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E L E G Y

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

RIMMA SUSHANSKAYA

Philip Dukes

W. LLOYD WEBBER HOWELLS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS ELGAR FINZI

E L E G Y

National Symphony Orchestra

- WILLIAM LLOYD WEBBER (1914–1982)
- 1 **INVOCATION FOR HARP AND STRINGS** 3'06
- HERBERT HOWELLS (1892–1983)
- 2 **ELEGY FOR VIOLA, STRING QUARTET AND STRING ORCHESTRA** Op.15 10'28
- WILLIAM LLOYD WEBBER (1914–1982)
- SERENADE FOR STRINGS**
- 3 i Barcarolle 2'28
- 4 ii Romance 3'23
- 5 iii Elegy 3'01
- EDWARD ELGAR (1857–1954)
- 6 **CANTO POPOLARE "IN MOONLIGHT"** (arranged David Ogden) 4'36
- RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)
- CONCERTO GROSSO**
- 7 i Intrada 2'34
- 8 ii Burlesca Ostinata 3'00
- 9 iii Sarabande 3'50
- 10 iv Scherzo 2'05
- 11 v March and Reprise 4'26

- GERALD FINZI (1901–1956)
- 12 **ROMANCE FOR STRING ORCHESTRA** Op.11 7'27
- RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)
- 13 **FIVE VARIANTS OF DIVES AND LAZARUS** 12'22

Total playing time: **62'51**

Strings of the National Symphony Orchestra

Leader: **Paul Willey**

Solo viola: **Philip Dukes** *

Solo harp: **Jean Kelly**

Conductor: **Rimma Sushanskaya**

Artistic Director: **Justin Pearson**

*Philip Dukes plays the 'Kux ex-Castelbarco' viola d'amore / J.B. Vuillaume / Stradivari viola, kindly made available for this recording by J & A Beare Ltd.

Producer: Michael Ponder

Engineer: Adaq Khan

Programme notes: Michael Jameson

Foreword: Julian Lloyd-Webber

Recorded at Henry Wood Hall, 21 and 29 June 2023

FOREWORD

On hearing this fascinating recording of British music for strings, I couldn't help noticing that my godfather, Herbert Howells' *Elegy* was felicitously 'sandwiched' between two pieces by my father William. Closer inspection revealed that my twinkly-eyed godfather, who was a great friend of my actual father, formed part of a chain of familial connections which was difficult to ignore.

This included both of my parents' studies with Ralph Vaughan Williams, my mother's violin lessons with Elgar's great friend and first biographer W H Reed, and my own later friendships with Ursula Vaughan Williams and Yehudi Menuhin, who recorded Elgar's Violin Concerto conducted by the composer. The links continued with its performers – my great friend, the violist Philip Dukes, having made the first recording of my father's own Viola Sonata.

So, one way or another, I am replete with stories (hearsay?) about both the composers and their performers on this recording. However, instead of 'telling tales out of school', I'm going to sit back and enjoy listening to these beautiful performances once again, relaxed in the knowledge that Michael Jameson's informative sleeve notes tell us all about that most important thing – the music itself!

Julian Lloyd Webber

That there is indeed something of the ethereal, of the timeless, and of the indefinable, pervading all, of the music heard on this CD which instantly calls into question our shared notions of what the term *Elegy* actually signifies.

Here the listener will encounter none of the unutterable despair of, for example, Samuel Barber's great *Adagio for Strings*, or the tortured valediction of Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen*, but rather an introspection and wistfulness of an altogether gentler sort. As the poet Thomas Gray expressed it in his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), "Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid some heart once pregnant with celestial fire; Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed, or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

The writer and critic Edward Greenfield ably characterised William Lloyd Webber's music as being "as sensuous as any you will find by a British composer." Meanwhile, the Lloyd Webber household's one-time lodger, the concert pianist John Lill, remembers him "as one of the six or seven finest musicians I have ever known." As Julian Lloyd Webber recalled (in an article about his father for *The Guardian*), "Malcolm Arnold once told me that in two weeks, when my father had deputised for his regular composition professor at the Royal College of Music, 'I learned more in those two lessons than I had in the previous two years!'"

Paradoxically, however, at the time of his death in 1982, little of William Lloyd Webber's music enjoyed much meaningful currency in the UK, and the fact that he chose to withhold so much of his highly personal and richly melodic output must in part have been a response to the times in which he lived. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, the disciples of serialism and of the *avant garde* (not to mention, of

course, those high-priests of modernity at the BBC!) would have been quick to seize upon and arraign anything remotely melodic or tonal in style!

