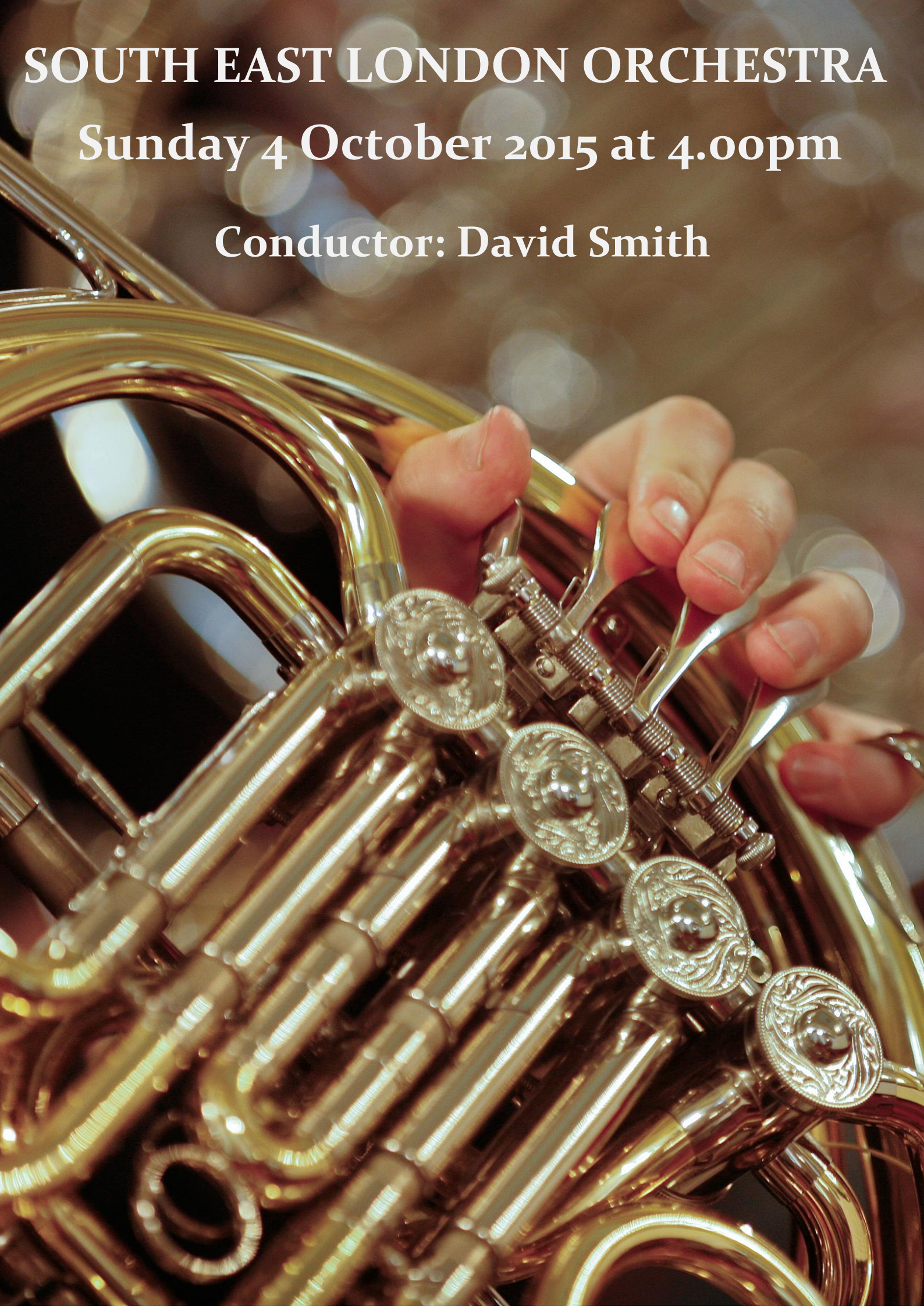


SOUTH EAST LONDON ORCHESTRA

Sunday 4 October 2015 at 4.00pm

Conductor: David Smith



Welcome to the first concert of our fourth season, which features three pieces that were all written within a seven-year period at the turn of the 20th century. This selection offers a snapshot of what Denmark, Czechoslovakia and England's greatest composers were presenting at this time.

All three pieces are linked by their descriptive nature – the depiction of sunrise, the programme music of a dark folk tale, and Elgar's portraits of his close friends.

