2026/27 season at the Southbank Centre

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Free concert programme

The power of listening



SOUTHBANK CENTRE 75

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The power of listening

What happens when we really listen? This season we're exploring the extraordinary ways that listening can inspire creativity, connection and new perspectives.

To begin our journey, we asked eight Royal College of Art students to listen to a piece of music featured in our London season, from Stravinsky's *The Firebird* to Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. From there, the artists unleashed their imagination, each creating an original artwork based on their personal response to the music.

You can see how varied their visual interpretations of the music were from the artworks on this page and on the programme cover.

If you haven't had the chance to see the artworks on billboards around London, you can view them all in detail on our website. You can also find out more about each of the artists and the processes they used, as well as listen to the music that inspired them.

Check out the artworks and the pieces that inspired them:
lpo.org.uk/listening

Artworks designed by (clockwise from top left) Megan Peng, Zengyue Zhao, CTZ, Yunqi Peng, Anna Korbel, Yejin Seo, Ishita Sharma, Ruwani Rajapakse



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
Wednesday 18 November 2026 | 7.30pm

Strauss's Ein Heldenleben

Sibelius
King Christian II Suite (23 mins)

Hindemith
Kammermusik No. 4 (21 mins)

Interval (20 min)

R Strauss
Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life) (46 mins)

Robin Ticciati
conductor

Vilde Frang
violin

Approximate finish time: 9.45pm

Please note the timings shown are given only as a guide.

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SOUTHBANK CENTRE 75
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Welcome

Welcome to the Southbank Centre

We're the UK's largest centre for the arts, 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.

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LPO news

Behind the scenes with LPO Friends

Earlier today, Friends of the Orchestra enjoyed exclusive behind-the-scenes access to a rehearsal with conductor Robin Ticciati and violinist Vilde Frang ahead of tonight's concert.

If you'd like to see for yourself what goes into preparing for a concert – plus enjoy a host of other amazing benefits, like a private bar space and meeting our musicians – join our family of Members today, from just £7 per month.

Interested in finding out more? Scan the QR code or visit **lpo.org.uk/membership**

Inside the Music: our new Sky Arts TV series this autumn

Our 2024 Sky Arts TV series, *Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*, was nominated for a BAFTA, recognising its compelling storytelling and rare behind-the-scenes insight into orchestral life.

Following this success, Sky Arts have commissioned a second series, which began on 10 November and will air weekly each Tuesday at 8pm. *Inside the Music with the London Philharmonic Orchestra* explores five different symphonies performed by the LPO, with conductors Edward Gardner, Karina Canellakis and Paavo Järvi guiding viewers through each work. Combining performance footage and insights from musicians, the series reveals how these masterpieces are built.

Inside the Music airs each Tuesday at 8pm until 8 December. Sky Arts is free to view on Freeview channel 36, and Sky and NOW Entertainment Members can catch up on demand.

Tonight's programme cover

Artwork by Royal College of Art student Yunqi Peng: 'Heavy brass, lighter mind'. Designed while listening to Stravinsky's *The Firebird* (Finale), performed by the LPO under Vladimir Jurowski. **#thepoweroflistening**

Tonight in 2 minutes

New to classical? Short on time? Your quick guide to tonight's concert.

The vibe

Strauss's Ein Heldenleben

The first half of tonight's concert pairs Sibelius's colourful, theatrical *King Christian II Suite* with Hindemith's inventive and witty *Kammermusik* ('Chamber Music') No. 4, spotlighting solo violinist Vilde Frang. After the interval comes the evening's major work: Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* ('A Hero's Life'). This epic orchestral self-portrait follows a hero through conflict, criticism and love, building to a triumphant celebration of his life and work.

Who's on stage?



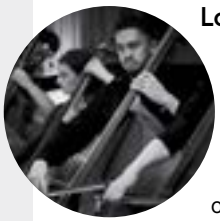
Robin Ticciati: conductor

British conductor Robin Ticciati is Music Director at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, where working closely with singers shapes his dramatically-charged conducting style. Robin enjoys a longstanding partnership with the LPO, conducting us regularly both in the concert hall and in opera at Glyndebourne during our summer residency there.



