



## The Charm of the Classical

25 November 2021, 7.45PM



Ulster Orchestra Season 2021/22

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25 November 2021, 7.45pm

**Mendelssohn-Hensel** Overture in C Major (10')

**Mozart** Flute Concerto No. 1 (25')

**Caroline Shaw** *Entr'acte* (11')

**Schumann** Symphony No. 1 *Spring* (30')

**Nil Venditti** Conductor

**Adam Walker** Flute

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# PROGRAMME NOTES

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## **FANNY MENDELSSOHN-HENSEL (1805 -1847)**

### Overture in C major

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The Mendelssohn family grew up making music. Fanny was the pianist, Felix the violinist and their younger brother Paul was the cellist. Felix and Fanny both went on to be published composers, with Felix initially publishing several of Fanny's songs under his own name (it was not considered respectable for a woman of marriageable age to publish music under her own name, although Fanny's husband Wilhelm Hensel – whom she married in 1829 – was highly supportive of her composing). But as children, brother and sister were constant musical co-conspirators, and unsurprisingly, their adult compositions have a genuine family resemblance.

The Mendelssohn family home at 3 Leipzigerstrasse, Berlin, was extensive – big enough that the newlywed Hensels could be given an entire wing of their own, in which Fanny hosted regular concerts. Usually, they involved two pianos and classics by Beethoven, Bach and Mozart. But the concert on 15 June 1834 was a bit different, as musicians from the orchestra of Berlin's Königstadt Theatre assembled under their conductor Julius Lecerf to give the premiere of Fanny's own Overture in C major. She described what happened next in a letter to Felix:

*Mother will have told you how I stood up there with a baton in my hand like Jupiter the Thunderer. My overture was played and I sat at the piano, then temptation in the form of Lecerf whispered to me to take the baton in my hand. Had I not been so shy, I would have been able to conduct reasonably well.*

But she had no reason to be shy about her Overture, which she had composed in the spring of 1832 – her first (and only) purely orchestral work. Scored for a big orchestra (by the standards of the time), it's poetic, colourful and utterly assured, and although Fanny never said whether it was inspired by a particular story or image, it tells its own tale in purely musical terms. Strings and woodwinds exchange quiet confidences in the serene opening section, before, with a brilliant flourish from the violins and stirring calls from the trumpets and horns, the music accelerates into a sparkling *Allegro di molto*. There's tenderness as well as drama, before the music sweeps to a triumphant finish.

## **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756 - 1791)**

### Flute Concerto No. 1 in G, K.313

*Allegro maestoso*

*Adagio non troppo*

*Rondo: Tempo di menuetto*

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"The other day I had lunch with Wendling, when he said: our Indian, actually a Dutchman of independent means, and a great friend of mine, is a remarkable fellow. He's offering to pay 200 *gulden* if you will compose 3 short, simple concertos and a pair of quartets for the flute". Which must have come as welcome news to Leopold Mozart when he received this letter of 10<sup>th</sup> December 1777 from his 21-year old son. Wolfgang was in Mannheim, despatched there earlier in the year in search of employment at the Elector's court. It had failed to materialise; meanwhile, to Leopold's consternation, Mozart's letters home gleefully described his late-night parties and flirtations with pretty teenage pupils.

But here, at last, was progress. The 'Indian' was Ferdinand Dejean, a doctor in the service of the Dutch East India Company and a pupil of Johann Wendling, flautist in the celebrated Mannheim court orchestra. The flute pieces were meant to be finished by mid-February 1778 – but this was the news on the 14<sup>th</sup>: "Herr Dejean paid me only 96 *gulden* because I don't have more than 2 Concerti and 3 *quartetti* ready for him". Then comes Wolfgang's excuse: "my mind gets easily dulled, as you know, when I'm supposed to write a lot for an instrument I can't stand". It's an astonishing comment. Possibly Mozart feared being typecast as a composer for the flute – the late 18<sup>th</sup> century's instrument of choice for mediocre amateurs. Possibly he hadn't heard Dejean play – then again, perhaps he had. But whatever the cause of his disillusion, the First Concerto shows a composer perfectly attuned to the character and potential of the flute – and delighting in it.

