

# London Philharmonic Orchestra

**TIPPETT**

**THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE**

Complete opera in three acts

EDWARD GARDNER conductor

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA & CHOIR

ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA CHORUS

A BBC recording



# MICHAEL TIPPETT

## THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE

**Edward Gardner** conductor  
**Robert Murray** *tenor* Mark  
**Rachel Nicholls** *soprano* Jenifer  
**Ashley Riches** *bass-baritone* King Fisher  
**Jennifer France** *soprano* Bella  
**Toby Spence** *tenor* Jack  
**Claire Barnett-Jones** *mezzo-soprano* Sosostris  
**Susan Bickley** *mezzo-soprano* She-Ancient  
**Joshua Bloom** *bass* He-Ancient  
**John Findon** *tenor* Dancing Man  
**Paul Sheehan** *bass-baritone* Half-Tipsy Man  
**Robert Winslade Anderson** *bass* A Man  
**Sophie Goldrick** *mezzo-soprano* A Girl  
**London Philharmonic Orchestra** Leader **Pieter Schoeman**  
**London Philharmonic Choir** Artistic Director **Neville Creed**  
**English National Opera Chorus** Chorus Director **Mark Biggins**

Recorded live by BBC Radio 3 at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, London, on 25 September 2021.

Producer Anthony Sellors Engineer Philip Burwell  
Post-production & editing Andrew Walton, K&A Productions Digital mixing Deborah Spanton, K&A Productions  
Publisher Schott Music Ltd  
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## ACT ONE: MORNING

01-02	<b>05:00</b>	Scene 1	<i>Chorus</i>
03-05	<b>05:58</b>	Scene 2	<i>Mark, Ancients, Dancers</i>
06	<b>04:35</b>	Scene 3	<i>Mark, Chorus</i>
07	<b>07:05</b>	Scene 4	<i>Mark, Jenifer, Chorus</i>
08	<b>04:47</b>	Scene 5	<i>King Fisher, Bella, Chorus, Ancients</i>
09-10	<b>04:40</b>	Scene 6	<i>King Fisher, Chorus</i>
11	<b>08:29</b>	Scene 7	<i>King Fisher, Jack, Bella, Chorus, Sosostris</i>
12-18	<b>22:38</b>	Scene 8	<i>King Fisher, Chorus, Jenifer, Mark, Ancients, Dancers</i>

## ACT TWO: AFTERNOON

01-02	<b>02:29</b>	Pre-Scene	<i>Strephon, Chorus offstage</i>
03-05	<b>07:53</b>	Scene 1	<i>Bella, Jack, Semi-Chorus (Full Chorus offstage)</i>
06	<b>03:02</b>	Scene 2	<i>Strephon, Dancers</i>
07	<b>04:07</b>	First Dance:	<i>The Earth in Autumn</i>
08	<b>05:37</b>	Second Dance:	<i>The Waters in Winter</i>
09	<b>03:42</b>	Third Dance:	<i>The Air in Spring</i>
10	<b>06:26</b>	Scene 3	<i>Bella, Jack</i>
11	<b>01:20</b>	Post-Scene	<i>Chorus offstage</i>

## ACT THREE: EVENING AND NIGHT

01	<b>00:55</b>	Pre-Scene	<i>Chorus</i>
02	<b>03:49</b>	Scene 1	<i>Chorus, Half-Tipsy Man, A Dancing Man, King Fisher</i>
03	<b>02:28</b>	Scene 2	<i>King Fisher, Chorus</i>
04	<b>03:19</b>	Scene 3	<i>King Fisher, Bella, Ancients</i>
05	<b>03:35</b>	Scene 4	<i>Chorus</i>
06-10	<b>15:21</b>	Scene 5	<i>King Fisher, Bella, Chorus, Sosostris</i>
11	<b>05:25</b>	Scene 6	<i>King Fisher, Bella, Jack, Chorus, Sosostris</i>
12	<b>03:34</b>	Scene 7	<i>Ancients, King Fisher, Chorus</i>
13-14	<b>04:44</b>	Scene 8	<i>A Man, A Girl, Ancients, Chorus, Strephon</i>
15	<b>05:23</b>	Fourth Dance:	<i>Fire in Summer</i>
16-20	<b>12:06</b>	Scene 9	<i>Chorus, Mark, Jenifer</i>

# MICHAEL TIPPETT THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE

## PROGRAMME NOTE

Two couples meet in a magic wood. Over the longest day and shortest night of the year, they find each other, and find themselves, by sunrise.

Seven hundred pages in full score, three-and-a-half hours in performance, and the result of some 16 years of work, *The Midsummer Marriage*, Michael Tippett's first mature opera, was composed for no fee and without commission. It first glimmered in Tippett's mind as early as 1939, but was delayed by the long years of the Second World War, during which Tippett, a conscientious objector, was sent to prison for refusing the terms of his exemption from military service.

The opera was conceived as a theatre piece, *Octett*, and then became a *Singspiel* (containing speech and music), initially called *The Masque* and then titled *Aurora Consurgens*. For a long while it was a collaboration with the poet Douglas Newton, Tippett's lover during the war: together the pair drafted the scenario on which the finished piece would eventually rest. When Newton left the project, Tippett, itching to begin, cast about for a librettist, and made overtures to writers such as Christopher Fry and Ronald Duncan. But in the end, more out of necessity than anything else, he wrote the text himself before, in 1946, finally beginning formal work on

the music. His belief was that an opera, instead of being a play-set-to-music, required words that should barely survive on their own terms when shorn from the notes.

The final title was felicitous: it refers not only to Tippett's conventionally 'comic' plot but to a psychological marriage between conflicts and opposites within the self. The opera shares its midsummer's eve setting with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*; the wood in which the action takes place is a Shakespearean forest of magical confusion; and the couples who find themselves lost within it are the conventional 'high' and 'low' pairs of Shakespeare or of *The Magic Flute*. Like Tamino and Pamina in Mozart's opera, Mark and Jenifer must undergo trials to reach union with each other – but also union within their own minds. The opera is steeped not in Enlightenment philosophy but in the teachings of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung, to which Tippett had turned during a time of personal crisis.

