

= BBC Symphony Orchestra =

The BBC Symphony Orchestra ( BBC SO ) is a British orchestra based in London . Founded in 1930 , it was the first permanent salaried orchestra in London , and is the only one of the city 's five major symphony orchestras not to be self @-@ governing . The BBC SO is the principal orchestra of the British Broadcasting Corporation ( BBC ) .

The orchestra was originally conceived in 1928 as a joint enterprise by the BBC and the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham , but the latter withdrew the next year ; and the task of assembling and training the orchestra fell to the BBC 's director of music , Adrian Boult . Among its guest conductors in its first years was Arturo Toscanini , who judged it the finest orchestra he had ever conducted . During and after the Second World War , Boult strove to maintain standards , but the senior management of the post @-@ war BBC did not allocate the orchestra the resources to meet competition from new and well @-@ funded rivals .

After Boult 's retirement from the BBC in 1950 , the orchestra went through a fallow period . Boult 's successor , Sir Malcolm Sargent , was popular with the public but had poor rapport with his players , and orchestral morale dropped . Sargent 's successor , Rudolf Schwarz , made little public impact , and although the BBC appointed high @-@ profile chief conductors in the 1960s and 1970s ? Antal Doráti , Colin Davis , Pierre Boulez and Gennady Rozhdestvensky ? the BBC SO remained underfunded and could not attract enough good players to rival the leading London orchestras .

As a result of initiatives begun in the 1960s by the BBC controller of music William Glock , performing standards gradually began to rise . Under Andrew Davis in the 1990s and Jiří Bělohlávek in the 2000s the orchestra prospered . By the second decade of the 21st century the BBC SO was once again regarded by critics as of first @-@ class status . From the outset the orchestra has been known for pioneering new music , and it continues to do so , at the Proms , in concerts at the Barbican Centre , and in studio concerts from its base at BBC Maida Vale studios .

= = History = =

= = = Background = = =

Almost from its beginning in November 1922 the BBC had started broadcasting from its " 2LO " transmitter with its own musical ensembles . The first such groups were the " 2LO Dance Band " , the " 2LO Military Band " , the " 2LO Light Orchestra " , and the " 2LO Octette " , all of which began broadcasting in 1923 . No concert promoter would co @-@ operate with the BBC , regarding it as a dangerous competitor , but the British National Opera Company allowed broadcasts of its performances from the Royal Opera House . John Reith , the General Manager of the BBC , invited the opera company 's musical director , Percy Pitt , to become the BBC 's part @-@ time musical adviser from May 1923 . Later in the same year Pitt conducted the BBC 's first broadcast symphony concert , which included Dvořák 's New World Symphony and works by Saint @-@ Saëns , Elgar and Weber .

Pitt expanded the regular eight @-@ piece studio ensemble to form The Wireless Orchestra of 18 players , augmented to 37 for important broadcasts . There was no thought at this stage that the BBC would maintain a full @-@ scale symphonic orchestra of up to 100 players . With Reith 's approval , Pitt engaged various orchestras for a BBC concert series in 1924 at the Methodist Central Hall Westminster . Pitt and Landon Ronald conducted the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra ; Eugene Goossens conducted the London Symphony Orchestra ; and Hamilton Harty and Sir Edward Elgar conducted the orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society .

In 1924 the Wireless Orchestra , by then comprising 22 players , was contracted for six concerts a week . The following year , Pitt , by now working full @-@ time for the BBC , as its director of music , augmented the ensemble to form the " Wireless Symphony Orchestra " for a new series of concerts broadcast from Covent Garden , conducted by Bruno Walter , Ernest Ansermet and Pierre Monteux . In 1927 the BBC and Covent Garden collaborated in a series of public concerts with an

orchestra of 150 players under conductors including Richard Strauss and Siegfried Wagner . Although the orchestra was large , it was not good . The BBC attempted to stop its contracted players sending deputies to rehearsals and even to concerts , but was unsuccessful . In January 1928 The Musical Times protested :

