JANE EYRE
An opera in two acts
by
JOHN JOUBERT
(b.1927)

Full cast, synopsis and libretto included in the booklet. Recorded live during a concert performance at Ruddock Performing Arts Centre, Birmingham on 25 October 2016.

Executive & Recording Producer: Siva Oke  Editing: Siva Oke & Kenneth Woods

Recording Engineer: Ben Connellan  Recording Engineer for Track B: Paul Arden-Taylor

Front cover image: © Lorraine Payne  Design: Andrew Giles

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**JANE EYRE  A Personal Note**

My father has always been a great reader with three, usually large, books on the go: one in his study, one by his chair and one by his bed. His love of reading is shared by my mother. Her study of Jane Eyre at a literature class prompted his idea of turning the novel into an opera. (His two previous major operas are based on novels by George Eliot and Joseph Conrad.) Dad didn’t write *Jane Eyre* to a commission and so worked on it in between other pieces over a ten year period (1987-97) with his librettist, Kenneth Birkin.

When the work was completed a performance was sought. Interest was expressed from various quarters: conservatoires, conductors, singers, but a fully staged professional performance proved impossible to secure. The score passed back and forth over the years but for all the interest or in some cases, lack of interest, no première of the completed work was in view. This made me sad, and must have disheartened my father. He never indulged in self pity but simply carried on writing the music he wanted and needed to write.

Years later when Siva Oke floated the idea of recording *Jane Eyre*, I confess to being cynical about the outcome. How would it be financed? Who would put their reputation on the line by conducting a large-scale work by a composer perhaps considered to be unfashionable by some? What singers would commit to such a risky undertaking? Would my father even live to see it?

When the real prospect of a performance came in sight he returned to the score, removed the orchestral interludes which he has since re-worked into his Symphony No 3, cut some of the music and made the opera into two acts rather than three. Siva remained undaunted through setbacks and struggles from beginning to end. In conductor Ken Woods she secured the services of a dedicated advocate of the work who gave totally of himself. I can’t thank Siva, Ken, the donors and benefactors, orchestra, audience and wonderful singers enough. To know that my father lived to hear his great work brought to life and to witness its thrilling reception was for me, his daughter, one of the highlights of my life. I hope that you enjoy hearing Jane Eyre and experience some of the joy of that unforgettable occasion.

Anna Joubert

**JOHN JOUBERT  An Operatic Life**

At the time of writing, John Joubert’s total of opus numbers is approaching the 200 mark. His compositions over a career spanning nearly three-quarters of a century encompass the whole range of genres, and *Jane Eyre* is the eighth of his operas, and the third of his full-length examples of the stimulus of secular literary texts (the others are *Silas Marner* and *Under Western Eyes*).

These titles alone give the clue to Joubert’s love of literature, and this love extends to the visual arts as well. Born in Cape Town in 1927, the Huguenot-descended Joubert came to England in 1946 after winning a Performing Rights Society Scholarship which enabled him to study for four years at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He had already had several works, both choral and orchestral, performed in South Africa; now he had countless heady opportunities to experience the full gamut of the arts in one of the world’s great cultural centres, and he took full advantage.
John Joubert particularly relished the summer Wagner seasons at Covent Garden’s Royal Opera House, where he heard the great Wagnerian performers of the time, including soprano Kirsten Flagstad and bass Hans Hotter. Later, when he was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Hull in 1952, he encountered Italian opera, particularly Verdi and Puccini, as brought by touring companies such as Carl Rosa.

Another great enthusiasm was for the music of Benjamin Britten, and we can hear the influence of all three of these sources in Joubert’s operatic output, all the time assimilated into his own highly personal language, full of integrity and expressive engagement.

After his move to the University of Birmingham in 1962, initially appointed as Lecturer in Music, then Senior Lecturer, and eventually Reader, John Joubert continued to produce works in every medium, with a particular emphasis on the vocal. He retired in 1986, since when a succession of major works has flowed from his pen, including the oratorio Wings of Faith, premiered by Ex Cathedra during the nationwide “Joubertiade” celebrating his 80th birthday in 2007, the Rochester triptych Blest Glorious Man, and An English Requiem, a counterpart to the Brahms German Requiem, premiered at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival in 2010.

As with Verdi when he was at a similar age, there is no drying-up of John Joubert’s compositional inspiration, and, like the great Italian composer, the stimulus of literary texts, whether sacred or secular, is a major factor in Joubert’s ongoing output.

Christopher Morley is Chief Music Critic of the Birmingham Post, an alumnus of Birmingham University and a former pupil of John Joubert.

JANE EYRE

On Adapting a Great Novel – a Note from the Composer

Any adaptation of a novel for the lyric stage must involve some adjustments to, and manipulation of, both text and plot. The first problem was the length of the book, which, because my librettist and I wanted mainly to deal with our heroine’s adult life, led to the omission of its first few chapters - those dealing with Jane’s unhappy childhood experiences both as her aunt’s ward and as a pupil at Lowood School. We did, however, want to include those chapters, so often omitted in TV and screen adaptations, to do with the relationship with the Revd St. John Rivers, which we considered the emotional turning point of the story. Above all, in those places where we have had to be selective, we have tried to be faithful both to the integrity of the original and the exigencies of the operatic stage.

Conductor, cast and orchestra acknowledge a standing ovation.

photograph: Graham Boulton

Christopher Morley
English Symphony Orchestra

Violin 1
Sarah Sew guest leader
Carl Darby
Jacqui Allen
Noriko Tsuzaki
Jeremy Sampson
Martin Owen
Jonathan Storer
Adam Hill

Violin 2
Eleanor Cooke
Suzanne Casey
Julia Watkins
Jess Townsend

Viola
Helen Roberts
Nicky Akeroyd
Isobel Adams
Julian Robinson

Cello
Corinne Frost
Alice McVeigh
Julian Metzger
Antoinette Davies

Double Bass
Stephen Warner
Damon Burrows

Flute
Catherine Handley

Oboe
Graeme Adams

Clarinet
Alison Lambert

Bassoon
Rosemary Cow

Horn
James Topp

Trumpet
John Ellwood

Trombone
Julian Turner

Tuba
Ian Foster

Timpani
Julian Wolstencroft

Percussion
Graham Bradley
Anna Newman

Piano
Phil Ypres-Smith

Organ
Jonathan Stamp

Assistant Conductors
Michael Young
Benjamin Knowles

Orchestra Librarian
Lucy Burke

General Manager
Matthew Peters
Part of what makes the opera so compelling, apart from its staggering beauty, is Joubert's mastery at balancing the levels of musical structure in the work. Each scene forms a sort of self-contained symphonic whole, while both acts are unified within themselves yet distinct from each other. Each act finds cohesion through the theme which opens it – neither of which is ever sung. In the case of Act 1, the mysterious opening in the viola, an enchanted musical “Once upon a time…” if there ever was one, achieves a kind of fierce monumentality at the climax of Jane and Mr. Brocklehurst's contentious duet at the end of Scene 1, then a bleak stentorian savagery in Rochester's despairing aria at the end of Scene 2, before being transformed into music of mystic tenderness at the opening of Scene 3. When we hear it in the closing bars of Act 1 we sense the completion of not only the first part of the musical journey, but the end of the first part of Jane's life.

