

Saturday 16th November 2024

7.30pm

Thornden Hall, Chandlers Ford

Bernstein

Excerpts from

“West Side Story”

Prokofiev

Excerpts from

“Romeo and Juliet”

Mel Bonis

“Ophelie” and “Cleopatre” from

“Trois Femmes”...

Join us for a high octane evening of emotional music, as we explore the themes of Love and Tragedy.

Conductor - John Trill

The City of Southampton Orchestra

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Saturday 16th November 2024

Conductor: John Trill

Leader: Christa Porter

Leonard Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

Prologue—Somewhere—Scherzo—Mambo—Cha cha—Meeting scene—Cool—Rumble—Finale

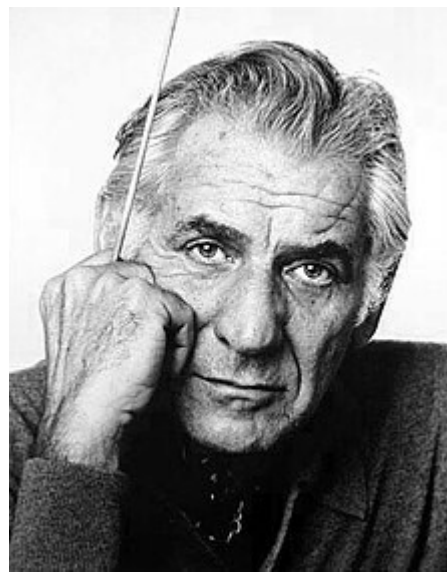
Mel Bonis: 'Ophelie' Op. 165 and 'Le Songe de Cleopatre' Op. 180 from *Trois Femmes de legend pour orchestra*

Interval

Sergei Prokofiev: Movements from *Romeo and Juliet Suites 1 & 2, Op.64*

- Montagues and Capulets
- Juliet the Young Girl
- Masks
- Romeo and Juliet
- Death of Tybalt
- Romeo and Juliet before parting
- Romeo at Juliet's Grave

Leonard Bernstein
(1918 - 1990)
Symphonic Dances from
West Side Story
(1961)



Prologue—Somewhere—Scherzo—
Mambo—Cha cha—Meeting scene—
Cool—Rumble—Finale

Leonard Bernstein was an American conductor, composer, pianist, music educator, author and humanitarian. Considered to be one of the most important conductors of his time, he was the first American-born conductor to receive international acclaim. He wrote symphonies, ballet music, choral works, opera, chamber music, and pieces for the piano. Bernstein was a critical figure in the modern revival of the music of Gustav Mahler.

Bernstein was born in Massachusetts to Russian Jewish parents, Sam and Jennie, his father emigrating from Russia and mother from Ukraine. In his early youth, his only exposure to music was the household radio and music on Friday nights at the synagogue. When he was ten years old he started to have piano lessons when his aunt deposited a piano in their home. In the summers, the Bernstein family regularly went to their vacation home in Sharon, Massachusetts, where young Leonard conscripted all the neighbourhood children to put on shows ranging from *Carmen* to *H.M.S. Pinafore*. He also gave piano lessons to young people in his neighbourhood, one of his students, Sid Ramin, becoming his lifelong friend and orchestrator for *West Side Story*.

In 1932, at the age of 14 Bernstein played Brahms's *Rhapsody in G minor* at his first public piano performance at the New England Conservatory. Two years later, he made his solo debut with orchestra in Grieg's *Piano Concerto* with the Boston Public School Orchestra.

Bernstein's sensational conducting debut, deputising for Bruno Walter, took place in November 1943 to enormous national acclaim. At this time he was working on a New York based musical *On the Town* for his friend Jerome Robbins. It opened in 1945 to ecstatic reviews and he was showered with awards.

The McCarthy era was in full swing by this time and Bernstein was among hundreds of artists who were asked to testify to the House Un-American Activities committee. He was denied a passport for some time. His response to the mood of hysterical witch-hunting influenced his next work for the stage, based on Voltaire's satirical *Candide*, but this ran for only seventy-three performances. As soon as *Candide* had opened in December 1956, Bernstein returned to *West Side Story* which, by contrast, two years later ran for 772 performances.

