

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jepsen

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 10 April 2024 | 7.30pm

Seong-Jin Cho plays Beethoven

Wagner

Prelude from Parsifal (14')

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 4 (34')

Interval (20')

Tippett

Symphony No. 2 (36')

Edward Gardner conductor

Generously supported by Aud Jepsen

Seong-Jin Cho

piano

Free pre-concert event

6.15–6.45pm | Royal Festival Hall

LPO Artistic Director Elena Dubinets discusses this evening's programme with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner.

Free and unticketed – all welcome.

The timings shown are not precise and are given only as a guide.

Concert presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra

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This concert is being recorded for broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on Tuesday 21 May at 7.30pm. It will remain available for 30 days after that on BBC Sounds.

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Welcome

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 lpo.org.uk/donate. Thank you.



LPO news

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 lpo.org.uk/friends



Coming soon on the LPO Label: Jurowski conducts Stravinsky Vol. 3

Friday 26 April will see the release of the eagerly-anticipated third volume in our 'Vladimir Jurowski conducts Stravinsky' series.

Recorded live in concert between 2018 and 2020, during Jurowski's tenure as Principal Conductor, it includes *Pulcinella*, *Requiem Canticles* and *Symphony in C*, as well as the lesser-known *Threni*, *Ode* and *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*. Alongside the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, it features soloists including Angharad Lyddon, Sam Furness and Matthew Rose.

The release will be available to download or stream via all major streaming services from 26 April, and to buy on CD from all good retailers (LPO-0127).



Vladimir Jurowski returns to the LPO on 27 April to close our season with Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*: the long-awaited conclusion of his LPO *Ring Cycle*. Book now at lpo.org.uk

On stage tonight

First Violins

Alice Ivy-Pemberton Leader
Vesselin Gellef Sub-Leader
Kate Oswin

Chair supported by Eric Tomsett

Lasma Taimina

Chair supported by Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave

Minn Majoe

Chair supported by Dr Alex & Maria Chan

Thomas Eisner

Chair supported by Ryze Power

Martin Höhmann

Yang Zhang

Cassandra Hamilton

Elizaveta Tyun

Jamie Hutchinson

Beatriz Carbonell

Thea Spiers

Alice Apreda Howell

Eleanor Bartlett

Ruth Schulten

Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal

Claudia Tarrant-Matthews

Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra

Nynke Hijlkema

Ashley Stevens

Fiona Higham

Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley

Kate Birchall

Marie-Anne Mairesse

Sioni Williams

Emma Crossley

José Nuno Cabrita Matias

Paula Clifton-Everest

Sheila Law

Lyrít Milgram

Charlie MacClure

Violas

Richard Waters

Guest Principal

Katharine Leek

Lucia Ortiz Saucó

James Heron

Toby Warr

Daniel Cornford

Kate De Campos

Mark Gibbs

Julia Doukakis

Jill Valentine

Laura Vallejo

Hannah Roberts

Cellos

Henry Shapard

Guest Principal

Wayne Kwon

David Lale

Hee Yeon Cho

Tom Roff

Helen Thomas

Julia Morneweg

Alicja Kozak

Wallis Power

Louise Dearsley

Double Basses

Sebastian Pennar Principal

Hugh Kluger

George Peniston

Lowri Estell

Simon Oliver

Sam Rice

Ben Havinden-Williams

Catherine Ricketts

Flutes

Fiona Kelly Guest Principal

Frederico Paixão

Mark Taylor

Piccolo

Frederico Paixão

Oboes

Ian Hardwick* Principal

Alice Munday

Eleanor Sullivan

Cor Anglais

Sue Böhling* Principal

Chair supported by Dr Barry Grimaldi

Clarinets

Benjamin Mellefont*

Principal

Chair supported by Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton

Thomas Watmough

Chair supported by Roger Greenwood

Paul Richards*

Bassoons

Jonathan Davies* Principal

Chair supported by Sir Simon Robey

Helen Storey

Antonia Lazenby

Contrabassoon

Simon Estell* Principal

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*

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

Percussion

Andrew Barclay* Principal

Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins

Harp

Rachel Masters Principal

Piano/Celeste

Katherine Tinker

Assistant Conductor

Luis Castillo-Briceño

**Professor at a London conservatoire*

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

Sonja Drexler
Mr B C Fairhall
Bianca & Stuart Roden
Neil Westreich

London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Mark Allan

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 most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month.

Alice Ivy-Pemberton

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.

This season

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.



Alice Ivy-Pemberton joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Co-Leader in February 2023.

