ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The Rite of Spring

Sat 17 Oct, 7:30pm

Please note that all timings are approximate and may be subject to change. Performers are correct at time of uploading.

Britten Suite on English Folk Tunes, Opus 90 "A time there was..." (14′)
Gavin Higgins Clarinet Concerto (world premiere) (33′)

- INTERVAL – (20′)

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring (32′)

Adam Hickox *conductor*
Mark Simpson *soloist*

This concert was supported by the Royal Philharmonic Society, Hinrichson Foundation, Boltini Trust, Marchus Trust and Fidelio Trust.

First Violins
Thelma Handy *
Andrew Harvey
Peter Liang
Martin Richardson *
Concettina Del Vecchio
Stephan Mayer *
Ruth McNamara
Susanna Poole
Elizabeth Lamberton
Emily Mowbray
Qian Wu
Evan Lawrence
Claire Stranger Ford
Nathan Fenwick
Helen Boardman
Marino Capulli

Second Violins
Kate Richardson *
Sophie McQueen
Sophie Coles
Kate Marsden
James Justin Evans *
David Rimbault
Olga Smoleń
Frances Evans
Chu Yu Yang
Rachel Stonham
Dewi Tudor Jones
Celia Goodwin
Emily Pettet
Laura Embrey

Violas
Alexander Mitchell
Nadia Debono
Sarah Hill
Gwendolyn Cawdron
David Ruby *
Rachel Jones
Ian Fair
Amy Hark
Harriet Mitchell
Emily Davies
Ray Lester
India Blackshaw Britton

Cellos
Tim Lowe
Hilary Browning *
Ian Bracken *
Ruth Owens
Alexander Holladay
Mark Lindley
Anna Stuart
Georgina Aasgaard
Lucy Hoile
Lizzie Elliott

Double Basses
Marcel Becker
Nathan Knight
Ashley Frampton *
Nigel Dufty *
Anthony Williams
Filipe Dandalo
Imogen Fernando
Nick Broughton

Flutes
Cormac Henry
Helen Wilson
Lily Vernon Purves
Abi Fletcher

Piccolos
Sameeta Gahir

Oboes
Helena Mackie
Catrin Ruth Davies *
Sally Richardson
Alec Harmon

Cor Anglais
Drake Gritton

Clarinets
Miquel Ramos Salvadó
Emma Burgess
Jill Allan
Marianne Rawles

Bass Clarinet
Beñat Erro Diez

Bassoons
Will Kidner
Rosie Burton
Andres Yauri
Gareth Twigg

Contrabassoon
Simon Davies

Horns
Timothy Jackson
Nicole Linning
Stephen Nicholls
Timothy Nicholson
Robert Ashworth
Catherine Hewitt
Erin Cooper Gay
Dave Tollington
Jenny Cox

Trumpets
Jonathan Holland
Hannah Mackenzie
Jim Bulger
Peter Chappell Athans

Piccolo Trumpet
James Nash

Trombones
Simon Cowen
Simon Powell

Bass Trombone
Simon Chappell

Bass Trumpet
Gemma Riley

Tubas
Robin Haggart *
Chris Barron

Timpani
Neil Hitt
Josephine Frieze

Percussion
Matthew Brett
Josephine Frieze
Scott Lumsdaine
Jim Goodwin
Jenny Mardsen

Harp
Mary Reid

Celeste
Ian Buckle

*Denotes 25 years' service

The Rite of Spring
Programme Notes

About the Music

Benjamin Britten (1913-76): Suite on English Folk Tunes ('A time there was...')
1. Cakes and Ale
2. The Bitter Withy
3. Hankin Booby
4. Hunt the Squirrel
5. Lord Melbourne

Composed: 1974
First Performed: 13 June 1975, Aldeburgh, Snape Maltings, English Chamber Orchestra cond. Steuart Bedford

In 1973, the sixty-year-old Benjamin Britten was taken into hospital for urgent heart surgery. It was successful – up to a point – but he suffered a stroke that affected his right hand, and the whole thing left him exhausted. And yet despite this, Britten's last three years saw him create some of his most beautiful music, including this five-movement *Suite on English Folk Songs*. It's dedicated 'lovingly and reverently' to the memory of the Australian-born composer and folk-song collector Percy Grainger, and there are implied tributes to other twentieth century pioneers of British folk music: Gustav Holst (whom Britten admired) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (about whom he had more complicated feelings).

