



Brahms Symphony No. 2

**November 6 | 2:30 pm
Farquhar Auditorium
UVic**

**EXTRA MUSICIANS FOR
HOLLY MATHIESON:
BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO. 2**

VIOLIN

Kelly Chang
Tyson Doknjas
Mark Ferris
Paule Prefontaine
Misako Sotozaki

VIOLA

Jessica Pickersgill

PERCUSSION

Rob Pearce, Acting Principal
Tristan Holleufer
Masako Hockey



New Year's Day Celebration

Sunday, January 1, 2023, 2:30 pm

Royal Theatre

Start off the New Year with a program every bit as effervescent as a glass of bubbles! **Maestro Giuseppe Pietrarao** and our guests share much loved arias, overtures, choruses, and dances from the pens of Lehár, Strauss, Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, Massenet and more!

As our special guest, Canadian soprano **Simone Osborne** will share some of her favourite arias, including "Sempre libre" (*La traviata*), "O mio babbino caro" (*Gianni Schicchi*), "Song to the Moon" (*Rusalka*) and "Vilja Song" (*The Merry Widow*).

Osborne has been hailed as "a joy to hear" (*Los Angeles Times*) with "a sweet and clear sound, sensitive phrasing and gleaming sustained high notes" (*New York Times*). Celebrated for her resplendent vocal timbre, exceptional musicality and unparalleled dramatic instincts, the Vancouver native is establishing herself as one of the most exciting emerging artists in the opera world.

Also joining the festivities are the dancers of **Ballet Victoria**, guided by Paul Destrooper, as well as members of **Pacific Opera Victoria Chorus**, who will leave you humming favourite melodies. Join us for one of the season's most anticipated and playful traditions! victoriasymphony.ca/concerts



HOLLY MATHIESON
Conductor

November 6
2:30 pm
Farquhar Auditorium
UVic

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Brahms

Symphony

No. 2

Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes
Grace Williams (1906–1977)

The Wand of Youth Suite No. 1,
Op. 1a

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

- Overture
- Serenade
- Minuet
- Sun Dance
- Fairy Pipers
- Slumber Scene
- Faeries and Giants

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73
Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

- Allegro non troppo
- Adagio non troppo
- Allegretto grazioso, quasi andantino
- Allegro con spirito



Holly Mathieson

Conductor

New Zealand-born Holly Mathieson is the Music Director of Symphony Nova Scotia in Halifax, Canada. She is also Co-Artistic Director of the Nevis Ensemble and was recently appointed to the newly created role of Artist in Association at English Touring Opera.

The 2022/23 season marks the third year of her Music Directorship with Symphony Nova Scotia. Further highlights are her debuts with Victoria Symphony and Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra in Canada as well as a return visit to the Royal Danish Ballet for Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.

Highlights of past seasons are her debut with Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra as well as debuts with New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, including return visits to Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. Recent debuts include Scottish Opera Orchestra, English Touring Opera (Mozart's *Così*

fan tutte), Opera North (*Song of our Heartland*, a new work by Will Todd) and New Zealand Opera, conducting Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*. Over the past years, Holly has worked with almost all key UK orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Holly's Decca recording of Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto with Isata Kanneh-Mason and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, released in July 2019, landed on the No.1 spot in UK Classical charts. She has worked with many esteemed conductors and counts the following among her mentors: Marin Alsop, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Christoph von Dohnányi, Peter Oundjian, Donald Runnicles, Thomas Søndergård, and Garry Walker.

Holly Mathieson:
Brahms Symphony No. 2

Cross-dressing farmers; a stealthy, frog-spearling swamp creature; a mysterious blacksmith: just as Grace Williams' *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes* conceals considerable depth beneath its jolly surface, the folk tunes that inspired this British composer touch on a surprisingly wide variety of rural characters and customs.

Not surprisingly, lullabies predominate, but here, too, there is an unanticipated richness. In folk music, the dreamy "Cysga Di, Fy Mhlentyn Tlws" ("Sleep, My Pretty Child") is unalloyed Celtic beauty, but in Williams' hands it is dressed up in Russian furs, taking on decidedly Eastern European colours. Conversely, Williams' concluding tune "Cadi Ha" ("Summer Katie") would fit a colliery band as well as it does its rousing orchestral setting; not surprising, given that it depicts a wild May Day dance. Cadi /Katie is usually a man—a kind of fool or Lord of Misrule, cavorting at the head of a band of village louts in drag.

