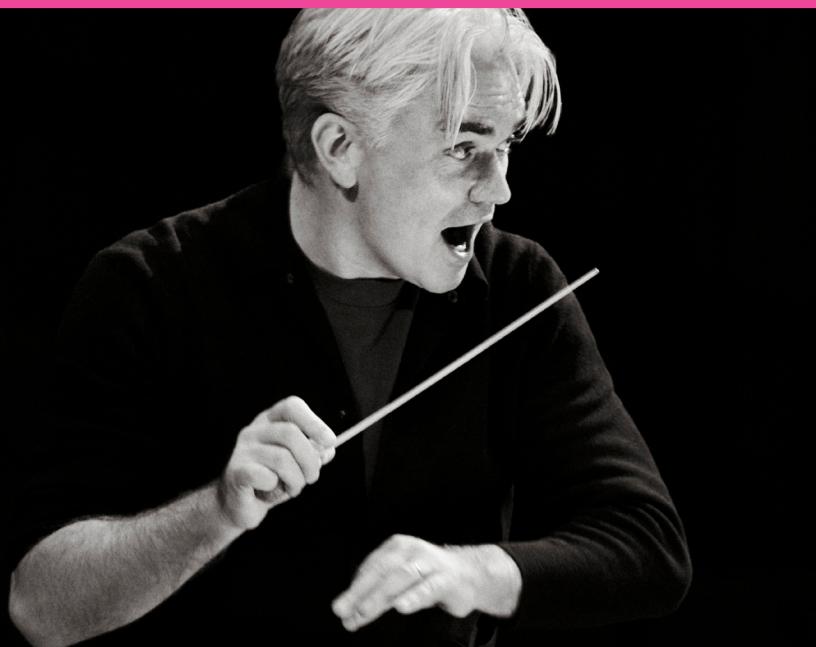




Free concert
programme

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 17 January 2026 | 6.30pm

The Firebird

Rimsky-Korsakov

Russian Easter Festival Overture (14')

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez

Tajogaite (Concerto for Piano and Orchestra)
(UK premiere) (17')

Interval (20')

Stravinsky

The Firebird Suite (1945 version) (30')

Maxim Emelyanychev

conductor

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez

piano

*Supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a Donor Advised Fund,
held at The Prism Charitable Trust.*

COCKAYNE

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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**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**
RESIDENT



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Welcome

LPO news

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.

Subscribers to our email updates are the first to hear about new events, offers and competitions. Just head to our website to sign up.

'The Nature Dialogues' Free pre-concert talks this season

Earlier this evening we were joined by celebrated broadcaster and writer Kate Humble – known for BBC's *Wild in Africa* and *Into the Volcano* – for a fascinating pre-concert talk about volcanoes and other natural phenomena, setting the stage for Gustavo Díaz-Jerez's piano concerto *Tajogaite*. Inspired by the volcano on the island of La Palma, this work receives its UK premiere this evening.

This event was part of 'The Nature Dialogues' – a series of free pre-concert talks by environmentalists, scientists and composers, offering fresh perspectives on the music and the season's wider theme, *Harmony with Nature*. Turn to page 7 for full details, or find out more and book your free tickets at lpo.org.uk/harmony-with-nature

Behind the scenes with LPO Friends

Earlier today, LPO Friends enjoyed exclusive, behind-the-scenes access to a Private Members' Rehearsal with the Orchestra, conductor Maxim Emelyanychev and pianist & composer Gustavo Díaz-Jerez ahead of tonight's concert.



If you'd like to see for yourself what goes into putting on an LPO concert – plus enjoy a host of other amazing benefits, like a private bar space and meeting our musicians – join our family of LPO Friends today, from just £6 per month!

Scan the QR code or visit lpo.org.uk/friends to find out more.

Printed with the planet in mind

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Scan here for PDF versions of all our programmes to read or download on your phone or tablet.



