

2026/27  
season at the  
Southbank  
Centre

London  
Philharmonic  
Orchestra

Free concert  
programme

*The power of listening*



SOUTHBANK  
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RESIDENT

# 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.

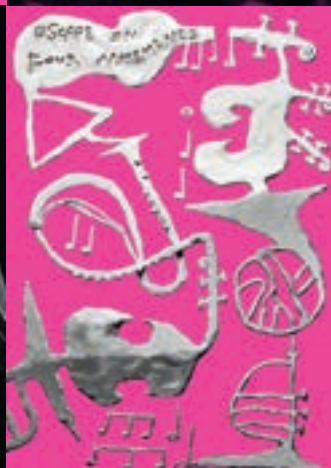
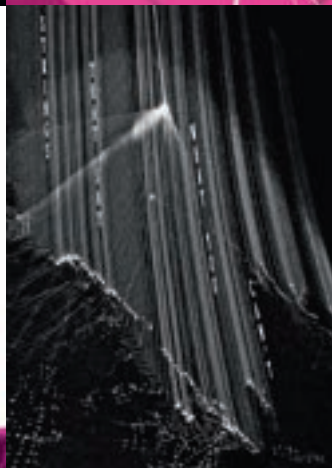
You can see how varied their visual interpretations of the music were from the artworks on this page and on the programme cover.

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](http://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 21 October 2026 | 7.30pm

## Julia Fischer plays Brahms

### Brahms

Violin Concerto (40 min)

*Interval (20 min)*

### Tchaikovsky

Manfred Symphony (60 min)

### Edward Gardner

conductor

Generously supported by Aud Jebsen

### Julia Fischer

violin

*Approximate concert finish time: 9.45pm*

## Contents

- 2 Welcome
- 3 Tonight in 2 minutes
- 4 About us
- 5 Leader: Pieter Schoeman
- 6 On stage tonight
- 7 Edward Gardner
- 8 Julia Fischer
- 9 In Search of Purpose:  
Our 2026/27 season theme
- 10 Programme notes
- 13 Sound Futures donors
- 14 Thank you
- 16 LPO administration

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ENGLAND**

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

## Welcome

### 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](mailto: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 Edward Gardner and violinist Julia Fischer 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](https://lpo.org.uk/membership)

### The Power of Listening

Tonight's work, Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony*, is one of the pieces of music featured in an exciting collaboration with the Royal College of Art. To introduce The Power of Listening, eight postgraduate students were each given a different piece of music to listen to, chosen from our current concert season. They then created an original artwork in response – capturing the emotions, memories, thoughts and images the music sparked in them.

The artworks were displayed last month at a sound gallery – a specially built installation featuring billboards with sets of headphones – at Vinegar Yard in London, as well as on the Tube network and around London.



See artist Zengyue Zhao's artwork inspired by *Manfred Symphony*: 'Chaos, perfectly orchestrated' – along with the other seven artworks and the stories behind them – at [lpo.org.uk/listening](https://lpo.org.uk/listening)

### 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](https://twitter.com/thepoweroflistening)

# Tonight in 2 minutes

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

## The vibe

### Julia Fischer plays Brahms

Tonight we'll hear two very different visions of struggle and purpose. Brahms's Violin Concerto is lyrical, searching and deeply expressive, while Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* takes us into a darker world of guilt, longing and despair. Inspired by the poet Byron's troubled hero, Manfred's journey asks what it is to search for meaning when none seems within reach.

## Who's on stage?



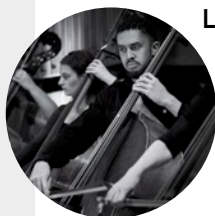
### Edward Gardner: conductor

Edward Gardner is our Principal Conductor and works closely with the Orchestra all year round, so our musicians know him well and enjoy a special connection and rapport with him. One of the leading British conductors of his generation, Ed is highly regarded for his work in opera as well as with orchestras.



### Julia Fischer: violin

Julia is the guest soloist in tonight's first piece: the Violin Concerto by Johannes Brahms. As well as appearing as a solo violinist with orchestras around the world, Julia is also an accomplished pianist, renowned teacher, and passionate advocate for supporting the next generation of musicians.



### London Philharmonic Orchestra

Tonight there are over 90 London Philharmonic Orchestra musicians on stage. 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, Ed, and solo violinist, Julia, come on stage. Once the applause dies down, sit back and enjoy the music ...



