



**Free concert
programme**

London Philharmonic Orchestra



**2025/26 season
at the
Southbank Centre**



**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**
RESIDENT

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jebsen

Principal Guest Conductor Karina Canellakis supported by Richard Buxton

Conductor Emeritus Vladimir Jurowski KBE **Patron** HRH The Duke of Kent KG

Artistic Director Jesús Herrera **Chief Executive** David Burke

Leader Pieter Schoeman supported by Neil Westreich

Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Saturday 27 September 2025 | 7.30pm

Beethoven's Emperor Concerto

George Benjamin

Ringed by the Flat Horizon (19')

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 5 (Emperor) (38')

Interval (20')

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No. 5 (47')

Edward Gardner conductor

Generously supported by Aud Jebsen

Yefim Bronfman

piano

Part of



**Harmony
with Nature**

Music for a sustainable future

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 30 September 2025 at 7.30pm. It will remain available for 30 days after that on BBC Sounds.

**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**
RESIDENT



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Welcome to tonight's concert

Welcome to the first concert of a brand new LPO season! We're so pleased to have you with us tonight as we begin our *Harmony with Nature* series: a season-long journey exploring our connection with the natural world through music that reflects its beauty, its unpredictability, and the powerful emotions it stirs in us. Tonight it's also a pleasure to welcome Sir George Benjamin, our new Composer-in-Residence, whose work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* opens this evening's concert.

We hope you enjoy tonight's concert and that you'll join us again soon! Next Friday (3 October), Edward Gardner returns to conduct Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with soprano soloist Jennifer France; his other highlights later in the season include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; 'Phoenix Lands': a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a concert performance of Berg's *Wozzeck*. Do pick up a 2025/26 brochure in the foyer this evening, or browse the full season at lpo.org.uk.

With best wishes,



David Burke
Chief Executive

Jesús Herrera
Artistic Director

Welcome to the Southbank Centre

We're the UK's largest centre for the arts and one of the nation's top five visitor attractions, showcasing the world's most exciting artists at our venues in the heart of London. As a charity, we bring millions of people together by opening up the unique art spaces that we care for.

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 email hello@southbankcentre.co.uk or write to us at Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX.

