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**FROM THE FIRST NIGHT
OF THE PROMS 1943**

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
SIR HENRY WOOD, Conductor

1	Announcer (Stuart Hibberd)	2:51		G.F.Handel (1685 - 1759)	
2	National Anthem	1:06	7	Love in her eyes sits playing From <i>Acis and Galatea</i> with Heddle Nash , Tenor	7:27
3	Paul Dukas (1865 - 1935)				
	The Sorcerer's Apprentice	11:43			
4	Announcer	0:18		Beethoven (1770 - 1827)	
				Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.67	
	Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 - 1921)		8	1st. mvt: Allegro con brio	6:40
	Piano Concerto No.2 in G minor, Op.22 with Moura Lympany , Piano				
			9	Lamar Stringfield (1897 - 1959)	
5	1st. mvt: Andante sostenuto	11:07		A Negro Parade	9:29
6	3rd. mvt: Presto	6:35			
			10	Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)	
				Theme & Variations from Suite No.3, Op.55	19:58

NB: There is a momentary loss
of pitch in track [5] at 1:43

Total duration 77:17

Live performance recorded off the air from the Royal Albert Hall, London 19th June 1943

Executive producer: Arthur Ridgewell Digital re-mastering: Laurence Nicholas

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From the first night of
THE PROMS 1943

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conducted by **SIR HENRY WOOD**

With **Moura Lympany** Piano
Heddle Nash Tenor



On Saturday, June 19th 1943, the fourth leader in that day's edition of *The Times* newspaper commenced:

'The Promenade Concerts, which begin their forty-ninth season under Sir Henry Wood tonight, are like no other event in the musical calendar. Not even the most casual among London's present floating population, putting his head into the Albert Hall at random for any programme between Monday and Saturday, could altogether miss their distinctive flavour. A common infectious enthusiasm creates a freemasonry among the audience which has a social as well as an artistic quality ... Yet so strong is tradition, so universal the spirit of music, so human the embodiment of both in the person of the conductor-in-chief, that the old magic works. All are caught up in a community of feeling which, by means of the new magic of wireless transmission, goes out to the ends of the earth.'

The medium of recording has enabled the 'old magic' of that First Night of the 1943 Proms to be shared by later generations of music-lovers, most of whom were not born when the event took place. In a very real sense, we can hear in this recording, and imagine in our mind's eye, the 74-year-old Sir Henry Wood entering – a few moments around 7pm that evening – the packed auditorium of the Royal Albert Hall in London to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra, led by Jean Pougnet, under the aegis of the British Broadcasting Corporation. He was greeted by a huge audience, for at full capacity the Hall could hold around 9,000 people, rising tier upon tier from the arena to the top gallery of the Hall, including 3,000 'Prommers'. The programme itself, following the National Anthem, adhered to a pattern which Sir Henry and the BBC had evolved during recent years – a pattern which was, as *The Times* later explained, 'a miscellaneous collection of inevitably popular works in the first half and a novelty with which to begin a short second half.'

Already, that first week of the 1943 wartime Proms promised much – on Tuesday June 22nd, a Grieg Centenary Concert, and two days later Ralph Vaughan Williams was to conduct the world première of his Fifth Symphony; on the following night, the Friday, Sir Henry conducted Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony in memory of the composer who had died less than three months before, and who had appeared as soloist in his own Second Piano Concerto at Wood's Jubilee concert in 1938 (for which programme Vaughan Williams had also composed his *Serenade to Music*).

No-one could have foreseen it, but 1943 was to be the last complete Proms season under Sir Henry's direction, even though he was obliged, through ill-health, to share the conducting with assistants, and to withdraw completely from other concerts. But by the time of his 75th birthday, in March

1944, he was well enough to celebrate the occasion in suitable style – in a concert with no less than four major London Orchestras (including the London Symphony, the London Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony) which combined to play in turn under Wood, Sir Adrian Boult and Basil Cameron, culminating in a specially-written *Fanfare for Sir Henry Wood* for four orchestras by William Walton, receiving its one and only performance. Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) attended the concert, as a result of the award by King George VI to Wood of the Companion of Honour. On June 10th 1944, Wood conducted at what was to be his final Proms First Night – but just the first half; ill-health was taking its toll, and he died after a short illness on August 19th 1944.

Of course, these events were still in the future at the time of the first night of the 1943 Season, which proved to be a brilliant affair, and although it would appear that not all of the items that were played and broadcast have survived, we can appreciate through this recording more than a glimpse, through sound alone, of the occasion (and, of course, the unique Proms 'community of feeling', as *The Times* said, which survives to this day) as well as the high standard of performance then consistently achieved by Wood in war-time Britain, aided by two outstandingly gifted British soloists – Moura Lipmany, piano, and Heddle Nash, tenor.

The complete programme was as follows. Arnold Bax: *London Pageant*; Paul Dukas: *L'Apprenti Sorcier*; Saint-Saëns: Piano Concerto No. 2; Handel: *Love in her eyes sits playing* (from *Acis and Galatea*); Beethoven: Symphony No. 5 – interval – Lamar Stringfield: *A Negro Parade* (first performance in Britain); Tchaikovsky: *Theme and Variations* from Suite No. 3. It was typical of Wood to draw this opening programme from composers of the main allied powers: the United Kingdom, France, the United States and Russia, and to include Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. When the First World War broke out, in August 1914, Wood was put under great pressure to remove all German music from his programmes, but he resisted; 'Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner' he was reported as saying at the beginning of World War II, 'are not responsible for Hitler.' And by mid-1943 – with El Alamein, Stalingrad and the Battle of Midway all proving victorious for the Allies – the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven had come to take on an extramusical meaning for those engaged in the struggle against Fascism.

