

## **Why do people wave flags at the Last Night of the Proms? Katie Derham discusses the subject with Dr. Leanne Langley**

**Katie Derham:** So Leanne, why do Prommers wave flags at the Last Night of the Proms? Is this something of a recent phenomenon?

**Dr. Leanne Langley:** I believe it dates probably from the 1950s, rather than way back when the Proms began. Although we do know that in World War One, August 1914, flags began to be hung over the organ in the Queen's Hall, to represent the countries that were fighting: the Allies. By 1918 there were eight flags, but nobody was waving them, it wasn't a jolly occasion. The point about waving flags at the Last Night is happiness, jollity, the end of a long season where everyone's had a really great time. And there's a music key to it as well which is a certain sequence of patriotic songs that began to be instilled in Prommers, and in the expectations of television viewers from the 1950s. It really comes together particularly clearly with Malcolm Sargent from about 1953-54 because television licence fee money was pouring in; television audiences expected to see a crowd having fun, particularly with the sequence of music that we all know and love as a patriotic sequence. The Sea Songs whip up an audience really well and it always gets people, perhaps, over-excited – so flags are part of that.