Vilde Frang: violin

Renowned Norwegian violinist Vilde Frang is the guest soloist in tonight's second piece: Hindemith's *Kammermusik No. 4*. Vilde made her debut with the Oslo Philharmonic at the age of 12, and has since performed with leading orchestras around the world.



London Philharmonic Orchestra

Tonight there are over 100 musicians playing in the Orchestra. Our talented members represent over 14 different nationalities, and many of them enjoy busy solo, chamber and teaching careers alongside their orchestral roles.

Turn to page 6 for tonight's player list.

What to expect

Take your seats...
The players tune up their instruments, then the conductor, Robin, will come on stage. Once the applause dies down, sit back and enjoy the music ...

4 movements

23 mins

Jean Sibelius
King Christian II Suite
Finnish composer Sibelius wrote this Suite to accompany a play about a 16th-century Scandinavian king. Its four movements capture a range of moods, from graceful elegance to lively dances.

Classical pieces are often made up of **movements**, or shorter sections. Applause is usually saved for after the final movement.

5 movements

21 mins

Paul Hindemith
Kammermusik No. 4
with violinist Vilde Frang
German composer Paul Hindemith was one of the leading musical voices of the 20th century, known for his inventive, energetic style. Tonight's work is one of seven pieces of *Kammermusik* ('Chamber Music') he composed for different solo instruments accompanied by small ensembles.

Maybe an **encore**! The soloist might play a little extra surprise piece, if the applause is loud enough!

Interval *20 min*

6 movements

46 mins

Richard Strauss
Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life)
Ein Heldenleben is a vast orchestral work that tells the story of a hero facing battles, critics and personal challenges, before finding comfort in love. It is often seen as a musical self-portrait, with Strauss casting himself as the hero. The orchestra brings the story vividly to life, from blazing brass and dramatic clashes to a tender violin solo representing the hero's beloved companion.

At the end of the concert, we applaud the performers. The conductor will acknowledge the Leader (chief First Violin), Pieter, and might highlight other players for particular appreciation and applause. You're welcome to take photos during the applause!

Want to read more? Turn to page 10 for a deeper dive into tonight's works.

About us: London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, since 1932 we've been recognised as one of the world's leading orchestras, celebrated for our excellence, versatility, invention and inclusivity. Our mission is to create unrivalled orchestral experiences on stage and cultivate human connections beyond it. We achieve this through our exceptional live performances, pioneering education and community projects, acclaimed recordings, online activity and trailblazing international tours.

Our home is here at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You can also hear us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour worldwide. For over 60 years we've been Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Life's big 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*.

Connecting 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 the third most followed globally across all social platforms. Our 2024 Sky Arts documentary series, *Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*, was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA, and a second series, *Inside the Music with the LPO*, is currently airing on Tuesday evenings at 8pm on Sky Arts.

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 in recognition of his impact as Principal Conductor from 2007–21. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin is 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

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 offer a range of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme creates pathways into the profession for young players from under-represented backgrounds, and our LPO Young Composers and Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. The LPO Conducting Fellowship supports the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2026/27 season

Our season theme, *In Search of Purpose*, explores the human spirit's resilience and quest for meaning, inspired by Beethoven's triumph over despair and the ways subsequent composers have used music as a vessel to confront life's big questions. Principal Conductor Edward Gardner returns with programmes including Britten's *War Requiem*, Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, and Composer-in-Residence George Benjamin's opera *Lessons in Love and Violence*. We'll also welcome back titled conductors Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as Chief Conductor & Artistic Advisor Designate Paavo Järvi.

Our lineup of soloists this season includes Alice Sara Ott, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Hilary Hahn, Pekka Kuusisto, Renée Fleming and Mitsuko Uchida, and we join the London Philharmonic Choir in celebrating its 80th anniversary year with Fauré's *Requiem* alongside a choral world premiere by Dame Judith Weir. The season concludes on 24 April with Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, again with the LPC. New music remains a core pillar this season, with further premieres by Mark Simpson, Jacob Mühlrad, Dai Fujikura and Kevin Puts.

The season also sees tours to China, Spain, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Canary Islands, as well as performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.

lpo.org.uk

Pieter Schoeman

Leader



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.

As well as at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, Pieter has performed worldwide as a soloist and recitalist at famous venues including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin and Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. He has also appeared as Guest Leader with many leading 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 London Philharmonic Orchestra. Highlights have included 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 London Philharmonic Orchestra is generously supported by Neil Westreich.

