

Programme notes



Nicola Benedetti © Luca Migliore

Ralph Vaughan Williams

(1872 – 1958)

The Lark Ascending (1914, rev. 1920)
(16 mins)

Musicians and music-lovers are by now used to hearing the news that many highly anticipated performances have been postponed on account of the pandemic. It's a scenario that Vaughan Williams, who lived through both World Wars, would have recognised. He wrote the first version of *The Lark Ascending* for violin and piano in 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War.

The conflict delayed the work's premiere until 1920 when, at last, it was performed. A revised version for violin and orchestra followed in the same year and was premiered in 1921, dedicated to the soloist, Marie Hall. The piece was praised in *The Times* for its "serene disregard of the fashions of today or yesterday. It dreamed itself along."

The Lark Ascending was inspired by a pastoral poem of the same name by George Meredith (1828 – 1909):

*As up he wings the spiral stair,
A song of light, and pierces air
With fountain ardour, fountain play,
To reach the shining tops of day,
And drink in everything discern'd
An ecstasy to music turn'd...*

In Vaughan Williams's sublime musical response, English folk styles and subtle orchestral colours are combined to create an impressionistic evocation of nature with a profoundly moving emotional undercurrent.

The Lark Ascending opens with a concise introduction for woodwind and muted strings, after which the soloist enters with a rhapsodic cadenza (when the soloist plays alone), the almost improvisatory melody tracing curlicues of sound to represent the lark's flight and song. Both violin and orchestra play the brooding pastoral theme that follows, with decorative touches reminding us that the bird is never far away.

After another cadenza there is a contrasting episode in which the flutes outline a new theme, echoed by the violin. The violin's trills lead us into the next, more animated section, including a lively tune on the oboe. The brooding theme and the flute melody, now played by the soloist, are reprised, and the piece ends with the solo violin line's exquisite ascent into the ether.

A press of hurried notes that run

So fleet they scarce are more than one,

Yet changingly the trills repeat

And linger ringing while they fleet...

The Lark Ascending
George Meredith

Programme notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770 – 1827)

Symphony No. 1 in C, Op. 21 (1800)
(26 mins)

I. *Adagio molto – Allegro con brio*

II. *Andante cantabile con moto*

III. *Allegro molto e vivace*

IV. *Adagio – Allegro molto e vivace*

Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 has to some extent been overshadowed by what he would go on to achieve, but this should not detract from its significance as a confident, skilful declaration of intent. Early sketches appeared in the late 1790s, and the work's premiere followed in Vienna on 2 April 1800. The symphony is Mozartian in form, but its light-hearted character is more reminiscent of Haydn.

The first movement begins with a musical joke, starting in the 'wrong' key (F) and on a discord (a 'seventh' chord), before arriving at the home key of C major. Beethoven also chose unusual scoring for this opening: woodwinds and pizzicato (plucked) strings, a sonority that surprised the critics of the day. These features may seem uncontroversial to modern ears, but in the context of the conventions of his

time Beethoven was making a bold statement: the first bars of his first symphony broke the rules, demonstrating in one concise passage that he was ushering in the new. There follows a pastoral slow introduction, after which the movement unfolds with energy, originality and concision.

The second movement includes delicate interplay between solo woodwinds and the strings, but the earthy third-movement minuet is full of vitality, anticipating Beethoven's use of the livelier 'scherzo' (instead of the staterlier minuet style) from his Second Symphony onwards. The trio section is an oasis of calm, the tranquil woodwind choir unmoved by rapid strings, an effect so striking that the young Elgar copied out this passage with fascinated precision.

The finale includes more of Beethoven's humour, an ascending figure coyly revealing itself before unveiling the first theme. This movement was the first to be drafted, originally intended to open the symphony. The 'scale' theme pervades the movement, and there are further witty touches when the woodwinds seem to announce the reprise of the main themes only to find that they have been beaten to it, as well as the mocking of the 'scale' idea in the coda.

