# London Philharmónic Orchestra

2023/24 concert season at the Southbank Centre

# Free concert programme



# London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jebsen Principal Guest Conductor Karina Canellakis Conductor Emeritus Vladimir Jurowski KBE Patron HRH The Duke of Kent KG Artistic Director Elena Dubinets Chief Executive David Burke Leader Pieter Schoeman supported by Neil Westreich

### Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Wednesday 20 March 2024 | 7.30pm

## La Mer

### Prokofiev

Symphony No. 1 (Classical) (13')

### R Strauss Burleske (19')

Interval (20')

Sibelius The Oceanides (10')

Debussy La mer (23')

Dima Slobodeniouk conductor

Martin Helmchen piano

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The timings shown are not precise and are given only as a guide. Concert presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra

## Welcome

## LPO news

### Welcome to the Southbank Centre

We're the largest arts centre in the UK and one of the nation's top visitor attractions, showcasing the world's most exciting artists at our venues in the heart of London. We're here to present great cultural experiences that bring people together, and open up the arts to everyone.

The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Hayward Gallery, National Poetry Library and Arts Council Collection. We're one of London's favourite meeting spots, with lots of free events and places to relax, eat and shop next to the Thames.

We hope you enjoy your visit. If you need any information or help, please ask a member of staff. You can also write to us at Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX, or email hello@southbankcentre.co.uk

Subscribers to our email updates are the first to hear about new events, offers and competitions. Just head to our website to sign up.

### Drinks

You are welcome to bring drinks from the venue's bars and cafés into the Royal Festival Hall to enjoy during tonight's concert. Please be considerate to fellow audience members by keeping noise during the concert to a minimum, and please take your glasses with you for recycling afterwards. Thank you.

### Enjoyed tonight's concert?

Help us to share the wonder of the LPO by making a donation today. Use the QR code to donate via the LPO website, or visit **Ipo.org.uk/donate**. Thank you.



### LPO 2024/25 season

Keep an eye out for details of our 2024/25 concert season, which we'll be announcing on Tuesday 16 April.

Did you know that Friends of the LPO enjoy priority booking for all our London concerts? LPO Friends receive our new season brochure ahead of the general public, and the priority booking period for Friends will open on Wednesday 17 April.



To find out more about LPO Friends and the other benefits on offer, including exclusive invitations to rehearsals, special events and a dedicated private bar at our London concerts, visit **Ipo.org.uk/friends** 

### Congratulations to Vladimir!



At the end of February, LPO Conductor Emeritus Vladimir Jurowski was appointed an Honorary Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) by His Majesty King Charles III, in recognition of his services to music and the arts.

Vladimir became the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Conductor Emeritus in September 2021, following 14 years as Principal Conductor, during which his creative energy and artistic rigour were central to the Orchestra's success. We're looking forward to next month when we once again join forces with Vladimir for *Götterdämmerung*, the long-awaited finale of his Wagner *Ring* Cycle, which brings our 2023/24 Royal Festival Hall season to a close on Saturday 27 April. Tickets are available at **Ipo.org.uk** 

## On stage tonight

### **First Violins**

Pieter Schoeman\* Leader Chair supported by Neil Westreich Alice Ivy-Pemberton Co-Leader Kate Oswin Chair supported by Eric Tomsett Minn Maioe Thomas Eisner Chair supported by Ryze Power Cassandra Hamilton Yang Zhang Martin Höhmann Katalin Varnagy Chair supported by Sonja Drexler Elizaveta Tyun Nilufar Alimaksumova Katherine Waller Ronald Long Alice Apreda Howell Jamie Hutchinson Svlvain Vasseur

### Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal Emma Oldfield Co-Principal Molly Cockburn Helena Smart Nynke Hijlkema Kate Birchall Joseph Maher Fiona Higham Chair supported by David & Yi Bucklev Ashley Stevens Sioni Williams Claudia Tarrant-Matthews Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra Sarah Thornett Kate Cole Paula Clifton-Everest

### Violas

James Heron Guest Principal Martin Wray Laura Vallejo Katharine Leek Benedetto Pollani Lucia Ortiz Sauco Michelle Bruil Alistair Scahill Kate De Campos Toby Warr Stanislav Popov Raquel López Bolívar

### Cellos

Kristina Blaumane Principal Chair supported by Bianca & Stuart Roden Waynne Kwon David Lale Hee Yeon Cho Francis Bucknall Nina Kiva Tom Roff Helen Thomas Sibylle Hentschel Iain Ward Pedro Silva Auriol Evans