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
Yang Zhang
Martin Höhmann
Katalin Varnagy
Nilufar Alimaksumova
Rasa Zukauskaite
Ricky Gore
Jamie Hutchinson
Daniel Pukach
Alison Strange
Chu-Yu Yang

Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal
Chair supported by The Candide Trust
Emma Oldfield Co-Principal
Coco Inman
Kate Birchall
Nancy Elan
Nynke Huijkema
Marie-Anne Mairesse
Joseph Maher
Sophie Phillips
Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra
Ashley Stevens
Sioni Williams
Jessica Coleman
Vera Beumer
Kate Cole

Violas

Nicholas Bootiman
Guest Principal
Benedetto Pollani
Lucia Ortiz Sauc
Laura Vallejo

Martin Wray

Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden
James Heron
Stanislav Popov
Shiry Rashkovsky
Alistair Scahill
Jisu Song
Jenny Poyer
Mark Gibbs

Cellos

Henry Shapard Principal
Waynne Kwon
Chair supported by an anonymous donor
David Lale
Leo Melvin
Francis Bucknall
Sue Sutherley
Tom Roff
Helen Thomas
Iain Ward
Colin Alexander

Double Basses

Kevin Rundell* Principal
Sebastian Pennar*
Co-Principal
Hugh Kluger
Tom Walley
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton
Laura Murphy
Chair supported by Ian Ferguson & Susan Tranter
Charlotte Kerbégian
Lowri Estell
Michael Fuller

Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal
Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites
Hannah Grayson
Stewart McIlwham*

Piccolo

Stewart McIlwham*
Principal

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
Chair supported by Roger Greenwood
Paul Richards*

Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards* Principal

Bassoons

Ben Hudson Guest Principal
Emma Harding
Simon Estell*

Contrabassoon

Simon Estell* Principal

Horns

Annemarie Federle
Principal
Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE
John Ryan* Principal
Martin Hobbs
Mark Vines Co-Principal
Gareth Mollison

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

Lyndon Meredith Principal

Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis* Principal
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Timpani

Jonathan Phillips
Guest Principal

Percussion

Andrew Barclay* Principal
Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins
Karen Hutt Co-Principal
Oliver Yates
Feargus Brennan
Francesca Lombardelli

Harp

Elizabeth McNulty
Guest Principal

Piano

Catherine Edwards

**Professor at a London conservatoire*

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

Sir Simon Robey
Bianca & Stuart Roden
Ryze Power

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 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 Thorvaldsdóttir, 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 Hiromi; 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.

This season also sees tours to South Korea and across Europe, as well as a wide range of 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



Maxim Emelyanychev

conductor



© Andrej Grlic

His opera credits include Handel's *Rinaldo* at Glyndebourne, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at Covent Garden, and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Zurich. He boasts an extensive discography and is recording Mozart's complete symphonies together with Il Pomo d'Oro.

Maxim's awards include the Critics' Circle Young Talent Award, International Opera Award (Newcomer), the ICMA Prize for his Mozart Sonatas, and the prestigious Herbert von Karajan Award 2025.

Maxim studied piano and conducting in his hometown of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, and later attended Gennady Rozhdestvensky's conducting class at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

Maxim Emelyanychev has been Chief Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra since 2019, with his contract recently extended until 2028, and Chief Conductor of the Baroque orchestra Il Pomo d'Oro since 2013. This season he also took on the role of Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

During the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons, Maxim Emelyanychev made debuts with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, WDR Köln, SWR Stuttgart, Dresden Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France and Tokyo Yomiuri Symphony Orchestra, and gave a concert in Salzburg with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. He has also guest-conducted the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Additionally, he has partnered with mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato as pianist in Schubert's *Winterreise* in concerts at London's Wigmore Hall and the Berlin State Opera, as well as in Dortmund and Antwerp.

With the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Maxim has appeared at the BBC Proms, toured across Europe, and recorded symphonies by Schubert and Mendelssohn. At the Edinburgh International Festival, he has led acclaimed concert performances of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and *Cosi fan tutte* in recent years.



