

SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER

OLIVER LEITH

**WRITTEN
IN
SWAMP
AND GOLD**

**PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
CONDUCTED BY NAOMI WOO**

SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER at 7.30PM

OLIVER LEITH

WRITTEN IN SWAMP AND GOLD

Naomi Woo – conductor

Philharmonia Orchestra

**with the ‘Forever Bells’ of the Royal Liverpool
Philharmonic & the Bells of All Saints Peckham**

“I love the orchestra so much. I think of it as luxury - a huge ornamental building. There is this very particular decadent sound, dozens of people playing a chord in unison. A little timpani hit, strings, winds in octaves. It is the sound I first associated with the orchestra and cannot shake - maybe the same sound as you.

Hard to describe - it is a visceral thing, like fireworks, guns, being happily sad, huffing something, saturated fat, slugs of strong booze.”

— Oliver Leith

With special thanks to Steinway & Sons and the
Vaughan Williams Foundation.

Pearly housatonic honey tragische cartoon

OLIVER LEITH (b. 1990)

**Pearly, goldy, woody, bloody, or Abundance
for orchestra**

2022

CHARLES IVES (1874–1954)

**'The Housatonic at Stockbridge' from
Three Places in New England**

1914

OLIVER LEITH (b. 1990)

Honey Siren

2019

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Symphony No. 4 in C minor, "Tragische", D 417

I. Adagio molto – Allegro vivace

1816

OLIVER LEITH (b. 1990)

Cartoon Sun

Bell cannon fantasy

Pin flare

Gold billow blow

2023

London Premiere

Visionary British composer Oliver Leith is the young master of boundary challenging, heart-in-the-mouth music that brings people together.

Just over a year ago Oliver Leith's work was introduced to audiences here as part of our 'Crisis' season by the acclaimed GBSR Duo (George Barton and Siwan Rhys). They presented *good day good day bad day bad day*, his piece for keyboards and percussion attendant to personal, mental and spiritual crisis; a musical notebook of surfacing obsessions and compulsions, and the rituals, superstitions and routines we play out to calm the mind.

Tonight's programme, specially imagined by Oliver for our COMMUNION season and for these concrete spaces, is titled *Written in Swamp and Gold*. It is the first programme dedicated to exploring his work for large orchestral forces. Leith's addictive sonic world is brought to life here by the Philharmonia Orchestra, led by conductor Naomi Woo, in communion with Charles Ives and Franz Schubert.

The evening opens with Leith's *Pearly, goldy, woody, bloody, or Abundance for orchestra*. Unashamedly exultant, exuberant, extravagant, the work gouges orchestral convention from the inside out, paying heed to decadent symphonic melodrama and teasing the cinema. *Pearly* graduates from "a sort of over-mannered and deflated party", to a "slurred, end of night, passing out". The orchestra's hazy high-end melodies carry over a running water fountain, fireworks and sporadic gunfire. The sound of the musician's instruments are augmented by periodic vocal utterances, mutterings as if overheard at a party. Oliver has said of it "I pictured an orchestra, wheeled out for a party, on a lawn, in front of the portico of a large house - playing this piece surrounded by burbling guests and fountains".

This brightness of scene is echoed in Charles Ives' 'The Housatonic at Stockbridge': a musical painting of the American dream at the turn of the 20th century, hailing from the composer's signature three piece suite *Three Places in England*. 'The Housatonic at Stockbridge' takes its inspiration from a stroll Ives took with his then-new wife Harmony in the summer of 1908 on a honeymoon hiking trip along the Massachusetts Housatonic River. Memories of "the distant singing

from the church” are mimicked by violas and an English horn; the rolling fog and swirling mist that “had not entirely left the river bed” is communicated by repeating rhythmic patterns played by the strings.

Leith’s *Honey Siren* similarly weaves together texture and melody until tightly bound together. The prolonged wails of warning sound after which the piece is named are created by continuous sliding up and down between the notes aka *glissandi*. Solid turning liquid, viscosity is everywhere, harmonies progress in thick, globular lines building in gummy and glutinous gradations; Leith’s golden sirens are more “smiling alarm” than danger signal.

The hypnotics of *Honey Siren* carries over to the first movement of Franz Schubert’s Symphony No. 4 in C minor, nicknamed “Tragic”, written by the composer at the tender age of 19. Sadly-sweet, yet economical and inventive, the “Adagio molto - Allegro vivace” oscillates broad and stately, gripping and nervy, high-energy and high-low.

The evening closes with the London premiere of Leith’s *Cartoon Sun* – commissioned and first performed by the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Thomas Adès at Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall. For Leith, bells contain the spectrum of human emotion – from joyful festive chimes to mournful funeral tolling.

At the heart of *Cartoon Sun* is instinctive glee; bright cascades of pealing bells encapsulate the beauty and extremity of the star that keeps our planet warm, musically conveying a “golden thickness or heaviness” or “a swarm of bees, not wasps, more haze in the air”. Brass and strings intertwine and interplay, sometimes unexpectedly rupture, and the interrelation of the sun and bells is revealed – tied together in brightness, intensity and transcendence; a giant heartbeat, huge, almost heart-stopping.