### Double Basses

Sebastian Pennar Principal George Peniston Lowri Estell Colin Paris Adam Wynter Emma Prince Catherine Ricketts Thea Sayer

#### Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal Daniel Shao

### Piccolo

Stewart Mcllwham\* Principal Oboes lan Hardwick\* Principal Alice Munday

#### Cor Anglais Max Spiers

#### Clarinets Benjamin Mellefont\* Principal Chair supported by Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton Thomas Watmough Chair supported by Roger Greenwood

Bass Clarinet Paul Richards\* Principal

### Bassoons

Guylaine Eckersley Guest Principal Patrick Bolton Emily Newman

### Contrabassoon

### Horns

John Ryan\* Principal Annemarie Federle Principal Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE Martin Hobbs Mark Vines Co-Principal Gareth Mollison

### Trumpets

Paul Beniston\* Principal Tom Nielsen Co-Principal Anne McAneney\* Tom Watts

### Cornets

Tom Nielsen David Hilton

### Trombones

Mark Templeton\* Principal Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton David Whitehouse

### **Bass Trombone**

Lyndon Meredith Principal

### Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis\* Principal

### Timpani

Simon Carrington\* Principal Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE Jeremy Cornes

### Percussion

Andrew Barclay\* Principal Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins Karen Hutt Chair supported by Mr B C Fairhall Jeremy Cornes

### Harps

Rachel Masters Principal Tamara Young

\*Professor at a London conservatoire

#### The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose players are not present at this concert:

Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave Dr Barry Grimaldi Sir Simon Robey

## London Philharmonic Orchestra



Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has been celebrated as one of the world's great orchestras since Sir Thomas Beecham founded it in 1932. With every performance we aim to bring wonder to the modern world and cement our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is here at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You'll also find us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour throughout the UK and internationally, performing to sell-out audiences worldwide. Each summer we're resident at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

### Sharing the wonder

You'll find us online, on streaming platforms, on social media and through our broadcast partnership with Marquee TV. During the pandemic period we launched 'LPOnline': over 100 videos of performances, insights and introductions to playlists, which led to us being named runner-up in the Digital Classical Music Awards 2020. During 2023/24 we're once again working with Marquee TV to broadcast selected live concerts, so you can share or relive the wonder from your own living room.

### Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included some of the greatest historic names like Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2021 Edward Gardner became our 13th Principal Conductor, taking the Orchestra into its tenth decade. Vladimir Jurowski became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his impact as Principal Conductor from 2007–21. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor and Tania León our Composer-in-Residence.

### Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems at every medal ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, our iconic recording with Pavarotti that made *Nessun Dorma* a global football anthem, or closing the flotilla at The Queen's Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant. And you'll almost certainly have heard us on the soundtracks for major films including *The Lord of the Rings*.

We also release live, studio and archive recordings on our own label, and are one of the world's moststreamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month.

### Pieter Schoeman Leader

### Next generations

There's nothing we love more than seeing the joy of children and families enjoying their first musical moments, and we're passionate about equipping schools and teachers through schools' concerts, resources and training. Reflecting our values of collaboration and inclusivity, our OrchLab and Open Sound Ensemble projects offer music-making opportunities for adults and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Our LPO Junior Artists programme is leading the way in creating pathways into the profession for young artists from under-represented communities, and our LPO Young Composers and Foyle Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. We also recently launched the LPO Conducting Fellowship, supporting the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds currently under-represented in the profession.

### Looking forward

The centrepiece of our 2023/24 season is our spring 2024 festival *The Music in You*. Reflecting our adventurous spirit, the festival embraces all kinds of expression – dance, music theatre, and audience participation. We'll collaborate with artists from across the creative spectrum, and give premieres by composers including Tania León, Julian Joseph, Daniel Kidane, Victoria Vita Polevá, Luís Tinoco and John Williams.

Rising stars making their debuts with us in 2023/24 include conductors Tianyi Lu, Oksana Lyniv, Jonathon Heyward and Natalia Ponomarchuk, accordionist João Barradas and organist Anna Lapwood. We also present the long-awaited conclusion of Conductor Emeritus Vladimir Jurowski's Wagner *Ring* Cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, and, as well as our titled conductors Edward Gardner and Karina Canellakis, we welcome back classical stars including Anne-Sophie Mutter, Robin Ticciati, Christian Tetzlaff and Danielle de Niese.





Pieter Schoeman was appointed Leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, having previously been Co-Leader since 2002. He is also a Professor of Violin at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance.

