Der Wald
Opera in one Act
Ethel Smyth

Natalya Romaniw, Claire Barnett-Jones, Robert Murray, Andrew Shore, Morgan Pearse, Matthew Brook
BBC Singers
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
John Andrews
Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)

Der Wald (The Forest)

Music-Drama with Prologue and Epilogue in One Act
Sung in English

Natalya Romaniw soprano, Röschen
Claire Barnett-Jones mezzo-soprano, Iolanthe
Robert Murray tenor, Heinrich
Andrew Shore baritone, A Pedlar
Morgan Pearse baritone, Rudolf
Matthew Brook bass, Peter
Rebecca Lea soprano, A Youth
Andrew Rupp baritone, First Huntsman

BBC Singers
Martin Fitzpatrick Chorus Master

BBC Symphony Orchestra
Stephen Bryant Leader

John Andrews conductor

Produced in association with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Singers and BBC Radio 3

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Total playing time [56:21]

* World premiere recording
In one of her many volumes of autobiography, Ethel Smyth describes how ‘lying buried in grass and flowers’ she and her companion were ‘often wakened by the choral singing of larks to discuss the projected choral singing in Der Wald’. This was in 1897 and she and her friend Henry Brewster were enjoying a cycling holiday in the Abruzzi region of Italy. ‘Bicycles were practically unknown in those parts, and our appearance excited frantic interest’, she explained. Back at her home in Surrey she was reputed to be the first woman ever to be seen cycling in the neighbourhood, often smoking a cigar and usually accompanied by her dog.

When in 1867, her father, Major-General John Hall Smyth, was given the command of the Royal Artillery at Aldershot, he had moved his family into a large house called ‘Frimhurst’ at Frimley Green and it was there, at the age of twelve, that the course of the young Ethel’s life was to be changed forever. She had heard a governess who had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory playing a Beethoven piano sonata, and ‘then and there conceived the plan, carried out seven years later, of studying at Leipzig’ and giving up her life to music. With her father being very much against the idea of his daughter travelling abroad to study music, it took her those seven years to persuade him to agree to her plan. Not long after she arrived in Germany she was introduced to the Austrian composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg and his beautiful wife Elisabeth, known to her friends as Lisl. While Ethel was soon to fall in love with her, Lisl was to treat Ethel as the daughter she never had. Through the Herzogenbergs, Ethel was to meet many of the leading musicians of the day, notably Johannes Brahms whose music and piano playing she greatly admired although, as a man, she found him rather coarse.

Ethel was also introduced to Lisl’s sister, Julia, whose husband was the man destined to become her closest male friend. His name was Henry Bennet Brewster, generally known as Harry or simply H.B. In describing her first meeting with him, she recalled how he ‘seemed to have read all books, to have thought all thoughts’ and that he was ‘extremely good-looking, clean-shaven but for a moustache, a perfect nose and brow, brown eyes set curiously far apart, and fair fluffy hair’. She also noted that he was ‘half English, half American, born and bred in France and domiciled in Italy’. Ethel was also more than fascinated by Julia Brewster who she described as being ‘the strangest human
being, if human she was, that I or anyone else ever came across'. For her part, Julia, whose constitution was not strong, once remarked to Ethel that she had been feeling ‘very well’ in order to enjoy her company.

It was not long before H.B. had fallen in love with Ethel but it took longer for her to fall in love with H.B. As she once remarked in a letter to him: ‘I wonder why it is so much easier for me to love my own sex more passionately than yours. I can’t make it out for I am a very healthy-minded person’. After Julia’s death in 1895, H.B. tried to persuade Ethel to marry him, but to no avail.