Big and bright as the sun, winking.

Oliver Leith (b.1990) studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama from 2009–2015, returning to his alma mater as Doctoral Composer-in-Residence at the Royal Opera House from 2019–22. Leith’s work has been performed at UK music venues including the Royal Festival Hall, the Barbican Centre, Wigmore Hall, Kings Place and Snape Maltings; as well as abroad at venues such as CNSDMP and Maison du Canada, Paris, FR; The Mexican Embassy, Tokyo, JP; and Liszt Academy, Budapest, HU. Leith is in demand not only from traditional music venues but also for cross disciplinary and site specific projects, such as his visual art collaborations exhibited at The Museum of Western Australia. In 2022 Leith’s debut opera (a co-production between the Royal Opera House and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama) “Last Days”, premiered at the Linbury Theatre. Featuring a libretto by Matt Copson, the production received positive critical acclaim, and was granted 4 star reviews in The Guardian and The Financial Times. International ensembles that have commissioned work from and performed pieces by Leith include Apartment House, BBC Symphony Orchestra,, EXAUDI, 12 Ensemble, GBSR Duo, The Hermes Experiment, Plus Minus, Festival Aix-en-Provence, the London Symphony Orchestra, Tanglewood Music Festival, Heidelberg festival, Homo Novus/Valmiera theatre, Explore Ensemble, An Assembly, and Philharmonia Orchestra. In 2020 UK experimental music label Another Timbre issued the recording of Leith’s “good day good day bad day bad day”, performed by GBSR Duo; the album was chosen by The Guardian as a pick of the week, and as a highlight of 2020 by BBC Radio 3’s New Music Show. Additional recordings include “Medusa” (Accidental Records: 2020), and “Balloon” (SN Variations: 2020). Leith’s contributions to the albums of others include 12 Ensemble’s “Death and the Maiden” (2020); The Hermes Experiment’s HERE WE ARE” (2020); Sean Shibe’s “Lost and Found” (2022); and The Ruisi Quartet’s “Big House” (2023). Leith’s work has been broadcasted on BBC Radio 3 and NTS Radio. Leith received a Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize in 2014, a British Composer Award in 2016, and an Ivors Composer Award in 2020. He was the beneficiary of PRS’s Open Fund for Music Creators for “good day good day bad day bad day”, and PRS’s The Composers’ Fund.

Charles Ives (1874–1854) was an American actuary, businessman and modern composer; and among the earliest American composers to achieve global recognition. Largely ignored during his early career with many of his works remaining unperformed for years, the quality of Ives' music was publicly recognised in his later life – largely due to the efforts of contemporaries such as Lou Harrison (1917–2003) and Henry Cowell (1897–1965). Coming to be regarded as an “American original”, Ives was one of the first composers to engage in a systematic program of experimental music, merging technique such as polytonality, polyrhythm, tone clusters, aleatory elements that leave portions of the composition are left to chance/the determination of its performers, and quarter tones. Foreshadowing many musical innovations latterly widely adopted, he is regarded as the leading American composer of art music of the 20th century. Ives often crafted tonal imagery drawing upon hymn tunes and traditional songs, alongside the incorporation of melodies of the town band at holiday parades, patriotic songs, parlour ballads, the fiddlers of Saturday night dances, and the melodies of Stephen Foster.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) was an Austrian composer of the late Classical and early Romantic eras who left behind a vast body of work despite his short life – including over 600 secular vocal works; a large body of piano and chamber music; operas; sacred and incidental music; and seven complete symphonies. Schubert became a household name following his admittance to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, aka the Wiener Musikverein) in 1821. Schubert's major works include the *Trout* Quintet (1819) the “Great” Symphony No. 9 in C major (1824–26); the String Quartet No. 14 Death and the Maiden (1824); and the song cycle *Winterreise* (1827). Passing away at the premature age of 31, Schubert's music was little appreciated whilst he was alive; Schubert gave a concert of his works – to great critical acclaim – only once throughout his career, in march 1828. Following Schubert's death interest in his work greatly increased, with pieces championed by various renowned 19th century composers such as Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Johannes Brahms. Schubert is contemporarily deemed one of the greatest composers in the history of Western classical music, with his work widely performed and continuously admired today.