Pieter has performed worldwide as a soloist and recitalist in such famous halls as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Moscow's Rachmaninov Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. As a chamber musician he regularly appears at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall. His chamber music partners have included Anne-Sophie Mutter, Veronika Eberle, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Boris Garlitsky, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Martin Helmchen and Julia Fischer.

Pieter has performed numerous times as a soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Highlights have included an appearance as both conductor and soloist in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* at the Royal Festival Hall, the Brahms Double Concerto with Kristina Blaumane, Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2, and the Britten Double Concerto with Alexander Zemtsov, which was recorded and released on the LPO Label to great critical acclaim.

Pieter has appeared as Guest Leader with the BBC, Barcelona, Bordeaux, Lyon and Baltimore symphony orchestras; the Rotterdam and BBC Philharmonic orchestras; and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Pieter's chair in the LPO is generously supported by Neil Westreich.

# Dima Slobodeniouk



Praised by musicians and audiences alike for his exhilarating approach and energetic leadership, Dima Slobodeniouk has become one of the most sought-after conductors of his generation. He works with the world's foremost orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, London Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and NHK Symphony orchestras. He last appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in March/April 2023, when he conducted a programme of works by Tania León, Mendelssohn and Sibelius at the Royal Festival Hall and Brighton Dome.

In the 2023/24 season Dima Slobodeniouk makes debuts with the National Symphony Orchestra Washington and Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, as well as returning to the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie and Berlin Radio Symphony orchestras. He also appears with the Vienna Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic orchestras, and makes a special return to the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, where he was Music Director until 2022. Further afield, he opened the 2023/24 season with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Tanglewood, and returns to the orchestra later in the season. Earlier this month he appeared with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. In January this year Dima Slobodeniouk made his debut at the Bavarian State Opera, where he conducted a revival of Calixto Bieito's production of Boris Godunov.

Soloists with whom Dima Slobodeniouk has worked include Leif Ove Andsnes, Emanuel Ax, Khatia Buniatishvili, Seong-Jin Cho, Isabelle Faust, Kirill Gerstein, Barbara Hannigan, Håkan Hardenberger, Martin Helmchen, Alexandre Kantorow, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Beatrice Rana, Baiba Skride, Yuja Wang and Frank Peter Zimmermann.

Known for his musical expertise and interpretive depth, Dima Slobodeniouk is also an acclaimed recording artist. Recent notable recordings include Esa-Pekka Salonen's Cello Concerto with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and Nicolas Altstaedt on Alpha, for which he received an ICMA Award. On the BIS label, he has released an album of music inspired by the Finnish folk epic, the *Kalevala*. Other releases on this label include works by Kalevi Aho with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, which won the 2018 *BBC Music Magazine* Award, and a further disc of Aho's *Sieidi* and his Fifth Symphony. For the Ondine label, he has recorded works by Perttu Haapanen and Lotta Wennäkoski with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Dima Slobodeniouk studied with the Ukrainian violinist Olga Parkhomenko at Helsinki's Sibelius Academy, graduating in 2001. It was there that he also took up conducting studies with Leif Segerstam, Jorma Panula and Atso Almila. From 2016–21 he was Principal Conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, as well as Artistic Director of the Sibelius Festival. He was Music Director of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia from 2013–22, with whom he built an extensive and highly acclaimed library of live concert recordings. A passionate believer in widening opportunity, whilst at the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia Dima also started a conducting initiative, giving aspiring conductors podium time with a professional orchestra and the opportunity to work with him on selected repertoire.

### Martin Helmchen piano



© Giorgia Bertazzi

Martin Helmchen is one of the most sought-after pianists and has been performing on the world's most important stages for decades. The originality and intensity of his interpretations, which he presents with impressive tonal sensitivity and technical finesse, particularly distinguish him as a musician. In 2020 he was awarded a prestigious Gramophone Classical Music Award for his recording of Beethoven's complete piano concertos with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Andrew Manze, released by Alpha Classics. In 2022 he received an ICMA Award.

Martin Helmchen has appeared as a soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra on several occasions, including a tour of Germany in 2014 with then-Principal Conductor Vladimir Jurowski. He is also the soloist on the LPO Label recording of Shostakovich's Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 and Piano Quintet in G minor, recorded in 2009/10 with an ensemble of LPO members (LPO-0053).