Perhaps the *Invocation* for harp and strings of 1957, with its rapturous main theme in E major, reveals this composer at his most heartfelt and uncomplicated. Noted as much for his verbal as musical economy, “Why”, he would ask his pupils, “write six pages when six bars will do?” William Lloyd Webber’s *Invocation* is a typical example of this approach, with its unambiguous and direct appeal. As he gave away the only extant copy of the manuscript, the work had to be painstakingly re-constructed from a private acetate recording.

Herbert Howells was born in Lydney, Gloucestershire, on 17th October 1892. He studied under Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, and Charles Wood at the Royal College of Music from 1912, and returned to teach there in 1920, thereafter enjoying a very close association with the RCM throughout the remainder of his life.

Howells’ *Elegy for viola, string quartet and string orchestra* dates from 1917, the year in which he became (albeit briefly, soon resigning due to fragile health) Assistant Organist to Walter Alcock at Salisbury Cathedral. The RCM Library contains the manuscript of Howells’ three-movement *Suite for Strings*, the central movement of which was later revised and recast, emerging as the touchingly eloquent work we hear on this recording.

Howells’ *Elegy* received its premiere on 13th July 1917, with Stanford directing the RCM Orchestra, and was heard again soon afterwards at the Mons Memorial

Concert at the Royal Albert Hall – tragically, more than 40 students and graduates of the RCM lost their lives during the Great War. The so-called *Mons Elegy*, as the piece became known, honoured their memory, was also greatly admired by another of the composers represented in this programme, Gerald Finzi, who told Howells that he and his Newbury String Players had “done it a lot, and we never tire of it.”

The *Elegy* opens with a delicate passage for the solo viola centred around the key of G, providing this 104-bar composition with virtually all of its thematic material. When this opening stanza is taken up by the full orchestra, the influence of Vaughan Williams, specifically the *Tallis Fantasia* and opening solo viola passage from his *Phantasy Quintet* (1912) is unmistakable.

On this CD, violist Philip Dukes plays one of the most highly-prized and unique violas in existence, the *Kux-Castelbarco* Stradivari, of around 1720, one of only 12 violas known to have been made by the great Cremonese master. This remarkable instrument began life as a six-stringed *viola d’amore*, but was remodelled in the 1850s by J.B. Vuillaume, who replaced its original flat back (now lost) with a conventional arched back, and substituted a viola head by Nicolo Amati (from the early 1600s) for the original 12 string head (for 6 playable strings and 6 sympathetic strings), which was gifted to the Paris Conservatoire Museum in 1873. This instrument is currently in the care of J & A Beare Ltd, who kindly made it available for this recording.

William Lloyd Webber’s *Serenade for Strings* could well be seen as a 20th Century foil to Elgar’s universally beloved antecedent, written in 1892. Interestingly, it is

widely thought that the Elgar work was derived from his *Three Sketches for Strings* (*Spring Song, Elegy* and *Finale*), the manuscript for which has not survived, while the Lloyd Webber *Serenade for Strings* also comprises of three named movements, composed variously during a period of almost 30 years, from 1951 (*Barcarolle*), 1980 (*Romance*) and 1960 (*Elegy*).

The *Barcarolle* is based on a song, describing a magical boat with its cargo of “pearl and silver beams to fashion little childrens’ dreams.” The wistful *Romance*, a favourite of the composer, was originally published as ‘*Justine*’ (in his collection of *Five Portraits for Home Organs*) written for a close friend, Justine Bax, whilst *Elegy* is from *Country Impressions for wind and piano*, intended for his eldest son Andrew, then studying the horn. Far from being elegiac in any accepted sense, this piece was originally published as *Summer Pastures – a Fresian Elegy*.

Listeners familiar with Elgar’s concert overture *In the South (Alassio)*, Op.50, a dazzlingly orchestrated musical postcard from an inspirational winter holiday spent in Italy during 1903–4, will instantly recollect the poignant viola solo at its heart. This melody soon acquired a name of its own, becoming the *Canto Popolare* which we hear here – Elgar’s publishers requested arrangements for several instruments, with piano accompaniment, though by far the most enduring was that for viola, edited by Ernest Hobday. Here, however, we hear an arrangement for viola and strings (by David Ogden) of the equally successful vocal version, Elgar’s own setting of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *In Moonlight*.