Mozart is clearly having the time of his life. He heads the first movement with a tongue-in-cheek direction of *maestoso* (majestically), and supports the light sound of his soloist with a slimmed-down orchestra of strings, oboes and horns. Just as elegant is the way he achieves the necessary contrast in tone for the *Adagio*. Brilliant oboes are replaced by mellow flutes, taking the edge off the orchestral sound and creating a warm setting for the soloist's song. And to finish, there's a bright, inventive *rondo* in which the bursts of virtuosity, irreverent asides and darker episodes are all contained within a graceful classical minuet. *Galanterie* was popular with Mannheim's musical amateurs, and Mozart signs off his patron's new concerto with a final gesture of exquisite courtesy. It's just good manners.

## CAROLINE SHAW (b. 1932)

### *Entr'acte*

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Caroline Shaw is eager to be writing for live audiences and meeting performers again. "There have been no surprises for a year" she told *BBC Music Magazine*. For this remarkable American composer – who in 2013, at the age of 30, became the youngest ever winner of the Pulitzer Prize – interaction is the root of inspiration, whether a collaboration with Kanye West or the encounter with a pine tree in the Pacific Northwest that became her string quartet *The Evergreen* (2020).

An *entr'acte* is a space between the acts of a play: a brief undefined interlude where nothing – or everything – can happen. And this one grew out of a very specific musical interaction. As Shaw explains:

*Entr'acte was written in 2011 after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn's Op. 77 No. 2 — with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further. I love the way some music (like the minuets of Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolour transition.*

## ROBERT SCHUMANN (1756 - 1791)

### Symphony No. 1 in B flat, Op. 38 *Spring*

*Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace*  
*Larghetto –*  
*Scherzo (Molto vivace)*  
*Allegro animato e grazioso*

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Out of a blue sky, trumpets sound. "If you could breathe into your orchestra, as it plays, some of the longing for spring – that is what I chiefly felt when I wrote it in February 1841" wrote Robert

Schumann to the conductor Wilhelm Taubert, who was planning a performance of Schumann's First Symphony:

*I should like the very first trumpet entrance to sound as if it came from on high, like a wake-up call. Further on in the introduction, I would like the music to suggest the whole world breaking out in greenery - perhaps a butterfly hovering in the air - and then, in the Allegro, to show how everything to do with spring is coming alive.*

"These, however" (he added) "are ideas that came into my mind only after I had completed the piece". A student of the classics, Schumann knew that to write a symphony barely 14 years after the death of Beethoven was a serious business. Images of butterflies and spring flowers had their place in romantic songs and piano miniatures, but a symphony was a public statement on a heroic scale: it had to stand or fall by its own musical logic. It's just that, by the start of 1841, everything in Schumann's personal and creative life was urging him to think bigger, bolder and more expansive: to stretch his wings and fly. His brilliant young wife Clara agreed. They'd married against opposition from Clara's father, but she'd never faltered in her belief that her awkward, idealistic fiancé had the makings of a genius.

And in January 1841. Clara was the first to know that he'd started a symphony. "I've heard nothing of it yet", she told her diary, "but I'm overjoyed that Robert has finally entered the realm where he and his imagination belong". He completed the sketch, after just four days and nights of breathless work, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1841. "Just think, a symphony - and what's more, a Spring symphony! I can't believe I've done it!" he wrote to a friend. He considered giving titles to each of the four movements - *Spring's Arrival*; *Evening*; *Happy Playmates*; *Spring in Full Bloom* - though he later dropped them, preferring to let the music speak for itself.

And it did - it still does. Right from the first bar, it's unmistakably the sound of a newly-married young genius, rejoicing in art and love. Those exultant fanfares introduce an *Allegro* that sings and dances like no symphony since Beethoven, its ebullience softened by tenderness. In the closing bars, the triangle tingles with sheer joy. The *Larghetto* is Schumann the poet, singing his heart out; deep brass chords sink over its final phrases before the music sweeps straight on into the *Scherzo*, as bracing and forceful as a spring downpour. Another surge of joy launches the *finale*, which dances away with a melody as fresh and light as a daisy-chain. Near the end, everything slows, the horns call softly, and a solo flute pirouettes free - as if a songbird has fluttered into the symphony, carried by a spring breeze. By the end, the whole orchestra is bursting out in jubilant fanfares.

The symphony was an instant success - possibly the most successful and widely-played new symphony since Beethoven. Schumann's great friend Felix Mendelssohn conducted the world premiere, in the Schumanns' home city of Leipzig, on 31 March 1841 - barely six weeks after the ink had dried on the page. And on 1 September that year, nine months after the conception of the symphony, Clara gave birth to the couple's first child: a daughter, Marie.

