



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Jérémie Rhorer • Prom 9

French conductor Jérémie Rhorer makes his BBC Proms debut, conducting Le Cercle de l'Harmonie, the period-instrument ensemble he founded in 2005, in works by Mozart and Mendelssohn. For him, these two composers almost represent different stages in a single tradition. 'There's a very natural development from the Classical style of Haydn and Mozart right through to the symphonies of Brahms,' he explains. 'For me, the big break really only came with Richard Strauss. And both Mozart's and Mendelssohn's music seem effortless, almost as if you can't see the art – that's one of the highest achievements in all music.'

Rhorer is a successful composer as well – he's just finished a Cello Concerto and one for piano is in the pipeline. He feels his perspective as a creator of new music is crucial when conducting works by others. 'I want it to be as though I'm writing the score as I'm conducting it, almost as if it becomes my own music. I've been very influenced in this sense by Leonard Bernstein conducting Mahler.'

With CD collaborations with eminent singers Diana Damrau and Philippe Jaroussky under his belt, Rhorer has achieved a lot in Le Cercle de l'Harmonie's decade of existence, but he feels his Proms performance will be something special: 'Everybody has the right to great music, however educated or rich they are. I think the Proms is one of the only festivals that's the incarnation of that, and I have a huge admiration for it.'

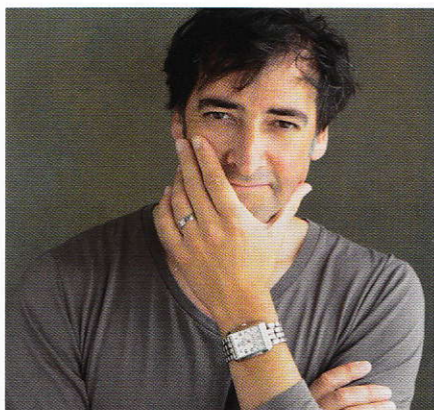


SPOTLIGHT ON...

Julie Boulianne • Prom 20

French-Canadian mezzo-soprano Julie Boulianne tickled audiences in Chabrier's frivolous sparkling comedy *L'étoile* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, earlier this year. And it's with another idiosyncratic French masterpiece that she makes her BBC Proms debut. Berlioz's choral symphony *Romeo and Juliet* is more the composer's personal response to Shakespeare's great tragic love story than a straightforward retelling and Boulianne has a key role to play in it, singing the first movement's tender love song. 'It's a very delicate and sensual moment,' she says. 'I think the key is to let the powerful text guide you through this very simple yet inspired music. It's an idealistic point of view about love, its beauty, value and fragility. It doesn't form part of the plot, but I feel it gives the audience a moment of meditation to fully understand and feel the two lovers' story. It has to be delivered with heart and humility, so for me it's the perfect way to make my Proms debut.'

Quebec-born Boulianne has performed at opera houses and concert halls through North America and Europe, but she feels the Berlioz work has always been with her. 'I was lucky enough to be introduced to this unique piece in my very first year at McGill University in Montreal and it's been following me ever since. And, because I only sing in the first part, I get to sit and calmly enjoy the rest of the music in all its brilliant complexity.'



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Alistair McGowan • PCM 3

With a documentary and a radio play on the eccentric French composer already under his belt (both of them for BBC Radio 4), comedian, impressionist and actor Alistair McGowan is fast becoming the go-to guy for all things Satie.

‘His music is so beautifully pure and calm and romantic,’ says McGowan, ‘and it was really the man who interested me alongside the music. I see myself a lot in him.’ As well as Satie’s renowned eccentricities – his bizarre titles for his musical pieces (the famous *Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*, perhaps, or even *Desiccated Embryos*), or his seven identical yellow suits, one for each day of the week – it’s the composer’s humorous writings that have fascinated McGowan. ‘He came out with some great one-liners, almost in the manner of Groucho Marx. He wrote these very jocular, often quite surreal pieces of, essentially, comedy – if I compared them with anyone, it would be with Spike Milligan’s writing in its sense of the absurd.’

