
Welcome

A very warm welcome, especially if this is your first ever Philharmonia concert – we hope it will be the first of many.

Bruce Liu first played with us in 2022, and the equivalent of almost 100 Royal Festival Halls full of listeners have since enjoyed that performance on our YouTube channel. Filmed broadcast, recorded and streamed performances are a game-changer for many music lovers who can't make it to concerts for a host of reasons. But I'm sure most would agree that there's nothing that compares to hearing great music live – it's a privilege for us to share that experience with you today.

If you'd like to get to know the Philharmonia better, and support our mission to bring the highest quality music-making to the widest possible audience, please consider becoming a Friend. Our Friends enjoy open rehearsals, priority booking, and opportunities to meet our players. We'd love to welcome you to the Philharmonia family.

With my best wishes,



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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thorben".

Thorben Dittes
Chief Executive

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

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This afternoon's concert

Bruce Liu plays Rachmaninov

Sunday 7 April 2024, 3pm

Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Santtu-Matias Rouvali – conductor

Bruce Liu – piano

RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 2 (33 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 10 (53 mins)

This performance finishes at
approximately 5pm.

This concert is supported by an anonymous benefactor.

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Programme notes

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 – 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18 (1900)
(33 mins)

Moderato

Adagio sostenuto

Allegro scherzando

By all accounts, Sergei Rachmaninov was prone to bouts of depression even before he was forced into permanent exile from his beloved Russia in 1917. Rachmaninov was a melancholic nostalgic at the best of times, but those feelings moved into the terrain of something more medically troubling when triggered by personal failures and crises.

One of the biggest of these occurred in March 1897, when Rachmaninov cowered in a St Petersburg concert hall stairwell as an orchestra fudged its way through his first symphony with a drunk conductor on the podium. What should have been the composer's breakthrough concert proved a fiasco. Rachmaninov believed his career as a composer was over before it had started.

All this plunged Rachmaninov into a deep depression and a writer's block. 'A paralyzing apathy possessed me...I found no pleasure in anything,' he recalled in his memoirs. Looking for any way to lift him out of the mire, the composer's relatives suggested he consult the psychiatrist Dr Nikolai Dahl, who happened to be a decent amateur musician and family friend.

It worked. After Dahl's course of hypnotherapy, Rachmaninov was not only writing again, but was freshly inspired. The first fruit of this new lease of creative life was also the work that

remains, probably, the composer's most famous and beloved: the Piano Concerto No 2. It was dedicated, of course, to Dahl.

Three years after the failure of his symphony, the first performance of the complete concerto was a triumph. It took place in Moscow on 14 October 1901 with the composer at the piano. Rachmaninov was a virtuoso pianist with huge hands whose playing career jostled with his composing one for prominence. Any performance from him was bound to be captivating; this one, in his first new work for years, was apparently rather more.

Rachmaninov's Second Concerto is emblematic of the impassioned sweep, harmonic richness, melodic warmth and orchestral snap-and-crackle that underpin the composer's enduring popularity. It provides an early example of his ability to invest melody and rhythm with an elastic quality, as if both are under the influence of the fluctuating human emotions we all know so well.

Hardly surprising, then, that bits of this concerto have been so extensively borrowed by film directors, songwriters and composers down the years. But there's more than lyricism in the score. Those great, expansive, embracing melodies are set in relief by orchestral brutality and the sense of a sardonic undertow. Never is the interaction between piano and orchestra not fascinating, colourful and varied - infused with an irresistible push-and-pull.

We hear that right from the start, as the soloist's series of nine clangorous chords – one of the composer's first musical references to the sound of bells that influenced much of his later music – induces a chant-like melody in the orchestra. For much of the 'moderately' paced opening

movement, the piano provides little more than accompaniment and decoration for the orchestra, until the soloist initiates a yearning secondary melody (echoed on a pining French horn) and then, as an aside, an invigorating march.

The special atmosphere of the concerto's slow movement was co-opted by David Lean for the movie *Brief Encounter*. Flute and clarinet establish a mood of total enchantment through which the piano sings a nocturnal melody. Despite its minor key footing, the final movement is high octane in the extreme. Two melodies vie for supremacy, the more famous of them introduced by violas and a solo oboe, as the mood veers from restless agitation to rhapsodic ecstasy. It's the piano that proves ultimately victorious, using a brief cadenza to spring the music into the brilliance of C major - a vision, perhaps, of Rachmaninov's own personal victory.