The following year, H.B. wrote to tell Ethel that he had ‘drawn up a little plan for your new opera, just by way of suggesting something to you’. He told her to make any use of it that she could, adding that ‘what I have tried for is to frame the passionate human story, to “set” it, in the impression of it that she could, adding that ‘what I have tried for is to frame the passionate human story, to “set” it, in the impression. Its peace must close over the march of Nature – Nature that envraps human destiny and recks [cares for] nothing of mortal joys and sorrows’. H.B. had also assisted Ethel with the libretto of her first opera, Fantasio. This work had its first performance on 24 May 1898 at the Hoftheater in Weimar and she was very keen to have another German premiere for her second opera, despite the fact that the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate had already expressed an interest in it; indeed she had been sent to Paris to play it to André Messager who was to be Covent Garden’s Chief Conductor during 1901. She also went to Dresden to visit Count Nikolaus von Seebach, the Indendant of the Opera House there, who had shown some interest in Fantasio. In the event, as this meeting came to nothing, she set her sights next on Berlin where she had an ally in the stage director, one Georg Pierson, who, according to Ethel, wanted to ‘demonstrate to an astonished world what sort of work a woman, an English woman, could turn out’.

Unfortunately for Ethel, Pierson died suddenly while preparing for the first performance of Der Wald at the Königliches Opernhaus, but this did not diminish her determination to get it on to the stage. She took over many of the arrangements, even ‘swarming up ladders and across beams’ to sort out the lighting to her satisfaction, and dealing with some rather recalcitrant singers. The conductor was to be Karl Muck who, despite his hatred of England and its current Boer War, very much approved of Der Wald. In a 1937 radio broadcast, Ethel recalled how she had found that Muck, whom she had known in London, was now a ‘man of iron and ice with white set face and a shaking voice’ who told her that he was willing to produce her opera but ‘between him, the composer and the English race there could be no friendly intercourse, merely the necessary business relations’. The fact that Ethel was very friendly with the German Chancellor Count Bernhard von Bülow and his wife, and had been introduced by them to the Kaiser, helped her cause more than somewhat.

The first performance of Der Wald took place on 9 April 1902 and, according to its composer, ‘went better than one could have hoped’ with the audience, despite some ‘well-organized booing and hissing’ before and after, being ‘interested, attentive and responsive’ to her intentions. The Press was generally hostile but several members of the orchestra at the following day’s rehearsal told Ethel that her opera was ‘simply magnificent’ (einfach grossartig).

There were three more performances in Berlin to increasingly enthusiastic audiences, which was possibly why Ethel was offered a date for a Covent Garden premiere later that season, providing that she could get the libretto translated into English in time. So it was that the first London performance of the opera took place on 18 July 1902 and was, according to its composer, ‘one of my few almost wholly delightful operatic experiences’ and ‘the only real blazing triumph I have ever had’. This time she had a ‘splendid cast, and a first-rate stage-manager and producer rolled into one’ called Francis Neilson who thought the opera ‘a strange and beautiful thing’. At one point during the rehearsals, Ethel had to call again on her friends in high places when it seemed that the production was about to be postponed. According to Neilson it was Lady Warwick who was persuaded to send a message to Covent Garden to the effect that King Edward VII, whose mistress she had been for some time, wished to send a representative to the first night of Der Wald. According to Ethel, however, it was the King’s sister-in-law, the Duchess of Connaught, who informed the directors that the whole Royal Family wished to attend it.
Another hurried trip to Paris resulted in Ethel persuading Maurice Grau, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, to have *Der Wald* performed there — you are ‘certainly a businesslike woman’ he told her. The performance, which took place on 11 March 1903, as part of a double bill with Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, marked the first time that an opera composed by a woman had been seen at the Metropolitan; there was not to be another until L’Amour de Loin by the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023) was produced there in 2016. The second New York performance of *Der Wald* was coupled with Donizetti’s *[La fille du régiment]*.

Despite the fact that Grau was taken ill with Donizetti’s *La fille du régiment* during the preparations for *Der Wald*, all went well and it proved to be the most financially successful production that season. After the first performance, the composer who, at the insistence of her sister, Mary Hunter, was attired in a gown of heliotrope silk’. When she had provided her with a ‘modest evening gown of black silk and with red roses in her hair, her fascinations fail, however, to prevail over Henrich’s part. Her fascinations fail, however, to prevail over Henrich’s love for Röschen.

