

# JESS GILLAM PLAYS WILLIAMS & VILLA-LOBOS



**CBSO**

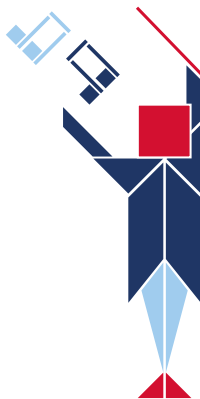
City of  
Birmingham  
Symphony  
Orchestra

Williams & Villa-Lobos  
Symphony Hall  
Wednesday 31 January, 2024  
7:30pm

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# City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra



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# INTRODUCTION

Hello everybody and thank you very much for coming to the concert tonight! I am really looking forward to playing with this brilliant orchestra again and to collaborating with Eduardo Strausser for the first time.

Whether this is your 100th time watching the CBSO or your very first time, I hope you can feel that palpable buzz of excitement as the lights fade and the orchestra begins to tune... we're all buckling in for the glorious ride of tonight's programme!

The orchestra are opening with Rossini's dramatic overture to his 'Cinderella' before we move to Villa Lobos' *Fantasia for Soprano Saxophone*, strings and three horns. It's not a very common combination of instruments but I think you'll hear the richness of the colours Villa-Lobos draws out from the pairings. The first movement, 'Anime', flits between quite declamatory and literal material and quite hazy, almost sultry slow dance sections. There is a lot of interaction between the saxophone and the strings, and I think one of the greatest challenges in this movement is trying to imitate the articulation of a bow on a string with the saxophone! In the second movement, the viola begins with what feels like a heavy sigh of a melody which is then echoed by the saxophone, and we are transported into a slightly surreal world. We hear the 3 notes from the very opening of the piece that catapult us into the frenzy of the third movement which finishes with a rush of energy.

The orchestra then move back into the land of fairy tale with Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel Suite* before we reach the interval where we'll all need a moment to digest the drama of the first half!

The concert finishes with some of the most glorious music ever - Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite*. Before that though, I'll join the orchestra alongside percussionist Adrian Spillett and bassist Anthony Alcock for John Williams' *Escapades*. Here, you can hear the alto saxophone in all its glory - bopping and hard-hitting with jazz-tinged longline melodies. The music was originally written for Spielberg's *Catch Me If You Can* - if you haven't seen it, I bet you can almost guess the storyline from this piece alone - the musical characters and ideas are so vivid and vibrant!

I hope you have a brilliant night and thanks again for joining us.

Happy listening!



**Rossini, La Cenerentola: Overture**  
8mins

**Villa-Lobos, Fantasia for Saxophone**  
10mins

**Rimsky-Korsakov, The Golden  
Cockerel Suite**  
25mins

*Interval*

**Williams, Escapades**  
15mins

**Stravinsky, The Firebird Suite (1919)**  
23mins

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**Eduardo Strausser, Conductor**  
**Jess Gillam, Saxophone**

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# JESS GILLAM PLAYS WILLIAMS & VILLA-LOBOS

Saxophonist, presenter and all-round force of nature, Jess Gillam makes everything she touches light up. Tonight, she travels to Brazil with Villa-Lobos and to Hollywood with John Williams: the fun-filled heart of a concert packed with enchantment, whether the glittering fairytales of *The Firebird* or an unmistakably Italian take on the story of *Cinderella*. Well, it is Panto season, after all.

**Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868)**

## OVERTURE TO LA CENERENTOLA

No-one did Italian comedy better than Rossini, and his opera *La Cenerentola* (1817) is basically a panto set to music. You know the story; we all do, because it's *Cinderella*. Well, nearly. Italian censors considered the sight of a lady's bare foot to be indecent, so out went the glass slipper. Rossini didn't trust the theatre's special effects team, so out, too, went pumpkin coaches and fairy godmothers.

Instead, the magic in *La Cenerentola* is in the music, and it takes a special kind of wizardry to start a story as brilliantly as Rossini does with this overture. He worked to a formula - a teasing introduction, followed by a fizzy fast section, a couple of really good tunes, some spicy orchestration and at least one long, thrilling *crescendo*. But being an Italian, he had the instincts of a gourmet - this, after all, is an opera with

a whole number devoted to the joys of the wine cellar - and it's all cooked for not a second longer than necessary. *Prego!*

**Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)**

## FANTASIA FOR SAXOPHONE, OP.630

- I. Animé
- II. Lent
- III. Très Animé

"What is folklore? I am folklore" declared the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos. He was born in Rio de Janeiro, and learned the cello and the guitar as a boy, spending his leisure hours playing in dance-bands and cinemas. Throughout his career, Villa-Lobos drew on the traditions, culture and landscape of Brazil and South America, but always in the service of his own vivid musical voice. As he once put it, "a truly creative musician is capable of producing from his own imagination melodies that are more authentic than folklore itself".