40 min

### Johannes Brahms Violin Concerto

with soloist Julia Fischer

A concerto is a showpiece for a solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra. One of the most famous of all violin concertos, Brahms's is a grand, lyrical work that gives the solo violin plenty of opportunity to sing, soar and show off. Listen out for the beautiful melody at the heart of the slow movement, first played by the oboe, and the lively Hungarian-inspired dance rhythms of the finale.

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

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



Interval 20 min



60 min

### Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Manfred Symphony

Inspired by *Manfred*, a poem by the English Romantic poet Lord Byron, Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* takes us on a dramatic journey through the mind of its troubled hero. During its four movements, the music moves from dark brooding and tenderness to fury and wild celebration, ending in a powerful sense of release. Lasting almost an hour, it's an epic, sweeping musical portrait of one man's struggle with his past.

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. Several rounds of bows will bring the evening to a celebratory close. 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

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© 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', will be broadcast this autumn.

## 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

## Pieter Schoeman

### Leader

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.



© 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.

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

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## 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  
Kate Oswin  
Chair supported by Eric Tomsett  
Lasma Taimina  
Chair supported by Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave  
Minn Majoe  
Chair supported by Dr Alex & Maria Chan  
Martin Höhmann  
Chair supported by Hans-Wilhelm & Evelyn Jenckel  
Yang Zhang  
Megan Yang  
Ruth Schulten  
Daniel Pukach  
George Lawson  
Beatriz Carbonell  
Alice Apreda Howell  
Katalin Varnagy  
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  
Marie-Anne Mairesse  
Joseph Maher  
Sophie Phillips  
Ashley Stevens  
Sioni Williams  
Lyrit Milgram  
Olivia Ziani

## Violas

Samuel Burstin  
Guest Principal  
Guillaume Leroy  
Benedetto Pollani  
Martin Wray  
Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden

James Heron  
Shiry Rashkovsky  
Jisu Song  
Charles Cross  
Chris Beckett  
Delyth John  
Laura Vallejo  
Katharine Leek

## Cellos

Kristina Blaumane Principal  
Chair supported by Bianca & Stuart Roden  
Henry Shapard Co-Principal  
Wayne Kwon  
David Lale  
Francis Bucknall  
Heeyeon Cho  
Auriol Evans  
Leo Melvin  
Helen Thomas  
Rasmus Støier Andersen

## 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  
Yijia Cui

## Flutes

Tom Hancox Guest Principal  
Hannah Grayson  
Stewart McIlwham\*

## Piccolo

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

## Oboes

Emanuel Abbühl  
Guest 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

## Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards\* Principal

## Bassoons

Jonathan Davies\* Principal  
Chair supported by Sir Simon Robey  
Helen Storey\*  
Chair supported by Louise Worthington  
Simon Estell\* Principal

## Horns

Annemarie Federle Principal  
Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE  
John Ryan\* Principal  
Will Scotland  
Mark Vines Co-Principal  
Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra  
Oliver Johnson

## 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

## Cornets

Tom Nielsen  
David Hilton

## Trombones

David Whitehouse Principal  
Andrew Cole

## Bass Trombone

Lyndon Meredith Principal

## Tuba

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

## Timpani

Marney O'Sullivan  
Guest Principal

## 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  
Jeremy Cornes  
Francesca Lombardelli

## Harps

Rosanna Rolton Principal  
Stien De Neef

## Organ

Clíodna Shanahan

## Assistant Conductor

Enyi Okpara

*\* Professor at a London conservatoire*

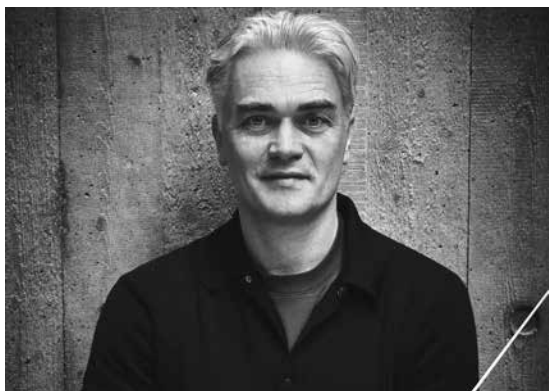
The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose players are not present at this concert:

Malcolm & Alison Thwaites  
Jenny Watson CBE

# Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra

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© Jason Bell

'A conducting force to be reckoned with' (*The New York Times*), leading British conductor Edward Gardner is now in his sixth season as Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and his third as Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet. He also serves as Honorary Conductor of Norway's Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, after an outstanding nine years as its Chief Conductor.

