



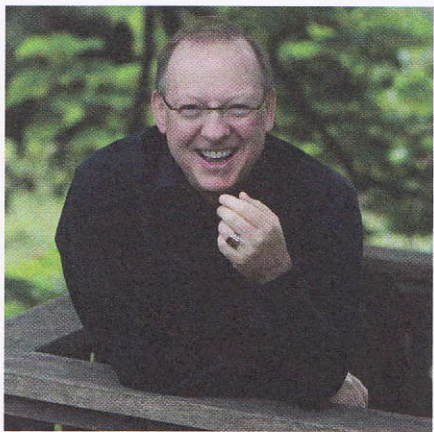
SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Robert Hollingworth • PCM 1

Theatricality, wit, drama and fun, side by side with serious scholarship – these are the two distinctive hallmarks of English vocal ensemble I Fagiolini, currently celebrating its 30th anniversary. Founding director Robert Hollingworth finds nothing unusual in this apparently stark contrast. ‘I don’t see that one gets in the way of the other. I use academic research as a way of trying to get closer to what composers might have meant by their music – but there’s no reason why we shouldn’t present things in a completely different way.’

His group returns to Monteverdi for its lunchtime Prom and Hollingworth has a simple aim: ‘I wanted listeners who have never been to a Monteverdi concert before, as well as audiences that love the composer, to get a little bit of everything.’ Which even includes a vocal dance suite – ‘I think that’s a lost genre of Monteverdi’s,’ Hollingworth adds. They also unveil a brand-new work by Roderick Williams. ‘Contrary to popular belief,’ Hollingworth says, ‘we’re not an early music group. We’ve always sung a great deal of contemporary music and we’ve commissioned about 40 works over our lifetime.’

But what is it about Monteverdi’s music that keeps Hollingworth returning to it? ‘It’s so powerfully emotional. And he keeps reinventing things as though nobody had ever written for these forces before. It’s really quite alarming!’



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Nicholas McGegan Proms at ... Stage@TheDock

By now, we're used to the Proms spreading its varied activities outside its iconic home base at London's Royal Albert Hall – just think of Proms Chamber Music at nearby Cadogan Hall. But this year the festival travels much further afield than Sloane Square – to Hull, UK City of Culture 2017. 'And where better to do Handel's *Water Music* than by the Humber?' enthuses the event's conductor, period performance specialist Nicholas McGegan.

It might be a long way north of the River Thames, location of the piece's celebrated premiere in 1717 and where Handel's dance suites famously serenaded King George I on his river excursion from Whitehall to Chelsea and back. But McGegan's three performances, outdoors at Hull's historic dock, celebrate not only the 300th anniversary of the piece itself, but also the city's own maritime achievements.

McGegan conducts the Royal Northern Sinfonia in the concerts. 'I've worked with them for more than a decade,' he explains. 'Over the years we've done quite a lot of Handel together, including three oratorios, as well as lots of Beethoven and even some Mahler. The RNS has a great feeling for musical style – whether it's of the 18th century, or something more recent. They always play with such joy and elan. I'm really looking forward to an exciting trip!'

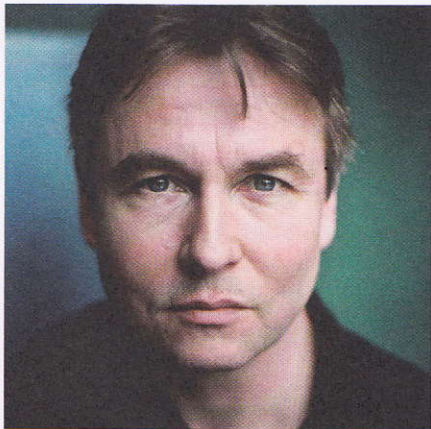


SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Van Kuijk Quartet • PCM 2

It's been a remarkably swift ascent to success for the Paris-based Van Kuijk Quartet. Formed in 2012, the foursome swept to victory with three awards – including First Prize – at the 2015 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, and the group has been a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist since 2015. How has their musical personality developed over such a short space of time? 'We're more mature, following more and more stage experience,' explains second violinist Sylvain Favre-Bulle. 'Our connection together and our identity have grown stronger and we feel freer now in our choices and artistic direction.'

That freedom in terms of artistic choices extends to their Proms debut, for which they contrast an iconic chamber classic with a brand-new piece by their compatriot Laurent Durupt. 'He's an extremely talented composer, of our own generation,' continues Favre-Bulle, 'and we feel it's very important to play the music of our time.' And for Mozart's glorious Clarinet Quintet, they're joined by Belgian clarinetist and fellow New Generation Artist Annelien Van Wauwe. 'It's one of the most beautiful chamber works,' says Favre-Bulle, 'and we particularly love it because the clarinet connects so completely with the instruments of the string quartet. We've already played with Annelien and we're really looking forward to reuniting for this project.'