Villa-Lobos wrote his *Fantasia for Saxophone* in 1948, inspired by the great French sax virtuoso Marcel Mule. He knew from experience just how well the saxophone could dance, and in the spirited first movement, as well as the rhythmically-driven third, he lets it do just that. But there's something else going on here, and Villa-Lobos sets the nimble sax against an orchestra – just strings, plus three horns to soften the edges – that is both agile and lush. Hand-in-hand with Villa-Lobos's dancing verve flows a mood that's deeper and more songful: the emotion that Brazilians describe as *saudade* – an indefinable, aching nostalgia (more sweet than bitter) for an impossible dream.

**Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov**  
(1844-1908), arr. Glazunov & Steinberg

## THE GOLDEN COCKEREL - SUITE

- I. Tsar Dodon in his palace
- II. Tsar Dodon on the battlefield
- III. Tsar Dodon and the Queen of Shemakha
- IV. The wedding and lamentable end of Tsar Dodon

"A fairy tale, though far from true / Can teach us all a thing or two..." wrote Alexander Pushkin at the head of his *Tale of the Golden Cockerel* (1834). Once upon a time, in a land very like Russia, the foolish old Tsar Dodon lived in fear. A wandering astrologer brought a solution to his worries: a magical golden cockerel to watch over his kingdom. Reassured, Dodon retired to bed only to be woken by the cockerel's cry. But his enemy, the beautiful Queen of Shemakha, possessed powers more beguiling, and more deadly, than any weapon...

On the surface, Rimsky-Korsakov's final opera was simply a colourful re-telling of Pushkin's tale – a classic of Russian

literature. But this was 1907, and a humiliated Russian Empire was still reeling from the aftermath of the catastrophic Russo-Japanese War. *The Golden Cockerel* was effectively banned: Rimsky never saw it performed, and it first became famous in Paris, where Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* staged it as a spectacular opera-ballet (*Le Coq d'Or*), just before the rest of Europe followed Russia into disaster in the summer of 1914.

It's an opera with an atmosphere all of its own – by turns eerie and farcical, and shimmering with sensuous allure – and after Rimsky's death, in 1910 his pupils Glazunov and Steinberg created this four-movement concert suite. The fierce cry of the Golden Cockerel (trumpet) raises the curtain on the drowsy world of Tsar Dodon's court, intertwined with the eerie melodies of the mysterious Astrologer. The cockerel cries again, and we see Dodon on the battlefield where his armies lie slaughtered – a scene of ominous desolation, before the Queen deploys all of her sensuous (and distinctly oriental) charms: singing and dancing for the besotted Tsar. Before long, a wedding is on the cards, but even trumpets and cymbals can't dispel the atmosphere of doom. The Golden Cockerel has the last laugh.

**John Williams** (b.1932)

## ESCAPADES FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND ORCHESTRA

- I. Closing In
- II. Reflections
- III. Joy Ride

Steven Spielberg's crime caper *Catch Me if You Can* (2002) is a Jet Age fantasy of sharp-suited airline captains, beautiful stewardesses and night flights to Vegas.

Leonardi di Caprio played Frank Abagnale Jr - a very ordinary American teenager in the early 1960s, with a gift for fraud and a taste for the high life. And John Williams wrote the score: evoking the lounge-bar swing of Frank Sinatra and Dave Brubeck. "A long awaited relative of *The Pink Panther* has surprisingly emerged" joked Williams.

*Escapades* turns Frank's adventures into a three-part concerto for alto saxophone, supported by its own rat-pack of bass and vibes. The sax is our solitary hero: quick-witted, smooth-talking, sometimes deeply lonely. John Williams describes its three movements without wasting a word. "In *Closing In* we have music that relates to the often humorous sleuthing which took place in the story" he says, "followed by *Reflections*, which refers to the fragile relationships in [the hero's] broken family. Finally, in *Joy Ride*, we have the music that accompanied his wild flights of fantasy, that took him all around the world before the law finally reined him in".

**Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

## L'OISEAU DE FEU (THE FIREBIRD) - SUITE (1919)

- I. Introduction
- II. Appearance of the Firebird
- III. Dance of the Firebird
- IV. The Princesses' Khorovod
- V. Infernal Dance of King Kashchei and his Subjects
- VI. Lullaby
- VII. Finale

In summer 1909, when Serge Diaghilev planned a new show for his brilliant *Ballets Russes* seasons in Paris, Stravinsky wasn't his first choice of composer. He wasn't even the second. Diaghilev had originally wanted Rimsky-Korsakov, but Rimsky had inconveniently died the previous summer. Diaghilev turned instead to Rimsky's pupil

Anatoly Liadov, but Liadov was a very slow worker, and Diaghilev had a show to put on. Desperate for a quick-fix, he turned to another, much younger Rimsky pupil - the 27 year-old Igor Stravinsky. Early in November 1909, Stravinsky got down to work. *The Firebird* is full of musical tricks and even melodies cribbed from Rimsky-Korsakov, but with his teacher no longer looking over his shoulder, Stravinsky went for broke. He even invented a totally new orchestral effect, the shimmering, iridescent "harmonic glissandos" that you can hear in the strings during the *Introduction*.