Praised by *The New York Times* for her 'sweet-toned playing', Alice has performed as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician to international acclaim. While growing up in New York City and studying with Nurit Pacht, Alice made a nationally televised Carnegie Hall debut aged ten, and was a finalist at the Menuhin International Competition at the age of 12.

Alice earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Itzhak Perlman and Catherine Cho as a fully-funded recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. During her studies she won Juilliard's Violin Concerto Competition, performed extensively with the New York Philharmonic and The Philadelphia Orchestra, and led orchestras under the baton of Barbara Hannigan, Xian Zhang and Matthias Pintscher. Upon graduating in 2022 she was awarded the Polisi Prize and a Benzaquen Career Advancement Grant in recognition of 'tremendous talent, promise, creativity, and potential to make a significant impact in the performing arts'.

An avid chamber musician, Alice has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Anthony Marwood, Gil Shaham and members of the Belcea, Doric, Juilliard and Brentano string quartets, and performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Festival appearances include Music@Menlo, Moritzburg and Yellow Barn. Also a passionate advocate for new music and its social relevance, Alice created *Drowning Monuments*, a noted multimedia project on climate change that brought together five world premieres for solo violin.

lpo.org.uk



Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Photographer London

Edward Gardner has been Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since September 2021. He is also Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic, a position he will relinquish at the end of the 2023/24 season. From August 2024 he will undertake the Music Directorship of the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, having been their Artistic Advisor since February 2022.

This season Edward conducts the LPO in ten concerts at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. In October 2023 he toured with the Orchestra to South Korea and Taiwan, and this season will also take them to major European cities including Paris, Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Bruges. As part of the LPO's cross-arts festival 'The Music in You' in March 2024, Edward conducted concerts including Haydn's *The Creation*; a reinvention of Szymanowski's ballet *Harnasie* in collaboration with choreographer Wayne McGregor; Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*; and Mozart's *Mass in C minor*. Other highlights with the Orchestra this season include Holst's *The Planets* and Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.

Edward opened the Bergen Philharmonic season in September with Mahler's Symphony No. 1. He completes his tenure as Chief Conductor at the closing of next summer's Bergen International Festival, conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 8. The orchestra will be joined by several choirs, including the Edvard Grieg Kor, of which Edward is the Principal Conductor.

As Artistic Advisor of the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, this season Edward will conduct a triple-bill of Schumann's *Frauen-Liebe und Leben*, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy*. Future plans with the company include a Wagner *Ring Cycle* commencing in spring 2026.

In demand as a guest conductor, recent seasons have seen Edward make debuts with the Cleveland Symphony, Staatskapelle Berlin, Bavarian Radio Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia, San Francisco Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony and Vienna Symphony orchestras; while returns have included engagements with the Chicago Symphony, Montreal Symphony and Philharmonia orchestras, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and the Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala di Milano. He also continued his longstanding collaboration with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010–16, and with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, whom he has conducted at both the First and Last Nights of the BBC Proms.

Music Director of English National Opera for eight years (2007–15), Edward has also built a strong relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, where he has conducted productions of *The Damnation of Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. In London he made his Royal Opera House debut in 2019 in a new production of *Káťa Kabanová*, followed by *Werther* a season later. Elsewhere, he has conducted at the Bavarian State Opera, La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra National de Paris, and this season he will conduct a double-bill of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Poulenc's *La voix humaine* at Teatro di San Carlo.

A passionate supporter of young talent, Edward founded the Hallé Youth Orchestra in 2002 and regularly conducts the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He has a close relationship with The Juilliard School of Music and with the Royal Academy of Music, which appointed him its inaugural Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Chair in 2014.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include being named Royal Philharmonic Society Award Conductor of the Year (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009), and an OBE for Services to Music in The Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

Seong-Jin Cho

piano

© Harald Hoffmann



With an innate musicality and overwhelming talent, Seong-Jin Cho has established himself worldwide as one of the leading pianists of his generation and most distinctive artists on the current music scene. His thoughtful and poetic, assertive and tender, virtuosic and colourful playing combines panache with purity and is driven by an impressive natural sense of balance.

Seong-Jin Cho first came to the world's attention in 2015 when he won First Prize at the Chopin International Competition, and his career has rapidly ascended since. In 2016 he signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, and in 2023 was awarded the prestigious Samsung Ho-Am Prize in the Arts, in recognition of his exceptional contribution to classical music. He works with the world's most prestigious orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras, the Orchestre de Paris, and The Philadelphia Orchestra. Conductors with whom he regularly collaborates include Myung-Whun Chung, Gustavo Dudamel, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gianandrea Nosedà, Sir Simon Rattle, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Lahav Shani.

