## Welcome

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

Bruckner is one of my favourite composers, so I'm really looking forward to hearing what Bruckner expert Manfred Honeck and our fantastic players bring to his last symphony. I hope those of you who booked because you are Alexandre Kantorow fans will be Bruckner fans too by the end of the evening, and vice versa.

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,



Thorse

Thorben Dittes Chief Executive

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# This evening's concert

### **Alexandre Kantorow plays Liszt**

Thursday 9 May 2024, 7.30pm Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Manfred Honeck – conductor Alexandre Kantorow – piano

LISZT Piano Concerto No. 2 (21 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

**BRUCKNER Symphony No. 9** (60 mins)

This performance finishes at approximately 9.30pm.

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# Philharmonia Chamber Players: Schubert's Quintet in C

6pm, Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Eunsley Park – violin Nuno Carapina – violin Rebecca Chambers – viola Richard Birchall – cello Alexander Rolton – cello

**SCHUBERT String Quintet in C major** 

This performance finishes at approximately 6.50pm

# **Programme notes**

### Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major (1840) (21 mins)

Adagio sostenuto assai – Allegro agitato assai – Allegro moderato – Allegro deciso – Marziale un poco meno allegro – Allegro assai

Since the time of Bach, pianist-composers have written concertos to demonstrate their prowess against an orchestra. The revolutionary thing about Franz Liszt was that he simply didn't need to. Hector Berlioz, as an orchestral conductor, was green with envy: "You can confidently say, I am the orchestra!" he wrote to Liszt.

"I am the chorus and conductor as well! My piano sings, broods, flashes, thunders. It rivals the keenest bows in swiftness, it has its own brazen harmonies and can conjure up magical enchantments just as an orchestra can. I don't need a hundred musicians. A large room with a grand piano in it, and I have a great audience at my command."

It was no overstatement: at the height of Liszt's celebrity in the 1840s audiences across Europe reacted with near-hysteria to his playing.

Listeners fainted; the Kingdom of Hungary sent him a jewelled ceremonial sword and in 1843 the Tsar of Russia presented him with a pair of dancing bears. When, in 1848, he suddenly retired from piano playing to become music director at the small German court of Weimar, the musical world was thunderstruck. Few realised that Liszt had serious ambitions as a composer. As he wrote to a friend, "The time has come for me to break out of my virtuoso's chrysalis and allow my thought unfettered flight".

In short: Liszt had no need to write piano concertos while he was a professional pianist – and even less after he retired. But he was interested in new ways for the piano to interact with an orchestra, and new forms to express them. He completed only two piano concertos: this Second Concerto was first conceived in 1839 but wasn't completed and performed until January 1857 (and not even performed by Liszt himself: the concerto's dedicatee, and first soloist, was his pupil Hans von Bronsart. Liszt conducted.)



iszt gives a concert for Emposeph I on a Bösendorfer p oublic domain)

But like everything Liszt touched, it's strikingly original. Liszt initially described it as a "Concerto symphonique": an organic musical narrative, rather than simply a display-piece for a virtuoso pianist. A big, colourful orchestra (Liszt includes piccolo, cymbals and a full brass section) is just as active as the piano in a drama that unfolds over an unbroken 25-minute arc – and everything grows from the melancholy, Hungarian-sounding opening melody for woodwinds. The piano is dreamer, orator, agitator and daredevil as the music moves from sultry quiet through

turbulence, romance and a swaggering march – before unwinding, through shimmering reminiscences, into a final, dazzling race for the finish. Woodwinds shrill, trumpets sound, and the piano crowns it all: even in retirement, Liszt knew exactly how to bring the house down.

Interval (20 mins)

# **Anton Bruckner** (1824 – 1896)

Symphony No. 9 in D minor (1850) (60 mins)

Feierlich, misterioso

Scherzo: Bewegt, lebhalft; Trio. Schnell

Adagio: Langsam, feierlich

When Anton Bruckner died on 11 October 1896, he'd been unwell for some years. His physician, Dr Richard Heller, noticed that he'd been struggling to write music, spending much of each day asleep in an armchair in his grace-and-favour apartment at Vienna's Belvedere Palace. Heller had visited Bruckner on 17 July; they strolled in the gardens, and afterwards, when Bruckner had dozed off in his English-made brass bed (one of his few luxuries, along with cigars), a friend of Heller's had photographed him in his sleep. Three months later, when Bruckner fell asleep forever, he left relatively few belongings: a black crucifix with an ivory Christ, a harmonium, his Bösendorfer piano and the unfinished manuscript of his Ninth and last symphony.

