HENLEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Alexander Walker - *conductor*
Hyeyoon Park - *violin*



Sunday 22nd March 2026 Concert Hall, Reading

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Registered Charity No. 271849

PROGRAMME

Gershwin – An American in Paris
Korngold – Violin Concerto

-INTERVAL-

Copland – Fanfare for the Common Man
Barber – Adagio for Strings
Bernstein – Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

Welcome to the concert

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Henley Symphony Orchestras 55th season and our Spring Concert in Reading Concert Hall.
This is my first address to you as the new Chair of the Orchestra and I wish to start by thanking Judy Whittaker for all of her hard work over 23 years to make this Orchestra as successful as it is.
We owe her, and indeed all of the committee, a great deal of gratitude for the work they do.
We are delighted to welcome our Principal Conductor and Musical Director Alexander Walker to his first time conducting us in this wonderful hall. For our all-American Programme our Leader David Burton, having been taught by American Mary Carroll, has guided the strings through the finer details of this programme.
The programme opens this evening with the lively and interesting descriptive piece, Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. We are pleased that violinist Hyeyoon Park joins us as our soloist playing Korngold's Violin Concerto in D, a late romantic piece written in California.
A showcase for strings with Barber's *Adagio for Strings,* followed by Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* highlighting the percussion and brass sections of the orchestra. Bernstein *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*, demands a high level of skills from all of us.
We very much hope that you will enjoy this wonderful programme and look forward to seeing you in our home town of Henley in June.

Thank you for your support.

Joanna Woolliscroft, Chair of Henley Symphony Orchestra

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS – George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Whatever we think about the dis-united state of America now, a century ago Gershwin was well on his way to developing a unique style, which blended classical forms and the new jazz music. The word *jazz* referred to architecture, fashion and much more besides music. The story of music in the US would be very different without Gershwin, and it's sad that a brain tumour cut his time short. His work and his life glittered with the mood of the jazz age, and the following composers tonight owed him a lot.

It might be surprising that this short tone-poem, as it's titled, came *before* the Academy-award winning film of 1951 with the same name. Gershwin reminded people not to take this music too seriously. "It's not a Beethoven symphony, you know… it's a humorous piece... If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of impressions musically expressed, it succeeds.''

This overture if you like, is in one movement of 5 sections. "My purpose is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city… listens to the various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere.'' The first part takes us for a brisk stroll into the city, with noise and bustle, motor cars, floosies flirting, and people calling out. Gershwin insisted on *actual* car horns here, several of which he himself had bought while in Paris, and he then presented these to the conductor in rehearsal! Next comes a "walking theme'' in the clarinet as the character wanders by the river, there's a violin solo (and hints of Debussy around) followed by a wistful blues section as our guy thinks of home. There are touches of the Charleston after that, then what is called "a second fit of blues'', and he finishes with an invigorating walk down the Champs-Elysees, out for the night-life and a good time.

Gershwin was a man whose life and work sparkled with the zeitgeist of the day, and his first hit *Swanee* at age 21, made him famous and wealthy. Soon, it was one hit after another. As the American critic, Tim Page, said "He made ripe, luscious melodies as an apple tree makes apples – melodies that sound equally at home in a jazz club and a concert hall."

Most composers spend a long time learning the craft before they achieve a major success, but with Gershwin that order was reversed. A few years after *Swanee*, he won great acclaim in 1924 for *Rhapsody in Blue* (scheduled for a Rhode Island Philharmonic concert that year), and it was only after this that he went looking for a mentor. He travelled to Paris four years later, where he met Ravel, Berg, Prokofiev, Milhaud, Poulenc, and others. And so, it was all this experience in the "City of Light" that inspired him to write something quite innovative - *An American in Paris.* C.S.

HYEYOON PARK - Violin


Photo: Halina Jasinska

Born in South Korea and now living in London, Hyeyoon first gained attention when she won the Munich ARD International Music Competition in 2009; she was the youngest ever winner, aged 17. Recently she played alongside Benjamin Grosvenor (piano) and Sheku Kanneh-Mason (cello) in Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Halle Orchestra. Renowned too as a chamber musician, Hyeyoon has played at London's Wigmore Hall, and future projects include European touring with her long-standing Piano Quartet colleagues, Kian Soltani, Timothy Ridout, and Benjamin Grosvenor again, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, also the Luxembourg Philharmonie, and Palau de la Musica in Barcelona. She'll be performing solo recitals including Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 3 in Koblenz, Portugal, and Munich.