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Esa-Pekka Salonen • Prom 24

Conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen feels a strong personal connection to the centrepiece of his Prom with the Philharmonia Orchestra. ‘John Adams’s *Naive and Sentimental Music* was actually my commission, when I was Music Director at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. I premiered it too – and John even dedicated it to me.’ Salonen is keen to stress Adams’s impact on his career, both as a conductor and a composer. ‘He’s a good friend of mine and he was one of the most important influences on me as a composer when I was in my thirties. He’s found something that feels very free, very undogmatic and he can move very easily between idioms and materials – I still really admire that today.’

Naive and Sentimental Music is a symphony in all but name, and full of challenges for any orchestra and conductor – but how does Salonen view it now, 18 years after he conducted its premiere? ‘It’s still a technically demanding piece, but I think I have a better grasp of its overall shape now. It’ll be like meeting an old friend again – even if it’s in a wrestling match that I have to win!’

Also in his Proms concert are pieces by two composers Salonen especially loves. ‘Stravinsky’s *Vom Himmel hoch* is a piece I hardly knew before, but it’s always fun to learn something new. And Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* – well, it’s just perfection in its balance, its contrasts, its colours. I don’t know anybody who doesn’t love it!’



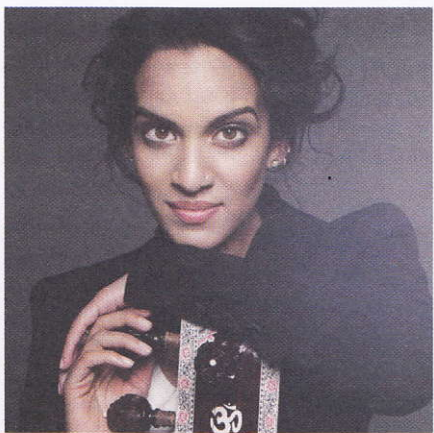
SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Latvian Radio Choir • Prom 38

‘There’s a saying in Latvia that half of the population are singers and the other half are dancers. And then there are some people who manage both!’ Tenor Kārlis Rūtentāls (*above*) from the Latvian Radio Choir is understandably proud of his country’s huge passion for singing: ‘In Riga alone there are more than 100 choirs – we have bank choirs, ministry choirs, petrol station choirs, lawyers’ choirs, university choirs – you name it. And we have a Song and Dance Festival every five years that brings 13,000 singers onto one stage.’

That’s not quite the number that will be visiting the Proms for the Latvian Radio Choir’s three concerts, the centrepiece of which is a late-night performance of Rachmaninov’s *All-Night Vigil (Vespers)*. ‘We are in a privileged position with Russian music,’ explains Rūtentāls, ‘in that historically and geographically we are, in a way, bound up with Russian culture, which allows us to understand and perform this music with less effort. Rachmaninov’s music is like the Russian soul itself, with all its greatness and also its subtlety – great choral chords against fragile solo parts.’

He’s proud, too, of his choir’s versatility. ‘In Latvia we sing everything from Bach and Brahms to contemporary and experimental music – and even theatrical performances. We even did a Halloween concert recently with exploding singers’ heads!’



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Anoushka Shankar • Prom 41

'I have memories of it being recorded as a child – I must have been aged about 9. It was an album I was absolutely fascinated by.' Sitar virtuoso Anoushka Shankar is talking about the 1990 album *Passages*, a collaboration between her father Ravi Shankar and American composer Philip Glass, in which each of the musical giants came up with themes and allowed the other to do what they liked with them. 'It now feels very ahead of its time,' Anoushka Shankar continues. 'I'm sure it was a huge influence on me: to be able to work between musical cultures in a way that's respectful and authentic to both is pretty much what I'm trying to do in my whole career. And *Passages* is a beautiful example of that.'

Shankar's Late Night Prom is the first time that *Passages* has been performed live and complete, and brings together the Britten Sinfonia and a raft of Indian musicians, alongside Shankar herself as sitar soloist. 'I'm absolutely thrilled to be doing it,' she says.

Does she feel any sense of responsibility to continue her father's musical legacy, five years after his death? 'I'm not sure I'd say it's a responsibility – maybe more of a passion. Obviously *Passages* is my teacher's work, but it's also my father's work, so it's very close to my heart. A project like this allows me to immerse myself all over again in the roots of my own music.'