As you might expect, there's plenty of musical fun-and-games, especially in the 'fast and rough' first movement, 'Cakes and Ale', and in the virtuosic fiddling of 'Hunt the Squirrel'. But there are darker strains here too, in the sharp-edged 'The Bitter Withy', and especially in the melancholic cor anglais melody of the finale, 'Lord Melbourne'. And then there's that subtitle, 'A time there was...', looking back nostalgically perhaps to the English rural world before industrialisation set in, and perhaps also to Britten's more optimistic youth. Sadness, especially at the loss of innocence, is rarely far away in Britten's music. It's certainly present here.

Gavin Higgins: Clarinet Concerto (world premiere, RLPS co-commission)
I. We were ghosts
II. Sawdust and sweat
III. And love spooled before us
Cadenza
IV. Everyone moves their extraordinary bodies

Classical music is filled with works that evoke the night; nocturnes, nachtmusik, and dream pieces which are often introspective and reflective in nature. But at night we are also haunted, transformed, share intimate moments with lovers,

and seek out hedonistic pleasure. *Nocturne,* is divided into 4 movements with a cadenza:

The first movement, 'We were ghosts', takes its title from Andrew Holleran's *Dancer From the Dance*, where the characters are both haunted by their past and, in turn, haunt the streets and nightclubs of New York.

The second movement, 'Sawdust and sweat', takes its title from *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out* by Jeremy Atherton Lin. In it, he describes a sign over the door of a club in East London, upon which the image of a macho carpenter is depicted laying down his tools, face turned away to the city.

The third movement, 'And love spooled before us', explores something more clandestine: love in shadows. The title is taken from David Tait's poem *End Credits.*

And in the fourth movement, 'Everyone moves their extraordinary bodies', we are in the world of the nightclub, where the body becomes the means of expression. The title is taken from Guillaume Dustan's *I'm Going Out Tonight*.

Gavin Higgins, 2026

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): *The Rite of Spring*
Part One: The Adoration of the Earth
Introduction – Augurs of Spring – Ritual of Abduction – Spring Rounds – Ritual of the Rival Tribes – Procession of the Sage – Dance of the Earth
Part Two: The Sacrifice
Mystic Circles of the Young Girls – Glorification of the Chosen One – Evocation of the Ancestors – Ritual of the Ancestors – Sacrificial Dance

Composed: 1913
First Performed: 29 May 1913, Paris, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, cond. Pierre Monteux

Spring comes late to the far north, and when it does it's quick and wild. When asked, years later, what he most loved about his former Russian homeland, Stravinsky replied, 'the violent Russian spring that seemed to begin in an hour and was like the whole earth cracking. That was the most wonderful event of every year of my childhood.' It's not surprising that the 'pagan' rites Stravinsky half-chose, half-invented to celebrate the arrival of spring are violent too, and that the musical result is the most thrilling and ragged ballet in the repertoire.

In collaboration with the Paris-based Ballets Russes supremo Serge Diaghilev, and with his choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, Stravinsky came up with a scenario that showcases the first stirring of life in the cold earth, and the human ceremonies that welcome it, the whole thing culminating in a ritual sacrifice, where a young girl dances herself to death. The music is highly dissonant, even

by Stravinsky's standards, and it uses complex, dizzyingly irregular rhythms to create an effect like an intoxicating spell. Running through the music are echoes of what sound like ancient Russian chants. It's powerful, primal stuff, drawing the audience in as though we too are participating in the savage spectacle, from the welcoming of life at the beginning right through to the horror at the end.

So-called 'primitive' Russian art had become rather *chic* in Paris in the 1910s, especially after Stravinsky's popular fairy-tale ballet *The Firebird* premiered at the beginning of the decade. But even so, *The Rite of Spring* was too much for some tastes, and the first performance provoked a near-riot. But others were enthralled. More performances followed, and before long *Rite of Spring* was on its way to becoming a concert favourite. Its use in Disney's *Fantasia* set the seal. It is one of the few modernist classics to be hugely influential on generations of avant-garde composers and to be a hit with audiences too. It can still challenge today, but surrender to Stravinsky's rhythms and the power of those chant-themes and dissonances, and it remains an experience like nothing else in music.