The Nature Dialogues

A series of fascinating free pre-concert talks as part of our 2025/26 season theme, *Harmony with Nature*

From stars to storms, wildlife to oceans, some of today's leading scientists and storytellers illuminate the natural world and discover a fresh perspective on this season's music. Book your free tickets now at lpo.org.uk



Saturday 17 January
2026
5pm
Royal Festival Hall

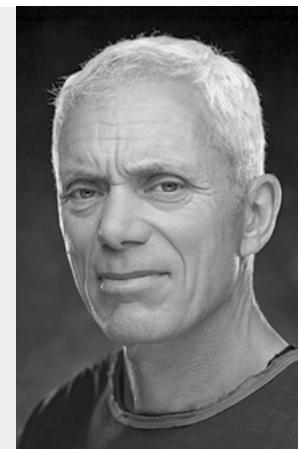
Harmony with the Volcanic World

With broadcaster & writer Kate Humble, geologist Professor Iain Stewart and composer Gustavo Díaz-Jerez

Saturday 21 March
2026
5pm
Queen Elizabeth Hall

Harmony with our Rivers

With extreme angler, author & broadcaster Jeremy Wade



Wednesday 8 April
2026
6pm
Royal Festival Hall

Harmony with our Fragile Earth

With scientist Johan Rockström, environmentalist Tony Juniper and composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir



Friday 17 April 2026
6pm
Royal Festival Hall

Harmony with our Changing Planet

With social scientist Gail Whiteman



Harmony with Nature

Tonight's works and our 2025/26 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 Thorvaldsdóttir 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?

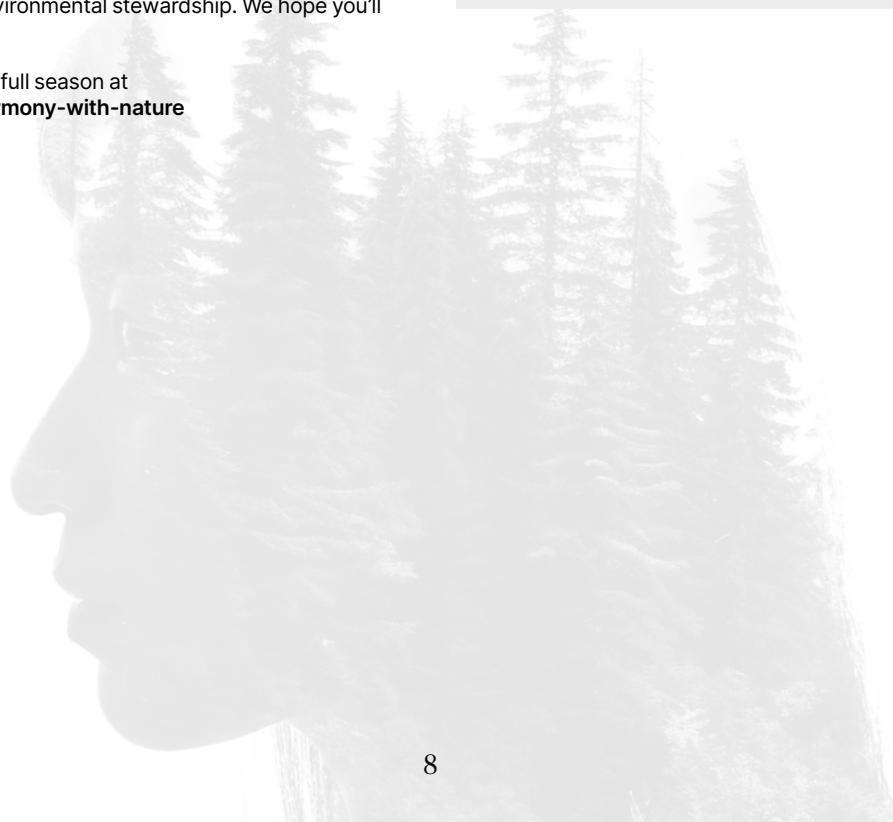
Throughout the season, we'll also be partnering with local environmental organisations, and welcoming a host of eminent pre-concert speakers (see page 7), as we attempt to use the power of classical music to encourage environmental stewardship. We hope you'll join us!

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

Nature's voice in tonight's programme

As our *Harmony with Nature* theme continues, tonight our focus turns to nature's more destructive forces – and to the renewal that can follow. Opening tonight's concert is *Tajogaite* by Spanish composer and pianist Gustavo Díaz-Jerez, receiving its UK premiere.