Video series: 'Humans of the Orchestra'

Scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



On stage tonight

First Violins
Pieter Schoeman* Leader
Chair supported by Neil Westreich
Alice Ivy-Pemberton Co-Leader
Chair supported by the Hodson family
Vesselin Gellev Sub-Leader
Minn Majoe
Chair supported by Dr Alex & Maria Chan
Katalin Varnagy
Martin Höhmann
Chair supported by Hans-Wilhelm & Evelyn Jenckel
Yang Zhang
Cassandra Hamilton
Chair supported by Jenny Watson CBE
Thomas Eisner
Sylvain Vasseur
Nilufar Alimaksumova
Sylvain Vasseur
Tom Aldren
Alison Strange
Daniel Pukach
Ronald Long
Gabriel Bilbao

Second Violins
Tania Mazzetti Principal
Chair supported by The Candide Trust
Emma Oldfield Co-Principal
Claudia Tarrant-Matthews
Chair supported by anonymous donors
Coco Inman
Kate Birchall
Fiona Higham
Nynke Hijlkema
Sophie Phillips
Ashley Stevens
Sioni Williams
José Nuno Cabrita Matias
Olivia Ziani

Violas
Vicki Powell Guest Principal
James Heron
Carys Barnes
Martin Wray
Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden
Laura Vallejo
Benedetto Pollani
Shiry Rashkovsky
Michelle Bruil
Alistair Scahill
Jisu Song
Pamela Ferriman
Mark Gibbs

Cellos
Kristina Blaumane Principal
Chair supported by Bianca & Stuart Roden
Henry Shapard Co-Principal
Waynne Kwon
David Lale
Francis Bucknall
Heeyeon Cho
Auriol Evans
Leo Melvin
Tom Roff
Helen Thomas

Double Basses
Kevin Rundell* Principal
Sebastian Pennar* Co-Principal
George Peniston
Tom Walley
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton
Laura Murphy
Charlotte Kerbegian
Lowri Estell
Siret Lust

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

Piccolo
Stewart McIlwham* Principal
Chair supported by The Thompson Family Charitable Trust

Oboes
Ian Hardwick* Principal
Alice Munday
Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley
Jack Tostevin-Hall
Sue Böhling*

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
Emily Crook
Paul Richards*

E-flat Clarinet
Thomas Watmough Principal
Chair supported by Roger Greenwood

Bass Clarinet
Paul Richards* Principal

Bassoons
Roberto Giaccaglia Guest Principal
Helen Storey*
Chair supported by Louise Worthington
Lorna West

Contrabassoon
Simon Estell* Principal

Horns
Annemarie Federle Principal
Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE
Oliver Johnson
Mark Vines Co-Principal
Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra
Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans
Timothy Ellis
Tommaso Rusconi
Duncan Fuller
Paul Cott
Will Scotland

Trumpets
Paul Beniston* Principal
Chair supported by the Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams
Tom Nielsen* Principal
Anne McAneney*
Chair supported by anonymous donors
David Hilton
Tom Watts

Offstage Trumpets
Matthew Williams
Joe Skypala
Sam Balchin

Trombones
Mark Templeton* Principal
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton
Andrew Cole

Bass Trombone
Lyndon Meredith Principal

Euphonium
David Whitehouse

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
Chair supported by Joe Topley & Tracey Countryman
Oliver Yates
Chair supported by an anonymous donor
Feargus Brennan

Harps
Elizabeth McNulty Guest Principal
Stephanie Beck

** Professor at a London conservatoire*

The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose players are not present at this concert:
Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave
Sir Simon Robey
Eric Tomsett

Robin Ticciati

conductor



© Benjamin Ealovega

Robin Ticciati OBE is Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Honorary Member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He was Music Director of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin from 2017–24 and Principal Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra from 2009–18.

Robin regularly collaborates with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, both on the concert stage and at Glyndebourne Festival Opera – in summer 2026 he conducted the Orchestra at Glyndebourne in performances of Puccini's *Tosca* and Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In March 2026, he conducted the Orchestra in a Royal Festival Hall concert pairing Sibelius's *Kullervo* with the world premiere of Lotta Wennäkoski's *Zelo*.

