



Conductor: Geoff Bushell

Leader: Kate Bailey

Honorary President: Lord Vaizey of Didcot

Concert **21** – Sunday 11 October 2026

PROGRAMME

Alfvén	Swedish Rhapsody no 1 "Midsummer Vigil"
Dukas	Polyeucte Overture
Elgar	Symphony no 1



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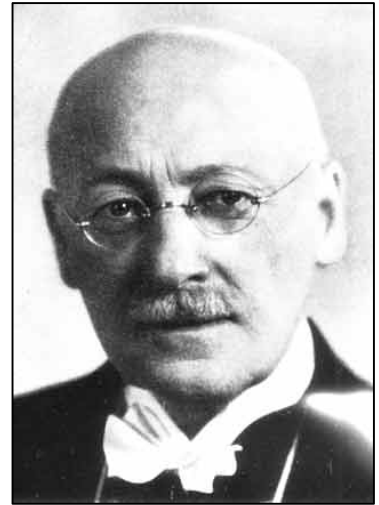


PROGRAMME

Swedish Rhapsody no 1, op 19

Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960)

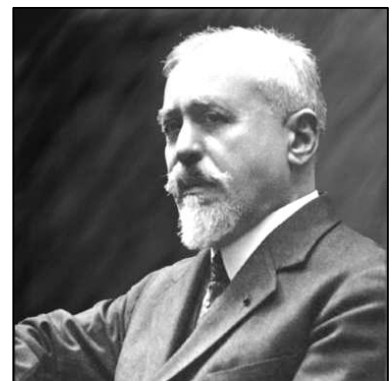
Light is very important to Swedish people. In winter there can be two hours or less of sunshine, so the return of the sun in spring is a subject of great celebration. The summer brings almost perpetual light, seemingly endless sunsets, which have inspired a number of composers to capture in song. Though Alfvén is regarded in his home country as Sweden's foremost Romantic composer, he is almost completely unknown outside Sweden. Alfvén started life as a violinist, and became director of music at Uppsala University. He also led the men's choir Orphei Drängar. He wrote three Swedish Rhapsodies, five symphonies, innumerable choral songs and many songs and short instrumental pieces. As well as composing, he was a celebrated artist, but in 1892 decided to abandon painting in favour of composition. Alfvén drew much of his inspiration from the archipelago of 20,000 islands outside Stockholm. He used to spend weeks on end composing at one particular island. The *Swedish Rhapsody no 1*, subtitled *Midsommarvaka (Midsummer Vigil)* was written in 1903 and its catchy tune has helped it to become internationally known. After quieter episodes featuring cor anglais and horn solos, there is a vivid depiction of sunrise. Soon after this, folk songs are evident and the work scampers headlong to a rousing conclusion.



Polyeucte Overture

Paul Dukas (1865-1935)

Paul Abraham Dukas was a French composer, critic, scholar and teacher. A studious man of retiring personality, he was intensely self-critical and abandoned and destroyed many of his compositions. His best-known work is the orchestral piece *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the fame of which has largely eclipsed that of his other surviving works, due to its usage in the 1940 Disney film *Fantasia*. Classical music scholar, author, and reviewer Hector Bellman writes: "*This is the earliest surviving orchestral work by Paul Dukas. The twenty-five-year old composer was inspired by one of the tragedies of Pierre Corneille that deals with the story of Polyeucte, a third-century Roman who was a martyr to the campaign of persecution of Christians. Dukas' piece is a fifteen-minute overture to the play. Its perfection belies the youth of the composer. Following the Wagnerian model, the work is really a symphonic poem which tells the story while following the formal scheme of a classical overture. It opens with a slow and spacious introduction based on the main theme, where the orchestra creates an atmosphere between Tannhäuser and Tristan. A second, more*



agitated section, presents the second theme. The struggle ceases and a threatening calm is followed by a certain melancholy. Gradually, the intensity increases. The main themes are combined and a climax is reached just before the reprise of the agitated section. When it subsides, a new majestic section, presents a Wagnerian transfiguration of the first theme."