Tajogaite captures nature at its most dramatic and creative. Inspired by the 2021 volcanic eruption on the island of La Palma, the composer transforms this moment of destruction and renewal into sound – weaving recordings of the eruption, birdsong, and the movement of wind and sea into a vivid orchestral tapestry. Like much of Díaz-Jerez's music, *Tajogaite* also looks to the natural world for structure: mathematical sequences and fractal patterns shape melodies and rhythms that seem to grow and evolve organically.

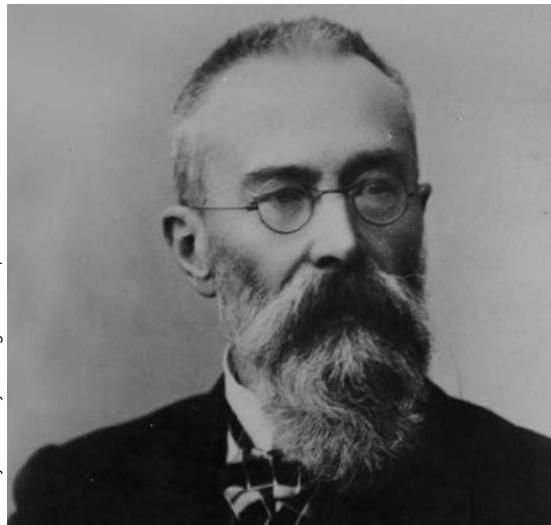


Programme notes

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
1844–1908

Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36
1888

Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London



Rimsky-Korsakov's long original title for this work, composed in 1888, does not translate smoothly into English, but can be expressed as 'Easter Festival: Resurrection Overture on themes from the *Obikhod*', where the *Obikhod* is the collection of chants used in the liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church. That may make it sound a religious work – and indeed, the carefully chosen chants are a major presence throughout the piece – but in fact Rimsky-Korsakov seems to have been drawn more to the element of 'pagan merrymaking' he detected in Russian Easter celebrations. Writing of the work in his autobiography, he posed the questions: 'Is not Russian Orthodox bell-ringing the church's instrumental dance music? Do not the flowing beards of the priests and sextons in their white surplices and vestments, singing in *Allegro vivo* tempo "beautiful Easter" etc., take one's imagination back to pagan times? And what about all those Easter eggs, loaves and burning candles ... How far is all this from the philosophic and socialistic teaching of Christ?'

It is this transition from 'gloomy and mysterious' religious feeling as experienced on Holy Saturday, to the 'unbridled rejoicing' of Easter Sunday that the Overture explores.

The work opens with a slow introduction in which the chant 'Let God arise' is contrasted with a more celestial presentation of 'An angel cried', signifying prophecy of the Resurrection. Rimsky-Korsakov described the next passage, initiated by dark brass and timpani interjections but quickly gaining in radiance, as showing the Holy Sepulchre and 'the ineffable light in which it had been bathed at the moment of resurrection'. It leads to the main *Allegro* section of the work, based at first on the 'Let God arise' theme but, as the celebratory excitement rises, eventually introducing a second theme high on violins: 'Christ is risen'. The atmosphere of Easter morning gets increasingly heady, with 'the triumphant, trumpet-like cries of the archangels alternating with the joyful, almost dance-like peal of bells, and that again with now the fast reading of the deacon, now the ritual chant of the priests reading the good tidings of the Holy Gospel'. At the end, the 'Christ is risen' theme returns imposingly amid the whirl, on trombones.

Rimsky-Korsakov claimed that to understand the work fully, one must have attended Easter service at a large and teeming Orthodox cathedral, but that seems rather to underestimate his own depictive powers. Writing of the music itself, he was typically clear in his self-assessment, saying that together with the two orchestral works that preceded it – *Capriccio espagnol* and *Sheherazade* – it brought to a close a period in which 'my orchestration had achieved a considerable degree of virtuosity and bright sonority, without Wagnerian influence'.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

Programme notes

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez
born 1970

Tajogaite (Concerto for Piano and Orchestra)
2023 (UK premiere)

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez piano

Commissioned by the Canary Islands International Music Festival, *Tajogaite* was premiered by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under conductor Kristiina Poska with the composer as soloist, on 30 January 2024 at the Auditorio Alfredo Kraus in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. Tonight is the work's first performance in the UK.

