



**Free concert
programme**

London Philharmonic★ Orchestra



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



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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 29 November 2025 | 7.30pm

Rachmaninov's Third

Robert Laidlow

Exoplanets (*world premiere*)* (23')

Bloch

Schelomo (20')

Interval (20')

Rachmaninov

Symphony No. 3 (38')

Edward Gardner

conductor

Generously supported by Aud Jebsen

Nicolas Altstaedt†

cello

†Unfortunately, Sheku Kanneh-Mason has had to withdraw from tonight's concert due to injury. We are very grateful to Nicolas Altstaedt for stepping in at short notice.

*Commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Interfinity Festival Basel.

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

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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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ENGLAND**

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 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.

LPO news

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

Earlier this evening, composer Robert Laidlow and astronomer David Kipping joined us for a fascinating pre-concert conversation delving into the cosmic inspiration behind Robert's new work *Exoplanets*, which opens tonight's concert.

This event was the second of 'The Nature Dialogues' – a series of free pre-concert talks offering fresh perspectives on the music and the season's wider theme, *Harmony with Nature*. Exploring topics from wildlife to volcanoes, stars to storms, guest speakers coming up include Kate Humble and Jeremy Wade, among many other renowned environmentalists, scientists and composers. Turn to page 16 for full details, or find out more and book your free tickets at lpo.org.uk/harmony-with-nature

December with the LPO

Following tonight's concert, Edward Gardner and the Orchestra will head off on a major tour of Germany. With concerts in nine different cities over 11 days, it'll be a busy start to December!

We'll be back in London for the Southbank Centre's 'Christmas Classics' concerts on 13 & 14 December with the London Philharmonic Choir and London Youth Choir. Perfect for the entire family, you'll be able to sing along to an array of traditional carols alongside popular contemporary Christmas favourites, presented by YolanDa Brown. Why not come and get into the Christmas spirit with us?

southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/christmas-classics

Printed with the planet in mind

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On stage tonight

First Violins

Pieter Schoeman* Leader
Chair supported by Neil Westreich
Alice Ivy-Pemberton
Co-Leader
Vesselin Gellef 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
Katalin Varnagy
Yang Zhang
Martin Höhmann
Thomas Eisner
Chair supported by Ryze Power
Nilufar Alimaksumova
Amanda Smith
Ricky Gore
Jamie Hutchinson
Daniel Pukach
Alice Apreda Howell

Second Violins

Tania Mazzetti Principal
Chair supported by The Candide
Trust
Emma Oldfield Co-Principal
Claudia Tarrant-Matthews
Coco Inman
Sophie Phillips
Chair supported by Friends of the
Orchestra
Marie-Anne Mairesse
Ashley Stevens
Joseph Maher
Kate Birchall
Nancy Elan
Sioni Williams
Vera Beumer
Anna Croad
José Nuno Cabrita Matias

Violas

Benjamin Roskams
Guest Principal
David BaMaung
Benedetto Pollani

Martin Wray

Chair supported by David & Bettina
Harden
Laura Vallejo
Lucia Ortiz Sauco
Katharine Leek
Michelle Bruil
Shiry Rashkovsky
Jisu Song
Raquel López Bolívar
Kate De Campos

Cellos

Henry Shapard Principal
Wayne Kwon
Chair supported by an anonymous
donor
David Lale
George Houlst
Leo Melvin
Francis Bucknall
Sue Sutherley
Tom Roff
Helen Thomas
Sibylle Hentschel

Double Basses

Kevin Rundell* Principal
Sebastian Pennar*
Co-Principal
George Peniston
Tom Walley
Chair supported by William & Alex
de Winton
Laura Murphy
Chair supported by Ian Ferguson
& Susan Tranter
Charlotte Kerbegian
Lowri Estell
Adam Wynter

Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal
Chair supported by Malcolm &
Alison Thwaites
Ellie Blamires
Stewart McIlwham*

Piccolos

Stewart McIlwham*
Principal
Ellie Blamires

Oboes

Ian Hardwick* Principal
Alice Munday
Chair supported by David & Yi
Buckley
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
Chair supported by Roger
Greenwood
Paul Richards*