Robin is also a regular guest conductor with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Budapest Festival Orchestra. Other recent highlights have included appearances with the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Czech Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and London Symphony Orchestra. In the US, he has appeared with The Cleveland Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

This season, Robin returns to the Orchestre de Paris, Staatskapelle Dresden, Teatro alla Scala Orchestra and Budapest Festival Orchestra, and makes debuts with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, the WDR Sinfonieorchester, and with the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Berlin Philharmonie. He leads new productions of *Idomeneo* and *Jenůfa* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the latter with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Born in London, Robin Ticciati is a violinist, pianist and percussionist by training. He was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain when, aged 15, he turned to conducting under the guidance of Sir Colin Davis and Sir Simon Rattle. He holds the position of Sir Colin Davis Fellow of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music. Robin was awarded an OBE for services to music in The Queen's Birthday Honours 2019.

Vilde Frang

violin



© Marco Borggreve

In 2012 Vilde Frang was unanimously awarded the Credit Suisse Young Artists Award, which led to her debut with the Vienna Philharmonic under Bernard Haitink at the Lucerne Festival. She has since developed into one of the foremost violinists, and works regularly with the world's leading orchestras and conductors.

Vilde's profound musicianship and exceptional lyricism have elevated her as one of the foremost violinists of her generation. She continues to appear regularly with the world's leading orchestras including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgbouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Budapest Festival Orchestra and The Cleveland Orchestra. She also appears regularly as a soloist at leading international festivals including the BBC Proms, Salzburg and Lucerne.

Vilde last appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in April 2025, when she performed Schumann's Violin Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall under the baton of Vladimir Jurowski.

She has also enjoyed collaborations with conductors including Kirill Petrenko, Sir Simon Rattle, Bernard Haitink, Herbert Blomstedt, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Mariss Jansons, Ivan Fischer, Maxim Emelyanychev, Jakub Hrůša, Vladimir Jurowski, Manfred Honeck, Teodor Currentzis, Daniel Harding, Antonio Pappano, Lahav Shani, Paavo Järvi and Gustavo Dudamel.

Highlights of Vilde's current season include returns to the Berlin Philharmonic, Staatskapelle Dresden, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. She makes her debut with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra at Suntory Hall, and embarks on an extensive European tour with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen.

A keen chamber musician, Vilde regularly appears at festivals including Verbier, Lockenhaus, the George Enescu Festival, the Salzburg Festival and the Prague Spring Music Festival. She also appears regularly in recital at Carnegie Hall, the Concertgebouw, Vienna Musikverein, Philharmonie Berlin, Tonhalle Zurich and BOZAR in Brussels, as well in North America as part of the Vancouver Recital Series, Boston Celebrity Series and San Francisco Performances.

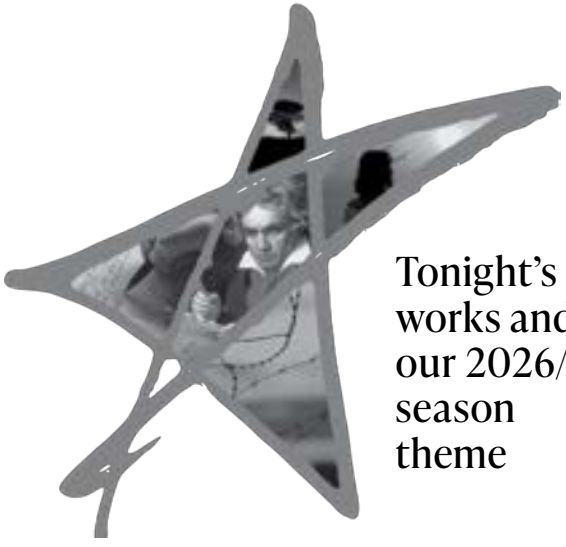
This season, Vilde is Artist-in-Residence at the Ascona Music Festival in Italy, where she gives masterclasses with young musicians and curates a programme alongside collaborators including Lawrence Power, Ilya Gringolts, Maximilian Hornung and Bertrand Chamayou. A passionate advocate for music education, she has developed meaningful connections with the next generation of musicians, including through her work with students at Barratt Due Musikkinstitutt in Oslo, The Juilliard School in New York, and London's Royal Academy of Music, where she was recently appointed an Honorary Member.