In 1949 Robbins had suggested a modern version of Romeo & Juliet which was to be called East Side Story, staging the conflict between rival Catholic and Jewish groups. However, this project foundered until 1955, when teenage Latin gang violence in Los Angeles made the news. The writer Arthur Laurents suggested that the conflict should be changed to involve Puerto-Rican versus white gangs on the then-grungy Upper West Side of Manhattan; Stephen Sondheim joined to write the lyrics and all at once the project took off. It is filled with jazz and Latin American rhythms and is painted in Bernstein's forceful, witty, tough, tender, joyful and tragic music. The same day that Bernstein saw his first run-through of *West Side Story*, he signed his contract to become the first American-born musical director (and conductor) of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the dark theme, sophisticated music, extended dance scenes, tragic love story, and its focus on social problems marked a turning point in musical theatre. The story explores the rivalry between two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds; the Sharks who are recent migrants from Puerto Rico, and the Jets, who are white.

Tony, a former member of the Jets and best friend of the gang's leader, Riff, falls in love with Maria, the sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks. The scenes and dances flow together with no breaks.

The *Prologue* sets the stage with the two gangs, the Jets and Sharks eyeing each other menacingly.

Somewhere is the beautiful duet where Tony and Maria imagine a place free from prejudice where they can be together.

The *Scherzo* shows Chino telling Maria that Tony has killed her brother. *Mambo and Cha Cha* take place in the gym while the Jets plan to drive the Sharks from the streets, and Tony first catches sight of Maria.

In *The Meeting and Cool* the Jets are nervous as they prepare to meet the Sharks and are told to just play it cool.

In the *Rumble* (gang fight) Riff and Bernardo are both knifed before a police whistle breaks the ensuing frenzy and the gangs flee.

In the *Finale* the stunned gangs appear in silence to carry away the body of Tony who had been shot in revenge by Chino.

Mel Bonis

(1858 - 1937)

'Ophelie' Op. 165 and

'Le Songe de Cléopâtre' Op.

180

(pub. 2018)

from *Trois Femmes de legend
pour orchestre*



Mélanie Hélène Bonis, known as Mel Bonis, was a prolific French late-Romantic composer who saw her works performed frequently during her lifetime, with over three hundred published works for piano, organ, chamber groups, choirs, and orchestra. She studied at the Paris Conservatoire, where her teachers included César Franck, Ernest Guiraud, and Auguste Bazille.

Bonis was born into a lower-middle-class family with parents who did not encourage her music. Undeterred by her circumstances, she taught herself to play the piano and at the age of twelve her aptitude was recognised by a family friend, Monsieur Maury, who taught at the Paris Conservatoire. Reluctantly, her parents conceded to allow her to receive tuition. At the age of sixteen, she was introduced to her new piano tutor, César Franck. Recognising her talent as a pianist and composer, Franck brought her to the Paris Conservatoire where she attended a range of classes including accompaniment, harmony and composition, learning alongside Claude Debussy and Gabriel Pierné.

It was at the Conservatoire that Bonis met Amédée Landély Hettich. A student, poet, and singer, at the age of 22 Hettich was beginning to make his mark as a journalist and music critic. Bonis set several of his poems to music for solo voice, including *Sur la Plage* (op.3) and *Villanelle* (op.4), and the pair fell in love. However their passionate affair met with opposition and disapproval from her parents. Despite having won prizes for accompaniment and harmony by this point, and with her evident promise as a composer, to the disappointment of her teachers Ernest Giraud and Cesar Franck, she was forced to resign from the Conservatoire.

Bonis, then aged twenty five, entered into an arranged marriage to a successful businessman, Albert Domange. Twenty two years her senior, and twice widowed with five children from his previous marriages, Domange was reportedly likeable and jovial, although not appreciative of music in any form. For several years Bonis split her time between Paris and Normandy, entertaining, going out and managing a large staff. Her circumstances, and lack of support from those around her, resulted in her musical career being sidelined as she gave birth to three children and immersed herself in family life.