Bruckner had suspected that his Ninth Symphony would be his last. "I don't like to start on the Ninth" he'd told an acquaintance, some years earlier; "I am scared, for Beethoven, too, concluded his life with his Ninth". He began work in earnest early in 1892 and worked intensely on the symphony for the next three years - but his own deteriorating health coincided with the most active period of his career, and distractions proliferated. On 13 November 1893, suffering from breathlessness and heart pain, he made his will. Then he returned to the symphony and by November 1894 he had completed the first three movements. Visitors would be regaled with excerpts from the work-in-progress, and Heller recalled one such occasion:

"Among other things he told me this: 'You see, I've already dedicated symphonies to two great monarchs, poor King Ludwig and our own illustrious Emperor – for me, the most exalted of all earthly rulers. And now I offer my last work to the King of Kings, the Dear Lord himself, and I hope that He will grant me enough time to finish it, and that He will graciously accept it."



© Diego Delso

The devoutly Catholic Bruckner had dedicated his Seventh Symphony to King Ludwig of Bavaria and his Eighth to Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria. But now he aimed higher. He prayed daily before beginning work: "Dear God, let me soon be well again; you see, I need my health so I can finish the Ninth". Heller believed that "in his mind, he had drawn up a contract with his 'dear Lord'. If He willed that the symphony, which was to be a hymn of praise to God, should be finished, He would give Bruckner the time he needed for his task. If he died too soon, God had only Himself to blame."

Bruckner was too humble a Catholic to question divine will, but he certainly had a fourth movement in mind. He spoke of ending the symphony with an 'Allelujah'; "a song of praise to the Dear Lord". The final triumph, for a believer like Bruckner, was never in doubt, and when he began to fear that he would never complete the symphony, he suggested to Heller (and others) that his choral *Te Deum* (1884) might serve as a substitute. Musically, it doesn't make much sense, but emotionally, his meaning was unambiguous: his life's work should end with an overwhelming hymn of joy and thanks to God.

As for what remains; it seems that Bruckner conceived the symphony as a sort of struggle towards heaven – using terms like *Feierlich* (solemn, or ceremonial) and *Misterioso* (mysterious) in a religious as well as a purely musical sense. Like his model Beethoven, Bruckner begins his first movement in an air of mystery and darkness. If the turmoil and anguish that follows is intensely real, so too are the contrasting moments of wonder and hope. The second movement is a classical *scherzo* on the mightiest of scales: a cosmic dance, driven by thundering rhythms and the repeated patterns

in which the number-obsessed Bruckner saw the architecture of the universe. But it's playful, too; and in the central *Trio* section, the atmosphere lightens and brightens before the midnight thunder returns.

And then, with a yearning cry for the violins he launches the Adagio – a meditation in the glowing key of E major. But it's a meditation with a very definite direction, and a purpose that's hinted at in the solemn chorales, the tragic outbursts and the shining, trumpet-crowned visions of glory that shape this heartfelt and unforgettable movement. "Yes, the victory is death". Bruckner told one friend, and some have heard this music as a reflection on death itself: the transition, both blessed and terrible, between worldly life and the heavenly glory that Bruckner intended as the conclusion of his symphony. God had other plans: Bruckner never revealed that final vision to earthly ears. Instead, the symphony leaves us where Bruckner himself left us: in music of profound tenderness and consolation.

# Programme notes by Richard Bratby © Philharmonia Orchestra/Richard Bratby

Richard Bratby is a critic and cultural historian who writes about music and opera for *The Spectator, Gramophone, The Birmingham Post* and *The Critic.*He is the author of *Forward: 100 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra* and *Classical Music: An Illustrated History.* 

# **Meet Alexandre Kantorow**



You've played with the Philharmonia several times in the last few years – what are you most

I'm very much looking forward to returning with the Philharmonia, getting a different feeling of the orchestra, with a different repertoire and conductor. It's always very interesting to see how connections with an orchestra can change how we shape and build the music.

looking forward to about this performance?

Liszt himself was renowned for his virtuosity and showmanship – do you think it's part of a soloist's role to impress and entertain the audience?

I think the soloist's role is to adjust to the music and to create an emotional link with the audience. In the case of Liszt's Second Piano Concerto, it is incredibly varied and vast with what you must do in very little time. The piano is sometimes an accompaniment like in chamber music, and sometimes the solo instrument that is much more like Italian opera and Chopin. There are moments that are hugely symphonic and titanic – a battle with the orchestra, for which you need the power and the intensity to show that.

Reviewers have noted how self-assured and relaxed you seem when you perform. Do you have any pre-concert rituals or techniques that help you get into the right frame of mind on the day of a concert?

The day of the concert is always a special day. I think as I've grown up and performed more, what actually works for me is to trust the feeling that I am experiencing on the day of concert. Before, I tried to visualise the performance, to try and practice at a certain time, or I would sometimes listen to music before going on stage. I would always be trying to capture the same feeling. But every day is different. It is scarier, but for example, if I suddenly feel low energy, I prefer to not force myself to have energy before going on stage and rather, to just let it happen. Walking on stage with low energy and starting the concert can happen, but the music will give me the energy I need and lift me up.