Each piece also reaches back into this orchestra's history in one way or another. Back in April 2012, when launching an amateur orchestra in Beckenham was a mere idea in two people's heads, we organised a repertoire 'play day' to attract local musicians and form the basis of the original membership, several of whom are still with us today. We spent the day working on a range of overtures – it seemed appropriate – including Nielsen's *Helios*, the greatest orchestral depiction of a sunrise in the repertoire.

Following the sunrise, time moves on to midday for Dvorak's tone poem based on the dark tale of *The Noon Witch*. This piece was the subject of another repertoire session that we ran in January of this year, which led to many requests to programme it in concert.

As the members of the orchestra will have heard me talk about more than once, Elgar's *Enigma Variations* is an important work to me personally, as I was brought up in Malvern, the town most associated with one of our nation's finest composers. Having attended and performed a number of concerts in Elgar Hall and seen the statues in Malvern and Worcester, as well as the brown tourist road signs for the 'Elgar Route' around the area, the name and the music has been with me all of my life, and I'm thrilled to conduct *Enigma* for the first time today.

Finally, you will see later in this programme that we have launched a brand new Friends Membership, inspired by members of our audience who approached us of their own volition. There are some fantastic opportunities to support particular aspects of our work, as well as gain access to reduced price tickets.

Thank you, as ever, for being with us today.

David Smith
Music Director

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Programme:

Nielsen: Helios Overture
Dvorák: The Noon Witch

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Interval

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Elgar: Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma)

Special thanks to our anonymous patron for supporting this concert and launching our Friends Membership

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Music Director: David Smith

David enjoys working with a number of ensembles in London, programming pieces from unusual corners of the repertoire, alongside the great classics. In addition to his work with SELO, he is also Music Director of the City of London Symphonic Winds.

He regularly conducts the London Repertoire Orchestra and has worked as guest conductor with many orchestras in London and across the South of England, including Brent Symphony Orchestra, Kingston Philharmonic, Sidcup Symphony and South Bank Symphony (now Sinfonia Tamesa). Concert venues have included Trinity College of Music, Hampton Hill Playhouse, the Landmark Arts Centre, Teddington, and St James's Park, as part of The Royal Parks series. Work abroad has involved concerts at the Chopin Academy in Warsaw, Poland, and in Italy as part of the International Festival of European Youth Orchestras.

David studied Music, and subsequently Musicology, at the University of Southampton, where his tutors included David Owen Norris and Michael Finnissy. He studied conducting with Robin Browning and Denise Ham. Alongside his conducting career and trombone playing, David works in the music education sector.

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Leader: Alan Titherington

Alan studied music in Huddersfield in the 1980s, where he was taught by Herbert Whone, immersing himself in as much contemporary music as possible, and over the years has worked closely with composers such as Witold Lutoslawski, Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies, John Cage and Michael Tippett.

He began freelancing following a year at The National Centre for Orchestral Studies (based at Goldsmith's College) and early engagements included extra work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and a short stint in the original Miss Saigon production in the West End. Playing mostly around the South East, other career moves such as joining the army, classroom music teaching and testing financial software have always been flexible enough in allowing time to continue musical pursuits.



After 23 years, Alan is also the second longest-serving member of the Dartington Festival Orchestra and has been privileged to have worked with some of the most respected and influential orchestral conductors, including Diego Masson, Charles Groves, Vernon Handley, Edward Downes, Ilan Volkov and Jiří Bělohlávek. A recent highlight of the Dartington years was a performance of Haydn's 'Creation' with Sir Charles Mackerras on his first visit to the Summer School in almost 40 years.

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Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

Helios Overture (1903)

Helios was the personification of the sun in Greek mythology, portrayed as a charioteer who drove the chariot of the sun across the sky each day. Carl Nielsen composed the Helios Overture while on a trip to Athens, and the piece is composed in a majestic arch form that reflects this daily journey of our nearest star.

From the darkness of the very opening, the horn calls suggest the coming dawn. The sound grows, more and more instruments are added and the glorious moment of sunrise bursts through the music in a bright major tonality. A quieter passage follows, before a lively and joyful fugue picks up the pace once more. The arch form is completed as the music dies away and we return to the quiet, still blackness of night.

Antonín Dvorák (1841–1904)

The Noon Witch (1896)

This mature work is one of Dvorák's rare forays into programme music. The Noon Witch is one of the dark folk tales of Karel Jaromír Erben, in which a harassed mother tells her naughty young son that he must behave, or risk the Noon Witch coming to take him away. The threat is ignored by the boy, and the witch duly appears. The mother clasps her son tight to her for his protection, but collapses just as the witch tries to take him. The father returns to find mother and son on the floor. She is revived quickly, but the son has been accidentally smothered during her collapse.