Bass Clarinet

Paul Richards* Principal

Bassoons

Jonathan Davies* Principal
Chair supported by Sir Simon
Robey
Helen Storey*

Contrabassoon

Simon Estell* Principal

Horns

John Ryan* Principal
Annemarie Federle
Principal
Chair supported by Victoria
Robey CBE
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

Simon Carrington*
Principal
Chair supported by Victoria
Robey CBE

Percussion

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

Harps

Abigail Kent Guest Principal
Milo Harper

Celeste

Catherine Edwards

Assistant Conductor

Wilson Ng

**Professor at a London
conservatoire*

The LPO also
acknowledges
the following chair
supporters whose
player is not present
at this concert:
Bianca & Stuart Roden

London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has been celebrated as one of the world's great orchestras since Sir Thomas Beecham founded it in 1932. Our mission is to share wonder with the modern world through the power of orchestral music, which we accomplish through live performances, online, and an extensive education and community programme, cementing our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You'll also find us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour worldwide. In 2024 we celebrated 60 years as Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the Grammy-nominated London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems for every medal ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, our iconic recording with Pavarotti that made *Nessun Dorma* a global football anthem, or closing the flotilla at The Queen's Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant. And you'll almost certainly have heard us on the soundtracks for major films including *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sharing the wonder worldwide

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

Our conductors

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

Next generations

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

Pieter Schoeman

Leader

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

Today's young instrumentalists are the orchestra members of the future, and we have a number of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme leads the way in creating pathways into the profession for young artists from under-represented communities, and our LPO Young Composers and Foyle Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. We also recently launched the LPO Conducting Fellowship, supporting the development of two outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2025/26 season

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

Highlights with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* to end the season. We'll also welcome back Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as guest conductors including Robin Ticciati, Kirill Karabits, Mark Elder and Elim Chan. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Himari; cellist 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 Lalovega

Pieter Schoeman was appointed Leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, having previously been Co-Leader since 2002. He is also a Professor of Violin at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance.

Pieter has performed worldwide as a soloist and recitalist in such famous halls as the Amsterdam

Concertgebouw, Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, and the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. He has also appeared as Guest Leader with many prestigious orchestras across the world. As a chamber musician, he regularly appears at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall. His chamber music partners have included Anne-Sophie Mutter, Veronika Eberle, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Boris Garlitsky, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Martin Helmchen and Julia Fischer.

Pieter has performed numerous times as a soloist with the LPO. Highlights have included an appearance as both conductor and soloist in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the Brahms Double Concerto with Kristina Blaumane, Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2, and the Britten Double Concerto with Alexander Zemtsov, which was released on the LPO Label to great critical acclaim.

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

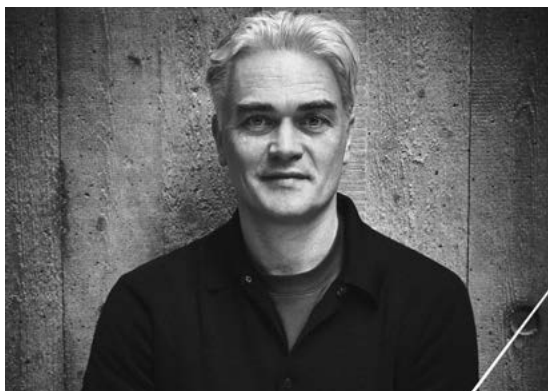
New video series: 'Humans of the Orchestra'

Scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

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

This season's LPO highlights include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; 'Phoenix Lands': two concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a concert performance of Berg's opera *Wozzeck* to end the season. Last month he and the Orchestra embarked on a tour to South Korea, and December sees a tour of major cities in Germany.

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

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

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

Edward Gardner has recorded extensively with the Bergen Philharmonic on the Chandos label, including most recently a Nielsen disc and Strauss's *Salome*, as well as a Grammy-nominated Janáček *Glagolitic Mass*. Other recent critically acclaimed releases include *Der fliegende Holländer* with Lise Davidsen, Gerald Finley and the Norwegian National Opera for Decca.

