

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

June 23 programme complementary content

Big, bold and beautiful melodies are the order of the day in this Thursday night concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall.

Two rising stars – pianist Pavel Kolesnikov and conductor Nil Venditti – join forces to bring youthful vigour to a programme which includes Beethoven’s mighty *Emperor Concerto*.

In addition, 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.

Nil Venditti

Italian-Turkish conductor **Nil Venditti** makes her Liverpool Philharmonic debut with this lively concert programme.

Venditti, who was **born in Perugia**, is former principal cello of the Santa Cecilia Youth Orchestra in Rome. She holds a master’s degree in cello from the conservatoire at Perugia, and in conducting from the conservatoire at L’Aquila.

Her tutors and mentors have included Bernard Haitink, Donato Renzetti and Jonathan Stockhammer.

In 2015, aged 20, she won first prize at the Premio Claudio Abbado for Young Musicians and in 2017, she won two prizes at the Jeunesses Musicales Competition in Bucharest.

She has a strong affinity for the core classical repertoire of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven but has also expanded her scope into the operatic field, conducting performances of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, as well as *Carmen*, *Nabucco*, and Peter Maxwell-Davies’ *The Lighthouse*.

She is currently principal guest conductor of the **Orchestra della Toscana** while her future engagements include *Tosca* with the Irish National Opera.

Pavel Kolesnikov

The son of scientists, London-based pianist **Pavel Kolesnikov** was born in Novosibirsk in Siberia in 1989 and started studying piano and violin at the age of six.

At 15, he entered the Novosibirsk State Academy and started to concentrate on piano alone. He later studied at Moscow State Conservatory and the Royal College of Music.

In 2012, **Kolesnikov** triumphed at the prestigious Honens International Piano Competition – one of 15 prizes he has won in competition.

An enthusiastic ensemble player, he is also in demand as a recitalist – including regular performances at Wigmore Hall – and has been praised for his imaginative, thought-provoking programming, as well as the sensitivity and musicality of his playing.

Kolesnikov has also embarked on a major project with the Rosas Dance Company, performing Bach’s **Goldberg Variations** with the company’s founder, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, in cities including Vienna, Brussels and Seville.

Vincenzo Bellini

Born into a musical family in Catania, Sicily, **Vincenzo Bellini** was a child prodigy who composed sacred works and instrumental pieces.

At 18 he moved to Naples on a special pension, or stipend, to study with the opera composer Niccolò Zingarelli, who became his mentor at the city's conservatory.

His first success on graduating was *Adelson e Salvini* and within two years, he had been invited to write an opera for La Scala. He spent most of his short career in Milan – where he composed ***Norma*** in 1831 – although he did also visit London and Paris, where he died in September 1835.

Despite dying aged just 34, Bellini is seen as one of the **key opera composers of the 19th Century**. His use of bel canto and ability to create long lines of lyrical melody influenced not only other opera composers, but also Chopin and Robert Schumann.

Joseph Haydn

On New Year's Day 1791, **Joseph Haydn** set foot on British soil for the first time, making the Channel crossing from Calais before travelling on to London.

The 58-year-old Austrian composer and 'Father of the Symphony' may have spent most of his career in the court of the Esterházy family, but his music had travelled far and wide, and he was already admired in British music circles.

His first visit, organised by German violinist and impresario **Johann Peter Salomon**, was a great success and became the start of a fruitful relationship with **England** and English audiences.

Haydn composed no fewer than 12 symphonies during two periods in London in the 1790s, giving many of them their own distinct monikers.

The '**Clock**' **Symphony**, more formally known as his *Symphony No 101 in D major*, was the ninth of the 12. The piece was written for his second visit in 1794, being premiered in the Queen's Concert Rooms in Hanover Square in March that year, with Salomon conducting.

Did you know? Haydn was a friend and mentor of Mozart – the pair played in string quartets together – and he also briefly taught a young Beethoven.

Ludwig van Beethoven

The Europe of 1809 was an unsettled place and conflict reached Vienna that year, as the **Franco-Austrian War** raged between Napoleonic France and the Austrian Empire.

In May, Napoleon's forces laid siege to, and then occupied, the city.