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez writes:

Tajogaite was inspired by the volcanic eruption which occurred in 2021 in the Canary Island of La Palma. The word "Tajogaite" literally means "cracked mountain" in the language of the Benahoritas, the first settlers of the island. This mountain, located in the municipality of El Paso, was the origin of the 2021 eruption. The work employs recordings of the volcanic eruption, which were transcribed musically and orchestrated using percussion and extended instrumental techniques. In addition, most of the musical prime matter with which the work is constructed is drawn from several mathematical models:

- Integer number sequences (inventory, "look-and-say", Morse-Thue, among others), whose structure, when mapped to the musical language, yields melodic and rhythmical material. Chords and harmonic progressions are constructed from the ordered verticalization of this material.
- Self-similar motives which contain themselves at different time scales (much like fractal structures), derived from the aforementioned integer sequences.

- Musical conversion and orchestration of plant-like abstract images with fractal (self-similar) structure.
- The coda of the piece follows a rhythmic pattern based on an elementary cellular automaton (Wolfram Rule 214).

'There are musical depictions of several birds common in the Canary Islands (including blackbird, seagull and turtledove), as well as nature sounds such as the sea and the wind. There is also a somewhat hidden quote from one of the most famous melodies in the Canary Islands: the 'Arrorró' from the *Cantos Canarios* by Teobaldo Power.'

'All these processes were creatively combined, seeking pattern repetition, contrast and variation, in a formal scheme that loosely follows that of the traditional piano concerto but at the same time mimics the morphology of most living organisms: the bilateral symmetry.'

© Gustavo Díaz-Jerez, 2024

Interval – 20 minutes

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

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez

pianist | composer



One of the foremost Spanish pianists and composers of his generation, Gustavo Díaz-Jerez has gained an international following among audiences, as well as unanimous critical acclaim, for his performances of both contemporary music and time-honoured repertoire.

Born in the Spanish Canary Islands, he studied piano with J. A. Rodríguez at the Conservatorio Superior of Santa Cruz (Tenerife), and subsequently with Solomon Mikowsky at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City, where he also studied composition with Giampaolo Bracali and Ludmila Ulehla.

As a composer, Gustavo Díaz-Jerez's works have been performed widely by soloists and ensembles around the world. His orchestral piece *Ymarxa* (2011) was premiered by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Charles Dutoit. In January 2024 the London Philharmonic Orchestra gave the world premiere of *Tajogaite*, his second piano concerto, with the composer as soloist.

Gustavo Díaz-Jerez has performed as a pianist extensively throughout the UK and Europe, Asia, South America, Australia and the USA, in many of the world's most renowned halls, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York, the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, and numerous other eminent venues.

His discography includes two CDs of his own piano pieces *Metaludios*. In 2015, he made a world-premiere recording of Albéniz's *Iberia* in high-definition (HD) video. In 2019, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra recorded a double CD with a cycle of seven orchestral works inspired by the Canary Islands, under the baton of maestro Eduardo Portal.

Programme notes

Igor Stravinsky
1882–1971

The Firebird Suite
1910 (arr. 1945)

Introduction – Prelude and Dance of the Firebird – Variations (Firebird)

Pantomime I

Pas de deux: Firebird and Ivan Tsarevich

Pantomime II

Scherzo: Dance of the Princesses

Pantomime III

Rondo (Khorovod)

Infernal Dance

Lullaby (Firebird)

Final Hymn

When in the summer of 1909 Sergei Diaghilev decided to commission a new score for his 1910 Ballets Russes season 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 folk tale, *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).

Programme notes

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 Opera 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 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.'

Stravinsky later arranged three suites from the ballet for concert performance, dated 1911, 1919 and 1945. The third of these, which we hear this evening, is the most expansive of the three, preserving much of the ballet's vivid storytelling and rich orchestral colour.