The parallel theme of Act II is the march heard first in the violas, which soon reveals itself as the music of Jane's wedding procession – music of hope, happiness and promise. As the wedding begins to collapse into humiliation and shame, Joubert changes this hopeful march into a despairing horn obbligato as Rochester confesses his previous marriage, then it later becomes a real funeral march at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 3. Joubert underlines the organic unity of the score by illustrating this theme's kinship with the main theme of Act 1 as soon as the 3rd bar of Act 2, when he inverts it and changes its rhythm to straight crotchets from dotted rhythms – it's only two notes different from the theme of Act I. This inverted form of the wedding march becomes the backdrop to much of the turmoil of the catastrophic wedding scene, heard as the agitated ostinato which underpins the section which begins when Rochester declares “She lives, but is not, was not and will never be a wife to me” and later forms the sort of waves which sweep this tumultuous scene to its bleak conclusion while the congregation screams out "Bigamy!"

There are several other fully fledged themes which Joubert handles deftly throughout the opera, such as the theme of Jane's longing, which we hear for the first time just after she sings “visions, long cherished dreams, become at last reality” in the first scene, and the

In Jane Eyre, John Joubert and librettist Kenneth Birkin have managed the crucial balance between storytelling and structure about as well as it can be handled. Joubert’s Jane Eyre, while spiritually true to Charlotte Brontë, dispenses with much of the expository and descriptive content of the novel and focuses intently on the emotional journey of the protagonist as viewed through six pivotal scenes in her life.

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The opera’s final scene, serves a dual purpose – in addition to depicting the reconciliation of the lovers, Joubert uses this final duet as a space in which to resolve the opera’s musical tensions. In a sense it functions in much the same way as a symphonic recapitulation, as musical ideas from across the score return and combine in newly stable ways. It feels very true to life in the way in which love now comes across as richer, more complex and more troubled, but ultimately deeper than in Act 1, which in retrospect looks like a sort of innocent bliss. The very ending of the opera is magical, Mahlerian in its transcendent yet wounded peace.

Beyond these longer and more involved themes, there are a complex web of shorter, Wagnerian Leitmotifs. One of the most important is the “Jane” motive, which Rochester sings three times at the climax of both Act 2 Scene 2 and Act 2 scene 3 (these are the only times in the opera this motive is sung, although it weaves its way through almost the entire score in the orchestra). One of the most interesting themes in the opera might be called the “love,” or “love’s sorrow” theme, which we first hear Jane sing near the beginning of the second scene to the words “demon shadows grow.” It is a heart-rending evocation of the pain of love, soon transformed into hopeful radiance when Jane sings “He is my light!” Joubert has fashioned a love theme capable of expressing all the nuances of this most complex emotion.

Jane Eyre is a work of mirrors – characters are illuminated by the ways in which they’re reflected against their counterparts, and scenes are given weight and meaning by the way in which they counterbalance each other. Each act ends with a love duet, and these two duets form one musical mirror as the relationship of the two main characters is fundamentally reset. In Act 1, it is Rochester who utters the pivotal words, “My bride is here!” in full throated fortissimo (followed by what has to be one of the most gorgeous passages in any opera). In the final scene, Jane almost whispers “Choose her who loves you best,” using the same music, but now suffused with tenderness and compassion. As she does so, Joubert weaves together the two narrative themes of the opera – with the “Once upon a time” music of Act 1 returning tenderly in the strings and the wedding/funeral march of Act 2 returning in the horn. We sense that at last, the journey is coming full circle as the conflicting forces in their lives which have separated them have now been reconciled in an act of love and forgiveness. I would be hard pressed to think of another duet which more poetically evokes the rapture of newly discovered love more touchingly than the one which ends Act 1. The opera’s final scene, serves a dual purpose – in addition to depicting the reconciliation of the lovers, Joubert uses this final duet as a space in which to resolve the opera’s musical tensions. In a sense it functions in much the same way as a symphonic recapitulation, as musical ideas from across the score return and combine in newly stable ways. It feels very true to life in the way in which love now comes across as richer, more complex and more troubled, but ultimately deeper than in Act 1, which in retrospect looks like a sort of innocent bliss. The very ending of the opera is magical, Mahlerian in its transcendent yet wounded peace.

In stark contrast to Jane’s duets with Rochester are those with the controlling Mr Brocklehurst in the opera’s first scene, and the equally controlling, messianic St. John Rivers in the opera’s penultimate scene. Where the two duets with Rochester show Jane’s capacity for love and partnership, these show her need for independence and agency. The scene with Brocklehurst unfolds as something like a set of variations on the theme that accompanies his arrival, another sort of funereal march, but ends with a reassertion of Jane’s music. A similar thing happens at the climax of the scene with St. John. After hearing Rochester call to her, Jane sings of her love and her determination to face the challenges that seeking out Rochester will bring. It is one of the most passionate episodes in the opera, as the “Jane” theme sings out in several permutations above the soaring climax. St John is reduced to impotent rage as he mutters “You are deceived: I heard nothing,” but Jane knows her own mind, singing as she did in Act 1 of her love for Rochester “He loves me still, he needs me” with the “love’s sorrow” theme returning in all its serpentine complexity.

The opera ends in A major, and without weighing the reader down with technicalities, it is worth noting Joubert’s subtle, symbolic and highly effective use of key throughout the
opera. The tritone relationship between this final A major, associated throughout the opera with light and love, and the E-flat major which ends Act 1 and which also underpins much of the scene between Jane and St. John gives some sense of the magnitude of Jane's journey. There are also certain distinctive harmonic progressions which recur throughout the opera which help give the large-scale form a sense of structural rhythm.