The *Concerto Grosso for String Orchestra* by Ralph Vaughan Williams was written in 1950, in response to a request from a trio of teachers that he might write

something substantial for a concert to be held at London’s Royal Albert Hall under the aegis of the then influential Rural Music Schools Association. There would be some 400 young string players under the direction of Sir Adrian Boult on stage for the premiere in November of that year. The composer’s wife Ursula related how Vaughan Williams responded eagerly to the challenge of composing a work for a mixed-ability ensemble, by interpolating three string groups (each with parts of differing complexity, including an *ad-lib* group using just open strings) into one, just as one finds with many Baroque concerti grossi, where the more technically demanding *concertino* element is complimented by the simpler *ripieno* parts played by the larger group. Vaughan Williams’ *Concerto Grosso* comprises five movements: *Intrada, Burlesca Ostinata, Sarabande, Scherzo, and March and Reprise*.

Like so much of Gerald Finzi’s output, his *Romance for string orchestra*, Opus 11, written in 1928 (but unpublished until 1951), is at once suffused with nostalgia for a world lost to the brutalities of the Great War, whilst being unmistakably rooted in the English pastoral tradition which unifies virtually all the music heard on this disc.

Finzi’s first teacher, Ernest Bristow Farrar, died on the Somme on 18th September 1918, having arrived at the front just two days earlier, hardly two months before the cessation of hostilities that November. Such tragedy, along with the loss of his father and three of his brothers, accounts in large measure for the resigned pessimism which informs so much of his output.

But that Finzi still remains a somewhat obscure figure owes as much to the fact that he shunned metropolitan life and the opportunities it might have afforded. He chose to settle in rural Wiltshire, where he devoted himself to composing and to

apple-growing, securing several rare English apple varieties from extinction. Finzi's music is always painstakingly crafted and often highly personal in utterance. Indeed, this yearningly contoured and rapturous piece is one of his most characteristic, and one can only wonder why it is not better known.

We conclude with more music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, which upon first appraisal might seem to perfectly exemplify the English pastoral idioms which are central to his output, and yet in many senses, the *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus* are atypical, for as the composer himself explained: "These variants are not exact replicas of traditional tunes but rather reminiscences of various versions in my own collection and those of others."

In fact, upon closer investigation, the origins of the original hymn-tune "*Dives and Lazarus*", based upon an episode related in Luke's Gospel, seem even more obscure. A similarly styled English folk-song, listed as No. 477 in the Roud Folk Song Index, is actually designated as a Christmas carol! Nevertheless, this was the theme Vaughan Williams selected as the basis for his *Five Variants*, composed in 1939, and premiered in New York under Sir John Barbirolli on June 10th 1939. Of particular note is the pronounced modal character of all but the penultimate section of the work, though its synergy with the unmistakable pastoral imagery of the *Tallis Fantasia* and *The Lark Ascending* places it at the very core of Vaughan Williams' mature creativity, in its sound-world of rapturous melodic introspection. As the composer later wrote of his discovery of the original theme in 1893, when he was just 21, "I had the sense of recognition, here was something I had known all my life, only I didn't know it!"

Michael Jameson

RIMMA SUSHANSKAYA Principal Associate Conductor, NSO

The National Symphony Orchestra is delighted that Rimma Sushanskaya, the distinguished violinist and conductor, has accepted a formal role with the orchestra. Critically acclaimed performances and recordings in recent years have developed a synergy, a shared passion, for music making. Sushanskaya has found an energy and vision which gives inspiration and a huge sense of eager anticipation for the future.

The internationally-acclaimed violinist Rimma Sushanskaya was the last pupil of David Oistrakh, with whom she studied at Moscow Conservatoire, and under whose tutelage she won many prestigious awards. Upon leaving the Soviet Union she rapidly established a glowing reputation in USA and Europe. *The Washington Post*, described her as "one of the greatest violinists alive today," and commented on her "extraordinary intensity and brilliant virtuosity." Rimma Sushanskaya then embarked on a most successful career in conducting.