Earlier this month, the LPO Label released Edward's recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, live at the 2022 BBC Proms (see page 12). September 2025 saw the release of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir. This was Edward's third Tippett release on the label, following *The Midsummer Marriage* – which won a Gramophone Award – and the Second Symphony and Piano Concerto with Steven Osborne. He has also released on the label works by Berlioz, Rachmaninov, Dvořák, Schumann and Britten. In 2024, he and the LPO featured in a Sky Arts series: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a BAFTA.

A passionate supporter of young talent, Edward founded the Hallé Youth Orchestra in 2002 and regularly conducts the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He has a close relationship with the Juilliard School of Music, and with the Royal Academy of Music.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music, and gained early recognition as Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year Award (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and an OBE for Services to Music in The Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

Nicolas Altstaedt

cello

© Marco Borggreve



Other highlights of 2025/26 include debut appearances with the Vienna Radio Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber, Hallé, Philharmonia Zurich and Freiburg Baroque orchestras, as well return engagements with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, NAC Orchestra Ottawa, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre National de Lille, among others.

Nicolas is Artist-in-Residence at the 2026 Bodenseefestival, while his chamber music highlights include tours of Australia and North America with lutenist Thomas Dunford – including an appearance at Carnegie Hall.

German-French cellist Nicolas Altstaedt enjoys a multifaceted career as a soloist, conductor and artistic director. His acclaimed 2010 debut with the Vienna Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel at the Lucerne Festival launched collaborations with leading orchestras worldwide including the Royal Concertgebouw, Budapest Festival, Philharmonia, Bavarian Radio Symphony and NHK Symphony orchestras, working with conductors such as Iván Fischer, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Lahav Shani, François-Xavier Roth, Gianandrea Noseda and Paavo Järvi. He often performs on period instruments, and regularly collaborates with Il Giardino Armonico and Giovanni Antonini, Philippe Herreweghe, René Jacobs, Jean Rondeau and Thomas Dunford.

Joint appearances and premieres with Thomas Adès, Sofia Gubaidulina, Wolfgang Rihm, Jörg Widmann, Fazıl Say, Heinz Holliger and Liza Lim make Nicolas Altstaedt a passionate advocate for contemporary music. He was chosen by Gidon Kremer as Artistic Director of the Lockenhaus Chamber Music Festival in 2012, and is Artistic Partner of the Tapiola Sinfonietta for the next three seasons. His recordings have received numerous accolades, including the BBC Music Magazine Concerto Award and a Gramophone Classical Music Award.

Nicolas has appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra several times, in concerts across the UK and on tour internationally. In April 2024 he performed Dvořák's Cello Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall under Edward Gardner, and he returned earlier this month, giving an acclaimed performance of Walton's Cello Concerto under the baton of Gemma New.

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 right), 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

The first piece in tonight's concert – *Exoplanets* by British composer and researcher Robert Laidlow – receives its world premiere this evening.

Expanding the idea of 'Harmony with Nature' beyond our own planet, *Exoplanets* draws inspiration from the scientific discovery of planets outside our solar system, translating astrophysical principles into sound. By exploring the physics that govern both distant worlds and our own, *Exoplanets* reminds us that the forces shaping life on Earth are part of a far greater, universal harmony.

Watch: Robert Laidlow on *Exoplanets*

Scan the QR code to watch video



Programme notes

Robert Laidlow

born 1994

Exoplanets

world premiere



© Jonathan Slade

An exoplanet is a planet outside of our solar system. Once only theorised, scientists have now discovered over 5000 of these alien planets using telescopes like the James Webb Space Telescope. They are strange, beautiful and wild beyond anything we might have dreamed of ourselves. This piece, *Exoplanets*, is a cosmic tone poem – I wrote it to sound like it is not of this Earth.

Every exoplanet researcher builds on what others learn – nobody works in isolation. Similarly, *Exoplanets* is a continuous melting pot of ideas, not a set of distinct movements. Different 'worlds' emerge, disappear and reappear, changed by what has occurred in the meantime. There are worlds with skies dominated by thousand-mile-an-hour clouds of glass, and ocean worlds where boundaries between liquid and gas are blurred. There are worlds that wander between stars in total, frozen, darkness and worlds where, if you were to stand on their surface, you would experience an infinite, radiant sunrise.