The Pedlar’s denunciation of the young woodcutter as a weakling. Struck by Heinrich’s good looks she tries to detach him from his bride and make him enter into her service at the castle. Complaints and reproaches to him in 1902 she wrote that ‘I feel I must fight for *Der Wald* because I want women to turn their minds to big and difficult jobs; not just to go on hugging the shore, afraid to put out to sea’. A decade or so later she was to give up composing for two years in order to join Emmeline Pankhurst (another of her female passions) in her fight to achieve ‘Votes for Women’. Indeed, she wrote a marching song which was to become the suffragettes’ anthem — but that is another story.

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CHORUS OF PEASANTS: Oh Röschen you are going to wed! Freedom is sweet and men can wait, let them wait! No, no, we cannot wait, so come kiss me quickly if you can.

[Slaughter and confusion: enter a Pedlar with his pack, leading a bear. The women scream.]

Scene II

PEDLAR: Fear not, he is gentle as a child! [He opens his box.] Ope’ wide your eyes and stare! Combs and brushes, rings and lockets, knives and purses for your pockets, wovens goods of finest Flemish stocks and smocks without a blemish, these and more I have to show. See my wares before you go! Story books from learned Milan, life of saint and death of villain, tales of war and battles gory, wild adventures, deeds of glory! See, the matter may affright you, but the prices will delight you! Pins and needles, bows and laces, ribbons, garters, daggers, bracces, potent drug and healing plaster going fast and going faster! Look! Oh give my wares a glance! Buy! Oh give my wares a chance!

CHORUS OF PEASANTS: Gracefully done! Come, show your wares I pray; come give me the laces and scarlet ribbons, hurrah hurrah! Though humble be the gifts we bring gentle Röschen, deign accept it.

CHORUS OF PEASANTS: In the greenwood let us dance come join me! [Dancing and stamping of feet]

RÖSCHEN: In the greenwood let us dance come join me! [Dancing and stamping of feet]

RÖSCHEN: In the greenwood let us dance come join me! [Dancing and stamping of feet]

CHORUS OF PEASANTS: In the greenwood let us dance! [Dancing and stamping of feet]

PEDLAR: What horn is this that rings through the forest? [Ope’ wide your eyes and stare!]

RÖSCHEN: Look at the dance, ye laggards join the dance! [One, two, three, bim! Bam! Come ye three!]

PEDLAR: We will be there his bride to guard!

RÖSCHEN: Alone! [Pressingly] The priest has numbered.

PEDLAR: Weird is the sound of that horn! Bruin! Here let us stay!

RÖSCHEN: Fear not for me! [Pressingly] The priest has much to ask you and why should you stay?

Scene III

PEDLAR: If that be your road then go with God!

RÖSCHEN: Peccatoribus. Ora pro nobis nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

CHORUS OF PEASANTS: Sancta Maria Mater Dei, Ora pro nobis peccatoribus. Ora pro nobis nunc et in hora mortis nostri.

Scene IV

PEDLAR: Is it the sound of that horn? Bruin! Here let us stay!

RÖSCHEN: What simple folk are these!

PEDLAR: [Pressingly] The priest has numbered.

RÖSCHEN: Joyfully, Heinrich, at last!

HEINRICH: Sh! Are you alone?

RÖSCHEN: Alone! And list’ning for your step, but what have you there?

HEINRICH: [Dramatically] The game for our feast have I brought you!

RÖSCHEN: [Horrified] Heinrich! Heed you the horn we dread?

HEINRICH: I heard it from far, but scarcely heeded.

RÖSCHEN: [Greatly agitated] ‘Tis death to slay the deer! Ah my love!

HEINRICH: No soul was near! Where can we hide it?

[Exit Peter in direction of village: the Pedlar has packed his box and slowly climbs the woodland path. Röschen carries the barrel and glasses indoors, and collects her presents: when singing she is sometimes indoors sometimes outside. The Pedlar, intimidated by the sound of the horn and by her song cannot make his mind up to go, but she cannot see him.]