Any discussion of the music of Jane Eyre would be incomplete without mention of Joubert's mastery of the orchestra. Joubert stipulates an orchestra of single woodwind (each player doubling one additional instrument, so flute doubling piccolo, oboe doubling cor anglais, clarinet doubling bass clarinet and bassoon doubling contra bassoon), single brass (horn, trumpet, trombone and tuba), two percussionists, timpani, piano, organ and a small string section. In the case of the current performance, that makes for an orchestra of just 35 musicians. With these rather modest forces, Joubert has created a score of staggering colouristic variety and astonishing power. For instance, the final pages of act one, with flute and cor anglais forming one pair and bass clarinet and contra bassoon another, each pair moving in winding parallelism, their phrases ending with citrus trills, must be one of the most stunning and original instrumental passages of recent decades, made all the more miraculous by the way in which it evolves out of melodic and motivic threads Joubert has been developing throughout the scene. Joubert's orchestra is capable of unleashing the full grandeur and power of a massive symphonic ensemble, but Joubert's smaller forces give it not only greater transparency, but a slight hint of lean tensile strength, shorn of the comfortable cushion of a huge string section. Joubert's use of the orchestral piano is also inspired. It plays much the same role as a harp might have in a Romantic score, but also serves as an able supplement to the percussion section when called for, and gives Jane Eyre's soundworld a slightly steelier edge. This is yet another example of the way that throughout Jane Eyre, Joubert has been careful to avoid maudlin sentimentality, while reaching for the most powerful possible emotional and dramatic impact.

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JANE EYRE synopsis

ACT 1
Scene 1 A schoolroom at Lowood
On a dull autumn evening Jane Eyre is supervising a small group of girls who are curious about her rumoured departure. She reveals that she is indeed about to take up a new position as governess in a distant household. Mr. Brocklehurst, a school governor, is shocked to hear of Jane's dissatisfaction with Lowood. Despite his angry protestations Jane reaffirms her decision to better herself in the wider world. Brocklehurst retires defeated and indignant, leaving Jane alone to take leave of her old life and contemplate the future.

Scene 2 Rochester's bedroom at Thornfield
It is some weeks after Jane has taken up her employment. As Rochester sleeps, a mysterious female figure enters. With a lighted candle she sets fire to the hangings surrounding the bed. The apparition retires leaving the candle behind. Woken by the smoke and smell of burning, Jane enters and attempts to douse the flames with the contents of a water jug. Rochester is dismissive of the incident but, at Jane's entreaty, goes to investigate. In his absence she reflects on her awakening love for him. Rochester returns and dismisses the incident as servant carelessness but swears Jane to silence. It is evident that a tender relationship is developing between them. They part with mutual reluctance and Rochester expresses in a bitter outburst the irony of his position without, however, revealing either its nature or its cause.

Scene 3 The gardens at Thornfield
It is a fine summer evening and Jane is taking the air. She has come to appreciate her new life at Thornfield and feels uneasy at the prospect of leaving – rumours of
Rochester's coming engagement to Blanche, a local socialite, has unsettled her. Rochester enters and tries to assuage her fears. The ensuing dialogue warms into an impassioned duet in which their previously unconfessed love for each other is now openly declared.

**ACT 2**

**Scene I  The interior of Thornfield Village Church**

Now, some weeks later, the day of Jane and Rochester's wedding has arrived. The congregation and clergy are in their places and, with the entry of the couple to the strains of a solemn wedding march, the service begins. It is rudely interrupted by one of the congregation who turns out to be the brother of Rochester's existing wife, Bertha Mason, who, since the onset of madness, has been confined at Thornfield under conditions of great secrecy. Jane is horrified at the accusation, which Rochester at first denies. The weight of evidence, however, at length persuades him to confess, and he explains how he was tricked into a reluctant marriage years ago in Jamaica. The congregation responds indignantly with cries of 'Bigamy!' and in the ensuing hubbub Jane slips away unobserved. Rochester, realising that Jane is now lost to him, cries out her name three times in anguish as the wedding service breaks up in confusion.

**Scene 2  The parlour of the Rivers' cottage**

It is one year later and Jane is still at Whitecross, where she has been given refuge by the Rivers family — the Revd. St. John and his two sisters. Family prayers are in progress, after which St. John announces his intention to take up missionary work in India. After expressing concern at this development the sisters and Jane prepare to retire for the night. St. John bids Jane to remain behind and reveals his intention to take her to India as his wife. Brushing her objections aside, he exercises his considerable persuasive powers to obtain her agreement. Her defences weaken. She appeals to the Almighty for guidance. At the peak of her distress she hears again those three anguished cries of Rochester, which have haunted her ever since her flight from Thornfield. She realises that this is the sign she has been waiting for. She leaves abruptly. Convinced that Rochester is in need of her, she determines to rejoin him.

**Scene 3  The gardens at Thornfield**

A few days later. The gardens are overgrown and neglected. The house in the background is a blackened, scorched and burnt-out ruin. Rochester is led in by John, his manservant. It is evident that he is disabled and blind. He recalls the events which have led to his present condition: the house set on fire by his wife; his unsuccessful attempt to rescue her before she perished in the flames; the injuries he sustained as a consequence. Above all, he muses on absent Jane, to whom in that very place he has declared his love. Jane enters silently without revealing her presence. She contemplates with emotion Rochester's dejected, unseeing and wasted form. After she advances and identifies herself an ecstatic re-union follows. Although they are now free to marry, Rochester has misgivings due to his helpless, crippled state. Jane reassures him, sweeping away his doubts. In the duet which follows, they express their mutual and abiding love before they exit, but now through the ruined entrance to Thornfield Hall.

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**PRODUCER’S NOTE**

A certain amount of patching was necessary and this was taken from the orchestral rehearsals of 24th and 25th October. However, it must be noted that remarkably few patches were needed. This performance, given in the presence of the composer and his family, was high on adrenaline from cast, orchestra, conductor and indeed audience. The silence at the end was eloquent, erupting eventually into a standing ovation.
A severely furnished schoolroom at Lowood on an evening in winter. Jane Eyre is supervising a small group of girls who are working at a long table lit by a single lamp. A distant clock strikes eight.

