein Druid

*Wer Opfer heut
Zu bringen scheut,
Verdient erst seine Bande.
Der Wald ist frei!
Das Holz herbei,
Und schichtet es zum Brande!
Doch bleiben wir
Im Buschrevier
Am Tage noch im Stillen,
Und Männer stellen wir zur Hut
Um eurer Sorge willen.
Dann aber lasst mit frischem Mut
Uns unsre Pflicht erfüllen!*

Chor der Wächter

*Verteilt euch, wackre Männer, hier
Durch dieses ganze Waldrevier
Und wachet hier im stillen,
Wenn sie die Pflicht erfüllen!*

Ein Wächter

*Diese dumpfen Pfaffenchristen,
Lasst uns keck sie überlisten!
Mit dem Teufel, den sie fabeln,
Wollen wir sie selbst erschrecken.
Kommt! Mit Zacken und mit Gabeln,
Und mit Glut und Klapperstöcken
Lärmen wir bei nächt'ger Weile
Durch die engen Felsenstrecken.
Kauz und Eule
Heul' in unser Rundgeheule!*

Chor der Wächter

*Kommt mit Zacken und mit Gabeln
Wie der Teufel, den sie fabeln,
Und mit wilden Klapperstöcken
Durch die leeren Felsenstrecken!
Kauz und Eule
Heul in unser Rundgeheule!*

A Druid

Who fears to-day
His rites to pay,
Deserves his chains to wear.
The forest's free!
This wood take we,
And straight a pile prepare!
Yet in the wood
To stay 'tis good
By day, till all is still,
With watchers all around us plac'd
Protecting you from ill.
With courage fresh, then let us haste
Our duties to fulfil.

Chorus of Guards

Ye valiant watchers, now divide
Your numbers through the forest wide,
And see that all is still,
While they their rites fulfil.

A Guard

Let us in a cunning wise,
Yon dull Christian priests surprise
With the devil of their talk
We'll those very priests confound.
Come with prong, and come with fork.
Raise a wild and rattling sound
Through the livelong night, and prow!
All the rocky passes round.
Screech owl, owl,
Join in chorus with our howl!

Chorus of Guards

Come with prong, and come with fork,
Like the devil of their talk,
And with wildly rattling sound,
Prowl the desert rocks around!
Screech owl, owl,
Join in chorus with our howl!

Ein Druid

So weit gebracht,
Dass wir bei Nacht
Allvater heimlich singen!
Doch ist es Tag,
Sobald man mag
Ein reines Herz dir bringen.
Du kannst zwar heut
Und manche Zeit
Dem Feinde viel erlauben.
Die Flamme reinigt sich vom Rauch:
So reinig' unsern Glauben!
Und raubt man uns den alten Brauch;
Dein Licht, wer will es rauben!

Ein christlicher Wächter

Hilf, ach hilf mir, Kriegsgeselle!
Ach, es kommt die ganze Hölle!
Sieh, wie die verhexten Leiber
Durch und durch von Flamme glühen!
Menschenwölfe und Drachenweiber,
Die im Flug vorüberziehen!
Welch entsetzliches Getöse!
Lasst uns, lasst uns alle fliehen!
Oben flammt und saust der Böse,
Aus dem Boden
Dampfet rings ein Höllenbroden.

Chor der christlichen Wächter

Schreckliche verhexte Leiber,
Menschenwölfe und Drachenweiber!
Welch entsetzliches Getöse!
Sieh, da flammt, da zieht der Böse!
Aus dem Boden
Dampfet rings ein Höllenbroden!

Chor der Druiden

Die Flamme reinigt sich vom Rauch:
So reinig' unsern Glauben!
Und raubt man uns den alten Brauch;
Dein Licht, wer kann es rauben!

A Druid

Thus far 'tis right.
That we by night
Our Father's praises sing;
Yet when 'tis day,
To Thee we may
A heart unsullied bring.
'Tis true that now,
And often, Thou
Fav'rest the foe in fight.
As from the smoke is freed the blaze,
So let our faith burn bright!
And if they crush our golden ways,
Who e'er can crush Thy light?

