

Song of the Earth

Aurora at 20

Aurora Orchestra

Alice Coote mezzo-soprano

Andrew Staples tenor

Nicholas Collon conductor

Lili Boulanger (1893–1918)

D'un matin du printemps (1917/18), arr. Iain Farrington

6'

Jean-Féry Rebel (1666–1747)

Les éléments (1737–8)

25'

- i. Le chaos (Chaos)
- ii. Loure I: La terre et l'eau (Earth and Water)
- iii. Chaconne: Le feu (Fire)
- iv. Ramage: L'air (Air)
- v. Rossignols (Nightingales)
- vi. Loure II
- vii. Tambourins I & II
- viii. Sicilienne
- ix. Rondeau: Air pour l'amour (Air for Love)
- x. Caprice

INTERVAL

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

Das Lied von der Erde (1908–9), arr. Iain Farrington

70'

- i. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde (The drinking song of Earth's misery)
- ii. Der Einsame im Herbst (The lonely one in autumn)
- iii. Von der Jugend (Of youth)
- iv. Von der Schönheit (Of beauty)
- v. Der Trunkene im Frühling (The drunken man in spring)
- vi. Der Abschied (The farewell)

texts: Hans Bethge (1876–1946), after Chinese poets · surtitle translations by Richard Stokes

Aurora at 20

Having performed our debut concerts in London in April 2005, we were thrilled to be offered a residency at Britten Pears Arts (then called Aldeburgh Music) the following year, including a performance in Snape Maltings Concert Hall. This was a huge vote of confidence in a brand-new ensemble, and a wonderful leg-up, providing rehearsal space for a week, and accommodation and fees for players. One of the enormous challenges for a new ensemble is persuading anyone to invest in you, be it financially or artistically, and this support provided a backbone for us at a crucial time.

Over the 20 years since we have been delighted to perform numerous times at Snape Maltings as part of the Britten Pears Arts umbrella, including concerts, staged operas, and other performances elsewhere across the site. I have many wonderful memories of thrilling moments: from our Ghost Weekend with Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, to the *Les Illuminations* project with circus performers and Sara Connolly (2016); and from Beethoven's Fifth (2018) to a hall-shaking memorised *The Rite of Spring* (2023). But still the most powerful memory for me is our first concert back in 2006, conducting Ligeti's Chamber Concerto, just nine days after the composer had died, and seeing a new relationship with Aurora come to life. We are enormously grateful to all those who have supported our journey here, and hope to be with you for many years to come!

Nicholas Collon

Principal Conductor, Aurora Orchestra

Violin I Alexandra Wood, Maria Spengler, Katharina Paul, Anna Caban

Violin II Tristan Gurney, Ellie Fagg, Elise Scheurer

Viola Luba Tunnicliffe, Oliver Wilson

Cello Brian O'Kane, Clare O'Connell

Double Bass Ben Griffiths

Flute & Piccolo Jane Mitchell, Katy Bircher

Oboe & Cor anglais Thomas Hutchinson

Clarinet Peter Sparks

Bassoon Emily Hultmark

Horn Andrew Budden

Trumpet Holly Clark

Trombone Huw Evans

Timpani & Percussion Elliott Gaston-Ross

Percussion Jacob Brown

Harp Tomos Xerri

Celeste & Harpsichord John Reid



'I have been in love with *Das Lied von der Erde* for 30 years. Its immense power was the reason I became a singer,' declares mezzo-soprano soloist Alice Coote. 'I wanted to try and be a part of expressing that purity of response to being alive on such a beautiful planet.'

In exploring the natural world, this evening's concert turns first to a spring morning. Born into a musical family, **Lili Boulanger** flourished as a performer and composer, winning the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1913, but the bright cheer of her *D'un matin du printemps* ('On a spring morning') belies the poignant circumstances of its composition. Composed in 1917, the piece was completed in the last two months of Lili's life (she died aged just 24), and the score itself was notated with the support of her sister Nadia by her side. Tonight you'll hear Iain Farrington's arrangement for ensemble forces.

Opening to an extraordinarily daring evocation of chaos, **Jean-Féry Rebel**'s *Les éléments* ('The elements') depicts the creation of the universe according to Genesis. Composed in 1737, when the composer was in his seventies, the work was commissioned by Prince de Carignan, a liberal-minded arts patron. As such, Rebel let his fancy reign free in what he termed a 'simphonie nouvelle'. The piece traces familiar Enlightenment values, in moving from 'when 'confusion reigned between the Elements before the instant when ... they took their prescribed place in the order of nature' – and in doing so, Rebel pushes at the very limits of harmonic innovation.

'Each time you listen to *Das Lied*, you hear something new – that's **Mahler**'s genius,' remarks tenor soloist Andy Staples of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. By turns tumultuous and delicate in its response to nature and mortality, Mahler's symphonic setting of Tang-dynasty Chinese poetry offers some of the composer's most charged and tender music. It was also created amid a period of great personal struggle for Mahler, following the loss of his daughter and the diagnosis of a serious heart condition. For Alice Coote, the composer's personal vulnerability is now mirrored in the ever-increasing fragility of nature: 'the time we now live in, with such uncertainty for the health of our planet, makes the music ever more poetic, painful, and exquisite in its love for life on earth.'

The work moves from the merriment and menace of 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' to the sparse coolness of 'Der Einsame in Herbst'. The following three movements offer spirited evocations of innocence and pleasure through playful shifts in tempo and orchestration, while 'Von der Jugend' conjures something of the text's East Asian origins through the pentatonic scale. Staples remarks how 'recently I've been thinking a lot about the role of drinking in the text. It's tempting to see it simply as a way of escaping life's anguish and to make fun of it – but it feels deeper than that. The poet isn't just numbing himself; he's seeking a higher state of consciousness, something beyond the self, where the subconscious can emerge. In the fifth movement, this really comes through. After a heavy night of drinking, the poet wakes not with a hangover, but into a lucid dream – clear, calm, and comforted... spring has arrived and the world is somehow renewed.'

The work closes with the monumental 'Der Abschied'. Coote describes how 'after a musically turbulent and complex 40 minutes, Mahler pulls the strings together on a single unison note [and] time almost stands still. All of life is there and the emotional climax of the whole work is there... after which an outpouring of love for the earth – for all eternity – is released.'

Programme notes by Kate Wakeling © 2025