



## On your feet for the 2013 Proms

Thousands of music lovers will stand to hear the complete Ring cycle at the Royal Albert Hall. Jessica Duchen selects the highlights of the world's greatest music festival, and offers advice on how to make the most of this year's jamboree

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If you're wondering what you need in order to enjoy the 2013 BBC Promenade Concerts to the max, I have one word to start you off: footwear. Every summer this much-loved classical music festival removes the seats from the Royal Albert Hall's arena to make way for standing places that are sold on the day: around 1,400 of them, together with those in the gallery. And this year, among 75 star-studded performances across nearly two months from 12 July, we can stand through no fewer than seven – yes, seven – complete Wagner operas. In a theatre, every performance would probably leave a substantial dent in our bank account. Instead, we can queue up and enjoy each one for a fiver.

There has to be a snag, no? Well, yes. Each of these operas is four or five hours long. So forget high heels or patent leather: energetic promenaders will require something to stand in for four or five hours – plus queuing beforehand, sometimes for most of the day, because demand for these cult favourites will be considerable. The Proms is mounting its first-ever complete Ring cycle, in concert performances conducted by Daniel Barenboim, featuring casts that would not disgrace Wagner's own theatre in Bayreuth. Add three more of his operas, including the mighty *Tristan und Isolde*, and it's apparent that this will be a Proms season like no other.

In the year of Wagner and Verdi's bicentenary, Wagner seems to be winning hands-down. According to the Proms' director, Roger Wright, this is more coincidence than conspiracy: he claimed at the launch that no complete Verdi opera performance of commensurately exciting quality had come his way for the programme. Instead, the Italian composer receives a concert of sacred works conducted by Sir Antonio Pappano, plus a programme of operatic extracts featuring the high-voltage Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja, who also appears in the Proms in the Park on the last night.

Since sensibly dropping the notion of “themes” for each season a few years back, the Proms has aimed to make every concert a festive occasion in its own right. Wagner galore there may be, plus a little Verdi and centenary trumpeting for both Benjamin Britten and Witold Lutoslawski, but beyond them this year's programme seems to have something for everyone, often in startlingly unexpected ways. There's even something for me: Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Symphony in F sharp* is to have its first-ever Proms hearing.

There is no shortage of newsworthy moments, either. The Doctor Who Proms held in past years, but not last year, have proved so popular that now the Daleks are coming back for more. As for non-classical works, there's a Gospel Prom, an Urban Classics Prom featuring Laura Mvula, and a 6 Music Prom, in which the presence of the punk band The Stranglers has had certain commentators metaphorically reaching for the blood-pressure tablets. Much attention, too, has focused on the fact that the Last Night will be conducted for the first time ever by a woman, the American "maestra" Marin Alsop, and it also features two superstars – the maverick violinist Nigel Kennedy and the magnificent mezzo Joyce DiDonato from the US.

Granville Bantock is a rather less familiar name in the Last Night line-up. He is one of those under-recognised, under-played British composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who tend to attract fanatical niche followings, yet rarely have the chance to reach a wider public. Bantock, born in London in 1868, wrote on a grand scale with a mystical focus, drawing on Celtic legend and Eastern exoticism. Among several of his works at the Proms is Sapphic Poem for cello and orchestra, with Raphael Wallfisch as soloist, plus the Celtic Symphony and, for the Last Night, The Sea Reivers.

Besides Bantock, British composers including Edmund Rubbra, Eric Coates, George Lloyd and more have an unusually high tally of performances. They may not be everyone's Earl Grey and they may not be perfect – but that's no reason not to give them a try. Further fascinating focus falls on composers from Poland who are not Chopin: for Lutoslawski's centenary the Proms are putting his glittering works in context with a Polish strand that includes music by his prominent peers Penderecki and Panufnik.

Among the cavalcade of international ensembles visiting the Proms is the newly formed National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America, which is making its British debut. So well established is the UK's National Youth Orchestra that it seems remarkable the US has not had one of its own until just recently. It is the brainchild of Clive Gillinson, executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall and formerly managing director of the London Symphony Orchestra. Evidently it has been a logistical feat of no small proportion to audition candidates from all over the US, and the results should be intriguing, especially with Valery Gergiev on the conductor's podium.

If you can't get to South Kensington, no problem. Every concert is broadcast live on Radio 3, with catch-up via iPlayer available for a week after the event. This year we're also promised more TV coverage than ever before. Watch out for regular series on BBC4: Thursdays for international orchestras, Sundays for a focus on 20th-century masterworks, and a magazine programme of highlights each Saturday night.