Programme notes by Joanna Wyld
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Paavo Järvi © Luca Migliore

Biographies



Paavo Järvi with Nicola Benedetti © Luca Migliore

Paavo Järvi

Conductor

“One rarely experiences such an immediate connection between orchestra and conductor, such an extraordinarily attentive presence on both sides so that with economical means an understanding of the most subtle shades is possible.” (*Wiener Zeitung*)

Estonian Grammy Award-winning conductor Paavo Järvi is widely recognised as the musicians’ musician, enjoying close partnerships with the finest orchestras around the world. He serves as Chief Conductor of the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and the NHK Symphony Orchestra, as the long-standing Artistic Director of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and of the Estonian Festival Orchestra, which he founded in 2011. He is also Conductor Laureate of the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Music Director Laureate of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Artistic Advisor of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra.

Paavo Järvi’s sixth season as Chief Conductor of the NHK Symphony Orchestra builds on the success of their tour of Europe in early

2020, followed by a nomination for Orchestra of the Year by *Gramophone* magazine. A double CD featuring the Stravinsky-Balanchine collaborative masterpieces will also be released on the Sony Red Seal label.

In addition to his permanent positions, Järvi regularly appears with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker, Münchner Philharmoniker and the Orchestre de Paris, where he served as Music Director from 2010 to 2016.

In 2019 Paavo Järvi was named Conductor of the Year by Germany’s Opus Klassik and received the 2019 Rheingau Music Prize for his artistic achievements with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen in the German orchestral and cultural landscape.

Other prizes and honours include a Grammy Award for his recording of Sibelius’s Cantatas with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Artist of the Year by both *Gramophone* (UK) and *Diapason* (France) in 2015, and Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture for his contribution to music in France. As a dedicated supporter of Estonian culture, he was awarded the Order of the White Star by the President of Estonia in 2013, and in 2015 he was presented with the Sibelius Medal in recognition of his work in bringing the Finnish composer’s music to a wider public. In 2012 he also received the Paul-Hindemith-Preis of the city of Hanau.

Born in Tallinn, Estonia, Paavo Järvi studied percussion and conducting at the Tallinn School of Music. In 1980, he moved to the USA where he continued his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute with Leonard Bernstein.

Biographies



Nicola Benedetti © Luca Migliore

Nicola Benedetti

Violin

Nicola Benedetti is one of the most sought-after violinists of her generation. Her ability to captivate audiences and her wide appeal as an advocate for classical music has made her one of the most influential artists of today.

This season, in addition to her collaborations with the Philharmonia, Nicola has appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment live at the BBC Proms and in digital projects with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Maxim Emelyanychev. Nicola will also perform with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and James Gaffigan, the Spanish National Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Symphony with Pablo Heras-Casado.

Nicola is also Artist in Residence for the St Louis Symphony and will perform several concerts, recitals and masterclasses throughout the season. In spring 2021 Nicola will give the world premiere of Mark Simpson's Violin Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda, before the same work is performed with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and WDR Köln.

Nicola has continued her role as a dedicated, passionate ambassador and leader in music education. Her commitment to supporting the UK's music practitioners was underlined in July 2018, when Nicola took over as President of the European String Teachers' Association. She has formalised her vision and expanded her commitment to the education of young people and support of music teachers by establishing a charitable organisation: The Benedetti Foundation. Launched in January 2020, The Benedetti Foundation puts on transformative workshops for young people and teachers, showcasing what music education at its best can look and feel like. The Foundation has delivered four live sessions throughout the UK and in May 2020, during lockdown, the Foundation went online with 'virtual sessions' providing over 7,000 musicians across the globe with online tutorials and inspirational workshops.

Winner of the GRAMMY Award for Best Classical Instrumental Solo in 2020, as well as Best Female Artist at both 2012 and 2013 Classical BRIT Awards, Nicola records exclusively for Decca (Universal Music). Her latest recording of Elgar's Violin Concerto entered at number one in the UK's Official Classical Album Chart. Other recent recordings include her GRAMMY Award-winning album written especially for her by jazz musician Wynton Marsalis.

Nicola was appointed a CBE in 2019, awarded the Queen's Medal for Music (2017), and an MBE in 2013. In addition, Nicola holds the positions of Vice President (National Children's Orchestras), Big Sister (Sistema Scotland), Patron (National Youth Orchestras of Scotland's Junior Orchestra, Music in Secondary Schools Trust and Junior Conservatoire at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). Nicola plays the 'Gariel' Stradivarius (1717), courtesy of Jonathan Moulds.