A famous line from Tippett's text to his oratorio *A Child of Our Time* runs: 'I would know my shadow and my light / So shall I at last be whole.' The words crystallize the Jungian conviction that, in order to know themselves, humans must come to terms with both the light and the

dark sides of the self: those facets openly acknowledged and positive, and those repressed and, in consequence, negative. The shadow, in Jung's conception, is prone to psychological projection onto a confected enemy if unacknowledged. Jung went so far as to suggest that if such projection occurred on a collective level, the outcome was total warfare.

*The Midsummer Marriage* searches for concrete images to make such abstract psychological ideals manifest on the stage. Mark and Jenifer travel individually through deathly gates into the shadowy earth, and up a staircase to the light-filled sky. Each realm is a metaphor for the archetypal opposites that must be reconciled: the 'shadow' and 'light', but also the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or – in Jung's terminology for qualities of the opposite gender – the 'animus' and 'anima'.

Their travels lead to their magical union in the third act: an enormous flower bursts open to reveal Mark and Jenifer intertwined within. During their absence, in the central act, are staged three of the four Ritual Dances, in which two dancers ritually reenact a sequence of pursuit and near-capture linked to the passing of the seasons, with the female pursuing in each case (the scenes are precursors of Philip Pullman's 'daemons', external

manifestations of the self in animal form). The fourth dance, set around the midsummer fires, is a climactic celebration of Mark and Jenifer's successful union; it seems to stage a moment from T.S. Eliot's 'East Coker', the second of the *Four Quartets*:

On a summer midnight, you can hear the music ...  
And see them dancing around the bonfire  
The association of man and woman  
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie ...  
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles ...  
The time of the seasons and the constellations

Such surreal, sexual, highly allusive symbolism is what gives the opera its peculiar, often perplexing, power. *The Midsummer Marriage*, its stage picture redolent of a Paul Nash landscape, creates its own mythology via literary allusion. A concoction of myth, dream and fairytale, it folds together elements not only from Mozart and Shakespeare, but from Eliot's poetry, the plays of George Bernard Shaw, and the writing of Robert Graves. Amid the magical landscape of the wood, with its giant flowers and fortune-tellers, its midnight bonfires and curious forest-dwellers, drift, as in all dreams, fragments of the real world: Jack the mechanic, King Fisher the tycoon. Even the lone staircase standing divorced from its

surrounds is hauntingly redolent of London in the Blitz. The more abstruse side of Tippett's imagery will be clear only to the most devoted Jungians, or to those who, like Tippett, have read not only Eliot's *Collected Poems* but all twelve volumes of James Frazer's mythological study *The Golden Bough*, with its survey of fertility rites and ancient religions that sprang from legends of rebirth. It is the music that truly aids understanding of the opera's spiritual explorations, and gives them palpable and comprehensible life, turning symbols into living characters, and putting theatrical flesh on the plot's metaphorical bones. The critic David Cairns has described the score as 'a flood of lyrical invention rarely equalled in 20th-century art'.

Tippett's method was to start with the theatrical idea and then work out the style and technique that would be required to bring it to life (to suggestions that he collaborate with professional librettists he replied that the music was a direct result of his work on the text). *The Midsummer Marriage* involved discarding his natural flair for counterpoint and fugue in favour of a rapturous and glittering lyricism. This was an often arduous task – he composed only a handful of bars each day – and the music itself took six difficult years in which the white-hot creative effort led to long periods of psychosomatic

illness so severe that he was tested for cancer. The most surprising thing about the score is how little it seems to owe to the British pastoral tradition: there is very little of Holst or Vaughan Williams, bar an early nod to an ascending lark. Composed during Tippett's enterprising and historic tenure as director of music at Morley College in South London, the opera reflects the repertoire he was programming at Morley, which championed contemporary works from exiled Europeans and revived neglected figures from the Renaissance and Baroque.

The result was a collage of disparate influences combined by sheer force of will into a unified and unique voice: Elizabethan madrigalists in the rhythmic bounce that distinguished the extensive music for the chorus; Purcell in the march for the Ancients; Wagnerian grandeur in the massive third-act aria for the clairvoyante Madame Sosotris, modelled on Erda, the earth goddess from *Das Rheingold*, and recalling the Angel's Farewell in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. The Ritual Dances are in dialogue with the early ballets of Stravinsky and spiky with the rhythms of Bartók. Most clearly influential was the German composer Paul Hindemith, then living in America and more popular in Britain than he is today: the final pages of *The Midsummer Marriage* – a brass chorale overlaid with whizzing quavers in the strings – were by

Tippett's admission almost brazenly lifted from Hindemith's 'Mathis der Maler' Symphony.

But the allusions and near-quotations only serve to strengthen Tippett's own musical identity: orchestrated with thick impasto but somehow attaining translucence, dappled with harp and celeste, woodwind solos ruffling the lakes, the sun and moon emerging from the clouds in great rays of brass, silvery strings singing in a delicate dawn chorus. In the raucous brass writing of Mark's descent into the cave, the harsher soundscape of Tippett's next opera, *King Priam*, is present in embryo. But the most defining characteristic of *The Midsummer Marriage* may be gaiety, even ecstasy, often achieved by Tippett's idiosyncratic rhythmic invention, which places the emphasis on the 'wrong' beat such that the music does not limp but dance. His vocal writing is unforgiving but euphoric: often single syllables – 'love', 'dance' – are swagged across cascades of notes.