As a winner in 2011 of a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, to mark the Trust's twentieth anniversary in 2023, Hyeyoon collaborated with fellow BBT alumna — composer Kate Whitely — on 'Verified', an original work written by Kate and Young Creatives. Hyeyoon received the London Music Masters Award in 2012 and is now a proud Ambassador of the same charity, which gives children from underprivileged areas a much-needed platform to experience classical music education in the UK.

Forthcoming highlights at home this season include a return to the London Philharmonic Orchestra with the Beethoven Violin Concerto, a work that is also the centrepiece of a specially curated play-direct touring project with Sinfonia Cymru. She makes her debuts with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and BBC Symphony Orchestra with Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2 and with Cape Town Philharmonic with Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 as well as returning to the award-winning Multi-Story Orchestra at the Southbank Centre for a performance of 'Verified.'

Her debut digital release on Decca Classics in 2022 to mark Vaughan Williams' one hundred and fiftieth anniversary featured the ever-popular Lark Ascending in its original scoring for violin and piano, alongside pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, which was praised for its "soaring beauty with an almost conversational intimacy." (Record Review, BBC Radio 3)

She gave the world premiere of a work written for her by composer Mark Bowden with Huw Watkins at the Newbury Spring Festival, which she subsequently recording for the NMC record label.

Hyeyoon plays a violin made by German violinmaker, Stefan-Peter Greiner.

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D, OP. 35 - Erich Korngold (1897-1957)

A child prodigy, Erich Korngold was born in Brunn, in the Austro-Hungarian empire (now Brno in the Czech Republic). He left Europe for America, to escape the rise of the Nazis in the mid-1930s, and he became one of the most important and influential composers and conductors, plagiarised by many. This Violin Concerto incorporates themes from four of his film scores and there is music here that will certainly ring bells with anyone who has heard later scores by John Williams, who will surely acknowledge the influence. William Walton's scores (like *Henry V* in 1944) and the talentedly eclectic John Barry, have similar cinematic power. After fleeing Austria, Korngold stopped writing concert music, other than film scores, until some years later. But this concerto, premiered in 1947, is not *only* film music, as its first soloist, Jascha Heifetz, would agree.

With the first entry of the solo violin we get a taste of the themes coming later, in particular the sharpened fourth (or tri-tone) is a feature - this slightly awkward sound is the first two notes of the song *Maria* later on in *West Side Story*, recurring throughout that show (also recall the deliberately discordant sound of the solo violin strings at the start of Saint-Saens' *Dance Macabre)*.
After some virtuoso solo work, the second main melody is more pensive, melancholy perhaps; these melodies are extensively developed, with occasional solo cello accompaniment.

Following a short moody introduction, the slow movement begins with a theme taken from the film *Anthony Adverse* (for which he'd won an Oscar). The movement is in three parts – firstly lyrical, then a chromatic middle section, and a calmer third part, with a mysterious ending. John Williams's music for *Schindler's List* might come to mind.

The finale takes material mainly from *The Prince and the Pauper;* it's typical rip-roaring Korngold, and consists of amazingly assorted variations. The French horns are notable at the climax, where we again hear that sharpened fourth note of the scale that has featured through the whole concerto, like an unexpected shot of bright sunshine. The work is dedicated to Mahler's widow, Alma, who was an early champion of Korngold's music.

At age 5 Erich was playing piano duets with his father, a prominent music critic, and by 7 he was writing original music of his own. Mahler called him a genius; similarly Richard Strauss told the boy's parents that there was no point in him going to a music conservatoire, as Erich was already far ahead of what he could learn there! He was soon very active in theatre and had composed several operas, also *The Snowman*, a ballet written when he was 11, performed at the Vienna Royal Court Opera. By 1931, aged 34, he was a professor of music at the Vienna State Academy.

It was director Max Reinhardt who persuaded Korngold to move to Hollywood in 1934 to write for films - first *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935) then the famous swashbuckling *Captain Blood* (1935), with Errol Flynn. He won a second Oscar for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and received two more nominations, altogether completing scores for 16 Hollywood films.

