



**Concert  
programme**

**London  
Philharmonic  
Orchestra**



**2025/26 season  
at Brighton Dome**



**D**  
Brighton  
Dome

# London Philharmonic Orchestra

**Principal Conductor** Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jepsen

**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

## Brighton Dome Concert Hall

Saturday 14 March 2026 | 7.30pm

## Congress Theatre, Eastbourne

Sunday 15 March 2026 | 3.00pm

# The Firebird

## Mendelssohn

Hebrides Overture (11')

## Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major, K488 (26')

*Interval (20')*

## Debussy

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (10')

## Stravinsky

The Firebird Suite (1919 version) (19')

## Dionysis Grammenos

conductor

## Lukas Sternath

piano

**Sunday 15 March | Congress Theatre, Eastbourne**  
**Pre-concert performance | 2.15pm**

Enjoy the sound of local young talent, as musicians from Create Music give a special free performance in the Congress Theatre foyer. Create Music is part of Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival and the Hub Lead Organisation for the Sussex Music Hub.

The timings shown are not precise and are given only as a guide.  
Concerts presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in association with Brighton Dome and Eastbourne Borough Council.

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**ARTS COUNCIL**  
**ENGLAND**

Saturday 14 March 2026

## Welcome to Brighton Dome

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Welcome to tonight's concert by the London Philharmonic Orchestra here at Brighton Dome. We hope you enjoy the performance and your visit here. For your comfort and safety, please note the following: thank you for your co-operation.

**Latecomers** may not be admitted until a suitable break in the performance. Some performances may contain no suitable breaks.

**Interval drinks** may be ordered in advance at the bar to avoid queues.

**Photography** is not allowed in the auditorium.

**Recording** is not allowed in the auditorium.

**Mobiles and watches** should be switched off before entering the auditorium.

The concert at Brighton Dome on 14 March 2026 is presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in association with Brighton Dome.

Brighton Dome gratefully acknowledges the support of Brighton & Hove City Council and Arts Council England.



### Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival with Create Music

Situated in the Royal Pavilion Estate at the heart of the city, Brighton Dome is an arts charity, three historic contemporary live arts venues, a music education service across the region – Create Music – and the biggest curated cross-arts festival in England.

[brightondome.org](http://brightondome.org) | [brightonfestival.org](http://brightonfestival.org)  
[createmusic.org.uk](http://createmusic.org.uk)

Sunday 15 March 2026

## Welcome to the Congress Theatre

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**Venue Director** Neil Jones

We extend a warm welcome to the members of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and to the artists performing with the Orchestra today – and of course to every one of you, our valued audience members.

The historic theatre in which you are now seated is unique in that it is conceived to be a perfect cube and has fantastic acoustics to enhance your experience of live music. Whether this is your first concert or you are a season regular, we hope you enjoy your experience at our venue. Please speak to a member of our staff if you have any comments you'd like to make about your visit. We thank you for continuing to support the concert series. Please sit back in your seats and enjoy your afternoon with us.

As a courtesy to others, please ensure mobile phones are switched off during the performance. Please also note that photography and recording are not allowed in the auditorium unless announced from the stage. Thank you.