I can't help but imagine what I called 'exomusic' – alien music. Would their rhythms correspond to what they see in the night sky, and would their voice be adapted to carry sound in 'air' very different to our own? On the Voyager spacecraft, we sent Bach to outer space – would an exocivilisation recognise anything about it?

Just as inspiring are the methods we use to discover exoplanets. We learn so much from so little. The slight wobble of a star, pulled by gravity, tells us there is an exoplanet lurking unseen. A tiny change in starlight tells us what an exoplanet's atmosphere is made from. This piece aims to capture that attention to detail. Harmonies and melodies wobble and drift, timbres are filtered, absorbed, re-emitted like light.

Telescopes tell us everything we know about exoplanets. Telescopes are time machines. They reveal the universe as it was, and scientists use them to predict the future of our planet. We see planets with strange atmospheres and runaway greenhouse effects; perhaps that can help us model climate change on Earth. What we don't see is any other life. We seem to be utterly alone in both space and time. Are we so unique? Or is it that any life flourishes only for an infinitesimal moment in the unfathomably long life of the universe – a moment we can't find in our time machines. These exoplanet-oracles have an aura of inevitability about them. In 500 million years, the warming sun will prevent photosynthesis, eradicating almost all life, and in 5 billion years its expansion will destroy Earth entirely. There will be no trace of us for future exocivilisations to see. They, also, will seem to be utterly alone. This was always in the back of my mind when composing *Exoplanets*.

Continues overleaf

Programme notes

Exoplanet Inspirations

Spoiler warning: if you prefer to imagine your own stories about what you're hearing, I encourage you to stop reading now, as I am going to reveal some specific scientific inspirations.

Raymond Pierrehumbert's work on hydrogen-ocean (Hycean) worlds was the original inspiration for *Exoplanets*. Unlike on Earth, Hycean exoplanets have no clear distinction between the atmosphere and the ocean; the world moves seamlessly from gas to liquid. If you were falling, you'd drown before you splashed. *Exoplanets* begins with percussion instruments submerging into water and the first few minutes explore blurring sonic boundaries. Ray also studies the runaway greenhouse effect, where heat is trapped in a positive feedback loop. Exponential growth is audible in the early minutes of *Exoplanets* – once an instrument enters the texture, it does not escape.

Ray put me onto the idea of orbital resonances, which is when notes are tuned according to how quickly exoplanets orbit round their star. My collaborators at the Swiss NCCR PlanetS research centre pointed me towards the TOI-178 system they discovered with their CHEOPS telescope, which has an unusually perfect set of orbital ratios. These ratios create a six-note musical motif, which is outlined at the very beginning of the work in tuned percussion, and returns many times in different forms. A ratio can also be used to create a rhythm, if you explore it horizontally (in time) rather than vertically (in harmony). The CHEOPS ratios underpin the complex and alien percussion rhythms that follow the Hycean music, and I also use it to create harmonies that exist outside of Western tuning systems. I spoke with several collaborators about 'technosignatures' at various points – signals that could only be explained by intelligent life (we haven't found any yet). Technosignatures would probably repeat inorganically, which informed parts of *Exoplanets'* repeated materials.

WASP-17b is a 'hot Jupiter' – it's a gas giant like Jupiter and orbits very close to its star. Hannah Wakeford discovered that WASP-17b has clouds made of quartz, which I find fascinating and striking. It is tidally-locked, meaning one extremely hot side always faces its star and one very cold side faces away. This enormous energy gradient and quartz cloud imagery gave rise to the idea of alternating music between extremely slow and extremely fast orchestral playing.

I want to thank each of these scientists, and the researchers in their labs, for their generosity in explaining their research to me and why it matters.

Robert Laidlow, 2025

About the composer

Robert Laidlow is a composer and researcher based in the UK. His 'gigantically imaginative' (BBC Radio 3) music is concerned with developing new forms of creative expression through the relationship between music, advanced technology and scientific research.