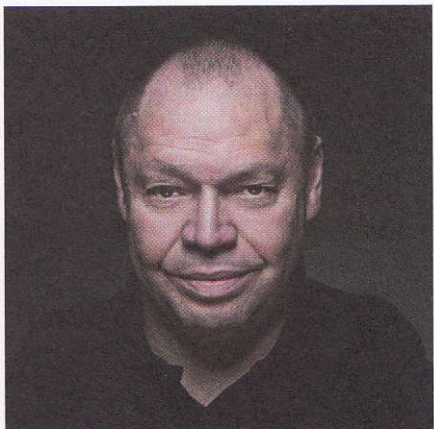


SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Bang on a Can All-Stars Prom 44

‘We’re part rock band (drum kit, electric guitar and keyboards) and part classical ensemble (cello, clarinet, piano and double bass).’ Bang on a Can All-Stars bassist Robert Black has a neat way of summing up his group – and its famously genre-straddling identity. ‘We have a reputation for playing rhythmically driving, hard-edged music, but we also have a lot of very gentle, mellow pieces,’ he continues, providing perfect descriptions for two of the works the group is bringing to its Late Night Prom: Louis Andriessen’s powerful *Workers Union* and Philip Glass’s sweetly consolatory ‘Closing’ (from his early bestseller *Glassworks*).

But the backbone of the All-Stars’ concert comes from Bang on a Can’s own founding trio of New York-based composers – Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe. ‘It feels great to have a close working relationship with them,’ Black says. ‘It’s also rather unique in that it’s been going on for 30 years. We really understand each other – the composers are very aware of the way we play and we have a fundamental understanding of their musical thinking too.’ Alongside a brand-new piece from Gordon, Black is looking forward to two established classics from Wolfe and Lang: ‘*Big Beautiful Dark and Scary* and *Sunray* are a couple of our favourite pieces. They really capture the essence of their composers – they’re sort of sonic portraits.’



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Thomas Quasthoff • Prom 46

'I have the smallest role in the whole piece!' German singer and actor Thomas Quasthoff is being modest about his crucial contribution to Schoenberg's massive *Gurrelieder* – 'an incredible, monumental, late-Romantic piece for a huge choir and orchestra, with beautiful music, and about love, death and everything in between,' as he describes it. For the climax of Schoenberg's gargantuan creation, he's very much centre stage, following the tragedy of the lovers' deaths with his joyous account of the coming of summer. 'It's an incredible piece for everyone involved,' he continues, 'and my section culminates in a wonderful sunrise, which ends the whole work – a truly amazing moment.'

One of the most admired singers of recent times, Quasthoff retired from the classical concert stage in 2012 but continues as a jazz vocalist, actor and speaker – recently, he even played Feste in the Berliner Ensemble's *Twelfth Night*. 'To be honest, I had to learn the technique of narrating in this way – it's tempting simply to turn it back into singing. But, if you're interpreting the meaning of the text, the speaking line follows those emotions anyway. It's a wonderful role – very colourful, a little bit kitsch, but I love it.'

He's particularly looking forward to working with Sir Simon Rattle again, too. 'He's my musical hero – I've done so many wonderful, challenging things with him. He actually lives in the next street to me in Berlin – we're pretty much neighbours!'



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

John Butt • Prom 49

It's no ordinary *St John Passion* that John Butt and his Scottish-based Dunedin Consort bring to the Proms – if there is such a thing, of course. As on his acclaimed 2013 recording of the work, Butt surrounds Bach's majestic choral masterpiece with organ music and choral motets, with the intention of recreating the context of a Passion performance as it might have been experienced in Bach's lifetime.

'It's a matter of hearing the *St John Passion* as part of a continuum,' Butt explains, 'where it rises out of something and falls back into it again. And it makes you more aware of the structures and symmetries within the piece itself. It also recalibrates the way we experience listening time – instead of starting at the beginning and going through to the end, this sense of time is more cyclical.'

The *St John Passion* is often described as the closest Bach came to an opera. However, for Butt, it's actually the other way round. 'A lot of people say that this piece is Bach leaning towards opera, but I'd say that, here, Bach has already seen opera, and is in fact turning it into something else.' What might that 'something else' be? 'There's still drama akin to opera that's happening, but it's happening not on the stage, but within each individual audience member.' A new form of drama for the inner self, perhaps – nothing if not an intriguing prospect.