Naomi Woo is a Canadian conductor, pianist, and musicologist. She held the position of Conducting Scholar for the Cambridge University Orchestra in 2017-2018; and has also conducted ensembles including the Clare College Music Society, the Berkeley College Orchestra, and the Yale Symphony Orchestra. She has been an invited conductor for the Cambridge Brahms Festival and the Cambridge Female Composers Festival. Especially interested in contemporary music, Naomi was invited to conduct the Cambridge New Music Ensemble at Stapleford Granary as part of the Living Notes series. In March 2018, she conducted the UK Premiere of Kaija Saariaho's *Lumière et Pesanteur* with the Cambridge University Sinfonia; and she has commissioned and conducted the world premiere of orchestral works by Emily Cooley, Stephen Feigenbaum, and Ellis Ludwig-Leone. Woo was one of only 12 conductors accepted onto a training course at the National Opera Studio, hosted by the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Royal Opera House. Outside of conducting, she has an active career as a pianist, spanning opera coaching, collaborative piano, and solo performance. She recently performed *Carnival of the Animals* alongside Tom Poster (October 2017) with the Cambridge University Orchestra, and has also performed concerts with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Yale Symphony Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Northwest (Seattle). Her performance of Prokofiev's *First Piano Sonata* at Carnegie Hall in 2011 was praised as an "elegant performance" in the *New York Times*. She has collaboratively created musical performance work with Catherine Kontz and Sasha Amaya and Sophie Seita; and participated in artistic residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada and Nida Arts Colony in Lithuania. With Sasha Amaya, she runs *tick tock*, a performance company dedicated to sonic and choreographic performance. Naomi holds degrees in mathematics and philosophy from Yale College, in piano performance from the Yale School of Music and Université de Montréal, and is completing a PhD in musicology at Cambridge University.

The **Philharmonia Orchestra (est. 1945)** has been resident of the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall (London, UK) since 1995. Led by Santtu-Matias Rouvali – known for his irrepressible energy and expressive, balletic style –the Finnish conductor (appointed

September 2021) is the sixth person to hold the title of Principal Conductor. Comprising 80 outstanding musicians from 16 countries, the orchestra has toured across Europe, Asia and America throughout its history. The Orchestra has residencies at venues and festivals across England, each embracing a Learning & Engagement programme that empowers people to engage with, and participate in, orchestral music. The Philharmonia's Emerging Artists Programme aims to increase diversity within the classical music industry, and develop the next generation of instrumentalists, composers and conductors. The Philharmonia is the go-to orchestra for many film and video game composers in the UK and Hollywood, and its music-making has been experienced by millions of cinema-goers and gamers. It has recorded around 150 soundtracks, with film credits stretching back to 1947. The Orchestra releases live recordings with Signum Records. The Philharmonia has over 1m listeners each month on Spotify, and a vibrant YouTube channel with over 126,000 subscribers. The channel features free performances; instrument guides; interviews with artists; and in-depth documentaries. The Philharmonia is Classic FM's Orchestra on Tour and broadcasts extensively on BBC Radio 3. In the last 10 years the Philharmonia has built upon its 76-year recording legacy by pioneering work with digital technology. The Orchestra's installations and VR experiences have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to the symphony orchestra. The Philharmonia has won four Royal Philharmonic Society awards for its digital projects and audience engagement work. The Philharmonia is a registered charity, proud to be supported by Arts Council England, many generous individuals, corporate supporters and Trusts and Foundations.

The '**Forever Bells**' project was launched by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in 2016. The largest collection of church bells (14) of any UK orchestra, the Forever Bells were made in the Royal Eijsbouts Bell Foundry in Holland, and feature the Liver Birds and Liverpool's official flower, Sea Holly, in bronze relief. Through the project, the Philharmonic continues and brings the longstanding tradition of bell ringing to new generations, enabling the performance of works in which the use of real bells was previously impossible. In 2019, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic became the first orchestra in the UK to perform Berlioz's famous *Symphonie Fantastique* with the correct low

bells, as originally specified by the composer. Hiring the bells to other UK orchestras has become an additional feature of the project. During the 125th BBC Proms, the project enabled the first performance for 100 years using eight Church bells in Debussy's *Sunken Cathedral*, lent to and played by the BBC Concert Orchestra.

All Saints, Peckham is a diverse church community, located on Blenheim Grove, in view of Peckham Rye Station. Holding three weekly services across Tuesdays and Sundays, the church has a robust calendar of activities throughout the week, including community meals with the charities Foodcycle and Migrateful; a Youth Outreach Programme; a community garden, Women's Breakfast mornings, and 5-a-side football. At the heart of the church's ethos is the promotion of racial diversity and belonging, championed via a subgroup of the PCC dedicated to listening, discussion and reflection, to address racism at both personal and institutional levels.

Pearly, goldy, woody, bloody, or Abundance (2022).
Commissioned by the London Contemporary Music Festival.

Honey Siren (2019). Commissioned by 12 Ensemble.

Cartoon Sun (2023). Commissioned by Hallé Concerts Society to be conducted by Thomas Adès in his first year as Artist in Residence with the Orchestra.

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Bold Tendencies is a not-for-profit arts organisation established in the rooftop spaces of Peckham's Multi-Storey Car Park in 2007. It has transformed a disused building in the heart of South London into an iconic, much-loved place of culture and assembly with spectacular views out over the city and pioneering architecture project Frank's Cafe. Supporting a new generation of creative voices alongside acclaimed international artists, it delivers an ambitious annual programme of experimental Visual Arts, Creative Learning and Live Events open to the public, offering access, participation and enjoyment of the arts for everyone.

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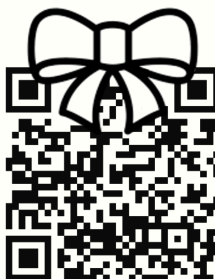
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