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17 March 2021

7.30pm

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**Guildhall Symphony  
Orchestra**

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Nicholas Collon  
*Conductor*

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**Johannes Brahms**  
Symphony No 3  
in F major, Op 90

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**Edward Elgar**  
Symphony No 1 in  
A-flat major, Op 55

**Guildhall Symphony Orchestra**  
**Nicholas Collon** conductor

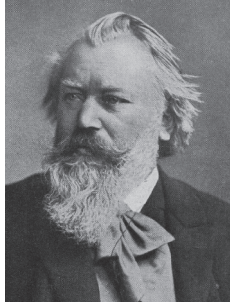
Wednesday 17 March 2021  
7.30pm

As Guildhall School has very recently returned to blended-learning allowing rehearsals to take place in-person, this programme was rehearsed and performed on a reduced schedule over three days. It was performed live across three venues on Wednesday 10 March 2021 and was recorded and produced live by Guildhall School's Recording & Audio Visual department.

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# Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

## Symphony No 3 in F major, Op 90 (1883)



1. *Allegro con brio*
2. *Andante*
3. *Poco allegretto*
4. *Allegro*

Brahms was aged 50 when he wrote the third of his four symphonies and by now had got past the anxiety of composing in Beethoven's shadow. Yet the comparison with Beethoven continued. While Brahms's First had been dubbed 'Beethoven's Tenth' by the critic Eduard Hanslick, his new Third Symphony was described by Hans Richter (who conducted the work's premiere) as 'Brahms's "Eroica"', linking it to Beethoven's heroic Third Symphony.

Brahms's Third is a symphony in which passion and formal design are held in keen balance, perhaps a reason why the conductor Bernard Haitink views Brahms as 'a wonderful example of a composer who thinks with his heart and feels with his brain'.

The first movement opens with three dramatic chords, whose uppermost notes, F–A–flat–F, spell out the motto attributed to Brahms, *Frei aber froh* ('Free but happy'), referring to his lack of romantic attachment. This motive returns frequently during the symphony.

Those three chords are the start of a broad, coursing first theme, contrasted by a tripping, pastoral second theme led by a clarinet with bassoon accompaniment. Later, in the development, this pastoral theme (on cellos and bassoons) opens the brief but stormy development. The movement ends quietly (as, unusually, do all four movements of this symphony), with a glowing reference to the opening theme.

The middle two movements are gentler in tone and more lightly scored. The Andante opens with an idyllic – even naive – pastoral woodwind hymn but a second theme raises a note of uncertainty.

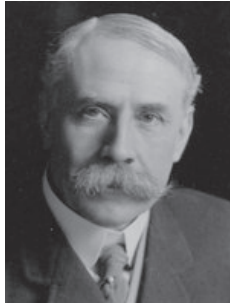
The three-part Poco allegretto is a graceful intermezzo, whose opening theme flows like a river (could this be Brahms's answer to Czech composer Smetana's tribute to the River Vltava in his cycle of orchestral tone-poems, *Má vlast?*). The central section brings another pastoral impression, with woodwind answered by strings. This movement was immediately encored at its first UK performance on 12 May 1884 (at which Elgar was present), to the horror of a *The Times* critic, for whom such a repetition represented a 'truly astonishing' lack of reverence for Brahms.

Opening with hushed urgency, the finale also contains the symphony's stormiest writing. But, much as this might lead us to expect a bold, affirmative conclusion, the symphony ends in gently smiling contentment.

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# Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

## Symphony No 1 in A-flat major, Op 55 (1904, 1907–8)



1. *Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro*
2. *Allegro molto –*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Lento – Allegro*

Elgar, as we saw above, had been present at the first UK performance, in 1884, of Brahms's Third Symphony. He wouldn't have credited then that Hans Richter, who conducted the Brahms performance, would nearly 25 years later be on the podium directing the premiere of his own First Symphony, in Manchester on 3 December 1908.

A few days after that, while rehearsing the London Symphony Orchestra for the work's London premiere, Richter was calling Elgar's First 'the greatest symphony of modern times'. It was the start of a new chapter in the history of the British symphony.

Elgar had been an admirer of Brahms's Third – he had dedicated a whole lecture to it during his short-lived professorship at Birmingham University – and there's a thematic nod to the earlier symphony in Elgar's finale. Playing the same game of comparisons that had earlier plagued Elgar's predecessor, the conductor Arthur Nikisch characterised Elgar's First as 'the Fifth of Brahms'.

The symphony opens with a broad, unmistakably Elgarian 'nobilmente' theme, at first a sombre processional, but soon proudly full-blooded. The movement continues with a complex discourse but one that incorporates sections of lighter fantasy.

The second-movement Scherzo also features a march theme, this time more overblown and darkly sardonic. It is reached via an opening passage of scurrying strings. Elgar once instructed the LSO to play the carefree, sunlit second theme (on flutes) 'like something we hear down by the river'.