The B.B.C. has been blamed for devoting too much time to the classics , and also for not giving them all that is due to them ; it has been held responsible for the inferiority of the apparatus of the listener @-@ in ; it has been censured on a variety of trifling points , but never for the one heinous offence it has committed , and goes on committing : for this corporation , with all its assured and conspicuous wealth , has given and is giving us the worst orchestral performances ever heard in London . ? This year at Queen 's Hall they have assembled an orchestra which sounds as if it were composed in great part of " substitutes . "

In 1927 the BBC took over the responsibility for the Promenade Concerts , widely known as " the Proms " . At first Henry Wood , the founding conductor , persuaded the corporation to engage his Queen 's Hall Orchestra for each Prom season ; from 1930 onwards , the BBC provided the orchestra .

The inadequacy of the BBC 's players , and also of the established London orchestras , was shown up by the Berlin Philharmonic , under Wilhelm Furtwängler , in two concerts in 1927 . A historian of the Queen 's Hall , Robert Elkin , writes , " At this period the standard of orchestral playing in London was distinctly low , and the well @-@ drilled efficiency of the Berliners under their dynamic conductor came as something of a revelation . " These , and later concerts by the same orchestra , gained plaudits from the public and music critics at the expense of the London orchestras . The chief music critic of The Times , Frank Howes , later commented , " the British public ... was electrified when it heard the disciplined precision of the Berlin Philharmonic ... This apparently was how an orchestra could , and , therefore , ought to sound " . After the Berliners , London heard a succession of major foreign orchestras , including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra under Willem Mengelberg and the Philharmonic @-@ Symphony Orchestra of New York under Arturo Toscanini .

Among those determined that London should have a permanent orchestra of similar excellence were Reith and the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham . The latter aimed at setting up a first rate ensemble for opera and concert performances and , though no admirer of broadcasting , he was willing to negotiate with the BBC if this gave him what he sought . Reith 's concern was that the BBC should have a first @-@ rate radio orchestra . The critic Richard Morrison writes :

Reith 's BBC of the 1920s was ... imbued with an almost religious zeal for " enlightening " the public through the magical medium of the wireless . An orchestra , and particularly one that was unencumbered by commercial constraints and thus free to deliver the highest of highbrow programmes , would fit very well into that idealistic philosophy .

Landon Ronald brought Reith and Beecham together in April 1928 ; negotiations and preliminary arrangements continued for more than 18 months until it became clear that the corporation and the conductor had irreconcilable priorities for the proposed new ensemble . Beecham withdrew and , as described by Nicholas Kenyon :

With the collapse of the Beecham scheme , the way was open for the BBC 's music department to design an orchestral scheme truly suited to broadcasting needs ? a plan for a 114 @-@ piece orchestra that could split into four different smaller groups , which had been devised in the autumn of 1929 by Edward Clark and Julian Herbage ? and to place that orchestra 's fortunes under the direction of the man who was to guide it with the utmost distinction for the next 20 years , the BBC 's new director of music , Adrian Boult .

= = = Foundation = = =

By the time Adrian Boult succeeded Pitt as director of music for the BBC , the violinist Albert Sammons and the violist Lionel Tertis had scouted for new talent around the country on behalf of the corporation . Twenty @-@ seven players had been offered positions in the new orchestra . Among those who joined were Aubrey Brain , Arthur Catterall , Eugene Cruft , Sidonie Goossens , Lauri Kennedy and Frederick Thurston . Although many of the principals were stars recruited from

the LSO , the Hallé and other orchestras , a high proportion of the rank and file members were fresh from music colleges . Boult wrote , " a brilliant group of young and inexperienced players came to sit behind the well @-@ known old stagers . "

A substantial number of the players performed at the 1930 Promenade Concerts under Sir Henry Wood , and the full BBC Symphony Orchestra gave its first concert on 22 October 1930 , conducted by Boult at the Queen 's Hall . The programme consisted of music by Wagner , Brahms , Saint @-@ Saëns and Ravel . Of the 21 programmes in the orchestra 's first season , Boult conducted nine and Wood five .