By the time *The Midsummer Marriage* was complete Tippett's reputation was still not firmly established, although it had been set in the right direction by the premiere, in 1944, of *A Child of Our Time*. Finally a production opened at the Royal Opera House on 27 January 1955, with a beautiful but cumbersome

design by the sculptor Barbara Hepworth and featuring Joan Sutherland, more at home with the notes than the text, as Jenifer. In that age before surtitles, much was written about the supposed confusion of the libretto, which (published separately from the music) was damned by some reviewers before the score had been heard. Tippett's essentially Surreal stage vision, dreamed up pre-war, was more akin to the symbolic verse dramas of

*World premiere of The Midsummer Marriage at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, January 1955*



his friends T.S. Eliot or Christopher Fry, or to Arthur Bliss's and J.B. Priestley's opera *The Olympians* (1949), in which a group of strolling players become gods on midsummer's eve. So long had Tippett taken to complete *The Midsummer Marriage* that the project outlived the fashions from which it had sprung, and was born into a theatrical and operatic world predominantly overtaken by the realism of John Osborne or Benjamin Britten.

But legend of the premiere's disaster is as mythical as the opera itself. Most of the critics were positive: *The Spectator* hailed 'an astonishing new work' that was a 'perfect integration of libretto and music'. The final performances sold out, the production was revived within 18 months, and within a decade a Proms performance and a radio broadcast introduced *The Midsummer Marriage* to new audiences. It became the first post-war opera to be given three individual productions at the Royal Opera House, and some 15 other stagings, in Australia, Europe, and America, cemented its international reputation. Even the libretto has come to be not only admired (the composer John McCabe called it a 'magnificent text') but studied.

At the heart of *The Midsummer Marriage* is a tension between its humanist philosophy and the theatrical magic of its setting; the tension is resolved by a commitment to, and reminder of, the healing power of art. The brassy turmoil of the 'shadow', the high and heavenly string music of the 'light', are finally united by the radiant wholeness of full orchestra in the dazzling A-major chords that end the work. Dreamed up on the cusp of war, prepared throughout the conflict, and composed during a period of post-war restoration, *The Midsummer Marriage* simultaneously evinces the memory of loss and the prospect of regeneration: as Tippett had it, 'the rebuilding is greater than the building'. The chorus dances off the stage singing a quotation from W.B. Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli': 'All things fall and are built again | And those that build them again are gay.'

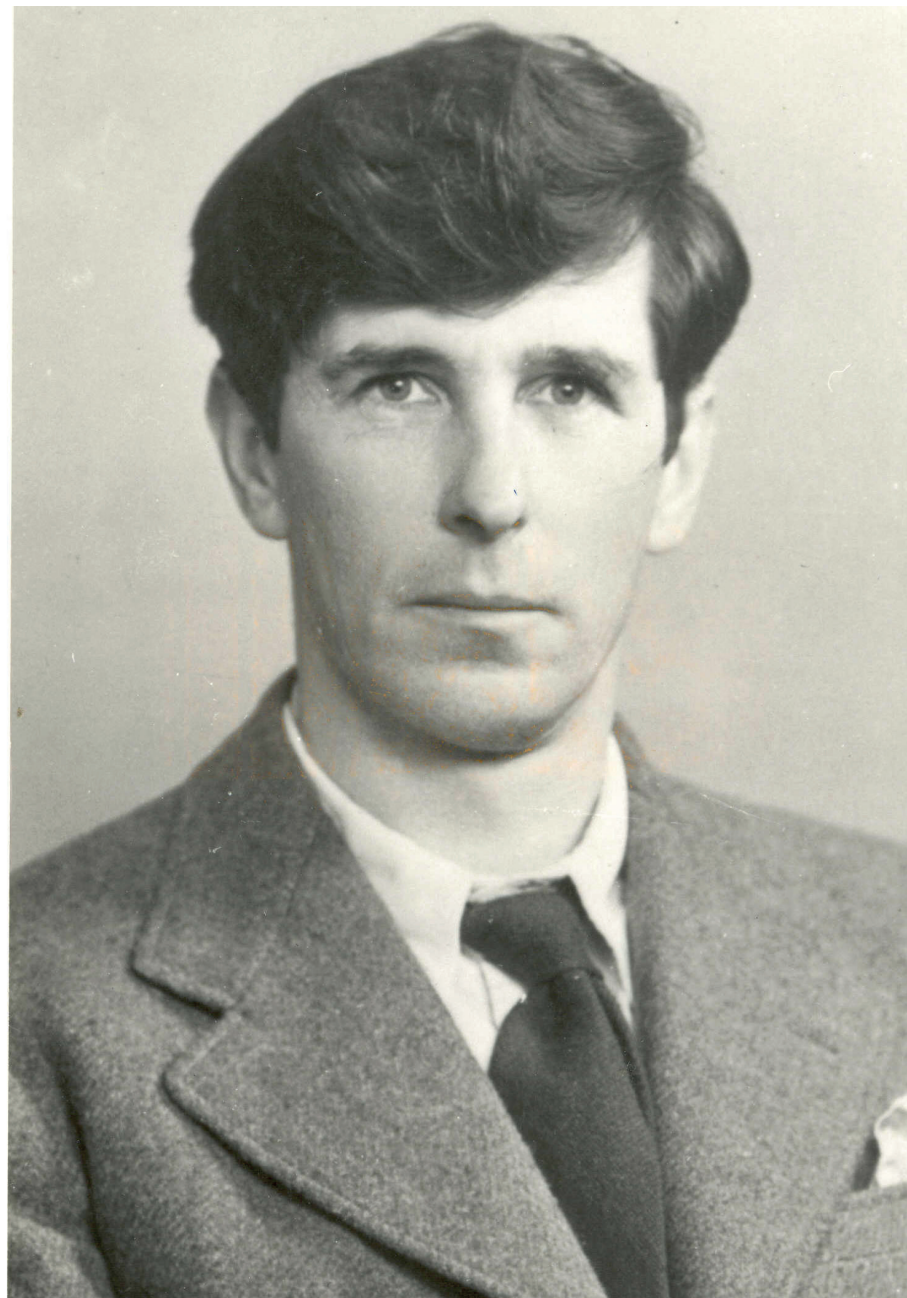
*Oliver Soden is the author of Michael Tippett: The Biography (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2019).*



## SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT 1905–98 COMPOSER PROFILE

Born in London in 1905, Michael Tippett died nearly one hundred years later, his life and career spanning a tumultuous century to which he and his music were especially attuned. Raised in a world of gaslight and Empire, in his mid-eighties he would write an opera, *New Year*, that encompassed computers and space travel, its soundscape spiced with reggae and electronics.

