

Autumn Concert



Saturday 23rd November 2024

Deddington Church

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Christmas Concert

Saturday 7th December 2024

A programme of fun festive favourites!

Including

Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*

4.00 p.m. - St Mary's Church, Banbury

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Spring Concert

Saturday 22nd March 2025

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – *Easter Festival Overture*

Nicholas Barton – *Horn Concerto*

Soloist – Alex Willett

Hubert Parry – *Symphony No.4 in E minor*

7.30 p.m. – Deddington Church

Tickets from

www.banburysymphony.com

Programme

Ethel Smyth — *The Boatswain's Mate*

George Gershwin — *Concerto in F*

Soloist – Madalina Rusu

- I Allegro (F major)
- II Adagio – Andante con moto (D-flat major)
- III Allegro agitato (G minor – F minor – F major)

Interval

Ruth Gipps — *Symphony No.3*

- I Moderato
- II Theme and Variations
- III Scherzo
- IV Finale

Dave Settle - Chair

I am delighted to welcome you again to another concert by Banbury Symphony Orchestra, here in the lovely setting of Deddington church. This evening marks the end of our season showcasing works by female composers, where we have included music that we believe should be better known into our concerts.

Tonight, we will be starting with the overture from Ethel Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate*, composed just before the outbreak of the First World War, and premiered in 1916. Although the opera was performed a few times at the Royal Opera House in the 1920s, Smyth's music then fell out of fashion and the opera was not performed again in public until 2007. The opera was composed at the height of the Suffragette campaign before the First World War, and the overture contains a number of

quotations from the Suffragette anthem, *March of the Women*, which Smyth had composed in 1910.

After this, we will be playing Gershwin's *Concerto in F* for piano and orchestra, composed in New York in 1925. Although this was composed only a decade after Ethel Smyth's overture, times had changed significantly, and this piece was composed at the height of the "Roaring 20s". New York was now full of jazz music, and also – following the introduction of Prohibition in 1920 – full of parties and illicit drinking outlets, with an estimated 100,000 illegal speakeasies in New York City alone. The concerto is a very exuberant work and incorporates plenty of jazz influences.

Finally, after the interval, we will be playing Ruth Gipps' *Symphony No. 3*, composed in 1965. It's a lovely work, composed in her characteristic melodic



Speakeasy patrons celebrating the end of Prohibition in 1933

style, with influences from earlier English composers such as Bridge and Butterworth. The symphony has hardly been heard since its first performance in 1969, but there is now a new recording of her Symphony No. 3 available, issued by Chandos in 2022. You can read more about Ruth Gipps from Steve Jones, our principal viola, who joined her London Repertoire Orchestra in 1975.

chair@banburysymphony.org



Paul Willett – Conductor

Paul Willett is our Conductor and Musical Director. Paul studied violin, singing and piano as a student but his main instrument was the French horn on which he gained his Performance Diploma from The Royal College of Music at the age of 16. He then went on to read music on scholarship at The Queen's College, Oxford, and studied for his teaching certificate in Music and Physical Education at Reading University.

For several years Paul combined teaching and freelance playing. He has given solo recitals and performed concertos throughout the country. He was a member of The Five Winds, a group that performed both at home and abroad, and also on BBC radio. Paul worked as a brass teacher for Oxfordshire Music Service and was director of a Saturday Music School of 200 students.

Paul was the Director of Didcot Sixth Form and whilst he is now mostly retired to concentrate on his music making and



being a 'stay-at-home' dad to his son Alfie, he has continued working part-time at Didcot Girls' School where he was Deputy Headteacher for many years.

Anna Fleming - Leader

Anna was born in South Africa where she started playing the violin at the age of ten. She joined the South African National Youth Orchestra and after successfully completing her music degree, majoring in orchestral studies, Anna joined the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992.

Anna moved to England in December 1996 and a couple of months later, joined Banbury Symphony Orchestra. She became the leader 2000, a post that she has held ever since. As a committed Christian, Anna enjoys worshipping on the violin in her church worship group. Focusing primarily on private violin and viola tuition, Anna teaches all ages and particularly enjoys helping adults to learn to play. She can be contacted by email: annamusic@hotmail.co.uk.



Madalina Rusu

Madalina Rusu is an established and experienced concert pianist, performing as a soloist and chamber musician.