In the 1890s, an encounter with Hettich encouraged her to embrace music back into her life. She quickly gained the attention and support from several notable publishers which inspired her creativity further. Her music was played frequently in parlours across France and Switzerland. Despite them both still being married, and Bonis having strong religious beliefs, she and Hettich resumed their affair alongside their creative partnership. The affair led to the secret birth of a daughter, Madeleine, who was cared for by a former chambermaid for many years before being reunited with her mother.

Bonis then devoted all of her energies to composition. She became a member of the Société des compositeurs de musique (SCM) in 1907, winning prizes and becoming its first female secretary, working closely alongside other Parisian musicians including Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré. Her music was performed in top venues by major performers at the time, and she used her influential position as secretary of the SCM to aid other female composers to gain recognition. Hettich continued his support of her, attending key performances.

Bonis continued to compose throughout the 1920s. World War 1 saw her fall on hard times following the death of her husband, Domange, and worsening

arthritis that left her depressed and bedridden. With the arts struggling to recover, her later works fell into obscurity until their more recent revival.

Our music tonight is taken from *Trois femmes de légende pour orchestra*; Ophelia, Salomé and Cleopatra. These tone poems began life around 1909 as piano works, 'Salome' and 'Ophelie' for solo piano and 'Le Songe de Cleopatre' for piano duet. Of the range of works that Bonis composed inspired by '*femmes de légende*', these were the three that she orchestrated. Their publication in 2018, many years after her passing, has brought renewed attention to her imaginative and skilful handling of a large orchestra. Lush scoring and chromatic and oriental inspired harmonies draw the listener into the worlds that Bonis created for her chosen characters.

Ophélie (Ophelia), inspired by the tragic lover of Shakespeare's Hamlet, opens with tranquil harp and muted upper strings. It continues with alternating gentle flowing watery music and more passionate passages expressing her doomed love for Hamlet. The ending dies away with the character in her quiet, watery grave.

Queen Cleopatra had occupied Bonis' imagination for a long time, as suggested by photographs taken in 1887 of her dressed as the queen of Egypt. In *Le Songe de Cléopâtre* (The Dream of Cleopatra) she gives the listener a sense of the character and her personality, Instead of relaying events or characters in the life of Cleopatra, the dream leads us through a series of impressions with many moods, tempi and orchestral colours. Like the story of Ophelia, Cleopatra's dream starts with the harp and muted strings, the whole orchestral sound flowing along dreamily but with contrasting changes of mood. Sometimes threatening, occasionally having a feeling of satisfied achievement, the dream eventually concludes with a gentle finish with harp and muted strings.

Sergei Prokofiev

(1891 — 1953)

Movements from *Romeo and Juliet Suites*, Op. 64

(1936)

- Montagues and Capulets
- Juliet the Young Girl
- Masks
- Romeo and Juliet
- Death of Tybalt
- Romeo and Juliet Before Parting
- Romeo at Juliet's Grave



Sergei Prokofiev was one of the major composers of the 20th century, producing seven operas, seven symphonies, eight ballets, five piano concertos, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, a symphony-concerto for cello and orchestra, and nine piano sonatas. He was born in 1891 in a rural part the Smolensk region in Ukraine when it was an uncontested part of the Russian Empire. His father was a soil engineer from Moscow and his mother, Maria, came from a Saint Petersburg family of former serfs. By the time of Prokofiev's birth, Maria was devoting her life to music. Sergei was inspired by hearing his mother practising the piano, and he wrote his first piano composition at the age of five. By seven, he had also learned to play chess, beating the world chess champion José Raúl Capablanca in an exhibition match in 1914.

At the age of eleven Sergei spent the summer having lessons with the composer and pianist Reinhold Glière. Two years later he was introduced to Alexander Glazunov, a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, who was so impressed by his music that he encouraged him to enrol. Several years younger than most of his class, Prokofiev was viewed as

eccentric and arrogant and annoyed a number of his classmates by keeping statistics on their errors. During that period, he studied orchestration under Rimsky-Korsakov. Prokofiev soon developed a reputation as a musical rebel, while getting praise for his original compositions, which he performed himself on the piano.

In 1910, Prokofiev's father died and Sergei's financial support ceased but by then he had started making a name for himself. He composed his first two piano concertos around then, the second of which caused a scandal at its premiere. According to one account, the audience left the hall with exclamations of "To hell with this futuristic music! The cats on the roof make better music!" but the modernists were in rapture.

