

**SUNDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2021**

7.30pm, SOUTHBANK CENTRE'S QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL

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## Fusing Forces: Yazz Ahmed and the BBC Concert Orchestra

**JESSIE MONTGOMERY** Banner 9'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. NOEL LANGLEY** La Saboteuse 6'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. TIM GARLAND** A Paradise in the Hold 8'

**JUDITH WEIR** Still, Glowing 4'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. NOEL LANGLEY**

Earth's Reflection 5'

A Shoal of Souls 7'

INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. ED PUDDICK** Barbara 11'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. CALLUM AU** 2857 9'

**ARVO PÄRT** Silouan's Song 6'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. GUY BARKER** Al Emadi 7'

**YAZZ AHMED, ARR. NOEL LANGLEY** Dawn Patrol 7'

**Yazz Ahmed** trumpet/flugelhorn

**Martin France** drums

**Dave Manington** bass guitar

**Corrina Silvester** percussion

**Ralph Wylde** vibraphone

**Bramwell Tovey** conductor

**Jumoké Fashola** presenter

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You are equally likely to hear the chameleon-like BBC Concert Orchestra on Radio 2's *Sunday Night Is Music Night* or performing classical concerts here at Southbank Centre or appearing on TV and film soundtracks.

Tonight, in its annual appearance at the London Jazz Festival, the orchestra collaborates with British-Bahraini trumpeter Yazz Ahmed, who performs a selection of her own pieces in brand-new orchestral arrangements. Ahmed's influences in her selection range from the songs sung by Bahraini pearl-divers to an imagined lunar landscape. Complementing these tracks are American composer Jessie Montgomery's colourful rhapsody on 'The Star-Spangled Banner', and laid-back, reflective pieces by Master of the Queen's Music Judith Weir and by one of the key figures of 'holy Minimalism', the Estonian Arvo Pärt.

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## JESSIE MONTGOMERY (born 1981)

### Banner (2014)

*Banner* is a rhapsody on 'The Star-Spangled Banner' composed in 2014, 200 years after Francis Scott Key wrote the poem that was later set to music and would become the US National Anthem. The piece is scored for solo string quartet and string orchestra and draws on musical and historical sources from various world anthems and patriotic songs. I've made an attempt to answer the question: 'What does an anthem for the 21st century sound like in today's multicultural environment?'

The structure is loosely based on traditional marching band form, in which several strains or contrasting sections are preceded by an introduction. I have drawn on the drum-line chorus as a source for the rhythmic underpinning in the final section. Within the same tradition, I have attempted to evoke the breathing of a large brass choir as it approaches the climax of the 'trio' section. A variety of other cultural anthems and American folk songs and popular idioms interact to form various textures in the final section, contributing to a multilayered fanfare.

'The Star-Spangled Banner' is an ideal subject for exploration in contradictions. For most Americans the song represents a paradigm of liberty and solidarity against fierce odds, but for others it implies a contradiction between the ideals of freedom and the realities of injustice and oppression. It is my opinion that we Americans are perpetually in search of ways to express and celebrate our ideals of freedom – a way to proclaim: 'We've made it!', as if the very action of saying it aloud makes it so. And for many of our nation's people, this was the case: through work songs and spirituals, enslaved Africans promised themselves a way out and built the nerve to endure the most abominable treatment for the promise of a free life. Immigrants from Europe, Central America and the Pacific have sought out a safe haven here and, despite having experienced the trials

of building a multicultural democracy, they continue to make significant contributions to our cultural landscape.

This tribute to the US National Anthem also acknowledges the contradictions and milestones that allow us to celebrate and maintain the tradition of our ideals.

Programme note © Jessie Montgomery

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## JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Jessie Montgomery grew up in Manhattan's Lower East Side, absorbing a strong sense of social justice and an array of influences: jazz, classical, African American spirituals, poetry and improvisation. Her music is ambitious in scope yet unified by a distinctive voice, from *Banner*, in which folk and protest songs question the American dream, to the New York cityscape of *Coincident Dances*. Improvisation is a key element of Montgomery's style, and she suggests that her solo violin works should 'be played with an improvisatory attitude'.