### Printed with the planet in mind

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# On stage

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## First Violins

Pieter Schoeman\* Leader

Chair supported by Neil Westreich

Minn Majoe

Chair supported by Dr Alex & Maria Chan

Katalin Varnagy

Alison Strange

Ronald Long

Camille Buitenhuis

Eve Kennedy

Kay Chappell

Maeve Jenkinson

Tayfun Bomboz

Simon-Philippe Allard

Pak Ho Hong

Martin Höhmann†

Alice Hall†

## Second Violins

Emma Oldfield Principal

Ashley Stevens

Kate Birchall

Joseph Maher

Lyrít Milgram

Sheila Law

José Nuno Cabrita Matias

Olivia Ziani

Gary Ngan

Joanne Chen

Sioni Williams†

Matthew Bain†

## Violas

Alexandros Koustas Guest Principal

Benedetto Pollani

Laura Vallejo

Martin Wray

Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden

Raquel López Bolívar

Joseph Fisher

Jisu Song

Jill Valentine

Toby Warr

Charles Cross

## Cellos

Henry Shapard Principal

Leo Melvin

Helen Thomas

Hee Yeon Cho

Henry Hargreaves

Rasmus Støier Andersen

Julia Morneweg

Edward Mead

## Double Basses

Kevin Rundell\* Principal

Hugh Kluger

George Peniston

Tom Walley

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Elen Roberts

Ben Havinden-Williams

## Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal

Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites

Ian Mullin

Stewart Mcllwham\*

## Piccolo

Stewart Mcllwham\* Principal

## Oboes

Ian Hardwick\* Principal

Alice Munday

Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley

## Cor Anglais

Adrian Rowlands

## Clarinets

Thomas Watmough Principal

Chair supported by Roger Greenwood

Emily Crook

## Bassoons

Will Kidner Guest Principal

Emma Harding

## Horns

John Ryan\* Principal

Martin Hobbs

Duncan Fuller

Elise Campbell

Tom Findlay

## Trumpets

Paul Beniston\* Principal

Chair supported by the Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams

Tom Nielsen\* Principal

Anne McAneney\*

## Trombones

Mark Templeton\* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

David Whitehouse

## Bass Trombone

Guy Berry

## Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis\* Principal

Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

## Timpani

William Lockhart Guest Principal

## Percussion

Andrew Barclay\* Principal

Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins

Feargus Brennan

Francesca Lombardelli

Emmanuel Joste

## Harps

Sally Pryce Guest Principal

Tomos Xerri

## Piano/Celeste

Iain Clarke

*\*Professor at a London conservatoire*

*†Brighton 14 March only*

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

An anonymous donor  
Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton  
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# 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. We're the most followed UK orchestra on Instagram, the most followed orchestra globally on TikTok, and overall the third most followed globally across all social platforms. 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 great 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 Kahchun Wong. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Himari; cellist Nicolas Altstaedt; 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.

The season also sees 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 Lalovega

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'

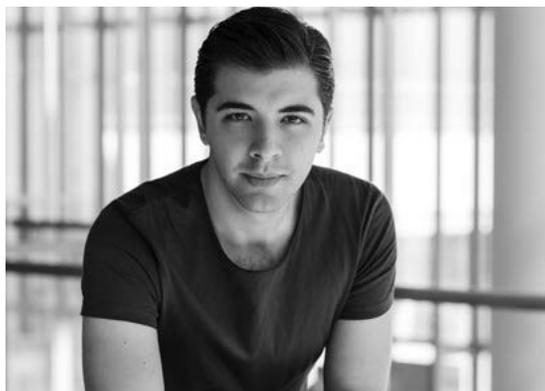
Scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



# Dionysis Grammenos

conductor

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Greek conductor Dionysis Grammenos first established himself internationally as a clarinetist. He won a place on the ECHO Rising Stars programme in 2013/14, which led to performances with many major orchestras and at some of the most prestigious venues worldwide. In 2016, he received a Conducting Fellowship at the Aspen Music Festival, and since this time has conducted widely across the world, both in the concert hall and opera pit. He is praised regularly for his innate and instinctive musicianship, the clarity and efficiency of his conducting, and his proficiency in shaping the sound of the orchestra. His performances are profoundly expressive, rich in colour and emotion, and he has been described by *Die Welt* as 'one of the most promising stars of tomorrow'.

Dionysis conducts worldwide with orchestras including the Houston Symphony, Belgian National Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Athens State Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Quebec, Cameristi della Scala, Lucerne Festival Strings, Ulster Orchestra and RTÉ Concert Orchestra, with soloists such as Khatia Buniatishvili, Renaud Capuçon, Noah Bendix-Balgley, Daniel Ottensamer, Anna Fedorova and Mahan Esfahani. He made his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in February 2024, when he stepped in at short notice to conduct them on tour in Athens.