In recent years, she has performed as a conductor in concert halls of an ever growing list of countries including Germany, Russia, Israel, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Switzerland, China and the United Kingdom. She has been enjoying successful performances and re-engagements in prestigious venues such as the Gewandhaus, Leipzig, Germany, Philharmonic Hall and Konzerthaus Berlin, Germany, Philharmonic Hall, Kharkiv, Ukraine, Tonhalle, Zurich, Switzerland.

Among the list of orchestras conducted by Rimma Sushanskaya include Berlin Sinfonetta, Neues Sinfonia Orchestra Berlin, Leipzig Chamber Orchestra in Germany, Kharkiv Philharmonic Ukraine, St. Petersburg State Orchestra, Russia State Philharmonic of Satu-Mare, Romania, Orchestra of the Swan, UK.



She made her highly acclaimed London début with the National Symphony Orchestra at Cadogan Hall in 2017 conducting *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *La Valse*. Among the many important orchestral works in Dr. Sushanskaya's repertoire, the following are to be noted: Beethoven's Symphony No.9, 'Choral', Rachmaninov's Symphony No.2, Mozart's *Requiem*, Mahler's Symphony No 4, and Orff's *Carmina Burana*.

Following in the traditions of her own legendary teacher, Sushanskaya has been equally anxious to pass on her knowledge and experience to younger musicians. She was a sought-after professor at Birmingham Conservatoire, and for many years presented her Virtuoso Violin Festival every summer in Stratford-upon-Avon, her home in England.



The National Symphony Orchestra is one of the longest-established and most versatile professional freelance orchestras working in Britain today. Formed in the 1940s during World War II, NSO's musicians were, by necessity, young and enthusiastic, and this dynamic performing tradition continues to this day. NSO has a comprehensive recording legacy, as well as a busy diary of live concert performances. The orchestra is admired for its versatility, ability to communicate, connecting with audiences with consistent commitment and passion. The orchestra has recently found renewed energy and direction under its managing director, Justin Pearson.

Through 2024 Rimma Sushanskaya conducts and records a complete cycle of the Beethoven symphonies in London. Her performance of the *Choral Symphony* on 7th May marks the exact 200th anniversary of the first performance. NSO performs through the United Kingdom with multiple performance at the Barbican and Cadogan halls, as well as frequent appearances at St. John's, Smith Square.

In 2023, NSO toured to the Riyadh Film Music Festival and the Saudi Opera Festival for series of concerts, immediately after recording new concertos by the Argentine composer, Polo Piatti, as well as this recording an English string music disc for Quartz Records with Rimma Sushanskaya and violist Philip Dukes. A live vinyl recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* with conductor Anthony Inglis was released to outstanding critical acclaim on the Chasing the Dragon Records label. Concurrently, NSO managed a Netflix video shoot with Alicia Keys which

immediately attracted over six million online views, in addition to appearing in the film *Maestro*, with many other appearances by NSO musicians in Netflix's *The Crown* and *Bridgerton*. The orchestra continued its series of classical concerts at Cheltenham Town Hall. The orchestra tours to New York in October, and trips to the Middle East and China are in preparation.

In 2022, NSO was chosen to perform for Queen Elizabeth in one of her final public appearances at the Platinum Jubilee Celebration at Windsor Castle, watched on ITV by an audience of millions. With Principal Associate Conductor, Rimma Sushanskaya, the orchestra recorded discs of Mozart concerti and symphonies, Beethoven Symphony No.5 and the two Romances for violin (Matilda Milwidsky), released on the Guild label, and Brahms symphonic works released on the Quartz label in May, 2022.

During the challenges of the pandemic NSO was the first orchestra to return to Air Lyndhurst Studios, recording Debbie Wiseman's score for the film *To Olivia*, also reaching no. 1 in the classical charts with the composer's album for Classic FM, *Kings and Queens*, with narrators Dame Helen Mirren and Damian Lewis.

NSO was proud to play at the ceremony marking the handover to the nation of the new DNRC Rehabilitation Centre in Loughborough in the presence of Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister. In March 2019, NSO performed at the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the Autumn of 2019, NSO appeared in a nationwide UK tour with Tasmin Little and Philip Dukes as soloists, conducted by Rimma Sushanskaya. Visits to New York and concerts for Viking Cruises at London's Cadogan Hall were highlights of the season.