JANE: Come, girls, enough. It’s getting late. Supper is prepared in the refectory. [The girls start gathering up their books] Quietly now. unfinished tasks must wait. I’ll look in on my rounds and say goodnight.

[As the girls leave the room, one of them, Sarah, lingers behind] SARAH: Miss Eyre . . .

JANE: Sarah – what troubles you?

SARAH: They say – it’s rumoured – you’re leaving us.

JANE: How could they know? News spreads so quickly! But yes – it’s true. I applied successfully some weeks ago for the post of governess to a child whose guardian, a gentleman, lives many miles from here.

SARAH: Oh Miss Eyre . . . may I . . .? [They embrace as Mr Brocklehurst enters]

BROCKLEHURST: Miss Eyre! [Sarah exits]

JANE: Mr Brocklehurst. You seek me, sir?

BROCKLEHURST: I do, Miss Eyre. The board has asked me to dissuade you from leaving Lowood. Miss Eyre, please reconsider. Resignation is final! Resignation is irrevocable! Have you thought of that?

JANE: Yes sir – but I’ve made up my mind. My testimonial is accepted. The post is offered me.

BROCKLEHURST: Then if you take this ill-considered step, pray when do you leave?

JANE: A fortnight hence!

BROCKLEHURST: A fortnight! Too soon! Too soon! You should not have accepted! You should have thought it over! Your place is here. Consistency in all things! Consistency, the first of human virtues! And the debt you owe to Lowood, I suggest, must take priority.

JANE: But sir. But sir . . . let me speak . . .

BROCKLEHURST: Attend to me! Enquiries have been made on your behalf. This charge of yours, this foreign ward – her English guardian – absentee and probably dissolute. This housekeeper in charge of everything; it’s most irregular!

JANE: My childhood needs were never met. Fostered by grudging hands on charity, I was unwanted, cast aside, denied a parent’s love and care. Taunted, beaten, treated cruelly. I learned to school my own rebellion. Yet my anger grew, turning to stubbornness as jealous lies, unfounded calumnies, followed me here to where your punishments and dire privations brought disease and death. Remember Helen Burns, my dearest friend? Where is she now? I mourn her still. It was you sir. You are accountable! It was your negligence!

BROCKLEHURST: Woman, enough: have done! This is ingratitude. Lowood has clothed and sheltered you. Your aunt entrusted you to me to learn obedience and humility. This charily you spurn, Miss Eyre, brought present opportunity – has made you what you are.
JANE: That was convenience, not charity. My aunt relinquished long ago all interest in my affairs. I am my own mistress now.

BROCKLEHURST: No. You’re mistaken: bondage for bondage is your lot, a poor exchange, Miss Eyre, but such is woman’s destiny.

JANE: No sir! We are all of us human, and it is vain to say that we must suffer tranquilly . . .

BROCKLEHURST: Woman, no more! Have done!

JANE: Men everywhere revolt against their lot.

BROCKLEHURST: Woman, no more! Have done!

JANE: We women, too, though secretly, condemned by custom to be calm, feel just as men feel, in like manner and to like degree, long for and seek a greater good, a finer, broader view of life, opening new vistas to the captive spirit.

BROCKLEHURST: Young woman, no more! Be silent!

JANE: Contain yourself!


ROCHESTER: Not here . . . in my house – impossible!

JANE: But candle? Murderous intent?

ROCHESTER: Very well, to set your mind at rest I shall investigate.

JANE: Be calm . . . you’re not afraid?

ROCHESTER: Then wait here patiently. Be still, I shall return. [He exits in the direction of the attic rooms.]

ACT 1 Scene 2

Thornfield, some weeks after Jane has taken up her employment. In a four-poster bed, the hangings of which are partly drawn, Rochester lies asleep. A white-clad female figure enters carrying a candle. Shining the candle round the room a few times she then crosses to the bed She applies the candle flame to the hangings and leaves the room. Placing the candle on the floor she closes the door, then vanishes in the direction from which she came, leaving the candle behind her. As she disappears she utters a low laugh and soon afterwards the distant slamming of a door is heard from the attic above. Disturbed by these sounds Jane appears on the landing.


[She knocks at the door, but receiving no answer, seizes the candle and bursts into the smoke-filled bedroom.] Awake sir! [She gazes wildly around the room] What must I do . . . Water . . . water . . . [She notices the water-jug on the wash stand.] God grant that I’m in time to save him [She seizes the jug and flings its contents over the burning hangings. Rochester, wakes and struggles to his feet.]

ROCHESTER: Flood! . . . Fire! . . . Am I awake, or do I dream? By all the elves in Christendom it is the governess . . .

JANE: Hush sir! You’ll raise the house!

ROCHESTER: Just so! No need to fuss! A trifling incident.

JANE: A trifling incident! Your life attempted! You dismiss it thus?

ROCHESTER: Mere night imaginings – sheer fantasy! What did you see? What did you hear?

JANE: I heard footsteps – a laugh the closing of a door. I saw smoke – a light, a candle on the floor . . .

ROCHESTER: How still she is! So still and silent . . . so slight, so solitary, so calm . . .

JANE: [turning round] Sir — all’s well?

ROCHESTER: Just as I thought —
some servant carelessness!

The matter’s ended.

Now Jane – silence.

Not a word of this to anyone.

Go back to bed – I count on you!

JANE: Then, sir, goodnight!


[Stepping forward he grasps both her hands]

JANE: I thought you had dismissed me, sir!

ROCHESTER: For sure . . . and yet! –

You saved my life!

JANE: You owe me nothing . . .

ROCHESTER: To part without a word!

No Jane! Besides –

there’s more between us now.

JANE: I’m cold sir.

I think I hear the servants moving

ROCHESTER: Leave me then, –

[He releases her]

cherished preserver . . .

good night!

[She exits hurriedly. Rochester gazes after her, deep in thought.]

Now the shadows close about me, whispering “happiness – forbidden fruit”, scourging my

life with bitter memories, and clouding any

remnant of delight with guilt and loneliness,

remorse and shame.

A demon from the pit of hell itself in evil hour

has sought me out.

Fate has brought me home,

has put me to the test again,

confronting me with that

which might have been.

There! At my feet – hell’s gate! Above – the unattainable,

one last glimpse of youth –

of long-forgotten trust,

sweetness – innocence.

But no – that choice, if choice it be

has come too late.

I know my fate is set,

I know my fate

is etched inexorable

across the sky.

And long ago was spun the sable thread

that wove my destiny.