Highlights to come with the London Philharmonic Orchestra this season include Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri*, a semi-staged concert presentation of *Lessons in Love and Violence* by Composer-in-Residence Sir George Benjamin and Martin Crimp, and world premieres by Mark Simpson and Judith Weir. Earlier this month, Edward led the Orchestra on tour to China, with further tours to Spain, Germany and the Netherlands to come.

Elsewhere this season, he launches his first complete Wagner *Ring Cycle* with a new production of *Das Rheingold* at the Norwegian Opera; makes his San Diego Symphony and Detroit Symphony debuts; and conducts a new production of Britten's *Death in Venice* at the Bavarian State Opera.

Edward has previously led distinguished orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony and Staatskapelle Berlin. He enjoys longstanding relationships with the City of Birmingham

Symphony Orchestra, where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which he has conducted at the First and Last Nights of the BBC Proms.

A major figure in the opera world, Edward previously served as Music Director of English National Opera, and has led productions at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival, Opéra National de Paris, Bavarian State Opera, and La Scala.

Edward's extensive and wide-ranging discography features multiple Grammy nominees, International Classical Music Award nominees and Gramophone Award winners, including Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra – winner of a 2023 Gramophone Award – and Britten's *Peter Grimes* with the Bergen Philharmonic, named *Gramophone's* 2021 Recording of the Year.

His latest release on the LPO Label is a pairing of Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin Suite* and *The Wooden Prince*, out this Friday, 23 October (LPO-0141). Other recordings on the LPO Label include Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, Piano Concerto and Symphony No. 2; Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*; Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*; Strauss's *An Alpine Symphony* and *Metamorphosen*; and works by Bartók, Rachmaninov, Dvořák, Schumann, Britten, Brett Dean and Tania León. In 2024, he and the Orchestra featured in a BAFTA-nominated Sky Arts TV series: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', and a second series, 'Inside the Music', will be broadcast this autumn.

The founder of Manchester's Hallé Youth Orchestra, Edward maintains close relationships with The Juilliard School and London's Royal Academy of Music, where he is the inaugural Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Chair. His accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society's Conductor of the Year Award, an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, the Sibelius Prize, and an OBE for Services to Music.

Edward Gardner's position with the London Philharmonic Orchestra is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

# Julia Fischer

## violin

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One of the world's leading violinists, Julia Fischer is a versatile musician who is also celebrated for her extraordinary abilities as a concert pianist, chamber musician and teacher. Since winning First Prize at the Yehudi Menuhin Competition in 1995, she has performed with top orchestras worldwide, including the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Dresden Staatskapelle, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic.

Julia is a regular collaborator with the London Philharmonic Orchestra: in spring 2022 she was Artist-in-Residence with the Orchestra, performing Elgar and Mozart concertos, play-directing a Mozart programme, and joining LPO Principal players in a chamber concert. In March 2024 she gave the world premiere of Daniel Kidane's *Aloud* with the Orchestra under Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall. Following tonight's concert, she will embark on a tour of Spain with the Orchestra and Edward Gardner, giving concerts in Barcelona, Zaragoza, Madrid and Valencia.

Highlights of Julia's 2026/27 season include a residency at Radio France, featuring a solo recital, concerts with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Tugan Sokhiev, and a tour of Germany with the Orchestre National de France and Cristian Măcelaru. She also returns to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra with Fabio Luisi to perform Hans Werner Henze's *Il Vitalino raddoppiato*, and joins the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko at the Royal Albert Hall to mark the orchestra's 80th birthday. Other highlights include appearances with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Vladimir Jurowski,

as well as a tour with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra and Alan Gilbert.

In 2010, Julia founded the Julia Fischer Quartet with violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky, violist Nils Mönkemeyer and cellist Benjamin Nyffenegger – they will embark on an extensive European tour together in January 2027. Julia's concert at the Alte Oper Frankfurt in 2010 marked her debut as a pianist: she performed Grieg's Piano Concerto in the second half, having played Saint-Saëns's Violin Concerto No. 3 in the first half.

Teaching is an integral part of Julia's musical life, as she continues to nurture and guide young talent at Munich's University of Music, and often performs alongside her students. In 2019, she founded a children's orchestra, the Kindersinfoniker, in her hometown of Munich. In 2024, she was named Artistic Director of the Boswil Summer Festival in Switzerland, alongside her fellow quartet member Benjamin Nyffenegger.

Over the course of her career, Julia has released numerous critically acclaimed and award-winning CD and DVD recordings, first on the Pentatone label and later under Decca. In 2017, she launched her own music platform, the JF CLUB, which offers fans exclusive audio and video content, as well as personal insight into her music and her work. Exclusive releases include Franck's Sonata in A major, Szymanowski's Sonata in D minor and Beethoven's String Trio in C minor. One of her recent releases includes a limited vinyl recording of Ysaÿe's Sonatas as an exclusive JF CLUB edition, in collaboration with Hänssler Classic.

