

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra May 12 and 15 programme complementary content

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic is like a big family – and these latest two concerts in the 2021/22 season are certainly a family affair.

Chief Conductor Domingo Hindoyan will be joined on stage at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall by his wife, the award-winning operatic soprano Sonya Yoncheva, for a special programme which marries Italian and German works.

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

Domingo Hindoyan interview

When Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva received her master's degree from the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève 13 years ago, it fell to a young assistant in conducting classes to lead the music at the ceremony.

That young assistant was a Venezuelan conductor called **Domingo Hindoyan** and it was the first time the two rising stars' paths had crossed.

“She sang her recital together with me – she sang two pieces, Manon and some dramatic aria,” he recalls.

They went their separate ways but later found themselves working together in Berlin, where Domingo was first assistant to the great Daniel Barenboim at the Staatsoper, and love blossomed.

But while the pair, who married in 2014 and have two young children, are a partnership off stage, you won't see them ‘on stage’ together that often.

“It’s not that we don’t want [to work together] but we don’t want this ‘couple’ thing all the time,” Domingo explains from their lakeside home in Geneva.

“We do a few things in special moments. In the summer, for instance, we had a tradition of doing rare operas in the **Radio France Festival** in Montpellier.

“And when we have the opportunity at Christmas or New Year’s, if we can plan it in advance, we try to work together.”

In fact, they spent Christmas 2021 at the Staatsoper Berlin, where Domingo conducted Lindy Hume’s staging of **Puccini’s La Bohème** and Sonya sang Mimi.

Now they are reuniting, not for an opera, but for this ‘symphonic’ concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Both singer and conductor have had a hand in the

programme, which includes 19th Century Italian composer Giuseppe Martucci's *La Canzone dei Ricordi*.

Domingo explains: "Sonya introduced these songs to me. It's a composer that, at first, I didn't really know about.

"In fact, Martucci is totally unknown to most people, but Sonya sings one of the songs already in the recital that she does. And she said 'isn't this group of songs fantastic? We should do it with an orchestra'."

Reading more about Martucci, Domingo was struck by how the composer bucked the trend of his 19th Century contemporaries by turning away from opera to concentrate on instrumental music and songs. In his day, he was also sometimes known as 'the Italian Brahms'.

"So I decided to surround him with Wagner [Overture to *Lohengrin* Act I] and with Schumann's Second Symphony. I didn't want to do it with Brahms because it would be too obvious - nevertheless it would be great!

"And with the second programme on the Sunday, then I chose a Verdi overture [from *Luisa Miller*] just to contrast, because Martucci was the only composer at that time in Italy who didn't write opera.

"I'm very much looking forward to it. And also, to have Sonya's voice in the Philharmonic Hall will be fantastic.

"Of course, I also really wanted to do Schumann with the Orchestra. One of my goals in my first season has been to find and explore, together with the Orchestra, some sounds I have in my mind from this Germanic repertoire. I've already done it with Bruckner and I'm going to do it in May, not only with Schumann but also with Brahms' First Symphony."

These two concerts are part of the final section of the conductor's inaugural Liverpool season. Last September, he explained how he hoped to marry the Orchestra's reputation for great performances of the 'big repertoire' with his love of French, Latin American and American music, and to present at least one opera a season.

"It's been incredible," he says of the last eight months. "I can't believe it, it's gone so fast. Every week has been filled with beautiful work. My feeling with the Orchestra, every week has been different. Every week has been a new exploration of sounds and repertoire.

"And I'm extremely happy towards the end of the season and I'm very much looking forward to the last three or four programmes still to do, and more to come in 2022/23."

While the new 2022/23 season programme is yet to be revealed, the 42-year-old confirms audiences can expect more French and Latin American repertoire, another opera, and some very special soloists.

In the meantime, he is conducting three more programmes this season.

First is **Transformations** on May 19, of which he says: “It’s all about this beautiful music, not a big symphony in there but brilliant pieces and Julian [clarinettist Julian Bliss] is just an absolutely brilliant player.”

That is followed by two concerts **at the end of May** which feature Brahms’ First Symphony and Armenian-American virtuoso Sergei Babayan – “one of the best interpreters of this concerto” – playing Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto. Finally, he’ll conduct a **Viva Verdi!** concert in June, compered by Liverpool favourite, John Suchet.

So, he’s decided to stay and give us another whirl in 2023 then?

Domingo smiles: “It’s a great city, and a great orchestra.”