Vilde Frang is an exclusive Warner Classics artist. Her recordings have received numerous awards including the Edison Klassiek Award, the Diapason d'Or, the German Radio Critics' Award, the Grand Prix du Disque, a BBC Music Magazine Award, and two Gramophone Awards.

Born in Norway, at the age of 12 Vilde was invited by conductor Mariss Jansons to make her debut with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. She studied at Barratt Due Musikkinstitutt in Oslo, with Kolja Blacher at the Musikhochschule Hamburg, and with Ana Humachenco at the Kronberg Academy.

Vilde performs on a 1734 Guarneri del Gesu, generously loaned to her by a European benefactor.

In Search of Purpose



Tonight's works and our 2026/27 season theme

At a moment of deep personal crisis in 1802, Ludwig van Beethoven confronted his hearing loss and questioned whether he could go on. In music, he found a way forward – and in doing so, transformed it into a powerful vehicle for human expression and resilience. From this journey, our 2026/27 season takes its title: 'In Search of Purpose'.

Throughout the season we'll trace Beethoven's path from despair to hope in his Fifth Symphony and a cycle of his piano concertos, and explore his ongoing legacy. And we hear from composers finding their purpose in the face of conflict, grief, and life's biggest questions.

Tonight's programme explores purpose in one's identity. Sibelius's *King Christian II Suite* and Hindemith's *Kammermusik No. 4* each reveal composers shaping distinctive musical identities, balancing theatricality, wit and invention. And after the interval, Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* takes self-exploration to extraordinary heights. Part-autobiography and part-artistic manifesto, it portrays an artist confronting critics, recalling love, and reflecting on the purpose of a life of creativity.

Check out the full season:
lpo.org.uk/purpose

Jesús Herrera on Purpose

Our Artistic Director on why he chose this season's theme, and why context matters



'While it's true that many of the iconic works we are so fortunate to perform were written decades or often centuries ago, they all emerged from artists who were driven to express something fundamentally human. This means the inspiration within these compositions can reflect experiences just as close to anyone in today's audience, regardless of their previous exposure to an orchestra.

As custodians of this incredible legacy, I believe it is a beautiful duty not just to present this repertoire because it is fantastic, but to be as generous as we can in how we provide that context. Exploring themes that amplify the depth of the music and connect listeners to its essence is a challenge, in my opinion, undoubtedly worth taking on.'

Jesús's full interview appeared in the latest issue of the LPO magazine, Tune In. *Read it online here:*



Programme notes

Jean Sibelius
1865–1957

King Christian II Suite
1898

1. Nocturne
2. Elegy and Musette
3. Serenade
4. Ballade



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

Sibelius composed his incidental music for the play *King Kristian II*, by his Swedish friend Adolf Paul, in 1898. Initially, for the premiere production at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki in February that year, he provided three short instrumental pieces and a song, all scored for small orchestra. Then during the summer he added three further pieces for larger forces: ostensibly for a new production in Stockholm (though in the event the theatre's pit proved too small to accommodate the orchestra required); but chiefly, it seems, to form the core of a concert suite which would be taken up by conductors and publishers. The Suite was indeed accepted into the catalogue of the leading Berlin publisher Breitkopf and Härtel, and was one of the works through which Sibelius first became known outside his native Finland.

The subject of the play is Kristian II, King of Denmark and Norway from 1513 to 1523. When he married into the family of the imperial Habsburgs in 1515, Kristian continued his affair with a mistress of Dutch bourgeois origin, Dyveke ('little dove'). After her sudden death in 1517, he accused a nobleman of poisoning her and had him summarily tried and executed. Kristian made three attempts to gain the throne of Sweden; the third was briefly successful, but in an attempt to strengthen his position he had a large number of his opponents arrested at a banquet and publicly beheaded, in what became known as 'the Stockholm bloodbath' – prompting a revolt that forced him to withdraw from the country. Later, he was overthrown by opponents in Denmark, and he spent most of his later years under house arrest.