Montgomery studied at the Third Street Music School Settlement, the Juilliard School and New York University. As a violinist, she is a founding member of PUBLIQuartet and performs regularly with the Silkroad Ensemble and Sphinx Virtuosi. She is Professor of violin and composition at the New School and Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Composer profile © Joanna Wyld

Joanna Wyld is a writer on music whose work embraces a broad spectrum of eras and styles. She has won awards for her creative writing, and wrote the libretto for Robert Hugill's chamber opera *The Gardeners*, first performed in 2019.

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**YAZZ AHMED (born 1983),  
ARR. NOEL LANGLEY  
(born 1963)  
La Saboteuse**

The title-track of Yazz's critically acclaimed 2017 album is quietly subversive. While many artists hail their sources of inspiration, the trumpeter recognises her anti-muse or 'inner-destroyer', perhaps as a nod to the deeply personal nature of the struggle that the vast majority of creative people undergo in the pursuit of excellence. In keeping with these ideas, the song has a disturbing and destructive intro leading to a bass guitar cadenza, which gently winds its way into an elegant melodic line that is subsequently embellished by concise yet haunting vibraphone chords, bringing out the dark hues of the underlying harmony. The sense of the artist battling with doubt or negativity is vividly encapsulated by the poetry written in English by Noel Langley and voiced in Arabic by Fartun Tahir, which says of La Saboteuse: 'she lives inside me she wants to keep me small'. The intriguing ambiance both confirms and counters that.

Programme note © Kevin Le Gendre  
Kevin Le Gendre writes about music and literature for publications including *Echoes* and *Jazzwise*, and is the author of *Don't Stop the Carnival: Black Music in Britain* (2018, Peepal Tree Press) and *Hear My Train A Comin': The Songs of Jimi Hendrix* (Equinox, 2020). He is a presenter on BBC Radio 3's *J to Z*.

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**YAZZ AHMED  
ARR. TIM GARLAND  
(born 1966)  
A Paradise in the Hold (2015)**

Water is the dominant theme here. On the one hand, the source is Bahraini folk songs sung by pearl-divers, which is a timeless art that requires no small amount of skill and focus. On the other

hand, there is a quotation of an enduring jazz standard, 'My Ship', a piece written by the great Kurt Weill with words by Ira Gershwin. Originally featured in the 1941 Broadway musical *Lady In the Dark*, the song was famously covered by Miles Davis on his landmark 1957 album *Miles Ahead*. Yazz's combination of these materials has produced music that has a graceful melodic base and an array of shimmering motifs that are designed to convey the imagery of the Gershwin lyric that compares a lover's beauty to a vessel laden with ornate cargo:

*My ship has sails that are made of silk,  
The decks are trimmed with gold,  
And of jam and spice there's a paradise in  
the hold.*

Programme note © Kevin LeGendre

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**JUDITH WEIR (born 1954)  
Still, Glowing (2008)**

As the composer admits herself, *Still, Glowing* is Judith Weir's first and so far only foray into 'ambient' music – by which she means music of almost static movement, warm harmonies and soft, hushed timbres – the kind of music that can colour a space without needing to be listened to. It is certainly a departure for Weir, best known for her snappily precise, attention-grabbing works for the stage. Yet drama endures: *Still, Glowing* is based on a chord sequence from her 1990 opera *The Vanishing Bridegroom*. Out of that work's surreal and melodramatic settings of Scottish folk tales, Weir extracts a kind of slow mystery that, for all its plush, relaxing atmosphere, still captivates and enthralls.