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On stage tonight

First Violins

Pieter Schoeman* Leader

Chair supported by Neil Westreich

Alice Ivy-Pemberton

Co-Leader

Vesselin Gellev 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

Martin Höhmann

Katalin Varnagy

Thomas Eisner

Chair supported by Ryze Power

Yang Zhang

Nilufar Alimaksumova

Amanda Smith

Alison Strange

Alice Apreda Howell

Camille Buitenhuis

Tayfun Bomboz

Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal

Chair supported by The Candide Trust

Emma Oldfield Co-Principal

Claudia Tarrant-Matthews

Ashley Stevens

Fiona Higham

Kate Birchall

Sophie Phillips

Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra

Nancy Elan

Sioni Williams

Nynke Hijlkema

Kate Cole

Ricky Gore

Marie-Anne Mairesse

Paula Clifton-Everest

Violas

Nicholas Bootiman

Guest Principal

Michael Andreas Grolid

Lucia Ortiz Saucó

Katharine Leek

Martin Wray

Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden

Benedetto Pollani

Jisu Song

Shiry Rashkovsky

Kate De Campos

Raquel López Bolívar

Laura Vallejo

Mark Gibbs

Cellos

Kristina Blaumane Principal

Chair supported by Bianca & Stuart Roden

Henry Shapard Co-Principal

Wayne Kwon

Chair supported by an anonymous donor

David Lale

Leo Melvin

Daniel Hammersley

Francis Bucknall

Hee Yeon Cho

Helen Thomas

Sibylle Hentschel

Double Basses

Sebastian Pennar* Principal

Hugh Kluger

George Peniston

Laura Murphy

Chair supported by Ian Ferguson & Susan Tranter

Charlotte Kerbegian

Lowri Estell

Adam Wynter

Elen Roberts

Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal

Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites

Daniel Shao

Stewart McIlwham*

Piccolos

Stewart McIlwham*

Principal

Daniel Shao

Oboes

Ian Hardwick* Principal

Alice Munday

Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley

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

E-flat Clarinet

Thomas Watmough

Principal

Chair supported by Roger

Greenwood

Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards* Principal

Bassoons

Jonathan Davies* Principal

Chair supported by Sir Simon Robey

Helen Storey*

Contrabassoon

Simon Estell* Principal

Horns

Annemarie Federle

Principal

Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE

John Ryan* Principal

Martin Hobbs

Mark Vines Co-Principal

Max Garrard

Trumpets

Paul Beniston* Principal

Chair supported by the Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams

Tom Nielsen* Principal

Anne McAnaney*

Trombones

Mark Templeton* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

David Whitehouse

Bass Trombone

Lyndon Meredith Principal

Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Timpani

Simon Carrington* Principal

Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE

Percussion

Andrew Barclay* Principal

Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins

Karen Hutt Co-Principal

Oliver Yates

Sarah Mason

Jeremy Cornes

Harp

Doriene Marselje

Guest Principal

Piano

Iain Clarke

Celeste

Fionnuala Ward

Assistant Conductor

Juya Shin

**Professor at a London conservatoire*

London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

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. Our mission is to share wonder with the modern world through the power of orchestral music, which we accomplish through live performances, online, and an extensive education and community programme, cementing our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is 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 worldwide. In 2024 we celebrated 60 years as Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the Grammy-nominated London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems for 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*.

Sharing the wonder worldwide

We're one of the world's most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month. In 2023 we were the most successful orchestra worldwide on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, and in 2024 we featured in a TV documentary series on Sky Arts: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA. During 2025/26 we're once again working with Marquee TV to broadcast selected live concerts to enjoy at home.

Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included some of the greatest historic names like Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2021 Edward Gardner became our 13th Principal Conductor, and Vladimir Jurowski became Conductor Emeritus. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin our Composer-in-Residence.

Next generations

We're committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers: we love seeing the joy of children and families experiencing their first musical moments, and we're passionate about inspiring schools and teachers through dedicated concerts, workshops, resources and training. Reflecting our values of

Pieter Schoeman

Leader

collaboration and inclusivity, our OrchLab and Open Sound Ensemble projects offer music-making opportunities for adults and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Today's young instrumentalists are the orchestra members of the future, and we have a number of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme leads 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 two outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2025/26 season

This season's theme, *Harmony with Nature*, explores humanity's bond with the natural world through works by Beethoven, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Elgar and Dvořák; masterpieces of an era that saw nature as a mirror of human emotion. Closer to our own time, we'll hear from composers as diverse as Duke Ellington, John Luther Adams and Anna Thorvaldsdottir, who have all found a source of creative energy in the processes of nature.

Highlights with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* to end the season. We'll also welcome back Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as guest conductors including Robin Ticciati, Kirill Karabits, Mark Elder and Elim Chan. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Himari; cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason; and pianists Yefim Bronfman, Alexandre Kantorow and Tomoko Mukaiyama. The season features nine world and UK premieres, including Tan Dun's choral *'Ode to Peace' Nine*, and *A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)* by jazz icon Terence Blanchard.

We're also looking forward to tours to South Korea and across Europe, as well as another season bursting with performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.



© Benjamin Ealovega

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 Amsterdam Concertgebouw,

Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, and the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. He has also appeared as Guest Leader with many prestigious orchestras across the world. 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 LPO. Highlights have included an appearance as both conductor and soloist in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the Brahms Double Concerto with Kristina Blaumane, Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2, and the Britten Double Concerto with Alexander Zemtsov, which was released on the LPO Label to great critical acclaim.

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

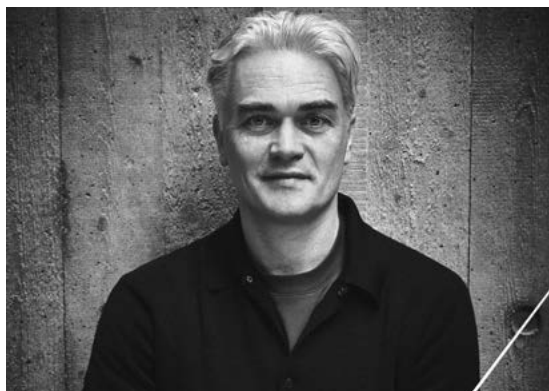
New video series: 'Humans of the Orchestra'

Scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Edward Gardner has been Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since 2021. He is also Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet and Honorary Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, following his tenure as Chief Conductor from 2015–24.

