

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
June 30 programme complementary content

This concert promises both a Liverpool debut and a UK premiere in one entertaining evening of classical music, old and new.

Pianist Mao Fujita plays on the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall stage for the first time – and what a piece to announce himself with!

Watch Stephen Johnson talking about the concert programme here

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.

Gemma New

Born into a musical family, conductor **Gemma New** studied both the violin and piano as a child. At 12, she was a member of a youth orchestra at home in Wellington, New Zealand, while as a teenager she conducted the Christchurch Youth Orchestra.

She gained a music degree at the University of Canterbury and a masters in orchestral conducting from the Peabody Institute in Baltimore.

New, who founded the Lunar Ensemble in Maryland, was assistant conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra for five years, while in 2014-15 she was a Dudamel Conducting Fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

She is currently musical director of the **Hamilton Philharmonic** in Ontario, principal guest conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and this year was appointed as the **first female principal conductor** of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Meanwhile, in March last year, she was announced as the 12th recipient of the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award.

Mao Fujita

Award-winning Japanese pianist **Mao Fujita** makes his Liverpool debut playing Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto.

The 23-year-old virtuoso was born in Tokyo and started playing the piano at the age of three, going on to study at the Tokyo College of Music High School and the college itself on a special scholarship.

In 2010, Fujita won the junior section of the World Classic in Taiwan. He also won a number of piano competitions as a teenager, including the prestigious Concours International Piano de Clara Haskil in Switzerland.

In 2019 he took silver in the **16th Tchaikovsky International Competition** in Moscow.

Much in demand as a soloist, Fujita plays with an innate musical sensitivity and naturalness.

In November 2021, he signed an exclusive multi-album recording deal with **Sony Classical International**. An eagerly anticipated recording of Mozart's complete piano sonatas is due to be released this autumn.

Future engagements include next month's Verbier Festival.

Aaron Jay Kernis

Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award-winning composer **Aaron Jay Kernis** was born in Philadelphia in 1960, and learned violin and piano before starting to compose at the age of 13.

He studied composition with John Adams at the San Francisco Conservatory, and undertook further studies at the Manhattan School of Music and Yale University.

In 1983, his work *Dream of the Morning Sky* was premiered by the New York Philharmonic.

Along with writing around 30 works for orchestra – including concertos for cello, violin, flute and **toy piano**– Kernis has also composed choral works, solo keyboard pieces and music for chamber ensembles.

Musica Celestis dates from 1990 and is based on the second movement of his string quartet.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

In 1874, **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** was a 34-year-old professor at the Moscow Conservatory, where his boss – and the Conservatory's founder – was a certain **Nikolai Grigoryevich Rubinstein**.

While he had produced two symphonies, string quartets and a number of piano pieces and songs - along with his opera *The Voyevoda* – Tchaikovsky remained near the start of his composing career. The works that have made him arguably the world's most popular Russian composer were still inside his head.

One of those pieces was his ***Piano Concerto No 1 in B-flat minor***, which he started working on during an intensive period of composition in the latter months of 1874, hoping Rubinstein would agree to play it.

Tchaikovsky showcased the work to Rubinstein and some friends on Christmas Eve – but he didn't get the response he was hoping for.

His mentor eviscerated what would go on to become Tchaikovsky's first great musical success. Its composer vowed he would 'not change a note' and offered it to Hans von Bülow instead, who **premiered the piece in Boston** in 1875.

Did you know? Tchaikovsky was a big fan of foraging for mushrooms and would search the woods and fields around his home at Klin, northwest of Moscow.

Katherine Balch

American composer **Katherine Balch** has been referred to as “some kind of musical Thomas Edison”, and her work described as capturing the magic of everyday sounds and

inviting audiences into a sonic world characterised by imagination, discovery and a rich diversity of styles.

She is often inspired by literature, nature and science.

Balch, who was born in San Diego in 1991, studied at Yale School of Music, where one of her tutors was Aaron Jay Kernis.

She is the winner of a number of composition prizes and scholarships. The first female composer-in-residence for the California Symphony Orchestra and composer-in-residence for **Young Concert Artists**, in 2020 she was the recipient of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's Women in Classical Music Symposium Career Advancement Award.

Like a Broken Clock, receiving its UK premiere at this concert, was composed in 2018 and its title comes from a lyric in Joanna Newsom's song, *In California*.

Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann's Third Symphony was composed shortly after he, wife Clara and their brood of seven children moved to Düsseldorf in 1850, where he took up the position of municipal music director.

Schumann was reportedly enthusiastic about his new job and received a warm welcome from the prosperous Rhinelanders, although the family's city centre **accommodation was so noisy** it disturbed Schumann's composing.

His Third Symphony was inspired by Cologne's magnificent cathedral – which impressed the composer on two trips to the city – and would garner the moniker '*Rhenish*'.

Although it is described as his third symphony, the *Rhenish* was actually his last – his Fourth Symphony having been nominally completed in 1841 before being heavily revised by its composer a decade later.