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**JUDITH WEIR**

Judith Weir's monodrama *King Harald's Saga* (1979) is an extraordinary feat of compression:

the epic story of Harald Hardrada's failed invasion of England squeezed into 10 minutes of unaccompanied song. It is also a revealing entry into the world of music theatre for a composer who places the highest premium on clarity and precision, and whose later, larger operas include the ingeniously constructed *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987), one of the most acclaimed British operas since Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice*, the trilogy of Scottish folk stories *The Vanishing Bridegroom* (1990) and the dark fairy tale *Blond Eckbert* (1993). Whether for orchestra (as in *The Welcome Arrival of Rain*, 2001, for the Minnesota Orchestra) or choir (*Illuminare, Jerusalem*, her 1985 Christmas carol for her alma mater, King's College Cambridge), every note of Weir's music – like Britten's – is exactly and tellingly chosen. She was made CBE in 2005 and in 2014 succeeded Peter Maxwell Davies as Master of the Queen's Music.

Programme note and composer profile  
© Tim Rutherford-Johnson

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**YAZZ AHMED  
ARR. NOEL LANGLEY  
Earth's Reflection (2018)**

This is an example of Yazz Ahmed's ability to respond musically to a series of stimulating events. Originally conceived as a solo piece for the Open University's *Moon Night* in 2018, *Earth's Reflection* deals with three distinct aspects of lunar history: the planetary science professor Dr Mahesh Anand suggested that Yazz contemplate the birth of the Moon, the discovery of water and the possibility of living on the Moon in the future. These profound notions gave rise to melodic ideas, which, as one can imagine, have a statuesque if not grandiose resonance in line with the barren landscape of the Moon. In order to further realise her vision, Yazz used a range of percussion, including dustbin lids, as well as incidental sounds from the trumpet, such as the rattling of the valves. These then formed digital

loops that enabled her to create a sense of the violence and chaos that underscore the collision of heavenly bodies evoked by the opening. The music progresses then to a serene coda in which a Moon-dweller beholds the Earth's reflection in a pool of water.

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**YAZZ AHMED  
ARR. NOEL LANGLEY  
A Shoal of Souls (2017)**

Next comes a thrashing whirlpool of sounds, inspired by ancestral Sufi traditions in which devotees spin into the deepest of trances. The driving rhythms of the song convey this in no uncertain terms but the central message of the piece is both personal and political. On the one hand, the turbulence reflects the struggle Yazz has with La Saboteuse, her 'inner destroyer', who, as depicted in the excellent album artwork of Sophie Bass, is liable to drag the trumpeter down to the depths and scupper her creativity. There has to be resistance to that state of affairs. At the same time, there is the idea of an individual sinking chimes with the harrowing realities of countless migrants losing their lives as they show incredible bravery in order to cross over land and sea in the most desperate conditions. The song is thus an ode to the unfathomable strength and power of the human spirit, even in the face of cruelty, and highlights the lack of compassion from those in the bulk of Western nations who are in more fortunate circumstances.

Programme notes © Kevin Le Gendre

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**INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES**



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**YAZZ AHMED**  
**ARR. ED PUDDICK (born 1980)**  
**Barbara (2015)**

A highlight of Yazz's 2019 album *Polyhymnia*, this sprightly, jaunty piece is dedicated to the great saxophonist Barbara Thompson, a formidable player and composer who achieved considerable success in the 1970s and 1980s with her band Paraphernalia.

Set to a skittering rhythm in which vibraphone and marimba entwine in taut, crisp, overlapping lines, the song is launched in earnest by bass clarinet, soon joined by the flugelhorn, (a favoured combination of Yazz's). These two instruments hover tantalisingly over the pulse of the music with a quiet yet steely determination that loosely parallels the courage and fortitude that Thompson has shown in her fight against Parkinson's disease. Slowly but steadily the orchestra builds in intensity, fleshing out the motifs with cascading canons and counterpoint. After the calm of the solo section there is a subtle shift in harmony and the strident melodic lines reach a conclusion that has a considerably brighter mood.

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**YAZZ AHMED**  
**ARR. CALLUM AU (born 1990)**  
**2857 (2015)**

The title *2857* refers to the number of the historic bus on which segregation was confronted head on by Rosa Parks in 1955. Because she refused to give up her seat for a white passenger, this unassuming yet fiercely determined Black woman was arrested for civil disobedience and ignited a fire of protest that in turn led to the famous Montgomery bus boycott, which is largely regarded as a landmark moment in the struggle for Civil Rights and racial equality in America. Pictures of Parks at the time, even

a stark police mug shot that captures her in dehumanising circumstances, show a woman of immensely tranquil dignity, which is what Yazz conveys in the first part of the piece. Then an eruption of energy embodies the 'storm of change' Parks helped create.