In the midst of this, **Ludwig van Beethoven** reportedly worked on padding the walls of his cellar **with pillows** to try and protect his remaining, precious hearing from the booming sound of the guns.

Though a troubled time politically, for the 39-year-old composer it was business as usual to all intents and purposes.

In addition to his *Fifth Piano Concerto* – which only later acquired its nicknamed 'the Emperor' – he also composed his *'Harp' Quartet*, three piano sonatas, his *Egmont* incidental music and a

number of vocal pieces including his *Six Songs*, **26 Welsh Songs** and his *March No 1 for Military Band*.

About the Music

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35): Overture to *Norma*

Composed: 1831

First Performed: La Scala Theatre, Milan, 26 December 1831

Bellini's opera *Norma* tells the tragic tale of a druid priestess who betrays her religion for a Roman soldier then sacrifices herself, along with her lover. Add to that a wealth of beautiful melodies, including the famous 'Casta Diva' ('Chaste Goddess'), and you have a recipe for operatic success, and not just in Italy – Wagner adored it. The Overture sets the scene beautifully in just six minutes: stern drama yields to impassioned lyricism, then the excitement builds to the moment when the curtain rises, and the painfully, gloriously human tragedy begins to unfold.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809): Symphony No 101 in D major, ('Clock') Hob: I/101

Composed: 1793 or 1794

First Performed: Hannover Square Rooms, London, 3 March 1794, dir. Haydn

Having spent most of his career as the servant (although a very favoured one) of Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, Haydn in his sixties suddenly found himself a free man and an international celebrity. On the invitation of the impresario Johann Peter Salomon he visited England in 1791, where he and his music made such an impression that he was invited back in 1794-5, where his twelve new 'London' symphonies were a sensation. Soon many of them were provided with nicknames – a sure sign of popularity. Symphony No 101 came to be known as the 'Clock', because of the recurring tick-tock accompaniment in the second movement. But the whole symphony seems to have gone down extraordinarily well. One critic observed that 'The first two movements were encored; and the character that pervaded the whole composition was heartfelt joy.' Well, perhaps not the 'whole' composition. As in several of his later symphonies, Haydn begins by pretending that this is going to be a very serious work: the Adagio introduction is in a sombre D minor. But the Presto soon puts that to flight with riotous laughter, and the kind of playful, teasing humour which made a deep impression on the younger Mozart. There are occasional shadows, but in the end pure sunlight wins.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): Piano Concerto No 5 in E flat major, Op. 73 ('Emperor')

Composed: 1809

First Performed: Gewandhaus, Leipzig, 28 November 1811, soloist Friedrich Schneider, cond. Johann Schulz

In English-speaking countries, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto is known as the 'Emperor', which has led to the misconception that it was written in praise of Revolutionary France's

military hero Napoleon Bonaparte. In fact, Beethoven's feelings about Napoleon had darkened by the time he came to write this concerto, and they grew darker still when Napoleon's forces invaded Beethoven's home city Vienna while he was composing it. Now there was 'nothing but drums, canon, soldiers, misery of all sorts', Beethoven wrote, and in a desperate effort to save what was left of his hearing he fled to his brother's cellar and covered his ears with pillows. Granted, there is something magnificently 'imperious' about the opening, in which the piano storms in with cascades and runs, claiming the stage at once – in defiance of classical convention, which normally brings in the soloist later, after the orchestra has prepared the scene. But as the long first movement unfolds, the orchestra seems to question the pianist's grand self-assertion, and a much more complex, nuanced dialogue begins to develop.

The wonderful slow movement is worlds away from military conflict. The piano writing has an almost fabulous delicacy (remember that the man who created this crystalline sound was now barely able to hear a piano), then comes a moment of expectant stillness. The piano seems to try out a new idea dreamily – then a titanic waltz-like finale bursts onto the scene. The waltz was beginning to emerge as 'the' Viennese dance form at this time. Could this be an act of solidarity with Beethoven's besieged home city? A way of saying 'You shall dance again'? Whatever, it makes a rousing ending. Once again though the soloist's 'imperial' role can be subtly challenged: in what ought to be the piano's big solo moment near the end the timpani won't stop playing – even in this mighty work Beethoven's sense of humour won't be repressed.