It’s some of these writings that McGowan brings to this lunchtime music-and-speech Prom, in which he’s joined by French pianist Alexandre Tharaud. ‘To my knowledge, Satie only ever performed one of them – called “In praise of critics” – so I’ll be one of the few people to have ever performed them.’ It was Satie’s piano music that got amateur pianist McGowan back into playing – didn’t he feel tempted to perform any of the pieces himself? ‘On a stage like this, at the Proms, live on the radio? No thank you!’



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Jamie Cullum • Prom 36

When UK jazz star Jamie Cullum made his BBC Proms debut back in 2010, he filled the Royal Albert Hall with feel-good tunes alongside crack crossover band the Heritage Orchestra. This year, however, he's planning something very different. 'The Proms is going to focus on songs – some of my own and some new and exciting interpretations,' he explains. 'Crucially, though, I'm going to try and use the space and the instrumentation available to me in an interesting way.'

Cullum is still finalising the fine details of his late-night gig, but he's taken inspiration for it from the venue itself. 'The Royal Albert Hall is one of those curious venues that can feel at once very intimate and then incredibly grand and open. I intend to exploit that unique quality in this concert.'

What role does he think jazz has in this eminent musical celebration? 'I hope we're at a stage now where artistic merit is judged beyond genres. I'm glad the Proms shines light on all areas of music.' And he's delighted to be able to bring his music to the diverse audience that the Proms attracts. 'You get an opportunity to play to people who might not necessarily have thought about coming to see you. All ages, all levels of musical knowledge, all with open minds – my favourite kind of audience.'



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Jonathan Cohen • Proms at ... Sam Wanamaker Playhouse

Shakespeare is the inspiration behind the two BBC Proms given by conductor Jonathan Cohen and his group Arcangelo, but by way of composers from half a century after the great Bard's time – Purcell, Blow, Locke and Draghi. 'The programme takes in *The Tempest* and *The Fairy Queen*, which is based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,' explains Cohen. 'Both Shakespeare plays were major inspirations for Purcell and others composers of the time, who wrote semi-operas or incidental music to complement them.' And, he continues, those scores could often be quite – well, unusual. 'I love the fantastical element to this music. Not bound to a plot or scene, the composer and librettist often went quite wild, frequently at a tangent to the play. The spectacle of fantastic and exotic acts as a kind of commentary on a scene was quite typical of the period.'

For Cohen, the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse is an ideal location for these events. 'In the intimacy of this wonderful small theatre, the audience will feel almost as if they are on stage, amid the performers. I love this bare, naked element.' And that, he feels, fits in perfectly with his broader aims for his respected period-instrument ensemble. 'In our work at Arcangelo, I like to encourage a real chamber music on stage, with a direct engagement with the music from each and every performer. The energy that brings suits an intimate venue like this, and also the music of the period.'



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Jiří Bělohlávek • Prom 45

Czech conductor Jiří Bělohlávek is far from a stranger to the BBC Proms, of course – as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 2006 to 2012, he's conducted dozens of Proms events, including three Last Nights. 'Nobody will be surprised that my strongest impression from the wonderful BBC Proms festival was (and still is) the incredible atmosphere of the Last Night,' he says, 'especially in 2012 – my farewell concert as Chief Conductor with the BBC SO, which remains a sacred moment in my memory.'

But it's one of his Czech homeland's most mysterious operatic offerings that he conducts this year, in a concert performance of Janáček's thriller-cum-love-story *The Makropulos Affair*. 'I heard the opera for the first time on the recording by František Jílek, and I remember the fascination it left in my mind. It was a completely new world of drama.'

Bělohlávek has conducted productions of *Makropulos* in San Francisco and at The Met, New York, both of them with Finnish soprano Karita Mattila as the enigmatic central figure of Emilia Marty. Mattila also sings the role at this Prom, amid an otherwise all-Czech cast. 'She proved to be the key to the musical and theatrical approach to the work. She is the ideal artist for this emotion-laden figure, and collaborating with her has been among the strongest impressions I have had during my opera career.'