The musical telling of this tale opens with an idyllic countryside scene, the mother preparing a meal for her husband. The strident cries of her child (flute and oboe) interrupt her again and again, and her growing agitation becomes apparent. She threatens to summon the witch, whose appearance is superbly portrayed by ghostly, high shifting string chords, and bass clarinet. A macabre witches' dance alternates the time signatures of 3/8 and 2/8, making for an even more disturbed feeling as she 'triumphs', before the mother's fateful collapse. The chimes of noon end this section. The father returns from the woods with a cheerful step, however this quickly turns to horror as he – and the mother – realise that the witch has indeed taken their son from them. Listen for a final reference to the witches' dance in the thrilling final bars, signaling that her victory is complete.

* * *

Interval

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Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma) (1899)

'I've written the variations each one to represent the mood of the "party" – I've liked to imagine the "party" writing the var: him (or her) self and have written what I think they wd. have written – if they were asses enough to compose – it's a quaint idea & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who "nose nuffin". What think you?'

What think you, indeed. Elgar's note to his long-time friend and publisher, August Jaeger, to whom we will return, in October 1898 describes perfectly the idea behind these

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Variations – a series of picture portraits of his friends tied together in one piece. At the time he wrote this note he had only sketched out the work, but he was quick to complete it (by February 1899), and sent a copy to the Austrian-Hungarian conductor Hans Richter, a renowned figure, regularly seen in British concert halls at the time. Richter's support and dedication to Enigma was vital in generating early successes, and he was amongst the voices (including Jaeger's) that asked Elgar to expand the original finale into the grand conclusion that we know today.

The superb balance of the work has been much commented upon – after the theme and first variation, eight short sketches lead to the central variation, Nimrod, which represents an emotional high. Following this 'slow movement' comes an intermezzo (Dorabella) and scherzo (G.R.S.), before three final substantial variations.

Whilst Elgar was right that an audience-member who "nose nuffin" would still enjoy the piece, it does add something to know the background to each variation's origins.

- Theme – Andante, which leads without a break to:
- C.A.E., Alice Elgar, his wife, a continuation of the theme with 'romantic and delicate additions', marked to be played at the same speed as the theme.
- H.D.S-P. is Hew David Steuart-Powell, an amateur pianist who often played chamber music with Elgar. His characteristic, light-touch warm-up routines are parodied by the violins, but are 'chromatic beyond H.D.S-P.'s liking.'
- R.B.T. is a caricature of Richard Baxter Townshend, a writer and amateur actor whose portrayals of old men could occasionally lead to his voice flying off into falsetto.
- W.M.B. is William Meath Baker, a country squire. This fast variation pens the picture of W.M.B. forcibly reading out the arrangements for a day, before hurriedly leaving and inadvertently banging the door behind him.
- R.P.A. is Richard Arnold, son of the poet Matthew Arnold and a music-lover who played the piano with the ability to suggest the real meaning, whilst avoiding difficult passages.
- Ysobel is Isabel Fitton, an amateur viola player and member of a Malvern music-loving family that Elgar knew well. The opening bar is an exercise in string crossing for the violas (a difficulty for beginner players) and the wide leaps may also represent Isabel's tall stature.
- Troyte is Arthur Troyte Griffith, a Malvern architect and close friend of Elgar's. The variation is an energetic, rhythmically disrupted account of Elgar's desperate (and unsuccessful) attempts to teach him to play the piano.
- W.N. is Winifred Norbury, or, more accurately, a suggestion of the 18th-century house, where the Norbury family lived. Winifred's characteristic laugh is gently mimicked by the woodwind in the middle of the variation.
- Nimrod is the previously-mentioned August Jaeger. The name Jaeger means 'hunter' in German, and in the book of Genesis, Nimrod is 'the mighty hunter' (and great-grandson of Noah). This most famous of all the variations was described by Elgar as: 'the record of a long summer evening talk, when my friend [Jaeger] discoursed eloquently on the slow

movements of Beethoven ... it will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the eighth sonata (Pathétique).’ It is a most moving record of a true friendship.