During her youth she performed to critical acclaim in her home country Romania, and throughout Europe in Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. She moved to London, UK, in 2004, to study with Professor Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Graduating in 2011, Madalina has appeared as a soloist across the UK including appearances at Barbican Hall, Cadogan Hall, LSO St Luke's, and St Martin-in-the-Fields. In 2020 she moved to Warrington, Cheshire, with her partner and daughter, and splits her time between performing and managing a busy music school.

Born in 1985 in Constanta, Romania, Madalina began her musical studies at the Music High School in Constanta with professors Iuliana Carlig, Cristian Dumitrescu, and Constantin Ionescu-Vovu. She then received a full scholarship to attend the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London, where she gained a First class BMus Honours degree, and graduated the MMus course (Guildhall Artist – Performance) with distinction. Madalina was therefore awarded the prestigious Guildhall Artist Fellowship.

During her studies, Madalina played in numerous masterclasses held at the Dartington Summer School and at the



Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where her talent was recognized by distinguished musicians such as Richard Goode, Paul Lewis, John Lill, Imogen Cooper, Simon Trpčeski, Stephen Kovacevich, Pascal Rogé, Bryce Morrison, Alfredo Perl, Joanna MacGregor, Douglas Finch, Daniel Adni, and Andrew Zolinsky.

In 2020 Madalina joined a new team at Keys Piano School in Bolton, Greater Manchester, a fast-growing, innovative Music School specializing in developing high aspirations in young pianists. As the head of Academy and Performance, her role requires a challenging combination of performing, teaching and delivering masterclasses to over 300 students.

Ethel Smyth

The Boatswain's Mate

Unlike many historic female composers, Dame Ethel Smyth did not labour in obscurity. She benefitted from her upper middle-class social status, which gave her access to influential people who championed her music. Through these connections, Smyth was also able to secure funds to mount professional productions of all six of her operas during her lifetime, a rare accomplishment for any composer, much less a British woman in the early 20th century. Smyth was awarded the DBE (Daughter of the British Empire) in 1922, as well as several honorary degrees, including one from Oxford.

At 19, over her father's strenuous objections (he did not believe music a proper occupation for women), Smyth moved to Leipzig to study music at the Conservatory, although she left after a year, dissatisfied with her professors and



the curriculum (they did not teach orchestration, for example). Smyth continued her music studies privately with Heinrich von Herzogenberg. Through him Smyth met Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann, and Joseph Joachim, who offered critical feedback on her compositions.

The *Boatswain's Mate*, Smyth's fourth opera, is a comic opera with a libretto by Smyth, inspired by William Wymark Jacobs's eponymous story. Retired boatswain Harry Benn, with the help of his friend Ned Travers, schemes to win the love of innkeeper Mrs. Waters. As in all comic operas, hijinks ensue when Mrs. Waters discovers Benn's plan, much to his chagrin.

The Overture does not contain music from the opera itself; instead, Smyth said she intended the overture to "be a few minutes of cheerful music which would serve as overture to any cheerful play."

The Overture does quote extensively from Smyth's 1910 anthem, *March of the Women*, which she composed for the Women's Social and Political Union, an activist group leading the fight for women's suffrage in England. Some have speculated that Smyth included *March of the Women* as a musical indication of Mrs. Waters' independent character. The first verse and melody has been reproduced below.

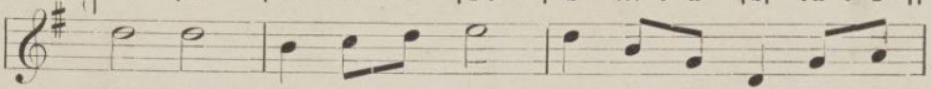
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The March of the Women.