In 1914, Prokofiev finished his career at the Conservatory by winning the 'battle of the pianos', a competition open to the five best piano students, by performing his own *Piano Concerto No. 1*. Soon afterwards, he journeyed to London where the impresario Sergei Diaghilev commissioned the ballet *Chout* ("The Buffoon"). Its premiere in 1921 in Paris was a huge success, Stravinsky calling it, "The single piece of modern music he could listen to with pleasure," while Ravel called it "A work of genius." It was about this time that Stravinsky described Prokofiev as the greatest Russian composer of his day, after himself!

After the Revolution of 1917, Prokofiev left Russia and made his living as a composer, pianist and conductor in the United States, then in Germany and France. Prokofiev's greatest interest was opera, but the only operatic success during his lifetime was *The Love for Three Oranges*, composed for the Chicago Opera and performed there in 1921, and then over the following decade in Europe and Russia. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression diminished opportunities for Prokofiev's music to be performed and, in 1936, he finally returned to his homeland with his family where he composed his best-known music including *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cinderella*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*.

In 1948 the Zhanov decree was published, denouncing six artists—Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Shebalin, Popov and Myaskovsky—in that order, for the crime of "formalism", described as a "renunciation of the basic principles of classical music" in favour of "muddled, nerve-racking" sounds that "turned music into cacophony." Shostakovich's famous response was his 5th *Symphony*. Prokofiev apologized, but hoped that works

such as *Aleksander Nevsky*, *Hail to Stalin*, *Symphony No. 5* and *Romeo and Juliet* had shown he could compose works that fell in line with the party's ideals. In 1949, Prokofiev wrote his *Cello Sonata* for the 22-year-old Mstislav Rostropovich. His last completed work was his *Seventh Symphony*. Prokofiev died at age 61 on 5 March 1953, the same day as Joseph Stalin.

Romeo and Juliet was first staged in January 1940 and was an instant success. The ballet had been initially rejected because of the tragic ending; "living people can dance, the dying cannot". *Romeo and Juliet* is now often considered as the crowning achievement of Soviet dramatic ballet. Prokofiev rewrote parts of the music as orchestral suites, movements from which will be played this evening. He was an extremely skilled orchestrator often writing for small numbers of instruments and dividing string sections into three parts. Typically we hear intricate rhythms, very frequent changes of key, quirky leaps in the melodic line and discordant harmonies.

In Shakespeare's story an age-old vendetta between the powerful Montagu and Capulet families erupts into bloodshed. Young Romeo Montague falls in love with Juliet Capulet. Romeo's attempt to halt a street fight leads to the death of Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, for which Romeo is banished. In a desperate attempt to be reunited with Romeo, Juliet fakes her own death and lies in a tomb waiting for Romeo to come so they can run away together. The message explaining the plan fails to reach Romeo and, believing Juliet dead, he takes his life in her tomb. Juliet wakes to find Romeo's corpse beside her and kills herself. The grieving families agree to end their feud.

Tonight's performance includes seven scenes from Prokofiev's version of the story:

Montagues and Capulets opens with the slow, threatening music which accompanies the Duke's order that the warring families must cease fighting on pain of death; this is soon followed by the menacing and slightly heavy, ominous Dance of the Knights.

The Young Juliet is a musical character portrait, brilliantly capturing the changing moods of the character's adolescent personality. Prokofiev introduces Juliet at three different ages. First we hear her in infancy, with dancing violins. Her adolescence is expressed by a lyrical clarinet, then a flute leads in to her early doomed adulthood.

In Masques (Masks), Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are disguised in order to crash the Capulets' ball in the enemy stronghold. There is an introduction of tense percussion, a cheeky clarinet and delicate plucked strings to accompany their stealthy arrival. This is followed by an extensive march theme as the ball progresses.

Romeo and Juliet is a sensitive musical treatment of the celebrated "balcony scene". The harp and muted violins suggest the expectant stillness. Romeo enters gently in the strings, answered by Juliet's graceful flute. Lengthy ecstatic sections follow as the characters move together before the music gently subsides into silence.