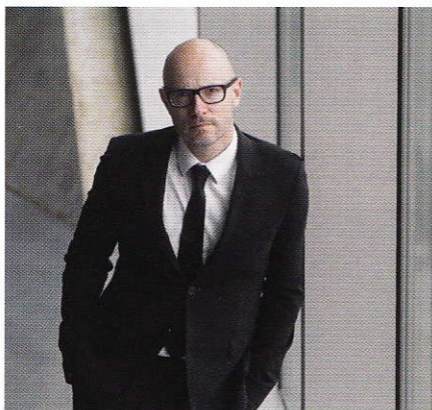


SPOTLIGHT ON...

William Christie • Prom 63

‘The Royal Albert Hall is the happiness hall!’ The distinguished US-born, French-resident conductor William Christie is far from a stranger to the Proms and performing here is clearly something he cherishes. ‘The audience is the best in the world. There are thousands of them and they peer down at you from all around. They’re there to enjoy the performance, obviously, but they’re immensely supportive as well. And every time I’ve been there it’s been with something I’ve desperately wanted to present to a London audience.’

This year is no exception. Christie is renowned for his sparkling period interpretations, especially of music from the French Baroque, and for having brought composers such as Rameau and Lully back into the public consciousness virtually single-handedly. But it’s a very different beast he tackles this year: Bach’s Mass in B minor. ‘When you’re in front of a piece like this, you feel wonderfully fortunate,’ he says. ‘This will be only the second time I’ve conducted it, but it comes at a marvellous moment in my life. I don’t think I could have said this 25 years ago, but I feel like I’ve digested and assimilated an awful lot of comment and scholarship, and now I think I have something to say about this piece. And essentially it has to do with me. Like everything I do, it will be an intensely personal interpretation. But I believe in what I’m doing.’



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Baldur Brönnimann • Prom 65

'I think we're probably still too close to Boulez's death to say what his influences are, and what his achievements have been,' admits Swiss-born conductor Baldur Brönnimann, who conducts a Late Night Prom in tribute to the great Frenchman. 'He was a composer and conductor, and also an important figure within the music business and the political and cultural scene – his achievements are on many different levels.'

Brönnimann's concert intentionally ranges wider than simply music by Boulez, taking in Elliott Carter and Bartók too. 'It's the kind of programme that Boulez himself would have planned and this is what we're celebrating as well – his impact on the whole way music is programmed.' It's Brönnimann's debut as a performer at the Proms, although he's been in the audience many times before. 'I saw Boulez conducting several Proms – I lived in Manchester for a long time, so I would go down to London whenever I could. And of course the Proms has a great history of putting on great new music – I heard a lot of interesting new pieces for the first time there.'

He's conducting the eminent Ensemble Intercontemporain, the group Boulez founded in 1976. And he admits feeling a sense of responsibility to his late colleague. 'The ensemble is a living piece of performance history – the players know so many of the composers of today and they live and breathe this music.'



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Daniil Trifonov • Prom 71

'Meteoric' is a word that's probably used too often to describe the upward trajectories of musicians' careers. But, in the case of young Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov, it seems pretty apt. It was only five years ago that he won two of the piano world's top contests – the Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky competitions – within weeks of each other, and he's now in demand around the world as one of today's very finest players.

He made his Proms debut in 2013, playing Glazunov's rarely heard Second Concerto, and was one of the pianists who tackled Prokofiev's complete piano concertos in a single Prom last year. But it's a very different piece he brings to this year's festival: Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21. 'I learnt this concerto while I was a student at the Moscow Gnessin School,' Trifonov explains, 'it was one of the pieces that made me, as a kid, adore Mozart's music. It's a great joy to return to it after many years of not playing it. Mozart is one of the most difficult composers for a pianist – every colour you make is so full of transparency. The instant something artificial happens, it can shatter the atmosphere of the music.'

Trifonov has cherished memories of his previous Proms performances, too. 'The moment I walked on that stage, I was startled by the energetic atmosphere and the massive space around you, filled with thousands of listeners. It can take you to another realm.'