- Dorabella (Intermezzo) was Elgar’s nickname (from Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*) for Dora Penny. It also carries the title *Intermezzo* – a movement between two others, an interlude, almost – and is a light, whimsical variation, which gently parodies Dorabella’s youthful stammer in the woodwind.
- G.R.S. refers to George Robertson Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral, but the variation is only remotely related to him. The first five bars represent Sinclair’s bulldog, Dan, falling into the river Wye, swimming upstream and scrambling to the bank with a triumphant bark.
- B.G.N. is Basil Nevinson, a fine amateur cellist who played trios with Elgar and H.D.S-P., and described as a ‘serious and devoted friend.’ Elgar often stayed at Nevinson’s London home. This heartfelt variation is, unsurprisingly, a fine showpiece for the cellos.
- * * * (Romanza) is the subject of some speculation. ‘The asterisks take the place of the name of a lady who was, at the time of composition, on a sea voyage. The drums suggest the distant throb of the engines of a liner over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn’s “Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage”.’ (To be heard later this season with SELO.) As to who she was, pages of scholarship exist to promote the cases of either Lady Mary Lygon, a society lady who was apparently on a voyage to Australia at the time of composition, or Helen Jessie Weaver, Elgar’s first love and former fiancée, who emigrated to New Zealand.
- E.D.U. (Finale) is Elgar himself, ‘Edoo’ being Alice’s pet name for her husband. It is a bold and vigorous self-portrait that refers back to C.A.E. and later *Nimrod* (in the extended section that Jaeger and others had advised).

There has been much written and discussed about a supposedly hidden ‘larger theme’ that runs either against the theme or across the entire piece, but no definitive answer has ever been (or is likely to be) found. Perhaps Elgar was mischievously setting a riddle that could never be answered.

What is certain is that this work was the start of Elgar’s peak as a composer. In his biography of Elgar, Michael Kennedy describes how the *Enigma Variations* can be seen as a turning point in his career: ‘they sum up the world Elgar was leaving for the world into which they took him.’

Programme notes © South East London Orchestra 2015

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Thanks must be given to the committee (David Smith, Charlotte Woolley, Hanna Barriga, Sarah Harington Hawes, Philip Broadey, Hilary Wood, Claire Rutland) and Tim Hide, for their ongoing support and excellent organisational skills.

Thanks additionally to the Parishes of St Barnabas and St Edmund, Christ Church and St George, for allowing us to use their wonderful churches and halls.

SELO wishes you a good weekend, and we look forward to seeing you at our next concert.

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Orchestra members:

Violin I

Alan Titherington
Katherine Savage
Steph Fuller
Jane May
Claudia Fuller

Violin II

Claire Rutland
Fiona Woolworth
Cornelia Maynard Smith
Christopher Rutland

Viola

Eleanor Beamond-Pepler
Jane McLauchlin
Tina Taylor

Cello

Hilary Wood
Ed Langford
Becki Hartley
Sarah De Winter

Double bass

Sophie Roper
Jack Cherry

Flute

Hanna Barriga
Sarah Harington Hawes
Jennifer Raven

Oboe

Catherine Smale
Catherine Parkinson

Clarinet

Charlotte Woolley
Phil Broadey

Bassoon

Claire Goddard
Val Currie

Horn

Natalie Church
Andrew Currie

Trumpet

Michael Hartley
Isabelle Draper

Trombone

Tom Woodcock

Harp

Aileen Henry

Timpani

David Coronel

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SELO Friends Membership Scheme:

Our Friends Membership launched in 2015, inspired by support from our audience. There are two levels of annual membership which carry particular benefits:

Friend

25% off two tickets per concert, and seat reservation privileges (if booked in advance). A written credit in all concert programmes.

Patron

Associate your support with a particular part of the SELO season, be it the performance of a particular piece, the appearance of a soloist, or more (see below).

In addition you will receive two half-price tickets per concert, seat reservation privileges (if booked in advance), a written credit in all concert programmes and a verbal acknowledgement in the appropriate SELO concert.

Patron opportunities for the 2015/16 season, with remaining availability, are:

- Support the opening concert of the season – *an anonymous patron*
- Support clarinetist Felicity Vine's Mozart Concerto appearance – **Available**
- Support the UK premiere of Fung Lam's 'In Search Of' – *an anonymous patron*
- Support guitarist Darren Ellsmore's Rodrigo Concierto appearance – **Available**
- Support the SELO leader's position – **Available**
- Support mezzo soprano Sarah Denbee's Mahler song cycle appearance – **Available**

All Friends and Patrons will be listed in concert programmes and will receive regular updates about SELO's concerts and activities.

Friend: £50 / year

Patron: from £150 / year

Local business sponsorship proposals are very welcome, please contact us to discuss your suggestions.

To join the SELO Friends Membership please contact us at seorchestra@gmail.com.

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Concert Dates for 2015/2016 season:

Sunday 6th December 2015

Sunday 20th March 2016

Sunday 22nd May 2016

Saturday 2nd July 2016

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