Despite the survival of most of the broadcast of this concert, it has not proved possible to obtain a suitable copy of the opening item, Bax's *London Pageant*, so – after the announcement of the broadcast by BBC Announcer Stuart Hibberd and the arrival of leader Jean Pougnet and Sir Henry (during which we catch a fragment of someone speaking as if instructing the orchestra to stand) – we

have the National Anthem, followed by Dukas' *L'Apprenti Sorcier (The Sorcerer's Apprentice)*. By general consent, Wood's greatest abilities were centred upon his immense capacity for sustained hard work and his unbounded energy, allied to his conscientiousness. This last characteristic was most clearly seen in his assiduity in marking all orchestral parts, in virtually every work he conducted, personally (using his famous thick blue pencil). As a consequence, such matters as phrasing and bowing, as well as dynamics, were settled before the rehearsals began, thus saving valuable time, for at this period of the Proms seasons Wood was restricted to just three rehearsals a week, in which six full programmes (including soloists) had to be prepared. It was an extraordinary situation, but Wood appeared to thrive on it, and the results – as we can hear – are generally first-class: Dukas' piece has some notoriously tricky moments, but the wartime LPO cope admirably.

The 27-year-old British pianist Moura Lympany was the soloist in Saint-Saëns' Second Piano Concerto, but sadly the middle movement has not survived in a suitable condition; none the less, we may appreciate her brilliant playing in the first and third movements, and Wood's excellent accompaniment. In 1950, Moura Lympany went on to make a commercial recording of this Concerto for Decca, also with the LPO, under Jean Martinon. She was a firm favourite of Sir Henry's and of Proms audiences; a year later, at the opening concert of the 1944 proms, she was again the soloist with Wood in Grieg's Piano Concerto (also with the LPO).

Of all British tenors of his generation, Heddle Nash was not only the finest in his field but also the best-loved in public esteem; in the aria *Love in her eyes sits playing* from Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (in what appears to be Mozart's re-orchestration), Nash's matchless qualities are clear for all to hear – although some may query, as critics did at the time, Wood's *accelerandi* between the verses. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony ended the first half, but again we do not have the complete work, just the opening *Allegro con brio* movement. However one may regret the absence of the entire symphony, we can certainly hear, in Wood's powerfully thrusting approach, just how convincing a conductor he was in the core orchestral repertoire.

The 'novelty' in this programme was the UK première of a work by a little-known American composer, Lamar Stringfield, who was born near Raleigh, the capital of the South Atlantic state of North Carolina, in 1897. He was the son of a Baptist minister, and, after serving in the US Army in World War I, originally studied medicine before taking flute, conducting and composition at the New York Institute of Musical Art. Many of Stringfield's works have a south-eastern states element, exhibiting inspiration from the Blue Ridge and Appalachian highlands and the Piedmont plains, alongside indigenous Indian

and Negro elements. A *Negro Parade* was written in 1931, and was first performed by the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington (DC) in February 1935 under Hans Kindler (in 1932, Kindler had programmed Stringfield's orchestral suite *From the Southern Mountains*, Opus 32). The work is in one short movement, depicting, in its odd bar-rhythms a procession of Negroes at Potter's Field celebrating their emancipation. At the time of Wood's performance of *A Negro Parade*, Stringfield was music director of the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra, the first state-supported symphony orchestra in the USA.

The composer describes the background of *Negro Parade* as follows:-

"From the direction of Potter's Field (the colored section of the town) comes the sound of drums, growing louder and louder. People – negroes and white alike – turn their heads and listen to the approaching procession. Little negro boys and girls are seen gleefully running alongside the gaily dressed Bugle Corps of a Negro American Legion Post. Men and women in working clothes mingle in the spectacle, negroes dominating. It is their day. The strutting Drum and Bugle Corps passes in review, sounding a barbaric rhythm of proud hearts. The sound of drums grows fainter and subsides in waves to a perfect calm. The Negroes have had their right-of-way and now retrace their steps, singing a converted hymn. "let Jesus lead you, and the White Folk feed you", and whistling characteristic labor tunes. Back in Potter's Field racial difference is forgotten and the Negroes, stimulated by fresh memories of their parade, are again masters of their own feelings."

The 1943 First Night of the Proms ended with the *Theme and Variations* (the last movement) of Tchaikovsky's Third Orchestral Suite, Opus 55. At the time, and for many years, this was an extremely popular work in the main orchestral repertoire, but has disappeared almost completely from programmes in recent decades. Many have regretted this development, for the *Variations* by themselves constitute a brilliant work that more than deserves revival, and it receives a splendid performance by the LPO under Wood. The finale, in particular, is very excitingly played, and we may also judge the quality of Jean Pougnet's solos in the variation beginning around 8:40.

This surviving broadcast is a rare and valuable document of one of the greatest musicians England ever produced, a man who – as *The Times* obituary said of him – 'first made orchestral orchestral conducting a full-time occupation for a British-born musician, and by concentrating exclusively on that paved the way for others to distinguish themselves in it'.

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Sir Henry Wood

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