

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 6 programme complementary content**

In 2007, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and its then new conductor Vasily Petrenko made a landmark recording of Tchaikovsky's thrilling and tormented *Manfred Symphony*.

But there's nothing quite like hearing the work performed live, and there's an opportunity to do just that in the hotly anticipated pair of concerts taking place this week – as well as the chance to enjoy listening to the brilliant German cellist Alban Gerhardt.

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.

### **Vasily Petrenko**

Vasily Petrenko needs little introduction to Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra audiences.

The Leningrad-born conductor returns to the Hope Street stage for these two autumn concerts in his formal role as Conductor Laureate.

Petrenko left the city in 2021 after 15 years at Liverpool Philharmonic and is currently music director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and chief conductor of the European Union Youth Orchestra.

He is also the new associate conductor at the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León.

Recent appearances have included concerts in Australia, Colorado and at the Royal Albert Hall, where he conducted Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Forthcoming engagements include concerts in Berlin, Cleveland, Madrid, Barcelona and Amsterdam.

He will also return to Philharmonic Hall in May 2023 to conduct the UK premiere of Bernd Richard Deutsch's new work, along with pieces by Strauss and Scriabin.

### **Alban Gerhardt**

German cellist Alban Gerhardt was born in Berlin in 1969, in his own words, "into a household filled with music".

The son of a coloratura soprano and a father who played violin in the Berlin Philharmonic, Gerhardt tried to learn violin without success before beginning to study both cello and piano from the age of eight.

His first public performance came aged 18, when he played none other than Haydn's *Cello Concerto in D major* with a chamber orchestra in the Berliner Philharmonie.

He studied in Berlin and also studied chamber music in Cincinnati for a year. Under tuition from the sought-after Boris Pergamenschikov, he began to win both national and international competitions.

Gerhardt has also become much in demand as a soloist and recitalist.

Outside the concert hall, he has taken part in special projects in schools, hospitals and young offender institutions, as well as live performances on Germany's rail commuter routes.

Among his many recording accolades he has won three ECHO Klassik Awards, while his Deutsche Grammophon recording of Unsuk Chin's *Cello Concerto*, which Gerhardt premiered at the BBC Proms, won the BBC Music Magazine Award in 2015.

Forthcoming engagements include performances with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Minnesota Symphony Orchestra.

## **Felix Mendelssohn**

In the summer of 1829, the teenage Felix Mendelssohn was on the first of what would be a total of 10 visits to Britain during his short life.

Feted in London where he enjoyed a successful concert season, at the end of July the young German composer and his friend Karl Klingemann ventured north to Edinburgh, reaching the Isle of Mull in early August after a week travelling through the Scottish Highlands.

On August 8, the pair set out from Tobermory to visit the Isle of Staffa and the mythological and geological wonder that was Fingal's Cave.

Within a few hours of returning from the trip, despite suffering what he described as "horrible seasickness", Mendelssohn had been inspired to pen what would become the first bars of his Hebrides Overture, sending them off to his family in Berlin and telling them how "extraordinarily" the Hebrides had affected him.

The work was premiered in London in 1832 under the title *Overture to the Isles of Fingal*, and received its final, famous name in 1834.

## **Joseph Haydn**

One thing is certain. Franz Joseph Haydn was prolific – particularly as a symphonist and composer of operas, chamber and piano music.

But one area of his work which perhaps gets less attention than others is concerti.

From the 1750s, Haydn composed for a range of solo instruments over a 40-year period, including violin, keyboard, horn, flute, violone (double bass) and cello.

His first Cello Concerto was composed in the early 1760s for Esterhazy Orchestra cellist Joseph Weigl.

But the origins (and even the authorship) of Haydn's Second Cello Concerto have been the subject of much debate and discussion over the past 240 years.

It's now believed the work was composed in 1783 and was premiered the following year in London by James Cervetto, the British-born principal cellist of the capital's Italian Opera.

Did you know? Haydn composed five concertos for King of Naples Ferdinand IV that were played on a 'lira organizzata', a type of hurdy-gurdy.

## **Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky**

When Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky first heard the pitch for a symphony based on Lord Byron's supernatural poem *Manfred*, he was less than enthused by the idea.

It was fellow composer (and member of 'the Five') Mily Balakirev who had suggested the tale after being sent a scenario by Russian music critic Vladimir Stasov.

But Tchaikovsky's tepid reaction eventually turned much warmer following a sojourn surrounded by the Swiss Alps – the same dramatic landscape which had inspired the exiled Byron's Faustian verse almost 70 years before, and where the Russian's close friend Iosef Kotek was dying from tuberculosis.

Settled in his new manor house home near Klin, where he read, walked, composed and was 'contented, cheerful and at peace', in May 1885 the composer embarked on his epic new work, one which would take him four months to complete.

In a letter to his patron Nadezhda von Meck he admitted: "Never before have I expended such labour and exertion as on the symphony I am now writing."

