



# Music to snooze by for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee

**The plans for the river pageant are an embarrassment**

by Jessica Duchon

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The whiff of magic lingers about the musical plans for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee river pageant – but it's not the sort of magic you'd expect. Some people are already puzzling over how the London Philharmonic Orchestra can be aboard a barge when simultaneously at Glyndebourne, performing *The Cunning Little Vixen*. And that's just for starters.

This extraordinary event on the afternoon of 3 June will involve 1,000 boats escorting Her Majesty along the Thames from Hammersmith to Greenwich, punctuated by significant musical contributions. But the pageant's playlist reads like a kind of UKIP fantasy. It barely reflects even a distorted portrait of today's UK; most of it would have looked dated when the Queen first came to the throne.

The pageant falls into various sections, a music barge heralding each one. First up, there's a floating bell tower. Next, 100 boats back, it just has to be Handel: the *Water Music* (played by the excellent Academy of Ancient Music). How original! The Queen's royal barge, *The Spirit of Chartwell*, is to be announced by trumpeters playing fanfares at each bridge in turn. The Band of the Royal Marines follows, playing "marine marches" and "popular nautical airs" – ie, sea shanties.

Amateur choral singing is one of the great joys of British musical life: on barge no. 5 a choir of 120 amateur singers from around the Commonwealth is being assembled by composer Orlando Gough and singing coach Mary King. Gough

is writing a new song for the occasion, with words by the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy. Apart from that, these Commonwealth citizens are going to sing... ah, British folksongs. A case of "look who's boss"?

Then there is one whole barge containing some actual music from far-off lands: India and, er, Scotland. Fifty musicians from the Shree Muktajeevan Pipe Band and Dhol Academy are to play what's being described as "a mixture of traditional Indian melodies, Scottish tunes and Bollywood anthems on bagpipes and percussion". I'm sure they are excellent musicians – but this is the sole gesture that acknowledges the existence of other musical traditions within the UK. Even then it seems possibly inspired by the former empire rather than more recent multicultural achievements.

The most creative barge is devoted to new music by 10 British film composers, who are creating a suite inspired by Handel's *Water Music*. It's great to see among them Anne Dudley, Jocelyn Pook and Debbie Wiseman, three women composers who are all national treasures; and their male colleagues are a fine collection too: Graham Fitkin, Gavin Greenaway, Christopher YOUNG, Adrian Johnston, John Lunn, Julian Nott and Stephen Warbeck. But why film composers in particular? And why did they have to model their works on a piece written 295 years ago? Are film composers perhaps considered less scary a prospect than those big bad wolves of the concert-hall mainstream who write – shock, horror – modernism?

But the next offering sounds a note of really bitter irony: a brass band of 75 young players, aged 12-21. Yet this celebration sails in at a time when tuition at the English music colleges is about to lose all government funding, along with most arts and humanities higher-education courses.

The LPO, or an incarnation of it, brings up the rear, conducted by David Parry – not, as was incorrectly reported elsewhere, its principal conductor, Vladimir Jurowski, who's doing Glyndebourne. It's not so unusual for orchestras to multi-task, though to do so this visibly seems tactless. They will play British music of the type we hear at the Last Night of the Proms. If this is an orchestra packaged as something grander than it is, playing music that packages the UK as something it is not, that kind of says it all.