Programme notes © Richard Bratby

## NIL VENDITTI CONDUCTOR

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Young Italian-Turkish conductor Nil Venditti has already established relationships with orchestras including Orchestra della Toscana, of which she is Principal Guest Conductor, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse and Ankara-based Ancyra Ensemble.

Throughout the 2020/21 season, she made successful debuts with the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Orchestre National de Metz, Pierre Lemanic Modern Ensemble, Stuttgarter Kammerorchester, Orchestra dell' Arena di Verona and Irish National Opera. Other notable debuts include Camerata Salzburg in November 2019, conducting Fazil Say in works by the pianist/composer himself, who has become a strong supporter since they first worked together in February 2018.

In the 2021/22 season, Nil Venditti returns to conduct the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse and makes both her operatic and symphonic debuts with the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, as well as debuts with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra, Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, Orchestre National de Lille, Orchestra Haydn di Bolzano e Trento, Opera North Orchestra and I Musici de Montréal.

With a strong affinity for the core classical repertoire of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, she is also expanding her scope into the operatic field, having conducted Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Die Zauberflöte*, as well as Peter Maxwell-Davies' *The Lighthouse*, Verdi's *Nabucco*, Bizet's *Carmen* and Salieri's *Prima la musica poi le parole*. In Spring 2022, she conducts Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* in Bordeaux and returns to the Irish National Opera for a production of Puccini's *Tosca*.

Nil Venditti is an advocate for finding inclusive relationships with new audiences. She has championed Nicola Campogrande's Concerto for Audience and Orchestra, originally commissioned for the Paris Philharmonie, for which the public is given kazoos and plastic-wrapped mints with which to interact with the orchestra, being conducted as part of the performance. She first conducted the work for an open-air audience of 2,000 people in Matera, Italy, in 2016, and with the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2019.

Nil Venditti trained in conducting at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste under the guidance of Prof. Johannes Schlaefli. She attended the Conducting Academy associated with the Pärnu Music Festival under Paavo Järvi, Neeme Järvi and Leonid Grin in 2017 and 2018, as well as the Gstaad Conducting Academy in 2016 and 2019. In Italy, she studied cello with Francesco Pepicelli and conducting with Marcello Bufalini.

Venditti was awarded First Prize at the national Premio Claudio Abbado for Young Musicians in 2015 at the age of 20 and won two prizes at the Jeunesses Musicales Competition in Bucharest in 2017.



## ADAM WALKER FLUTE

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At the forefront of a new generation of wind soloists, Adam Walker is a leading ambassador for the flute with a ferocious appetite for repertoire and a curious and creative approach to programming. His interests range from lesser-known French Baroque repertoire through to newly commissioned works. He has given world premieres of concertos by composers including Brett Dean, Kevin Puts, and Huw Watkins, as well as championing works by Kaija Saariaho, John Corigliano and Weinberg.

As a soloist Walker regularly performs with the major UK orchestras including the BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, London Symphony, Hallé, Ulster, Scottish Chamber and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Further afield he has performed with the Baltimore Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Grant Park Festival, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Mexico, Seoul Philharmonic, Auckland Philharmonia, Malaysian Philharmonic, Malmö Symphony, Tampere Philharmonic, Vienna Chamber, Solistes Européens, Luxembourg and the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestras.

A committed chamber musician with an open and collaborative style, recent seasons have seen Walker make appearances at the BBC Chamber Proms, Wigmore Hall, LSO St Luke's, De Singel Antwerp, Musée du Louvre, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Frankfurt Alte Oper and the Utrecht, West Cork, Delft and Moritzburg Chamber Music Festivals. Recent collaborators include Tabea Zimmermann, Cédric Tiberghien, Angela Hewitt, Mahan Esfahani, Ailish Tynan and Sean Shibe. Walker is an alumnus of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's prestigious Bowers Program and in 2018 he founded the Orsino Ensemble; a wind ensemble with a mission to showcase the depth and versatility of the wind chamber repertoire.

Concerto engagements in the current season include performances with the Ulster Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfonica de Tenerife, Tampere Philharmonic and Toulon Opera Orchestra, whilst recital engagements see Walker return to the Bath Mozartfest, Wigmore Hall and Weesp Chamber Music Festival.

