



[Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#)

by [Denis Joe](#) April 2011

One of the great things about living in the North West of the Britain is the proximity of two of the finest musical organisations in the country. For a long time it was thought that Manchester's Hallé was the oldest orchestra in Britain, but that honour belongs to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

In 1853, the Philharmonic orchestra was formed for "the pleasure of the moneyed merchant class" of Liverpool, subsequently attracting some of the greatest artists the musical world has had to offer. Guest conductors have included Wilhelm Furtwängler, Pierre Monteux, George Szell, Serge Koussevitzky, and Bruno Walter, the two latter being the greatest champions of contemporary music, including the likes of Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Alban Berg and Schönberg. Guest instrumentalists included Pablo Casals and a young Yehudi Menuhin. Guest singers included Nellie melba, Clara Butt and John McCormick.

Under Malcolm Sargent

In the early 1940s, the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Society (the orchestra did not gain 'royal' status until 1957) took their expertise into the community, initiating a programme of musical education in and around the City.

Under Sargent's leadership the orchestra were playing many more concerts, and there was a move to attract a wider audience. With this came the inevitable popular classics: lighter music. There were complaints at the time - that are still echoed today, by snobs (of which I am one) - who accused the orchestra of (to use the current parlance) 'selling out'.

Today the RLPO is recognised as one of the leading Orchestras in Europe. The outstanding succession of its conductors has meant that the orchestra deliver only the highest standards. This has also meant that there have been off-shoots. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir has three other choirs associated with it. Younger members sing in the Liverpool Philharmonic Training Choir and in 'Melody Makers' and two other choirs in the society are the Liverpool Philharmonic Gospel Choir and the Liverpool Philharmonic Community Choir (accepting anyone with a love of singing and without an audition).

'Ensemble 10/10' was formed by orchestra members in 1997 to perform works of contemporary music, and has performed a large number of world premières. Many of its concerts are played in The Cornerstone, Hope, at Everton - the second campus of Liverpool Hope University. And there is the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra who could count such luminaries as Simon Rattle, who was a percussionist, amongst their players.



My earliest encounter of the RLPO and Choir was the recordings of Vaughn Williams' Symphonies under the Emeritus of Vernon Handley, although he did record some with the London Philharmonic, I rate those that he recorded with the RLPO as the best of any recording.

In 1998 the orchestra became the first in Britain to own and run its own record label, known as RPLO Live. Two CDs that stand out for me are the recording of 'Rothschild's Violin' by Veniamin Fleishmanmin and 'The Gamblers' by Dmitri Shostakovich (AV2121) and 'Lovebytes', compositions by local composer Stephen Pratt (RL2107), The recording of Tchaikovsky's 'Manfred Symphony' (Naxos 8570568) was considered to be the 'Best of Category' for the Gramophone Award 2009.

Today, the RLPO maintain the high standard of musicianship of their predecessors, and under the conductor Vasily Petrenko the orchestra have gone from strength to strength. Each new season provides music lovers with a banquet, that includes 'The Wedding of Camacho' a little heard opera by Felix Mendelssohn, that continues the annual partnership with The European Opera Centre as well as James MacMillan's 'St John Passion', with the composer

conducting. For details of these and other concerts in the season click on this link for the [Liverpool Philharmonic](#)'s website.