

Jansen's Dubugnon Premiere, and Vaughan Williams's Antartica

Sunday, November 29, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Janine Jansen, violin · London Symphony
Chorus, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>The Swan of Tuonela, from 'Lemminkäinen Suite', Op. 22</i>	9'
2	DUBUGNON b. 1968 <i>Sonnenring for violin and orchestra (world premiere)</i>	30'
3	VAUGHAN WILLIAMS 1872–1958 <i>Sinfonia antartica (Symphony No. 7)</i>	40'
TOTAL MUSIC		79'

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

9 minutes

The Swan of Tuonela, from 'Lemminkäinen Suite', Op. 22

THE COMPOSER

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) is Finland's greatest composer and one of the supreme symphonists of the twentieth century. His music, above all the seven symphonies and tone poems such as Finlandia and Tapiola, became inseparable from Finland's emerging national identity during its struggle against Russian domination, and he was revered as a national hero in his own lifetime. His style evolved from late-Romantic richness toward an increasingly concentrated, organic and original conception of symphonic form, in which themes seem to grow and fuse like living things, shot through with the cold light and vast spaces of the Nordic landscape. Famously, after completing the Seventh Symphony, the incidental music to The Tempest and the tone poem Tapiola in the mid-1920s, he fell almost completely silent for the last thirty years of his life: the 'silence of Järvenpää'.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Swan of Tuonela is the most famous of the four tone poems that make up Sibelius's Lemminkäinen Suite (1893–95), drawn from Finland's national epic, the Kalevala. In the myth, the hero Lemminkäinen is sent to kill the sacred swan that glides on the black river encirc-

ling Tuonela, the land of the dead; instead he is struck down by a poisoned arrow and dies. But the music is not about the hero. It is a hushed, transfixing portrait of the swan itself, floating serenely on the dark waters of the underworld.

Sibelius casts the swan's song as a long, melancholy solo for the cor anglais (English horn), one of the most celebrated and evocative solos in the entire orchestral repertoire. Around it he weaves a gossamer texture of muted, divided strings, conjuring the cold, still, mysterious river of death. It is a miniature masterpiece of atmosphere, and a perfect, contemplative opening to a programme that ends amid the frozen wastes of the Antarctic.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, above all, for the cor anglais: its long, plaintive, song-like melody is the voice of the swan, and it threads through almost the entire piece. Around it, listen for the dark, muted strings that create the still, glassy surface of the river of the dead, for the soft tolling of harp and timpani, and for a brief swell of more impassioned feeling at the centre before the swan glides on. The whole piece moves slowly, in a hushed 9/4, conjuring an atmosphere of solemn, otherworldly calm. It is a few minutes of pure, dark enchantment.

Richard Dubugnon

b. 1968

30 minutes

Sonnenring for violin and orchestra (world premiere)

THE COMPOSER

Richard Dubugnon (born 1968 in Lausanne) is a Franco-Swiss composer who came to music relatively late. After studying history in Montpellier, he took up serious musical study at twenty, trained as a double bassist at the Paris Conservatoire and then studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London. His music is colourful, dramatic and communicative, often with a vivid sense of atmosphere and narrative, drawing on a broad palette from the late-Romantic to the contemporary. He has been championed by leading soloists, and has a particularly close creative relationship with the violinist Janine Jansen, for whom he has written several works, including a Violin Concerto (2008) premiered with the Orchestre de Paris under Esa-Pekka Salonen. That makes her the ideal advocate for this latest piece written with her in mind.

ABOUT THE WORK

This concert features a world premiere: *Sonnenring*, a new work for violin and orchestra by Richard Dubugnon, co-commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra and given here for the first time, with Janine Jansen as soloist. The pairing is significant. Dubugnon and Jansen have a long creative partnership, and he has written several works for her, including his Violin Concerto, so this new piece comes from a composer writing intimately for a soloist he knows well.

The German title ‘*Sonnenring*’ means ‘sun ring’, which suggests a halo or corona, a ring of light around the sun. The LSO calls Dubugnon a master of orchestral colour, and a title like this hints at a work concerned with radiance and light, perhaps the play of brilliance around the singing line of the solo violin. At around half an hour it is a substantial piece. As a brand-new work it comes without preconceptions; what we can expect, on the evidence of Dubugnon’s other music and his rapport with Jansen, is a vivid, communicative showcase for one of the world’s great violinists. It sits intriguingly between the icy myth of Sibelius’s swan and the frozen grandeur of Vaughan Williams’s Antarctic symphony.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Come to this premiere with open ears: there is no recording to anticipate. Listen for the relationship between the solo violin and the orchestra, how Jansen’s line sings, soars and is coloured by the instrumental halo around it (the ‘sun ring’ of the title may well be reflected in shimmering, radiant orchestral textures). Dubugnon is a colourful, dramatic orchestrator, so listen for vivid instrumental effects and a strong sense of atmosphere and momentum. Above all, let Janine Jansen, one of the most charismatic and intense violinists before the public, guide you through this new music written to display exactly her kind of artistry.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

1872–1958

Sinfonia antartica (Symphony No. 7)

THE COMPOSER

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) was the central figure of the twentieth-century English musical renaissance: the composer who, more than any other, gave English music a distinct national voice freed from German domination. Drawing deeply on English folk song (which he collected) and on the Tudor church music he loved, he forged a style at once rooted in the past and

40 minutes

strikingly original. A late developer who went to Paris in his mid-thirties to study with Ravel and clarify his textures, he produced a vast and varied output over sixty years (nine symphonies, the Tallis Fantasia, The Lark Ascending, operas, songs and choral works), ranging from pastoral serenity to harsh modernity. He composed into his eighties, his music marked throughout by a visionary, questing spirit and a deep humanity.