Sonya Yoncheva

Superstar soprano **Sonya Yoncheva** makes her first appearance on stage at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in this concert conducted by her other half, Domingo Hindoyan.

The multi award-winning Bulgarian was born in Plovdiv, where she studied piano and voice at the National School for Music and Dance.

As a teenager, she presented a show about music on Bulgarian television and won several music competitions, one with her younger brother **Marin Yonchev**, who himself went on to triumph on the Star Academy reality show.

Yoncheva studied at the **Conservatoire de musique de Genève** and has gone on to forge a career as a much sought-after performer, both of opera and in recital work. She has performed at leading venues across the world including the Metropolitan Opera, Milan’s Teatro alla Scala, Paris Opera, Staatsoper Berlin, Teatro Real, the Royal Opera House, and at the Salzburg Festival.

Among her many awards are Medici.tv Artist of the Year 2017, the Readers’ Award in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the 2021 Opus Klassik Singer of the Year, while future appearances include La Gioconda and Fedora at Teatro alla Scala, Norma at Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Fedora at the Metropolitan Opera, and concerts in Tokyo and Munich.

Richard Wagner

Richard Wagner's earliest ambition as a child was to be a playwright, and as a teenager, already greatly influenced by Shakespeare, he wrote a tragic drama called *Leubald*.

The young Wagner was also inspired by opera. – Determined to set this tragedy to music, he asked his mother and stepfather for music lessons.

His first opera, *Die Feen* – or *The Fairies* – was composed when he was a 20-year-old choirmaster at the theatre in Würzburg, but would not be publicly performed until after his death. His second opera, the comedy ***Das Liebesverbot***, closed after one performance.

Not exactly an auspicious start for the man who would become one of the greatest opera composers of all time.

But within a decade, that luck would start to change. *Rienzi*, based on a drama by Edward Bulwer-Lytton and premiered in Dresden in 1842, became his first success. This was followed by *The Flying Dutchman*, which had been inspired by a **tempestuous sea voyage to London**, and – in 1845 – by *Tannhäuser*.

His own country's myths and legends were starting to supersede his earlier English inspiration. Wagner's next project, completed while he was kapellmeister in Dresden, was steeped in another medieval German epic (albeit with Arthurian overtones) – ***Lohengrin***, or the Knight of the Swan.

Did you know? Wagner loved dogs. His first, Robber, was a 160lb Newfoundland who originally belonged to his landlord in Riga, but followed the composer everywhere (even rehearsals) and was eventually given to him.

Giuseppe Verdi

It was a trio of works – *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata* – arriving in a rush over the course of just two years which really cemented **Giuseppe Verdi's** reputation as one of the opera greats, both during his lifetime and beyond.

But the Italian composed more than 25 operas during his long career, from *Oberto*, *Conte di San Bonifacio*, in 1839, to his final work ***Falstaff***, which premiered at La Scala when the great composer was 80.

The 1840s were a particularly prolific time for the young composer, who overcame heartache in his private life (he lost both his young children and became a widower by the age of 23) to succeed in public.

Verdi started to outline the idea for his dark tragedy *Luisa Miller* in Paris, where he had been living for two years. He then returned to his hometown, Busseto, where he completed the score to a libretto by Salvadore Cammarano, who would go on to work with Verdi again on ***Il Trovatore*** ((<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Il-trovatore#ref1182117>)).

Giuseppe Martucci

Composer, conductor and pianist **Giuseppe Martucci** was born in Capua near Naples in 1856 and proved to be a child prodigy – he played the piano in public aged eight, and at 11 he was studying at the Naples Conservatory.

When he was still only 19, Martucci embarked on a solo piano tour which took in Germany, France, and England. He performed in at least two concerts in London, including a banquet of the Newspaper Press Fund which was conducted by **Sir Julius Benedict** – at that time, the principal conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society.

Returning to Italy, he became a professor at Naples and later at Bologna, where his pupils included composer Ottorino Respighi.

Although Martucci never composed a single opera himself, preferring to concentrate on instrumental music and songs, as a conductor he helped to introduce Wagner's operas to Italian audiences.

Robert Schumann

When **Robert Schumann** sat down to sketch out the outline of his Second Symphony in December 1845, he had already begun to experience the effects of the **mental instability** which would dog his final years.

The 35-year-old composer, conductor and music critic suffered from depression (perhaps exacerbated by feelings of inadequacy in the face of wife Clara's professional success), ringing in the ears and 'nervous protestation'.

