

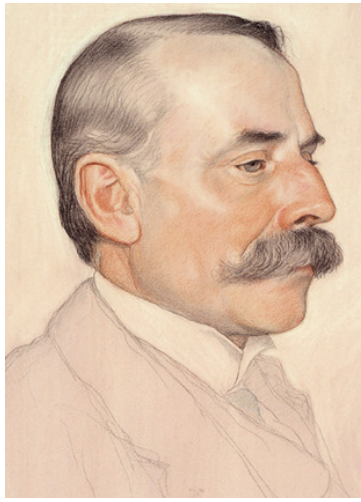
# NSSO

*National Schools Symphony Orchestra*

*Conductor & Soloist  
Peter Donohoe*

*19th July 2008*

*Reading University  
Great Hall*



*Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)*  
**Cockaigne Overture**

Dispirited by the perceived failure of the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, Elgar uttered his oft-quoted remark "I always knew God was against art..." ...and quickly set to work on this overture. It is supposed to present a musical portrait of life in turn-of-the-century London - admittedly a somewhat romanticized portrait, for Cockaigne is the fabulous country of luxury and delight.

Elgar wrote a detailed programme for the work, including lovers in a secluded public garden and a brass band appearing round a corner. At this time, however, the Elgars had lived in London for only one brief, unhappy spell some ten years earlier, and it is equally possible to see within the music Elgar's native Worcestershire. The lovers' theme in particular evokes the open spaces of his favourite Malvern Hills with their broad panoramas, where Elgar escaped from the harsh realities of life as a struggling composer by flying kites. Indeed, at the end of the score, as if in acknowledgement of his true inspiration, he added a quotation from the medieval poem *Piers Plowman*: "Meteless and moneless on Malverne hulles".

The work was an immediate success, not only in Britain (where Hans Richter was an early champion) but also in Germany and the USA. This is a lively, colourful and varied piece if in parts a little brash. It continues to be performed regularly.



*Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)*  
**Piano Concerto in D minor**  
*Soloist: Peter Donohoe*

Bach performed as soloist in the first performance of this work in 1738, and it is well-suited to his dynamic, aggressive keyboard playing. One of several of Bach's innovations in keyboard playing was his advocacy of the use of the thumb, which was generally not used much prior to his career. He also greatly increased the use of the little finger—earlier keyboard-players had relied on the first three fingers, with some pretty elaborate crossover and substitution (of fingers) patterns. He certainly revolutionised keyboard-playing, and this concerto is a prime example. The soloist is almost constantly busy, and in the outer movements is in the business of supplying a pretty-well constant motoric drive to the music as well as the bulk of the melody. The gorgeous slow movement, on the other hand, uses a recurring and somewhat austere ground in the strings, sometimes joined by the keyboard, over which the soloist weaves an increasingly elaborate and poignant cantilena, variations on a ground. Both the first and last movements have what might be considered cadenzas, but which are simply straightforward solo passages with little or no accompaniment that provide a textural break before the final measures of each of these movements.

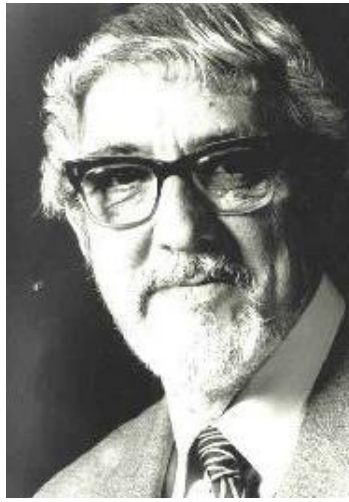
It should also be pointed out that Bach championed “equal-tempered tuning,” that is, adjusting the tuning of intervals so that all major and minor keys could be equally used on the keyboard. This is very important to the d minor concerto, because it is tonally very adventurous, goes through all the keys several times over, and in its own Bach-like way is highly chromatic while always managing “to land in the right place at the right time.” Bach would have performed this on the harpsichord (it is often heard that way today). He would not have worried much about which keyboard instrument to use, because he played them all. Toward the end of his life, he was introduced to the early as-yet-primitive piano. He had reservations about it, but thought it had great possibilities: in fact, he expressed interest in selling the new musical invention. One imagines he would be very pleased to hear one of his best concertos on today's modern concert pianos.



