

## ***Flourish with Fireworks, Op. 22***

OLIVER KNUSSSEN

B. June 12, 1952, Glasgow, Scotland

*Composed in 1988, revised in 1993. Premiered on September 15, 1988 by the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas; the revised version was premiered on August 25, 1993 by the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra conducted by the composer.*

*Scored for four flutes (fourth doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, four clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, four percussion (bass, tenor, and snare drums, spring coil, suspended cymbals, tam tam; triangle, vibraphone, whip, wood blocks), celesta (doubling keyboard glockenspiel), harp, and strings. (approx. 4 minutes).*

Oliver Knussen burst onto the British classical music scene as a precocious teenager – in April 1968, before his sixteenth birthday, he conducted the premiere of his own First Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra! Knussen's musical training was extensive: as a youth he studied with the British composer John Lambert, attended the Purcell School outside London, and came to the United States in the late 1960s to study with Gunther Schuller at the Tanglewood Music Festival. Like Schuller, Knussen has pursued a dual career as composer and conductor, and has been an advocate for contemporary music throughout the world. He became the Music Director for the London Sinfonietta in 1988, and in 2002 was made Conductor Laureate.

One of Knussen's longtime collaborators is the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, for whom *Flourish with Fireworks* was composed in 1988. Knussen wrote the work as a concert opener for Tilson Thomas's first season as Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. Both Knussen and Tilson Thomas are well-known interpreters of Stravinsky's music, and it is the Russian master's orchestral miniature *Fireworks* that serves as a model for *Flourish with Fireworks*. Knussen's piece seems to work on several different levels – the references to Stravinsky's *Fireworks* are on the whole subtle and fleeting, with the most obvious being the lines of perpetual motion in the flutes at the beginning and the distorted fanfare-like figures in the brass near the end of both works. Knussen also pays homage to the dedicatees of the work through musical monograms – similar to the famous B-A-C-H motive for Johann Sebastian Bach or Dmitri Shostakovich's musical signature DSCH. However, since pitch names do not include, L, O, M, or T, Knussen transcribes the initials LSO (London Symphony Orchestra) and MTT (Michael Tilson Thomas) in part by using solfège (La, sO, Mi, and Ti). The S is provided as by Shostakovich using the German "Es" abbreviation for E-flat. The resulting series of pitches (A–E-flat–G–E–B–B) are the first notes of the piece and are subjected to numerous transformations to create the harmonic language of this brilliant orchestral showpiece.

This is the Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiere of Knussen's *Flourish with Fireworks*.

*Program notes written by Tim Sullivan, doctoral candidate in Music Theory at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.*