He was brought up in Suffolk, his childhood largely overtaken by his mother's fierce commitment to the women's suffrage movement. It was an innate sense that he should respond creatively to global events, rather than any natural talent, that led to his studying at the Royal College of Music. His twenties and thirties were given over to compositions, now withdrawn, that he later decided were weakened by lack of originality and a devotion to left-wing politics. Aghast at the Great Depression and the threat of fascism, Tippett initially dedicated much of his time to political endeavours, not least major musical projects formed to boost the morale of unemployed miners in the north of England. He quickly rejected the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism, believing instead, with a temporarily violent fervour, in Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent worldwide revolution.



*Tippett at 30*

A breakdown of a major love affair and a subsequent period of Jungian therapy coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War, leading Tippett to reject violence of any persuasion – Trotskyian, Hitlerian, Churchillian – in favour of an ardent and absolute pacifism. He registered as a conscientious objector, and his refusal to comply with the terms of his exemption from military service led to his serving two months in HMP Wormwood Scrubs. By the end of the war he had produced a clutch of powerful works, characterised by imaginative counterpoint and a characteristically eclectic list of influences from Beethoven to blues: two string quartets, a symphony, the Concerto for Double String Orchestra, and *A Child of Our Time*, an oratorio woven around the events of Kristallnacht.

The post-war years Tippett dedicated to the lushly-orchestrated lyricism of his first mature opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, and its satellite works, chief among them his Piano Concerto and the *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli*. Critical reception was either politely perplexed or openly hostile, an attitude only exacerbated by the breakdown of his second symphony at its first performance, in 1958. Undeterred, Tippett reinvented himself musically with his second opera, *King Priam* (a re-telling of Homer's *Iliad*), splintering the

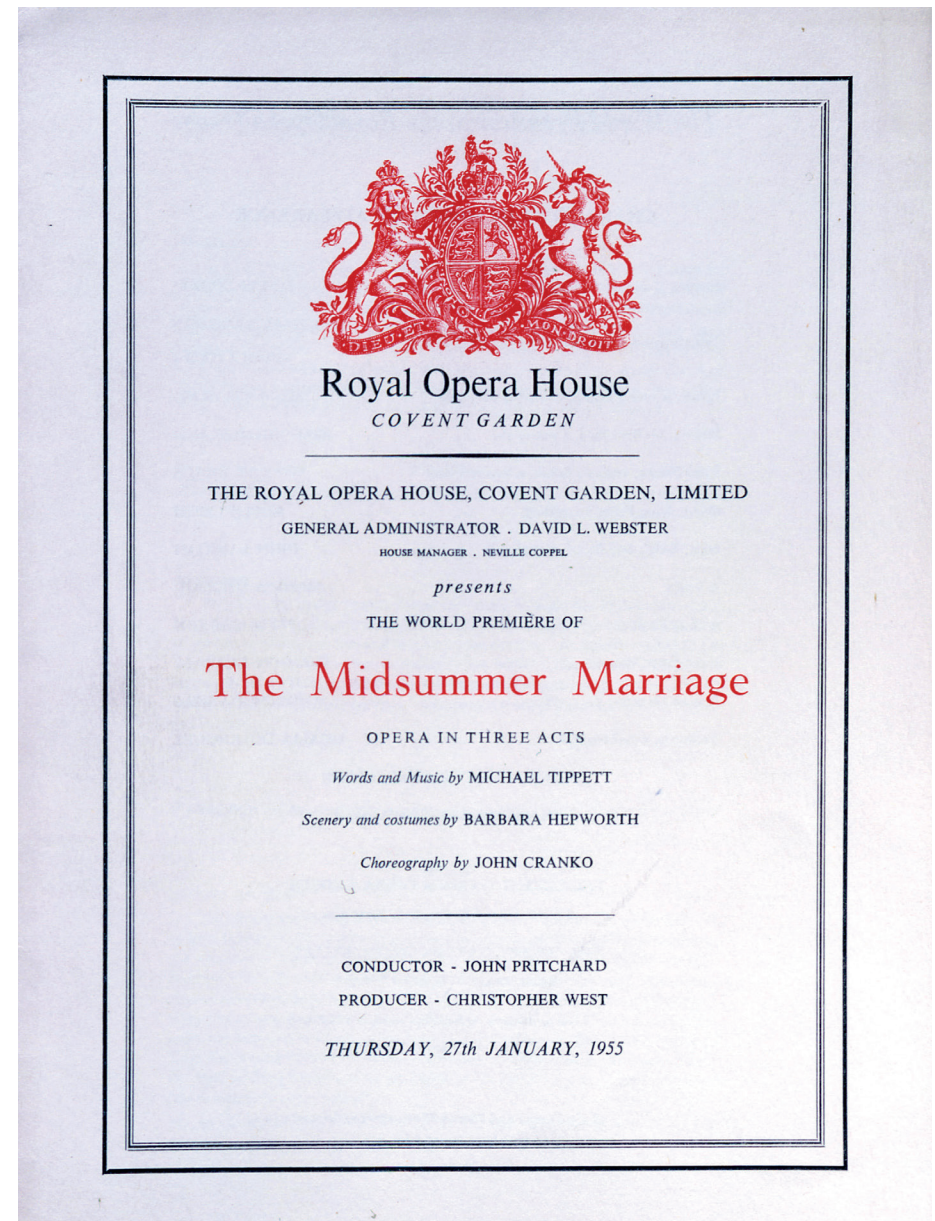
orchestra into a jagged mosaic of juxtaposed motifs, alternately harsh and lyrical. Praise of *King Priam* and the works it gave rise to – *The Vision of Saint Augustine* and a concerto for orchestra – coincided with a reappraisal of earlier pieces to cement Tippett's reputation as one of the country's leading composers.