Most artists throughout history have depended on being commissioned by rich patrons to compose or paint, and many have died young and poor when things went wrong – think of Mozart and van Goch. Other composers who wrote film scores include Vaughan-Williams, Shostakovich, Walton etc. and we can ponder how many might also have written for the silver screen if they had lived *later* – just imagine… "director: Kenneth Branagh, music: Henry Purcell".
At the same time as his work on the film *Another Dawn* (1937), Korngold began sketches for this concerto based on its themes, but after a disappointing try-out with a violinist who was not up to the task, Korngold shelved it. Perhaps he thought he had written a solo part that was unsuitable for the violin.

His father continually implored Erich to return to writing more "serious" pieces. Korngold never agreed with that, but he did return to concert music before his father died, and one of the first such projects was the completion of the discarded sketches of this violin concerto. The premiere was a success, and Heifetz kept it in his performance repertoire, even though some critics dismissed it as a "Hollywood Concerto" for its lush romantic style. It's true that this idiom was no longer as popular in 1957 when Korngold died, but his music underwent a resurgence of interest in the 1970s beginning with the release in 1972 of a CD of classic film scores. His influence lives on in numerous action films, up to the present. C.S.

FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN – Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in 1941, there was a boost in the war effort among America's artists and musicians. As a result, Eugene Goossens, conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, commissioned 18 composers to write fanfares, one of which was *Fanfare for the Common Man.*
This short piece opens with timpani, gongs and drums establishing the mood, followed by three unison trumpets announcing the fanfare themes - a bravura flourish and a sustained idea. French horns join the trumpets, building support and harmony. Finally, the roars of trombones and tuba emerge from below as the fanfare builds to its climax.
Copland's idea here was to honour the common man who performed deeds of heroism not on the battlefield but on the home front. "I sort of remember how I got the idea of writing *Fanfare for the Common Man*," he recalled later, "- it was the common man, after all, who was doing all the dirty work in the war and the army. He deserved a fanfare." The Fanfare was later well used as the introduction to the finale of his Third Symphony of 1946. Some musicians though were unhappy with *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and a few critics even complained that some of Copland's music roused the kind of intense nationalist feelings that *caused* wars. They had a point that we can recognise today.

Copland had realised that there was an increasing gap between the composer and the public, and so he attempted to communicate better with them to "see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms." He incorporated various folk materials, but in a sophisticated and artistically tasteful style. This astonishing blend was partly done through ballet, beginning with *Billy the Kid* in 1938, *Rodeo* in 1942 and *Appalachian Spring* in 1943.

Jazz and rock stars have been inspired by Copland's masterpiece, as well. The orchestra of jazz clarinettist Woody Herman arranged a version they often used to close their performances. In 1975 and 1976, the Rolling Stones opened their shows with part of the fanfare. The rock bands Styx and Emerson, Lake & Palmer have adapted it, too – the latter is especially popular. C.S.

ADAGIO FOR STRINGS – Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

This was originally written as the second movement of Barber's String Quartet, Op. 11, composed in 1936. In that version, it must be particularly awkward to perform for the cellist because of so much double-stopping (playing 2 notes at once), but in this more frequently played form, there are many places where strings are divided, giving a rich but delicate texture.

The slow and meandering melody is deceptively simple and yet it does develop as instruments are added to the blend in layers, like an ethereal tiramisu of strings. First the violins whisper it, then violas followed by the cellos; finally the double basses (missing from the original string quartet of course) add depth and colour. The climax feels inevitable but we're left suspended in silence . . . to anyone hearing it for the first time, this will be a surprise you won't forget. The ending is like a sigh or prayer of hope.

His partner, Gian Carlo Menotti - the successful Italian-born opera composer - is likely to have been the one that pushed the reticent Barber to put this work into the spotlight. Menotti urged the conductor Toscanini to perform it in an arrangement for orchestra, and it was premiered by the NBC Symphony Orchestra in 1938. Today it is the most often played of all Barber's compositions.

It was brilliantly used in Jacob Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man" 1970s TV documentary, just at the heavenly moment when, in slow-motion, a child walks for the first time. In contrast, the piece was played at the funeral of President John F. Kennedy after his assassination in 1963 - hundreds of ensembles throughout the U.S. played this *Adagio* in tribute – and it was played again after the 11th September Twin Towers atrocity in 2001.