ETHEL SMYTH

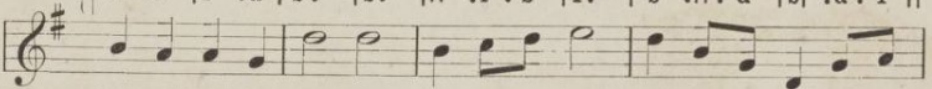
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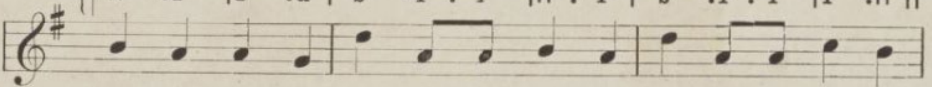
Sing, sing up with your song, Cry with the wind, for the

{ | m : r | r : d | s :— | s :— | m : f . s | l :— | s : m . d | s₁ : d . r ||



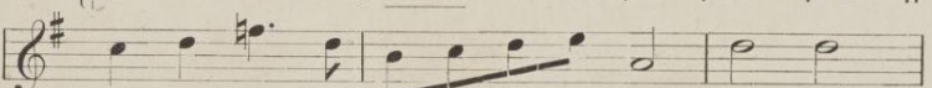
dawn is break-ing. March, march, swing you a - long. Wide blows our ban - ner and

{ | m : r | r : d | s : r . r | m : r | s : r . r | f : m ||



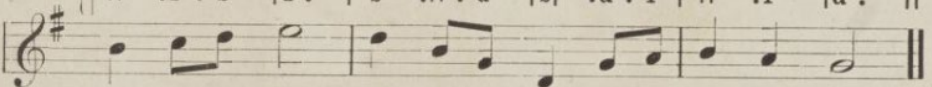
hope is wak - ing. Song with its sto - ry, Dreams with their glo - ry,

f.c. { | f d¹ : r¹ | f¹ : - r¹ | t . d¹ : r¹ . m¹ | l :— | r¹ s :— | s :— || G.t.



Lo! they call and glad— is their word. Hark, hark,

{ | m : f . s | l :— | s : m . d | s₁ : d . r | m : r | d :— ||



hear how it swells, Thunder of free - dom, the voice of the Lord.

George Gershwin

Concerto in F

In the year 1925, in addition to continuing to satisfy a large public clamouring for more of his sweet and tender, buoyant and rambunctious songs that could be sung, whistled, and hummed, George Gershwin took another foray into the classics. This one, the *Concerto in F* for Piano and Orchestra, was an even more ambitious venture than the previous year's *Rhapsody in Blue*: a full-fledged concerto in time-honored three-movement form and a work that was all Gershwin, down to his own orchestration, which had not been the case with *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Those who thought Tin Pan Alley's super-composer had gotten the "serious" bug



out of his system with *Rhapsody* were wrong—in a way. Although the phenomenally talented and successful songwriter turned in earnest to the serious musical forms of concerto, symphonic poem (*American in Paris*), and opera (*Porgy and Bess*), he didn't change his musical persona for the concert hall—no split personality for Gershwin. Whereas most American composers of his era, many with a far more highly developed traditional background than he had, were writing in the fashionable European styles, Gershwin cultivated his mother tongue—the one truly original American vernacular: jazz.

It may be true that Gershwin's jazz has a highly polished commercial veneer, and that what is considered the real—that is, improvisational—jazz burned brightly for only a relatively small audience. Still, there is no denying the strength and originality of the Gershwin product, in whatever form it appears. As for the *Concerto in F*, it is jazz all the way, and a remarkable achievement for a 27-year-old tunesmith.

The Paris connection was for Gershwin extremely important. His admiration for French music is certainly made tangible in the *Concerto's* *Adagio* second movement. There, an extended (46-bar) introduction confined almost exclusively to winds and brass (no piano at all) conjures an ambiance that goes directly to the heart of Debussy and, somewhat,

of Ravel. Thematically, the main tune that finally emerges in the piano is hinted at early in the introduction by a muted trumpet. The fascinating manipulations of this theme by piano and orchestra and the figurations and filigree that evolve from it show Gershwin at his most inventive and bracing. The construction of the movement is highly original, what with the reappearance of the introduction prefacing a piano cadenza that in turn leads into the “big” tune of the movement—a Gershwin song that is, well, irresistibly Gershwin. The melody is given the grand concerto treatment and holds up very well until it is cut off abruptly for a nostalgic, abbreviated return of the motif from the introduction, this time intriguingly scored for piano and flute.

The outer movements are, expectedly, fast ones that the composer, in a brief analytical note, described as follows:

“The first movement employs the Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettle drums, supported by the other percussion instruments and with a Charleston motif introduced by bassoon, horns, clarinets, and violas. The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later a second theme is introduced by the piano.

“The second movement has a poetic, nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated.

“The final movement reverts to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping the same pace throughout.”