The symphony, dedicated to Balakirev, was premiered in Moscow in 1886.

## **About the Music**

### **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847): Overture *The Hebrides (Fingal's Cave)***

Composed: 1830 (revised, 1832)

First Performed: 14 May 1832, London, cond. Thomas Attwood

After Mendelssohn's hugely successful first visit to London in 1829, he set off with a friend to explore Scotland, inspired by the poems of Ossian and the colourful historical novels of Walter Scott. A boat trip to see the legendary Fingal's Cave, on the island of Staffa, was particularly memorable – partly, it must be admitted, because Mendelssohn was violently seasick. But the sea cave itself impressed him deeply, so much so that he wrote down a theme which came to him as the boat entered it. Soon this was developing into a fully-fledged orchestral piece, which Mendelssohn called an overture, but is that really the right term? The music doesn't exactly tell a story, but it is so richly evocative of swelling sea, mysterious northern lights and the awe-inspiring cave itself that 'overture' seems too abstract. The history books may tell you that the Romantic tone poem was a later invention, but judging by *Hebrides*, Mendelssohn was well ahead of the game.

### **Joseph Haydn (1732-1809): Cello Concerto No 2 in D major, Hob XIIb/2**

1. Allegro moderato
2. Adagio
3. Rondo (Allegro)

Composed: 1783?

First Performed: 24 March 1784, Hannover Square, London, James Cervetto (cello)

For two centuries, mystery surrounded both of Haydn's cello concertos. The First, written two decades earlier, was thought to be irretrievably lost until it was rediscovered in Prague in 1961. The Second Concerto survived in the public domain (just about), but its somewhat untypical character led some to conjecture that it wasn't actually by Haydn. The story was that it had been written for Antonin Kraft, cellist in the orchestra at the Palace of Esterhaza, where Haydn was court composer – or at least that's what Kraft's son claimed. But some had their doubts: had Kraft composed it himself and tried to pass it off as Haydn? It was only in 1951 that Haydn's manuscript turned up, proving that he was indeed the composer. Then, in 2019, researchers established that the Concerto had its premiere in London with the cellist of the city's Italian opera, James Cervetto, as soloist. It was a success, and it's easy to see why. Haydn's love of audacious surprise and his lightning wit, abundant in the First Concerto, may be less in evidence here, but it's a wonderfully tuneful piece, warm and relaxed, its slow movement soothing rather than searching, but it's all beautifully structured. The finale's lilting first theme has long been a favourite, its every return like encountering an old friend.

### **Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93): Symphony in B minor, *Manfred*, Op 58**

1. Lento lugubre
2. Vivace con spirito
3. Andante con moto
4. Allegro con fuoco

Composed: 1885

First Performed: 23 March 1886, Moscow, cond. Max Erdmansdörfer

Manfred, the hero of a long poem by Lord Byron, is the archetypal romantic outsider. Tormented by a sense of guilt he can't fully explain, he wanders the Alps longing for redemption, distraction, or best of all oblivion. It was a subject that appeared guaranteed to appeal to Tchaikovsky, often prone to gloomy, self-tormenting introspection and also tormented by guilt – perhaps due to his suppressed homosexuality, or perhaps the cause was buried in his unconscious (like Manfred's). But when the composer Mily Balakirev suggested to Tchaikovsky that he write a dramatic symphony on the subject, presenting him with a detailed scheme as to how to structure it, Tchaikovsky was evasive. Was this because the subject was potentially too close to his heart?

Eventually Tchaikovsky started work on his *Manfred* Symphony, on a much bigger scale than any of his numbered symphonies and employing the biggest orchestra he'd ever used. The work was gruelling, and Tchaikovsky's opinion of it fluctuated wildly – but then it often did when he was really engaged with a subject. Ever since its premiere in 1886, *Manfred* has

divided the crowds: for some it's one of his greatest works, for others it's sprawling and inconsistent, especially in its long finale. But performed with conviction and understanding, it can feel like a uniquely personal revelation, and the thrilling tragic tune that ends the first movement and forms the climax of the finale is one of the greatest Tchaikovsky ever created. Not Byron's Manfred, but Tchaikovsky himself stands before us.

In the first movement, the hero (depicted by the downward-plunging opening motif) wanders alone in the Alps, assailed by memories of his lost ideal love, Astarte, and of nameless crimes. He cries for release, but without hope. In the exquisitely scored Scherzo he encounters the 'Alpine Fairy', a famous optical illusion at mountain waterfalls, but here suggesting occult dimensions. The peaceful regularity of Alpine rural life forms an idyllic contrast in the slow movement – until Manfred's motif returns like the proverbial spectre at the feast. Finally, Manfred enters on a hellish subterranean orgy. Things look bad when he's discovered, but the ghost of Astarte appears and pardons him. The tragic first movement theme returns, but then hymn-like music, enhanced by the organ, leads to peaceful release and the rest Manfred has long sought.