HENLEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

ALEXANDER WALKER - CONDUCTOR
MIGUEL ÀNGEL VILLEDA - VIOLONCELLO



Sunday 21st June 2026 Concert Hall, Reading

www. henleysymphonyorchestra.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 271849

Welcome to the concert.

Good evening Ladies, Gentleman and Friends. On behalf of us all in the Orchestra it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our Summer Concert. I would like to thank you for your continued support of live performance and our Orchestra.

In May we performed in Falaise, France which is twinned with Henley. We may not have all been able to speak French, but music has a unique way of bringing people together. We all very much enjoyed our joint concerts with a choir as well as time with our host families.
We are especially delighted to welcome our Principal Conductor and Musical Director Alexander Walker whose passion, energy and musicianship continues to inspire us all. I would also like to recognise our wonderful Leader David Burton for his dedication and leadership.

We are honoured this evening to feature the outstanding cellist Miguel Ángel Villeda Cerón who will join us to play Prokofiev's hugely demanding Symphony Concerto in E Minor, for cello and orchestra. Miguel has built an extensive career as a soloist appearing with major orchestras in his native Mexico and I know you will enjoy his performance immensely.

Thank you again for your support.
Joanna Woolliscroft, Chair of Henley Symphony Orchestra

PROGRAMME

Rossini - Overture to La Cenerentola

Prokofiev - Sinfonia Concertante Op.125

INTERVAL

Dvořák - Symphony No. 7 in D minor Op.70

OVERTURE TO *LA CENERENTOLA /Cinderella*

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Rossini was born in Pesaro, near Bologna, Italy, in 1792, and died in Paris in 1868. This overture, which needs no analysis, is based on the classic fairy tale, *Cendrillon* (Cinderella) by Charles Perrault. It was composed in the winter of 1816-17 when he was 25 years old, immediately following the great success of *The Barber of Seville*. Rossini had been commissioned by the Teatro Valle in Rome to write an opera for its pre-Christmas season in 1816. But his composition failed to pass the strict Papal censorship process, so a substitute had to be found fast. He was famous in his own lifetime for the speed at which he worked. Some of that fame was the result of his own exaggeration, but there was some truth behind it. Here, for example, Rossini received the libretto for *La Cenerentola, ossia La bontà in trionfo* (Cinderella, or Goodness Triumphant) on Christmas Day in 1816 and completed the score in three weeks, in time for a premiere at the Teatro on January 25, 1817! Much of the Overture he took from his own opera, *La Gazzetta* (The Newspaper); he had composed that for Naples the previous August, so it wasn't likely to have been heard in Rome yet. He also cheekily got some other composers to churn out the recitatives for him.

Rossini wrote operas in both comic and tragic modes, and he had confidence in this one. Despite mixed reviews to start with, it turned out before the composer's death that *Cinderella* later became even more popular than *The Barber*, following performances in London and New York. The librettist, Ferretti, made significant changes in the end to the Perrault story - the Wicked Stepmother was replaced by a Wicked Stepfather, Don Magnifico; the Fairy Godmother became Alidoro, a philosopher; and for some reason the glass slipper became a bracelet – perhaps he was afraid someone backstage would break the glass slipper. Who knows!

Starting at the age of 18, by the time he was 30 Rossini had composed nearly three-dozen operas - twenty-eight of them between 1812 and 1819! In 1823, Rossini moved to Paris where he was employed by the French government to compose for the Théâtre Italien as well as the Opéra. It would be there, in 1829, that he would write the last of his operatic works, *William Tell*, originally entitled in French as Guillame Tell – possibly his best-known and interesting overture. Some may think *The Thieving Magpie* and others are formulaic in structure, (the same could be said of many Elgar overtures) but they're always enjoyable. CS

MIGUEL ÁNGEL VILLEDA CERÓN - Violoncello

Miguel Ángel's early career was boosted when he was recognized by the Mexican Government as a child prodigy, granting him the opportunity to collaborate as a soloist with the major orchestras and conductors of the country. When he joined Mexico's National Youth Orchestra, he was the youngest member in the history of this institution, later becoming first cello.
He did his Master's studies in London at Trinity Laban under the guidance of Richard Markson, finishing in 2022 with distinction and the "Barbirolli Memorial Prize for solo Cello". He has taken masterclasses and collaborated with renowned figures such as Alexander Rudin, Emanuel Gruber, Yo-Yo Ma, Rebecca Gilliver, Alban Gerhardt, Lynn Harrell, Raphael Wallfisch, Natalie Clein, and Vagram Saradjian.

While studying in London he founded The Waldstein Quartet and the Waldstein Piano Trio; both ensembles have achieved significant early success, winning several international competitions and awards, in Vienna, Salzburg, and elsewhere. He has participated in several tours performing in major concert halls in Mexico and around the world, such as the Musikverein, Teatro Degollado, Festspielhause, Kölner Philarmonie, the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, and Carnegie Hall, building an extensive career as a soloist.
A versatile musician, Miguel Ángel is equally confident as a conductor, solo cellist, orchestral player, and chamber musician.

Miguel Ángel was Associate Principal of the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico for 10 years, and has recently won an audition to join the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) as a Concert Artist which gives him the status of musical ambassador for Mexico. He divides his time between Mexico and London, and regularly collaborates with UK's leading ensembles, including the London Symphony Orchestra and St Martin in the Fields.