Martin's 2023/24 season began in August with his long-awaited BBC Proms debut, in which he performed Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo. Further concerts this season take him to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Philharmonia Zürich, Tonkünstler-Orchester, Kammerakademie Potsdam and hr-Sinfonieorchester. He will also perform with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie in Bremen, as well as a touring project in Belgium. Last month he embarked on a piano trio tour with his wife, the cellist Marie-Elisabeth Hecker, and violinist Augustin Hadelich. As a soloist Martin has performed with renowned orchestras including the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Staatskapelle Dresden, Tonhalle Zurich, NDR Elbphilharmonie, Philharmonia, Vienna Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, New York Philharmonic and Cleveland orchestras, and the Orchestre de Paris. He works regularly with conductors such as Herbert Blomstedt, Manfred Honeck, Jakub Hrůša, Paavo Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Klaus Mäkelä, Andrew Manze, Andris Nelsons, Sakari Oramo, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Michael Sanderling, Christoph von Dohnányi, Kazuki Yamada and David Zinman.

Chamber music has a special significance for Martin – a passion initially ignited by the Russian cellist Boris Pergamenschikow. His close chamber partners include Marie-Elisabeth Hecker, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Julian Prégardien, Augustin Hadelich, Antje Weithaas and Carolin Widmann. With Marie-Elisabeth Hecker, Martin commissioned a double concerto for cello and piano from York Höller, which they premiered at the Ruhr Piano Festival in June 2022.

Martin Helmchen is an exclusive artist with Alpha Classics. His most recent release was the highly acclaimed album 'Novelletten und Gesänge der Frühe' in 2022, featuring piano works by Robert Schumann. 2021 saw the release of his recording of Weber's *Konzertstück* with the Konzerthausorchester Berlin under Christoph Eschenbach. Past releases have included Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*, and duo recordings with Marie-Elisabeth Hecker including works by Brahms and Schubert.

Born in Berlin in 1982 and a former student of Galina Iwanzowa, Martin Helmchen continued his studies with Arie Vardi at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien in Hannover. Other mentors include William Grant Naboré and Alfred Brendel. His career gained incredible momentum when he won the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in 2001. Since 2010 Martin Helmchen has been an Associate Professor of Chamber Music at the Kronberg Academy.

### Sergei Prokofiev 1891-1953 Symphony No. 1 in D (Classical) 1916-17

1 Allegro 2 Larghetto 3 Gavotta: Non troppo allegro 4 Finale: Molto vivace

It can be hard to pin down Prokofiev, a man whose creative personality was shaped more by his easy native talent than artistic credos. In his twenties he was known as one of Russia's great *enfants terribles*, an iconoclast who loved to shock with aggressive rhythms and fierce dissonances; yet what piece could be more lyrically friendly and easy on the ear than his First Symphony, composed in 1916–17, to which he gave the reassuring title of 'Classical'?

The work's origins lie with Prokofiev's love and respect for Haydn, whose music he had got to know well as a conducting student. 'It seemed to me', he wrote, 'that had Haydn lived to our day he would have retained his own style while accepting something of the new at the same time. That was the kind of symphony I wanted to write: a symphony in classical style.'

The First can certainly be described as that, not only in its small orchestra and four-movement format of *Allegro* – slow movement – dance movement – finale, but also in its internal formal procedures; the outer movements are both in sonata form. Yet what is striking here is that there is no real sense of pastiche: this is a work that predates the neo-classical movement of the inter-war period by some years, and its relaxed good humour suggests more an act of release than intellectual effort. That it is also so recognisably the work of Prokofiev would seem to confirm how naturally the style came to him. The first movement has the airy athleticism of one of Prokofiev's ballet scores, boldly striding one moment, lightfooted and delicate the next. The rocking bassoon accompaniment to the quiet second theme seems a particularly Haydnesque inspiration. It is followed by an exquisitely wrought Larghetto. While the gently unwinding main theme may be more a product of Prokofiev's imagination than Haydn's, the way in which chugging repeated notes power the climax of the central section and then stay on to form a new accompaniment to the main theme's return brings the flavour of early Beethoven. Next comes a brief Gavotte, an 18th-century dance-type, which Prokofiev parodies but keeps on the right side of the grotesque; the gavotte's rustic origins are also hinted at in a central 'pipe and drone' section. The finale is full of energy and light, and like the first movement has about it the excited air of a ballet scene - and a singularly joyous one at that.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

### **Richard Strauss**

1864-1949

### Burleske

1885-86

### Martin Helmchen piano



It is probable that not many people think of Strauss as a pianist, but in fact he was a highly accomplished one, despite a lack of formal conservatoire training. When, at the age of 21, he was surprisingly handed the opportunity to work as assistant conductor to Hans von Bülow at the Meiningen court orchestra, he also found himself getting opportunities as a piano soloist, and on one occasion performed Mozart's C minor Concerto with new cadenzas of his own. Bülow himself was not only the foremost conductor of the day, but also one of the 19th century's greatest pianistic lions, and it may well be this that encouraged Strauss to compose in 1885–86 a *Scherzo* for piano and orchestra. Alas, Bülow declared it 'unplayable' and Strauss, looking at it again, concluded for himself that it was 'utter nonsense' and put it aside.