Interval (20 mins)



Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975)

Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93 (1953)
(57 mins)

Moderato

Allegro

Allegretto – Largo

Andante – Allegro

Rachmaninov knew he couldn't return to Russia after the Revolution of 1917. Things were rather different for Dmitri Shostakovich, whose life and music are defined by his complicated relationship with the Soviet authorities, who kept a watchful eye over his every creative move. Composers under Stalin were supposed to write music that chimed with the dictator's view of the world. For an artist like Shostakovich who naturally opposed Stalin's oppression and killing, that made for a living hell.

Shostakovich experienced two major run-ins with Stalin. The first came in 1936, when the dictator decided to attend the composer's satirical opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* and was enraged by what he decreed 'muddle instead of music' – an affront to the regime's 'good vibes only' insistence that music be uplifting, aggrandizing and easily understandable.

The next altercation, in 1948, was far worse. Following the defeat of the Nazis three years earlier, Shostakovich got to work on a Ninth Symphony that Stalin expected to be a hymn of praise directed at himself, along the lines of Beethoven's Ninth. Instead, the composer delivered an introverted work that Stalin took as a direct insult. The score was promptly banned and Shostakovich didn't get near another

symphony for five years.

In 1953, Stalin died. Immediately, the situation for artists was easier. Within months Shostakovich had formally started work on his next symphony - the Tenth. Some of the music, allegedly, existed already. The pianist Tatyana Nikoleava has suggested parts of the work were written in 1951, at the same time as Shostakovich's austere Preludes and Fugues for piano, and withheld until Stalin died. That chimes with Shostakovich's own confession to Solomon Volkov that the symphony was 'all about Stalin and the Stalin years.'

Certainly, the symphony can be heard as a depiction of life in a suppressed society. David Oistrakh cited the work's inner conflicts, its dramatic effect and even its use of intense beauty to point-up the tragedy of Soviet life. John Mangum, CEO of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, has memorably described it as "48 minutes of tragedy, despair, terror and violence and two minutes of triumph".

Others have noted the symphony's innovative design in an age when symphonic architecture was deemed old-hat: its conjuring of huge arch forms punctuated by eruptive climaxes inflated apparently from the smallest motifs. One contemporary Soviet composer, Aram Khachaturian, claimed the Tenth represented an affirmation of the highest principles of realism in the context of the Soviet symphony. Shostakovich himself said he wanted simply "to convey human feelings and passions."

Despite the doom and gloom, this appears to be a symphony in which Shostakovich asserts himself and his individualism – not least in the prevalence of his own personal musical initials, D-S-C-H (according to the German notation

system, the notes D, E flat, C and B) and the similar notational encoding of his love for a student, Elmira Nazirova.

The symphony's colossal first movement erupts in climaxes described by the composer as "dramatic, heroic and tragic". Musical themes are introduced by treading cellos and basses, wistful clarinet and a jittery flute whose pressurized little waltz foreshadows nightmares to come. At its peak, the movement erupts with shrieking woodwinds, ominous military drum and apocalyptic tam-tam (a suspended cymbal).

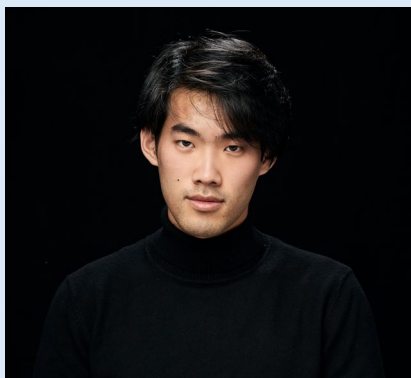
"Music illuminates a person through and through," commented Shostakovich in relation to the symphony's second movement, which he admitted was a scherzo depicting Stalin. This is music of unremitting fear and violence - wild, furious and unpredictable.

Next, the music appears to turn inward. In the Allegretto the composer's initial motif is entwined with the horn calls derived from Elmira's name with a sense of Romantic longing. The finale visits the nightmarish territory of the opening Moderato, introduces a coarse Russian dance native to Stalin's locale on woodwinds (a Gopak), and builds to a colossal climax during which Shostakovich appears to claim a personal victory (via his initials) once again - another individual victory, this one not over illness, but evil and oppression.

Programme notes by Andrew Mellor
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Andrew Mellor is a journalist and critic based in Copenhagen and author of *The Northern Silence: Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture*

Get to know Bruce Liu



© Darek Golik

The first time you performed with the Philharmonia Orchestra, it was for a streamed performance during lockdown. What was your first impression of the orchestra?

I was actually the last-minute replacement for this concert. It was really memorable for me because I had the chance to play Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto, which is so rarely played but a true masterpiece to me. It was also the first time that Santtu conducted this piece, and I didn't know Santtu or the orchestra. I was impressed by how quickly they react, like chamber musicians, especially in the second movement which is very famous for its trio section.

What difference does getting to know a conductor make to your performances together?

