

# LSO St Luke's

# CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: GARETH DAVIES & MICHAEL MCHALE

Friday 13 May 2022 1pm  
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

**Claude Debussy** *Syrinx*  
**Richard H Walthew** *Idyll*  
**Electra Perivolaris** *Glen Sannox River Song*  
**William Grant Still (arr Alexa Still)**  
Three Songs for Flute and Piano  
**Carl Reinecke** *Undine Sonata*

**Gareth Davies** flute  
**Michael McHale** piano

## Syrinx

### Claude Debussy

Claude Debussy wrote *Syrinx* in 1913 as a piece of incidental music for Gabriel Mourey's play *Psyché*. Soon after, the flautist Louis Fleury performed it in concert, introducing it to a wider audience. The title refers to the nymph Syrinx, a character from Ancient Greek myth. When the god Pan pursued her with amorous intentions, she turned herself into a bunch of reeds. Hearing the pleasant sound the breeze made through them, Pan used them to make a wind instrument: the panpipes. Debussy's wistful unaccompanied melody gives a vivid impression of the god lamenting for his lost love as he plays his new instrument. The flexible tempo (speed) gives the music an almost improvisatory feel.

*Syrinx* was the first significant work to be written for unaccompanied flute since C P E Bach's 1747 Sonata in A minor. It is one of the best-known and most popular works in the flute repertory.

Debussy was born on the outskirts of Paris, and studied at the Paris Conservatoire as both a pianist and composer. In 1884 he won the prestigious Prix de Rome and spent two years in Italy. His compositions reflect his wide range of interests, including Wagner's operas, Japanese art, Spanish culture, gamelan music and symbolist literature. They include orchestral works such as *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune*, the *Images* and *Nocturnes* and *La mer*, the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a string quartet, songs, and numerous piano pieces including the two books of *Préludes* and *Images*, *Estampes* and the playful suite *Children's Corner*. Debussy died in Paris some months before the end of World War I.



## Idyll

Richard H Walthew

A contemporary of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Richard Henry Walthew is now chiefly remembered for his chamber music. He composed *Idyll* for flute and piano in 1907. The piece is notable for its long, flowing melody and its sumptuous harmonic language. A dreamy opening section in which the soaring flute line interweaves with an exquisitely simple piano accompaniment gives way to a livelier central episode, with passages that resemble birdsong. A short cadenza (free-flowing solo) passage for flute leads into a contemplative reprise of the opening section and a tranquil conclusion.

Walthew grew up in Islington, and studied with Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music. He later taught at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and became Professor of Music at The Queen's College, Harley Street. His early works included choral and orchestral pieces and two operettas. However, his greatest strength was as a composer of chamber music. His many works in this genre include several string quartets, *Mosaic in Ten Pieces* for clarinet and piano, a Trio in C minor for clarinet, violin and piano, *Introduction and Allegro* for bassoon and piano and a *Phantasy Quintet* for violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano. He had a long-term involvement with the Conway Hall Ethical Society and with the South Place Sunday Concerts in London, for which he wrote programme notes.

## Glen Sannox River Song

Electra Perivolaris

*Glen Sannox River Song* was composed for LSO Soundhub, for a first performance by Gareth Davies in 2021.

Electra explains 'This piece is influenced by the landscape and musical traditions of my home on the Scottish Isle of Arran. The structure of the piece follows the undulating shape of the Glen Sannox river which runs between the mountains in the North of Arran. The reinventions of the melodic lines trace the bends and curves in the river as it flows down from its high mountain source.

*Glen Sannox River Song* is a response to traditional Gaelic singing. Through the piece I experiment with the use of the voice of the flautist over played pitch. The played and sung lines of the flautist reflect the call and response dialogues in Gaelic Psalmody and Hebridean Waulking Songs, as well as the inflection and ornamentation in the voices of precentor and congregation. There is a process of growth through the piece, as the call and response textures become faster with increasing ornamentation and intensity. The central melodic line reinvents itself over these cycles of dialogue, moving between unison calls and the answering lines in the interweaving voices of the congregation.

The constancy of the flowing river and the endless cycles of melodic reinvention and transformation might bring new reflections from the natural surroundings of my home into the urban surroundings of LSO St Luke's, as the area undergoes a process of reinvention, emerging out of the pandemic'.

Described as a 'Classical Star of the Future' in a BBC Introducing article, Electra Perivolaris (b 1996) is a composer and pianist from Scotland of mixed British and Greek heritage. Following success in the BBC Young Composers' Competition 2014, Electra has had her music performed across the UK and internationally by musicians of the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Hebrides Ensemble, BBC Singers, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and BBC Concert Orchestra. She is Ambassador for the BBC Young Composer Scheme and she is currently writing for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra as part of their New Stories scheme.

## Three Songs for Flute and Piano

William Grant Still arr Alexa Still

- 1 Bayou Home
- 2 If You Should Go
- 3 Song for the Lonely

Along with nine operas and various choral works, William Grant Still composed some beautiful art songs. *Three Songs for Flute and Piano* are arrangements of three of these. In 'Bayou Home' (1944) he sets a text by his wife Verna Arvey that expresses anticipatory nostalgia for the American South (bayous being the swampy creeks commonly found there). Grant Still's love of American folk music is evident in the song's catchy refrain: 'I'm leaving my home on the Bayou ... got to answer a call from afar.'