About the Music

Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960): *Musica Celestis*

Composed: 1990

First Performed: 30 March 1992, Sinfonia San Francisco, cond. Ransom Wilson

In the late 1980s, when the music of the American composer Aaron Jay Kernis first began to be heard in this country, modernism was still very much the orthodoxy, and there were dark mutterings amongst some critics about how shamefully lyrical and (worse still) tonal it was. Yet decades later, it has stood the test of time very well indeed. *Musica Celestis* ('Heavenly Music') was originally the slow movement of Kernis' String Quartet, composed in 1990, but it went down so well that Kernis arranged it as a separate piece for string orchestra. Medieval religious music, especially that of the mystic Hildegard of Bingen, left a deep imprint on *Musica Celestis*, but it doesn't sound in any way archaic. Its serene, soaring joyousness is very much for our times – especially such dark times as we find ourselves in now.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93): Piano Concerto No I in B-flat minor, op 23

1. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito
2. Andantino semplice – Prestissimo – Tempo 1
3. Allegro con fuoco

Composed: 1874-5

First Performed: 25 October 1975, Boston, Hans von Bülow (soloist), cond. Benjamin Johnson Lang.

Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto is one of this ever-popular composer's most popular works, brimming over with passion, drama, brilliance and glorious melodies. Tchaikovsky hoped that his influential friend, Russian pianist and composer Nikolai Rubinstein, would introduce it to the world in Moscow, but Rubinstein's reaction was crushing: he tore into the score, not just criticising it but even mocking it savagely. Fortunately, the hyper-sensitive Tchaikovsky kept faith and showed it to another famous pianist, the German Hans von Bülow, who was thrilled by it – 'so original and noble', he wrote. He arranged a premiere in America, where it was such a success that the finale was encores.

The Concerto's most famous theme, a superb, long-breathed tune, is heard at the beginning, where it goes through a short sequence of variations – and then never returns. A few critics have grumbled about this, but there's plenty more colour, thrilling theatre and above all fabulous lyricism to come. The first movement is a long, gripping darkness-to-light drama, after which comes a lovely wistful pastoral interlude (but with a few virtuoso fireworks at its climax). Then comes the stunning finale, in which soloist and orchestra battle it out to a thrilling conclusion, crowned by yet another memorable tune. No wonder this Concerto remains one of the supreme challenges in the repertoire.

Katherine Balch (b. 1991): *like a broken clock* (UK premiere)

Composed: 2018

First Performed: 5 May 2018, Leshner Centre California, California Symphony Orchestra cond. Donato Cabera

Like her teacher Aaron Jay Kernis, Katherine Balch has a way of engaging directly with her audience – you don't have to know anything about the music to be captivated by its fantastical sonorities and textures. The idea for *like a broken clock* came from a pop song by Joanna Newsom called *In California*, which contains the lovely lines 'like a little clock / that trembles on the edge of the hour / only ever calling out Cuckoo Cuckoo'. The idea of a clock that was somehow off kilter, its rhythms not quite synching, set Balch's mind working in intriguing new directions. Strikingly, there are no modern 'colour' instruments in *like a broken clock* – no exotic percussion or unusual woodwinds. Balch creates her weird panoply of 'sputters, ticks and clangs' using only the instruments used by Tchaikovsky and Schumann in tonight's companion works.

Robert Schumann (1810-56): Symphony No 3 in E flat major, op 97 ('*Rhenish*')

1. Lebhaft [Lively]

2. Scherzo: Sehr mässig [Very moderate/measured]

3. Nicht schnell [Not fast]

4. Feierlich [Solemn]

5. Lebhaft [Lively]

Composed: 1850

First Performed: 6 February 1851, Düsseldorf, cond. Schumann

In March 1850, Schumann was offered the post of Music Director in the Rhineland port of Düsseldorf. At first he was nervous, but a trip around the surrounding country, taking in the city of Cologne, filled him with enthusiasm (his mood could change rapidly), and soon he was pouring out his impressions in his Third Symphony, which he composed in just over a month. Schumann was particularly stirred by Cologne's huge gothic cathedral – begun in the Middle Ages but which had only recently been completed – where he witnessed the enthronement of its new cardinal. His reaction is expressed directly in the 'Solemn' fourth movement, but it's possible to hear echoes of other features of the Rhineland throughout the Symphony.

The 'Lively' first movement, for instance, is carried forward by a terrific sense of momentum, like the current of the great river itself. The moderate-paced second movement echoes the three-time German folk dance, the *Ländler*, but a particularly strong beat at the beginning of each of the theme's bars suggests that it might be a rowing song. Gentler currents and subtler colours pervade the third movement, then comes the evocation of the cathedral and its rites, in which the trombones (heard for the first time) evoke the sound of sombre choral singing. But then the finale is like stepping out of the spacious, cool gloom of the cathedral into the bustling sunlit life of the city. The excitement mounts towards the coda, in which the River Rhine itself seems to add its elemental voice. The Third Symphony was a huge success at its first performance, with audience and orchestra joining in the cheers and loud applause. Alas, it all went downhill rather rapidly after that, and Schumann's final mental collapse followed just three years later. But for now, let's join in celebrating his triumph – a triumph this magnificently conceived symphony thoroughly deserves.