

Proms themes and anniversaries

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The Sea

Two hundred years on from Nelson's momentous victory over the French in the Battle of Trafalgar, and 100 years after Debussy composed *La mer*, the Proms takes as one of its key themes the inspiration the sea has afforded to composers through the ages.

Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea-Songs* – a staple of the Last Night of the Proms – was composed in 1905 specifically to celebrate the centenary of Nelson's triumph. This year, marking the work's own centenary, the Proms restores Wood's authentic naval bugle-calls, which herald the regular sequence of sea-songs and hornpipe, with further national sea-songs added from around the UK.



Sally Matthews performs in Gilbert and Sullivan's HMS Pinafore

Four of the most famous sea overtures are programmed throughout the season: Berlioz's overture *The Corsair* (Prom 1) sets the Proms season off to a piratical start, Mendelssohn's '*The Hebrides*' overture (Prom 11) and Wagner's overture to *The Flying Dutchman* (Prom 59) are two of the most evocative yet concise musical illustrations of storm-ridden seascapes, and Walton's *Portsmouth Point Overture* gives yet another naval perspective to the Last Night.

Sir John Eliot Gardiner, his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists perform Haydn's '*Nelson*' Mass as the centrepiece of an all-Haydn Late Night Prom (Prom 7). Formally entitled *Missa in angustiis* (Mass in time of Peril), it was written in 1798 when the war against revolutionary France was at a low ebb. Stanford's *Songs of the Sea* draw on the glories of England's naval past with settings of poems by Sir Henry Newbolt (Prom 35).

The Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin make their Proms debut and open their Late Night Concert and with Telemann's *Hamburger Ebb' und Flut* (Prom 29) and Martyn Brabbins and the Nash Ensemble close their Late Night Prom with Meirion Bowen's arrangement of Tippett's *Tempest Suite* (Prom 70), whilst Sir Thomas Allen gives the Proms Chamber Music series a taste of the sea with Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach* and a selection of traditional sea-songs (PCM 1).

Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra programme possibly the most famous of sea works and detailed painting of nature, Debussy's *La mer* (Prom 73), completed in 1905, whilst the six movements of Thea Musgrave's *Turbulent Landscapes*, receiving its London première, are based on the composer's interpretations of Turner's

paintings (Prom 6). Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*, performed by Rumon Gamba and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (Prom 68), and Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*, with Gerard Schwarz and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (Prom 11), provide two of the classics of British sea music. A vivid contrast is afforded by the effervescent Gilbert & Sullivan – *HMS Pinafore* – and Sir Charles Mackerras's brilliant re-orchestration of Sullivan in *Pineapple Poll* on the second night of the season.

Fairy Tales



Sakari Oramo conducts Ravel's Mother Goose

The bicentenary of the birth of Hans Christian Andersen allows the Proms to programme a raft of music featuring intriguing characters, vivid aural pictures and chilling contrasts of cruelty and love. Throughout the ages, composers have been inspired by the variety

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of fairy tales – whether the traditional tales passed down orally from generation to generation, or the more sanitised or whimsical tales of the 19th century and later.

The theme bursts upon the season with the epic Purcell semi-opera *The Fairy Queen* (Prom 3), considered by some to be the finest musical score from any English composer before Sullivan. Centred on characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the work – originally a spectacular and lavish musical play – consists of powerful songwriting with interlocking musical interludes and setpieces. The concert performance is given by the Gabrieli Consort and Players and an array of British vocal talent, directed by Paul McCreesh, and builds on their critically acclaimed performance at the 2003 Proms of Handel's *Saul*. Rarely heard in its full version, Mendelssohn's youthful and imaginative interpretation of the Shakespeare play is performed this season by Thierry Fischer and the Ulster Orchestra (Prom 39).

Perhaps Hans Christian Andersen's most famous creation, *The Little Mermaid* receives two contrasting musical interpretations this season: Zemlinsky's lavish symphonic poem *Die Seejungfrau* is performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by James Conlon (Prom 67), whilst Bent Sørensen's three-movement semi-dramatic work *The Little Mermaid*, features soprano and tenor soloists (Inger Dam-Jensen and Gert Henning-Jensen) alongside the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and Girls' Choir, who are conducted by Thomas Dausgaard (Prom 38). The work was co-commissioned by the BBC Proms and the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra specifically for the Hans Christian Andersen 200th anniversary.

Stravinsky's interpretations of Hans Christian Andersen's tales – *The Nightingale* and *The Fairy's Kiss* (based on *The Ice Maiden*) – form the other cornerstones of the fairy tales



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theme. *The Nightingale* is performed by Gianandrea Noseda, the BBC Philharmonic and a host of exceptional soloists, including Olga Trifonova and Sergei Leiferkus (Prom 8). *The Fairy's Kiss* sits in a BBC Symphony Orchestra Prom conducted by Oliver Knussen which also features anniversary composer Lyadov's *Baba-Yaga*, *The Enchanted Lake* and *Kikimora* (Prom 15). Musorgsky's powerful interpretation of *Baba-Yaga* in his *Pictures at an Exhibition* can be heard the very next night in a City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Prom conducted by Sakari Oramo, which opens with Ravel's *Mother Goose* suite (Prom 16).