Putting classical music across effectively on the small screen is a perennially tricky task and the broadcasting team goes to some startling lengths to make the concerts look as good as they sound. Jan Younghusband, commissioning editor for the BBC's music and arts programmes, says that they want to "convey the sumptuousness of the Proms as a live experience", adding: "We've made the colours and the lighting richer to match the excitement of the occasion." They have even painted the platform floor blue, "otherwise you could be pointing a camera straight down at a fairly disgusting surface full of scratches and masking tape."

On the other hand, for those who want to go the whole hog and attend all the Wagner in person, a few survival tips might help. My advice is to join the queue very early; wear loose, comfortable clothing; and bring plenty of water, something to eat in the interval and your choice of sugary substances for energy. Don't lock your knees: try to stay reasonably relaxed and flexible.

For the full effect, stand as close to the front of the arena as humanly possible, but please observe Proms etiquette and do not jostle or attempt to usurp someone who has staked their claim on a spot; over a five-hour opera, you'll want to be on good terms with those around you. And if Wagner is well performed, it should leave you feeling as if you've only been there for five minutes.

Incidentally, for Wagner novices in search of guidance, there's a Ring Study Day on 21 July, led by BBC Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch, as well as Proms Plus Intros at the Royal College of Music before each opera.

To get the most out of this best-loved of London summer music fixtures, then, try a bit of everything, in whatever medium suits best. Whether you buy a season ticket and stand through the lot, or stay at home with your mouse and the iPlayer, there's no excuse not to hear the music.

*BBC Proms, The Royal Albert Hall, London SW7 (0845 401 5040) 12 July to 7 September*

### **Ten unmissable events at The Proms**

#### **National Youth Orchestra of the USA**

*Prom 13, 21 July*

A brand-new youth orchestra for the United States makes its UK debut conducted by Valery Gergiev. Music by Shepherd, Tchaikovsky (with Joshua Bell, violin) and Shostakovich.

#### **Wagner: The Ring Cycle**

*Prom 14, 22 July: Das Rheingold*

*Prom 15, 23 July: Die Walküre*

*Prom 18, 26 July: Siegfried*

*Prom 20, 28 July: Götterdämmerung*

Daniel Barenboim conducts the Berlin Staatskapelle and an all star-cast including Nina Stemme (Brünnhilde), Anja Kampe (Sieglinde) and Lance Ryan (Siegfried) among others, in the first-ever Proms account of Wagner's momentous tetralogy.

#### **BBC National Orchestra of Wales**

*Prom 16, 24 July*

## **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

*Prom 52, 21 August*

Two Granville Bantock highlights: 'Sapphic Poem' with Raphael Wallfisch (cello), on 24 July; and 'Celtic Symphony' on 21 August, which features Sakari Oramo conducting.

## **Aurora Orchestra**

*Prom 25, 31 July (10.15pm)*

Nicholas Collon conducts one of the brightest new outfits among UK orchestras in a typically fresh programme including the UK premiere of Philip Glass's Symphony No 10 and works by Conlon Nancarrow and Frank Zappa.

## **Britten Sinfonia, Sarah Connolly (mezzo)**

*Proms Saturday Matinée 2, 3 August (3pm) Cadogan Hall*

British star Sarah Connolly sings Britten's last vocal work, 'Phaedra', and Lennox Berkeley's 'Four Poems of St Teresa of Avila'. Sian Edwards conducts.

## **BBC Philharmonic**

*Prom 31, 6 August*

John Storgards conducts the first Proms performance of the Symphony in F sharp by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, which draws on some of his darkest film music. The programme has works by Walton and Rubbra, and Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1 with the young Norwegian soloist Vilde Frang.

## **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra**

*Prom 33, 8 August, and Prom 35, 9 August*

Mariss Jansons conducts his Rolls-Royce of an orchestra in two concerts: first, music by Beethoven and Berlioz; then Mahler's Symphony No 2.

## **Nigel Kennedy/ Palestine Strings**

*Prom 34, 8 August, 10.15pm*

Violin maverick Nigel Kennedy performs The Four Seasons with a group of young players drawn from the Edward Said Conservatory of Music in the Palestinian Territories, plus members of Kennedy's own Orchestra of Life.

## **London Symphony Orchestra**

*Prom 41, 13 August*

Valery Gergiev directs a thrilling all-Russian programme with the youthful piano superstar Daniil Trifonov as soloist in Glazunov's rarely heard Piano Concerto No 2.

## **Billy Budd**

*Prom 60, 27 August*

A concert performance of Britten's operatic masterpiece straight from Glyndebourne. The radiant young baritone Jacques Imbrailo is Billy and the tenor Mark Padmore is Captain Vere. Sir Andrew Davis conducts.