Robert's music investigates the intersection of classical music, interactive technology and creativity, and spans orchestral, chamber and solo works. *TECHNO-UTOPIA* (2025), commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, and *Silicon* (2022), a symphonic-length work for the BBC Philharmonic, explore human music-making in the age of AI and have been featured in *The New York Times*, *New Scientist*, *Bachtrack*, Sky News, BBC Radio and international television. *Post-Singularity Songs* (2023), for soprano Stephanie Lamprea, uses hallucinating AI to invent creation myths and love songs, situating this technology as oracle and worldbuilder. *Tui* (2024), for International Contemporary Ensemble, examines creative machines in relation to other non-human intelligence.

Projects in 2025/26 include *Medium* for Cyborg Soloist Zubin Kanga and *ANCESTORS*, an immersive solo opera with the singer Peter Brathwaite. Robert is midway through a long-term project translating the four fundamental forces into music, having composed *Gravity* (2020) for the Echea Quartet and *Chromodynamics* (2021) for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Robert's work has been performed and recorded by leading musicians in the UK, including the Riot Ensemble, Britten Sinfonia, the Elias Quartet, the Piatti Quartet, Chineke!, Joseph Havlat and David Zucchi. He has been commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society Composer's Prize, and been nominated for two Ivor Novello Composers Awards along with the RMA Tippet Medal.

Born in London, Robert read Music at Cambridge University before studying Composition with David Sawyer at the Royal Academy of Music. From 2018-22 he was the RNCM PRISM (Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music) PhD Researcher in Artificial Intelligence with the BBC Philharmonic. He is a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford University.

Programme notes

Ernest Bloch

1880–1959

Schelomo: Hebrew Rhapsody for cello and orchestra

1916

Nicolas Altstaedt *cello*



In 1915, the first full year of World War One, Ernest Bloch was still living in his native Switzerland, so the developing catastrophe didn't affect him directly. But to see Europe, the supposed home of modern civilisation, so torn apart depressed him profoundly. One book above all seemed to sum up his feelings: the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, traditionally ascribed to the great Jewish King Solomon. It's not exactly a comforting read, and at times it comes close to despair: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity ... I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

At the same time, Bloch was attempting to come to terms with his own Jewish heritage. In the 19th century, many European Jews had striven to 'assimilate' – to drop their religious practices and embrace the culture into which they were born. But after the shock of the Dreyfus case in France, the pogroms in Russia and the

election of an openly anti-Semitic mayor, Karl Lueger, in Vienna, Jews were increasingly asking themselves who they were, and what really constituted home for them.

It was out of all this that Bloch composed his remarkable *Schelomo* (Hebrew for 'Solomon'), half a highly original cello concerto, half a gigantic song without words. At first, Bloch thought in terms of a vocal work setting Solomon's writings, but he didn't speak Hebrew (the book's original language), and none of the translations he read felt right to him. Then, towards the end of 1915, Bloch met the cellist Alexander Barjansky. The composer was deeply stirred by Barjansky's playing and Barjansky, in turn, was bowled over by Bloch's Jewish-inspired works. Barjansky's cello, Bloch felt, was 'an infinitely grander and more profound voice that could speak all languages.' At the same time, Barjansky's sculptress wife, Katya, worked on a statuette of King Solomon, which also influenced Bloch's thinking as he composed.

The result, *Schelomo* (finished in 1916), is unmistakably a tragic work, but it is also grand, majestic and opulent: the Biblical Solomon certainly didn't allow his famous world-weariness to prevent him from enjoying his wealth, his pomp, his wives and concubines – all reflected in the luxurious use of the large, colour-enhanced orchestra. However the lavishness is framed by the meditative, deeply elegiac music that begins, ends, and to a certain extent punctuates the work. 'One may imagine the voice of the solo cello is the voice of King Solomon', Bloch wrote. 'The complex voice of the orchestra is the voice of his age ... his world ... his experience ...' It is for the cello to put Solomon's 'pessimistic philosophy into words.'

Broadly speaking, *Schelomo* falls into three linked sections, but it's all so seamless, so beautifully urged forward by the ever-eloquent cello, that one can simply let oneself be carried along by the current of ideas and

Programme notes

emotions. Like a lot of Jewish traditional and popular music, the music is overwhelmingly in the minor key, the melancholic tone enhanced by flavoursome modal inflections in the melody lines. There is a hint of hope towards the end – perhaps peace and justice may reign again, one day? But at the end, the cello brings us back to reality: 'I have seen it all ... I knew hope ... it is become barren, sterile.'