ACT 1 Scene 3

The lights go up gradually to reveal the gardens at

Thornfield with the house in the background.

It is a fine summer evening. Jane enters from the house.

As Jane sings her soliloquy, Rochester enters unnoticed.

JANE: This is the sweetest hour.

The sun going down in simple state,

sheds golden blessings on mankind,

extending high and soft and wide

the radiant heavens over.

Day lingers in the Western sky,

waiting upon night’s harbinger,

the eastern star lingers,

as I do; who, loth to leave this hallowed place,

must say “goodbye”

to love and happiness.

ROCHESTER: Listen! The nightingale –

his song entreats you to remain.

Why will you leave me, Jane?

JANE: Because you ordered it!

ROCHESTER: Then stay! . . .

JANE: You know that that’s impossible.

How cruel of you to taunt me so!

My heart’s not made of stone!

I grieve to leave this place;

to leave what I have grown to love.

For here my hopes

have not been trampled on,

but, treated as an equal face to face,

I’ve found that which I truly reverence,

communion with a vigorous, expanded mind.

And were I gifted by the Gods

with beauty, title, wealth and state,

I’d make this parting full as hard for you –

as now it is for me.

ROCHESTER: Janet!

JANE:  No! – Let me speak!

To stay and to be nothing to you,

how could I bear it?

ROCHESTER: Why should you go, Janet?

JANE: To stay and see you married –

my heart would break.

ROCHESTER: Are you so blind, my dear?

JANE: These games you play

are life and death to me.

ROCHESTER: Are you so blind, my dear?

JANE: For good or ill this passion,

masters me –

ROCHESTER: Your will alone . . .

shall be your destiny.

JANE: It is . . . as if, transcendent . . .

ROCHESTER: as if transcendent . . .

JANE: Spirit to spirit . . .

ROCHESTER: Spirit to spirit . . .

JANE: Soul to soul . . .

ROCHESTER: Soul to soul . . .

JANE: Woman to man . . .

ROCHESTER: Woman to man . . .

JANE: For all eternity . . .

ROCHESTER: For all eternity . . .

[Together] We stand

in quiet humility before God’s throne –

equal, as now we be.

[They clasp hands, and are about to embrace.]

JANE: Think on your bride –

you are not free.

ROCHESTER: What is that to me?

My bride is here!
Jane: O Rochester, my love!

Rochester: Dearest! [They embrace]

Jane: My love . . . lay your head upon my breast.
Listen —
my heart will tell you all I’d say.
Trembling, my lips touch yours —
my fingers wonderingly trace
the dark, stern contours of your face:
yearning, longing,
ever satisfied.
Is this a waking dream?
Can this be true,
this moment unforgettable?

Rochester: Dearest . . . lay your head upon my breast

Jane: I lay my head upon your breast
Rochester: Listen —
my heart will tell you all I’d say.

Jane: Your heart will tell me all you’d say.
Rochester: Trembling, my lips touch yours —
Jane: Trembling, my lips touch yours —
Rochester: My fingers wonderingly trace —
Jane: My fingers wonderingly trace —
Rochester: the soft, sweet contours of your face
Jane: the dark, stern contours of your face

[together] Yearning, longing,
ever satisfied.
Is this a waking dream?
Can this be true,
this moment unforgettable?

They kiss, tenderly but passionately.
And so, at last, our shadows touch.
You hold me fast, so tenderly.
To be alive, today, is wonderful,
yearning, longing,
never satisfied.
Is this a waking dream?
Can this be true,
this moment unforgettable?

[They exit hand in hand into the house as the stage darkens]

ACT 2 Scene 1

Thornfield Village Church some weeks later. The wedding of Jane and Rochester is about to take place. Adèle, Rochester’s ward, the retainers from Thornfield, the clergy, Briggs and Mason are seated awaiting the entry of the couple. John opens the door to admit Jane and Rochester who enter arm in arm.

Rev’d Wood [reading from the prayer book]
“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy Matrimony which is an honourable estate . . .”

[Briggs, rising from his seat advances towards the altar]
Briggs: The marriage cannot go on!
I declare the existence of an impediment!

Rochester: Proceed!

Wood: I may not, sir until this obstacle has been explained away.

Briggs: Impossible!
Wood: I speak advisedly.

Rochester: And who are you?
Briggs: My name is Briggs, solicitor.
Rochester: And you would thrust a wife on me?
Briggs: My duty’s to uphold the law.
Rochester: This congregation shall be the best judge of that!

Mrs Fairfax/Leah:
The master’s angry!
Wood: Let him have his say!

Mrs Fairfax/Leah:
Something’s amiss ...
Verger: Quiet weddings!

Wood: [to Briggs] Speak, Sir!

Jane/Mrs Fairfax/Clerk
Something’s amiss . . .

Briggs: This copy of his marriage lines affirms that fifteen years ago Edward Fairfax Rochester of Thornfield Hall, was wed to Bertha Antoinetta Mason, a Creole — a marriage duly solemnized in Spanish Town, Jamaica.

Mrs Fairfax/Leah/John/Verger:
Bertha Antoinetta Mason, a Creole —
In Spanish Town Jamaica.
BRIGGS [handing the paper to Wood]
The document is dated, sealed and signed.

2 ROCHester: That she yet lives: can you prove that?
BRIGGS: She was alive three months ago, I have a witness to the fact!

ROCHester: Produce him, then! [Briggs signals to Mason to come forward. He rises from his seat and advances up the aisle. His arm is bandaged.]

ROCHester: Mason! You!
MASON: The very same; still bearing the scars of your wife's, my sister's, viciousness.

JANE: The stranger at the party... the unexpected visitor. Savaged and bleeding in that attic room.
WOOD: Mr Rochester – what have you to say?
ROCHester: As God's my judge, she's innocent. Miss Eyre knew nought of this!
BRIGGS: 'Tis true, she's clear of blame.
MASON: I have discharged the task her uncle laid upon me.
BRIGGS: The law's the law... It was her uncle's dying wish.

MRS FAIRFAX/LEAH/JOHN/CLERK/VERGER: Bigamy!
WOOD: This is an outrage Sir! It ill becomes you to set aside God's law, in His house too!
ROCHester: An ugly word. Fate has outmanoeuvred me.
MASON: I've kept my word, I've rescued her.
BRIGGS: The law's the law... It was her uncle's dying wish.
MRS FAIRFAX/LEAH/JOHN: Bigamy!
JOHN: A bad business, a bad business...
LEAH: He never should have led her on –

ROCHESTER: My love, forgive; I never meant to wound you so.

