

## THE SHOWMAN

Despite a lifetime of varied composition, **Howard Blake** can't shake the reputation of his best-known film score

Composer Howard Blake turns 70 this year – not that you'd know that by meeting him. One of the most prolific of living English composers, he has penned more than 60 scores for film and television as well as over 600 opus numbers to date. Yet as he readily admits, the long-lived success of *The Snowman*, an animated Channel 4 film for which he wrote the the soundtrack and its song *Walking in the Air*, has tended to overshadow his concert works. One might say his career has snowballed since then (excuse the pun). 'Its concert version continues to receive performances all over the place, while the stage version runs every year at Sadler's Wells,' he despairs. 'Fortunately, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) has agreed to help me redress the balance with a special birthday concert at Cadogan Hall.'

Taking place on 28 October, the concert will see Blake himself on the podium conducting the programme. 'I was determined to do something to mark my birthday,' he says. 'After the hope of landing a huge magazine spread quickly evaporated, I thought it would great to put on a concert – not that I'd ever done so before. I'd wanted to give my choral piece, *The Passion of Mary*, its London premiere and also wanted to have a new performance of my Piano Concerto, commissioned by the Philharmonia in 1991 to celebrate the 30th birthday of Diana, Princess of Wales.' As anticipated, the evening will open with a concert version of *The Snowman* narrated by actor Nigel Havers with *Walking in the Air* sung by Robert William Blake, the composer's nine-year-old son. 'Believe me, I did my darnedest to get it off the programme,' he teases. 'That aside, my son, a member of the Stockholm Boys Choir, can actually sing, so I thought it would be a nice touch to get him involved, as well as other friends. I just hope everybody turns up!'

Hopefully so, as the concert could prove to be the catalyst for others with Blake as conductor and/or pianist: 'I'd like to do a lot more concerts,' he reveals. 'I used to conduct my own movie scores, of course, yet I've never had the time to develop a career as both a pianist and a conductor.' That said, the former session pianist at the London's Abbey Road studios has 'dabbled in just



Howard Blake  
Interview: Tony Pinkham

about everything' previously. A Royal Academy of Music (RAM) graduate, Blake landed a job as a projectionist at the National Film Theatre during which time he directed, edited, acted in and wrote both the words and music for his own film. 'I once turned down an acting role opposite Ava Gardner, only to perform with all manner of groups playing pop, R&B, rock, jazz and whatever else.'

'I'd found my time at RAM very odd,' he reflects. 'Most people there had been to Chetham's or some conservatory. They knew the ropes and had played 100 concertos already. I'd never done anything and suffered from considerable English modesty!'

For now, Blake can rest easy, for other birthday celebrations include two CD releases on Naxos and Sony BMG, both released in October in advance of the RPO date. Further celebrations include – you've guessed it – another season of *The Snowman Stage Show* which has now been running for over a decade. 'There's even a celebrity DVD of the show in preparation,' Blake asserts. 'All in all, I suddenly feel wanted. Let's hope I can pull it all off!'

[www.howardblake.com](http://www.howardblake.com)  
Artist's website

**Roland Ott** is to become managing director of Festival Strings Lucerne, the Swiss chamber ensemble, in October. After more than eight years with the orchestra, Samuel Steinemann vacates the post. Born in Germany, Ott, 45, studied music in Dresden as an opera and concert singer before becoming an ensemble member of the Berlin State Opera. He later moved into international music management as director and jury member of song competitions as well as a marketing and project manager with Sony Classical and Universal Music. He has worked as a key member of Deutsche Grammophon's DVD division since 1999.

**Jack Schantz** has announced he will step down as artistic director of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra to pursue other artistic and personal interests. He will remain with the ensemble throughout this season, having spent 15 years with the group. Schantz said he would like to see the CJO 'play a more prominent role on the national and international level.'

The **Yale School of Music (YMS)** has added to its teaching roster with the appointments of composers David Lang (*below*) and Christopher Theofanidis. Both are YMS graduates and will teach students studying on YMS' composition programme. They will teach courses and participate in performances of their works. Mezzo Jana Baty (assistant professor of voice), Richard Holzer (associate professor of music history), Tiffany Kuo (assistant professor of hearing) and Michael Roylance (tuba lecturer) also join this year.



Photo: © Peter Serling  
Lang

**Stephen Baker**, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra's (BPO) associate executive director, has been appointed vice president of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Baker will focus on the Seattle orchestra's strategic planning process while also directing its marketing, promotional, PR and communications efforts 'with the goal of increasing subscriptions and single-ticket sales.' He leaves the BPO after four years.

**Robert Birman** has been named chief operating officer at the Louisville Orchestra. The percussionist and former president of

the board of the Association of California Symphony Orchestras takes up his post on 6 October. Since 2001 he has served as the executive director of the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra in San Francisco, before which he was chief executive of the Santa Barbara Symphony and CEO of the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston.

**Jamie Engen** has stepped down as chief executive of Loud Technologies, one of the world's largest dedicated pro audio and music products companies, after a 10-year tenure. Rodney Olson has since been appointed

the company's chairman and CEO. The appointment follows the departure of chief financial officer Gerald Ng in May. Olson's appointment follows that of James Stewart as the organisation's chief operating officer in July and David Olson as chief financial officer last month.

The **Jacksonville Symphony Association** has appointed a new executive director. Stacy Ridenour, formerly executive director of the Kalamazoo Symphony, will take up the post in October. She leaves the KSO after a 10-year tenure and succeeds Alan Hopper, who

resigned in March. The group has also elected Chris Doerr as chair-elect for its board of directors. Doerr, the executive VP and chief financial officer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Inc, will begin his new term in July 2009.

**Mark Lundberg**, the American opera singer, has died after a brief illness at the age of 50. Lundberg sang bass and baritone for many years before making the transition to more dramatic tenor roles. He was to perform the role of Samson in *Samson et Dalila* with the Pittsburgh Opera later this year.

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