*Stravinsky (1882 - 1971)*  
**Concerto for Piano and Wind**  
*Soloist: Peter Donohoe*

Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum, Russia, and brought up in St Petersburg where his father was a bass singer at the Mariinsky Theatre. After thoughts of becoming a lawyer he began to study with Rimsky-Korsakov at the age of 20 and this study laid the foundations for his orchestral expertise and his supreme confidence in trying out new ideas.

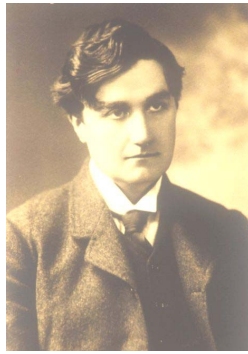
Stravinsky's early successes all had Russian themes, but as an international figure he was soon asked to write purely concert works and the bulk of his orchestral output is from the 1920s, 30s and 40s. During these years he produced five concertos and three symphonic works. The Piano Concerto, written in 1924, is one of a number of works Stravinsky wrote for himself to perform, to help his finances after fleeing the Russian Revolution in 1917 and making his home in the West. It is striking in that the orchestra consists of wind instruments, with only the double basses of the string section taking part. It is in the usual three movements and has many baroque features.



*Leonard Salzedo (1921 - 2000)*  
**Percussion Concerto**

Salzedo was born in 1921 in London. He took up the violin at the age of 6 and began composing at 12. At the Royal College of Music he studied with Howells, Dyson and Jacob. As well as composing for Ballet Rambert, he played violin with the LPO and RPO. He also became conductor of the Scottish Ballet and Director of the London City Ballet. Much of his best-known music was written for Hammer horror movies. He died in Leighton Buzzard in May 2000.

The Concerto for Percussion was written specially for Philips records in 1968 and appeared on a record issued in 1969. It been used several times as ballet music. Firstly by the Scottish Ballet for an experimental production, then by Norman Morrice for a ballet called 'Percussion Concerto' produced by the Batsheva Company in Israel. He subsequently produced the ballet for the Ballet Rambert but changed the name to the 'Empty Suit'. It has been produced by a university company in Johannesburg and most recently in Milwaukee at the University of Wisconsin.



## *Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)*

# **A London Symphony**

Vaughan Williams described this piece as a “Symphony by a Londoner”, the music is intended to be self-expressive, and must stand or fall as ‘absolute’ music. Therefore, if listeners recognize suggestions of such things as the ‘Westminster Chimes’ or the ‘Lavender Cry’ they are asked to consider these as accidents, not essential of the music.

The work opens slowly and mysteriously to convey the impression of an autumnal London morning with fog rising off the river Thames. Harp and clarinet sound out the Westminster Chimes as heard from Big Ben. The mood then quickens to reveal the hustle, bustle and noise of a teeming London. A contrast is afforded by a quiet section which suggests the idea of the calm to be found in the deserted narrow streets and alley-ways which lead from the Strand to the river, But back comes the mood of the thronging city, with its high spirits and unique cockney qualities.

In the second movement, Vaughan Williams depicts a nostalgic vignette of the Bloomsbury district during a damp and foggy November afternoon. The opening motive is given to a solo cor anglais. This is followed by another theme played by flute and trumpet over muted strings. Eventually there is a solo viola passage contrasted with woodwind; the ‘Lavender’ cry is clearly discernable. The jingle of a passing hansomcab is heard in the background and the whole mood rises to an impassioned climactic outburst. The quiet opening cor anglais melody returns and the movement concludes with the viola.

The composer described the contrasting Scherzo thus: “if the hearer will imagine himself standing on Westminster Embankment at night, surrounded by the distant sounds of the Strand, with its great hotels on one side and the ‘new Cut’ on the other, with its crowded streets and flaring lights, it may serve as a mood in which to listen to this movement’.

The fourth movement was the one where Vaughan Williams made the most revisions, not only shortening it but also modifying the shape. The final form is of two slow marches flanking an allegro. The broad nature of the finale begins a strong, positive and agitated march-tune. The ensuing Allegro is of considerable panache in a manner similar to the opening movement but lacking the cheerful nature. The return of the march atmosphere eventually builds to the climax of the movement. The appearance of the “Westminster Chimes” given out by the harp heralds the introduction to the epilogue where we return to the opening damp, quiet atmosphere of the work’s opening.

