

# A BBC Radio 3 Invitation Concert given by The Ulster Orchestra

An English Idyll: Recorded for BBC Radio 3 Classical Live  
Friday 12th June 2026, 2pm  
Ulster Hall, Belfast





## **Enyi Okpara, conductor**

Enyi Okpara is the newly appointed Fellow Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra for the 2026/27 Season. He is currently the Calleva Assistant Conductor of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, after winning the BSO's Calleva Conducting Competition in 2024, the Artistic Director and Founder of Elysium Music, and was recently listed on Classic FM's Rising Stars List for 2025, as one of "30 *incredible musicians under 30*".

As Calleva Assistant Conductor, Enyi has conducted the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in various performances across the country, including six weeks in the BSO's main season series and his Royal Albert Hall debut for Classic FM Live at 25. Across the 2025/26 season, he has debuted with the Ulster Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, Britten Sinfonia, London Symphony Orchestra, Multi-Story Orchestra and the National Children's Orchestra. He also made return appearances to the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan and London Schools Symphony Orchestra. Recent highlights also include projects with Chineke! Orchestra involving collaborations with George the Poet and Ayanna Witter-Johnson, and upcoming highlights include debuts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in his new role as Fellow Conductor for the 2026/27 season, and the Orchestre national Avignon-Provence.

Enyi has performed with some of the world's leading soloists including Esther Abrami, Alim Beisembayev, Julian Bliss, Danny Driver, Milly Forrest, Clare Hammond, Martin James Bartlett, Thomas Luke, Fergus McCreadie, Johannes Moser, Joe Stilgoe and Ayanna Witter-Johnson.

Enyi has also held positions as Conductor-In-Residence with the London Schools Symphony Orchestra, and Bursary Conductor for the Havant Symphony Orchestra in 2023/24. In 2022, he was a finalist at the inaugural Weston Conductors Competition, during which he conducted the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. He was also awarded the Young Conducting Scholarship with the national choral charity Sing for Pleasure in 2021.

Hugely passionate about music outreach, accessibility, and education, Enyi is the Artistic Director and Founder of Elysium Music. Founded in September 2021, Elysium is a charity dedicated to collaborative projects between young professional musicians and children. It bridges the gap between music in schools and conservatoire music making by providing side-by-side projects, workshops and resources to provide school musicians with a real flavour of life as a professional musician.

Growing up in Camden, North London, Enyi's musical journey started initially as a percussionist and saxophonist and member of the Camden Music Hub. Enyi studied conducting with Sian Edwards at the Royal Academy of Music, where he held the Derek Butler Award.

He graduated in 2024 with Distinction, was awarded a DipRAM prize for outstanding final recital, won the Conducting Prize for highest final recital mark, and won HRH Princess Alice, The Duchess of Gloucester Prize for exemplary studentship and performance at graduation.

Enyi recently appeared on BBC Radio 3's *This Classical Life* presented by Jess Gillam, and the podcast *Things People Do*, hosted by Joe Marler and Tom Fordyce.

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

**Serenade for Strings (1892)**

1 Allegro piacevole

2 Larghetto

3 Allegretto

Though the gloriously tuneful *Serenade for Strings* is now one of Edward Elgar's most popular works, it wasn't always that way. He wrote it in March 1892, early on in his career, while he was still struggling to make a living for himself, his wife and daughter in his native Worcestershire from teaching and directing local music ensembles. It was one of those amateur groups – the Worcester Ladies' Orchestral Class – that gave the *Serenade* its first performance later that year, in fact. But when he sent it off to London publisher Novello in the hope that they might take it on, Elgar was brushed off: the reply came that 'this class of music is practically unsaleable'.

It didn't remain unsaleable, however, after 1899, when Elgar's *Enigma Variations* put him firmly on the musical map, and interest gathered in the earlier works that this saviour of English music had produced. Indeed, late in his life, Elgar confessed that the *Serenade's* three short movements were probably his favourites of all his own pieces: 'I like 'em (the first thing I ever did),' he wrote to a friend.

The *Serenade's* opening movement has been interpreted variously as a lullaby or as music to welcome the dawn. But with its soaring melody set against an insistent figure in the violas, it defines very much its own mood and character. The slower second movement contains one of the composer's most overtly lovely melodies, whose bounding leaps convey a very Elgarian sense of restrained passion. With its restless shifting between optimistic major and more sombre minor modes, Elgar's lilting, rather Brahmsian final movement seems to sum up the *Serenade's* bittersweet mood.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

**Symphony No. 5 (1943)**

- 1 Preludio
- 2 Scherzo
- 3 Romanza
- 4 Passacaglia

When Ralph Vaughan Williams unveiled his Fifth Symphony in London's Royal Albert Hall on 24 June 1943 – at the height of the Second World War – many in the audience were deeply shocked. Not because the Symphony reflected the brutality and violence of conflict, but because of its sense of calm, reflection and deep spirituality. Still today, it's a piece with deep personal associations for many listeners, one that brings a sense of comfort and solace, even hope, during difficult times.

