

RLPO November 18 and 21 programme complementary content

Stephen Hough returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall this November for a pair of concerts under the baton of Domingo Hindoyan.

The Wirral-born superstar pianist presents Brahms' First Piano Concerto in a programme that's full of musical passion.

You can learn more about it in our programme notes which this year are being presented in a new and accessible way.

And in addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content which we hope will help shine additional light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Stephen Hough interview

What do Leonardo Da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stephen Hough have in common?

They're all considered polymaths – individuals whose knowledge and talent spans a wide number of subjects.

Hough started his career as a pianist, but his interests and quiet intellect have led him in many directions; to composing, writing, painting and theology.

It's as a musician however that he returns to Hope Street this month, performing Brahms' First Piano Concerto with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and chief conductor Domingo Hindoyan.

The pianist recorded both the First and Second Piano Concertos in 2013, and later said the experience had led him to reconsider the two works, composed 20 years apart, suggesting **while the second was the 'better' of the two, the first was the 'greater'**.

"Ah, well that was really just a way to try to explain what's wonderful about both," he says of the comparison. "In short (the long version is in my book *Rough Ideas*), the second is perhaps the better constructed piece, better orchestrated etc, whereas the first has perhaps the greater discharge of creative energy, an early work by a composer of utter genius.

"Greatness can be seen sometimes in aiming higher than you can reach."

The pair of concerts are the latest in a long line of appearances at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall for the Heswall-born virtuoso who first set foot inside the building as a **schoolboy some half-a-century ago**.

“It seemed so big!” he recalls of those earliest experiences sitting in the audience. “I was a little boy having piano lessons on Hope Street and we’d go to concerts on Saturday nights. I said to my mother, ‘do you think I’ll ever get to play on that stage?’

“One thing I’ve been doing during the last couple of years is writing a memoir, and quite a bit of it takes place in Philharmonic Hall.

“I also remember seeing the naked ladies traced on the walls of the hall. That seemed quite daring to me as a little boy.”

Of course, the brilliant young pianist (who also studied flute, cello and percussion and at 14 appeared on Oscar Peterson’s Piano Party with Count Basie) did get to play on the stage and has returned many times.

He was at the hall last March just ahead of the first Covid lockdown and **then again in the autumn** – albeit playing to a socially distanced audience.

He describes the last 18 months as a huge challenge.

“After my March 2020 concerts with the Liverpool Phil I went home to a steady stream of cancellations; I think about 40 in the first two weeks of the pandemic,” he recalls. “That was an enormous adjustment – psychological, professional and financial.

“From the very first day of lockdown I felt I’d reached a crossroads; either I’d treat it like some sort of holiday, I was tired anyway from a busy early part of the 2020 season, or I’d see it as an opportunity to work in ways and with an intensity I’d never done before.”

Hough consciously ‘tried to follow the latter path’, helped by demand for compositions including one for the Takacs quartet.

“And then other projects came in,” he smiles, “including an extensive one for Lang Lang which I can’t say too much about at the moment.”

A conversation with Hyperion Records also led to a spurt of creativity in the studio – resulting in six recordings.

He considers: “I think it’s too early yet to know how the pandemic will change things permanently, but right now it just feels wonderful to be interacting with an audience again and to be seeing old friends – and giving them a big hug!”

Along with big hugs, he has a big birthday coming up later in November when he turns 60. Is it a time for reflection perhaps? Or to consider the future?

“In a way, I try not to be self-conscious about where I’m going or where I’ve been,” he says. “Every day is a new beginning, and every moment is a chance to choose the path ahead. I have many things planned and I just hope to be healthy and busy for as long as possible.”

Whatever is planned is likely to involve music in some shape or form.

Recently on Twitter, the 59-year-old reported having Mott the Hoople’s version of David Bowie’s All the Young Dudes stuck on a loop in his head.

Does he have a current earworm? Brahms perhaps?

“Well, I’ve been working on a film score – another pandemic project,” he reveals. “It’s a movie about a composer writing a short piano concerto, which I finished doing just the other week and so that music has been going around in my head in rather an annoying way!”

Domingo Hindoyan

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra’s new chief conductor continues his inaugural season with a pair of epics.

Hindoyan is a big fan of the German Romantic repertoire, and here he conducts the Orchestra and the stellar Stephen Hough in one of its most luscious examples.

Conductor and soloist were due to originally work together a year ago when the pianist played Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto. But **pandemic travel restrictions** meant only Hough made it to Hope Street and Joshua Weilerstein stepped in to direct the performance.

Brahms

Johannes Brahms has been described a ‘Janus-like’ figure in the history of music – his compositions blending the dynamism of Beethoven and lyricism of Schubert with the Baroque era’s use of counterpoint.

He toiled over his epic first piano concerto for four years.

It started life in 1854, the year Robert Schumann was committed to an asylum and the young Brahms took on a self-appointed role as **Clara Schumann’s protector**.

At that stage the 21-year-old conceived the work as a sonata for two pianos. It later morphed into a full four-movement symphony before he finally settled on a piano concerto.

He premiered the work in Hanover in January 1859, but most of its early performances received a **chilly reception from audiences** and it would take time and patience for it to eventually be regarded as the masterpiece it is today.

Did you know? As a teenager in Hamburg, Brahms supplemented his family’s modest income by playing piano in dockside taverns.

Watch Stephen Hough play an excerpt from Brahms’s Piano Concerto No 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTOtJlIBjfo>

Tchaikovsky

On October 28, 1893, **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** stepped on to the podium at the Russian Musical Society in St Petersburg to conduct the premiere of his **new symphony**.

The structure was unusual – its second movement in the 5/4 time of Russian folk music and the third and fourth movements swapped from the norm, a scherzo followed by an adagio with a bleak pppp ending.

The symphony, in its composer's words, "caused some bewilderment" among its listeners but he himself was "more proud of it than any of my other works."

Sadly, he didn't have time to enjoy that pride, because nine days later the 53-year-old was dead, a victim of cholera just as his mother had been when he was still a teenager.

But what a **catalogue of music** he left the world.

The Pathétique has been used in film soundtracks including Merchant Ivory's *Maurice*, *The Aviator*, *Death of Stalin* and here in the 1942 Bette Davis drama *Now Voyager*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tU--5rGK4M>