Tchaikovsky's oeuvre was also heavily influenced by fairy tales, and Vassily Sinaisky and the Welsh National Opera give a concert performance of *Iolanta*, starring Nuccia Focile in the title role. The concert begins with excerpts from Tchaikovsky's sparkling ballet score for *The Nutcracker* (Prom 42). Sinaisky also conducts excerpts from *The Snow Maiden* in his BBC Philharmonic Prom earlier in the season (Prom 19).

Mahler described his cantata *Das klagende Lied* as a 'fairy tale from my youthful days'. It is performed by Donald Runnicles and the BBC Symphony Orchestra with soprano Gweneth-Ann Jeffers, mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung, tenor Johan Botha and baritone Mark Delavan (Prom 33).

Little-known Czech composer Novák's *Eternal Longing*, performed by the BBC Symphony under its new Chief Conductor Designate Jiří Bělohlávek, takes one 'evening' of the 33 'evenings' Hans Christian Andersen describes in his *What the Moon Saw*, and the concert finishes with Stravinsky's *The Firebird* suite (Prom 50).

Dukas is almost exclusively known now for his *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, but his bubbling fairy tale ballet, *La Peri*, was commissioned by Diaghilev

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for his Ballet Russes and is performed in the Proms by BBC National Orchestra of Wales under its new Principal Guest Conductor Jac van Steen (Prom 28).

Finally, no fairy tale theme would be complete without a version of *Sheherazade*, and Rimsky-Korsakov's famous work forms the second half of the Prom given by Valery Gergiev and the World Orchestra for Peace (Prom 57).

End of the Second World War

The 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War is commemorated at the First Night of the Proms with Tippett's anti-war oratorio *A Child of Our Time*. Sir Roger Norrington conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra with the star line-up of soprano Indra Thomas, mezzo-soprano Christine Rice, tenor Ian Bostridge and bass Willard White.

Later in the season, the Proms hosts the two orchestras whose very existence is proof of the significant role that culture can play in the world peace agenda: Daniel Barenboim returns with the Arab-Israeli West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in a programme of Mozart and Mahler (Prom 41) and, as mentioned above, Valery Gergiev returns to the Proms with the World Orchestra for Peace, originally formed 10 years ago by Sir Georg Solti, for a concert featuring the well-known repertoire of Rossini's *William Tell* overture, Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* overture, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*, and a new work by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Anniversaries

The 100th anniversary of the birth of Sir Michael Tippett gives the BBC Proms the opportunity to programme a wide range of



The Proms celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Sir Michael Tippett

the still-controversial composer's works – from *A Child of Our Time* on the opening night, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sir Roger Norrington, to the rarely heard *The Vision of St Augustine*, performed by Richard Hickox and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (Prom 14). A Late Night Prom given by the Nash Ensemble conducted by Martyn Brabbins (Prom 70) and the BBC Singers with Stephen Cleobury programmes a variety of Tippett a cappella choral works and the *Tempest* suite. Other key works – such as the Ritual Dances from *A Midsummer Marriage* (Prom 31) and the Piano Concerto (Prom 34) – are interspersed throughout the season. And Sir Colin Davis, a long-time champion of Tippett's work, pairs Symphony No. 4 with Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 *Eroica* in the London Symphony Orchestra's Prom (Prom 47).

Seventy years after his death, the music of Alban Berg, often described as the human face of Viennese modernism, is celebrated. The *Lulu Suite* with the *Lulu* of the age, Christine Schäfer, forms the first half of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's Prom conducted by Daniele Gatti (Prom 44); the Three Pieces for Orchestra, Op 6, form the first half of the

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BBC Symphony Orchestra concert conducted by Donald Runnicles (Prom 33); Leonidas Kavakos is the soloist for the Violin Concerto accompanied by Sir Andrew Davis and the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Prom 55); and Three Fragments from *Wozzeck* form part of Zubin Mehta's programme with the Vienna Philharmonic (Prom 71).

In addition to the centenary of Sir Michael Tippett, two further British composer centenaries are marked – Alan Rawsthorne's with Piano Concerto No. 2 and Constant Lambert's with his *Merchant Seamen Suite* and the popular *Rio Grande* programmed for the Last Night.

The Late Night Proms celebrate, at each end of the Western classical music canon, the 500th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Tallis with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen – using 40 voices for *Spem in alium* amongst other repertoire (Prom 64) – and the 70th birthday of Arvo Pärt is marked by Paul Hillier's concert with Pärt's compatriots, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (Prom 45).

Other anniversaries celebrated throughout the season include:

Carissimi (b 1605)
Jonah and *Motets* (PCM 7)

Tubin (b 1905)
Toccata (Prom 30)

Berio (b 1925)
Coro (Prom 26)

Maw (b 1935)
Life Studies, Nos. 3, 6 and 8 (Prom 48)

Chausson (b 1855)
Songs (PCM 4)