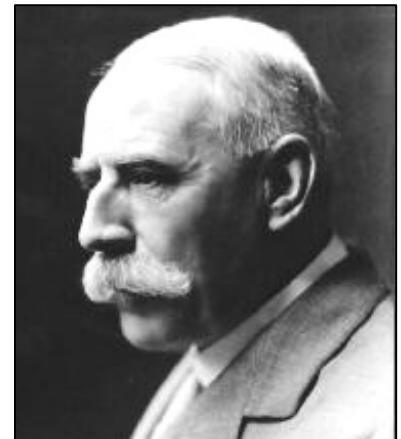
Interval – 20 minutes

Ice cream outside the auditorium + refreshments downstairs

Symphony no 1 in A flat, op 55

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

- I Andante. Nobilmente e semplice
- II Allegro molto
- III Adagio
- IV Lento – Allegro



It is said by many that Elgar's First Symphony is the greatest symphony written by an Englishman. It is in the unusual key of A flat, and its opening contains the main theme simply stated by woodwind and strings, accompanied by the stalking tread of cellos and basses.

After a restatement of the theme for full orchestra, the second subject swerves into the unexpectedly remote key of D minor. The first movement has great variation in musical ideas and emotional intensity, and while a rousing ending might have been expected, the last notes are delicate and quiet.

Unusually, the fast movement is placed second – a technique occasionally used by composers to heighten the intensity of the slow movement when it eventually arrives. This scherzo (though Elgar withheld this title) is in another rare key – F sharp minor, and most of it is helter-skelter in keys that do not lie easily under the fingers of the players – nevertheless the movement contains no shortage of hummable tunes. Towards the end, the mood relaxes, with the violins holding a long F sharp which dissolves into the slow movement.

The outpouring of emotion which comprises the third movement makes it one of the finest slow movements ever written. The observant listener may notice that the main tune is exactly the same as the helter-skelter theme of the previous movement, but now becalmed and at least ten times slower. Midway through, a new tune is introduced on the strings to the marking '*molto espressivo e sostenuto*' (very expressive and sustained), and this tune is to play a crucial role in the ending. Time and again the movement appears to be coming to a resolution, only to regain new life. When the ending does come, fully fifteen minutes after the start, it is to one of the slowest pulses in all music, and decorated with muted brass triplets, before a

final pair of notes on a solo clarinet fade into nothing. The ensuing silence is part of the music!

The finale begins in the same key with *pianissimo tremolando* strings and a languid bass clarinet and stalking phrase for bassoons and contrabassoon. After a while, a scurry in the strings heralds the fast section, again interspersed with reflective moments. Finally some insistent octaves on trumpets and horns announce the return of the first movement's original theme, this time triumphant and decorated with glittering woodwind and string counterpoint and leading, at long last, to a convincing conclusion.

Programme notes by Geoff Bushell

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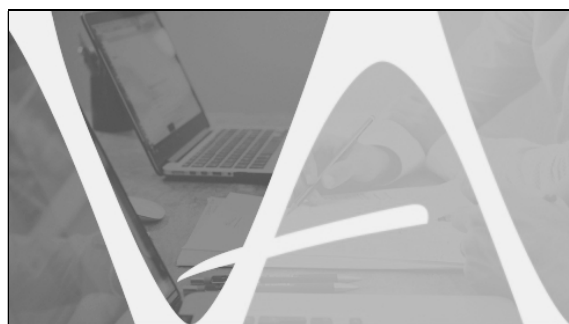
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ABOUT DCO

Didcot Concert Orchestra (DCO) was founded in 2017 by local amateur musicians Jackie Bushell and Geoff Bushell. Realising that the rapidly growing town was bringing ever more orchestral musicians and larger potential concert audiences to the area, Jackie and Geoff felt it could now support its own full-size performing orchestra and become a cultural destination for classical music. Audiences in the Didcot area would then be able to experience high-quality classical orchestral music without needing to travel to London or Oxford, at an accessible price. Participation in classical music, whether as a listener or a performer, has been shown to bring many benefits in health and wellbeing to individuals and to the community.