Programme notes © Kevin Le Gendre

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**ARVO PÄRT (born 1935)**  
**Silouan's Song (1991)**

Silouan was Saint Silouan of Athos (1866–1938), a Russian-born elder of the Eastern Orthodox monastery of St Panteleimon in northern Greece. Pärt's instrumental song is based on one of his remarkable prayers, which begins, 'My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek him in tears'. Working abstractly, Pärt created a melodic line out of the stresses and syllables of Silouan's Russian text, inserting silences and changes of texture wherever there was a punctuation mark. This transcription (realised by first violins and double basses in contrary motion) is harmonised in a characteristic 'tintinnabuli' style of alternating consonances and dissonances. Although systematically conceived, the music's breath-like swell and release perfectly entwines the anguish, yearning, grief and solace of Silouan's prayer.

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**ARVO PÄRT**

Born in Paide, Estonia, Pärt received Soviet censure for his early music: his serialist *Nekrolog* (1960) drew the ire of Tikhon Khrennikov, head of the Russian Composers' Union under the Soviet regime. After *Credo* (1968) – an even more daring mix of religion, political critique, experimentalism and Bach – Pärt fell virtually silent before re-emerging in 1976 with a style derived from painstaking study of medieval and Renaissance music; four years later he left

the Soviet Union altogether, moving to Berlin. With regular, subtle variations the 'tintinnabuli' technique he invented – named after its bell-like qualities of chime and reverberation – has helped Pärt create a body of music unmatched in its spirituality and depth of expression, from the keening lament of *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1977) to the stark majesty of *Passio* (1989), and from the virtuoso fireworks of the double violin concerto *Tabula rasa* (1977), whose 1984 ECM recording practically set the template for the 'holy Minimalism' boom of the 1990s, to the intimate *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), a popular choice for film and TV soundtracks.

Programme note and composer profile  
© Tim Rutherford-Johnson

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**YAZZ AHMED**  
**ARR. GUY BARKER (born 1957)**  
**Al Emadi (2014)**

Like many artists in vibrant multicultural Britain, Yazz Ahmed has an interest in her heritage and genealogy. Al Emadi is the tribe to which her Bahraini family belongs and this song acknowledges and celebrates that. Originally written for multitracked trumpets, guitars and percussion, the music has a short, punchy, insistent bass line and a danceable pulse upon which the leader and additional horns can build. The central theme, with its ethereal, delicate

sway, gives a perfect demonstration of Yazz's polished tone and precise intonation. There is a sense of a forward march or procession conveyed by the relentless surge of energy, which the composer likens to many individual voices that have come together as one.

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**YAZZ AHMED**  
**ARR. NOEL LANGLEY**  
**Dawn Patrol (2020)**

A return to the theme of water. Commissioned by Adult Swim for its playlist New Jazz Century, *Dawn Patrol* reflects Yazz's engagement with the infinitely fascinating subject of the movement of water, from the majesty of the sea to the art of diving and surfing. This also gave rise to the title, as dawn is the best time to get the board out and ride the waves, which is the kind of demanding yet exhilarating activity that strikes a parallel with the high-risk strategies of a musician improvising on stage.

The seamless fluidity of the composition as well as the subtle rhythmic undercurrents and peaks of energy underline the place of water as a key source of artistic inspiration for countless composers, from George Frideric Handel to Herbie Hancock, no less.

Programme notes © Kevin Le Gendre

“ I hope that through my music I can bring people together, building bridges between cultures, and changing perceptions about women in jazz and people of Middle Eastern heritage.