Since September 2022 he is Junior Fellow at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, with the kind support of Mr. Philip Carne.
Miguel Would also like to express his gratitude to Teresa and Jonathan Sumption for their invaluable support.

Miguel Ángel is fluent in four languages, and his favourite pastimes are chess and books.

SINFONIA CONCERTANTE Op.125 – Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1958)

This work is also known as the *Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* or 2nd Cello Concerto, but it would never have seen the light of day without Mstislav Rostropovich. In 1947 the young cellist decided to perform Prokofiev's original cello concerto (Opus 58 of 1938); the composer himself and most critics had found the piece really rather unsatisfactory, so when he heard that someone was going to play it Prokofiev couldn't understand why anyone would bother. Intrigued, he went to the concert where he met Rostropovich, and decided he would revise the piece, taking into account this player's enormous virtuosic skill.

It was premiered by Rostropovich in Moscow in February 1952 with Sviatoslav Richter conducting, that being the only occasion he ever conducted. Prokofiev died a year later, on the same day in fact as his tyrannical critic, Stalin. The piece was considered unplayable for many years, and the soloist even suggested Prokofiev could write easier passages for some other players, which he did, although these days they aren't used. The concerto was played all over the world by Rostropovich, and there are parts which suggest perhaps an influence on Walton in his cello concerto, and very likely others too.

The first movement, marked Andante, opens with a punchy rhythm in the orchestra, quickly followed by the solo cello introducing a dark but singing melody. Although it has no standard build-up to a climax as such, there are moments when the mood is very much like parts of his *Romeo and Juliet*, and other ideas develop in a similar mood.

The second movement, a kind of scherzo, at about 18 minutes is one of the longest movements he wrote. There are 3 main ideas, full of contrasts – an exciting theme first; an almost cynical second, with many jabbing repeated notes; and a third lyrical romantic one. In the middle of all this there's also a long challenging cadenza.

The third movement starts with slow sombre material but soon becomes more powerful, played on muted trumpet. Several variations follow, with a short jokey middle section. A frantic finale with repeated rising patterns takes the cellist into stratospheric regions to the climax, in Rostropovich's words, "as if spiralling up to the very summit of a domed roof."

Sadly, Prokofiev's health was declining at this time, and he had little success after Stalin's brutal clampdown in 1948. He lost many good friends and kept away from Moscow whenever possible, a feeling which perhaps shows in his compositions later in his life (e.g. the rarely played 7th Symphony). This famously difficult concerto is an exception to that, with its impetus owing a lot to the initial concerto, which he'd started in the era of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Alexander Nevsky,* and *Peter and the Wolf.* That was a time when he was happily moving around between USSR and the Western world, before settling back in the home country. CS

---------INTERVAL---------

SYMPHONY No. 7 in D minor Op.70 - Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Partly inspired by his friend Brahms's recent 3rd symphony - yet very different from it - this symphony was composed in 1884-5, as a highly valued commission from the Royal Philharmonic Society of London. Dvorak loved the railways, and planned the trip himself to get to England from Prague (which took only 48 hours) to conduct the premiere of this work.
The mood of the symphony is mainly dark, but listen out for the varied textures and shades to enjoy. As usual there are 4 movements, and the middle 2 are much lighter in general.
Dvořák had played the viola professionally, and from this central seat in the orchestra he'd learnt the colours and capabilities of all the instruments.

The first movement begins with very quiet low strings playing a mysterious meandering little melody. This is repeated immediately in the woodwind, and recurs in several guises as the movement develops, often with rhythms that throw the listener out of the groove, which is typical of Dvorak, and indeed Brahms. It ends as eerily as it began.

The second movement is characteristically much calmer, and in a letter to a friend Dvorak said it was about "love, God, and my fatherland". However, a note in the score says "from the sad years", probably referring to the death of three of his children only a few years earlier.

The third movement is a lively *scherzo* (from the Italian for *joke*) using dance rhythms of the furiant and the polka. The middle section has a jollier slant, strings happily humming like bees, alongside silky solos in the woodwind.

The fourth movement begins with a screaming leap that sets the dramatic mood for most of these final minutes. The rhythms are once again powerful and driven, frankly often demanding a lot from the players. But it ends with a major chord, making a big impact at the climax with striking brass, and finally the sun breaks through the dark clouds.

Dvorak was writing in the Czech / Slovak / Bohemian tradition, at a time when nationalism in music was a growing trend across Europe. Like Vaughan-Williams here a little later (not to mention Grieg, Sibelius and others) Dvorak used many folk-like elements in his compositions as a basis for development. Although at the time the Austro-Hungarian Empire was ruled by the Habsburgs, who tried to crush the Czech language, Dvorak resisted any drive to repress their culture.

This symphony (called the 2nd in our parts) is rated as one his very best works, along with the famous 9th/4th "From the New World" and the 8th (or 3rd) in G major, which HSO played in 2024 in Henley. The numbering, as I've implied, is slightly confusing - he did write 9 symphonies but only 5 were published in his lifetime, and parts printed before the 1970s still use the old numbering scheme! It was Brahms' publisher Simrock who reluctantly printed the first three of Dvorak's published symphonies, but all Simrock really wanted was plenty of popular music, easy to sell. Having paid the composer 3,000 marks for this symphony, Simrock then offered only 1,000 for the 8th, which Dvorak rejected, and had it published by Novello in London instead. So there! CS

Programme notes by Clive Sieling