Born in Munich to German-Slovakian parents, Julia received her first violin lessons at the age of three. Aged nine, she started studying with the renowned violin professor Ana Chumachenko, later becoming her successor at the University of Munich.

Julia holds numerous awards including the Federal Cross of Merit, the Gramophone Award, the German Culture Prize, the Cultural Honorary Prize of the City of Munich, the Rheingau Music Prize and the Bavarian Maximilian Order. She plays a violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini (1742) as well as an instrument made by Philipp Augustin (2018).

## 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 (Wednesday 4 November) and a cycle of his piano concertos (starting Friday 6 November), and explore his ongoing legacy. And we hear from composers finding their purpose in the face of conflict, grief, oppression, and life's biggest questions.

Tonight, Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* searches for purpose in the void. Inspired by Byron's dramatic poem *Manfred*, the Symphony follows its troubled antihero: a solitary figure haunted by guilt, grief and despair. Tchaikovsky transforms Manfred's existential emptiness into music of overwhelming intensity, confronting the loneliness of searching for meaning without finding peace or resolution.

Check out the full season:  
[lpo.org.uk/purpose](https://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

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Johannes Brahms

1833–97

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

1878

Julia Fischer violin

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*1. Allegro non troppo*

*2. Adagio*

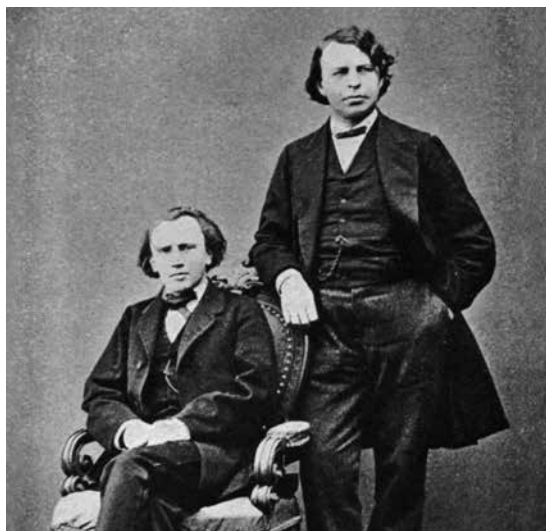
*3. Allegro giocoso*

In the summer of 1853, at the age of 20, Johannes Brahms was introduced to the renowned Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim. Just two years Brahms's senior, Joachim was already well-known across the concert halls of Europe and it was he who would introduce Brahms to the likes of Robert and Clara Schumann, helping to kick-start the young composer's burgeoning career. Brahms and Joachim formed a strong and immediate bond, and Brahms would often write to Joachim, enclosing copies of his new scores for his comments and approval. But it would be another 25 years before Brahms at last felt ready to compose Joachim a concerto and to take on the legacy that Beethoven had left behind. 'You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us', Brahms once quipped, as he laboured over his First Symphony – a work that took him more than 20 years to complete.

Few concertos for the violin had taken hold in the concert hall since Beethoven's – a work that Joachim himself revived when he performed it under Mendelssohn's direction to 'frenetic applause', aged just 13. So when Brahms finally set about drafting his own violin concerto from his holiday home in Pörtsach, Austria in the summer of 1878, he remained indebted to Joachim's guidance. 'After having written it out, I really don't know what you will make of the solo part alone', he wrote to Joachim. 'It was my intention, of course, that you should correct it, not sparing the quality of the composition and that if you thought it not worth

scoring, that you should say so. I shall be satisfied if you will mark those parts which are difficult, awkward or impossible to play.'

Joachim wrote back enthusiastically, insisting 'there is a lot of really good violin music in it' and the work was premiered (alongside the Beethoven) on New Year's Day 1879 in Leipzig, with Brahms himself conducting.



*Brahms (seated) with violinist Joseph Joachim*

## Programme notes

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The initial response was somewhat muted, with many critics declaring the Concerto too modern and the violin part too difficult. Joseph Hellmesberger criticised it as not so much a concerto 'for' the violin as 'against the violin'. But as Joachim toured the work across Europe over the following months, both he and Brahms continued to make revisions and audiences gradually began to warm to Brahms's new concerto style.