Schumann had already written two of the four symphonies that would form part of his canon: his *Symphony No 1 in B-flat major (Spring)*, performed under the baton of Felix Mendelssohn, and his pioneering *Symphony No 4 in D minor*. He had also

composed the celebrated ***Piano Concerto in A minor***, and was in the middle of setting Goethe's 'Faust' to music.

Did you know? Schumann was at first determined to be a pianist but damaged his hand with a homemade practice contraption and turned to composing instead.

About the Music

Richard Wagner (1813-83): Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act I

Composed: 1844-48

First Performed: Hoftheater, Weimar, 28 August, 1850, cond. Franz Liszt

Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* reflects his lifelong fascination with religious myth and mysticism. Lohengrin is one of the Knights of the Holy Grail, sent out into the world to defend Christendom against its enemies, but forbidden to reveal his real name. The ban ultimately destroys his relationship with Elsa, Duchess of Brabant, and the opera ends in tragedy. The Prelude, however, is an exquisite evocation of the Grail itself – at first bathed in ethereal light, it rises lyrically to an ardent climax, at last returning to the hushed sounds of the opening. The human world may be marked by passion and loss, but the Grail itself remains eternal, unchanging in its primal purity.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901): Overture *Luisa Miller*

Composed: 1849

First Performed: Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 8 December, 1849

Verdi's fifteenth opera, *Luisa Miller*, is based on a play called 'Intrigue and Love' by the German romantic poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller. It tells of tragically thwarted love and a villainous plot to capture the heroine in marriage, ending spectacularly with the three main characters all dying together on the stage. The remarkably compact Overture is like a miniature tone poem, portraying the agonies and ecstasies of love and betrayal with theatrical panache, and ending with a tremendous blood-and-thunder flourish, guaranteed to bring the house down just as the curtain rises.

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1901): *La Canzone dei Ricordi*

Composed: 1886-7?

First Performed: Milan, 1888

Opera was born in Renaissance Italy, and Italy has remained its home ever since, so much so that many Italian composers have seen writing in other forms as at best a distraction, at worse something close to betrayal. Giuseppe Martucci, however, wrote no operas, concentrating instead on the kind of abstract instrumental forms popular in northern Europe. That would be enough to prejudice some against him, but when you add in his championship of Wagner – the German interloper who dared to remodel opera on radical lines – you can see why his music was neglected in his home country. *La Canzone dei Ricordi* ('The Song of Memory') reflects Martucci's love of Wagner, particularly his gorgeous erotic masterpiece *Tristan and Isolde*, but it's far less theatrical and far more 'inward' in its delicate musical poetry.

La Canzone dei Ricordi is a beautifully linked cycle of seven songs, dreamlike in the way it evokes lost love, sometimes painfully, but in the end with gratitude. The consolation such memories offer may be illusory, but illusions can give us strength to go on living. Loss is acknowledged, but ultimately the door to this dreamworld is still open.

Robert Schumann (1810-56): Symphony No 2 in C major, Op 61

Composed: 1845-6

First Performed: Leipzig, 5 November, 1846, cond. Felix Mendelssohn

For a long time, Schumann's Second Symphony divided the crowds. Some compared it to Beethoven, while others struggled to make sense of it: one eminent critic even dismissed it as a 'pathetic failure'. It made Schumann himself uneasy, but for different reasons: it reminded him, he said, of 'dark days'. It was certainly written during a particularly dark time for Schumann. Always unstable and prone to extreme mood-swings, after three astonishingly productive years, he experienced a 'violent and nervous attack' in 1844, followed by severe depression and creative paralysis. His Second Symphony was the main focus of his attempt to claw his way back out of the abyss.

You'd never guess that anything was wrong from the opening: a slow brass fanfare sounds with calm dignity through flowing strings. But then the struggle begins, with a tense, jagged theme repeated and developed obsessively. Is this Schumann willing himself to be positive? If so, is that why some people find this music difficult? Go with it though, and it's thrilling. Nervous obsessiveness can also be heard in the following Scherzo, but then comes the wonderful Adagio, beginning with a noble, long, almost Bachian melody. Here, Schumann seems determined to face the darkness with courage. The finale begins resolutely, but memories of the slow movement keep coming back. Then, after a pause, Schumann sounds a new, more hopeful theme, based on the line 'Take, oh take these songs I offer' from Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* ('To the distant beloved') – a favourite of

Schumann's wife Clara, and almost certainly a gesture to her for sticking with him during the crisis. Significantly, it's this theme that's raised aloft in triumph at the end.