Programme notes

Sibelius's Suite begins with a romantic 'Nocturne'. This has been described as anticipating the composer's First Symphony of 1900 in its musical language; but with its D major tonality, six-in-a-bar motion and melodies made largely out of fragments of scales, it has greater affinities with the Second Symphony of 1902. This movement is followed by two of the pieces for small orchestra that formed Sibelius's original score. The grieving 'Elegy', for strings only, was played as the overture to the Helsinki production; the 'Musette', a dance for Dyveke, imitates the sound of street musicians, including a bagpiper, through the sonorities of clarinets, bassoons and undulating strings with a static bass line. The 'Serenade', designed to preface a scene at court, begins and ends with a stately minuet, but in between becomes more personal and impassioned in tone. The Suite ends with the dramatic 'Ballade', an interlude depicting 'the Stockholm bloodbath'. Here the insistence of the string figuration and the openness of the textures look as far ahead as Sibelius's Third Symphony of 1907.

Programme note © Anthony Burton

New episodes of our LPO podcast – out now

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Programme notes

Paul Hindemith
1895–1963

Kammermusik No. 4, Op. 36 No. 3
1925

Vilde Frang violin

1. Signal –
2. Sehr lebhaft (Very lively)
3. Nachtstück (Nocturne)
4. Lebhafte Viertel (Lively crotchets) –
5. So schnell wie möglich (As fast as possible)



Hindemith has long suffered from a kind of affection deficit, with the court of public opinion awash with forbidding adjectives such as 'astringent', 'bracing' and 'cerebral'. Yet his eight *Kammermusik* ('chamber music') mini-concertos – elegant, ingenious, dramatic works that redefine the concerto for modern times – are gems. They are often blithely labelled as '20th-century Brandenburg Concertos' on account of their modest proportions, variety of soloists and their profusion of Bachian counterpoint. Some might detect other musical ghosts here; the flat-calm *denouement* of the second movement has a Mahlerian air, and the first movement's perky solo trumpeter is a close cousin of the one in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. But this is highly original music, with a bewildering amount of material and contrasting moods crammed into five movements and 20 or so minutes, albeit organised in the traditional fast-slow-fast model (since the outer fast movements are played without a pause between them.)

The solo violin is absent from the first movement (indeed the ensemble is shorn of violins throughout, intensifying the spotlight on the soloist.) It is, in effect, a brief prelude, with woodwind and string flourishes over a stern trombone and a trumpet's military fanfare. It paves the way for the entry of the solo violin, in a

Programme notes

ferocious *moto perpetuo* (a rapid stream of notes) of angular patterns and sequences. The tension eases in whimsical duets with the woodwind, then dissolves completely into a brief but bewitching stasis, the soloist's soaring *cantilena* (lyrical, singing-style passage) intertwined with a lonely clarinet.

In the *Nachtstück* ('Nocturne'), the almost ever-present violin leads, decorates and accompanies a brooding lament. A contrasting central section has the violin accompanied by pecking fragments initially played only by two piccolos and a pair of clarinets – the tiny E-flat and the bass; an extraordinary, original soundworld. A chaotic quick march ensues, followed immediately by a wild finale, marked to be played 'as fast as possible' and later 'if possible, faster still'! It's a thrilling, virtuosic *tour-de-force*, but one delivered – in an antidote to the showstopping finales of Romantic concertos – delicately, in a quiet *sotto voce*. The orchestra gamely attempts to grasp at the soloist's swirling lines, like a cat trying to catch snowflakes.

The piece was written for Licco Amar, the leader of the string quartet in which Hindemith played viola. He must have been some player. It's dedicated 'for a dear lion's birthday' to *Yashnykneshpeff* – Hindemith's affectionate nickname for his wife Gertud, whom he'd married the previous year.

Programme note © Dan Whitfield

Interval – 20 minutes

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



Programme notes

Richard Strauss
1864–1949

Ein Heldenleben ('A Hero's Life')
1898

1. Der Held (The Hero)
2. Des Helden Widersacher (The Hero's Adversaries)
3. Des Helden Gefährtin (The Hero's Companion)
4. Des Helden Walstatt (The Hero at Battle)
5. Des Helden Friedenswerke (The Hero's Works of Peace)
6. Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung (The Hero's Retirement from this World and Completion)



By 1898, the 34-year-old Strauss had completed seven large orchestral tone-poems, five of them inspired by larger-than-life characters from literature or folklore. As he came to plan his eighth, 'A Hero's Life', Strauss turned to a character who fascinated him 'as much as Napoleon or Alexander'. That character was the composer himself. His new work was to be an orchestral autobiography.