Four years later he had moved on from Meiningen and, more importantly, reached higher in the ranks of musical celebrity thanks to his growing reputation as a conductor and the triumphant premiere in January 1890 of the tone-poem *Don Juan*. Now another virtuoso pianist, Eugen d'Albert, asked to see the *Scherzo*, and this time the reaction was enthusiastic. Retitled *Burleske*, the work was premiered by d'Albert and Strauss at a concert in Eisenach on 21 June 1890.

It is not unplayable, of course, and while Strauss himself was not always convinced of its quality, his only composition for piano and orchestra has gained in popularity as the years have passed. The piano-writing is Brahmsian almost to the point of parody, but the abiding impressions are of wit, sparkle and a touch of grotesquerie. It opens in the most unexpected way with a four-bar theme announced quietly by the timpani, followed soon after by braying laughs from orchestra and piano, and when this sequence is recapitulated later on Strauss teasingly re-orders its elements. Contrast is provided by slower waltz-like episodes at the heart of the work and again in the long coda, but even here playfulness is never far away.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

Interval – 20 minutes An announcement will be made five minutes before the end of the interval.

### Jean Sibelius 1865-1957 The Oceanides, Op. 73 1914

In 1905 the Finnish painter Akeseli Gallen-Kallela produced *Aallottaret*, a depiction of the seductive feminine life-forces of the ocean in radiant pinks and golds. The following decade, Gallen-Kallela's friend Jean Sibelius set about writing an orchestral depiction of the same figures and context in response to a commission from a festival in Norfolk, Connecticut. Sibelius called his piece *The Oceanides*.

As the composer sailed to America in 1914 for the work's premiere – perhaps as the Atlantic heaved underneath his steamer – he learned new things about the ocean and re-wrote the piece almost entirely. It became shorter, it became more severe, but it also became more typical of 1910s Sibelius in its concurrent brevity and breadth. 'I seem to be finding myself more and more,' Sibelius wrote to his wife from the ship.

Musicologist Timo Virtanen has described the form of the piece in simple metaphorical terms. '*The Oceanides* can be seen as a single wave' he writes, 'slowly gathering force, foam forming on its crest and, on reaching its destination, quickly abating and sweeping the sand on the shore.' Virtanen expands on that, specifically describing how Sibelius merges the 'foreground' of the piece with its 'background'. The result is the feeling of two concurrent musical planes, completely entwined but of different meta-speeds, something we also hear in the composer's late symphonies.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

Aallottaret by Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931)





Jean Sibelius Photo courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

### **Claude Debussy**

1862-1918

### La mer

1905

### 1 De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From Dawn to Noon on the Sea) 2 Jeux de vagues (Play of Waves) 3 Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue between the Wind and the Sea)

Claude Debussy's re-imagining of musical purpose and orchestral potential came to the fore in his 1893 depiction of a woodland faun's erotic fantasies, the Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune. In Debussy's eyes, Romanticism had been wrung for everything it was worth by a succession of composers from Beethoven to Wagner - from the former's compelling command to the sonic ecstasy of the latter's never-resolving harmonies. In the musical 'Impressionism' of the Prélude (the composer disliked the term, but it's useful to an extent), Debussy discovered an orchestral language of implication. Impressionist painters had used short, builtup brush strokes and multiple colours in creating the visual equivalent - leaving explicit details to the imagination of the observer while conjuring a new sense of light and movement. Debussy's orchestra, too, became a medium of exotic beauty and colour; through his move away from traditional harmonic 'preparation' and 'resolution', his superimposition of short motifs and his emphasis on passing, shifting textures, Debussy created a language of suggestion - of free thought and mood evocation rather than narrative angst and forthright explanation.