Operas three and four – *The Knot Garden* and *The Ice Break* – were rapturously reviewed, younger audiences thrilling to the septuagenarian Tippett's grappling with 20th-century life in a soundworld that now fizzed with jazz and blues, the orchestra augmented with electric guitars and a drum kit. His commissions became international and lucrative; happy to appear on television chat shows wearing brilliant and eccentric outfits, he was something of a celebrity. He enjoyed a mainly vigorous old age, reintroducing to his music a lyricism some thought had gone for good: the Triple Concerto; a large-scale setting of Yeats's 'Byzantium'; and a further two symphonies, one culminating with a set of blues songs in dialogue with Beethoven's Ninth, the other incorporating the pre-recorded sound of human breath. For his 90th birthday celebrations he produced a final blaze of instrumental colour in *The Rose Lake*, a 'song without words for orchestra', and died aged 93, in 1998.

Centenary overkill followed hard on the heels of funeral tributes, and he fell speedily from fashion, a situation exacerbated by the financial disarray of his estate. Early pieces, once dismissed, are now thought masterpieces of British composition. Reappraisal of his later work may yet prove that, while he never eschews the British tradition, Tippett is most fruitfully comparable to international contemporaries such as Bernstein or Messiaen. His importance lies in his being a gathering place of 20th-century music, where his national inheritance collides with European modernism and the American vernacular.

Advocacy by new generations of performers, while not restoring Tippett to his former glory, has nevertheless assured that he will continue to be appraised, in the words of musicologist Ian Kemp, as 'one of the giants of the century'.

*Oliver Soden*



*Cover of the programme for The Midsummer Marriage's 1955 world premiere at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden*

# MICHAEL TIPPETT THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE

## SYNOPSIS

*Note This performance maintains the cuts to Acts 2 and 3 that were made, with the composer's approval, for the 1968 Covent Garden production.*

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*'You shall say: I am a child of earth and of starry heaven.'*

A clearing in a wood. At the back, a group of buildings around a Greek temple. To the right, a spiral staircase of stone, reaching up into the sky. To the left, gates that appear to be the entrance to a cave, reaching down into the earth. The time is the present.

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### ACT ONE (MORNING)

It is the dawn of midsummer day. Young people gather in a wood to celebrate the wedding of a young 'royal' couple, Mark and Jenifer (the Cornish version of Guinevere). Startled by strange and distant music, they hide as a group of dancers comes from the temple, led by two 'Ancients', named for characters in Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*. Mark himself arrives, and calls for a new dance in celebration of his wedding, but to demonstrate the perils of disrupting tradition, the He-Ancient trips the attendant, Strephon (perhaps the personification of Mark's 'shadow'). Mark sings rapturously of his happiness in love, but when Jenifer arrives, she is dressed for a journey rather than a wedding and ascends the stone

staircase to disappear from sight. Jenifer's father, King Fisher, storms on: he is a business tycoon, a modern riff on the Fisher King of legend, whose impotence condemns the land to infertility (the name is conceived in the same vein as Duke Ellington or Count Basie). King Fisher is accompanied by his secretary, Bella, and is in a fury at Jenifer's elopement. Mark escapes through the gates, descending into the cave behind. The Ancients refuse to open the gates for King Fisher, who is unable to bribe the chorus to come to his aid. Bella suggests that her boyfriend, Jack, a mechanic, might force them open, but Jack's attempts are hindered by a warning from a disembodied voice. Suddenly Jenifer appears, transfigured, at the top of the staircase; the gates open and Mark emerges, similarly transformed. Each sings of

their experiences, but they find themselves again in disagreement: this time, Jenifer enters the gates and Mark climbs the staircase, leaving King Fisher protesting and the chorus laughing in the sunshine.

## ACT TWO (AFTERNOON)

Strephon begins a dance but is interrupted by the chorus. Separating from the group, Bella proposes to Jack, and – content with domesticity rather than psychological exploration – they sing a lullaby to their future child. Then come the first three of the opera’s four Ritual Dances, each of which combines a season with an element (The Earth in Autumn, The Waters in Winter, The Air in Spring). Strephon, variously transfigured as three hunted animals (a hare, a fish, a bird) is pursued in each by a female dancer (as a hound, an otter and a hawk). The bird’s plight frightens Bella, who clings to Jack. She straightens her hair, puts on her make-up, and they run off to join the others.

## ACT THREE (EVENING AND NIGHT)

The chorus is celebrating after a party, some rather the worse for wear. King Fisher arrives with a gun. In the hopes of finding Mark and Jenifer he has brought a clairvoyante, named after a character in T.S. Eliot’s

*The Waste Land*: Madame Sosostriis. Jack pretends to be Sosostriis but the true clairvoyante eventually appears, more than life-size, swathed in swirling black veils. She sings of the horrible burden of her oracular powers, and describes a vision of Mark and Jenifer making love. King Fisher cannot bear to listen and destroys her crystal ball, demanding that Jack strip away Sosostriis’s veils. Jack refuses and he and Bella leave the opera for their life together. King Fisher steels himself to unveil Sosostriis and reveals the bud of an enormous flower, which blooms, petal by petal, to show Mark and Jenifer entwined within. Almost blinded by the radiant sight, he crumples, dead, to the ground. As in legend, the death or sacrifice of the Fisher King becomes part of an age-old fertility rite, and the fourth Ritual Dance (Fire in Summer) can now take place. Mark, Jenifer and Strephon are all enclosed by the petals of the flower, which bursts into flame. As in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, ‘the tongues of flames are in-folded ... And the fire and the rose are one.’ The moonlight gives way to the dawn and the morning mist: it is midsummer day once again. Mark and Jenifer emerge, dressed for a wedding. All go off into the distance, leaving the stage flooded with light, and the temple and buildings revealed as nothing more than ruins.