This season's highlights with the LPO include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; 'Phoenix Lands': a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a concert performance of Berg's opera *Wozzeck* to end the season. They will also give five concerts in South Korea and a tour of major cities in Germany.

Edward opens his second season as Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet with *Rusalka* and concert performances of Kurtág's *Fin de partie*. In spring 2026 he will conduct *Don Carlos* and Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. June 2026 sees concert performances of Wagner's *The Ring Without Words*, and next season the opera house will begin its journey towards a complete *Ring Cycle* in the 2028/29 season.

In demand as a guest conductor, this season Edward returns to orchestras in the USA including the Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Dallas Symphony and National Symphony orchestras, and makes his debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In Europe he conducts the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Danish National Symphony Orchestra and Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. In Tokyo he makes his debut with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

An acclaimed opera conductor, in spring 2025 Edward was re-invited to London's Royal Opera House to conduct the world premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen*, having made his Covent Garden debut with *Káťa Kabanová*. In June 2025 he returned to the Bavarian State Opera for *Rusalka*, following his debut with *Peter Grimes* in 2022 and Verdi's *Otello* in 2023. Music Director of English National Opera for eight years (2007–15), he has also built a strong relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, with productions of *The Damnation of Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. Elsewhere, he has conducted at La Scala, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and the Opéra National de Paris.

Edward Gardner has recorded extensively with the Bergen Philharmonic on the Chandos label, including most recently *Salome*, as well as a Grammy-nominated Janáček *Glagolitic Mass*. Other recent critically acclaimed releases include *Der fliegende Holländer* with Lise Davidsen, Gerald Finley and the Norwegian National Opera for Decca. Earlier this month, the LPO Label released Edward's recording of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir. This was his third Tippett release on the label, following *The Midsummer Marriage* – which won a 2023 Gramophone Award – and the Second Symphony and Piano Concerto with Steven Osborne in 2024. He has also released on the label Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, and works by Rachmaninov, Dvořák, Schumann and Britten. In 2024 he and the LPO featured in a Sky Arts series: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a BAFTA and is still available to watch on NOW TV.

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.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music, and gained early recognition as Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year Award (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.

Yefim Bronfman

piano



© Dario Acosta

Internationally recognised as one of today's most acclaimed and admired pianists, Yefim Bronfman stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors and recital series. His commanding technique, power and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike.

Following summer festival appearances in Vail, Tanglewood and Aspen, the 2025/26 season began with an extensive recital and orchestral tour in Asia including China, Japan and South Korea. In Europe, as well as tonight's concert with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Yefim Bronfman can be heard this season with orchestras in Kristiansand, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and Dresden, and on tour with the Israel Philharmonic. A special trio project with violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter and cellist Pablo Ferrández will continue later this autumn, with performances in Switzerland, Spain, Germany and France. In North America, he returns to New York, Rochester, Cleveland (in Miami), Pittsburgh, Kansas City and Montreal, and in recital, he can be heard in Prague, Milan, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Orange County, Charlottesville and Toronto.

Yefim Bronfman works regularly with illustrious conductors including Daniel Barenboim, Herbert Blomstedt, Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Christoph von Dohnányi, Gustavo Dudamel, Charles Dutoit, Daniele Gatti, Valery Gergiev, Alan Gilbert, Vladimir Jurowski, Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Jaap van Zweden, Franz Welser-Möst and David Zinman. Summer engagements have regularly taken him to the major festivals of Europe and the US. Always keen to explore chamber repertoire,

his partners have included Pinchas Zukerman, Martha Argerich, Magdalena Kožená, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Emmanuel Pahud and many others. In 1991 he gave a series of joint recitals with violinist Isaac Stern in Russia, marking his first public performances there since his emigration to Israel aged 15.