RÖSCHEN: DANGER: DANGER: DANGER: DANGER: DANGER:

FAIER TO BEHOLD SHE WALKS THE WOODLAND BRIGHTENING OUR MAIDS WITH THE GLANCE OF HER EVIL EYE, OUR YOUTHS WITH HER LUST DEVOURING!

FAIER TO BEHOLD SHE WALKS THE WOODLAND BRIGHTENING OUR MAIDS WITH THE GLANCE OF HER EVIL EYE, OUR YOUTHS WITH HER LUST DEVOURING!

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HEINRICH: scorn not my fears. the dreadful horn.

PEDLAR: [Aside] Twere well to be going, no one trusts a poor pedlar's word. Men's lives count as less than nought, but game must abound, come Bruin! Let's go while we may! [Exits without being seen]

HEINRICH: [covering up the well] There! Lie safe till tomorrow! [To Röschen] But why so pale? If danger were, it is past!

RÖSCHEN: My heart was heavy, I waited long.

HEINRICH: Hear what fate befell me.

RÖSCHEN: My heart was heavy, I waited long. it is past!

HEINRICH: But why so pale? If danger were, it is past!

RÖSCHEN: O what pow'rs can part us? What power can part us? [They turn to the forest] Turn to us and hear us, O sacred forest hear our cry, if harm be near us, watch o'er thine own and shelter us who dwell beneath thy roof! O Mother, thy mighty heart hath taught us mighty love! Changeless, eternal love. In childhood's years our playmate and friend, we still implore thy fostering care, need they counsel, crave thine aid! Sombre loving mother! From hidden peril defend us! Forest defend thine own! [Voices of the Spirits from above]

CHORUS OF WOOD-SPIRITS: How swiftly passeth the day! Of yore the hunter's song was the woodman's delight! Forest defend thine own! From hidden peril defend us!

IOLANTHE: So deep the forest gloom, so dim the light! In man's delight!

Voices of the Spirits from above

HEINRICH: Lithe of limb, with thews of steel, in the lusty pride of youth! Methinks I can see the bright axe flash as it cleaves the air! Friend, you must surely know me?

HEINRICH: [Unearthly!] I know you not. Unless perchance 'tis Dame Iolanthe.

IOLANTHE: [Smiling] You whisper my name with paling cheek... Heed, heed not these fears? But draw nigh, of your pity help my weakness! The hunt was up at dawn today and fierce the noontide, Heinrich I faint for thirst!

[She sinks upon a rock as if exhausted, and hands him her drinking horn, and gazes after him admiringly as he goes to drink and falls it.]

IOLANTHE: [Aside] Ne'er gazed these eyes on fairer sight! So young and pure so proud and strong; what sylvan god is this haunting his glades as of yore for my delight?

[Enraptured by Iolanthe, Heinrich returns and hands her the horn: she drinks, and gazes longingly at him.]

[Heinrich turns round, sees Iolanthe, and starts violently.]

IOLANTHE: My friend, what alarms you?

HEINRICH: With hesitation I heard no footsteps!

IOLANTHE: So deep the forest gloom, so dim the light! In this woodland solitude, what power is there for us save in Death as is Love! Thine am I heart of my heart art thou!

[Exits without being seen]

Scene V

[Heinrich turns round, sees Iolanthe, and starts violently.]

IOLANTHE: My friend, what alarms you?

HEINRICH: With hesitation I heard no footsteps!

IOLANTHE: So deep the forest gloom, so dim the light! In this woodland solitude, what power is there for us save in Death as is Love! Thine am I heart of my heart art thou!

[Exit without being seen]
IOLANTHE: ‘Tis well! You served me in my need, demand of me what boon you will... it shall be granted!

[As a sign from her the huntsman hands her a hunting horn attached to a chain.]

HEINRICH: [Shyly] I know not what!

IOLANTHE: Then be mine the choice! [Throwing the chain around his neck] My gallant huntsmen you join today! I see in your eye the gleam that I love, the glance that quails not! Noble arms we will train you to wield and this I know. Young Heinrich will wield them nobly! [Gently] Heinrich be my servant faithful and true!