MRS FAIRFAX/LEAH/JOHN/CLERK/VERGER: Bigamy!
ROCHESTER: Jane, Come away with me – trust me... Give me a sign.
MRS FAIRFAX/LEAH/JOHN/CLERK/VERGER: Bigamy!
WOOd: This is an outrage Sir! It ill becomes you to set aside God's law, in His house too!
MRS FAIRFAX/LEAH/JOHN: Bigamy!
JOHN: A bad business, a bad business...
LEAH: He never should have led her on –

MRS FAIRFAX: I knew no good would come of this!

[altogether, excepting Jane and Rochester]
MRS FAIRFAX: I knew no good would come of this
CLERK: It's nothing short of sacrilege! LEAH: He never should have led her on.
VERGER: In God's house too!
JOHN: A bad business
WOOD: This is an outrage, Sir!
MASON: I've kept my word – I've rescued her.
BRIGGS: The law's the law. It was her uncle's dying wish.

ROCHester: Fate has out-manoeuvred me.
JANE: [to Rochester, but unnoticed by him] Dear master, God keep you. I shall not cease to love; but you'll forget.
[She kisses Adèle and releases her tenderly. Unobserved by anybody she steals quietly out of the church. The wedding party and clergy gather into a single group united in hostility to Rochester. He, ignoring their voices, looks distractedly around for Jane during the ensuing hubbub.]

ALL TOGETHER [variously, except Rochester]

Bigma!

[The wedding party breaks — confusion. Rochester is left alone. He at last realizes she has gone. He calls out in despair]

ROCHESTER: Jane! … Jane! … Jane!

ACT 2 Scene 2

The parlour of the Rivers’ cottage about a year later. Centre stage — table and chair; a window to the rear. It is evening, and prayers are in progress. Moonlight filters into the room. The Rivers family — which now includes Jane — are seated round the table with ST JOHN at the head. He is reading from the family Bible. Hannah stands respectfully near the door.

ST JOHNS: [reading aloud]

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will Give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

JANE: This is the fate foretold for me if I resist his will.

ST JOHN: Let us pray.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Lord. Amen.


ST JOHN: Good night, Hannah.

HANNAH: Good night, Mr. St John.

DIANA: Good night.

HANNAH: Good night, Miss Diana

MARY: Good night.

HANNAH: Good night, Miss Mary

JANE: Good night

HANNAH: Good night, Miss Jane

ST JOHN/DIANA/MARY/JANE: [altogether]

Good night

[Diana bobs a curtsey to each member of the family in turn, and retires.]

ST JOHN: Jane, can you spare me a moment?

JANE: Cousin?

ST JOHN: I go to India for His sake.

JANE: God will protect you for you undertake His work.

ST JOHN: You will concede it is a noble cause?

JANE: I do, but it will be hard for us to part, dear friend.

ST JOHN: That we should part: pray, do not think of it.

You’re family now, and have means of your own.

JANE: Yes, Thanks to my uncle. But when shall we see you again? India is so far away.

ST JOHN: I think it strange that all around me do not burn to join in this same enterprise.

JANE: All men have not your powers. The feeble — march together with the strong! Why that’s impossible!

ST JOHN: The feeble?

I do not think of them, I think only of those who’re worthy of the Cause.

JANE: And they are few.

ST JOHN: Yes, they are few indeed, but Jane, when they’re discovered, then our duty’s plain — to stir them up! To speak Heaven’s message in their ears

JANE: Will not the Spirit first make clear the call, move their own hearts to speak?

ST JOHN: Well, then, Jane — what does your heart say?

JANE: My heart is dumb, St John. . . it cannot speak.

ST JOHN: [rising to his feet]

Then I must speak for it. Come to India with me.
Come as my help-mate.
Come as my fellow labourer.
Come as my wife!

JANE: What, marry you?
No Sir!
We do not love.

ST JOHN: You’re framed for labour,
not for love.

JANE: No, St John – it cannot be!

ST JOHN: You shall be mine as He ordains,
JANE: I am not fit . . .

ST JOHN: It must be so!
JANE: St John! enough! What can I say?

ST JOHN: I want an answer, Jane!
JANE: What can I say? What can I do?
Dear God – I must have time to think.
To India, with him!
And as his wife! It is not possible.

ST JOHN: How can she hesitate?
Lord send her strength that she decide aright.

JANE: I know he does not love me as a husband should.
ST JOHN: She must . . . she will . . . agree!

JANE: It seems I have a woman’s heart, alas!

ACT 2 Scene 3
Thornfield, late afternoon a few days later. The house stands in the background a gaunt, fire-blackened ruin. The gardens, now overgrown and neglected, are fringed by fields and woodland. As the curtain rises Rochester enters: blind, with a crippled left hand, carrying a stick and leaning on John, his manservant’s arm.

ROCHESTER: Leave me, John –
I wish to be alone today.

[John settles him on the bench under the tree and wraps him in a cloak.]

ROCHESTER: This is the place . . .
[he rises unsteadily to his feet gazing fixedly in the direction of the house]
Thornfield ablaze –
she stood upon the battlements.
“Bertha! wait!” I cried . . .
But it was useless.
Before I reached her she had sprung howling to her death.
Her end was terrible:
A soul in torment! At peace, at last.
And Thornfield, her prison and mine is no more.

[He sinks back onto the bench]
Jane, where are you now?
I miss you so.
Long months have passed and still no news.
Am I forgotten then?
It’s better thus:
there’s nothing here for you
but memories, disappointed hopes,
the ashes of a great and wondrous happiness.

[Emotionally exhausted, he leans forward, head in hand. Jane enters silently. He is temporarily masked from her sight by a fallen tree. As she moves across the stage she notices the figure of Rochester huddled on the bench.]

JANE: They said I’d find him here –
can it be my own dear master?
So changed . . . and yet,
my Edward still.
Edward . . .
ROCHESTER: That voice... Who is it? – Speak!

JANE: [placing her hand in his]
One who used to call you master, sir

ROCHESTER: What madness, seizes me!
Who are you? – If only I could see!

JANE: Trust your heart, sir...

ROCHESTER: It can’t be true – and yet... these are her very fingers!

JANE: Well, sir!

ROCHESTER: [rising to his feet]
Jane Eyre!