Yazz Ahmed

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**BRAMWELL TOVEY**  
CONDUCTOR

Bramwell Tovey is Principal Conductor of the BBC Concert Orchestra and Artistic Advisor of the Rhode Island Philharmonic, and was recently appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec. Following an 18-year tenure as Music Director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, he is now the orchestra's Music Director Emeritus. Recent engagements have included a gala concert with Emanuel Ax to conclude the Rhode Island Philharmonic's season, an appearance at the BBC Proms with the BBC Concert Orchestra and concerts with the New York Philharmonic at the Bravo! Vail festival in Colorado and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

In 2003 he won a JUNO Award for his *Requiem for a Charred Skull*. His trumpet concerto *Songs of the Paradise Saloon* was commissioned by the Toronto Symphony for principal trumpet Andrew McCandless and has since been performed by Alison Balsom in Los Angeles, Philadelphia and London. His song-cycle *Ancestral Voices*, addressing the issue of reconciliation, was composed for mezzo-soprano Marion Newman and premiered in 2017. A recording of his opera *The Inventor*, commissioned by Calgary Opera, features the original cast and the Vancouver SO.

Bramwell Tovey was the recipient of the Oskar Morawetz 2015 Prize for Excellence in Music Performance. He won the Prix d'Or of the Académie Lyrique Française for his recording of Jean Cras's opera *Polyphème* with the Luxembourg Philharmonic. In 2013 he was appointed an honorary Officer of the Order of Canada for services to music.

**YAZZ AHMED**  
TRUMPET/FLUGELHORN

The music of British-Bahraini trumpet player and composer Yazz Ahmed brings together the sounds of her mixed heritage, infused with elements of electronic sound-design, in what has been described as 'psychedelic Arabic jazz, intoxicating and compelling'.

In 2020 Yazz was presented with two Jazz FM Awards – the UK Jazz Act of the Year and Album of the Year – and the year culminated with the receipt of the prestigious Ivor Novello Award for Innovation in Composition.

Her debut album, *Finding My Way Home* (2011) announced her as a performer and composer with a unique voice; however, it was *La Saboteuse* (2017) that made a global impact, earning multiple rave reviews, bringing her music to a wider audience outside the 'jazz umbrella', and leading to extensive live performances around the world.

Yazz's 2019 album, *Polyhymnia*, featuring an extended ensemble of 25 musicians, cemented her growing reputation as a notable composer and a pivotal figure at the heart of the UK jazz scene. Evolving from a suite commissioned by Tomorrow's Warriors, it is a celebration of the achievements of courageous and inspiring women.

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**MARTIN FRANCE**  
DRUMS

Martin France has performed with many of Europe's leading symphony orchestras and big bands. He has been active for many years as a studio musician in London, performing in numerous recording sessions with leading composers, conductors and arrangers. He is also involved in composing music for commercial broadcast.

He has performed and recorded with artists including Django Bates, Elvis Costello, John Dankworth, David Gilmour, Joe Lovano, Nils Petter Molvær, Evan Parker, John Surman, Kenny Wheeler and Norma Winstone.

**CORRINA SILVESTER**  
PERCUSSION

Corrina Silvester has played a wide variety of percussion instruments with Yazz Ahmed's Family Hafla Band, appearing at the Berlin Jazz Festival, Love Supreme and Pori Jazz, and touring to Bahrain, Chicago and Toronto. She also appears on Ahmed's albums *Finding My Way Home*, *La Saboteuse* and *Polyhymnia*.

She has performed for numerous West End shows and is currently playing in *Tina – The Tina Turner Musical* (Aldwych Theatre). As well as appearing on film soundtracks including *The Hobbit* and *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, she was a drum captain for the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony.

**DAVE MANINGTON**  
BASS GUITAR

A prominent figure on the London jazz scene, bassist and composer Dave Manington is a founder member of the Loop Collective. He has played with many of the pre-eminent jazz musicians in the UK and Europe, including Julian Arguelles, Iain Ballamy, Alan Barnes, Tim Garland, Michael Garrick, Gwyneth Herbert, Pete King, Mark Lockheart, Tina May, Marius Neset, Roberto Pla, Gwilym Simcock, Martin Shaw, Martin Speake and Pete Wareham. He is also in demand with a wide range of ensembles, playing with musicians hailing from South America to the Balkans.