Fast forward 12 years, and Debussy was working on the major orchestral work that is often seen as the *Prélude's* sister: *La mer* ('The Sea'). By this time, though, fate was dealing the composer a rather different hand to the carefree but determined ambition he'd experienced when writing the *Prélude*. The composer had walked away from his life – leaving his wife for that of a wealthy banker (Emma Bardac) and abandoning the family home in Paris. In so doing he lost almost all of his friends. He travelled to England in search of emotional respite, and it was in an Eastbourne hotel, overlooking the English Channel, that he put the finishing touches to *La mer*.

When La mer was first performed in Paris on 15 October 1905 it slightly wrong-footed both the paying audience and the critics who were mapping the composer's style. From the title of the piece – and those of its three movements - many expected a straightforwardly evocative 'sea' piece in the vein of the Grotto Scene from Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande or 'Sirènes' from his Nocturnes. What they got wasn't a programmatic tone-poem, but rather a full advancing of the musical principles suggested by the Prélude; the three 'symphonic sketches' contain a series of complex episodes and superimposed patterns that encompass a huge descriptive range. The focus, even more than before, is on texture: 'From Dawn to Noon on the Sea' sees instruments suggesting a collage of fragmentary ideas but the orchestra as a whole moving together tidally through visions of the sea at different times of day ('I particularly liked the bit at guarter to eleven' proffered the biting wit of Erik Satie).

While beautiful fragmentary ideas emerge from the horn and oboe (among others) in 'Play of Waves', the movement is one of rhythmic irregularity without much in the way of standard harmonic progression or melodic line. Perhaps the most Impressionistic movement of the three, this world of surface spray and isolated happenings is notably evocative of the seascapes of the Impressionist painters. In the wild, elemental and mysterious exchanges of the 'Dialogue between the Wind and the Sea' (this title itself could be a Turner homage), a soaring melodic idea tries to break from the surface, but is drowned by the power of the colliding elements and a final oceanic surge from the orchestra – a forthright break for freedom from Debussy, perhaps, against the waves of criticism levied at him over the Emma Bardac affair.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

### Recommended recordings of tonight's works by Laurie Watt

Prokofiev: Symphony No. 1 (Classical) Royal Scottish National Orchestra | Thomas Søndergård (Linn) or London Philharmonic Orchestra | Kurt Masur (Teldec, to download)

#### R Strauss: Burleske

Bertrand Chamayou | Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia | Antonio Pappano

#### Sibelius: The Oceanides

London Philharmonic Orchestra | Adrian Boult (Celeste) or Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra | Edward Gardner (Chandos) or Lahti Symphony Orchestra | Osmo Vänskä (BIS)

**Debussy: La mer** Berlin Philharmonic | Herbert von Karajan (Deutsche Grammophon)

### We'd love to hear from you

We hope you enjoy tonight's concert. Could you spare a few moments afterwards to complete a short survey about your experience? Your feedback is invaluable to us and will help to shape our future plans.



and will help to shape our future plans.

Just scan the QR code to begin the survey. Thank you!

## London **Philharmónic** Orchestra

Next concerts at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

### ROMEO AND JULIET Friday 22 March 2024 7.30pm

Tchaikovsky Romeo and Juliet (Fantasy Overture) Mozart Violin Concerto No. 3 Prokofiev Romeo and Juliet (*excerpts*)

> Gemma New conductor Randall Goosby violin

### JÄRVI CONDUCTS BRUCKNER

Saturday 6 April 2024 | 7.30pm

Stravinsky Violin Concerto Bruckner Symphony No. 7

Paavo Järvi conductor Leila Josefowicz violin

### SEONG-JIN CHO PLAYS BEETHOVEN Wednesday 10 April 2024 7.30pm

Wagner Prelude from Parsifal Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 4 Tippett Symphony No. 2

Edward Gardner conductor Seong-Jin Cho piano

## THE PLANETS

Friday 12 April 2024 | 7.30pm

Dvořák Cello Concerto Holst The Planets

Edward Gardner conductor Nicolas Altstaedt cello London Youth Choir

LPO.ORG.UK

## Sound Futures donors

We are grateful to the following donors for their generous contributions to our **Sound Futures** campaign. Thanks to their support, we successfully raised £1 million by 30 April 2015 which has now been matched pound for pound by Arts Council England through a Catalyst Endowment grant. This has enabled us to create a £2 million endowment fund supporting special artistic projects, creative programming and education work with key venue partners including our Southbank Centre home. Supporters listed below donated £500 or over. For a full list of those who have given to this campaign please visit **Ipo.org.uk/soundfutures**.

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