*Oliver Soden*

# A TWINKLY-EYED GENIUS: WHY I LOVE THE MUSIC OF TIPPETT

## EDWARD GARDNER



You have to love Michael Tippett's music if you are going to conduct it. His music is exasperating to bring to performance – it is impractically written, often on the edge of possibility, and frustrating for musicians to realise. The first performance of his Second Symphony fell apart, and, later, under the direction of the composer, a recording session of the same piece had Tippett on the podium, utterly lost, swishing pages back and forwards, giggling.

I have a slight fetish for those composers for whom the narrow bandwidth of five neat lines on paper seems hopelessly inadequate – Berlioz, Janáček and Lutosławski (try his Third and Fourth Symphonies) are all in this group, as is Tippett. Their fantasy and lack of boundaries can make rehearsals feel career-shortening, but make performances transcendental. When you listen to their music you are in awe at how it could ever be reduced to paper. There is something of the essence of Tippett's sound- world here. He made music that is otherworldly, luminous and elemental, which strikes right from his inspiration to a listener's heart.

In 1943, Tippett was imprisoned for two months for being a conscientious objector. Having registered his objection to the war, he refused to accept a tribunal's decision that he do supportive civilian work. His sentence was despite some support from government and much support from the musical establishment (including Ralph Vaughan Williams and Peter Pears, Benjamin Britten's partner). It says much about Tippett's spirit that two great pieces, *The Midsummer Marriage* and *A Child of Our Time*, were conceived in this terror-filled time. Both are statements of hope and reconciliation. Tippett found recognition with *A Child of Our Time* (as well as criticism from major music figures, who found the piece formless and musical

language incoherent). The piece's blend of anger and insecurity is framed by soothing spirituals aimed to repair a fractured society. It's still Tippett's best-known piece and it speaks as powerfully today as it did in the 1940s. *The Midsummer Marriage* was first performed in 1955, but Tippett worked on it from 1940. It's a brighter, more optimistic work, and it celebrates individuality, different ideals and, finally, a sense of community and regeneration of society.

The postwar years were frantically verdant for great English-language operas. There was clearly a need to explore ideas of society, of relationships, of life itself in our own language and to create a lyrical tradition of our own. Between the end of the war and 1955, Igor Stravinsky wrote *The Rake's Progress*, William Walton wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, and Britten wrote *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Albert Herring*, *Gloriana* and the piece that overshadowed all others, the great *Peter Grimes*.

*The Midsummer Marriage* had a difficult genesis. Rehearsals were fraught (enervated singers even expressed frustration in the press) and one wonders if the Royal Opera House had the resources to put on such a huge work in the same year as Walton's opera (but what a brilliant endorsement of British art to even try).

Tippett had tried to find a route through the piece with various literary figures, but ended up writing the text himself. In an era before surtitles, the critics, including the all-powerful Ernest Newman, were sent a copy of the libretto in advance; the cocktail of half-painted Jungian philosophy, classical allusion and natty 50s colloquialisms left them completely baffled. But to try to explore the work dry like that was to miss the point of Tippett's artistry. He wasn't interested in a linear narrative: he paints sentiment, feeling and spirituality behind, under and on top of the words.

Where did Tippett get his musical language from, his sense of timelessness, rooted in the distant past and reflecting the present, all wrapped in a world that seems fresh today? Morley College, where Tippett was music director from 1940, was a laboratory for the rebirth of British music. The rediscovery of Purcell's music was central, but also medieval and early choral music (he conducted a performance of Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium*) and organised the first British performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers*, a piece blazing with colour and virtuosity. We explore the past to find out more about ourselves now. In *The Midsummer Marriage* you hear this engagement with the past, whether from the Purcellian clarity of the otherworldly old-guard, 'the ancients', or the



*Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten*

arching lines of Mark's expression of love at the beginning of the piece, winging Monteverdi-like phrases, trying to touch the skies.

There are two images I have of Tippett. The first comes from meeting him when I was 13. He was a flamboyantly dressed man with a lovely twinkle in his eye, and kind. The second is an image of him and Britten at a reception. The love between the two is evident. Britten gave Tippett unflinching support, pushing commissions his way, helping his court case and underwriting the premiere of *A Child of Our Time*. But he was acutely aware that Tippett had a gift, a vision that he himself didn't.

Britten's music is accessible (a vague word). It has a clarity on the page and in performance, and his choice of text is always impeccable. Dare I admit there are times when it leaves me cold, painting emotion rather than delving into it? Tippett wrote, rather disloyally, about Britten's word-setting: 'The music seems always to be "setting a play to music" not to be the principal vehicle of the comic imagination.' This really chimes with me. I find some of Britten's settings vampiric, drawing energy from the words, not adding musical depth. (I find his *War Requiem* and *Billy Budd* both uncomfortable because of this.) In that picture I imagine Tippett whispering strange



thoughts, seer-like, into Britten's ear, and Britten thinking: 'Where does he get this stuff from?'

What do we need to experience through opera? For me, the music has to express the hinterland of the text, the possibilities of meaning, what is left unsaid or can't be expressed through text; this is what *The Midsummer Marriage* does, and pieces such as this represent the greatest artistic fusion we know.

So, I ask you to leave your librettos and guides to Jung at home, and experience Tippett's unique magical world – the shimmer of light in the woodwinds above the landscape at the beginning of Act Two, promising us the joy of a midsummer's day, Jenifer laughingly dancing with a trumpet or the searing, cataclysmic brass crescendos punctuating Sosostri's vision in Act Three. Tippett's music affects me in a way no other does. I well up with the childlike optimism, and almost laugh out loud at the joyousness. I would love everyone to hear *The Midsummer Marriage* and share the unique effect Tippett's music can have.

The opera's final lines, sung by all, are a quote from Yeats: 'All things fall and are built again, and those that build them are gay.' As we come out of a dreadful 18 months,

what better time to celebrate the regeneration of art and the genius of this twinkly-eyed master?