Walker's first recital disc for the Chandos label was released in spring 2021; *French Works for Flute* saw him praised in *Gramophone* for his "clear, cool, bright tone, effortless technique and finely nuanced expressiveness". 2021 also saw the simultaneous release on Chandos of the debut recording from Walker's Orsino Ensemble, showcasing repertoire from the French Belle Époque. Previous releases include *Vocalise* for the Opus Arte label; an exploration of the lyrical, vocal nature of the flute, which prompted *The Guardian* to praise Walker as "a stunning talent". He has also recorded the Kevin Puts Flute Concerto with Marin Alsop and the Peabody Institute (Naxos) and the Huw Watkins Concerto with the Hallé and Ryan Wigglesworth (NMC).

Adam Walker studied at Chetham's School of Music with Gitte Sorensen and at the Royal Academy of Music with Michael Cox, graduating with distinction in 2009 and winning the HRH Princess Alice Prize for exemplary studentship. He was appointed Principal Flute of the London Symphony Orchestra at the age of just 21, a position he held until 2020. His many awards include Outstanding Young Artist Award at MIDEM Classique as well as a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. He was appointed professor at the Royal College of Music in 2017.

# ON STAGE

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## 1<sup>st</sup> Violin

Tamás Kocsis  
Tom Jackson +  
Jonathan Griffin  
Danny McCann-Williams  
Claire Thatcher  
*Supported by Mr Eric Woods*  
Zuzanna Edmonds  
Alys Jackson  
Krzysztof Rucinski  
Ailbhe Clancy  
Astrid King

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Violin

Nicholas Rippon \*  
*Supported by the Belfast Telegraph*  
Michael Alexander (Section Leader Emeritus) +  
*Supported by Stratton Mills*  
Scott Lowry  
Kevin Harrell  
Megan Royce  
Usman Peguero  
Adéla Peguerová  
Katherine Sung

## Viola

Milena Simovic  
Richard Hadwen  
Ralph Tartaglia  
Richard Guthrie  
Feargal Ó Dornáin  
Philip Walton  
John Murphy

## Cello

Morag Stewart \*  
Sarah Shephard +  
Rosalie Curlett  
*Supported by Dr Joan Smyth CBE*  
Sian Hetherington  
*Supported by Dr John McCaffrey*  
Kathryn Lowry  
*Supported by Mrs Dorothy Dunlop*  
Andrew Nesbitt

## Double Bass

Joe Cowie  
Michelle Strong +  
*Supported In Memory of Dr Mark Gibson*  
Helen Glynn  
Gareth Hopkins



# ON STAGE

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## Flute

Jennifer Sturgeon \*

*Supported by the Millar Family*

Diomedes Demetriades \*

## Oboe

Christopher Blake \*\*

*Supported by Leslie & Hilary Morrison*

Eugene Feild

## Clarinet

Francesco Paolo Scola \*\*

*Supported by Dr Louise Cooke*

Ciaran McQuaid

## Bassoon

Vahan Kourdoian \*\*

*Supported by Alan and Ruth Hewitt*

Greg Topping \*

## Horn

Paul Klein \*\*

*Supported by Avril & Charles Raitt-Brown*

Martin Wall \*

Jessie Durkan \*

Derek Parkins \*

## Trumpet

Tom Fountain

Darren Moore

## Trombone

Neil Gallie \*

Barnaby Philpott

## Bass Trombone

Richard Ashmore \*

## Timpani

Mark McDonald \*

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Sam Staunton \*\*

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\* Principal

+ Sub-Principal

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The Ulster Orchestra Foundation has been established as a separately registered charity to support and sustain the future development of this cultural leader for current and future generations. It has a clearly defined mission to support the full programme of work which the Orchestra delivers, including concerts, community outreach, musical education in schools and colleges, and taking music to the disadvantaged.

Obviously such ambition requires considerable financial resources. The Ulster Orchestra, in common with all orchestras of standing, is dependent upon significant public funding and the invaluable support of its key partners and patrons. There is, however, a need to benefit from a considerable level of additional support from other sources, including the business world and philanthropic institutions and individuals.

*The Foundation is delighted to acknowledge the very generous support of the following donors:*

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ULSTER

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Throughout the COVID pandemic, the recording of performances for BBC Radio 3 has been a core output of Ulster Orchestra activity and the Orchestra has been proud to be able to produce high-quality performances for broadcast when so much else has been curtailed.

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# Administration

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The Ulster Orchestra offices remain closed at this time, so contact us via email on [info@ulsterorchestra.com](mailto:info@ulsterorchestra.com) or find us on social media by searching for Ulster Orchestra on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube.

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