Seong-Jin Cho's 2023/24 season began with his debut at the Salzburg Festival with the Mozarteumorchester and Ivor Bolton, and a return to the BBC Proms with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali. This season he also returns to the Royal Concertgebouw, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Boston Symphony orchestras, giving performances in both Boston and at Carnegie Hall, and makes anticipated debuts with The Cleveland Orchestra and the San Francisco and Chicago Symphony orchestras. A highly sought-after

touring soloist, he embarks on several international tours, including with the Berlin Philharmonic and Kirill Petrenko in Korea, and with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Andris Nelsons in Korea and Japan. Earlier this year he toured Europe with the National Symphony Orchestra Washington and Gianandrea Nosedà.

An active recitalist, Seong-Jin Cho appears at many of the world's most prestigious venues including the main stage of Carnegie Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna; the Prinzregententheater Munich; London's Barbican Hall; Suntory Hall Tokyo; Walt Disney Hall, Los Angeles; La Roque-d'Anthéron Festival; and Verbier Festival. In the 2023/24 season he performs solo recitals at halls including the Alte Oper Frankfurt, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, KKL Luzern, Sala Santa Cecilia, Megaron Athens and Carnegie Hall.

Seong-Jin Cho's latest recording is a solo album entitled 'The Handel Project', released in February 2023. In 2021 he released Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 and *Scherzi* with the London Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Nosedà for Deutsche Grammophon. He had previously recorded his first album with the same orchestra and conductor, featuring Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 as well as the *Four Ballades*. A solo album titled 'The Wanderer' was released in 2020 and features Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasy, Berg's Piano Sonata Op. 1 and Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor. A solo Debussy recital was also released in 2017, followed by a Mozart album with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin in 2018. All albums have been released on the Yellow Label and have garnered impressive critical acclaim worldwide.

Born in 1994 in Seoul, Seong-Jin Cho started learning the piano at the age of six and gave his first public recital aged 11. In 2009 he became the youngest ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. In 2011 he won Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. From 2012–15 he studied with Michel Béroff at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. Seong-Jin Cho is now based in Berlin.

Programme notes

Richard Wagner

1813–83

Prelude from Parsifal

1882

Parsifal was Richard Wagner's last music-drama, first performed at the 1882 Bayreuth Festival only months before his death, and his most specifically Christian in imagery and narrative. Based on an early 13th-century poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach, it depicts the brotherhood that guards the Holy Grail, enfeebled by the mortal sin of its leader, and its redemption by the young knight Parsifal, a 'pure fool made wise through pity'.

The opera, like all Wagner's mature works, had a long period of gestation. The first sketch of a scenario dates from as early as 1857, a full 20 years before the writing of the full text; the music followed between 1878 and 1882. Wagner made a draft of the whole work before starting on the orchestration – except that towards the end of 1878, while he was still drafting the third and last Act, he orchestrated the Prelude, and added a concert ending, so that it could be included in a private concert for his wife Cosima's birthday that Christmas Day.

The Prelude begins with a fourfold statement of a theme associated in the opera with the love and pain of the Last Supper and of the Grail community, alternately in mysterious bare unisons and surrounded by radiant figuration. A figure representing the Grail itself (incorporating the six-note 'Dresden Amen' sequence) then alternates with sonorous episodes on a theme which stands for the idea of Faith. The opening theme returns, now accompanied by string *tremolandos*, reaches a brief climax, and climbs again towards a hovering conclusion reinforced (in the concert ending) by the Grail motif.

Programme note © Anthony Burton



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

‘It is incomparable and bewildering, splendid and strong. *Parsifal* is one of the loveliest monuments of sound ever raised to the supreme glory of music.’