The reviews of the new orchestra were enthusiastic . The Times wrote of its " virtuosity " and of Boult 's " superb " conducting . The Musical Times commented , " The boast of the B.B.C. that it intended to get together a first @-@ class orchestra was not an idle one " , spoke of " exhilaration at the playing " , and called another concert later in the season " an occasion for national pride " . The Observer called the playing " altogether magnificent " . After the initial concerts Reith was told by his advisers that the orchestra had played better for Boult than anyone else . Reith asked him if he wished to take on the chief conductorship , and if so whether he would resign as director of music or occupy both posts simultaneously . Boult opted for the latter .

During the 1930s , the orchestra became renowned for its high standard of playing and for performing new and unfamiliar music . The pioneering work of Boult and the BBC SO included an early performance of Schoenberg 's Variations , Op. 31 , British premieres , including Berg 's Wozzeck and Three Movements from the Lyric Suite , and world premieres , including Vaughan Williams 's Symphony No. 4 in F minor . Anton Webern conducted eight BBC SO concerts between 1931 and 1936 .

During the 1930s the orchestra presented rarely heard large @-@ scale works from the past , including Berlioz 's Grande Messe des morts and Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale . Mahler 's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies , and Purcell 's King Arthur .

The excellence of the orchestra attracted leading international conductors . In its second season guest conductors included Richard Strauss , Felix Weingartner and Bruno Walter , followed , in later seasons , by Serge Koussevitzky , Beecham and Mengelberg . Arturo Toscanini , widely regarded at the time as the world 's leading conductor , conducted the BBC SO in 1935 and later said that it was the finest he had ever directed . He returned to conduct the orchestra in 1937 , 1938 and 1939 , and declared , " This is the orchestra I would like to take round the world . "

= = = Second World War and postwar = = =

On the outbreak of war in September 1939 the BBC put into effect its contingency plans to minimise disruption of broadcasting . The corporation withdrew from responsibility for the Proms , with which Wood went ahead , backed by the Royal Philharmonic Society , with the LSO replacing the BBC SO . The BBC SO was relocated from London to Bristol . More than 40 players were released for active service , including the 30 youngest members ; the orchestra was reduced to a complement of 70 , although it was increased to 90 later in the war . During 1940 and 1941 Bristol suffered devastation from German air @-@ raids , and the BBC decided to move the orchestra again . In September 1941 the BBC SO took up residence in Bedford , where it remained , giving live broadcasts and making recordings until it returned permanently to its London base at the BBC 's BBC Maida Vale studios in 1945 . The BBC resumed its support for the Proms in 1942 , with the BBC SO returning temporarily to London during the Proms seasons of 1942 ? 45 . For the rest of the year , the orchestra played in the hall of Bedford School , and after the launch of the V @-@ 1 raids in 1944 the remaining broadcast concerts of that year 's Proms season were performed at the Bedford Corn Exchange .

Boult had striven to maintain the orchestra 's standards and prestige during the war ; as an instance of its prowess in the 1940s Kennedy cites an HMV recording of Elgar 's Second Symphony released in January 1945 : " a performance that blazed with excitement and passion and is documentary evidence of the excellence of the orchestra in 1944 " . With Reith long gone from the post of director @-@ general , Boult found that the top management of the BBC was less concerned for the status

of its Symphony Orchestra . The new director @-@ general , Sir William Haley , was unwilling to approve the funding needed to keep the orchestra competitive with new rivals ? Walter Legge 's Philharmonia and Beecham 's Royal Philharmonic . Some younger players felt that many BBC SO principals were past their best . There were even a few members of the BBC 's staff who were not sorry when Steuart Wilson , a BBC executive with a private grudge against Boult , engineered Boult 's retirement in 1950 , though many profoundly regretted it . Wilson had neglected to secure a successor of similar eminence to take over the orchestra . His efforts to recruit Sir John Barbirolli and Rafael Kubelík were unsuccessful , and he was obliged to offer the post to his third choice , Sir Malcolm Sargent , on whatever terms Sargent demanded .