Ruth Gipps

Symphony No.3

Ruth Gipps lived a remarkable life in a society which was not prepared to fully accept all of her considerable abilities. Accomplished as pianist, oboist, composer, and conductor, her success during her life was limited by her gender. Although she conducted choruses and orchestras, wrote articles, lectured and taught, she was constantly frustrated that major conductors failed to consider programming her works and major



orchestras refused to engage her as conductor.

Among her academic positions, she taught at Trinity College of Music, the Royal College of Music and Kingston Polytechnic. She also conducted several amateur and semi-professional orchestras, including the London Repertoire Orchestra which she founded and conducted for 31 years.

It is with the London Repertoire Orchestra that Ruth Gipps conducted the premiere of her Symphony No. 3 in March of 1966. Her two previous symphonies had been written in the 1940s, during World War II. Longer and more ambitious than its predecessors, this symphony finds the composer using traditional tonality and modality (rather than the then-in-vogue 12-tone system) as well as forms familiar to symphonic audiences.

The first movement begins with its main theme in the cellos and violas. This material is developed through transformation throughout the movement and is similar to the opening theme of the finale. The second movement is a theme and variations, including a variation where the theme is inverted and used as counterpoint against the original. The third movement is a scherzo in 7/8 time with a lovely ostinato from the unusual combination of harp, viola pizzicato, and timbales (antique pitched cymbals). Against this ostinato, a figure of

extraordinary delicacy is woven. The finale ensues without a break, connected by the solo flute which introduces the first of the main themes of the movement. After this introduction, an allegro ensues. A large fugue is well developed until interrupted by the coda. Themes from the scherzo return, and the Symphony closes with the original first movement theme in its original key.

Ruth Gipps Remembered

Steve Jones (Viola)

On arriving in London in 1975 I joined the Greenwich Symphony Orchestra, which was at that time conducted by Bryan Gipps, a charming old chap and an excellent violinist, who had been principal second violin in Sir Thomas Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He suggested I might also be interested in an orchestra formed by his younger sister Ruth Gipps (known to everyone as "Wid"), the London Repertoire Orchestra (LRO), that met twice every week from 6 to 9 pm at a school in Clerkenwell.

The orchestra's stated mission was to familiarise students from the music colleges with as much of the repertoire as possible. In every 3-hour session we rehearsed a different short programme, usually including a symphony or a concerto and winding up with a play-through. There was no subscription but

at the interval Wid's husband Robert stood at the door and collected 50p from us all. Their transport was an old Morgan sports car whose hood was never known to be raised.

Comprising about 40% students or recent music school graduates, the rest being amateurs and a few active professionals, the LRO was very much Wid's creation and personal fiefdom. Her knowledge of the repertoire was comprehensive and she was able to fathom unfamiliar scores better than anyone I've ever met. Once or twice each year we'd play one of her own compositions of which her *Leviathan* for contrabassoon and orchestra was a popular curiosity.

The LRO was also a vehicle for players with solo ambitions to try out their concertos. I don't recall many of their names but on one occasion a couple of teenage hotshots came from the Menuhin School, one of them being Tasmin Little. Up-and-coming conductors would also find the LRO a willing horse to ride. Early in his career conductor Mark Elder was granted a whole Friday rehearsal to get acquainted with Elgar's *Falstaff* before giving a broadcast concert.

Wid had a great pair of ears which for us was both a blessing and a curse. On detecting a wrong note in the midst of complex harmony she would instantly know who played it, and probably why. If we should show signs of getting behind

the beat, she'd naturally row back to lend a hand, appearing to physically pull us along with a bowed back and an effortful expression. Eccentric to a considerable degree, her concert attire comprised a selection of flimsy, floaty, flowery dresses whose hems ended four inches above her trainers.

Wid completed her fifth and last symphony in 1982. The premiere performance was given by us, the LRO, in the concert hall of the Guildhall School of Music. The event was recorded and is available on YouTube, but I hope that our effort will soon be superseded by a professional recording.

Wid was exceptionally kind to all her players, some of the younger ones becoming her protégés and even quasi-adoptees. I feel very privileged to have had the chance to learn from such a hugely accomplished musician and great-hearted person.

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

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All rehearsals take place in Banbury in term time on Tuesday evenings from 7.30 to 9.30 pm.