2025/26 season highlights include a return to the Slovak State Orchestra and a recording project with the Philharmonia Orchestra. With the Greek Youth Symphony Orchestra, he will make his conducting debut at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam and will be joined by Leonidas Kavakos for a performance at the Megaron in Athens.

On the opera stage, Dionysis Grammenos has conducted Puccini's *La bohème* with English Touring Opera and New Zealand Opera, receiving praise for 'one of the best *Bohèmes* I have heard in recent years' (*Daily Mail*) and for his 'sensitivity and assurance, balancing the orchestra beautifully with the singers' (*The Press, NZ*). He has also conducted Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at Nevill Holt Opera, Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* at the Aspen Music Festival, and Verdi's *Il trovatore* at the Theater Vorpommern. Prior to this, he made his operatic conducting debut in Würzburg with Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, and has assisted Johannes Debus on productions of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at the Canadian Opera Company.

Dionysis Grammenos is Founder and Artistic Director of the Greek Youth Symphony Orchestra (GYSO). Under his leadership, the orchestra has performed at prestigious venues across the world including Carnegie Hall in New York and St Martin-in-the-Fields in London. Having joined the European Federation of National Youth Orchestras, the orchestra was invited to perform at the opening concert of the Young Euro Classic Festival at the Berlin Konzerthaus. Since 2020, the GYSO has been Orchestra-in-Residence at the Megaron in Athens.

Dionysis trained as a clarinetist at the Franz Liszt University of Music in Weimar, Germany, and in 2008 won the Grand Prix d'Eurovision from the European Broadcasting Union, as well as the title of European Young Musician of the Year – the first wind player ever to receive this title. As soloist, he has performed at the Berlin Philharmonie and Carnegie Hall, with the Vienna Symphony, Norwegian Radio and ORF Vienna, and as an ECHO Rising Star he appeared at many of the world's top venues including London's Barbican and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. He has also made recordings for Naïve and Warner Classics.

In 2009, Dionysis Grammenos was awarded the Leonardo da Vinci World Award of Arts and the Gold Medal of the City of Athens. After his studies in Weimar, he studied conducting at the Würzburg Music University with Ari Rasilainen, and was invited to take part in conducting masterclasses with David Zinman, Bernard Haitink, Patrick Summers and Robert Spano. In 2018, he was selected for the European Young Leaders programme under the patronage of Jean-Claude Juncker, which aims to cultivate a European identity by engaging the most promising talents in initiatives destined to shape Europe's future.

# Lukas Sternath

piano

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© Julia Wesely

From a very early age, Lukas Sternath's life revolved around music. Born in Vienna in 2001, he travelled the world as a member of the famed Vienna Boys' Choir and gave concerts on the most prestigious stages in Europe, North America and Asia. He received his musical training in piano from Anna Malikova and Alma Sauer at the University of Music & Performing Arts in Vienna. In 2025, he completed his Master's degree at the Hanover University of Music, Drama & Media, studying with Igor Levit and Paul Lewis. Further mentors include pianists Till Fellner, as well as Ingolf Wunder and Sir András Schiff, whose masterclasses he attended.

At the 71st International ARD Music Competition in Munich in 2022, Lukas Sternath caused a sensation – in addition to the First Prize, he was awarded seven special prizes, including the Audience Prize and the Prize for the Best Interpretation of the Commissioned Composition. The previous year, he was a multiple prizewinner at the 63rd International Ferruccio Busoni Piano Competition in Bolzano, at the 14th International Schubert Piano Competition in Dortmund, and at the 17th European Piano Competition in Bremen.

Nominated by the Vienna Musikverein, the Vienna Konzerthaus and the Luxembourg Philharmonie, Lukas Sternath was named an ECHO Rising Star for the 2024/25 season. In 2025, the BBC selected him as a New Generation Artist for the next two seasons. He made his debut at the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of its Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo in September 2025, and as part of this prestigious programme will continue to perform with leading orchestras and in recitals across the UK.