In 2018, NSO topped the classical charts for weeks collaborating with presenter Alan Titchmarsh and composer Debbie Wiseman for a project named The Glorious Garden. In 2017, NSO again occupied top spot with a recording of new music in Debbie Wiseman's *Musical Zodiac*. The recent release of the film *Edie* starring Sheila Hancock featured NSO on its soundtrack. NSO returned to Abbey Road Studios in November 2018 with Debbie Wiseman and Stephen Fry, recording a soundtrack to Fry's book *Mythos*, another no.1 disc in the classical chart.

The National Symphony Orchestra was founded in the 1940s and immediately became a significant recording orchestra. From the 1980s the reputation and standing of the orchestra surged forwards, successfully performing and recording for audiences in a dynamic range of genres: Classical, film and TV scores, West End and Broadway Musicals, accompanying celebrated international singers, all of which it continues to do to this day.

Though based in London, the NSO performs throughout the United Kingdom, drawing its fine players from all round the country. The NSO prides itself on the huge audiences that regularly support its concerts. The orchestra has performed Opera Evenings with artistes such as Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Lesley Garrett.

Viennese Nights, Tchaikovsky Galas and programmes of popular classics have been performed to capacity houses at prestigious venues including The Royal Festival Hall, Barbican, Royal Albert Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham to name but a few.

The NSO played seasons with the New York City Ballet when they visited the London Coliseum, performing under the baton of Charles Barker and Jack Everly;

the orchestra toured extensively for The Moscow City Ballet for many years each time they visited Britain.

The NSO has recorded more than 40 complete major classic musicals. This significant legacy means that the NSO is one of the most recorded orchestras at EMI Abbey Road Studios. These musicals, marketed mainly in the USA, often sold more than 1.5 million discs, including recordings of *Phantom of the Opera* and *West Side Story*. The Leonard Bernstein Estate remarked: "There is no finer recording of *West Side Story* than that which was laid down by the NSO". The orchestra has also performed a number of spectacular televised and recorded concerts under the direction of distinguished composer conductors from the worlds of TV and film, such as the Oscar-winning composer Anne Dudley, and Debbie Wiseman who is currently Classic FM's Composer-in-Residence.

Guest Leader: **Paul Willey**

Managing Director and Artistic Director: **Justin Pearson**

Principal Associate Conductor: **Rimma Sushanskaya**

PHILIP DUKES FGSM, Hon ARAM

Recognised as one of the world's leading viola players, Philip Dukes has enjoyed a career spanning over 30 years as an accomplished concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. He made his solo recital début in 1991 at the Southbank Centre, London, hailed by *The Times* as 'Great Britain's most outstanding viola player' and by *The Strad* as 'world class'. As a winner of the coveted European Rising Stars Award in 1997, he immediately made his recital débuts in Vienna, Stockholm, Frankfurt, Paris, and Amsterdam to critical acclaim and went on to perform



as a soloist with all the major UK orchestras. He has appeared as a soloist at the BBC Proms on numerous occasions, including one in which his performance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Andrew Davis in the Triple Concerto by Sir Michael Tippett was recorded live for the Deutsche Grammophon label. In addition, Philip has also recorded extensively for the Chandos, Naxos, Nimbus, BIS and

Hyperion recording labels, as well as regularly recording and broadcasting for BBC Radio 3. He also gave the world première of the Concerto for Violin, Viola and Orchestra by Benjamin Britten. Philip has enjoyed close musical associations with Yehudi Menuhin, György Kurtág, Daniel Hope, Tasmin Little, Julian Lloyd Weber, Michael Tree, Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, the Beaux Arts Trio, Debbie Wiseman and Sir Andrew Davis. In more diverse collaborations, Philip has worked with artists such as Eric Clapton, Sir Paul McCartney, Massive Attack, Madonna, Björk, Bryan Ferry, Nigel Kennedy, Robbie Williams, Oasis and David Gilmour. In demand worldwide as a director/conductor/soloist, Dukes holds guest teaching positions at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Wells Cathedral School, and is also Artistic Director at Marlborough College. Philip was unanimously elected a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2006, and in 2007 was appointed an Honorary Associate at the Royal Academy of Music. Philip Dukes is also Associate Artistic Director of the Savannah Music Festival in Georgia, USA, and is also a member of the prestigious Wigmore Soloists ensemble. Highlights for 2023/24 include performances throughout the UK, USA, Germany, Turkey and Ireland, in concert with the Sacconi, Tippett and Escher string quartets, Daniel Hope, Jennifer Pike, Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Wigmore Soloists, Matt Ford and Debbie Wiseman.