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Jayanthi Kumaresh • Prom 55

It's been 70 years since India and Pakistan gained independence – an anniversary whose celebrations are tempered by painful memories of the trauma of Partition. A special Late Night Prom sets out to celebrate the full breadth of the subcontinent's music, with performers from both of India's classical traditions – northern Hindustani and southern Carnatic – as well as the intense spirituality of Sufi devotional qawwali singing from Pakistan.

Representing the south of India is eminent veena (plucked stringed instrument) virtuoso Jayanthi Kumaresh. 'The veena dates back over 3,000 years and it has a lot of mystical significance,' she explains. 'Saraswati, goddess of learning, is always depicted with a veena in her hand, and it's designed in the shape of the human body, with a head and 24 frets representing the 24 vertebrae in our spines.'

Jayanthi is the sixth generation in an ancient family lineage of musicians. 'It means that expectations are very high, but I think it helps me a lot – I feel like I have the music in my genes.'

For her Proms performance she'll be appearing with her husband, violinist Kumaresh Rajagopalan. 'It's not something we do very often – only for special occasions. Our playing styles are very different, but when we play together it's as though we create a new musical space where we meet for our collaboration.'



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Sheku Kanneh-Mason • Prom 62

'Life has changed immeasurably since BBC Young Musician,' admits Nottingham-based cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason, winner of the 2016 competition. He now has an agent, a record deal and invaluable mentors and friends in the music world – including Guy Johnston, Julian Lloyd Webber and Nicola Benedetti. 'I also have bookings two years ahead now and I'm very busy with engagements. And I'm still working towards my A levels and going to school in between.'

Amid this hectic schedule, he sees his BBC Proms debut as an unforgettable occasion. 'It seems like such an iconic event, to play at the Proms, and it holds a very special meaning. To be playing on such a stage, with all the atmosphere and magic that this involves, is very exciting.' The pieces he's playing, too, are particular favourites. 'Dvořák's *Rondo* is a beautiful work, combining tenderness with poise and precision. Popper's *Hungarian Rhapsody* covers almost everything a cello can do: singing phrases, haunting melodies, virtuoso passages – all the things I love about the cello!'

Kanneh-Mason is making his debut alongside the orchestra Chineke!. 'Playing with Chineke! has always been significant for me. It's a fantastic group, bringing together the very best of black and minority ethnic musicians and proving they stand among the best orchestral players in the world. On this occasion I won't be playing in the orchestra myself – although I usually do!'



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Marcus Farnsworth

Proms at ... Wilton's Music Hall

'It's one of the most visceral pieces of music I've ever performed. You have to approach it totally differently from anything else in the repertoire.' British baritone Marcus Farnsworth is talking about Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, an astonishingly powerful piece of music theatre from 1969 that portrays the derangement and confusion of George III in a notoriously demanding vocal part bringing together all manner of extreme effects, even including singing whole chords at once. 'It's really about exploring the emotions of madness, the internal turmoil of someone in that situation,' he continues. 'There's lots of pastiche in the music and plenty of references to Handel, as well as tunes from a mechanical organ the King owned. He also kept birds and there are lots of interesting little bits of birdsong throughout the piece, conversations that the King has with himself through the birds.'

It's a piece that has lost none of its power to startle in the almost half-century since its premiere, but for Farnsworth – who has been performing it since 2012 – it's about far more than shock value. 'It can be a very unusual experience for the audience, because it's so emotionally direct. And there are plenty of moments that are quite amusing. But I think it's very moving too, and it's given me a very different perspective on what we call madness and how we treat people we might call mad.'



SPOTLIGHT ON ...

Sara Mohr-Pietsch

Proms at ...

The Tanks at Tate Modern

It's an unconventional space for a concert – and it's set to host some equally unconventional music. The Tanks at Tate Modern – which stored oil during the gallery's former life as a power station and have now been converted into a raw, industrial space for the newest of art – is the venue for an unpredictable Late Night Prom curated by BBC Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch.

'This is an *Open Ear* concert,' she explains, referring to the BBC Radio 3 series that started last year, 'to showcase the huge variety of practice in contemporary music. We've had everything from a chamber orchestra playing traditionally notated music to turntable artists, improvisation and performance art. There's a growing audience of adventurous listeners for whom the usual distinctions between music, art, architecture, even theatre and dance, just don't exist in the same way.'

Mohr-Pietsch is delighted to have on board the London Contemporary Orchestra, and she's particularly excited about the Tanks' remarkable space. 'It has such an extraordinary atmosphere,' she continues, 'with the extremity of the concrete, and its huge, sweeping walls. It feels like a space that's just waiting to have people come in and make weird noises!'