Samuel Osmond Barber II was a composer, pianist, conductor, baritone, and music educator, born in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He trained under Rosario Scalero at the Curtis Institute, and for more than 25 years with his uncle, the composer Sidney Homer. Many of his compositions were commissioned or first performed by such noted groups and artists as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, Vladimir Horowitz, Francis Poulenc, and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

Barber's style was mainly traditional in harmony and structure until after 1940, when he adopted some more modern influences. This can be seen in the Piano Sonata (1949) and Cello Concerto (1945). Other works of note include "Dover Beach" for tenor and string quartet, in which the composer sang for its first recording. C.S.

WEST SIDE STORY, SYMPHONIC DANCES

Leonard Bernstein (1918-90)

Book by Arthur Laurents, song lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.
Orchestrations realized by Sid Ramin and Irving Kostal, in consultation with Bernstein.

Many people will already know that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was the inspiration for the stage musical from which these arrangements come. Bernstein had earlier thought of a version that he called East Side Story, based on the doomed love affair between a Jewish girl and a Catholic boy on New York's Lower East Side. But with the writer Arthur Laurents, he realised that the religion was secondary to the youth-gangs angle, and so the Puerto-Ricans (Sharks) and the Italian-Americans (Jets) became the rival factions. Laurents said: "We realized the religious issue had become extraneous. Juvenile delinquency had become the problem. We thought in terms of the Mexicans in Los Angeles. Then it was just a step to the Puerto Ricans in New York." Thus, in a cultural clash in the middle of the 1950's come Maria and Tony, on the backstreets of New York, as Juliet and her Romeo. It came to the stage eventually in 1957, 8 years after Bernstein and his friends Jerome Robbins (the choreographer) and Arthur Laurents (the writer) had first considered the idea.

From the very opening notes of this dance suite, tension is the word – as I mentioned earlier (with the Korngold) the harsh tritone/augmented fourth at the start is an edgy interval in musical terms. Listen out later for the first 2 rising notes of *Maria* for instance, and you'll notice this interval appears many times, both in that slow romance and the fight scenes.

After a single mood-setting punch, the first section is a cool swing. There are several sections, all moving without much of a pause; the second starts with a driving bass riff, leading into *Somewhere*/ there's a place for us. Next we hear a light swinging number, but this runs bang into the *Mambo*, which you'll soon spot – enjoy the Latin/South American percussion and splintering brass sounds. This dies down into a gentle Cha-cha (*Maria*), a lovesong featuring nimble strings. Then there's a second version of the opening Cool music, with more incredible harmonies, which slides into a complex Fugue of all things. (There is no record of what Bach felt about this!) After its quiet fade-out we're assaulted by the *Rumble*, with stabbing rhythms like those in Tchaikovsky's fight scene in his Romeo and Juliet overture. The end of course is tragic and quiet, with throbbing bass heartbeats, and a final clash of harmony – that tritone again.

The music is a fabulous landmark, although from its beginnings the show was chaotic, even by Broadway standards. One of the two original producers, Cheryl Crawford, ended up getting cold feet about what she termed "a show full of hatefulness and ugliness," and pulled out. The lyricists also dropped out, because of other commitments to a film project. So a young man called Steven Sondheim, who Laurents had heard of, ended up writing the lyrics. He hadn't been certain about taking the job on, until Oscar Hammerstein persuaded him…then Sondheim happily took it up, and the rest is history.

Bernstein had been working on *Candide* already, and some of the songs from that show and W.S.S. were swapped over, although the mood of each show is completely different – *Candide* being, as Bernstein said, a Valentine's card to European music, with a lyrical overture, and scattered with hints of waltzes, gavottes, etc. Whereas here the dance scenes are often sinister and threatening, playing a more important role than was usual in American musicals… other exceptions to that were the famous "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" ballet in 1936 *On Your Toes*, by Rodgers and Hart, and the 1943 Rodgers and Hammerstein *Oklahoma*! which Bernstein acknowledged as an influence.

Some people tonight will recall the 1984 TV documentary by Humphrey Burton, about the studio recording of West Side Story for a CD, starring Kiri Te Kanawa and Jose Carreras; Bernstein came across as someone who was difficult to please, always smoking, often arguing.
He was a respected if troubled conductor; gay but married, Jewish and perhaps bipolar. There's an anecdote that he'd booked the wrong Spanish tenor for the recording by mistake; it was Domingo he'd wanted! But the accent still wouldn't have been authentic Manhatten.

Programme notes by Clive Sieling