Adam Hickox

British conductor **Adam Hickox** brings to the podium an impressive and elegant fluidity of technique and mature interpretations of a wide range of repertoire, which is seeing him in increasing demand across the world. In recent seasons he has conducted the Orchestre de Paris, BBC Scottish Symphony, BBC Symphony, the Ulster Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, Philharmonia Orchestra, Deutsche Symphony Orchestra Berlin, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Iceland Symphony Orchestra and Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. Meanwhile in November 2024, just a few months after making his debut with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, he was announced as its new **chief conductor**, taking up the position in autumn 2025.

In the opera house he has conducted *Tosca* at Opera North and a new production of *Hansel and Gretel* at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire. And in December 2023, following a successful debut at Glyndebourne conducting Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, he was appointed **principal conductor of the Glyndebourne Sinfonia.** In 2024 he conducted *La Traviata* at Glyndebourne as well as a concert staging of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

Born in 1996, Hickox studied music and composition with Robin Holloway at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and conducting with Sian Edwards at the **Royal Academy of Music** from where he graduated in 2019. He was assistant conductor at the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 2019-22, and in 2021 he was invited to Tanglewood as one of the festival's two conducting fellows, later also taking part in the fellowship's corresponding residency with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig.

Mark Simpson

He's a much sought-after clarinettist and contemporary classical composer with awards on his mantelpiece and commissions on his book. And this year is also a special one, marking the 20th anniversary of him doing 'the double' – when he was crowned both **BBC Young Musician of the Year** and BBC Proms/Guardian Young Composer of the Year. But **Mark Simpson's** ambitions to conquer the classical music world were forged long before that, in the auditorium of Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. "Those big and wild ambitions were formulated while I was sitting watching concerts in the Phil, or playing in the National Youth Orchestra," the 37-year-old says. "It was just a sense, 'this is what I'm going to do, I'm doing it'."

Simpson recently had a chance to reflect on his formative years, when he performed in Barrow as part of his year-long residency with Liverpool Philharmonic and was interviewed in front of an audience of young people in the Cumbrian port town. He explains: "I was talking to the guy who was interviewing me about my life and my teenage years, the same age as they were – and everything was to do with Liverpool and to do with the music support service, the free instruments, the music lessons after school and Saturday morning music school, and then the Phil and the Merseyside Youth Orchestra, Liverpool Philharmonic's 10:10. The council used to run a music competition, of which I did all different variations, and that started a whole thing about competing and playing and I got obsessed with that – and that led to Young Musician. So, I had everything at my disposal at that age which meant I was able to have these wild ambitions."

It was also the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, specifically Liverpool Philharmonic's 10:10, that gave Simpson the composer his first commission at the age of 15 – the first of what has turned out to be four commissions so far. Simpson's had a busy schedule as the Orchestra's Artist in Residence this year, a collaboration which Simpson says has been on the cards for a number of years. "One of the things we spoke about was that it would showcase the breadth of what I can do, as a performer and as a composer," he says. "And then the other thing the Phil really wanted to do was to present a premiere of some kind."

Last September, Timothy Ridout performed the UK premiere of Simpson's *Hold Your Heart in Your Teeth* concerto for viola and orchestra. And then in March, the Orchestra presented a new version of *The Immortal*, the supernatural oratorio for **baritone, chorus and orchestra** which won Simpson the prestigious 2016 Southbank Sky Arts Award for Classical Music. "I reduced the percussion," he says of the differences with the original. "And there are usually two choirs in the piece, a full chorus and a semi-chorus. I always did put the full chorus as

optional, so this was the first time without it. It's a slightly pared down version so it could fit on the stage!"

With his performing hat on, Simpson's year has featured a performance with 10:10 – playing John Adams' *Gnarly Buttons*, a long-time favourite – and an appearance in Barrow, the clarinettist performed Mozart's *Gran Partita* and his own work *Geysir* at The Tung Auditorium in January, a venue he praises for its fantastic acoustic. He delivered another recital in the Music Room in May, and now finishes his season with the world premiere of Gavin Higgins' new piece. And what's next? "I'm working on a new big piece," he smiles. "I can't say much, but it's something large scale that's going to take me three years to write."