*Edward Gardner*

*This article was originally published in The Guardian, 23 September 2021.*



Gardner and the LPO rehearsing *The Midsummer Marriage*, September 2021

# EDWARD GARDNER

## CONDUCTOR

© Benjamin Ealovega



Edward Gardner became Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2021; since 2015 he has also been Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic. From February 2022 he became Artistic Advisor at the Norwegian Opera & Ballet, and takes up the position of Music Director in August 2024.

In demand as a guest conductor, Edward has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Vienna Symphony. He also continues his longstanding collaborations with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010–16, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, whom he has conducted at both the First and Last Night of the BBC Proms.

Music Director of English National Opera from 2006–15, Edward has an ongoing relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, where he has conducted *La damnation de Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. He made his debut at London's Royal Opera House in 2019 in a new production of *Káťa Kabanová*, and returned for *Werther* the following season. Elsewhere, he has conducted at the Bayerische Staatsoper, La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Den Norske Opera and Ballet, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra National de Paris.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include being named Royal Philharmonic Society Award Conductor of the Year (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and receiving an OBE for Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

## ROBERT MURRAY

tenor | MARK

© Gerard Collet



British tenor Robert Murray has performed principal roles with the Royal Opera House, Hamburg State Opera, English and Welsh National Operas, Norwegian Opera, Bergen National Opera, Beijing Music Festival, Venice Biennale, and the Salzburg and Edinburgh festivals. Highlights also include his debut

appearances with the Bayerische Staatsoper (*Peter Grimes*), Theater an der Wien (title role in Handel's *Belshazzar*) and Teatro alla Scala Milan (Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*); his first Florestan (*Fidelio*) with the Irish National Opera; Quint and Prologue (*The Turn of the Screw*) with Opera Glassworks (John Wilson); a staged *St John Passion* at the Théâtre du Châtelet; and the world premiere of Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* at the Royal Opera House. He appears regularly in concert with Edward Gardner, Paul McCreesh, Harry Christophers and Simon Rattle, and in recital at the Lammermuir Festival, Oxford Lieder Festival and Wigmore Hall.

Robert is a graduate of the University of Newcastle and the Royal College of Music, and was a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House.

## RACHEL NICHOLLS

soprano | JENIFER

© David Shoukry



Rachel Nicholls is widely recognised as one of the most exciting dramatic sopranos of her generation. In 2013 she was awarded an Opera Awards Foundation Bursary to study with Dame Anne Evans.

Highlights include Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* for the Théâtre des

Champs-Élysées and in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Rome, Turin and Karlsruhe, as well as with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and Grange Park Opera, and in concert with the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra; the title role in *Elektra* in Basel, Karlsruhe and Münster; Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* for ENO; Brünnhilde in *Siegfried* in concert with the Hallé (also released on CD); Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* in Taiwan; *Fidelio* for Lithuanian National Opera; Guinevere in Birtwistle's *Gawain* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra; Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth* for Karlsruhe and NI Opera; and Eva in *Die Meistersinger* in Karlsruhe and for ENO.

Rachel is also in demand as a concert artist and has worked with orchestras throughout Europe and the Far East, and in recital at venues including London's Wigmore Hall.

## ASHLEY RICHES

*bass-baritone* | KING FISHER

© Debbie Scanlon



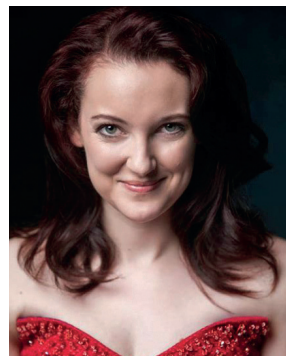
Bass-baritone Ashley Riches studied at King's College, Cambridge and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He was later a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House and a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist.

On the operatic stage Ashley has sung Figaro and Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Escamillo in *Carmen*, Schaunard in *La bohème* and the Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance*, at houses including the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Glyndebourne, Garsington, The Grange Festival and Opera Holland Park. In recital he has collaborated with pianists including Graham Johnson, Iain Burnside, Julius Drake, Joseph Middleton, Anna Tilbrook, James Baillieu, Simon Lepper, Gary Matthewman and Sholto Kynoch.

Ashley has a fast-growing discography including the BBC Music Magazine 2020 Recording of the Year – Purcell's *King Arthur* with the Gabrieli Consort – and Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* with the LSO and Simon Rattle. Most recently he released his debut solo disc for Chandos, *Musical Zoo*.

## JENNIFER FRANCE

*soprano* | BELLA



Winner of the 2018 Critics' Circle Emerging Talent Award, Jennifer France's operatic roles include title roles in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Semele* and Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, as well as The Controller (Jonathan Dove's *Flight*), *La Princesse* (Philip Glass's *Orphée*), *Ice* (Stuart MacRae's

*Anthropocene*), *Ophelia* (Brett Dean's *Hamlet*), First Niece (*Peter Grimes*), *Marzelline* (*Fidelio*), *Susanna* (*Le nozze di Figaro*), *La Princesse Elsbeth* (*Fantasio*), *Dalinda* (*Ariodante*), *Despina* (*Così fan tutte*), *Giulia* (*La scala di seta*) and *Zerbinetta* (*Ariadane auf Naxos*). She has also sung *Le Feu/Le Rossignol* in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* in concert with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and *Zerbinetta* at Nederlandse Reisopera, where she was nominated for a Schaunard Award.

A prolific concert artist, Jennifer has sung with the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, Hallé and City of Birmingham Symphony orchestras, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Britten Sinfonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Academy of Ancient Music, London Mozart Players, and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (Salzburg Festival).

## TOBY SPENCE

tenor | JACK

© Mitch Jenkins



An honours graduate and choral scholar from New College, Oxford, Toby Spence studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He was winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society 2011 Singer of the Year Award.

A regular guest at the world's greatest opera houses including the

Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper and Wiener Staatsoper, Toby's operatic repertoire includes staples of the tenor repertory such as Aschenbach, Peter Grimes, Ghandi, Lensky, Faust, Don Ottavio, Tom Rakewell, Count Almaviva and Tamino.