This weekend's concerts mark Lukas's debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This season he also makes debuts with the Vienna Philharmonic under Tugan Sokhiev in Vienna and on a European tour to Slovakia, Germany, and Luxembourg. Further debuts will follow with the Kammerakademie Potsdam, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. As a soloist with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Lukas will perform in Vienna under the baton of Kazuki Yamada and also tour Germany – the latter conducted by Chief Conductor Petr Popelka. Another highlight of the season will be his return to the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra under Jakub Hruška, also as part of a German tour. He will give recitals at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, the Prinzregententheater in Munich, Flagey in Brussels, and Wigmore Hall in London. In February this year, he launched a 'Lukas Sternath Cycle' at the Vienna Musikverein, presenting recitals and chamber music concerts – a first in the history of the venue.

In previous seasons, Lukas has made recital debuts at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Gewandhaus Leipzig, the Philharmonie Essen, the Ruhr Piano Festival and the Heidelberg Spring Festival. As a soloist, he has collaborated with the Salzburg Festival and the Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg under Ádám Fischer, the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra with Markus Poschner, the Wuppertal Symphony Orchestra with Patrick Hahn, the Vienna Philharmonic Summer Academy with Tugan Sokhiev, the SWR Symphony Orchestra with Giedrė Šlekutė, and the Munich Philharmonic with Andrés Orozco-Estrada.

## Programme notes

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### Felix Mendelssohn

1809–47

### Hebrides Overture, Op. 26 (Fingal's Cave)

1830

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With his meticulous craftsmanship and formal balance, Mendelssohn stands as one of the most Classically-inclined of the major 19th-century composers, yet he was also prone to moments of spontaneous Romantic inspiration. This was certainly the case when he visited Scotland with his friend Karl Klingemann in the summer of 1829; in July they were at Holyrood Palace, and Mendelssohn, in his own words, 'found the beginning of my "Scottish" Symphony [No. 3]'; and on 7 August a visit to the Western Isles had the composer writing home from Tobermory that 'in order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides have affected me, I have written down the following which came into my mind'. What followed was the opening ten bars of the *Hebrides Overture*.

But this was a holiday, and Mendelssohn was not in Scotland to write music. The day after the letter, he took a boat trip to the Isle of Staffa 'with its strange basalt pillars and caverns', and it was not until December 1830 (in Rome!) that he completed the work, entitling it *Die einsame Insel* ('The Lonely Isle'). Revisions followed – Mendelssohn, fighting to reconcile the Classical and the Romantic, was concerned that it tasted 'more of counterpoint than of train oil, seagulls and salted cod' – and the version of the Overture as we know it now, with its dual title of *Die Hebriden* ('The Hebrides') and *Fingalshöhle* ('Fingal's Cave', after Staffa's best-known landmark) only emerged in 1832.

Mendelssohn's original thematic idea remained as the work's opening, its gently rolling melodic outline and atmospheric accompaniment surely conjuring as instant a vision of the sea as its composer could have hoped for. Its melancholy falling six-note motif dominates the ten-minute work, a warm and shapely rising second theme (first heard on cellos and bassoons) notwithstanding, and undergoes a number of mood-changes. A storm blows up briefly in the central development section, but calm is soon restored, especially in the second theme's restful return on clarinet, before the coda raises a final squall, again quickly quieted.

*Programme note* © Lindsay Kemp



## Programme notes

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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756–91

### Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major, K488

1786

Lukas Sternath piano

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1. *Allegro*

2. *Adagio*

3. *Allegro assai*



By the spring of 1786, Mozart's considerable popularity with the Viennese public was on the verge of decline. There is evidence that audiences were beginning to find his music over-composed, in the sense of being unnecessarily rich in melodic invention and complicated by chromatic and contrapuntal detail. When fellow composer Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf told the Emperor

'He is indisputably a genius', he added: 'I have never yet found anyone who possessed such an astonishing wealth of ideas. I wish he were not so lavish with them. He leaves his hearer out of breath, for scarcely has one thought through one idea than stands already another, which drives out the first.'