= = = 1950s = = =

Sargent , an immensely popular figure with the public , was not at all popular with orchestral players , because of what a historian of the Proms has called his " autocratic and prima @-@ donna attitude towards orchestral players " . He offended the BBC SO players by demanding that they all stand up when he came on to the platform ? which they firmly declined to do . He rapidly became equally unpopular with the BBC music department , ignoring its agenda and pursuing his own . He refused to join the staff of the BBC , and insisted on remaining a freelance , taking numerous external engagements to the detriment of his work with the BBC SO . A senior BBC manager wrote , :

Except when a Barbirolli or a Kletzki has been in charge for a few days , the Orchestra is inferior , as an artistic instrument , to the Hallé or Philharmonia ... [ Sargent ] is indifferent to the morale and welfare of the Orchestra and to the individual temperaments of his players as artists or as human beings .

It did not help that Sargent was universally acknowledged to be at his finest in choral music . His reputation in big works for chorus and orchestra such as The Dream of Gerontius , Hiawatha 's Wedding Feast and Belshazzar 's Feast was unrivalled , and his large @-@ scale performances of Handel oratorios were assured packed houses . However , his regular programming of such works did nothing to lift the spirits of the BBC SO : orchestral musicians regarded playing the instrumental accompaniment for large choirs as drudgery .

In the 1950s the BBC SO , in common with the rest of the BBC 's musical organisation , suffered from stagnation . In the words of the critic Peter Heyworth , " the Corporation 's music department had become a byword for its narrow @-@ mindedness and lassitude " . Boult had been followed as director of music by a series of successors between 1944 and 1959 who either lacked his commitment to modern music or were actively hostile to it . Richard Howgill , who held the post from 1952 to 1959 , took the view that although Webern " might have been a small composer of some significance , Schoenberg wasn 't really a composer at all . " In addition to working under a conductor it disliked , the BBC SO found its role as a pioneer of progressive music gone , and its performances of the standard classics criticised as under @-@ rehearsed ( particularly during Proms seasons ) compared with those given by Legge 's Philharmonia and others . Sargent 's contract was not renewed in 1957 , although he continued with undiminished popularity as chief conductor of the Proms until his death ten years later . Howgill appointed Rudolf Schwarz as chief conductor of the BBC SO . Schwarz failed to restore orchestral standards to pre @-@ war levels , and lacked Sargent 's box @-@ office appeal . Under Schwarz , BBC SO concerts other than the Proms drew poor houses ? as low as 29 per cent of capacity in the 1959 ? 60 season . The manager of the Royal Festival Hall , Ernest Bean , spoke of " an inherited aura of mediocrity about BBC concerts which keeps people away " . Schwarz 's five @-@ year contract was not renewed when it expired .

= = = 1960s to 1980s = = =

In 1959 William Glock was appointed controller of music for the BBC , and the profile and fortunes of the BBC SO began to rise . For the post of principal conductor Glock engaged Antal Doráti , who , in Heyworth 's judgment , raised standards of playing and brought new vigour to the programmes in

his four years in charge ( 1962 ? 66 ) . Doráti was convinced that the orchestra was stultified by concentrating on studio broadcasts , as it did except during the Proms season . He strove to free players from " slavery to the microphone " , and Glock promoted a regular series of concerts at the Festival Hall . The music critic Tom Sutcliffe later wrote that Doráti and his successors , Colin Davis ( 1967 ? 71 ) , Pierre Boulez ( 1971 ? 75 ) and Gennady Rozhdestvensky ( 1978 ? 81 ) had been partly successful in improving playing standards , but had not brought the orchestra up to its original level of distinction .