Yefim Bronfman's recordings have been nominated for six Grammy Awards, winning in 1997 with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic for their recording of the three Bartók Piano Concerti. His prolific recording catalogue includes works for two pianos by Rachmaninov and Brahms with Emanuel Ax; the complete Prokofiev concerti with the Israel Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta; and the soundtrack to Disney's *Fantasia 2000*. In 2013 the Da Capo label released Yefim Bronfman's Grammy-nominated recording of Magnus Lindberg's Piano Concerto No. 2 – which was commissioned for him – with the New York Philharmonic under Alan Gilbert; in 2015 Bronfman gave the work's UK premiere with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Vladimir Jurowski during Lindberg's period as LPO Composer-in-Residence. Other recent releases include Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 with Mariss Jansons and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra; a recital disc, *Perspectives*; and all the Beethoven piano concerti as well as the Triple Concerto with violinist Gil Shaham, cellist Truls Mørk and the Tönhalle Orchestra Zürich under David Zinman for the Arte Nova/BMG label.

Available on DVD are his performances of Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2 with Franz Welser-Möst and the Vienna Philharmonic on Deutsche Grammophon; Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 with Andris Nelsons and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra from the 2011 Lucerne Festival; Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle on the EuroArts label; and both Brahms concerti with Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra.

Born in Tashkent in the Soviet Union, Yefim Bronfman emigrated to Israel with his family in 1973, where he studied with pianist Arie Vardi, head of the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University. In the United States, he studied at The Juilliard School, the Marlboro School of Music and the Curtis Institute of Music, under Rudolf Firkusny, Leon Fleisher and Rudolf Serkin. A recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, one of the highest honours given to American instrumentalists, in 2010 he was further honoured as recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane prize in piano performance from Northwestern University, and in 2015 with an honorary doctorate from the Manhattan School of Music.

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Harmony with Nature

Our planet, centre stage: tonight's works and our season theme

This season, we invite audiences to join us in exploring one of the most urgent conversations of our time – our relationship with the natural world – through the power of music. We'll marvel at oceans, forests, caves, mountains and wildlife through works by Beethoven, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Elgar and Dvořák; masterpieces of an era that saw nature as a mirror of human emotion – but also, perhaps, experienced it more immediately and organically than in the digital age.

Closer to our own time, voices as diverse as Duke Ellington, John Luther Adams, Gustavo Díaz-Jerez and Anna Thorvaldsdottir have all found an unquenchable source of creative energy in the processes of nature, from river deltas to volcanic eruptions. For composers such as Anna Korsun, Gabriela Lena Frank and Terence Blanchard (whose powerful meditation on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina receives its UK premiere), humanity enters the picture. As destroyer or protector? Or simply as an organic, inextricable part of nature itself?

Throughout the season, we'll also be partnering with local environmental organisations and announcing a host of exciting pre-concert speakers, as we attempt to use the power of classical music to encourage environmental stewardship. We hope you'll join us!

Check out the full season at
lpo.org.uk/harmony-with-nature



Nature's voice in tonight's programme



Tonight's concert opens with *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* by our new Composer-in-Residence, Sir George Benjamin: a haunting, atmospheric orchestral piece inspired by vast skies and looming storms.

The work's title comes from a line in T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land*, describing a thunderstorm over an arid desert: 'What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air'. Reflecting on the piece's origins, the composer writes: 'A dramatic photograph of a thunderstorm over the New Mexico desert and an extract from *The Waste Land* provided the inspiration for this piece. I wanted to portray an eerie tension as a landscape is overwhelmed by a vast storm.' The result is a vivid musical portrait of landscape and weather – unsettling at times, but mesmerising in its stillness and power.

Introducing Sir George Benjamin

Our new Composer-in-Residence

© Åsa Westerlund



Tonight marks the start of Sir George Benjamin's position as LPO Composer-in-Residence, succeeding Tania León (2023–25). During his time with us, he will participate in rehearsals and performances of his music, and will help us develop the next generation of music creators as mentor to our LPO Young Composers.