Toby has sung with some of the world's most renowned orchestras including the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra, with conductors such as Christoph von Dohnányi, Simon Rattle, Michael Tilson Thomas, Antonio Pappano, Valery Gergiev, Colin Davis, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gustavo Dudamel and Charles Mackerras. Appearances with the LPO include Tom Rakewell in *The Rake's Progress*, Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Stravinsky's *Perséphone*.

## CLAIRE BARNETT-JONES

mezzo-soprano | SOSOSTRIS

© Benjamin Ealovega



British mezzo-soprano Claire Barnett-Jones was a Finalist and Winner of the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2021.

Highlights have included her role and house debut as Madame Flora in Menotti's *The Medium* for Oper

Frankfurt; her debut as Fricka in *Die Walküre* at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl; Dryad in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Edinburgh International Festival; and *Szenen aus Goethe's Faust* at the Concertgebouw conducted by John Eliot Gardiner. She made her company debut with ENO as Eurydice Myth/Persephone in Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus*, and was awarded the Lilian Baylis Award for Outstanding Potential in the Field of Opera in recognition of her exceptional stage debut. On the recital platform, Claire has given recitals at Snape Maltings, Wigmore Hall and the BBC Proms.

Claire studied at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Academy Opera and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and was an English National Opera Harewood Artist from 2020–22.

## SUSAN BICKLEY

*mezzo-soprano* | SHE-ANCIENT



© Julie Kim

Susan Bickley is one of the most accomplished mezzo-sopranos of her generation, with a wide repertoire encompassing the Baroque and the great 19th- and 20th- century dramatic roles, as well as contemporary repertoire. In 2011 she received the prestigious Singer Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards.

Highlights with English National Opera include Fricka in *Die Walküre*, Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Herodias in *Salome*, Offred's Mother in Poul Ruders's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Paulina in Ryan Wigglesworth's *The Winter's Tale*. Other operatic appearances include Kabanicha in *Kát'a Kabanová* for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; and Matron in *The Nose* at the Royal Opera House.

Concert highlights include Auntie in *Peter Grimes* with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner; Fricka in *Das Rheingold* with the Hallé; Thomas Adès's *America: A Prophecy* with the BBC Philharmonic; and Baba the Turk in *The Rake's Progress* at the Edinburgh International Festival.

## JOSHUA BLOOM

*bass* | HE-ANCIENT



© Kim Hardy

Australian-American bass Joshua Bloom is frequently praised for his 'resplendent bass' and 'huge vocal capacity' alongside an 'outstanding dramatic precision and power' (*The New York Times*; *The Independent*), across a remarkable variety of repertoire from Mozart, to Wagner and Strauss, to world premiere works by Gerald Barry and Richard Ayres.

He has sung principal roles with Oper Köln, English National Opera, Garsington Opera, the Royal Opera House, San Francisco Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, LA Opera, Opera Australia, New York's Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Badisches Staatstheater, Irish National Opera and New Israeli Opera, among others.

Joshua has also appeared on the concert stage with all of the major London orchestras and with the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Auckland Philharmonia and Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, as well as the Melbourne, Queensland, Adelaide and Western Australian symphony orchestras.

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: NEVILLE CREED



© Louise Kragh

The London Philharmonic Choir was founded in 1947 as the chorus for the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It is widely regarded as one of Britain's finest choirs and consistently meets with critical acclaim. Performing regularly with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Choir also works with many other orchestras throughout the United Kingdom and makes annual appearances at the BBC Proms.

The Choir has performed under some of the world's most eminent conductors – among them Marin Alsop, Pierre Boulez, Semyon Bychkov, Mark Elder, John Eliot Gardiner, Edward Gardner, Bernard Haitink, Neeme Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Kurt Masur, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Roger Norrington, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Simon Rattle, Georg Solti, Nathalie Stutzmann and Klaus Tennstedt.

The London Philharmonic Choir has made numerous recordings for CD, radio and television. The Choir often travels overseas and in recent years it has given concerts in many European countries, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia.

The Choir prides itself on achieving first-class performances from its members, who are volunteers from all walks of life.

**[lpc.org.uk](http://lpc.org.uk)**



# ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA CHORUS

CHORUS DIRECTOR: MARK BIGGINS

The ENO Chorus is one of the finest operatic ensembles in the UK. Tracing its roots to the founding of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company by Lilian Baylis in 1931, the ENO Chorus is committed to bringing opera sung in English to the widest possible audience in thrilling and theatrically inventive productions.

The ENO Chorus is a key part of the company ensemble, performing repertoire from Henry Purcell to Philip Glass. Notable recent successes include major new productions of Glass's *Akhnaten*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Poul Ruders's *The Handmaid's Tale*. At the 2016 Laurence Olivier Awards, the ENO Chorus and Orchestra won the award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, and the Chorus was named Chorus of the Year at the 2016 International Opera Awards.

Excelling in new repertoire, the ENO Chorus has helped create works including Ryan Wigglesworth's *The Winter's Tale*, Nico Muhly's *Marnie*, and Iain Bell's *Jack the Ripper: The Women of Whitechapel*. The Chorus has performed Britten's *Death in Venice* at Het Muziektheater, Amsterdam and an acclaimed *Peter Grimes* at the BBC Proms; and has sung at the Aldeburgh Festival, the Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican.

The Chorus was at the forefront of ENO Studio Live productions – operas presented in smaller, intimate spaces. The inaugural production of Jonathan Dove's *The Day After* was chosen by *The Observer* as one of the top ten musical events of 2017. Other Studio Live productions include Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, and a critically acclaimed production of Britten's *Paul Bunyan* at Wilton's Music Hall, revived at Alexandra Palace in 2019.

At the centre of ENO's mission to connect with new audiences through innovative programming, the Chorus participated in the UK's first drive-in opera – *Drive & Live: La bohème* at Alexandra Palace, broadcast Mozart's *Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah* on BBC Two, and performed *Tosca* at the South Facing Festival at Crystal Palace.

[eno.org](http://eno.org)

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



© Benjamin Ealovega

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard

Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski.

[lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)