*Peter Donohoe*  
**Conductor & Piano**

Peter Donohoe is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest living British pianists. He first came to public attention when he won the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow in 1982 and he now performs regularly with many of the major orchestras throughout the world. "Donohoe is a pianist in a class of his own, an interpreter with a quite extraordinary feeling for musical phrasing, a 'sculptor' of the piano; his relentlessly clear representation of thematic conflicts brings the drama to life." Detlef Brandenburg (Schleswig-Holstein, 1993).

He was born in Manchester, England, and studied there at Chetham's, The Royal Northern College of Music and then later in Paris with Yvonne Loriod, wife of the late Olivier Messiaen. He has developed a distinguished career in Europe, the United States and the Far East. During the 2007/8 season his performances include the City of Birmingham Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestras, an extensive tour to South America and concerts in Moscow and St Petersburg. He will also take part in a major Messiaen Festival in the Spanish city of Cuenca, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth.

*Jason Thornton*  
**Conductor for Bach and Stravinsky**

Jason Thornton is one of Britain's finest young conductors. He is the Musical Director of Bath Philharmonia, and has also worked with many of Britain's finest orchestral and choral ensembles. Future plans include a tour of *The Bear and The Snowman* with Howard Blake and Bath Philharmonia and also his debut with the Beijing Symphony and Shanghai Philharmonic in the first Chinese performances of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*.

*Adam Sealey*  
**Leader**

Adam, 17, has been a student at Wells Cathedral School, one of five specialist music schools in Britain under the DfES music and dance scheme, since the age of ten. He has just completed his A level examinations and holds an offer to read Geography at St Edmund Hall, Oxford University, starting in October.

Adam has studied the violin for eleven years, since 2001 under the guidance of Brigid Kirkland-Wilson. Earlier this year he passed his violin diploma with distinction. He also plays classical piano to a post grade eight standard. He has played with many orchestras both at school and nationally, and performed as a member of the National Children's Orchestra for four years. He enjoys chamber music and has recently participated in several successful string quartets. 2008 is his third year as a member of the National Schools Symphony Orchestra.

# PROGRAMME

*Elgar*

## **Cockaigne Overture**

*Bach*

## **Piano Concerto in D minor**

*Allegro, Adagio, Allegro*

*Stravinsky*

## **Concerto for Piano and Wind**

*Largo-allegro, Largo, Allegro*



**SHORT INTERVAL**



*Salzedo*

## **Concerto for Percussion**

*Scherzo, Arioso, Finale*

*Vaughan Williams*

## **A London Symphony**

*Lento-allegro risoluto, Lento, Scherzo (Nocturne), Andante con moto.*

# *NSSO 2008*

## *SCHOOLS REPRESENTED*

American  
Alleyn's  
Ampleforth

Bedales  
Bedford High  
Brooke Weston

Canford  
Charterhouse  
Cheltenham  
Cheltenham Ladies'  
Chigwell  
Clifton

Eltham  
Epsom  
Eton

Gloucester High  
Godolphin  
Guildford High

Hampton  
Harrow  
Hereford Cathedral  
Home schooled

King's Ely  
King William's  
King Edward VII & Queen Mary  
King John (Thrapston)  
Kingswood  
King's Worcester

Malvern  
Malvern St James  
Marist  
Millfield  
Moreton Hall  
Northwood  
Norwich  
Notre Dame Senior (Cobham)  
Nottingham High

Perse  
Perse Girls

Radley  
Red Maids'  
Reigate Grammar  
RGS Guildford

Sevenoaks  
South Wilts Grammar  
St Mary's (Ascot)  
St Paul's  
St Paul's Girls'  
St Swithun's  
St Mary Redcliffe  
Stonyhurst  
Surbiton High

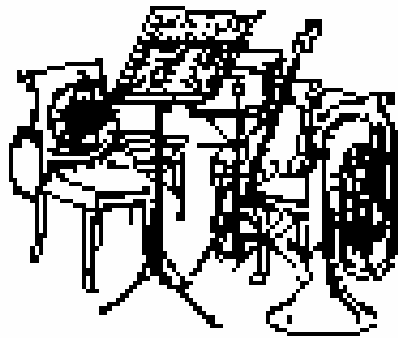
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