Programme note © Stephen Johnson

Interval – 20 minutes

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

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Sergei Rachmaninov

1873–1943

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44

1936

1. Lento – Allegro moderato – Allegro

2. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro vivace

3. Allegro – Allegro vivace – Allegro (Tempo primo) – Allegretto – Allegro vivace



Fate dealt a cruel hand when it pushed into exile a man so filled with love for his native country as Sergei Rachmaninov. The composer fled Russia at the Revolution of 1917 and effectively gave up hope of ever returning. 'His homesickness assumed the character of a disease as the years passed', wrote Rachmaninov's most famous interviewer, David Ewen, 'and one symptom of that disease was an unshakeable melancholy.'

It was a melancholy that seeped into Rachmaninov's late orchestral scores, heating their brooding passion and tempering their epic sweep. The inspiration was still Russia, but now the composer was writing of it from the outside – in longing and frustration rather than fascinated wonder. That is felt strongly in the Third Symphony. Not only does it sound more Russian than its two predecessors, it conveys that sense of nostalgia and loss more profoundly through both its aching lyricism and thundering explosions.

Most of the Symphony was written in Rachmaninov's villa overlooking Lake Lucerne in Switzerland. The first two movements took shape with relative ease in the autumn of 1935, but Rachmaninov fretted over the third; it had been nearly three decades since he'd written a symphony, and his two most successful recent pieces – the *Paganini Rhapsody* and the *Corelli Variations* – used tunes by other composers. 'With each of my thoughts I thank God that I was able to do it', Rachmaninov wrote to his sister-in-law in June 1936 as he finally finished the finale, and the Symphony was first performed on 6 November of that year by the

Programme notes

composer's favoured Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski.

The reception was lukewarm, but Rachmaninov's achievement in the Third is unquestionably outstanding. With perspective we can hear how he perfects the established hallmarks of his late style: how his tunes have that bit more shape and flair, how thoroughly he understands the qualities of individual instruments, how his orchestration is more delicate and discriminating, how his harmonic language has added pungency and danger, how his counterpoints are more skilful and considered, and how the whole symphonic conversation has become that bit more intense and diverse.

What remains from the work's two predecessors, however, is the use of a pervading 'motto' theme employing narrow, stepwise intervals akin to those of a sacred chant. This is heard right at the start of the piece on clarinet, muted horn and muted cello, a gesture described by Russian music expert David Nice as 'a ghostly reminiscence'. Cellos against gentle woodwind syncopations introduce the gorgeous secondary theme as the tempo eases, but soon the music rediscovers its thrust and becomes more schizophrenic; trumpets throw the 'fate motif' back at the orchestra three times and despite the impassioned protests of the strings, it wins out – closing the movement in new orchestral clothing.

Only two movements follow, Rachmaninov deploying his new trick of placing a brittle *scherzo*-style passage within his slow movement. A horn plays the 'motto' right at the start, accompanied by spread chords on a harp.

But it's a solo violin that introduces the movement's main theme. This uses a smooth triplet rhythm (three notes in the space of two) that is itself countered by a melody on the flute topped off by a graceful trill.

The struggles Rachmaninov faced in writing the Symphony's final movement seem immediately blown away as the movement launches. This is a *tour-de-force* of melody-propelled dynamism that immediately thrusts out themes before plunging into a rapid fugue heralded by the fate theme. Staggered entries from top-down strings suggest a dance, but for David Nice 'the dance seems destined to sink in a slough of despond', compounded by an airing of the plainsong theme referencing the 'day of wrath', the *Dies Irae*. But the dark clouds appear to be banished as a coda full of snappy, lunging brilliance wraps the Symphony up.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

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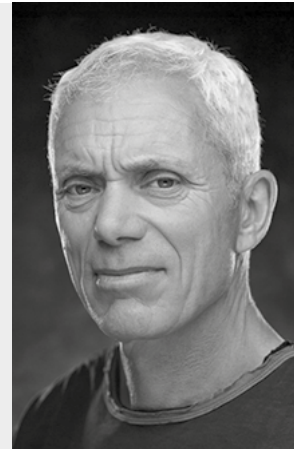
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