Benjamin Britten

"Composing is like driving down a foggy road towards a house," explained Benjamin Britten. "Slowly, you see more details of the house – the colour of the slates and bricks, the shapes of the windows. The notes are the bricks and the mortar of the house." **Britten** himself was one of the most important musical housebuilders in 20th Century British music. And his own bricks-and-mortar home for almost two decades, **The Red House** at Aldeburgh (which he shared with his life partner Peter Pears and which now houses the Britten-Pears Foundation), was also a place of great creativity for him. It was just down the road in 1948 that he started what became the Aldeburgh Festival.

A prolific child prodigy, he had started composing by the age of 10 and as a teenager studied with composer Frank Bridge, really taking on board Bridge's maxim of being true to your own artistic vision. He later attended the Royal College of Music on a scholarship, where his tutors included Vaughan Williams and John Ireland. He developed a distinctive musical voice, informed by **a diverse range of influences**, from Henry Purcell to Schoenberg and Anton Berg, English folk music and Japanese Noh theatre.

Britten is perhaps best known for his operas – among them *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Albert Herring*, *Death in Venice* and *The Turn of the Screw* – but he also produced song cycles, choral works, film music (notably his 1936 documentary soundtrack *Night Mail* with words by poet, and friend, WH Auden) and chamber and orchestral pieces. His popular Christmas choral piece *A Ceremony of Carols* dates from 1942 and was composed at sea as Britten and Pears were returning from a three-year stay in America. Twenty years later, he was commissioned to write the *War Requiem* for the consecration of Coventry's new cathedral.

In the final year of his life, Britten was made a life peer, taking the title Baron Britten of Aldeburgh. And it was there that he died in December 1976, aged 63.

Gavin Higgins

Gavin Higgins is one of Britain's most exciting and gifted contemporary compositional talents, described as 'boldly imaginative' by *The Times*. **Born in Gloucestershire in 1983**, he was brought up in Whitecroft in the Forest of Dean where he first began playing tenor horn in a local brass band. He studied French horn with Peter Francombe and composition with Gary Carpenter at Chetham's in Manchester from 2001-5 before continuing his compositional studies with Kenneth Hesketh at the Royal College of Music.

He was the inaugural composer in residence for the Rambert Dance Company in 2010 and is currently both composer in association with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and inaugural associate composer for the **Three Choirs Festival**.

Higgins' music is performed by the world's leading orchestras, ensembles and soloists and has been commissioned by some of the UK's leading festivals including Three Choirs, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham and the BBC Proms.

His collaborations with soloists have resulted in daring and substantial additions to the concerto repertoire including a 'wild and wacky' Percussion Concerto *(Beano Concerto*) for Colin Currie, *Horn Concerto* for Ben Goldscheider and Trombone Concerto *(The Book of Miracles*) for Helens Vollam.

Early works meanwhile included the innovative 2005 *Coogee Funk* for wind band, *A Forest Symphony* for brass (2007) and the 2010 orchestral work *Dancing at the Edge of Hell.*

For the stage, his groundbreaking ballets – *What Wild Ecstasy* and *Dark Arteries* – were premiered at Sadler's Wells in 2010 and 2015 respectively, and in 2019 his first opera *The Monstrous Child*, commissioned by the Royal Opera House, opened to acclaim.

He is the winner of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, Sky Arts Award, Critics Circle Award, The Worshipful Company of Musicians Ille's Medal, and two Ivor Novello Awards.

Igor Stravinsky

When the great Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev heard a *Scherzo Fantastique* at a concert in St Petersburg in 1909, he was impressed enough to engage its young composer to write some short pieces for his Ballet Russes. But Igor Stravinsky wasn't the first choice when it came to creating the music for the company's full-length production *The Firebird*. Instead, Diaghilev

approached fellow Russian Anatoly Liadov to provide the score. Unhappily for Liadov, he failed to come up with the goods – but Stravinsky, approached in his place, had no such problem.

The Firebird opened at the Paris Opera on June 25, 1910 and turned its composer into a star overnight. It also became the first of a trio of collaborative works which continued in 1911 with *Petrushka* and culminated in *The Rite of Spring* two years later.

The Rite of Spring sprang from Stravinsky's mind in a rented house in Clarens, Switzerland, and burst onto the stage in Paris in 1913. And **what happened next** has gone down in music history.