JANE: Jane Eyre, as ever was!

ROCHESTER: Janet, in truth – restored to life again!

JANE: You called me: I’ve come home.

ROCHESTER: My truant love,
Where have you been?

JANE: I was well cared for, sir
good people took me in.
I found fortune, friends and family.

ROCHESTER: [turns away]
And happiness?

JANE: All my happiness is here, with you

ROCHESTER: Too late, too late;
it is too late for that.
Look at me – useless, a cripple, old and blind.

JANE: Dear friend,
these wounds
are cruel indeed,
and for those wounds
I honour you.

ROCHESTER: Honour: respect: that’s not enough!
I need more, much more, than that.
How could I tolerate your presence here,
knowing, as I do,
that friendship’s
all that you can offer me,
and all that I dare offer you?

JANE: Proud, so proud, my dear...

ROCHESTER: Jane, don’t torture me!

JANE: You torture yourself, sir.

ROCHESTER: I seek a wife, Jane!

JANE: Choose, then...

ROCHESTER: Choose... whom?

JANE: Choose her who loves you best.

ROCHESTER: My choice —
would fall on her that I love best

JANE: Well, sir? Well sir...!

ROCHESTER: My choice would fall on you!

JANE: Edward!

ROCHESTER: Janet, will you marry me?

JANE: You know I will.

ROCHESTER: But, can you bear with my infirmities?

JANE: What are they beside our love?

ROCHESTER: You’d shoulder such a burden?

JANE: Happily.

ROCHESTER: Janet!

JANE: Edward!

ROCHESTER: Janet, will you marry me?

JANE: She’s dear to both of us,
we’ll call her ours
and bring her home.

ROCHESTER: To rest my head upon your quickening breast
is all my joy.

JANE: To put my arms around the one I love —
what burden’s that?

ROCHESTER: To hold your beating heart so close to mine —
what sweet delight!
Love tempered in the fire
her power none can break:
Our souls are joined as one
till life shall end.

Together It is as if, transcendent,
spirit to spirit, soul to soul;
Woman to man, man to woman,
for all eternity,
we stand in quiet humility
before God’s throne,
equal as now we be.

[Arm in arm they exit slowly through the gardens towards
the house, their figures silhouetted against the setting
sun as the lights fade and the curtain falls]
JANE EYRE biographies


The cast

APRIL FREDRICK has performed widely as a soloist in recital and oratorio venues in the UK, including St. John's Smith Square, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Bridgewater Hall, Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall and the Holywell Music Room in Oxford. Her work spans period music to devised and site-specific performances.

Her two discs on the SOMM label, Barber Knoxville: Summer of 1915 and Copland 8 Songs of Emily Dickinson with Orchestra of the Swan, and Earth's Call, John Ireland songs with pianist Mark Bebbington, have both been received with critical acclaim.

Recent performances include Mahler Symphony 4 with the Warsaw Philharmonic, Mahler Symphony 2 with the Wrexham Symphony Orchestra at Bridgewater Hall, Dobrinka Tabakova's Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music and the world premiere of Kristina Arakelyan's Sonnet 114 with the Orchestra of the Swan, the world premiere of Philip Sawyers' Songs of Loss and Regret with the English String Orchestra, Vivaldi Gloria and Bach Cantata 51 with Dei Gratia and the Midlands Festival Choir, Strauss' Vier Letzte Lieder with the Blackburn Symphony Orchestra, Vier Letzte Lieder and Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony with Marcus Farnsworth and the Nottingham Harmonic Society, and the world premiere of Laurence Osborn's Micrographia with the Riot Ensemble.

April studied at Northwestern College in Minnesota, USA and the Royal Academy of Music, London, where she gained an MMus in Vocal Performance and a PhD on the late songs of Ivor Gurney. She now studies with Jacqueline Straubinger-Bremar.

DAVID STOUT has rapidly established himself as one of the UK's most versatile baritones. His repertoire ranges widely, encompassing early music with period instruments, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Britten, the bel canto repertoire and contemporary and twentieth-century works. He has earned a formidable reputation for his stage charisma, refined acting and presence on stage.

Recent highlights include a critically acclaimed Posa in Don Carlo (Grange Park Opera); the title roles of Le nozze di Figaro and Figaro Gets A Divorce (Welsh National Opera); Count Douglas in Mascagni's Guglielmo Ratcliff (Wexford Festival); the title role of Le nozze di Figaro and Fritz Kothner in Die Meistersinger (both English National Opera); Sandoval in Le Duc d'Albe, Paolo in Simon Boccanegra and the title role of Falstaff (all with Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé); an acclaimed Sancho Pança in Don Quichotte (Grange Park Opera); Oromazes in Rameau's Zaïs with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; and Aeneas in Purcell's Dido and Aeneas with the English Concert at the Bristol Old Vic.

Upcoming work includes Philip Sawyers’ Songs of Loss and Regret with the English String Orchestra at St. John's Smith Square, Rossini's Petit Messe Solennelle with the Nottingham Harmonic Society, Barber Knoxville: Summer of 1915 with the Cheltenham Symphony Orchestra, Vivaldi Gloria and Bach Cantata 51 with Dei Gratia and the Midlands Festival Choir, Strauss' Vier Letzte Lieder with the Blackburn Symphony Orchestra, Vier Letzte Lieder and Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony with Marcus Farnsworth and the Nottingham Harmonic Society, and the world premiere of Laurence Osborn's Micrographia with the Riot Ensemble.
One of the most versatile tenors of his generation, MARK MILHOFER is as much at home in the music of Rossini as in the repertoire of Monteverdi, Mozart, Strauss or Benjamin Britten. He has built a strong reputation as a masterful interpreter of even the most demanding musical genres. Forthcoming highlights this year include Nicea in Amor vien dal destino by Steffani at the Staatsoper Berlin (cond. Jacobs), Lysander in A Midsummer Night’s Dream in Valencia, the title role in Le Comte Ory in concert in London and the title role in Acteon by Charpentier at the Beaune International Baroque Festival. Last season was as busy as ever with successful performances of Schneewitchen by Heinz Holliger in Basel, various roles in Luigi Rossi’s Orpheus at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse for the Royal Opera House, Purcell’s The Fairy Queen in Stuttgart (directed by Calixto Bieito), Thespis/Mercure in Rameau’s Platée for Opera Stuttgart, The Madwoman in Britten’s Curlew River for the Presteigne and the Sagra Musicale Umbra Festivals, The Conte d’Almaviva in Il Barbiere di Siviglia for Nationale Reisopera in the Netherlands (available on CD here), role debuts as Nadir in Bizet’s Les Pêcheurs de Perles for the Daegu Opera Festival in South Korea, Le Comte de Rosillon in Lehar’s Die Lustige Witwe for Opera Graz and a return to La Cenerentola in Bern.