Sir George Benjamin is one of the leading figures in contemporary classical music. Born in 1960, he studied with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire and with Alexander Goehr at King's College, Cambridge. Tonight's work, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, was performed at the 1980 BBC Proms when he was just 20, marking the start of a remarkable career. His many subsequent works have been performed by notable conductors and orchestras worldwide, and his groundbreaking opera collaborations with playwright Martin Crimp have created the modern classics *Into the Little Hill*, *Written on Skin*, and *Lessons in Love and Violence*. His most recent opera, *Picture a day like this*, was premiered at the 2023 Aix-en-Provence Festival.

Benjamin's music has recently been in focus at the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Aspects, festival des musiques d'aujourd'hui, the Ravel Festival, the Festival des Volques, Gürzenich Orchester Köln, and Prague Spring. A 2023 tour with Ensemble Modern, with Benjamin conducting, marked three decades of collaboration between Benjamin and the group.

Recent works include *Interludes and Aria* (from *Lessons in Love and Violence*), premiered by Simon Rattle, Barbara Hannigan and the London Symphony Orchestra, which toured to the Philharmonie de Paris and Philharmonie Luxembourg. Benjamin premiered *DIVISIONS* for piano four-hands with Pierre-Laurent Aimard at the Boulez Saal in 2025.

The Henry Purcell Professor of Composition at King's College London since 2001, Benjamin has received numerous awards, including a knighthood in 2017, the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize in 2023, and the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in 2024.

It's a pleasure to welcome Sir George Benjamin to the LPO and to tonight's concert – and we look forward to sharing more of his music during his time with us.

'I hugely look forward to collaborating with this illustrious orchestra and their wonderful Principal Conductor over the seasons ahead, as well as playing a role in their renowned Young Composers programme.'

– Sir George Benjamin

**Video: Sir George Benjamin
on *Ringed by the Flat Horizon***

Scan the QR code to watch



**Sir George
Benjamin**

introduces
Ringed by the Flat Horizon

London
Philharmonic
Orchestra



Programme notes

George Benjamin

born 1960

Ringed by the Flat Horizon

1980

*Who are these hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air*

– from *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot

Written in 1979–80 for the Cambridge University Musical Society, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* was first performed at the University of Cambridge by the CUMS Orchestra under Mark Elder on 5 March 1980. It received its London premiere later that year, on 25 August 1980 at the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, by the BBC Symphony Orchestra again under Elder. Instantly a breakout success, the work showcased the 20-year-old Benjamin's raw talent and imaginative treatment of orchestral textures.

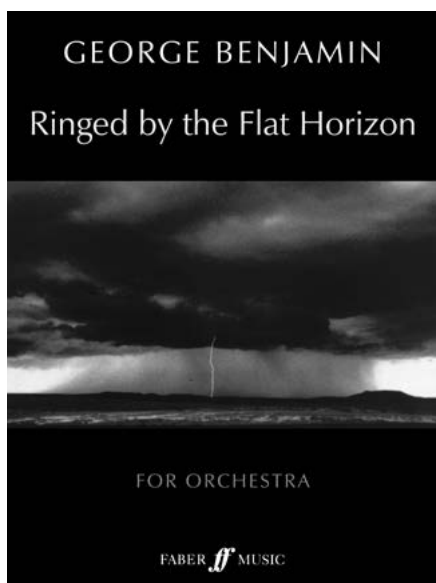
Reflecting on the piece's origins, the composer writes: 'A dramatic photograph of a thunderstorm over the New Mexico desert and an extract from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* provided the inspiration for this piece. I wanted to portray an eerie tension as a landscape is overwhelmed by a vast storm.'

The work starts slowly and mysteriously, with a succession of three textures that recur throughout the structure – weird, soft, bell chords, a sustained semitone clash, and deep tremors in the lower registers of the orchestra which depict distant thunder. Piccolo solos surrounded by high violins follow, and fuller developments of the opening ideas, gradually transform the momentum to faster music. Here a sonority of wind and muted trumpets, punctuated by wooden percussion, is juxtaposed with quieter, more lyrical cello solos. These build with increasing intensity, culminating in a massive climax, after which the music slowly descends to the bass register, subsiding in a solitary bass-drum roll. There follows a sequence of dark, ominous chords for full orchestra (a sound completely new to the piece), interspersed with solo

melodic lines over the deep tremors of the opening. For a moment the original semitone clash hovers motionless in the air; the thunder at last erupts in a violent explosion; and the work returns to a mood of unreal calm, ending as it began, with a soft bell chord.'