The realm of the immortal demon-king Kashchei is dark and lifeless ('Introduction'). Enter, in a shower of sparks, the magical Firebird, hotly pursued by Prince Ivan Tsarevich ('Prelude and Dance of the Firebird'). The Prince captures the Firebird, and in the expressive 'Pantomime I' and tender 'Pas de deux', she pleads for her freedom; in return, the bird gives him one of its enchanted feathers – the only thing that can break Kashchei's spells.

The mood softens in 'Pantomime II' and 'Dance of the Princesses', in which the Prince encounters 13 beautiful princesses, enslaved by Kashchei. As he watches them dance a gentle Russian *khorovod* (round dance), he falls in love; but 'Pantomime III' darkens the atmosphere as 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 reappears, 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



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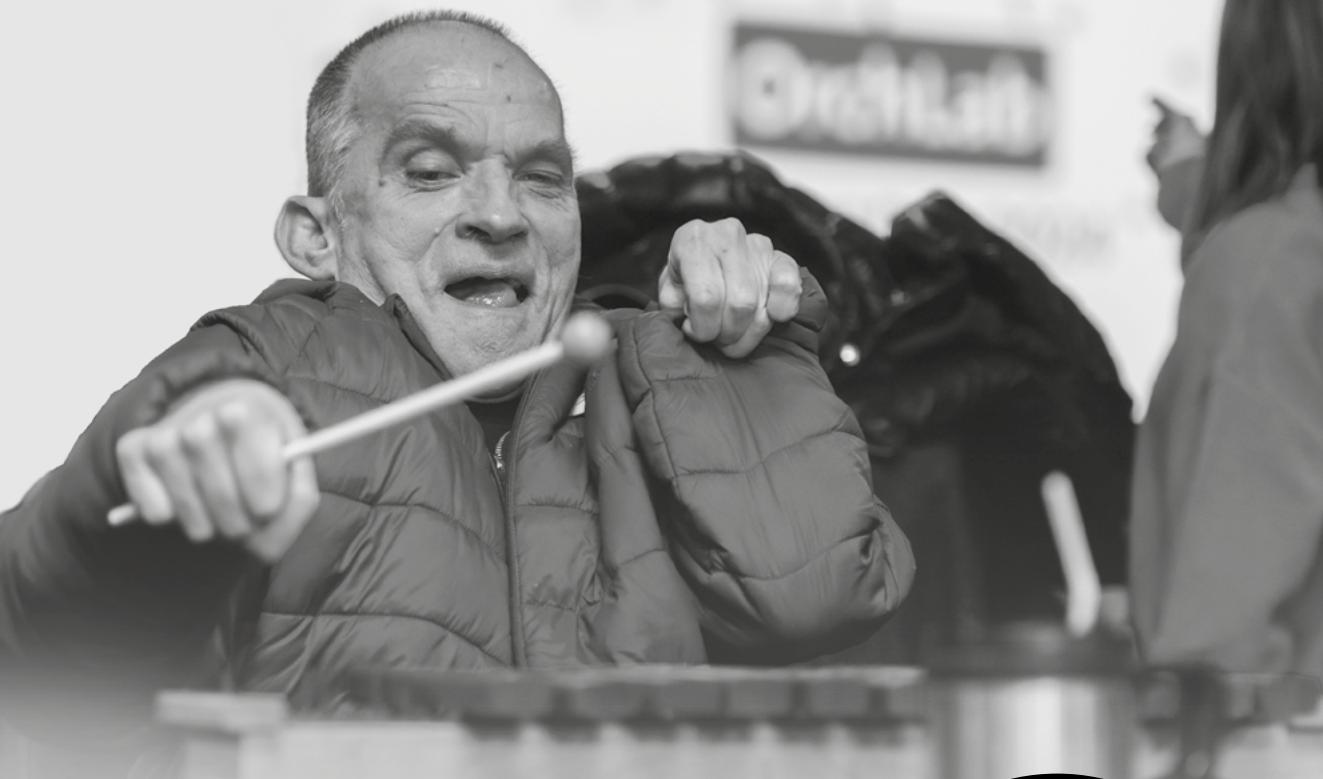
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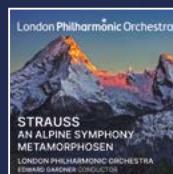
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