The Scherzo eases into the Adagio, just as, in Elgar's 'Enigma' *Variations*, the preceding variation slips blissfully into 'Nimrod'. Elgar cleverly transformed the scurrying string figure from the Scherzo to form the opening theme of this movement. More clearly noticeable is a four-note descending figure that recalls the slow processional of the first movement. Richter thought this movement worthy of Beethoven but, in fact, it occupies a different plane of spaciousness and imagination.

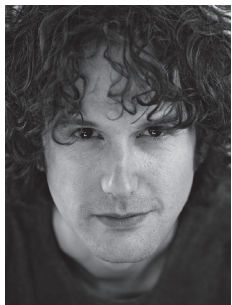
The finale opens in dark restlessness and continues to present a flurry of ideas, including a new, sinister march. Unlikely as it seems, this tune will later be transformed into a lyrical reverie. But it is a grandiose incarnation of the first movement's processional theme that returns to close the symphony, in a show of exuberant optimism.



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## Nicholas Collon

### Conductor



British conductor Nicholas Collon is Founder and Principal Conductor of Aurora Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Gürzenich Orchester in Cologne, and Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Residentie Orkest in The Hague until 2021, when he starts as Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony.

He is recognised as a born communicator, innovative programmer, and high-calibre interpreter of a wide repertoire. Under his direction, Aurora Orchestra have become known for their eclectic programming and for performing complete symphonies from memory. They are Associate Orchestra at the Southbank Centre and appear every year at the BBC Proms. Collon's elegant conducting style, searching musical intellect and inspirational music making have ensured that he is already a regular guest with orchestras such as the Orchestre National de France, Bamberg Symphony, Danish National Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony and BBC Philharmonic.

Collon has released ground-breaking recordings with Aurora for Warner Classics, and critically acclaimed discs with the Halle Orchestra and Danish Radio Symphony.


He has conducted over 200 new works, and has conducted opera at English National, Welsh National, Oper Köln and Glyndebourne on Tour. Collon is a violist by training, and studied as Organ Scholar at Clare College, Cambridge.

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# Guildhall Symphony Orchestra

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## Brahms Orchestra

### Violin I

Millie Ashton\*  
Eliette Harris  
Joonas Pekonen  
Alex Collins  
Victoria Farrell-Reed  
Federica Gatti  
Rebecca Pelta  
Nina Lim  
Jeff Wu  
Kryštof Kohout  
Annie-May Page  
Evie Rogers  
Clement Lebourgeois  
Ines Soltwedel  
Pauline Herold

### Violin II

Maria Ismini  
Anastasiadou\*  
Melanie Gruwez  
Reonel Rafols  
Imogen Brewer  
Ella Fox  
Susanna Griffin  
Leona Gogolicynova  
Paula Guerra  
Joana Correia Rodrigues  
Anastasia Egorova  
Jessica Meakin  
Malvina Karagianni  
Joanna Strembicka

### Viola

Theodore Chung\*  
Kate Correia de Campos  
Mabon Rhyd  
Sally Belcher  
Kelvin Chan  
Isobel Doncaster  
Lara Bowles  
Ruby Bowler  
Georgia Russell  
Ami-Louise Johnsson

### Cello

Laura MacDonald\*  
Yishang Sheng  
Harry Everitt  
Charlie Walker  
James McBeth  
Evangeline Coplan  
Klavs Jankevics  
Alexia Bergman  
Natalie Alfille-Cook  
Nathanael Horton

### Double bass

Fabián Galeana\*  
Ben du Toit  
Catharina Feyen  
Sophie Walker  
Yat Hei Lee  
Chiu Yung Chan  
Melisande Lochak

### Flute

Sophie McLaughlin\*  
Nicola Stevenson

### Oboe

Emily Crichton\*  
Emma Beach

### Clarinet

Cara Doyle\*  
Hannah Hever

### Bassoon

Lucy Gibson\*  
Paddy Kearney

### Contrabassoon

Hazalen Tang

### Horn

Flora Bain\*  
Alex Harris  
Fran Gordon  
Niamh Rodgers  
Michael Hofmann

### Trumpet

Lucas Houldcroft\*  
Adam Meyer

### Trombone

James Graham\*  
James Thomas

### Bass trombone

Alexander Froggatt

### Timpani

Francisco Negreiros

*\*denotes Section Principal*

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## Elgar Orchestra

### Violin I

Millie Ashton\*  
Eliette Harris  
Joonas Pekonen  
Alex Collins  
Victoria Farrell-Reed  
Federica Gatti  
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Ben du Toit  
Catharina Feyen  
Sophie Walker  
Yat Hei Lee  
Chiu Yung Chan  
Melisande Lochak

### Flute

Karen Wong\*  
Fiona Sweeney  
Stefan Cunningham  
(piccolo)

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Charlotte Brenton

### Cor anglais

Cat Lockhart

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### Bassoon

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Ruby Collins

### Contrabassoon

Verity Burcombe

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Adam Quilter

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