HEINRICH: Oh, Lady dared I demand of your grace a favour my freedom were the boon! To us of the forest the world of men has nought to say, no happier, no prouder lot I ask, then He ordained who placed me here!

IOLANTHE: So say you now, who ne’er beheld the glory, the pride of Yonder world; ah! Could you but see the knights in their glittering armour clad, with noble dames at their side, proudly, gaily to some fair tourney speed! Up then, and on where glory’s meed awaits you, where victory oh Heinrich my pride, my strength have left me, Woman has ruled the world? Sated and cloyed am I with verdant bloom the laurels for him who knows not fear!

RUDOLF: Ah turn not in wrath away, what fault is mine?

IOLANTHE: Speak but do not linger say on and go! RUDOLF: At noon I missed you, and long sought you in the gloomy forest aisles, with many a lurking danger haunted: they side, proudly, gaily to some fair tourney speed! Up then, and on where glory’s meed awaits you, where glory’s meed awaits you, where

Scene VI
[Heinrich goes into the cottage as one dreaming: Rudolph enters in agitation: Iolanthe looks at him coldly. He pauses, in silence.]

IOLANTHE: [Coldly] I called you not!

RUDOLF: [Rudely] I would speak with you!

IOLANTHE: [With contempt] The village maid that left you but now? She ‘tis that keeps you! Stands ‘twixt the blaze of the sun and you! O fool! [Imperiously] ‘Tis for Iolanthe to command! Her humble slaves are ye! This is my will, bid the maid farewell; [Count Rudolf is seen hastily approaching] then straight way to the castle hie you, my further pleasure and to her my troth is plighted!

IOLANTHE: [Contemptuously] Nor sinner nor saint, you wind-shaken reed would fair be Lord of my heart? [Fiercely] Enough! Too weak the chain that held me. If spell you cast, its power is gone, gone! And I am free!

RUDOLF: [As if fighting for breath] You Woodman, you love him, you love him!

IOLANTHE: [With wild defiance] And what if I love him? Who dares say me nay?

[A noise is heard behind the scenes and the Pedlar’s voice]

PEDLAR: Have mercy! Have mercy!

IOLANTHE: Send these brawlers away and go, yes! Go! [She disappears in the cottage]

Scene VII
[The Pedlar is dragged in by Huntsmen; Others lead the Pedlar.]

PEDLAR: O spare us, o spare us, what harm have we done, and to her heart, Iolanthe!

IOLANTHE: [With contempt] And what if I love him?

PEDLAR: Kind sirs, have mercy! Have mercy!

HUNTSMEN: Our sport you have spoilt!

PEDLAR: Have mercy! Have mercy!

IOLANTHE: 'Tis well! You served me in my need, demand of me what boon you will... it shall be granted!

PEDLAR: [In despair] Mercy! Have mercy!

HUNTSMEN: His master shall ride him, come quick tie him on, the impudent rogue.

[Huntsmen seize the rope and begin pulling on it] You fellows... Let us duck him in the well! Up with the bucket!

HUNTSMEN: Come haul away help us.

FIRST HUNTSMAN: But what have we here? Tis heavy as lead.

HUNTSMEN: ‘Tis Heavy as lead!

[Huntsmen pull up the deer, and are frightened]

PEDLAR: Have mercy! Have mercy!

HUNTSMEN: Tie his hands!

PEDLAR: Kind sirs, let me go!

FIRST HUNTSMAN: You cannot deceive us!

PEDLAR: Kind sirs, have mercy! Have mercy!

HUNTSMEN: But look! His teeth are gone! What shall we do to plague him?

PEDLAR: Lord I am not guilty!

RUDOLF: [Stepping forward] Yeondr the culprit! Sieze him!

PEDLAR: Lord I am not guilty!

HUNTSMEN: But look! His teeth are gone! What shall we do to plague him?