Mark Milhofer was a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford before going on to study at the Guildhall School of Music in London. He made his operatic debut as the Madwoman in Britten’s Curlew River, recorded for CD by Koch. Subsequently invited by the As.Li.Co. Opera Studio in Milan to study in Italy, he worked with Renata Scotto and Leyler Gencer, singing the title role in Pergolesi’s newly-discovered La Morte di S. Giuseppe. He went on to sing the role of Fenton in Verdi’s Falstaff in several major theatres and made his debut for the Teatro Regio in Parma as Ramiro in Rossini’s La Cenerentola, conducted by Alberto Zedda and directed by Pier Luigi Pizzi, launching his international career.

Engagements in the 2016-17 season include Donner in Das Rheingold (with Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé); Marcello in La Bohème (Scottish Opera); Gratiano in André Tchaikowsky’s The Merchant of Venice (Welsh National Opera); The Dream of Gerontius with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra; and Aeneas in Dido and Aeneas in Lausanne with The English Concert.

Highlights on the concert platform include Verdi’s Requiem with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall; Handel’s Messiah and Brahms’ Requiem with the Hallé; and Bach’s St. John Passion with Polyphony at St. John’s Smith Square, and with the Aurora Orchestra at King’s Place, London.

Baritone GWION THOMAS was born near Swansea and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He is a busy opera and concert soloist. Highlights include Figaro in The Barber of Seville for WNO, Godwin in Sally Beamish’s Monster for Scottish Opera, many roles with Kent Opera, including title role in Monteverdi’s Orfeo and the protagonist in the premiere of Judith Weir’s first opera A Night at the Chinese Opera. Many roles with Music Theatre Wales include Mr. Punch in Birtwistle’s Punch and Judy, Blazes in Maxwell Davies’s The Lighthouse, and, most recently, Dad in Turnage’s Greek and Huld in Glass’ The Trial.
Hailed by Gramophone as a “symphonic conductor of stature,” conductor, cellist, composer and author Kenneth Woods has worked with the National Symphony Orchestra (USA), Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and English Chamber Orchestra. He has also appeared on the stages of some of the world’s leading music festivals, including Aspen, Scotia and Lucerne. In 2013, he took up a new position as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra. In 2015 he became the second Artistic Director of the Colorado MahlerFest, the only American organization other than the New York Philharmonic to receive the Gold Medal of the International Gustav Mahler Society.

Woods was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra of the Swan in 2010 and during his tenure lifted that orchestra to a new level of international renown. With them, he recorded the first complete cycle of the symphonies of Hans Gál paired with those of Robert Schumann, among the most widely praised classical recording projects in recent years, highlighted in National Public Radio’s All Things Considered, Performance Today, BBC Radio 3, the Sunday New York Times, the Sunday Telegraph, Washington Post and was an Editor’s Choice in Gramophone. Among his other recordings are Schoenberg’s chamber ensemble versions of Das Lied von der Erde and Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (for Somm) by Gustav Mahler, which won the coveted IRR Outstanding rosette from International Record Review, and Spring Sounds, Spring Seas, a MusicWeb ‘Record of the Year’. His recordings with the English Symphony Orchestra and English String Orchestra include the Elgar Piano Quintet as orchestrated by Donald Fraser, and the complete piano concertos of Ernst Krenek, a Sunday Times “Best of 2016.”

A widely read writer and frequent broadcaster, Woods’ blog, A View from the Podium, is one of the 25 most popular classical blogs in the world. He has spoken on Mahler on NPR’s All Things Considered and BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme and is a frequent commentator on BBC Radio 3.

The English Symphony Orchestra is an ensemble which in recent years has become synonymous with artistic excellence, innovative and visionary programming, distinctive commissioning, ground-breaking recording, a welcoming and immersive concert experience, transformative youth programmes and service to the community. Since the appointment of Kenneth Woods as the orchestra’s new Artistic Director and Principal

Oratorio and concert work include Bach Passions and Carmina Burana, and the Schubert song-cycles. Future work includes a revival of The Trial with Scottish Opera and further work with Music Theatre Wales - a new opera by Guto Puw, in Welsh, YTwr. Gwion lives in Northamptonshire and is a visiting tutor in singing at Birmingham Conservatoire and at Rugby School.
Conductor in 2013, the orchestra has re-emerged as a major force in British musical life, presenting 2015 and 2016 Classical Music Magazine “Premieres of the Year,” and releasing a triumphant series of recordings including Donald Fraser’s orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet (Classic FM Disc of the Week) and the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek (Sunday Times Best of 2016). Highlights of recent seasons include triumphant debuts in LSO St. Luke’s, St John’s Smith Square and Elgar Concert Hall. In 2016-7, the orchestra will be appearing at The Bridgewater Hall, King’s Place and Cheltenham Town Hall.

Founded in 1978 by William Boughton, the ESO have a long and distinguished history of collaboration with legendary figures of British music making. Vernon “Tod” Handley became the orchestra’s second Principal Conductor in 2007, and led the orchestra until his death. Over the years, the ESO has worked extensively with Nigel Kennedy, Stephen Isserlis, Daniel Hope, Michael Tippett, Nicholas Maw and Yehudi Menuhin, who was appointed the ESO’s Principal Guest Conductor in 1991. British music has always been a central part of the orchestra’s mission. Appropriately for an orchestra based in Elgar’s home town, the ESO has made many acclaimed recordings of that composer’s music, and that of major 20th century British composers including Vaughan Williams, Britten, Butterworth and Bridge. John McCabe served as the orchestra’s Composer-in-Association from 2013 till his death in 2015. Following McCabe’s death in 2015, the ESO appointed Philip Sawyers as “John McCabe Composer-in-Association.”

In 2016-7, the ESO embarked on their most ambitious endeavour to date: The 21st C. Symphony Project, which was triumphantly launched with the premiere of Philip Sawyers’ Third Symphony in February 2017, and continues with the premiere of David Matthews’ Ninth in 2018.

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