

PRESS RELEASE

FARNBOROUGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CELEBRATES 90TH BIRTHDAY



The Farnborough Symphony Orchestra will reach its 90th birthday during the 2011-2012 season. By way of celebration, the season's four concerts feature an exceptional programme of exhilarating music. One of the major highlights of the anniversary season is the live orchestral accompaniment of a 1927 Buster Keaton film, a rare undertaking for an amateur orchestra. Other exciting prospects include a performance of Rachmaninov's 3rd piano concerto, which was the recurring theme in the 1996 film "Shine", and a rare performance of Parish-Alvars' Concertino for Two Harps. The musical celebration will culminate in a jubilant 'Prom' concert at the Princes Hall in collaboration with 'Hart Voices'.

History of Farnborough Symphony Orchestra

The Orchestra has been a feature of Farnborough life since its formation in 1922 as the Orchestral Society of the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE). The founding Music Director was Sir Ben Lockspeiser, an eminent scientist who was later to become the first director of CERN¹. Under his leadership, the Society flourished before the war, performing regularly in the old RAE Assembly Hall and latterly in the Farnborough Town Hall on Alexandra Road. It attracted several well-known soloists, notably including Beatrice Harrison who was famous for having made the first complete recording of the Elgar cello concerto.



Sir Ben Lockspeiser and the Orchestra in 1931 in Farnborough Town Hall

The outbreak of war brought musical activities to a halt but the Orchestra reformed in 1944 with amateur pianist, David Kettle, as conductor. By 1965 David Kettle had passed the baton to John Cotterill, a local solicitor and amateur violinist, who was also founder of the Farnham-based Waverley Singers. He spearheaded a drive to improve standards of performance and, in 1969, the Orchestra was retitled the RAE Symphony Orchestra. The Orchestra continued to flourish but, in 1981, John Cotterill moved on and, following his recommendation, a professional conductor was appointed. John Forster was an accomplished conductor, pianist and violinist who had worked extensively with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and who had strong associations with the Royal College of Music. John Forster's tenure was to span over a quarter of a century during which the musical excellence of the Orchestra improved consistently.

¹ The European nuclear research organisation recently famous for building the Large Hadron Collider



John Cotterill and the Orchestra in 1967 in the RAE Assembly Hall (on Farnborough Road)

In the late 1980s, the Royal Aircraft Establishment became part of Margaret Thatcher's Defence Research Agency, a move which culminated in the Orchestra becoming an independent charity in 1996. With the ending of the 70 year link with the RAE, the new organisation became a true community orchestra and was christened the Farnborough Symphony Orchestra.

In 2007, John Forster was succeeded by the current Music Director, Mark Fitz-Gerald. Commenting on the Orchestra's long history of music making in Farnborough, Mr Fitz-Gerald said, "I am constantly amazed at the high standard of musicianship this orchestra has maintained over the years. They are a group of highly dedicated musicians who love live performance and who enjoy sharing that experience with their loyal local audience."

The Farnborough Symphony Orchestra Today

Today the FSO continues to perform live music in the Farnborough area, performing four concerts each season. It delivers interesting and varied programmes to its audiences and commands an impressive range of accomplished soloists.

The Farnborough Symphony Orchestra's first concert of the 2011-12 season takes place on 12th November at 19:45 at Princes Hall, Aldershot. It opens with The Flying Dutchman Overture featuring Wagner's original ending as first performed in Dresden in 1841. Russian pianist Irina Lyakhovskaya, who last performed with the orchestra in 2009, is welcomed back for a performance of the fiendishly difficult 3rd Piano Concerto in D minor by Rachmaninov. Whilst demanding for both soloist and orchestra, the concerto's lyrical themes are sure to delight any audience. Brahms' Symphony No. 4 in E minor concludes the first concert of this celebratory season.



Further details of this concert and the rest of the season's celebratory programme may be found on the website www.farnboroughsymphony.org.uk.

Tickets for all concerts can be obtained from the Ticket secretary, Elspeth Todd, on 07775 789477 or through the website. There is also an opportunity to purchase season tickets which enable audience members to enjoy four concerts for the price of three. Again, details can be obtained from the Ticket Secretary.

The Farnborough Symphony Orchestra serves the local community in North East Hampshire and West Surrey and is supported by Paris Smith, React Marketing and Making Music. It aims to perform a varied programme of orchestral music to a high standard and provide its members with the opportunity to play a symphonic repertoire under a professional conductor.

For more details, contact **Elsbeth Todd** (Publicity Officer, Farnborough Symphony Orchestra)

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