PEDLAR: [Sternly] Say what you know!
Beware! Rudolph, Lord of the forest is master yet! and lead him to death! deadlier crime than this now let him atone! Huntsman, pointing to the cottage dread the death he must die. Vengeance, vengeance! A This deer he slew he in the forest. Black is the crime and pierced be that heart by me! sway me now. Through him, your false heart has chosen, raving IOLANTHE: Still in my path? RUDOLF: Scorned and betrayed I fear you not! IOLANTHE throws open the cottage door and remains Standing on the sill, furiously angryScene VIII Pedlar a purse his head. This and more be mine to avenge. RUDOLF: His head. A youth I saw... PEDLAR: I know him not, but I was there when he hid his head. That and more be mine to avenge. [Throwing the Pedlar a purse] Is for your pains 'tis well. I know the man! PEDLAR: A crossbow, how was he clad? PEDLAR: Like a Woodman. PEDLAR: I will scourge they pride! Bow, insolent hind, thy neck! Here shalt thou sue for mercy! And she, the foolish maid, whose feeble hands hold him back, shall kneel, shall grovel here in the dust.

RÖSCHEN & HEINRICH: Behold I wait! If this be thy council, proud maid, his blood be on thy head! [Heinrich's gesture indicates that he will not go: she comes nearer and looks at him threateningly] IOLANTHE: I wait for you! IOLANTHE: If this be thy council, proud maid, his blood be on thy head! [To Heinrich] Follow me or die! [Heinrich walks firmly up to Iolanthe] My life you offer me, my faith, my love the price! Then take my life, [Iolanthe beckons to her huntsmen] thou damned witch. [Throws her horn at her feet] Thus I thank thee, thus I defy thee! Scorn, abhor thee! Strike home, and hell take thy soul! IOLANTHE: Enough thou base-born slave, then die! [Iolanthe points to her hunting knife significantly: the hunters fall upon Heinrich and stab him] IOLANTHE: Behold I wait! IOLANTHE: [With cold sarcasm] Ah me! Well-a-day! Perchance 'twas unwise to refuse my favours; Iolanthe had pleaded his cause, nor pleaded in vain; but maybe my power may prevent him e'en now, all yet may be well. [She goes fixedly at Heinrich. To the Huntsmen] My steed! I would be gone. [To Heinrich, looking at him sternly] If in wiser humbler mood you repent, and fain would serve me, the follow me. IOLANTHE: Behold I wait! The huntsmen fall upon Heinrich and stab him. IOLANTHE: How can I bear it, go! Go! Or you are lost beloved! IOLANTHE: Behold I wait! HEINRICH: Our life is a shadow that passes, but love is mighty and deathless. RÖSCHEN & HEINRICH: O joy! O pain! Nor danger nor death can part us, nor danger nor death can part us now. [They are clasped in a last embrace; Iolanthe's horse is led on in the background; she steps forward]

Scene IX

HEINRICH: Our life is a shadow that passes, but love is mighty and deathless. RÖSCHEN & HEINRICH: O joy! O pain! Nor danger nor death can part us, nor danger nor death can part us now. [They are clasped in a last embrace; Iolanthe's horse is led on in the background; she steps forward]

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[Image 510x63 to 580x88]
Claire Barnett-Jones (mezzo-soprano). Fast becoming one of the most sought-after voices on the operatic stage and concert platform, Claire Barnett-Jones was named one of Operawire's Top 10 Rising Stars and was Finalist and Winner of the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2021. Operatic highlights have included Fricka Die Walküre for the Tiroler Festspiele Erz, Waltraute Die Walküre for the Bayreuth Festival; Jezibaba Rusalka (new production) for the Théâtre du Capitole, Toulouse and Madame Flora The Medium for Frankfurt Opera. In concert she has worked with Sir Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra for Katya Kabanova and Edward Gardner and the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Sossostris Midsummer Marriage.