The orchestra aims to give local musicians and audiences the opportunity to experience a very high standard of performance. This level of attainment is achieved by personal invitation or auditioning of players, and through the support and encouragement of professional string section leaders. Players meet for just three rehearsals before concert day, usually over a nine day period.

DCO gave its inaugural performance in 2018 and programmes February, May and October concerts at Cornerstone. Focusing on popular classical music from the Romantic era, each concert also offers new experiences to both audiences and players by including at least one "rare gem" that is very seldom, if ever, heard in the public concert hall. Future programmes are listed on the back of this programme and on DCO's website at www.didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk.

Sponsorship

DCO is a not-for-profit unincorporated charitable association. Putting on concerts incurs significant costs which our generous sponsors, benefactors and donors help partly to defray. The orchestra welcomes offers of sponsorship from philanthropic businesses, organisations and individuals who are keen to support the performing arts in south Oxfordshire. If you can help us fund future concerts, please contact us via music@didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk or see page 2 of this programme.

Participation

If you play an orchestral instrument to a high standard, and are interested in participating in future concerts, DCO would love to hear from you. Contact us via www.didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk or come and speak to us at a concert.



DCO is a member of Making Music, which provides advice, support and resources for leisure-time musicians and music groups across the UK.

CONDUCTOR

Geoff Bushell

Geoff Bushell studied conducting with George Hurst, Denise Ham, Michael Rose and Adrian Leaper. He was conductor and musical director of Oxford-based St Giles Orchestra for 40 years from 1983 to 2023, and regularly conducts other orchestras in the area. Highlights of Geoff's conducting career have included large-scale performances of Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with 200 performers, a recording of Walton's *Crown Imperial March* broadcast on the BBC One Show, and being invited since 2022 to conduct annual charity concerts of Aylesbury Vale Concert Orchestra, which have already featured international guitar soloist Xuefei Yang and Classic FM presenter John Brunning at Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre. With a growing repertoire of over 500 different works conducted in public concerts, Geoff is renowned for introducing players and audiences to lesser-known but unjustly neglected romantic repertoire, of which he has conducted several UK premieres. As well as playing the horn in a number of orchestras, Geoff also composes romantic-style pieces, including five commissions from Abingdon and District Musical Society to celebrate its major anniversaries.

LEADER

Kate Bailey

Kate began her violin studies with Pamela Spofforth at the age of nine, and was an early member of Pro Corda, where she gained a love of chamber music. Whilst reading Music at University College, Oxford, she studied with David Ogden and Emanuel Hurwitz, and then went on to study with Erika Klemperer at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Since 2006, Kate has played in the string quartet OXUS, a group which specialises in approachable contemporary works such as Steve Reich's *Different Trains* and Elvis Costello's *The Juliet Letters*. She is also a founder member of The Holywell Ensemble (formed in 1984), a flexible chamber group renowned for its committed and evocative performances of British chamber music on CD and in the concert hall, which was described by the BBC Music Magazine as "one of the most important chamber music groups on the British musical scene". Kate lives in Oxford, and regularly leads a number of orchestras in the area. She is also a freelance orchestral player and has performed a number of concertos, including Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* with her colleagues from The Holywell Ensemble, and in March 2018 Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with viola player Heather Birt.

SECTION LEADERS

Louise Graham, violin

Louise Graham lives in Headington and is a freelance violinist and teacher. She studied under Béla Dekany at the Guildhall School of Music, plays in various local orchestras, leads the Erato Chamber Orchestra and is a member of OXUS. Louise teaches privately and for the Oxfordshire County Music Service.

Heather Birt, viola

Heather Birt works as a freelance viola player with many period ensembles including Academy of Ancient Music, Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, The King's Consort, The English Concert and The Mozartists. Heather has performed in several BBC Promenade concerts and appears on many recordings, including the highly regarded Pachelbel Vespers CD with The King's Singers. Heather also plays Double Bass in Allen Beechey's Bright Stars of Jazz, and has performed at numerous jazz festivals in Britain and Europe.