The first time Santtu and I played together, we instantly had great musical chemistry. But for the first concert we could only rehearse, work, and talk about music. The second time I worked with him in New York, we really got to know each other much better, talking about interests, hobbies, and drinks. I look forward to playing with Santtu and the orchestra again.

How do you approach a piece like Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2, that's been played and recorded so many times before?

I asked myself the same question during my teenage years, but now I try not to overthink about this kind of question. Everyone is unique and I know myself much better than five years ago as my identity and my conception of music has solidified.

Approaching this piece, I always think of the landscape that Rachmaninov had in his mind. I compare Rachmaninov's Russia to Canada, where I lived the longest - with its vast landscape and wild nature. You can feel the loneliness in its size, and deep down there is melancholy. The paintings of Isaac Levitan and Ilya Repin have inspired me a lot in my childhood.

How would you describe the live orchestral concert experience?

Being in a live concert is the only place I feel I can be completely touched emotionally. We're all enjoying music together in a common space about a message that is understood differently yet in a shared language.

You're performing with the Philharmonia on a major European tour. What's your favourite thing about international touring?

It's always fascinating to be on tour as by the end we are like soulmates. It's basically like a whole period of dating together. If there's enough time, I would love to bring members of the orchestra and Santtu together to do some nice hobbies. I would love to introduce them to karting, bowling or snooker.

Read the full interview on our website: philharmonia.co.uk

Santtu-Matias Rouvali

Conductor



©catherinegarciastudio

Santtu-Matias Rouvali first conducted the Philharmonia in 2013, aged 27. He was instantly recognised by the players as “an inspiring individual... a musician with spirit and passion akin to our own” (Cheremie Hamilton-Miller, viola).

He took up the baton as Principal Conductor in September 2021. He is just the sixth person to hold that title since the Orchestra was founded in 1945. He is also the Honorary Conductor of Tampere Philharmonia Orchestra.

Since his appointment, Santtu has conducted a wide range of music with the Philharmonia, from blockbusters by Strauss and Rachmaninov to less well known works by his compatriots Sibelius and Lindberg. He made his BBC Proms debut with the Philharmonia in summer 2022, conducting ballet music by Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev and the European premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s Violin Concerto, and returned in 2023 with music by Elgar, Chopin and Strauss. In the 2023/24 season, he has conducted music by George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and Wynton Marsalis as part of the Philharmonia’s series *Let Freedom Ring: Celebrating the Sounds of America*, alongside Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Sibelius and Shostakovich.

Santtu’s third release on the Philharmonia Records label, *Santtu conducts Stravinsky*, was released in March, featuring his recordings of *Petrushka* and *The Firebird Suite*, recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall. Previously, he has released *Santtu conducts Strauss*, featuring his recordings of four Strauss tone poems, and *Santtu conducts Mahler* – a recording of Mahler’s Symphony No. 2, ‘Resurrection’.

This season Santtu conducts the Philharmonia in all its UK residency venues – London, Basingstoke, Bedford, Leicester and Canterbury – and takes the Orchestra on tour to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland.

Santtu is also Chief Conductor of Gothenburg Symphony, with whom he is recording an award-winning Sibelius cycle. The most recent volume released in October 2022 – Symphonies Nos. 3 & 5 and *Pohjola’s Daughter* – was awarded a Radio Classique Trophée. The first two volumes both received the Choc de Classica, and the first was also named Gramophone Editor’s Choice and Diapason D’Or Découverte.

Originally a percussionist, Santtu played with the Philharmonia’s percussion section in Steve Reich’s *Music for Pieces of Wood* in a streamed performance during the Covid pandemic, and in October 2023 he played drum kit in the first performance of the Philharmonia Big Band. When he’s not conducting, Santtu loves to spend time meditating, foraging and hunting in the forests around his home in Finland.

“It’s a rare thing to have such an instant rapport with a conductor and we are all extremely lucky” (Victoria Irish, violin).

Bruce Liu

Piano



© Yanzhang

First prize winner of the 18th Chopin Piano Competition 2021 in Warsaw, Bruce Liu's "playing of breathtaking beauty" (BBC Music Magazine) has secured his reputation as one of the most exciting talents of his generation and contributed to a "rock-star status in the classical music world" (The Globe and Mail).

Highlights of Bruce Liu's 2023/24 season include international tours with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Paavo Järvi, the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali, and the Warsaw Philharmonic and Andrey Boreyko, as well as the Münchener Kammerorchester in a play-direct programme. Furthermore, he makes anticipated debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony, Danish National Symphony, Gothenburg Symphony and Singapore Symphony Orchestras. He works regularly with many of today's most distinguished conductors such as Gustavo Gimeno, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gianandrea Noseda, Rafael Payare, Vasily Petrenko, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Lahav Shani and Dalia Stasevska.

