



Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra

Newsletter April 2020

Already in 2020, the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra (RPCO) experienced a number of firsts, before we experienced a rather abrupt halt to our diary plans! Please see below for an insight to the life of the RPCO:

The Orchestra's first engagement for 2020 was to a festival in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia. This was a new territory for the organisation being our first ever visit to the country. **The Winter In Tantora Festival** is in a remote part of the country in the middle of the desert, where a very impressive concert hall has been specially built. The Orchestra's journey there was long and challenging but the Festival organisers were very welcoming and kindly gave us a tour of the locality and historic sites. Our performance in the brand new (and still some finishing touches to be completed) concert hall was with the wonderful José Carreras conducted by Paul Bateman. Needless to say, it was a very special evening and broadcast on the Arab State TV service.



José Carreras at the Winter in Tantora Festival, Saudi Arabia



Maraya, the extraordinary mirrored concert hall in the desert

Another first for the RPCO in 2020, was the **European Premiere** of the music from the computer video game, *NieR re: 12018*, arranged for a full orchestral concert. This concert was in London's Royal Festival Hall for two sold out performances with the Chamber Choir of London.



RPCO with conductor Arnie Roth, soloist Emi Evans and composer Keiichi Okabe

"After many wonderful performances with the RPCO at Royal Albert Hall, I was thrilled to invite them to join us on this European premiere concert at Festival Hall, part of a new tour of music from the video game series NieR. The tour was a collaboration between SQUARE ENIX (developers of the NieR series) and AWR Music Productions (producers of Distant Worlds: music from FINAL FANTASY). NieR director Yoko Taro created HD video projections especially for this tour, and the concert featured the RPCO, the Chamber Choir of London, renowned vocal soloist Emi Evans, and composer Keiichi Okabe and producer Yosuke Saito were in attendance. We had two spectacular sell-outs, and I am looking forward to our next collaboration: FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE Orchestra World Tour at Royal Albert Hall on 30 October." Arnie Roth.



At the beginning of March the RPCO participated in a concert in the beautiful surroundings of Boxgrove Priory near Chichester. This was a unique event which featured the music of Sussex-based female composers and a world premiere! Composer Nathan James brought together a multi-faceted event bringing together artists, dancers, two choirs, authors, journalist, a poet as well as the RPCO and featured a guided walk of the historic site 3 weeks in advance of the concert. The composer said of the new work:

"On Windover Hill was the culmination of almost 4 years of research and writing. Supported by Arts Council England and The RVW Trust, the 9-movement cantata for SATB choir & chamber orchestra explores the mysterious figure of the Long Man of Wilmington that has been a prominent landmark on the South Downs for centuries. Texts were drawn from a wide range of sources, including the ancient Egyptian religion of Atenism, through to early 20th century Sussex poetry, right up to contemporary prose. The premiere took place on 7 March in the 12th Century church of Boxgrove Priory and it was to a sell-out audience that the RPCO performed alongside Harlequin Chamber Choir under the direction of its conductor, Dr Amy Bebbington. Several movements included elements of contemporary dance by Emily Ayres and Rosalyn Walsh, and the cantata was interspersed by extracts of poetry and prose, read by a number of special guests, including Philip Carr-Gomm (author), Cole Moreton (Radio 4 journalist), Emily Jeffery (BBC Presenter), Peter Martin (poet), and Justin Hopper (author)."



(L to R): Nathan James, Philip Carr-Gomm, Peter Martin, Cole Moreton, Emily Jeffery, Dr Amy Bebbington and Justin Hopper
(photograph by Rachel Poulton)

The premiere was a resounding success and conductor, Dr Amy Bebbington said of the performance:

"The highlight of the evening for me was the privilege of leading the RPCO and Harlequin Chamber Choir in Nathan James' world premiere. His ability to create a well-balanced, evocative, cleverly written and luminous score, mark him out as a composer with great skill, emotional depth and sensitivity. Bringing to life his new work, On Windover Hill, with all its beauty, history and drama, was an artistic joy, and I sincerely hope it finds a place in the choral-orchestral canon for future audiences to continue to witness and enjoy."

The Orchestra were a dream to work with, and negotiated some tricky moments with great skill, a sublime sound and a strong sense of unity and tone. Their friendly, supportive and professional attitude in both the rehearsal and performance was hugely reassuring and very affirming for all the musicians and artists involved in this unique event."



Dancers Emily Ayres and Rosalyn Walsh during *On Windover Hill* (photograph by Rachel Poulton)

The first half of the concert consisted of Sussex-themed music with a focus on female composers. Nathan James explains:

"The concert featured the first UK performance of Wyndore in 82 years, by Avril Coleridge-Taylor. Written near the Long Man of Wilmington in 1936 by the daughter of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Wyndore is a tone poem "of great delicacy and beauty" for wordless chorus and orchestra, reminiscent of Vaughan-Williams. Also featuring in the first half of the concert was a rare performance of Goblin Market by Ruth Gipps. This extraordinary setting of Rossetti's poem was withdrawn from print soon after its first performance in 1956, though remains significant as an example of Gipps' intricate scoring and her particular approach to setting texts to music. For this, the strings of the RPCO were joined by Corra Sound, who had been privileged to rehearse the music under the watchful gaze of Gipps' son, Lance Baker. The performance of these two works was kindly supported by The Ambache Trust."

Dr Amy Bebbington added of the Gipps piece:

"Ruth Gipps' little known Goblin Market was perhaps the most thrilling work for me to conduct, due to its emotional storytelling, vocal complexities and the technical demands of the score overall. It never sits still! The strings rose to the occasion superbly enabling Corra Sound's dramatic interpretation come to life. To have the opportunity to perform this work with a fabulous choir whose mission it is to actively promote works by women was a dream come true!"



Dr. Amy Bebbington with the RPCO (photograph by Rachel Poulton)

Although the concert was the centre piece, there were several other activities and events surrounding the main event:

"Far from being a stand-alone concert, On Windover Hill had also inspired a creative pre-performance walk at the Long Man of Wilmington some weeks previous, which had attracted a great many artists and composers. Artists Catherine Greenwood and Ashley Hylands also used the concert rehearsal to make sketches of the RPCO and choirs, exhibiting them at the concert alongside the works of numerous other artists who had accompanied the earlier walk."

For more information on *On Windover Hill*, please visit Nathan James's website: www.castleymusic.com/OnWindoverHill

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Sketch of the RPCO and choirs in Boxgrove Priory by artist Catherine Greenwood