© George Benjamin, 1980

Cover of the score, featuring the photograph by Dr William Winn that inspired the work.



Programme notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 73 (Emperor)

1809

Yefim Bronfman piano

1. Allegro

2. Adagio un poco mosso –

3. Rondo: Allegro



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

One has to wonder whether the organisers of the concert at which Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto received its Viennese premiere in February 1812 – the actual premiere having taken place in Leipzig the previous November – provided the ideal audience. A contemporary report of the combined concert and art exhibition mounted by the Society of Noble Ladies for Charity tells us that 'the pictures offer a glorious treat; a new pianoforte concerto by Beethoven failed'. And it is true that, while it was later to become as familiar a piano concerto as any, in its early years the 'Emperor' struggled for popularity. Perhaps its leonine strength and symphonic sweep were simply too much for everyone, not just the Noble Ladies. Cast in the same key as the 'heroic' Third Symphony, it breathes much the same majestically confident air, though in a manner one might describe as more macho. Composed in the first few months of 1809, with war brewing between Austria and France, this is Beethoven in what may have seemed overbearingly optimistic mood.

The Concerto is certainly not reticent about declaring itself. The first movement opens with extravagant flourishes from the piano punctuated with stoic orchestral chords, leading us with an unerring sense of direction towards the sturdy first theme. This march-like tune presents two important thematic reference-points in the shape of a tight melodic twist (technically known as a 'turn') and a tiny figure of just two notes (long and short) which Beethoven refers to constantly in the

Programme notes

course of the movement. The latter ushers in the chromatic scale with which the piano re-enters, and the same sequence of events later serves to introduce the development section. Here the turn dominates, dreamily passed around the woodwind, but the two-note figure emerges ever more strongly, eventually firing off a stormy tirade of piano octaves. The air quickly clears, however, and reappearances of the turn lead back to a recapitulation of the opening material. Towards the end of the movement Beethoven makes his most radical formal move. In the early 19th century it was still customary at this point in a concerto for the soloist to improvise a cadenza (a solo passage), but in this work Beethoven for the first time includes one that is not only fully written-out, but involves the orchestra as well. It was an innovation that many subsequent composers, perhaps glad of the extra measure of control, would follow.

The second and third movements together take less time to play than the first. The *Adagio*, in distant B major, opens with a serene, hymn-like tune from the strings, which the piano answers with a theme of its own before itself taking up the opening one in ornamented form. This in turn leads to an orchestral reprise of the same theme, now with greater participation from the winds and with piano decoration.

At the end, the music dissolves, then eerily drops down a semitone as the piano toys idly with some quiet, thickly scored chords. In a flash, these are then transformed and revealed to be the main theme of the bouncy *Rondo* finale, which has followed without a break. Physical joins between movements were a trend in Beethoven's music at this time, but so too were thematic ones. At one point in this finale, with the main theme firmly established, the strings gently put forward the 'experimental' version from the end of the slow movement, as if mocking the piano's earlier tentativeness. The movement approaches its close, however, with piano and timpani in stealthy cahoots before, with a final flurry, the end is upon us.

The Concerto's nickname was not chosen by Beethoven, and, given the composer's angry reaction to Napoleon's self-appointment as Emperor in 1804, it may seem more than usually inappropriate. Yet there is an aptness to it if we take the music's grandly heroic stance as a picture of what, perhaps, an emperor ought to be. Beethoven once remarked that if he had understood the arts of war as well as he had those of music, he could have defeated Napoleon. Who, listening to this Concerto, could doubt that?

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Interval – 20 minutes

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Programme notes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–93

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

1888

1. Andante – Allegro con anima

2. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza

3. Valse: Allegro moderato

4. Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

Tchaikovsky's last three symphonies (Nos. 4–6) are sometimes depicted as a set, or even as a kind of dramatic trilogy. Of course each work is entirely self-sufficient, and they don't directly 'refer' to one another – as some of Mahler's symphonies do. But it is possible to see similar preoccupations being worked out in all three symphonies: some of them purely musical, others more personal, possibly autobiographical.