Bruce Liu has performed globally with major orchestras including the Wiener Symphoniker, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique du

Luxembourg, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and NHK Symphony Orchestra.

As an active recitalist, he appears at major concert halls such as Carnegie Hall, Wiener Konzerthaus, BOZAR Brussels and Tokyo Opera City, and makes his solo recital debuts in the 2023/24 season at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Philharmonie de Paris, Wigmore Hall London, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Kölner Philharmonie and Chicago Symphony Center.

Having been a regular guest at the Rheingau Musik Festival since 2022, Liu will return in summer 2024 to feature in a series of wide-ranging events. In recent years, he has appeared at La Roque-d'Anthéron, Verbier, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Edinburgh International, Gstaad Menuhin and Tanglewood Music Festivals.

An exclusive recording artist with Deutsche Grammophon, Liu's highly anticipated debut studio album *Waves* spanning two centuries of French keyboard music (Rameau, Ravel, Alkan) was released in November 2023. His first album featuring the winning performances from the Chopin International Piano Competition received international acclaim including the Critics' choice, Editor's choice, and 'Best Classical Albums of 2021' from the Gramophone Magazine.

Bruce Liu studied with Richard Raymond and Dang Thai Son. Born in Paris to Chinese parents and brought up in Montréal, Liu's phenomenal artistry has been shaped by his multi-cultural heritage: European refinement, North American dynamism and the long tradition of Chinese culture.

About the Philharmonia



© Luca Migliore

The Philharmonia Orchestra is made up of 80 outstanding musicians of 17 different nationalities. Every one of us is dedicated to bringing orchestral music of the very highest standard to the widest possible audience – in the world’s top concert halls, in our residency communities and in your own home.

Founded in 1945, we quickly established our reputation as the leading recording orchestra, our unparalleled catalogue growing as fast as the global market for LPs. We’ve continued to embrace the use of cutting-edge technology to share the orchestral experience around the world and beyond – our recording of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 is travelling through interstellar space on board the Voyager spacecraft. In the last two decades our pioneering immersive installations and VR experiences have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to the symphony orchestra, and our streamed performances have been enjoyed by listeners from Fiji and Indonesia to high above the Arctic Circle in Norway.

In 2021, Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as our Principal Conductor. He follows in illustrious footsteps: Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Carlo Maria Giulini, Arturo Toscanini, Riccardo Muti and Esa-Pekka Salonen are just a few of the great conductors to be associated with the Philharmonia over the years, honing the celebrated Philharmonia sound.

Marin Alsop is our Principal Guest Conductor. Violinist Nicola Benedetti and singer Julia Bullock are our Featured Artists this season, and sarod virtuoso Soumik Datta is our Artist in Residence.

We regularly tour throughout Europe, performing in some of the world’s most prestigious venues, such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. Further afield, we’ve performed in China, Japan and Colombia. We recently returned to China, and in January we were the first major international symphony orchestra to tour to Mauritius. You’ll also find us playing in some unexpected venues, from the Apple Store in Berlin to a multi-storey car park in Peckham.

The Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall, in the heart of London, has been our home since 1995. Across the UK, we have residencies in Bedford, Leicester, Canterbury, Basingstoke, at Garsington Opera and at the Three Choirs Festival. Our established and award-winning Learning & Engagement programme is embedded in several of our residency communities, and delivers

experiences that empower people to engage with and participate in orchestral music. Our Emerging Artists Programme develops the next generation of instrumentalists, composers and conductors, with a focus on increasing diversity within the classical music industry.

We commission new music every year, and we have premiered works by Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Errollyn Wallen, Kaija Saariaho, Anna Clyne, Laufey and many others. Our film credits stretch back to 1947, and we are in demand among film and videogame composers in the UK and Hollywood. We have recorded around 150 soundtracks, bringing the Philharmonia sound to millions of cinema-goers and gamers.

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**Santtu-
Matias
Rouvali**

**Isabelle
Faust**

**Sol
Gabetta**

**Masaaki
Suzuki**

**Alexandre
Kantorow**

Philharmonia

London season spring highlights:

Masaaki Suzuki
conducts
Schumann and Dvořák
Sunday 28 April, 7.30pm

Sunwook Kim plays
Brahms
Thursday 2 May, 7.30pm

Alexandre Kantorow
plays Liszt
Thursday 9 May, 7.30pm

The Bach Choir: The
Dream of Gerontius
Thursday 16 May, 7.30pm

Brahms & Beethoven
with Isabelle Faust
Sunday 2 June, 7.30pm

Santtu conducts
Elgar's Enigma
Variations
with Sol Gabetta
Thursday 6 June, 7.30pm

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