By 1962 Glock had persuaded the management of the BBC to increase the orchestra 's budget to allow for joint principals in the string sections , to attract top musicians who could play in the BBC SO without having to give up their solo or chamber careers . The following season he was able to engage joint principals for the wind section ; he recruited such star players as Jack Brymer and Terence MacDonagh , formerly members of Beecham 's celebrated " Royal Family " in the RPO . The problem remained that recruiting rank @-@ and @-@ file string players was difficult : although the BBC offered secure employment and a pension , it did not pay as well as its London rivals . After 1964 the BBC SO was the only one of the five London symphony orchestras that was not self @-@ governed , and some musicians felt that the BBC SO 's constitution as a body of salaried employees , with no say in the management or repertory of the orchestra , attracted an unadventurous type of player . A former member of the BBC SO said in 1979 @,@

I felt I was getting too secure ... [ in ] the BBC Symphony you can be a poor player , but if you 're on time and never moan at the conductor ? you 'll have no trouble ... I think the BBC Symphony lost some good young players because the management got their priorities wrong .

Glock was well known as a proponent of music of the Second Viennese School and their successors ; earlier in his career he had been dismissed as music critic of The Observer for such views as " no great composer has ever cared how ' pleasant ' his music sounds " . Under his administration , the BBC SO gave world premieres of works by composers including Roberto Gerhard , Peter Maxwell Davies and Michael Tippett , and UK premieres of works by , among others , Luciano Berio , Boulez and Edgard Varèse . The policy of commissioning works , and giving UK premieres of new compositions was continued under Glock 's successors . World or UK premieres in the 1970s included works by Elliott Carter , György Ligeti , Witold Lutosławski , Olivier Messiaen , Luigi Nono , Arvo Pärt and Karlheinz Stockhausen . BBC commissions premiered by the BBC SO in the 1980s included Alfred Schnittke 's Second Symphony , Harrison Birtwistle 's Earth Dances , and John Tavener 's The Protecting Veil .

Although Glock restored the orchestra 's reputation as Britain 's leading modern music ensemble , the balance of programming affected the players ' capacity in the mainstream repertoire . The principal horn , Alan Civil , recalled , " We did about eighty percent modern and twenty percent classical . The awful tragedy , for the orchestra , was that eventually we were not able to play the standard classics . We could sight @-@ read the most fearsome contemporary piece , but a Brahms symphony ? embarrassing ! " The bassoon player William Waterhouse who joined the BBC SO from the LSO found the BBC 's repertory refreshing , but the music making less impressive : " There were no potboilers , but also , I 'm afraid , no world @-@ ranking soloists either . "

John Pritchard was principal conductor from 1982 to 1989 . In The Times , Paul Griffiths wrote , " Sir John 's seven @-@ year period with the orchestra has been marked by growing orchestral confidence and many memorable performances . " Principal guest conductors in the 1970s and 1980s included Sir Charles Mackerras ( 1977 ? 79 ) , Michael Gielen ( 1978 ? 81 ) , Günter Wand , Mark Elder ( 1982 ? 85 ) and Péter Eötvös ( 1985 ? 88 ) .

= = = 1990s and 21st century = = =

Pritchard 's successor was Andrew Davis , who ( 1989 ? 2000 ) was the longest @-@ serving chief conductor since Boult . He was at the helm for what John Allison in The Times called " the valuable Barbican weekends that each January investigate another major but not fully understood 20th @-@ century composer . " Noting that modern music was central to the work of Davis and the orchestra , Allison added that under Davis the orchestra took part in " once @-@ in @-@ a @-@ lifetime

projects such as Anthony Payne 's completion of Elgar 's Third Symphony . " Such was Davis 's contribution to the orchestra that when he resigned he was appointed its first conductor laureate .