The death of Tybalt describes the savage fight in which Tybalt slays Mercutio whose famous final words were "A plague on both your houses." This is followed by the furious duel in which Romeo avenges Mercutio's death, with its brutal dissonances and aggressive percussion and violins playing countless notes per second. Heavy, thuds on the timpani herald Tybalt's funeral procession, bringing the scene to a close.

In Romeo at Juliet's house before parting, the lovers awaken after their first night together. There is much sighing with references to Romeo's love theme and a lush central section. Even here the soaring music is shot through with intimations of impending misfortune.

Finally we hear Romeo at Juliet's Tomb. Romeo's love theme pours out in his overwhelming grief. At the very end, a contrabassoon speaks as from the depths of the tomb but is silenced by soft shimmering strings above which a piccolo intones a single high note while cellos and bass clarinet throb in deep sorrow as he takes poison and dies in music of tragic dissonance.

Notes: Chris Anthony, October 2024

John Traill

Conductor



John Traill specialises in conducting symphonic and contemporary repertoire, and he is committed to making music accessible to all. Director and Supernumerary Fellow in Music at St Anne's College, Oxford, he has been course director of courses in Instrumental Conducting, and Orchestration, at the Faculty of Music, Oxford University. From 2017-2020 he was a Teaching Fellow at Royal Holloway University London, responsible for courses in ensemble performance, conducting, and composition. Previously posts include Teaching Fellow at Kings College London, lecturer at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Bristol University, and Head of Performance at Bangor University. In January 2022 John became a Professor at the Royal Military School of Music.

John has performed across the UK and overseas, with orchestras that include the London Mozart Players, Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, the Sofia New Symphony Orchestra, the Kharkov Philharmonic, the SCAR Philharmonic, and the Curitiba Symphony (Brazil). His work with leading contemporary music ensembles includes the London Sinfonietta, CHROMA, the New Music Players, London Contemporary Music Group, Sounds Underground,

and the Moscow Studio for New Music. He has performed at many major venues, including premieres at the Royal Albert Hall, Symphony Hall Birmingham, the Barbican, Southbank Centre, and the Fergusson Centre (Virginia). John is conductor of the St Anne's Camerata, Ensemble ISIS (the new music group at Oxford Faculty of Music), the City of Southampton Orchestra, and the Oxfordshire County Youth Orchestra. His outreach work, with the Oxfordshire Music Service's Advanced Musicianship Programme, has developed a unique collaboration between the University of Oxford and the Oxfordshire County Music Service, awarded the National Music Council Paritor Award for Achievements in New Music. John's recordings include Thomas Hyde's *Autumnal* (Guild Records), and *Scherzo Capriccioso* (BBC Radio 3).

Early training with Rossen Milanov at the Mt. Vitosha International Conducting Institute, Bulgaria (1998/2000) culminated in winning major prizes at the Leeds Conductors Competition (2005), and the Vakhtang Jordania International Conducting Competition (2006). At the same time, John studied composition with Robert Saxton at the University of Oxford, becoming the youngest recipient, in 2006, of a DPhil in this field. His compositions have been performed at major venues in UK, Europe, and the USA. Specializing in both contemporary concert and music for education, recent projects include Arts Council funded commissions (*Double Concerto for Vibraphone, Marimba, and Orchestra*, and *Concerto for Trumpet (doubling Flugelhorn) and Orchestra*), and a new arrangement of Brahms' *German Requiem*, with Deborah Pritchard, for the Manchester Camerata at the Litchfield Festival 2016. His oratorios for education have bought national recognition, most notably *Lightbobs for 600+ performers* (March 2014: Symphony Hall, Birmingham), and *Oxonia for massed children's choir, symphony orchestra, brass band, and solo cello* (2011-12: Royal Albert Hall, Symphony Hall Birmingham).

As resident composer for the Cornish American Song Institute, John has enjoyed a long association with tenor David Sadlier. Song sets therein include *Four Cornish Songs* (2016: Mary Ogilvie Theatre, Oxford), *Phases* (2014: Mary Ogilvie Theatre, Oxford), *Three Songs for the Britten Centenary* (2012: St. Martin in the Fields, London), *Today for tenor and chamber orchestra* (2010: Fergusson Centre, Virginia). John has worked closely with trumpeter Simon Desbruslais, and in addition to his 2016 concerto, they premiered his *Serenade for Trumpet and Orchestra*, premiered in Sao Bento Monastery, Brasilia, April 2014. Highlights from John's catalogue include *Equale for Horn and String Orchestra* (2014: Oxford), *Concerto for Ensemble* (2010: Northwestern, Chicago), *Five Piano Miniatures* (2008) and *Dissolving Fragments for Violin and Piano* (2009/11).