Claude Debussy

Programme notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

1882–1971

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58

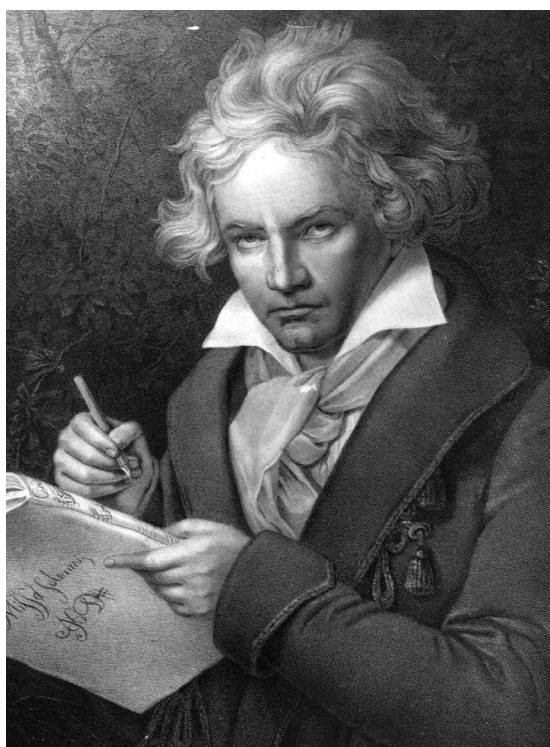
1806

Seong-Jin Cho piano

1 Allegro moderato

2 Andante con moto –

3 Rondo: Vivace



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

'A man's reach should exceed his grasp,' wrote the poet Robert Browning, and there are few composers who lived that philosophy more energetically than Beethoven. But there were times when, in his straining for the impossible, he became his own worst enemy. The first public performance of this Concerto in Vienna in 1808 is a case in point. Beethoven may have thought it was a good idea to programme a concert including not just the Fourth Piano Concerto but also the Fifth and Sixth symphonies, large chunks of the *Mass in C*, a full-scale *Fantasy* for piano, chorus and orchestra, the concert aria *Ah! Perfido* plus a substantial solo improvisation of his own; but it seems nobody else did – especially not in an unheated theatre on a freezing December day. We are told that the poor soprano in *Ah! Perfido* 'rather shivered than sang', while the chorus broke down completely in the *Fantasy* – only to have Beethoven yell at them that they should start it all over again.

It is hard to imagine a less appropriate debut for the Fourth Piano Concerto, on the whole one of the gentlest and most intimate of Beethoven's large-scale works. Here, as in the Fifth Concerto (the so-called 'Emperor' Concerto), Beethoven breaks with Classical convention by having the piano come in right at the start. But, whereas in No. 5 the pianist immediately seizes the audience's attention with eruptions and cascades of broken chords and runs, here in the Fourth Concerto the pianist steals in quietly, unaccompanied, musing on the

Programme notes

first theme before coming to a half close. This, and the orchestra's response, on a completely unexpected harmony, *pianissimo*, form one of the most magical beginnings in the concerto repertoire. Some listeners may notice that the leading 'da-da-da-DA' rhythmic pattern of the first theme is the same as that of the famous 'Fate' motif that opens the Fifth Symphony; yet it is hard to imagine two movements less like each other than the driven, tragic *Allegro con brio* of the symphony and the serene *Allegro moderato* of this concerto.

Amazingly, the Fourth Concerto managed to charm at least some of its audience even at that disastrous premiere. The writer J F Reichardt recalled the slow second movement as 'a masterpiece of beautiful

sustained melody,' in which Beethoven 'truly sang on his instrument with deep melancholy feeling.' Actually it isn't quite a 'sustained' melody. The *Andante con moto* unfolds as a dialogue between unison strings (initially aggressive, but gradually calmer) and lyrical piano. Liszt memorably compared this movement to the classical legend of Orpheus taming wild beasts with his music. This links into a wonderful high-spirited *Rondo* (a circular form, with the main theme recurring more-or-less regularly). Again, unusually for a Classical concerto, the soloist keeps up his fireworks right through the final orchestral *tutti*. Thus a concerto that begins with unprecedented modesty ends with a brazen appeal for thunderous applause.

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

Interval – 20 minutes

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



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Programme notes

Michael Tippett

1905–98

Symphony No. 2

1957

1 Allegro vigoroso

2 Adagio molto e tranquillo

3 Presto veloce

4 Allegro moderato

It began with Vivaldi and a view. In 1953 Michael Tippett, sitting in a radio studio high above Lake Lugano, heard a passage of Vivaldi with pounding Cs in the bass. It marked 'the exact moment of conception of the second symphony', which he began composing in earnest two years later.

The mid-1950s were the trickiest period of Tippett's late-starting career. In 1944 his oratorio *A Child of Our Time* had been acclaimed as a masterpiece but, a decade later, his first major opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, while not the disaster of legend, received mixed reviews. His Piano Concerto had meanwhile been declared impossible by a number of distinguished players and the view began to circulate that Tippett was nothing but a bungling amateur. Novel effects in his music that subsequent performers have triumphantly realised (Julius Katchen eventually premiered the concerto from memory) were dismissed as evidence of poor technique and a tin-ear.