The ballet premiered in Paris on 25th June 1910 and with Fokine's stunning choreography, it was a triumph. Stravinsky, though, was concentrating on his music: "The stage and the whole theatre glittered at the premiere, and that is all I recall". This concert suite follows the story of the ballet. The realm of the immortal demon-king Kashchei is dark and lifeless (*Introduction*). Enter, in a shower of sparks, the magical Firebird (*Dance of the Firebird*), hotly pursued by Prince Ivan Tsarevich. The Prince catches the Firebird and the bird gives him one of its feathers - the only thing that can break Kashchei's spells. The Prince encounters thirteen beautiful princesses, enslaved by Kashchei. As he watches them dance a gentle Russian *Khorovod* (round dance), he falls in love; but Kashchei's attendant monsters swarm round and prepare to turn him to stone in a frenetic *Infernal Dance*.

Just in time, the Prince remembers the magic feather. The Firebird re-appears, putting the monsters to sleep with an eerie *Lullaby*. Guided by the Firebird, the Prince finds and smashes the egg containing Kashchei's soul; and the demon's spells are undone. While a solo horn sings a quiet folk-song, Kashchei's petrified victims return to life, and as daylight spreads across the land, the full orchestra celebrates in a majestic and jubilant *Final Hymn*.

© Richard Bratby



# EDUARDO STRAUSSER



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The 2023/24 season sees Brazilian conductor Eduardo Strausser continue his regular relationships with Kansas the City Symphony and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra as well as conduct engagements with Bamberger Symphoniker, Utah Symphony Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestre de Montpellier and Argovia Philharmonic. He also has regular relationships with Antwerp Symphony Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. US engagements have included the symphony orchestras of North Carolina, Detroit and Indianapolis. From a young age, Eduardo developed an interest in works by contemporary composers and during his studies he took part in courses with the visionary composer Karlheinz Stockhausen and attended the International Forum for Conductors at the Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt, where he had the chance to work closely with composers György Kurtág and Brian Ferneyhough. At the Zurich University of Arts he studied with Johannes Schlaefli. Eduardo has worked with a number of top soloists, including Paul Lewis, Isabelle Faust, Augustin Hadelich, Richard Galliano, Cédric Tiberghien, Steven Osborne, Barnabas Kelemen and Sergei Krylov among others. A multi-linguist, Eduardo speaks eight languages fluently including German, Italian, French, Spanish and Hebrew.



# JESS GILLAM

Jess Gillam has been forging her own adventurous path since she became the first saxophonist to reach the finals of *BBC Young Musician* and the youngest ever soloist to perform at the *Last Night of the Proms*. Passionate about inspiring and bringing joy to people through music, Jess invites audiences on journeys of musical discovery through her electrifying performances and eclectic programming. She is an Associate Artist of the Royal Albert Hall and signed exclusively to Decca Classics. She has won a Classic BRIT Award and was awarded an MBE for services to music in 2021. Jess performs in venues across the globe - from New York's Carnegie Hall to Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie and has worked with orchestras such as the BBC, DSO Berlin, Gothenburg, Iceland, Lahti, London and Minnesota symphony orchestras as well as the London, Royal Liverpool and Munich Philharmonics. She also tours with her own band - Jess Gillam Ensemble. Jess became the youngest ever presenter for BBC Radio 3 with the launch of her own ARIA award-winning weekly show, *This Classical Life* which is now in its fifth year.



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Eugene Tzikindelean\*  
Julian Gil Rodriguez  
Zahra Benyounez  
Jack Greed  
Amy Jones\*\*  
Jane Wright\*  
Bethan Allmand\*  
Mark Robinson\*\*  
Nathan Bomans\*  
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Angus Bain  
Wendy Quirk  
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## **VIOLIN II**

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**Katie Lucas** Head of Learning & Engagement  
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**Leeloo Creed** Learning & Engagement Officer  
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**Louise Madden** Chorus Officer

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 or phone **0121 616 6500**. For ticket enquiries,  
 or queries directly relating to Symphony Hall,  
 please contact B:Music.

## UPCOMING CONCERTS...



### VALENTINE'S DAY CONCERT: TCHAIKOVSKY & BEETHOVEN

Love is in the air for our  
Valentine's Day concert.

Wed 14 Feb, 7:30pm



### BAROQUE TO BROADWAY

Celebrate the evolution of music,  
from Handel to Hammerstein.

Fri 22 Mar, 7:30pm



### RHAPSODY IN BLUE

Get ready to swing, on this wild ride  
through America.

Wed 27 Mar, 7:30pm

Book online at [cbso.co.uk](http://cbso.co.uk) or call the  
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But it is the people themselves who are at the very heart of our membership. CBSO members can enjoy the chance to share the company of musicians and artists and meet new like-minded friends.

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We're working to better understand our audiences, and by completing a survey following a CBSO concert, you can opt in to be entered into the prize draw.



If you'd like to share any additional feedback, or have any questions, please email us at [marketing@cbso.co.uk](mailto:marketing@cbso.co.uk).