Where did the Symphony's unexpectedly visionary tone come from? Partly from circumstance, and from the musical material that made it up. Vaughan Williams began sketches for the Symphony in 1936, but worked in earnest on it between 1938 and 1943. And in it, he explained, he also reworked material from his (at that time unfinished) opera on profoundly spiritual themes, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which wouldn't be seen on stage until its Covent Garden premiere in 1951.

But as well as reworking spiritual music in response to war, the Symphony may also be a response to love. In 1938 Vaughan Williams met the poet Ursula Wood, an encounter that both later remembered as love at first sight – despite the composer being almost 40 years Wood's senior, and married. He remained committed to his wife Adeline, however, and devoted increasing time to her care as she became increasingly debilitated by arthritis, until her death in 1951. He and Wood would marry in 1953. It's at least possible that Vaughan Williams's feeling of new love – however difficult the three individuals' circumstances – may have injected a fresh sense of hope and optimism into his music.

A lot of the Symphony's feeling of purity, consolation and contemplation is conveyed through its musical construction. Vaughan Williams launches his opening 'Preludio' with a musical conundrum. A gently rocking melodic idea from the horns offers a clear sense of key (D major), but a drone in the lower strings sounds an alien note (C). Which key are we actually in? It's the question – left unresolved at the end of the opening movement – that drives the Symphony forward, and which is only answered in the concluding moments of the final movement. In between those two movements, swirling strands of sound dart back and forth across the orchestra in the second movement 'Scherzo', as though we're glimpsing half-seen characters in the murk, though a more folk-like, dancing main melody quickly emerges from flutes and clarinets.

The third movement 'Romanza' stands as the piece's emotional heart. Quietly radiant string harmonies introduce a long, reflective melody from the cor anglais, ultimately leading to a rising, yearning melody in the strings that forms the movement's most overtly emotional material. The fourth movement begins, not as a victorious finale, but as a thoughtful 'Passacaglia' built on top of a repeating bassline, heard in the cellos right at the start of the movement. A surging timpani roll, however, throws us back into the conflicted, two-key music that opened the Symphony, now forcefully delivered by the full orchestra.

Ultimately, it's the calm, beatific harmonies of the horns that win the day, and Vaughan Williams's quiet, slow-moving conclusion – as string lines soar ever higher against a long-held note in the double basses – can only be described as transcendent.

## ULSTER ORCHESTRA PLAYERS' LIST

*Music Director Laureate* **Daniele Rustioni**  
*Honorary Principal Guest Conductor* **Jac van Steen**  
*Conductor Laureate* **Rafael Payare** *Artist Laureate*  
**Sir James Galway**  
*Leader* **Ioana Petcu-Colan**

### **1st Violin**

Ioana Petcu-Colan  
Thomas Jackson  
Ana Vandeppeer  
Krzysztof Rucinski  
Zuzanna Edmonds  
Danny  
McCann-Williams  
Jonathan Griffin  
Beverley Scott  
Conor Masterson  
Jasmine Morris  
Astrid King  
Pak Ho Hong  
Alys Jackson

### **2nd Violin**

Elizabeth McLaren  
Nick Rippon  
Mafalda Galante  
Joanne Campbell  
Scott Lowry  
Aisling Manning  
Ruta  
Mazolyte-Aghaunor  
Usman Peguero  
Megan Lowry  
Kevin Harrell

### **Viola**

Julia Doukakis  
Richard Guthrie  
John Murphy  
Feargal Ó Dornáin  
Philip Walton  
Ralph Tartaglia  
Sasha Buettner  
Ruth Bebb

### **Cello**

Thomas Isaac  
Morag Stewart  
Sian Hetherington  
Gen Li  
Rosalie Curlett  
Sokol Koka  
Andrew Nesbitt

### **Double Bass**

Ben Burnley  
Helen Glynn  
Gabriel Rodrigues  
Roger McCann  
Aiyana Marcia Rennie

### **Flute**

Mark Taylor  
Andrew Douglas

### **Oboe**

Rees Webster  
Emily Cockbill

### **Clarinet**

Ciaran McQuaid  
Patrick Burke

### **Bassoon**

Guylaine Eckersley  
Emily Ambrose

### **Horn**

Jesse Durkan  
Sarah Johnson

### **Trumpet**

Cameron Chin See  
Stephen Murphy

### **Timpani**

Jonathan Herbert

### **Trombone**

Neil Gallie  
Nathan Moore

### **Bass Trombone**

Richard Ashmore

Please switch off mobile phones during the performance and refrain from taking photos or recordings.  
Infra-red headsets are available for use with hearing aids inside the Grand Hall.

Please ask a member of staff for more information