**RALPH WYLD**  
VIBRAPHONE

Ralph Wyld is a vibraphonist, percussionist and composer. Winner of both a Kenny Wheeler Jazz Prize and a Dankworth Prize for Jazz Composition, he has performed at venues across the world and at the London, Berlin and New York jazz festivals. In 2016 he released his critically acclaimed debut album *Subterranea*. His band has played live on BBC Radio 3's *Jazz Now* as part of the Sound Frontiers festival at the Southbank Centre. He also plays as a sideman with a wide range of groups, including Stan Sulzmann's Big Band and the James Taylor Quartet. He is a tutor for the National Youth Jazz Collective, and this year he founded the Buckinghamshire Youth Jazz Collective.

## BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA

The mission of the BBC Concert Orchestra is to bring inspiring musical experiences to everyone, everywhere, with the ensemble's versatility as the key. The orchestra can be heard on BBC Radio 2's *Sunday Night Is Music Night* and for BBC Radio 3 it explores a wide selection of music, ranging from classical to contemporary. The orchestra has performed on many soundtracks, including *Blue Planet* and *Serengeti* for BBC One, as well as on George the Poet's award-winning podcast for BBC Sounds. In February it performed for the BBC One and BBC Radio 2 national celebration of musical theatre, *Musicals: The Greatest Show*.

The orchestra appears annually at the BBC Proms and is an Associate Orchestra at the Southbank Centre. Along with its regular engagements throughout the UK, the orchestra tours internationally – most recently performing in Malta for the BBC Radio 2 broadcast *It's a Kind of Magic – The Queen Story*.

The BBC Concert Orchestra offers enjoyable and innovative education and community activities and takes a leading role in BBC Ten Pieces, the BBC Young Composer competition and the newly launched BBC Open Music programme.

**Principal Conductor**  
Bramwell Tovey

**Principal Guest Conductor**  
Anna-Maria Helsing

**Conductor Laureate**  
Barry Wordsworth

**Composer in Residence**  
Dobrinka Tabakova

**First Violins**  
Nathaniel Anderson-Frank  
*leader*  
Rebecca Turner  
Peter Bussereau  
Lucy Hartley  
Cormac Browne  
Rustom Pomeroy  
Miranda Allen  
Amanda Britton

**Second Violins**  
Michael Gray  
Matthew Elston  
David Beaman  
Daniel Mullin  
Sarah Freestone  
Robin Martin

**Violas**  
Timothy Welch  
Nigel Goodwin  
Helen Knief  
Mike Briggs

**Cellos**  
Miwa Rosso  
Matthew Lee  
Josephine Abbott  
Ben Rogerson

**Double Basses**  
Dominic Worsley  
Stacey-Ann Miller

**Flutes**  
Ileana Ruhemann  
Alyson Frazier

**Piccolo/Alto Flute**  
Alyson Frazier

**Oboes**  
Rachel Harwood-White  
Victoria Walpole

**Cor Anglais**  
Victoria Walpole

**Clarinets**  
Nicholas Carpenter  
Derek Hannigan

**Bass Clarinet**  
Derek Hannigan

**Bassoons**  
John McDougall  
Jane Gaskell

**Contrabassoon**  
Jane Gaskell

**Horns**  
Mark Johnson  
David Wythe  
Richard Steggals  
Alex Carr

**Trumpets**  
Catherine Moore  
David McCallum  
John Blackshaw

**Trombones**  
Tom Dunnett  
Richard Ward  
David Stewart

**Tuba**  
Carl Woodcroft

**Timpani**  
Barnaby Archer

**Percussion**  
Stephen Whibley  
Bobby Ball

**Harp**  
Elizabeth Bass

*The list of players was correct at the time of publication*

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Bill Chandler

**Team Assistant**  
Bethany McLeish

**Producer**  
Neil Varley

**Concerts and Planning Manager**  
Carolyn Hendry

**Concerts and Planning Co-ordinator**  
Ruth Potter

**Concerts and Broadcast Co-ordinator**  
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