In 2000 , Davis was succeeded by Leonard Slatkin , whose relationship with the players was uneasy , and whose repertoire was not generally liked by the orchestra or the audiences ; he was felt to emphasise twentieth century American music at the expense of cutting @-@ edge modern works and the central European classics . When his departure was announced in 2004 the BBC had not found a replacement . There was speculation that the successor would be Jukka @-@ Pekka Saraste , Donald Runnicles or David Robertson , but the post went to Jiří Bělohlávek . He was well known to the players , having been the orchestra 's principal guest conductor in the 1990s . The classical repertoire was regarded as one of Bělohlávek 's strengths , but he had no reputation for conducting new works , which remained a core part of the orchestra 's remit . He welcomed the fact that the orchestra 's new principal guest conductor was David Robertson , a new @-@ music expert and a protégé of Boulez . The orchestra was seen by some as " a bolshie lot " and " grumpy " , but its relations with Bělohlávek were harmonious . Under Bělohlávek the orchestra won glowing reviews : The Times referred to its " superb musicians " , Michael Kennedy in The Sunday Telegraph referred to a " rich and opulent [ score ] magnificently played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra " under Bělohlávek , and another Telegraph critic praised the BBC SO 's " virtuoso form " .

Principal guest conductors during these years were Alexander Lazarev ( 1992 ? 95 ) , Bělohlávek ( 1995 ? 2000 ) and Jukka @-@ Pekka Saraste ( 2002 ? 05 ) . It was announced in 2012 that Sakari Oramo would take over as chief conductor in 2013 . In 2012 , Semyon Bychkov assumed a newly created position in the orchestra , the Günter Wand Conducting Chair .

= = = Function in the 21st century = = =

The BBC SO is the associate orchestra of the Barbican Centre in London , where it gives an annual season of concerts . These seasons include series of concerts devoted to individual modern composers , who have included John Cage , James MacMillan , Elliott Carter , Sofia Gubaidulina and Michael Tippett .

The orchestra remains the principal orchestra of the Proms , giving about a dozen concerts each season , including the first and last nights . Most of its concerts are broadcast on BBC Radio 3 , streamed online and available as podcasts for a month after broadcast , and a number are televised : the orchestra 's website claims that this gives the BBC " the highest broadcast profile of any UK orchestra " . The orchestra continues to make studio recordings for Radio 3 at the Maida Vale studios ; some recording sessions are free for the public to attend .

In common with other orchestras , the BBC SO engages in educational work . According to the orchestra 's website : " Among ongoing projects are the BBC SO Family Music Intro scheme , introducing families to live classical music , BBC SO Student Zone and the highly successful BBC SO Family Orchestra , alongside work in local schools . Total Immersion composer events also provide rich material for education work . "

In 2000 , the orchestra appointed its first associate composer , Mark @-@ Anthony Turnage . John Adams became the BBC Symphony Orchestra 's artist in association in June 2003 . The composer and conductor Oliver Knussen took up the post of artist @-@ in @-@ association in July 2009 . The orchestra 's commitment to new music continues . In 2013 , the music journalist Tom Service wrote , " I 've heard the BBC Symphony give concerts that I don 't think any other orchestra in the world could do as brilliantly ? That supreme virtuosity in new music makes them unique among London 's big orchestras . "

= = Recordings = =

From its first years the BBC SO was active in commercial recording studios . Under Boult it recorded a wide range of music from Bach to Mozart and Beethoven , Brahms , Wagner and Elgar . In the 1950s and 1960s it recorded a range of music with Sargent , mostly British but with several

Sibelius discs in addition . With Doráti the orchestra made recordings of works by Bartók , Gerhard and Messaien . Under Colin Davis it made its first opera sets : Mozart 's Idomeneo and The Marriage of Figaro , and Berlioz 's Benvenuto Cellini , as well as works by Beethoven and Tippett . Under Boulez the orchestra recorded mostly twentieth century music ? works by Bartók , Berg , Schoenberg and Boulez himself ? and also Berlioz . Andrew Davis has recorded extensively with the orchestra for the Teldec label and others . Under B?lohlávek the orchestra has recorded Martin? 's complete symphonies , and also his The Epic of Gilgamesh .

With guest conductors the BBC SO has recorded Elgar and Vaughan Williams under the composers , Beethoven under Toscanini , Bruno Walter and Barbirolli , and Sibelius under Beecham and Koussevitsky .