A Christian Guard

Comrades, quick! your aid afford!
All the brood of hell's abroad;
See how their enchanted forms
Through and through with flames are glowing!
Dragon-women, men-wolf swarms,
On in quick succession going!
Let us, let us haste to fly!
Wilder yet the sounds are growing,
And the archfiend roars on high;
From the ground
Hellish vapours rise around.

Chorus of Christian Guards

Terrible enchanted forms,
Dragon-women, men-wolf swarms!
Wilder yet the sounds are growing!
See, the archfiend comes, all-glowing!
From the ground
Hellish vapours rise around!

Chorus of Druids

As from the smoke is freed the blaze,
So let our faith burn bright!
And if they crush our golden ways,
Who e'er can crush Thy light?

ANDREW GRIFFITHS – Musical Director



A musician of rare versatility, Andrew Griffiths combines his role as Head Coach at the National Opera Studio with a busy freelance career in the worlds of opera and choral music.

A graduate of the Royal Opera's Jette Parker Young Artist Programme, he has conducted productions for The Royal Opera, The Royal Ballet, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Opera Theatre Company, Opera Collective Ireland, Early Opera Company, Mid Wales Opera, Bampton Classical Opera and Iford Festival Opera. He has appeared in concert with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra of the Swan, Southbank Sinfonia and Orpheus Sinfonia, and he is regularly engaged to broadcast and record with the BBC Singers.

Andrew has worked at Glyndebourne, ENO, Scottish Opera, Chicago Opera Theatre, and with the BBC Symphony and Scottish Symphony Orchestras, and regularly joins the music staff at The Royal Opera, working alongside such conductors as Pappano, Bychkov, Gardiner and Mackerras. He is often engaged for projects outside the standard operatic canon, and is particularly experienced in Baroque repertoire and the music of the last 50 years. He is much in demand as a vocal coach, and works regularly with the Young Artists at The Royal Opera, as well as overseeing the training of the Young Artists at the National Opera Studio.

In constant demand as a choral conductor, Andrew appears regularly with the BBC Singers, for whom his engagements have included the world première of John Pickard's *Mass in Troubled Times*, recordings of Brahms, Hassler, Barber, Ives and Giles Swayne, and broadcasts of Howells, MacMillan and Martinů, as well as a Barbican debut directing music from the Flemish Renaissance. He is Musical Director of Kingston Choral Society and chamber choir Londinium, whose recordings have received wide critical acclaim. He regularly conducts for the Music Summer School at Gresham's, and has appeared as a guest conductor with the BBC Symphony Chorus, the choirs at Dartington, New London Chamber Choir, and Hong Kong's Tallis Vocalis.

A pianist, viola player and singer by training, Andrew began his musical education as a Quirister and Scholar at Winchester College, and read music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he held a Choral Exhibition. He studied conducting under Martyn Brabbins in Glasgow, and trained as a répétiteur at the National Opera Studio and at Scottish Opera. He is a former principal viola of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and a founder member of vocal consort Stile Antico.

Engagements during the current season include conducting contemporary opera scenes at the National Opera Studio directed by Keith Warner, a return to Bampton Classical Opera for Salieri's *La locandiera*, Handel's *Israel in Egypt* at Gresham's, assistant conductor for *Il trovatore* at The Royal Opera, and chorus-master for Boulez's *Cummings ist der Dichter* with the BBC Singers.

ALEXANDRIA MOON - Mezzo-soprano



British mezzo-soprano Alexandria Moon is a member of the opera studio at the Royal College of Music in London and is the Lotti Masterson Scholar supported by the John Nickson and Simon Rew Scholarship in memory of Sir Peter Jones, studying with Mary Nelson and Caroline Dowdle. Her studies have been generously supported by the Opera Awards bursary, Drake Calleja, Countess of Munster and Josephine Baker Trusts. Alexandria is an Opera Prelude Young Artist for 2026 and was a Garsington Alvarez Emerging Artist for 2025 where she received the Simon Sandbach award after debuting in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* as Masha and as a member of the chorus alongside covering Edwige in their production of *Rodelinda* where she performed the role in their OperaFirst production.