ABOUT THE WORK

Vaughan Williams's Seventh Symphony, the *Sinfonia antartica*, grew out of one of the most evocative film scores ever written. In 1947–48 the composer, then in his mid-seventies, wrote the music for the Ealing Studios film *Scott of the Antarctic*, about Captain Scott's doomed 1912 expedition to the South Pole. He was so gripped by the subject (the vast, indifferent grandeur of the ice, and the human courage and tragedy played out against it) that he reworked the material into a full symphony, completed in 1952 and premiered by Barbirolli and the Hallé in 1953.

The result is a remarkable, atmospheric work in five movements, each prefaced in the score by a literary epigraph (from Shelley, the Psalms, Coleridge, John Donne and Scott's own final journal). It is a symphony of landscape and of human struggle: shimmering, glacial soundscapes; the relentless trudge of the explorers; moments of beauty, terror and desolation. To conjure the polar world, Vaughan Williams deploys a huge orchestra with a large percussion section, organ and, most famously, a wind machine, alongside a wordless soprano and women's chorus whose eerie, textless voices float over the ice like the wind itself or the siren call of the unforgiving landscape. It is a unique and haunting addition to the symphonic repertoire, and a powerful close to a programme of cold, mythic and elemental music.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, from the very opening, for the great striding theme that represents heroic human endeavour, and then for the chilling sounds of the Antarctic itself: the wordless soprano and women's chorus (here the women of the London Symphony Chorus) keening over the orchestra, the eerie whistle of the wind machine, the glitter of celesta, harp, piano and tuned percussion evoking ice and snow. This blend of the human and the elemental is the symphony's whole world.

Follow the five movements as a journey: a grand, struggling Prelude; a Scherzo evoking the wildlife and the floes (listen for suggestions of penguins and whales); a vast, bleak central Land-

scape, its climax crowned by a terrifying organ entry depicting the immensity and menace of the ice; an Intermezzo of tenderness and human warmth; and a final Epilogue, in which the heroic theme returns and the explorers march bravely on. At the very end the music dissolves into the wind machine and the wordless voices alone, the indifferent landscape outlasting the men who dared it. It is one of the most atmospheric and moving of all twentieth-century symphonies.

Tonight's artists

Janine Jansen *violin*

There could be no better advocate for Richard Dubugnon's new Sonnenring than Janine Jansen: she and the composer have a long collaborative history, and he has written several works with her playing in mind. One of the most intense and communicative violinists before the public, she brings to a brand-new concerto exactly the charisma, commitment and tonal richness needed to make a first performance compelling, championing the new work as she has championed Dubugnon's music before.

Janine Jansen, born in Soest in 1978, is one of the most charismatic and admired violinists in the world. From a musical Dutch family, she studied with Coosje Wijzenbeek, Philippe Hirschhorn and Boris Belkin, and has built a career of the highest distinction as soloist and chamber musician, recording widely and founding the International Chamber Music Festival in Utrecht. She is the LSO's Portrait Artist this season. Renowned for the intensity, communicative warmth and fearless commitment of her playing, she also has a long creative partnership with the composer Richard Dubugnon, who has written several works for her, which makes her the natural soloist for tonight's premiere.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia antartica* calls for a wordless soprano soloist and women's chorus, whose textless voices drift over the orchestra to conjure the eerie desolation of the polar landscape: wind, ice and the siren pull of the wilderness. The women of the London Symphony Chorus supply these haunting, otherworldly voices, one of the symphony's most unforgettable effects.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams**

Ursula Vaughan Williams, Oxford University Press 1993

The composer's life told by his widow, who knew him during the years of the Scott of the Antarctic film score from which the *Sinfonia antartica* grew.

ACCESSIBLE **Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland**

Glenda Dawn Goss, University of Chicago Press 2009

Sets Sibelius in the Finland of the Kalevala, the world of legend behind *The Swan of Tuonela* and the *Lemminkäinen Suite*.

DEEPER **The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams**

Michael Kennedy, Clarendon Press 1992

A work-by-work study of Vaughan Williams's music by his friend and biographer, with a full account of how the *Sinfonia antartica* came out of the film score.

SOURCES

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2. Lemminkäinen Suite, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemmink%C3%A4inen_Suite
3. The Swan of Tuonela, Op.22, No.3, The Gerald Larner Programme Notes. <https://gerald-larner.com/work/sibelius-the-swan-of-tuonela-op-22-no-3>
4. Biography, Janine Jansen. <https://www.janinejansen.com/biography/>
5. Biography, Richard Dubugnon. <https://www.richarddubugnon.com/biography>
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8. A guide to Vaughan Williams's Symphony No. 7 'Sinfonia Antartica', BBC Music Magazine. <https://www.classical-music.com/features/recordings/guide-vaughan-williamss-symphony-no-7-sinfonia-antartica>
9. Ralph Vaughan Williams, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Vaughan_Williams
10. Janine Jansen, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janine_Jansen

Ralph Vaughan Williams · Sinfonia antartica (Symphony No. 7)

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13. The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780198163305>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/Iso-2026-11-29-pappano>

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