Growing up, did you always want to be a professional musician? If not, what other path were you interested in?

When I was little, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think something in science – I loved astrophysics. It was one of the things I took time with to read books and try to understand all the mysteries of the universe in a very condensed way. I didn't want to be the one going into space but being the one on Earth doing the calculations to send people to explore the universe. Music started seriously when I was around 14, when I knew I wanted to become a musician for the rest of my life. Since then, I haven't really looked back – it feels natural.

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

# Manfred Honeck Conductor



Manfred Honeck has firmly established himself as one of the world's leading conductors, whose distinctive and revelatory interpretations receive great international acclaim. He is now entering his 16th season as Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, where his contract was extended to run through the 2027-2028 season. Celebrated at home and abroad, he and the orchestra continue to serve as cultural ambassadors for the city of Pittsburgh. Guest appearances regularly include Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, as well as the major venues of Europe and festivals such as the BBC Proms, Salzburg Festival, Musikfest Berlin, Lucerne Festival, Rheingau Music Festival, Beethovenfest Bonn, and Grafenegg Festival.

Manfred Honeck's successful work in Pittsburgh is extensively documented by recordings on the Reference Recordings label, featuring works by Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Shostakovich, Strauss, Tchaikovsky, and others. They have received a multitude of outstanding reviews and awards, including many Grammy nominations, and he and the orchestra won the Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance in 2018. The most recent release, Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, coupled with Stucky's *Silent Spring*, was an Editor's Choice of Gramophone.

Born in Austria, Manfred Honeck completed his musical training at the University of Music in Vienna. His many years of experience as a member of the viola section in the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna State Opera Orchestra have had a lasting influence on his work as a conductor, and his art of interpretation is based on his determination to venture deep beneath the surface of the music. He began his conducting career as assistant to Claudio Abbado and as director of the Vienna Jeunesse Orchestra. Subsequently, he was engaged by the Zurich Opera House, where he was awarded the European Conducting Prize in 1993. He has since served as one of three principal conductors of the MDR Symphony Orchestra Leipzig, as Music Director of the Norwegian National Opera, Principal Guest Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, and Chief Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Stockholm.

As a guest conductor, Manfred Honeck has worked with the leading international orchestras around the globe, including Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Staatskapelle Dresden, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Accademia di Santa Cecilia Rome, and the Vienna Philharmonic. In the United States, he has conducted all major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. He has also been Artistic Director of the International Concerts Wolfegg in Germany for more than 25 years.

# Alexandre Kantorow Piano



ondation Louis Vuitton tin Raphaël Martiq

Alexandre Kantorow is the winner of the 2024 Gilmore Artist Award, the youngest pianist and the first French artist to receive this accolade. Four years ago, at the age of 22, he was the first French pianist to win the Gold Medal at the Tchaikovsky Competition, also receiving the Grand Prix, previously awarded only three times in the competition's history. Now in demand at the highest level worldwide, he is applauded for his innate poetic charm, luminous clarity and stunning virtuosity.

In recital, Kantorow appears at major concert halls such as the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, Philharmonie de Paris and Tokyo Opera City, and in 2023 he makes his debut at New York's Carnegie Hall. He performs regularly at the most prestigious festivals around the globe, including the Ravinia Festival, Verbier Festival and BBC Proms. Chamber music is one of his great pleasures, and he performs with artists such as violinist Renaud Capuçon, violist Antoine Tamestit, cellist Gautier Capuçon, and baritone Matthias Goerne.

Highlights of Kantorow's upcoming seasons include concerts with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Berliner Philharmoniker, Orchestre de Paris, Philharmonia, Rotterdam Philharmonic and

tours with the Munich Philharmonic and Hong Kong Philharmonic orchestras amongst others, and with conductors including Manfred Honeck, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Jaap van Zweden, Francois-Xavier Roth and Klaus Mäkelä. Past highlights have included performances with the Boston Symphony, Budapest Festival and Israel Philharmonic orchestras, and with conductors such as Sir Antonio Pappano and Valery Gergiev.

Kantorow records exclusively for BIS, now part of Apple Music. All his recordings have received the highest critical acclaim internationally as well as multiple awards, including several Diapason d'Or, Victoires de la musique Classique and Trophée d'Année and in 2022 he was featured in Gramophone magazine, with a full front-page cover and Editor's Choice.

Kantorow is a laureate of the Safran Foundation and Banque Populaire Foundation. Born in France and of French British heritage, Kantorow studied with Pierre-Alain Volondat, Igor Lazko, Frank Braley, and Rena Shereshevskaya.

# **About the Philharmonia**



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.

The Philharmonia is a registered charity. We are proud to be supported by Arts Council England, and grateful to the many generous individuals, businesses, trust and foundations who make up our family of supporters.

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