Other role highlights include Lucretia (*The Rape of Lucretia*, British Youth Opera), Concepción (*L'heure espagnole*, Royal College of Music) and Marcellina (*Le Nozze di Figaro*, Royal college of Music) which is currently available to stream online on Opera Vision. Upcoming engagements include debuting Flora in *La Traviata* for Garsington's 2026 season, covering Mercedes in *Carmen* at the English National Opera and going on tour with Scottish Opera in their annual Opera Highlights tour of Scotland's islands and highlands.



**KCS gratefully acknowledges the financial support
of the Josephine Baker Trust for the soloist
Alexandria Moon in this concert.**

EMYR LLOYD JONES - Tenor



Emyr Lloyd Jones is a tenor from North Wales. He trained at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, the Royal Northern College of Music and the National Opera Studio, and is now a Jette Parker Artist at the Royal Ballet & Opera. Roles include Oronte (*Alcina*), Fulgor in the world premiere of Stephen McNeff's *A Star Next To The Moon*, and Eckbert in Judith Weir's *Blond Eckbert* with GSMD; Don Riccardo (*Emani*) with Buxton International Festival; and Bunyan (*The Pilgrim's Progress*) with British Youth Opera. Jones was the 2022 winner of the Pendine International Voice of the Future at Llangollen International

Musical Eisteddfod and winner of the Dunraven Young Welsh Singer of the Year Award 2024. He was also a semi-finalist at the 2024 Kathleen Ferrier Awards at the Wigmore Hall. While at the RNCM, he won the Joyce and Michael Kennedy Award for the Singing of Strauss, the Alexander Young Prize, the Oncken Song Prize and the Elsie Thurston Prize. At the National Eisteddfod of Wales, he is a previous winner of the Blue Ribband for folk singing. His Royal Opera roles during the current season include Odoardo (*Ariodante*), Gastone (*La traviata*), Borsa (*Rigoletto*) and Philistine Messenger (*Samson et Dalila*). Cover roles include Janek (*The Makropulos Case*).

AMBROSE CONNOLLY - Baritone



Ambrose Connolly graduated from University College London with a degree in Russian and French before studying in Russia at the Kazan State Conservatoire under the tutelage of Ekaterina Laider. He was the winner of the 2020 Serebranie Rosi International Opera Singing Prize. Ambrose has more recently completed a Masters in Advanced Vocal Studies at the Wales International Academy of Voice in Cardiff, under the direction of Dennis O'Neill. He was one of eight young singers selected for the Glyndebourne Academy in 2021. Notable roles include Guglielmo, *Così fan tutte*, (Cardiff Opera), Germont, *La Traviata* (North Wales Opera Studio), and Eugene Onegin (HGO and Bath Opera).

Ambrose has appeared as a soloist for numerous Choral Societies both in the UK and Europe, including as a soloist for *La Misa Del Vale* with the Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla, baritone soloist for Elgar's *Coronation Ode* (Trowbridge Symphony Orchestra), Brahms's *Requiem* with the Gower Choral Society, and *The Five Mystical Songs* with Orchestra (Benson Choral Society). Ambrose has sung the roles of Fiorello and Baron Duphuol in the *Barber of Seville* and *La Traviata* for Diva Opera for their tour in 2024 around the UK, Europe and South Africa and is currently a young artist at the National Opera Studio and will join Garsington Opera as an Alvarez Emerging Artist for this summer's festival. Ambrose is taught by Russell Smythe.

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Harry Kerr
John Dickenson
Anna Szabo
Eleanor Bartlett

Second Violin

Ruth Funnell

Nicole Stokes
Victoria Marsh
Gillian Brightwell
Emma Martin

Viola

Katie Perrin

Diana Matthews
Terry Nettle
Wendi Webber

Cello

Chris Allan

Leonie Adams
Clare Graham

Bass

Alex Verster

Clare Clarkman

Flute / Piccolo

Emma Williams

Carolyn Hope
Nicola Summerscales

Oboe

Fraser MacAuley

Lucy Foster

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Stuart King

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Horn

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