The symphony added insult to injury. Adrian Boult conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in its first outing, on 5 February 1958. Within a few bars, the performance broke down, and Boult – gallantly taking the blame – had to start again. The leader of the orchestra, with whom Tippett was already on poor terms, had deemed the notation eccentric. Between the final rehearsal and the concert he requested that the string parts be rewritten, a hasty and unhelpful intervention that has since been blamed for the collapse. Careful attention to an archive recording of the premiere instead reveals that the strings were managing

perfectly well, rewrite or no rewrite: a lost flautist, giving a false cue, brought the whole orchestra down on top of him, and threatened to pull Tippett's reputation down too. A repeat performance was nearly as disastrous. Letters were written to *The Times*, Tippett was banned from walking within a certain distance of the podium at subsequent rehearsals, and so it went on.

But these are red herrings, which recede in the face of the work itself, the reputation of which was rejuvenated by Tippett's great advocate Colin Davis. Seventy years on, players rise easily to its challenges; at the time of writing, the most recent recording is by a student orchestra.

The Symphony is in four movements, each of which Tippett, still in his post-war dedication to expressions of jubilation and renewal, linked to a specific state: joy, tenderness, gaiety, and fantasy. It is a work on the cusp, full of the rhythmic exuberance and lushly scored exultation of soundworlds he had made his own in *The Midsummer Marriage*, but already taut with the harder-edged building blocks of his second opera, *King Priam*.

Inspired by Vivaldi, the first movement bursts into life with a thump of quavers on a low C (given a percussive sheen by the addition of a piano). Gyrating strings then romp in above, resolutely accented on the 'wrong' beat. As so often in Tippett, the achievement is that such seeming missteps make the music dance rather than limp. A second subject is introduced, of graceful, elegiac woodwind, polished to a sugar-plum-fairy sparkle by

Programme notes

the celeste. The two subjects are spliced and intercut within an overall sonata-form framework, and build the dialogue of contrasts inherent to so much of Tippett's music, the friction between them providing inexorable momentum, cast each as you will: man and woman, earth and heaven, body and soul, shadow and light.

The orchestration of the slow movement seems to write into the score not only the notes themselves but their resonance: an opening trumpet call is followed by a mournful song for the cellos, and each leaves behind an afterglow of harp and piano. After this introduction, the movement proper begins, with a sea of pulsing strings laid out beneath a sky spangled with oboe and clarinet. Where the first movement showed the influence of neoclassical Stravinsky on Tippett, here the throbbing wash of string-waves seems firmly in a British tradition, reminiscent of the 'Moonlight' interlude from Britten's *Peter Grimes*, or of the accompaniment to the first of Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, 'Sea-Slumber Song'. Slowly the tide goes out, and the movement is stilled by a quartet of horns.

Third comes the *Scherzo*, a rival for Beethoven in being, to use Wagner's phrase, 'the apotheosis of dance'. A fiendish violin solo spins like a whirling dervish out of a rhythmic maelstrom, different time signatures flashing past, before the string section entire leads the whole orchestra into joyous climax. Instruments gradually leave the floor: a harp and piano valiantly duet, a brave flute tries to start the whole thing up again, but the attempt is short-lived, and the movement finishes with a few last bubbles from the clarinet and a gurgle of bassoon.

Michael Tippett at work



The finale was composed under pressure, the BBC Symphony Orchestra's deadline, and the anniversary the Symphony was intended to commemorate (the BBC Third Programme's tenth), having passed. It is a fantasia, composed of four unrelated sections laid out next to each other with an almost jarring lack of transition. A short percussive introduction leads to a brilliant set of variations over a ground bass. Brass fanfares, half-terrifying, half-exultant, peel out over blasts of timpani-fire and snare drum. In the third section the strings unfurl the ribbon of melody that had become Tippett's speciality, beginning with violins at the heights and moving down through nearly six octaves, with triplets in the woodwind guiding the way. The fourth section is made up of one passage, a brass build-up that sends the strings whirling in ecstasy. This passage, with Tippett's characteristic generosity of spirit, is repeated (with variation) five times, forming – in the composer's words – five 'gestures of farewell'. Below it all the piano and timpani have returned the piece to its opening bedrock, seeming to fasten the tonality in the secure white granite of C once again, though tipped into mystery by the final chord, which is haunted by the ghosts of D and A major. The Symphony finishes where it began, while forgetting nothing learned, and seeming to usher in new possibility, the promise of further wonders, in Tippett's third and fourth symphonies, yet to come.

Programme note © Oliver Soden

We'd love to hear from you

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by Laurie Watt

Wagner: *Prelude from Parsifal*

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Beethoven: *Piano Concerto No. 4*

Mitsuko Uchida | Berlin Philharmonic | Simon Rattle
(Berliner Philharmoniker Recordings)
or Alfred Brendel | London Philharmonic Orchestra
Bernard Haitink (Decca)

Tippett: *Symphony No. 2*

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra | Martyn
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