Matthew Brook (bass) has appeared as a soloist worldwide, and has enjoyed working with ensembles including all the major UK orchestras, the Freiburger Barockorchester, the Collegium Vocale Gent, the Gabrieli Consort, the Dunedin Consort, The Sixteen, Nederlandse Bachvereniging, the Handel and Haydn Society, Les Violons du Roy Quebec, and Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, amongst many others. He has developed an international reputation for his interpretation of the music of Bach and Handel, and regularly performs pieces such as Beethoven Ninth Symphony and Missa Solemnis, Berlioz L’Enfance du Christ, Brahms Requiem, Elgar Dream of Gerontius, Haydn The Creation, Mendelssohn Elijah, and Tippett A Child of Our Time.

Robert Murray (tenor) studied at the Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio, and was a Jette Parker Young Artist. He has performed principal roles with the Royal Opera House, Hamburg State Opera, English and Welsh National operas, Norwegian Opera, Bergen National Opera, Beijing Music Festival, Venice Biennale, and the Salzburg and Edinburgh festivals. He made his debuts with the Bayerische Staatsoper (Peter Grimes), Teatro all Scala Milan in (Thomas Adès The Tempest) and the Theater an der Wien (title role of Handel Belshazzar). He appears regularly in concert with Edward Gardner, Paul McCreesh, Harry Christophers and Sir Simon Rattle.

Morgan Pearse (baritone). Australian born, Morgan Pearse is widely recognised as one of the most exciting and talented baritones of his generation. He made his professional début with English National Opera singing Figaro / The Barber of Seville and since then has worked at the highest level performing regularly with all of the major UK orchestras, the Moscow Philharmonic, Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony, Academy of Ancient Music, Israel Philharmonic and Netherlands Radio Philharmonic. Operatic roles have include Figaro / Le nozze di Figaro for Opernhaus Zurich, Escamillo / Carmen and Figaro / Barbier for South Australian Opera, and Papageno / Die Zauberflöte for the Badisches Staatstheater. He has given recitals at various venues including the Wigmore Hall.

Natalya Romaniw (soprano). Welsh-Ukrainian soprano Natalya Romaniw is hailed as one of the most exciting young stars on the stage today. Winner of the Young Artist of the Year at the Gramophone Classical Music Awards 2020, the prestigious Singer Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards and the 2016 Critics’ Choice Award for Music, Romaniw is hailed by the British press as ‘the outstanding soprano of her generation’ (The Daily Telegraph). Highlights of Romaniw’s 2023/24 season include her role début as Judith in a semi-staged Bartók Bluebeard’s Castle for the English National Opera and a return to Grange Park Opera. On the concert platform, Romaniw will feature with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and perform Verdi Requiem with the Philharmonia and Santtu-Matías Rouvali following her critically acclaimed début of the work with the Hallé and Sir Mark Elder.

Andrew Shore (baritone) is one of the most outstanding baritones of his generation. He is widely recognised as one of the most exciting and talented baritones and since his critically acclaimed début of the work with the Hallé and Sir Mark Elder. He has performed Fricka Die Walküre for the Tiroler Festspiele, Waltraute Die Walküre for the Bayreuth Festival; Jezibaba Rusalka (new production) for the Théâtre du Capitole, Toulouse and Madame Flora The Medium for Frankfurt Opera. In concert he has worked with Sir Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra for Katya Kabanova and Edward Gardner and the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Sossostris Midsummer Marriage.

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BBC Symphony Orchestra

The BBC Symphony Orchestra has been at the heart of British musical life since it was founded in 1930. It plays a central role in the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, performing at the First and Last Night each year in addition to regular appearances throughout the Proms season with the world’s leading conductors and soloists.

The BBC SO performs an annual season of concerts at the Barbican in London, where it is Associate Orchestra. Its commitment to contemporary music is demonstrated by a range of premieres each season, as well as Total Immersion days devoted to specific composers or themes, and its richly varied programming includes well-loved works at the heart of classical music, newly commissioned music, collaborations with highly regarded musicians from the world of pop and, in recent years, evenings of words and music featuring readings by well-known authors.