At its core, it is a lyrical work: Brahms spent much of the same year composing songs, and the Concerto's songful character comes to the fore in the central

*Adagio* (a movement Brahms disparagingly described as 'feeble'), which is centred around an elegant melody for solo oboe. There is more than a hint of Beethoven across the work too – not least in the strident declaration of the work's opening melody, and the stormy contrast of themes that follows, jostling between virtuosic fireworks and tender contemplation. But the finale is all Brahms: a joyous celebration of gypsy dances in the Hungarian style, in itself a nod to the Hungarian violinist Joachim, the work's treasured dedicatee.

*Programme note* © Jo Kirkbride

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Interval – 20 minutes

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

### Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–93

### Manfred, Op. 58

Symphony in four scenes, after the dramatic poem by Byron

1885

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*1. Lento lugubre – Moderato con moto*

*2. Vivace con spirito*

*3. Andante con moto*

*4. Allegro con fuoco*

In Tchaikovsky's time, Byron's gothic drama *Manfred* (1816) would have been familiar to any educated European. Manfred is the archetypal 'Byronic hero' – passionate, solitary and tormented by his traumatic past. Though it's never satisfactorily explained how, his obsessive (possibly incestuous) love has led to the death of his adored muse Astarte; now, tormented with

guilt, he wanders the Alps in a desperate attempt to achieve some form of release.

Schumann had already set parts of *Manfred* to music in 1852, but the Russian critic Vladimir Stasov felt that it offered more. In 1868 he devised a programme for a symphony based on the poem, and offered it to the

## Programme notes

composer Mily Balakirev, who declined but in 1881 passed it on to Tchaikovsky – who also declined. But in 1884, something changed. Tchaikovsky bought a copy of *Manfred*, and took it with him that November to the Swiss Alps, where his friend Josef Kotek was dying of tuberculosis. Stasov's programme, Byron's poetry, the Alpine scenery and personal tragedy all somehow combined; the Symphony was completed in September 1885.

The storyline proved a liberation. Tchaikovsky was constantly aware that his inspiration didn't fit easily into classical forms ('It has a mountain of padding', he later commented about his Fifth Symphony). Now – as in his ballets – he could let emotion find its own form. The story of a sensitive outsider, wracked by a forbidden love, fleeing a hostile world – it's easy to appreciate why Tchaikovsky identified with that. 'I myself think it's my best symphonic work', he wrote to Balakirev after its premiere in Moscow in March 1886, 'though because of its extreme difficulty, complexity and large scale, it is doomed to failure and to be ignored'.

Here's the plot – in the words of Stasov's original programme, as adapted by Tchaikovsky:

1. *Manfred wanders in the Alps* [the bassoons play Manfred's brooding theme; the strings suggest nagging pangs of guilt]. Tormented by fateful questions of existence, tortured by the burning anguish of hopelessness and the memory of his guilty past, he experiences cruel spiritual torments [the music accelerates to a series of tempestuous climaxes] ... Memories of his ruined Astarte, whom once he had passionately loved, gnaw at his heart [the music grows gentler, then flares up once more, before muted strings, harp and woodwinds paint a tender portrait of the lost beloved] and there is neither divine Grace nor an end to Manfred's boundless despair. [Manfred's theme returns in tragic grandeur and the movement pounds to a violent close].

2. *The Alpine fairy appears to Manfred in the rainbow from a waterfall's spray*. [The Symphony's *scherzo* – a delicate, fantastic interlude in the manner of Tchaikovsky's fairytale ballets. Manfred's sombre theme shadows the sweet central melody].

3. *Life amongst the Alpine hunters, full of simplicity, good nature and tradition, with which Manfred clashes in sharp contrast*. A quiet, idyllic *Adagio*. [A ravishing pastoral: there's a shepherds' song on the oboe, birdcalls, and the wheezing of a rustic bagpipe. Manfred's sudden appearance is grim.]

4. *A wild, unbridled Allegro, full of savage audacity*. Manfred travels into the subterranean halls of the demonic spirit Arimanes. His arrival arouses a general outburst from the mountain demons – and finally, the spirit of Astarte is summoned. [For the first time, the music grows gentle, though the harmonies are anguished. Baleful fanfares surround the scene, and Manfred's theme is heard, as at the start of the Symphony]. The devilry continues – finishing with Manfred's death. [The frenzy resumes – interrupted by Astarte's music and Manfred's increasingly desperate response. Byron's Manfred dies defiantly, but Tchaikovsky redeems him, as the organ enters and noble, hymn-like chords stride through the orchestra. Manfred's torments fade at last – 'Old man, 'tis not so difficult to die'].

Programme note © Richard Bratby

### Video: Edward Gardner on the *Manfred* Symphony

Scan the QR code to watch the interview



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