
7 November 2020

7.30pm

**Guildhall Symphony
Orchestra**

Jessica Cottis
Conductor

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Missy Mazzoli
Violent, Violent Sea

Leoš Janáček
Sinfonietta

Jean Sibelius
Symphony No 1
in E minor, Op 39

Guildhall Symphony Orchestra
Jessica Cottis conductor

Saturday 7 November 2020
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This concert was performed live across four venues at Guildhall School on Wednesday 4 November 2020. It was recorded and produced live by Guildhall School's Recording & Audio Visual department.

Missy Mazzoli (born 1980)

Violent, Violent Sea (2011)

– version for full orchestra



The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Mead Composer-In-Residence, Missy Mazzoli has received relatively little exposure this side of the Atlantic, but major UK performances include two European premieres – of her orchestral piece *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)* at the BBC Proms, and of her second opera, *Breaking the Waves* (an adaptation of the Lars von Trier film), at last year's Edinburgh International Festival. In March, just before lockdown, she appeared at nearby St Giles' Cripplegate in tandem with fellow American composer and pianist Kelly Moran, performing some of her own material.

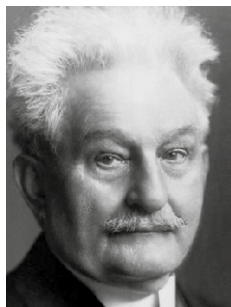
Like Mazzoli herself, who also composes for her all-female art-pop band Victoire, *Violent, Violent Sea* looks simultaneously in opposite directions. Beginning with thoughts of an emotional mood rather than a precise musical idea, the composer wrote in her early notes for the piece:

LOUD BUT SLOW.
LIGHT BUT DARK.
VIBRAPHONE.
HOW TO DO THIS?

Almost throughout, the slow-shifting, sustained chords in the strings contrast with more chaotic (but precisely notated) lines in the winds and brass. This idea, though simple, generates myriad contrasts – of instrumental timbre, of texture ('vertical', or harmonic, against 'horizontal', or contrapuntal) and of rhythm. Tension and calm often coincide, while short Minimalist gestures overlay Romantic expression. If the harmonic language seems to have a foot rooted in tonality, this is without apology. 'My goal with all my music,' Mazzoli has said, 'is to draw listeners in with something familiar and then have it be like, "Oh, I never heard it put that way."'

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)

Sinfonietta (1926)



1. *Allegretto*
2. *Andante*
3. *Moderato*
4. *Allegretto*
5. *Andante con moto*

The spur for Janáček's *Sinfonietta* was an outdoor concert he attended in Písek, southern Bohemia, in 1924, while visiting Kamila Stösslová, the much younger married woman with whom he was infatuated. The concert opened with a fanfare march performed by four trumpeters whose instruments were decorated with the flag of Czechoslovakia. When asked to write a fanfare for the Sokol gymnastics festival in 1926, Janáček remembered the brass band in Písek and wrote a fanfare for brass and timpani, but promptly went on to add four further movements.

The *Sinfonietta* was given its premiere on 26 June 1926 by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under Václav Talich. Tapping into the nationalistic spirit of the newly independent Czechoslovakia, a review in *Lidové noviny* ('People's News') reported that the piece expressed 'the free Czech man of today, reflecting the beauty of his soul and his joyfulness as well as his strength and harmonious equilibrium'. The critic also declared the piece 'one of the most precious compositions created in our liberated homeland'.

The proud brass fanfares of the first movement are shot through with a bold timpani line, mostly playing a catchy zigzagging figure with a palindromic rhythm (short-short long long short-short).

Squawking oboes lend a rustic feel to the opening of the second movement, accompanied by hopping trombones and bassoons. Later in the movement, a fanfare rises triumphant, launching a minor fixation with a repeated long short-short pattern. The other significant rhythmic motif in the movement is a tightly swirling four-note figure, strongly characteristic of Janáček and arguably suggesting alarm and nervous anxiety.

Lush-sounding violins and cellos open the third movement but eventually trombones intervene. The wild climax features a howling horn and virtuosic gusts from piccolo and flutes, but the lush opening music returns to close the movement wistfully.

The brief fourth movement, like the first two, carries a strong rhythmic inflection – and an austerity that perhaps led to its use as the theme tune for the 1970s early-afternoon TV drama *Crown Court*. The finale comprises a sequence of iterations of the opening flute melody, growing towards a return of the first-movement fanfares, which drive the piece to a blazing, brass-and-timpani-driven conclusion.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Symphony No 1 in E minor, Op 39

(1898–9, rev. 1900)



1. *Andante ma non troppo – Allegro energico*
2. *Andante (ma non troppo lento)*
3. *Scherzo: Allegro – Lento (ma non troppo) – Tempo primo*
4. *Finale (Quasi una fantasia): Andante – Allegro molto*

While many composers have traced a path of continual expansion across their symphonic output, aiming at increasingly grand expression, Sibelius went the opposite way. Between his First Symphony at the beginning of the 20th century and his Seventh, completed nearly 25 years later, he applied a process of concentration, blending and tightening so that, at around 25 minutes, his final symphony was conceived as a single-movement symphonic microcosm.