City of Southampton Orchestra



The City of Southampton Orchestra has been described in a BBC Radio 3 broadcast as “one of the best non-professional orchestras in the south”. Our purpose is to promote concerts of as high a musical standard as can be achieved while maintaining the friendly approach needed to encourage regular attendance at rehearsals on a volunteer basis.

The City of Southampton Orchestra celebrated its 50th anniversary in the 2021-22 season. To mark the occasion, current members of the orchestra contributed ideas towards the commission of “A Southampton Overture”, composed by John Traill, currently also the orchestra’s principal conductor.

The music played by the orchestra usually exploits the full scope of symphonic instrumentation used from the 19th century onwards. We aim to reach a wide audience and each winter a Saturday morning family concert is performed that is designed for children. Each of the remaining concerts contains both well-known items and less familiar works. We hope that the introduction of the latter will prove rewarding.

The orchestra has an important part to play in the local community. We provide an arena for musicians to use and develop their talents, and our weekly rehearsals are a time of study and relaxation for members. The culmination of all this pleasurable activity is our regular concert season where we offer our talents back to the community in a series of performances in the City and surrounding areas. We are proud to display the results of our labours and wish to share the exhilaration of making music with our concert goers.

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City of Southampton Orchestra

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Louise Coggins
Annastasia Radford
Emma Hodges
Paul Watson
Ingrid Isaac
Jane Nunn
Alison Little
Hannah Martin
Kathy Smalley
Caroline London
Ruth Powell

2nd Violin

Kinga Kowalczyk
Sarah Smith
Penny Burnett
Sue Osmond
Gordon Thick
Anne Fice
Bree Enemark
Brian Hodgson
Jos Creese
Philippa Headley
Sue Dancer
Debra Lain

Viola

Debbie Hickson
Jane Andrews
Sam Cleverley
Vanessa Jarvis
Sandra Littler
Emma Moules-Jones

Cello

Bernard Postlethwaite
Chris Anthony
Anna Bell
Jenny Bleek
Sophie Blundell
Michael Brockman
Ilfra Carlick
Graham Dudding
Katie Greener

Double Bass

Carole Dowding
Mary Toms
Oliver Bates
Peter Pecoock

Flute

Gina Briant
Sue Edmonson

Piccolo

Judith Beton

Oboe

Lucy Orme
Philip Brazier

Cor Anglais

Elinor Twyeffort

Clarinet

Anton Crout
Elizabeth Wood

Bass Clarinet

Naomi Rides

E flat Clarinet

Catherine Sayers

Saxophone

Anna Robinson

Bassoon

Alison Wathey
Juliette Whatmore

Contrabassoon

John Athersuch

Horn

Peter Hackston
Rob Shepherd
Trevor Grant
Judith Houghton

Trumpet

Pamela Crawford
Wayne Landon
Andrew Salmon

Tenor Trombone

Dave Cole
Kevin Turner

Bass Trombone

Jonathan Bunt

Tuba

Chris Dale

Harp

Jenny Broome

Percussion

Jonathan Ferguson
Tim Boxall
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Thomas Freedman
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Piano

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Saturday 25th January 2025, 11am and 2:30pm
Central Hall, Southampton

John Trill: Conductor
Family concerts: Heroes and Villains

Saturday 22nd March 2025, 7:30pm
Turner Sims, Southampton

Joe Davies: Guest conductor
David Palmer: Piano
Shostakovich: *Chamber Symphony (arr Barshai)*
Stravinsky: *Concerto for piano and winds*
Tchaikovsky: *Symphony no. 2*

Saturday 21st June 2025, 7:30pm
Romsey Abbey

John Trill: Conductor
Hannah Arnold: Cello
Mayer: *Faust—Overture*
Elgar: *Cello Concerto*
Brahms: *Symphony no. 4*