"Migildi, Magildi" is untranslatable, as it's an onomatopoeic rendering of the sound of a blacksmith's hammer on hot iron, a noise that would have been common in Edwardian Glamorgan, where Williams was born in 1906. And "Deryn y Bwn" refers to the bittern, a secretive and well-camouflaged heron with a distinctive and unforgettable call—which, sadly, Williams has chosen not to reproduce here.

The composer herself was ambivalent about *Fantasia*. In one letter, she told her correspondent "It

was never meant to be taken seriously," while in another she more confidently said "I can give something of myself to folksong fantasias and such things. Yes, I know they are derivative but they've got a splash of me in—because I really and truly love those traditional tunes."

Ironically, Edward Elgar was unmoved by the vernacular music of the United Kingdom, reportedly telling one listener "Madam, I *write* the folk songs of England," when asked if he drew on rural melodies. (He did, however, consent to paraphrase Polish folk tunes in *Polonia*, written in 1915 in aid of the Polish Victim's Relief Fund.) The Germanophilic composer, whose reputation as a British patriot rests largely on the popularity of his anthemic "Land of Hope and Glory," shares Williams' nostalgic bent, however. In fact, *The Wand of Youth Suite No. 1* is based on the composer's juvenilia, incorporating themes he'd written as a 10-year-old along with dance music he'd penned as a young man.

Elgar reconstituted these heirloom passages from his surviving notes as a gift to himself on the occasion of his 50th birthday, in 1907. From the music, one can deduce that his memories of childhood were mostly benign; despite being the sensitive one in a large and boisterous family, he had a secure place as in-house composer, literally, for his six siblings' theatrical productions. His notes for *The Wand of Youth Suite No. 1* include surviving stage directions such as "enter two old people" and "two fairy pipers pass in a boat, and charm them to sleep." We are in the world of A.A. Milne and Kenneth Graham here, not that of Roald Dahl—and it's

not coincidental that Elgar wrote his musical reminiscence just a year before Graham published *The Wind in the Willows*, which also features a lovely little boat and the lulling music of a supernatural piper. For the English middle and upper classes, this was a sunlit time, with not a hint of the sorrows soon to come.

Pivoting between reflection and warmth, *The Wand of Youth* leads perfectly into Johannes Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D major, another world in which grief is largely absent. Brahms 2 has aesthetic and historical links to both of the preceding compositions. Listen, for instance, to how the Symphony No. 2's third movement, Allegretto grazioso, alternates between skipping dance rhythms and lullaby-like placidity; one could almost imagine the faster passages scoring a lively May Day celebration. A pedagogical link between Williams and Brahms can also be found in the former's Austrian mentor, Egon Wellesz, who would have been intimately familiar with his German counterpart's work.

The Brahms/Elgar connection involves delving deeper into psychological mysteries. Music historian Grant Woods has written a fascinating essay, *Elgar, Brahms, and the Masculine Ideal*, which unpacks the psychological similarities between the two composers, along with Elgar's idolization of the older musician.

"Although his music may not be as conspicuously Brahmsian as some of his contemporaries, Elgar nonetheless drew a great deal of inspiration from Brahms, both as a composer and as a

man," Woods writes. "Some scholars have noted Elgar's musical indebtedness to the German composer ([the scholar and broadcaster] Hans Keller refers to him as "Elgar's overpowering father figure"), but none have examined the role that Elgar's obsession with masculinity played in his perception of Brahms. Due to a number of deep-seated anxieties about his own manliness and class, Elgar endeavored throughout his life to present himself as a noble and dignified gentleman. These fixations exhibited themselves in his dress, behavior, and compositional practice. Brahms's reputation as a serious composer and icon of bourgeois masculinity likely resonated with Elgar on multiple levels and provided a model of compositional manliness that he could follow."

Woods goes on to note that throughout his life, Elgar would attempt to emulate the "reticent," "broad," and "noble" qualities that he saw in his German forebear. These are not bad elements to encapsulate in sound, but in this program they will likely make the joy and whimsy evident in Williams' *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes* all the more delightful.

NOTES BY ALEX VARTY



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**Simone Osborne, soprano
Ballet Victoria
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January 1
at the Royal Theatre

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