

Suffolk Youth Orchestra

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Millie Wood leader

John Paul Jennings conductor

Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)

Night on the Bare Mountain (1867, arr. by Rimsky-Korsakov, 1886)

10'

Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880)

Orpheus in the Underworld: Overture (1858)

5'

César Franck (1822–1890)

Symphony in D minor (1888)

40'

- i. Lento – Allegro ma non troppo
- ii. Allegretto
- iii. Allegro non troppo

Mussorgsky, arr. Rimsky-Korsakov: Night on the Bare Mountain

When Walt Disney was compiling his classical music anthology *Fantasia* in 1940 he hoped the film would bring the music to people who – like himself – had ‘walked out on this kind of stuff’. He couldn’t have chosen a better finale to his film than this thrilling tone poem. It depicts a wild mountain-top bout of devil-worship and his animators responded with a truly terrifying sequence of a giant demon and flying skeletal ghouls – it’s worth checking out the excerpt on YouTube. The drama begins instantly, with stomping bass lines, and cackling, shrieking woodwinds. Listen out for the bare 5ths in the horns and strings – like a bagpipe’s drone – and brief brass fanfares. The music is volatile, unpredictable. Mussorgsky returns to the beginning – these are witches that dance in a repetitive, cyclical frenzy. But the distant chiming of a church bell heralds the arrival of first light. An uncertain, lonely clarinet and more optimistic flute herald the dawn, dispelling the night’s terrors. The witches have gone ... for now.

Offenbach: Orpheus in the Underworld: Overture

We continue in hellish territory. The Greek classical Orpheus myth has inspired opera composers from the Baroque period (it is the subject matter of what is considered to be the first opera – Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* – in 1607) to the present day. The musician Orpheus charms the gods of the underworld into releasing his wife Eurydice from their clutches, on the condition he must not look back at her when leading their perilous escape. In a moment of doubt, love and desperation he turns round to check she is following – and she is lost to him forever. Offenbach turns this heart-rending tragedy into a knockabout satirical comedy, where Orpheus is rather glad to be rid of his wife and only forced into his rescue mission by ‘public opinion’. The music is appropriately witty, light-hearted, and the overture is the expected *pot-pourri* of themes from the operetta, with notable solos for clarinet and the orchestra leader before it unleashes one of the most notorious dance tunes ever written.

Franck: Symphony in D minor

The best orchestral work you’ve never heard of? The finest symphony by a Belgian? Joking aside, this wonderful piece has somewhat fallen out of fashion. But it’s worth noting that until the 1960s, the now-popular music of Mahler was a rarity in our concert halls. History judged him a legendary conductor who wrote symphonies in summer vacations. Franck was also not a full-time composer, but an acclaimed organist. He produced only a handful of orchestral works, and some notable chamber music – his cherished violin sonata is universally known by musicians as the Franck Sinatra. But this welcome – if rare – performance proves that public taste may be fickle, but quality and innovation endure. This is radical symphony building; its construction’s distinguishing feature is how little material is used. Franck returns time and again to his melodies, transforming and combining them throughout. And what melodies they are! After the first movement’s stormy fast music (itself a transformation of the slow introduction) the surging, sighing second theme is particularly important. You will hear it often, and in the finale it shares top billing

with a buoyant melody that’s so closely related you could almost fit one inside the other, like a family of Russian dolls. Memories of earlier high-kicking witches and famous French dance tunes will be elbowed aside by this joyous, ingenious music, and it might be Franck’s symphonic earworms you’ll be humming in the night air afterwards.

Dan Whitfield © 2025

Suffolk Youth Orchestra

Suffolk Youth Orchestra (SYO) is a full symphony orchestra of approximately 60 players aged between 13 and 22 years old. It is amongst the finest of its type in the UK. As well as appearing in prestigious venues at home, including annual performances at Britten Pears Arts’ Summer at Snape season, SYO has toured extensively, giving performances to critical acclaim throughout Europe. The annual European concert tour programme has seen the orchestra perform in countries including: Belgium, the Czech and Slovak Republics, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

Conductor: John Paul Jennings

American conductor John Paul Jennings has quickly emerged onto the scene as a young conductor of note. He is music director of Suffolk Youth Orchestra, and assistant artistic director of Regents Opera, where he is currently assistant conductor for Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. In 2023, he conducted a new production of Bizet’s *Carmen* with St Paul’s Opera, and his Czech debut came as assistant and second conductor of a new production of Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle* at the Moravské Divadlo in Olomouc. Most recently, he led South London Opera Group’s workshop on Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. As a guest conductor, John Paul enjoys a regular relationship with the East Anglia Chamber Orchestra, and he attracted particular attention after jumping in at three hours’ notice for a concert with the Thames Philharmonia. He was featured in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra’s Emerging Conductor Showcase in 2022 and conducted the Orchestra of English National Opera in a masterclass with Martyn Brabbins.

Leader: Millie Wood

Millie’s passion for the violin started at four years old, when she asked for a pink violin for Christmas! She started in chamber ensembles and orchestral playing whilst at Primary School and in the County Youth Music Service. She continued her education, attending regular ensemble training weeks at Pro Corda from the age of seven where she also learnt the viola. Millie is a member of Ipswich School’s Symphony and Chamber orchestras along with various ensembles and trios, and plays in a further duo with her sister and a string quartet with her peers. She studies with Rebecca Scott-Smissen and is working towards a second diploma. Millie is taking A-level Music, English and Geography, with a view to studying Music at university.

When not playing music Millie is learning to DJ and mix, play golf and is a keen cricket player for Melton Ladies.

Violin 1

Millie Wood (Leader)
Colin Chung
Joshua Foreman
Georgia Gamba
Naomi Gibbs
William Johnson
Joseph Lewis
Arthur Pettitt
Maggie Russell Hoare
Acer Smith

Violin 2

Lily Fisher (Section Leader)
Lily Connell
Zoe Findlay
Eliza Forgiel
Emma Gregory
Lottie Grigg
Hazel Hawkes-Wright
Ella Mitson
Helena Pascalides
Laure Reaville
Alexander Shears
Nikita Wong

Viola

Florence Clare (Section Leader)
Jennifer Cross
Jessica Lamb
Jeremy Tang

Cello

Eva Mawson (Section Leader)
Dillon Bhavsar
Leo Bloor
Charlotte Brandon
Elsie Connell
Kaci-Jean Franks
Malcolm Loggie
Annabel Marsden
Yasmine Moll
Alexander Pascalides
Xanthe Tate
Sebastian Todd
Isabella Wood

Double Bass

Caoimhe Keaney

Harp

Lilianna Travasso

Flute

Abigail Woodhouse (Section Leader)
Phoebe Adams
Evelyn Cook
Ella Petts

Oboe

Ellen Hall (Section Leader)
Elysia Hargreaves
Jamie Holland

Clarinet

Magnus Whitfield (Section Leader)
Nicholas Johnston

Trumpet

George Goymer
Harrison Klass
Georgia Moffat

Trombone

Gabriella Parkes (Section Leader)
Morgan Barber

Tuba

Richard Stevens

Percussion

Oberon Heginbotham