

Total performance time: approximately 110 minutes, including an interval of 20 minutes

BBC Concert Orchestra

[BBC Concert Orchestra](#)

[Barry Wordsworth](#) conductor

[Zeb Soanes](#) narrator

Doreen Carwithen (1922–2003)

Overture from The Men of Sherwood Forest
(1954) 5'

Lord Berners (1883–1950)

A Wedding Bouquet (1937) 30'

INTERVAL

Peter Dickinson (1934–2023)

Suite from The Unicorns (1967, rev.1980):
world premiere of orchestral version (2017) 15'

1. *Fanfares and Choruses*
2. *Dance*
3. *Lullaby*
4. *A Celebration Fugue*
5. *The Ballad of St Brendan*

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

Variations on an Original Theme,
Op.36 'Enigma' (1899) 30'

- Enigma: Andante*
- Variation 1: C.A.E. (L'istesso tempo)*
- 2: H.D.S.-P. (Allegro)*
- 3: R.B.T. (Allegretto)*
- 4: W.M.B. (Allegro di molto)*
- 5: R.P.A. (Moderato)*
- 6: Ysobel (Andantino)*
- 7: Troyte (Presto)*
- 8: W.N. (Allegretto)*
- 9: Nimrod (Adagio)*
- 10: Dorabella (Intermezzo: Allegretto)*
- 11: G.R.S. (Allegro di molto)*
- 12: B.G.N. (Andante)*
- 13: *** Romanza (Moderato)*
- 14: E.D.U. Finale (Allegro – Presto)*

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This concert is dedicated to the memory of
Professor Peter Dickinson



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Doreen Carwithen had a dazzling early career as a composer of songs, chamber music and symphonic works, but was best known as the world's first full-time female film composer. Early successes include *Boys in Brown* (1949) starring Richard Attenborough and Dirk Bogarde; the Pathé film of Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, scored by Carwithen but mis-credited; and the 1954 adventure movie *The Men of Sherwood Forest*.

The Men of Sherwood Forest follows Robin Hood as he is enlisted to rescue Richard the Lionheart from capture on his return from the Third Crusade. Carwithen's score begins with an overture that perfectly grasps the film's sense of heroism and adventure. Quick contrasts in mood and characterisation are deftly handled so as never to sound clunky, the orchestration is expert, and the pacing and easy-flowing melody are testament to Carwithen's natural gifts as a composer.

Lord Berners, born Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt-Wilson, was a colourful character. He inherited Faringdon House in Oxfordshire aged 35, and was known for dyeing the pigeons bright colours, using pearl necklaces for his dogs' collars, and driving around his estate in his Rolls-Royce (which contained a small clavichord) while wearing a pig's-head mask to frighten the locals. He lived with his partner, Robert Heber-Percy (1911–1987), an aristocrat 28 years Berners' junior and known as 'the Mad Boy'.

Berners was a talented composer, painter and novelist, despite his parents' unsuccessful efforts to guide him towards a position in the Foreign Office. His choral ballet *A Wedding Bouquet* was premiered at Sadler's Wells in 1937, with a nonsensical text by Gertrude Stein (from her play *They Must Be Wedded, To Their Wife*) and choreography by Frederick Ashton. Berners takes the unusual step of giving Stein's words to an onstage chorus, later economised to a single narrator, who explains what is happening: a bride, Julia, is left with only her dog for company at the end of a disastrous wedding in provincial France, having become a source of embarrassment to her rakish groom. Mischievously, the words often fail to make sense of the action, contributing instead irrelevant comments, meaningless noises or barbed one-liners, whilst an entertaining succession of waltzes and tangos provides the backdrop to the story.

Peter Dickinson was a visionary composer and academic, a pioneer in the serious study of popular music and key modern composers who brought the joyful eclecticism of American experimental music back to Britain when he returned from his studies at New York's Juilliard School. Particular influences were Charles Ives's use of vernacular music and cacophonous layering of styles, and John Cage's revolutionary belief that noise and silence could be music, too. Dickinson's music exhibits a wide range of styles, from jazz and ragtime in *Blue Rose Variations* (performed at the Proms in 2009) and pop in his Beatles tribute *Merseyside Echoes* (1986), to the more avant-garde *Mass of the Apocalypse* (played at the Aldeburgh Festival in 2015).

The Unicorns began life in 1967, when Dickinson commissioned a libretto from John Heath-Stubbs (1918–

2006). Instead of an opera he reworked the material into a six-movement suite for soprano (Elisabeth Söderström) and brass band (Solna Brass) in 1980. Today's concert features the world premiere of his 2017 orchestral version of the 1980 suite, which omits the voice part and one movement.

The Unicorns' opening Fanfares heralds expeditions by two rival countries, Eastland and Westland, to catch unicorns, which have been discovered in a remote part of Africa, and make use of their horns' magical properties. Eastland succeeds in the Dance, using a boy dancer to trick a unicorn into impaling itself in a tree. The Lullaby tells of how Westland captures its unicorn by using a girl's song to charm it to sleep. Celebrating, the boy and girl fall in love, which triumphs over their countries' differences, and the closing Ballad tells of their escape with the unicorns to the earthly paradise of the Island of St Brendan.

Edward Elgar is now considered one of the greatest British composers, but came from humble beginnings, growing up above his father's music shop in Worcester, mostly self-taught as a musician. Finely turned-out in tweeds and distinguished moustache, he seems in photographs to be the epitome of an Edwardian Englishman, yet he thought of himself as a European composer, influenced primarily by his French and German counterparts than his British contemporaries.

Throughout the 1890s Elgar was struggling to make an impact as a composer, but his breakthrough came with the *Variations on an Original Theme*, completed in 1899 when Elgar was 42. He named the original theme 'Enigma' (it is believed to encode some hidden meaning) and composed variations on it in the imagined style of various members of his close circle: 'what I think they would have written – if they were asses enough to compose'. Begun as a humorous exercise, it became a heartfelt and serious composition, with the Nimrod variation – depicting his friend, the music publisher August Jaeger – now one of his best-known pieces. The 14 variations begin with a depiction of his wife, Alice, and end with a self-portrait, which is then combined with Alice and Nimrod in a blazing finale.

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Peter Dickinson (1934–2023)



Professor Peter Dickinson – composer, writer, pianist, and dear friend of Britten Pears Arts

Photo: Francis Dickinson