The First Symphony was composed around the height of the ‘Russification’ of Finland that followed the accession of Tsar Nicholas II in 1894, and it came to be associated – mistakenly – with other patriotic works by Sibelius of the same period, especially the tone-poem *Finlandia* (1899), which became an unofficial Finnish national anthem.

The first movement opens with a desolate clarinet rising out of a hushed timpani rumble. This theme returns at the opening of the Finale but is otherwise not developed. What emerges is music of broad sweep, impetuous energy and elemental force. Even the delicate, dance-like warbling of the second subject soon meets with granitic brass chorales and winds and strings driving in opposite directions.

We enter a calmer, almost fairy-tale world in the slow movement, with its gentle theme on violins and cellos carried by a pulsing low harp. The rondo-like form of the movement brings episodes related to parts of the first movement. Sibelius was not afraid to unleash a storm in this slow movement but, after it quells, we are left with the harp-borne violin-and-cello theme from the movement’s start, which fades gently into the distance.

The third-movement Scherzo begins with a firm rhythmic grip, with which the luminous central trio section – featuring horns and flutes – forms a dreamy contrast. The opening Scherzo music returns to drive forward a thumping end.

Launching in with Tchaikovskyan tragedy and fervour, the strings open the finale by recalling the solo clarinet theme from the symphony’s opening. This movement boasts a big-boned, full-on

Romantic tune – one of the composer’s finest – though, as one commentator has put it, ‘Sibelius never tried to “swoon” like this again’. The dramatic, surging end shows that the First Symphony was no half-hearted testing of the symphonic waters on Sibelius’s part. As the Finnish conductor and renowned Sibelius interpreter Osmo Vänskä has said, the work contains ‘all the wildness and rage of the man’.

Programme notes by Edward Bhesania © 2020

Jessica Cottis

Conductor



Jessica Cottis spent her early professional years as assistant conductor to Vladimir Ashkenazy at the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Since then her performances have received consistent acclaim in the national and international press.

Recently noted as “Classical ‘face to watch’” (*The Times*), Cottis’s dynamic conducting style, high musical intellect, and inspirational leadership have led to guest conducting invitations from orchestras such as the London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, Houston Symphony, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Sinfonietta, Gävle Symphony Orchestra, Malmö Symphony Orchestra and Oulu Symphony Orchestra, as well as numerous re-invitations to the prestigious BBC Proms.

Following the success of her debut at the Royal Opera House in 2017 conducting the premiere of Na’ama Zisser’s *Mamzer*, she was immediately re-invited to conduct the world premiere of *The Monstrous Child* by Gavin Higgins, which was “strikingly brought to life by the Aurora Orchestra conducted by Jessica Cottis” (*Financial Times*).

Upcoming performances this season include a return to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and debuts with Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, and the English Chamber Orchestra. She works widely as an advocate for classical music.

Guildhall Symphony Orchestra

Violin I

Sabine Sergejeva*
Paula Gorbanova
Amelia Harding
Cathryn Cowell
Giulia Lussoso
Ella Ronson
Jessica Meakin
Joana Praça
Ella Fox
Tiago Costa
Gwyneth Nelmes
Jasper Noack
Luka Perazic
Harriet Haynes

Violin II

Tilman Fleig*
Sonja Tuomela
Pauline Herold
Ana González Alonso
Laura Pastor Rocamora
Nina Lim
Kalina Mincheva
Zoe Hodi
Ivelina Ivanova
Evie Rogers

Viola

Mabon Rhyd*
Kate Correia De Campos
Charles Whittaker
Samuel Watkin
Simon Philip-McKenzie
Georgia Russell
Lara Bowles
Kelvin Chan
Ami-Louise Johnsson

Cello

William Clark-Maxwell*
Christopher Hedges
Patrick Moriarty
James McBeth
Yishang Sheng
Kosta Popovic
Aline Christ
Rita Moutinho

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Yat Hei Lee*
Catharina Feyen
Kornel Koncas T
Evangelos Saklaras
Max Salisbury
Benjamin Du Toi

Flute

Fiona Sweeney*
Rebecca Rouch
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Sophie McLaughlin
(piccolo)

Oboe

Emma Beach*
Sam Willmore
(cor anglais)

Clarinet

Hannah Hever*
Andrew Mellor
(E-flat clarinet)
Fresca David (bass clarinet)

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Lucy Gibson

Horn

Leonardo Pinho*
(*Mazzoli & Janáček*)
Zac Hayward* (*Sibelius*)
Alexander Grinyer
Michael Hofmann
Elizabeth Baumberg

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Maciej Kropidlowski
Louis Grao

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James Graham

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Tuba

Charles Jones

Janáček Fanfare Brass:

Trumpet

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Patrick Wilson
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Abigail Patterson
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Olga Malawska

Bass trumpet

Sam Gale*
James Thomas

Euphonium

Brian Choi*
Adam Quilter

Timpani

Hristiyan Hristov
(toy piano)

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Robert Turner (Tutti Strings)
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Chris Richards (Clarinet)
Dan Jemison (Bassoon)
Angela Barnes (Horn)
Niall Keatley (Trumpet;
Fanfare Brass)
Eric Crees (Bass trumpet
& Euphonium)
Jim Maynard (Trombone
& Tuba)
David Corkhill (Timpani
& Percussion)
Bryn Lewis (Harp)
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