It sounds like an act of tremendous immodesty – even before you experience the bombastic brilliance of Strauss's opening statements, intended to introduce the Hero's qualities of ambition, resilience, bravery and intellect. But Strauss probably had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he talked of a picture of himself in the work. Besides, at the time of writing he was young and on the brink of change. His move into opera would later see him write music of touching vulnerability, while the effects of the Second World War would draw from him the resigned, autumnal shades of *Metamorphosen* and the *Four Last Songs*. Moreover, Strauss himself suggested that the heroic character represented in *Ein Heldenleben* was only partly his own. In a letter to his father, he wrote that the Hero was in fact 'not a single poetical or historical figure, but rather a more general and free ideal of great and manly heroism'.

Programme notes

> 'I do not see why I should not compose a symphony about myself; I find myself quite as interesting as Napoleon or Alexander.'
>
> *– Richard Strauss*

No matter what the heroic qualities (or otherwise) of Strauss the man, his music up to 1898 had been just about as heroic as it gets. Claude Debussy commented on its 'frenzied energy which carries one with him as long as he chooses', referring to his orchestral effects as 'those of a book of pictures, or even a cinematography.' The tone-poems Strauss had written so far were powerful, rich, malleable, unpredictable, virtuosic, wickedly exciting, touchingly tender and intensely dramatic – all wrapped up in the composer's own brand of instrumental character and orchestral Technicolor.

In *Ein Heldenleben*, the listener experiences all of the above and more. This is Strauss's most rounded, comprehensive and ambitious tone-poem, and sees him expanding further his already impressive toolbox of orchestral effects. There's room for all of them in Strauss's music precisely because of its narrative range: we meet not just the central Hero, but a confection of souls with whom he fraternised and fought.

The orchestral introduction to the Hero mentioned above launches with a broad, all-seeing theme spanning three octaves and lasting 16 bars. The second of Strauss's six sections is labelled 'The Hero's Adversaries', a thinly disguised caricature of music critics and a representation of more abstract barriers and doubts. For Strauss, there were four types of music critic: carpers (heard on the flute); vituperators (oboe); whiners (cor anglais); and hair-splitters (tuba). It's said the latter's theme is explicitly intended to mimic the name of Strauss's nemesis in the Munich press, a certain Doctor Dehring (think 'Doc-tor DEH-ring'). Needless to say, the Hero despatches them all with ease – though some critical spectres continue to haunt the coming sections.

Listen out next for Strauss's wife Pauline, represented by a lone violin which sings a series of increasingly demanding cadenzas (solo passages). Pauline was capricious and tricky and Strauss knew it, but he also knew he couldn't live without her; this section, 'The Hero's Companion', ends with a rapturous love scene, gatecrashed at its conclusion by the sniping critics of the previous portrait.

Three offstage trumpets herald the next section, which depicts the Hero's brave deeds on the battlefield with some of Strauss's most energetic and fearsome music. Strauss said at the time of writing that no instrument could be more heroic than the horn; at the battle's conclusion, all eight of the score's horns join in unison to proclaim victory.

Strauss's most explicitly autobiographical music comes in the next section, titled 'The Hero's Works of Peace'. Here Strauss quotes from nine of his previous compositions, including six tone-poems. There are notable outings from *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* and *Don Juan* on woodwinds, as well as the return of the seemingly irrepressible tuba of Doctor Dehring, heard right at the section's opening.

In Strauss's final chapter, the Hero 'withdraws from the world and finds fulfilment'. After one last internal struggle, the cor anglais recalls a pastoral theme from the tone-poem *Don Quixote*, and the music moves from bravado to serenity; from confidence to disarming love. There are final utterances from a solo horn and violin – pictures of Strauss and his wife having transcended their troubles.

Strauss lived through every note of his *Heldenleben* in public as the conductor of the work's first performance on 3 March 1899 in Frankfurt. His compositional voice might have been on the brink of change, but *Ein Heldenleben* and its predecesssors heralded an era of orchestral virtuosity that flourished in the 20th century and continues to do so today. For many – and not just the horn players – *Ein Heldenleben* remains the ultimate orchestral test-piece.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

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