But Mozart may have been thought of as applying a little too much expressive weight as well, for the fact is that even those works of his which seem at first the most straightforward can hold surprising depths, or startle us with sudden turns into new and totally different emotional worlds. Such changeability may have left some listeners feeling uncomfortable, although of course it is just this ability to encompass in one work so many facets of the human condition, and to do it with an unobtrusive ease amounting almost to subterfuge, that makes Mozart's piano concertos the marvels they are.

K488 was composed in March 1786, at the same time as one of the most generous and humanly perceptive of all operatic masterpieces, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that its status as a favourite today owes as much to the contrasting and complex emotions it invokes as to its undoubted and enduring attractiveness.

The first movement is amiable and gentle, with pianistic brilliance rejected in favour of a lyrical landscape on which the sun frequently shines, but in which the occasional threat of clouds prevents things from spilling

## Programme notes

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into exuberance; even the end of the movement is cheerful in a subdued sort of way. It is the darker side, however, that emerges in the slow movement, although so magnified as to take us into the realms of heart-rending pathos. If the *Adagio* is a relatively rare choice of tempo-marking in Mozart's concertos, the selection of key, F sharp minor, is a unique one among all his works. And yes, this is the kind of movement only he could have written, cast in the lilting dance-rhythm of a *siciliana*, and with the anguished complaints of the piano seemingly incapable of consolation from the tender ministrations of the orchestra. It is the piano, however, that in an instant transforms the atmosphere

in the opening notes of the finale, a bustling rondo that brings the work to an exhilarating close as if nothing had ever been wrong in the world.

There is a story of how once, when Mozart was improvising in front of an audience he considered insufficiently attentive, he suddenly broke off, executed a few cartwheels, dived under the table and abruptly left. Such mercurial behaviour is never easier to imagine than when listening to this perfect, priceless concerto.

*Programme note* © Lindsay Kemp

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### Interval – 20 minutes

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

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## Programme notes

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Claude Debussy

1862–1918

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

1894

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Debussy's talent as a young composer was confirmed when he was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire aged just ten years old, but it would be another 20 years before he made his name throughout Europe with a revolutionary new work inspired by the symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* ('Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun'), based on Mallarmé's poem of the same name, was an immediate success. The conductor at its Parisian premiere in 1894, Gustave Doret, described how the audience was held 'spellbound', demanding that the work be repeated there and then in an unprecedented outpouring of praise. This was something of a surprise to both Doret and the orchestra, who had their doubts about how this 'new style' would be received by the public. 'Debussy was constantly modifying this or that sonority', Doret recalled. 'We tried it out, repeated it, compared it. Once the players had come to understand this new style, they realised that we would have a serious battle on our hands. Of course, Debussy's name was familiar to the real connoisseurs, but to the general public it was still unknown.'

At the forefront of Debussy's mind was a desire to create colours – new colours – using textures, harmonies and forms in fresh and often surprising ways. In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* Debussy makes no attempt to transpose Mallarmé's text, word for word, into music. Instead, he hoped to stimulate the imagination of his listeners, to conjure up a vivid new world of expression and sensuality, to allude to the text of the original poetry but ultimately to transcend it. Using a radical new harmonic palette, hitherto unexplored formal ideas and a dazzling new approach to texture and colour, in this one ten-minute work, Debussy set the stage for a whole new chapter of Western music history, ushering in the dawn of the 20th century, and with it the very concept of modernity.