The BBC SO has close relationships with its world-class roster of conductors and guest artists: Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo, Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevksa, holder of the Günter Wand Conducting Chair Semyon Bychkov, Conductor Laureate Sir Andrew Davis and Creative Artist in Association Jules Buckley. It also makes regular appearances with the BBC Symphony Chorus.

The vast majority of performances are broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and a number of studio recordings each season are free to attend. These often feature up-and-coming new talent, including members of BBC Radio 3’s New Generation Artists scheme. All broadcasts are available for 30 days on BBC Sounds and the BBC SO can also be seen on BBC TV and BBC iPlayer and heard on the BBC’s online archive, Experience Classical.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Proms – also offer enjoyable and innovative education and community activities and take a leading role in the BBC Ten Pieces and BBC Young Composer programmes.

BBC Singers

The BBC Singers have held a unique place at the heart of the UK’s choral scene for almost 100 years and have collaborated with many of the world’s leading composers, conductors and soloists.

They promote a 50:50 gender policy for composers whose music they perform, and they champion composers from all backgrounds. Recent concerts and recordings include music by Joanna Marsh, Soumik Datta, Cecilia McDowall, Sun Keting, and Roderick Williams, and they have performed with singers Laura Mvula, Clare Teal, South Asian dance company Akademi and world music fusion band Kabantu.

The BBC Singers appear annually at the BBC Proms. The 2023 season will see them perform at the First and Last Night of the Proms, with Sir Simon Rattle, an evening with Jon Hopkins and the BBC Symphony Orchestra and a concert with Sofi Jeannin performing two BBC commissions.

The choir are based at the BBC’s Maida Vale Studios where they rehearse and record for Radio 3.

They present an annual series of concerts at Milton Court Concert Hall, perform free concerts in London, and appear at major festivals.

The BBC Singers also offer a wide programme of innovative learning activities working with schools, colleges/universities and community groups.
John Andrews (conductor)

Born in Nairobi and brought up in Manchester, John Andrews graduated from Cambridge University with a doctorate in music and history. He won the Orchestra Prize at the Bela Bartok International Opera Conducting Competition and the Leonard Ingrams Memorial Prize from Garsington Opera. With a special affinity for Italian bel canto and English baroque, he has conducted over forty operas with companies including Garsington Opera, the Grange Festival, Buxton Festival, Opera Holland Park, English Touring Opera, Opera de Baugé and the Volkstheater Rostock in Germany. An exponent of neglected English music, he is Artistic Director of Red Squirrel Opera. He has recorded works by Sir Arthur Sullivan including The Light of the World and Haddon Hall, The Mountebanks (Gilbert/Cellier) and The Judgement of Paris (Arne) for Dutton Epoch, Arnold’s The Dancing Master for Resonus Classics (which won the BBC Music Magazine Opera Recording Award 2021), Sherwood's Double Concerto and Cowen’s Fifth Symphony for EM Records and orchestral works by Christopher Wright and Nicholas Barton with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for Toccata Classics. He is Principal Guest Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, and Conductor-in-Association with the English Symphony Orchestra.

Malcolm Arnold: The Dancing Master Op. 34
Eleanor Dennis (soprano), Catherine Carby (mezzo-soprano), Fiona Kimm (mezzo-soprano), Ed Lyon (tenor), Mark Wilde (tenor), Graeme Broadbent (bass-baritone), BBC Concert Orchestra, John Andrews (conductor)
RES10269

‘In short, it’s hard to imagine it done better. Arnold’s many admirers should snap it up, as should anyone interested in 20th-century British opera.’ Gramophone (Editor’s Choice)

Maconchy, Lutyens & Wallen: Works for Piano & Orchestra
Martin Jones (piano), Rebeca Omordia (piano)
BBC Concert Orchestra, John Andrews (conductor)
RES10315

‘This terrific recording features three composers, two pianists and one orchestra. All the pieces are premieres on disc – and they are discoveries you’ll want to hear many times again.’ BBC Music Magazine

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Producer, editor & mastering: Adam Binks
Engineer: Dave Rowell
BBC Studio Manager: Drew Leckie
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