'If You Should Go' comes from the 1949 cycle *Songs of Separation*. The composer perfectly captures the dreamy tone of US poet Countee Cullen's poem of the same name through his meditative music, which contains a hint of jazz in its harmonies. 'Song for the Lonely' (1953) sets another text by his wife Verna Arvey, this time about solitude. The falling phrases, simple melody line and slow tempo create a mood of melancholy resignation. *Three Songs* were arranged by New Zealand flautist Alexa Still, a great champion of Grant Still's work.

Long known as the 'Dean of African-American Classical Composers', as well as one of the foremost composers from the US, William Grant Still has had the distinction of becoming a legend in his own lifetime. He was born in Woodville (Wilkinson County) Mississippi on 11 May 1895, to parents who were teachers and musicians.

Still wrote over 150 compositions (well over 200 if his lost early works could be counted), including operas, ballets, symphonies, chamber works and arrangements of folk themes, especially African-American spirituals, plus instrumental, choral and solo vocal works.

## Undine Sonata

Carl Reinecke

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Intermezzo: Allegretto vivace
- 3 Andante tranquillo
- 4 Finale: Allegro molto agitato ed appassionato, quasi presto

Carl Reinecke's *Undine Sonata* is a musical retelling of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's fairytale novella *Undine* (1811).

The water nymph Undine longs to experience human love. In the opening Allegro, with its virtuoso central section, she leaves her underwater kingdom for a new life on land. The nimble Intermezzo that follows depicts her romance with the knight Huldebrand, introduced in the first of the movement's two trios by a stately piano solo. In the lyrical Andante tranquillo the couple rejoice in their initial marital happiness – though Undine's water-goblin uncle briefly disturbs their peace with a warning of imminent danger.

This duly arrives in the fierce Finale, which opens with a tritone interval: the famous 'devil in music'. Huldebrand rejects Undine, she falls into the Danube, and he, believing her dead, marries a mortal woman. The music is as turbulent as the characters' emotions. Only at the end, after Undine has returned and delivered the kiss of death to her faithless spouse, does it achieve calm.

Carl Reinecke was a pianist, composer, conductor and teacher, who during his lifetime held positions as a professor at the Cologne Conservatory and as director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, Leipzig.

As a performer he embarked on his first concert tour at the age of 19, and at 80 made recordings on piano roll, making him the earliest born pianist to have his playing preserved in any way.

He started composing from the age of just seven years old, and continued after retiring, resulting in almost 300 published works, the most famous of which is his *Undine Sonata*.

Programme notes by Kate Hopkins (*Syrinx, Idyll, Three Songs for Flute and Piano* and *Undine Sonata*) and Electra Perivolaris (*Glen Sannox River Song*)

## Gareth Davies

### LSO Principal Flute

**G**areth Davies studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and joined the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra as Principal Flute after graduating. After five years on the south coast, he joined the London Symphony Orchestra where he has been Principal Flute for 22 years. He has recorded several solo works including the Nielsen, Karl Jenkins and Knehan's concertos and can be heard on many LSO Live recordings including two versions of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Daphnis and Chloe*. He appears on several of the *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* soundtracks as well as many other film and TV shows.

He is in demand as a teacher around the world and is currently visiting professor at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Gareth is also in demand as a presenter and writer. He has written and presented programmes on Classic FM and BBC Radio 3 and has interviewed many people from the classical music world for broadcast including Sir Colin Davis, Sir Simon Rattle and Thomas Adès.

His writing has featured in *BBC Music Magazine* and several newspapers, and his first book *The Show Must Go On* was a book of year in the *Financial Times* and *Classical Music* magazine.

He also writes education material for LSO Discovery concerts to help introduce young people to classical music. They include *Game Over*, *Voyager*, and the pandemic digital project *Where's Simon?*, described by *The Guardian* as a 'short and irresistible children's guide to the orchestra'. His latest project for LSO Discovery, *The Disappearance of Doctor Copernicus*, was performed last weekend at the Barbican.

Gareth is a Wm S Haynes artist.

## Michael McHale

### piano

**B**elfast-born Michael McHale has established himself as one of Ireland's leading pianists and has developed a busy international career as a solo recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician.

He has performed and recorded as a soloist with the Minnesota and Hallé Orchestras, the Moscow, Bournemouth, Jacksonville, Fort Smith, BBC and London Symphony Orchestras, City of London Sinfonia, London Mozart Players and all five of the major Irish orchestras, and performed at the Tanglewood and Tokyo Spring Festivals, Wigmore Hall, London, Berlin Konzerthaus, Lincoln Center, New York, Symphony Hall, Boston and Pesti Vigadó in Budapest.

In 2017 Michael was invited to become a Patron of the Ulster Youth Orchestra, and in 2018 he was appointed lecturer in piano for undergraduate and postgraduate students at the MTU Cork School of Music in Ireland.

Michael collaborates regularly with Sir James Galway, Michael Collins, Patricia Rozario, Dame Felicity Lott and Camerata Pacifica.