Spike Wilson, cello

Spike Wilson won a choral exhibition to The Queen's College, Oxford, and now leads a busy musical life combining cello-playing in chamber groups (including The Holywell Ensemble and OXUS) and orchestras, with coaching chamber groups and directing several school and youth orchestras. He coaches for the Oxford Cello School and the Oxford Chamber Course and is much in demand as a cello teacher, with many adult and younger pupils.

OXUS

Kate Bailey and Louise Graham (violins), Heather Birt (viola) and Spike Wilson (cello), are the members of OXUS – an innovative and vibrant string quartet, formed in 2006. They perform music from all eras, but specialise in contemporary repertoire and give regular recitals and workshops in schools and colleges. OXUS frequently works with other performers and media, performing works including Steve Reich's *Different Trains* with electronics; an original composition by and with jazz guitarist Pete Oxley; and, with actor-singer Nicholas Cass-Beggs, *The Juliet Letters* by Elvis Costello and The Brodsky Quartet. Performances include appearances at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, the Oxford Contemporary Music Marathon, and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and they have also enjoyed the challenge of working with artist Pam Foley, composing and improvising, for a project on Chronic Grief, entitled *Routes of Sorrow*. www.oxus.uk

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PERFORMERS – 11 OCTOBER 2026

FLUTE	Sue Hurst	VIOLIN 1	Kate Bailey ★
	Rachel Wright		Neil Thomas
+ PICCOLO	Katherine Finlay		Eleanor Bagg
			Eleanor Bolton
OBOE	Alan Evans		Lily Ip
	Dani McNeil		Peter Berrisford
COR	Sophie Hebden		Herbie Frankcom
ANGLAIS			Joe Andrews
CLARINET	Lisa Walker	VIOLIN 2	Louise Graham ★
	Jackie Bushell		Gillian Corrigan
BASS	Lindsey Iles		Jeanette Thomas
CLARINET			Catherine Lloyd Evans
			Alison Forrow
BASSOON	Will Grainger		Pat Field
	Peter Brook		Ewa Świątkowska
CONTRA	Chris Grovenor		Liz Lochhead
BASSOON			
		VIOLA	Heather Birt ★
HORN	Sean Frankcom		Margarete Lucas
	Paul Willett		Louise Hill
	James Seddon		Rosie Bruce
	Geoff Haines		Rhian Frankcom
			Katherine Baker
TRUMPET	Thomas James		
	Philip Dobbie	CELLO	Spike Wilson ★
	Andrew Goff		Polly Silk
			Sarah Higgins
TROMBONE	Nigel Howard		Lisa Rees
	Prin Boon		Sarah Sparrow
	Stephanie Howard		
		DOUBLE	Chris Seddon
TUBA	Matt Sanders	BASS	Andrew Tyler
TIMPANI	Chris Fletcher-Campbell	★ professional musicians	
PERCUSSION	Jackie Mann		
		Total 55 players	
HARP	Anna Lockett		

NEXT CONCERTS

22 Sunday 7 February 2027 at 4pm at Cornerstone

Tchaikovsky

Voyevoda: Symphonic Ballad

Tchaikovsky

Violin Concerto (Mabelle Young-Eun Park 🌟)

Dvořák

*Symphonic Poem Cycle: In Nature's Realm,
Carnival Overture, Othello Overture*

🌟 Kindly supported by Making Music's Philip & Dorothy Green Young Artists scheme

23 Sunday 16 May 2027 at 4pm at Cornerstone

Borodin

Prince Igor: Overture

Humperdinck

Merchant of Venice: Love Scene

Taneyev

La Oresteia

Glazunov

Symphony no 2 in F# minor

24 Sunday 10 October 2027 at 4pm at Cornerstone

Dvořák

Vanda: Overture

Brahms

Violin Concerto (Vladislav Adelskhanov)

Sullivan

Symphony in E "Irish"

25 February 2028 at Cornerstone

Wagner

Ride of the Valkyries

Puccini

Manon Lescaut: Intermezzo

Dohnányi

Suite in F sharp minor

Wagner

Tristan and Isolde: Prelude and Liebestod

Rimsky-Korsakov

Capriccio Espagnol

Please see further information at www.didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk

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