*Programme note* © Jo Kirkbride

# Programme notes

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Igor Stravinsky

1882–1971

The Firebird Suite (1919 version)

1910

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1. *Introduction* –

2. *Appearance of the Firebird* –

3. *Dance of the Firebird* –

4. *The Princesses' Khorovod* –

5. *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei and his Subjects* –

6. *Lullaby* –

7. *Finale*

When in the summer of 1909 Sergei Diaghilev decided to commission a new score for his 1910 *Ballets Russes* seasons in Paris, Stravinsky wasn't the first choice. He wasn't even the second. The author of the ballet's scenario, Alexandre Benois, wanted to use Nikolai Tcherepnin. Diaghilev favoured Rimsky-Korsakov's pupil Anatoly Liadov. Unfortunately, Diaghilev had temporarily forgotten one important fact about Liadov: he was an extremely slow worker. With plans already confirmed for the new ballet's premiere, he turned instead to another, much younger Rimsky pupil – 27-year-old Igor Stravinsky.

It was a bold choice. Stravinsky, though gifted, was something of a late developer, and although earlier in 1909 he'd orchestrated a couple of pieces of Chopin for Diaghilev's *Les Sylphides*, this would be his first score on such an ambitious scale. He'd been working on his opera *Le Rossignol* in St Petersburg. 'But a telegram then arrived to upset all my plans', he recalled in his autobiography:

Though alarmed by the fact that this was a commission for a fixed date and afraid lest I should fail to complete the work in time – I was still unaware of my own capabilities – I accepted the order. It was

highly flattering to be chosen from among the musicians of my generation...

Rimsky-Korsakov's sons loaned him the family's country dacha, and early in November 1909, Stravinsky got down to work. 'I worked strenuously at it, he remembered, though unsurprisingly in the circumstances, the dacha wasn't the only thing that Stravinsky borrowed from his late teacher. Rimsky had written his own opera on a similar Russian folktale, *Kashchei the Immortal*, in 1902, and *The Firebird* is full of orchestral techniques and even melodies learned from Rimsky-Korsakov. (Stravinsky's *Khorovod* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sinfonietta* of 1884 use the same old Russian dance tune).

Still, with his master no longer looking over his shoulder, Stravinsky's imagination soared. *The Firebird* is as colourful as Rimsky-Korsakov at his most extravagant – Stravinsky even devised a wholly new orchestral effect, the whispered, iridescent 'harmonic *glissandos*' of the strings during the Introduction. The ballet premiered at the Paris Opéra on 25 June 1910 with Michel Fokine's stunning choreography and Tamara Karsavina in the title role. Stravinsky, though, was concentrating on his music: 'The stage and the whole theatre glittered at the

## Programme notes

premiere, and that is all I recall.' Diaghilev was more perceptive. 'Mark him well', he remarked of Stravinsky during rehearsals. 'He is a man on the eve of celebrity.'

This concert suite – one of three created by Stravinsky – follows the story of the ballet. The realm of the immortal demon-king Kashchei is dark and lifeless (Introduction). Enter, in a shower of sparks, the magical Firebird (Dance of the Firebird), hotly pursued by Prince Ivan Tsarevich. The Prince catches the Firebird, and to win its freedom the bird gives him one of its enchanted feathers – the only thing that can break Kashchei's spells. The Prince now encounters 13 beautiful princesses, enslaved by Kashchei. As he watches them dance a gentle Russian khorovod (round dance), he falls in love; but Kashchei's attendant monsters swarm round and prepare to turn him to stone in a frenetic Infernal Dance. In the nick of time, the Prince remembers the magic feather. The Firebird re-appears, putting the monsters to sleep with an eerie Lullaby. Guided by the Firebird, the Prince finds and smashes the egg containing Kashchei's immortal soul; and the spells are undone. While a solo horn sings a quiet folk-song, Kashchei's petrified victims gradually return to life, and as light spreads across the kingdom, the full orchestra celebrates in a jubilant closing hymn.

Programme note © Richard Bratby

### We'd love to hear from you

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Sat 14 Mar: Brighton

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**Nefeli Chadouli** conductor\*  
**Nadine Benjamin** soprano

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Nadine Benjamin

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