These last three symphonies are so familiar to many that their originality tends to be overlooked. In fact these are some of the most original symphonic works composed after Beethoven's titanic nine. Although all of them are in the traditional four movements, the layout is radically different in each case. The Fourth balances a huge, complex and powerfully tragic first movement with three shorter ones, which can be seen as strikingly contrasted responses to the bleak predicament outlined in the first. The Sixth (the 'Pathétique'), on the other hand, places the tragedy at the end in a shattering *Adagio lamentoso* – symphonies ending in slow movements were extremely rare in the 19th century.

The Fifth follows yet another course. Like No. 4, it begins with what is clearly a 'Fate' motif, which here returns to haunt all three later movements. After Tchaikovsky's disastrous attempt to conquer – or at least conceal – his homosexuality by marrying one of his students in 1877, he became increasingly convinced that his life was directed by some kind of dark, implacable force. The brazen fanfare theme that begins the Fourth Symphony was specifically labelled 'Fate' by its composer. The Fifth's fateful motto theme, however, enters with a very different kind of tone and tread.

Low clarinets (a colour Tchaikovsky often used to great effect) sing a mournful, funereal theme, while low string chords underscore the sense of heavy, weary movement. Eventually this comes to a halt, *pianissimo*; but then the string chords set out at a livelier pace, and a new theme – melancholic but with a new dancing momentum – emerges on clarinet and bassoon. The Symphony appears to be attempting to counter gloom with the classic remedy of physical movement. This *Allegro con anima* has its exhilarating highs and stark lows, but the end echoes the beginning: a bassoon subtly recalls the outline of the original Fate theme before descending to a cavernous low B, as timpani and double basses close the movement unambiguously in the minor.

Sombre low string chords begin the slow movement, but now they climb towards the light, which dawns fully in a wonderful long horn melody. If the first movement's motto theme represents Fate, then this is almost certainly a 'Love' theme. Eventually the music grows agitated, and the first movement's Fate theme storms in on trumpets, bringing the music to a dead stop. Has the idyll been shattered? Tentatively at first, the Love melody returns (now on violins with oboe countermelody) and the mood grows more ardent – until again Fate intrudes, still more aggressively, on trombones. This time there is no return of the Love theme, but a tender, possibly resigned coda.

The following *Valse* (Waltz) movement is in striking contrast. Its elegant, lilting dance tune could have come straight from a ballroom scene in one of Tchaikovsky's operas or ballets. But just before the end, Fate returns

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again, this time quietly on low clarinets and bassoons – a dim but ghostly presence amid colourful merriment. Clearly its implications have to be faced, so Tchaikovsky begins his finale by transforming the Fate theme into a resolutely major-key march tune. This new-found determination is striking, but before long the resolve seems to falter and a turbulent *Allegro vivace* explodes onto the scene. At length this comes to a big expectant pause, then the resolute major-key version of the Fate theme marches back in on strings to launch Tchaikovsky's most positive symphonic conclusion – could Tchaikovsky be telling us that we can be reconciled with, even embrace our fate? Eventually the coda races to the finishing post with memories of the first movement's dancing *Allegro* theme shining out on trumpets and horns. Not every listener finds this final affirmation entirely convincing – but that may have been Tchaikovsky's intention. After all, how often in life do we experience unequivocal triumph?

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

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6.30pm

L Boulanger D'un matin de
printemps

L Boulanger Faust et Hélène

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Rachmaninov's Second Symphony

Saturday 25 October 2025,
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Mozart Overture, Idomeneo

Mozart Masonic Funeral Music,
K477

Mozart Piano Concerto No. 25
in C major, K503

Rachmaninov Symphony No. 2

Karina Canellakis conductor

Paul Lewis piano

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Wednesday 29 October 2025,
7.30pm

Chinary Ung Water Rings

Sibelius Violin Concerto

Dvořák Symphony No. 9
(From the New World)

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