Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
November 10 programme complementary content

Gorgeous melodies, sumptuous strings and the lone lament of a cor anglais combine in this programme, conducted by the talented Emilia Hoving in her Liverpool debut.

The concert also includes the UK premiere of an orchestral work by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's assistant leader, Mihkel Kerem.

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.

Mihkel Kerem

Mihkel Kerem's *Divertimento* is receiving its UK premiere in the concert hall he has called 'home' for the last seven years.

But the orchestral piece, which the 41-year-old wrote back in 2007, may never have been heard at all.

"I had to go on tour and thought I'd take it with me so I could carry on writing because I knew I had quite a lot of free time," he recalls of composing the work 15 years ago. "But when I got there, I was in Sweden, there was no luggage. And it wasn't found, and wasn't found, and wasn't found.

"It did turn up eventually, but for two days I wondered if it was gone forever. I'd just started the last movement, it was a long way in, and I thought – can I reproduce this? No, I can't.

"It's hard to describe, that feeling that something you've created is – before it even saw daylight, before it was even finished – destroyed forever."

Mihkel will be putting his trust in airlines and airports again for *Divertimento's* performance in Liverpool, as he'll be in Rome the night before the Philharmonic Hall concert, conducting another of his works – a powerful, epic score for a new film of 1984.

Those who know him as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's assistant leader may be surprised to learn that the Estonian violinist is also a prolific composer, with more than 170 works to his name.

Mihkel's musical career began as a child in 1980s Tallinn, then still part of the Soviet Union, where he lived with his parents. His mother is a violinist and senior lecturer at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, while his father is a violist who worked in opera for 40 years.

"When I was little, of course I saw them rehearse music at home," he says. "I didn't really see that one could do anything else. Music was around me all the time. I didn't understand that people could NOT play an instrument."

He picked up a violin at the age of four, and it was at six that he composed his first piece of music – although he wasn't aware that was what he was doing.

He explains: "I was playing around on the piano, as kids do. My dad was in the same room, and he got out some manuscript paper and a pencil and said: 'do that again'.

"I did it again and he said: 'play it again'. So I played it a few times. He started to hear that I wasn't just playing, I was starting to repeat…it was more than a phrase it was a short piece.

“He wrote down my Opus 1. I gave it a title as well, something like ‘Spooky Mountain’ is the best translation. I was very young, and it was very basic, but nevertheless it was there.”

Mihkel was initially attracted by the music of the baroque, but lessons he and a schoolfriend took with the late Estonian composer Mati Kuulberg – in which they were encouraged to write small piano pieces mimicking animals – changed his musical direction.

He wrote his first symphony at the age of 15, and over the past 25 years his output has encompassed concertos, string quartets, sextets, octets, sonatas, and solo piano works.

Composition and performance have, in effect, become dual strands to his career and along with playing with the Orchestra in Liverpool, he has a busy diary performing as a soloist and at chamber music festivals.

“Obviously I play more than I write because violin playing keeps me in bread and butter,” he says. “But I can’t say I’m more of a violinist than a composer. Playing keeps me alive physically, but I write most days for myself. I feel I HAVE to write.”

While lockdown was a huge disruption for many performers, it was a creative time for Mihkel - once the floodgates opened that is.

“I’d finished my Fourth Symphony half a year earlier,” he reveals. “I started writing a string quartet for friends which I’d been promising them for ages, and I thought, this is a good moment. And I started it off, wrote two lines and got stuck, nothing was going on.

“I also had a commission in for a sonata, so I started but also got stuck.

“I thought, well why not, let’s write another symphony that nobody needs or wants! So I started the Fifth Symphony which had been brewing inside me anyway almost immediately after the fourth, but I thought Mike stop it, there’s no need to.

“I finished that in four weeks. Then finished the sonata and then the quartet. Somehow it needed to happen. And then straight away I wrote the Sixth Symphony and I was so lucky that it was then taken up by a conductor and orchestra in Russia half a year later.”

Not only did he write his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, but by January this year he had also completed his Seventh and Eighth. And he admits he has the next, his Ninth, in his head.

“I just don’t feel there’s a need for it yet,” he admits.

One thing the last five symphonies have had in common, is that they have been composed with the sound of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in Mihkel’s ears.

He first played in Liverpool a decade ago as a freelancer, and then returned on trial, and finally joined the Orchestra seven years ago.

He reveals: “The very first time I came to Liverpool, the very first gig, I was backstage – actually I was in the toilets – and I could hear people talking and it made me feel at home.

“It was very similar to the Estonian State Orchestra where I worked just before I came over to England. And that made me feel a bit – …because none of the London orchestras have that kind of feel we have here.

“So I really enjoyed it pretty much the first moment I came here, and now of course it really is my physical home, and it’s a lovely place to be.

“It’s also easy to get away which is very important as well. A musician can’t be handcuffed to one thing, because we stagnate and then we don’t play at the top of our games.

“To go and spread my wings somewhere a bit, get a breath of fresh air and then come back with even more love in my heart for the place, it’s a nice thing.”

Emilia Hoving

Rising star conductor Emilia Hoving was born in Finland in 1994.

As a child, she learned the piano, clarinet and cello, and went on to study conducting with Jorma Panula and at Helsinki's Sibelius Academy.

She first attracted widespread attention in 2019 when she stepped in at the last minute to conduct the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra live on television.

Hoving is currently assistant conductor at the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

Last year she was awarded the prestigious Finnish Critics' Association Critics' Spurs Prize for 'best artistic breakthrough for a young artist'.

She has recently made debuts with the Iceland Symphony, Quebec Symphony and Luxembourg Philharmonic, while this summer she conducted Mahler's Fourth Symphony at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford.

Forthcoming engagements include performing with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in Canada.

Henning Kraggerud

Superstar violinist Henning Kraggerud has been described as playing with "striking virtuosity", his performances having a "life enhancing glow".

He was born in Oslo in 1973 and studied with Camilla Wicks and Emanuel Hurwitz.

Kraggerud regularly performs on both violin and viola at major festivals and venues, and has won many awards including Norway's prestigious Grieg Prize.

He is artistic director of the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra and in 2015 he was appointed International Chair in Violin at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Meanwhile, he is also a prolific composer whose works are performed by leading musicians and orchestras around the world. One of his most recent compositions, *Romantarctica*, was commissioned by the Arctic Philharmonic and Tasmanian Symphony – the northern and southern most professional orchestras – and premiered in Tromsø.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

In early 1878, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was on the run from his short and disastrous marriage to his former student Antonina Milyukova.

Decamping first to Italy, the composer moved on to the clean mountain air of Switzerland.

And despite the mental torment caused by his private life, it turned out to be a creative time for the 37-year-old composer.

In Italy, he worked on his *Fourth Symphony* and the score for *Eugene Onegin*. While in Switzerland, he would compose what would become one of his most popular and enduring works.

The presence of his pupil – and real object of his affection – violinist Iosif Kotek undoubtedly helped.

Kotek arrived with a bag full of scores and they proceeded to play music together. It evidently inspired Tchaikovsky because what became his *Violin Concerto* materialised – the pair collaborating in a concentrated burst of creativity.

It was completed within a month, including the rewriting of the work's Canzonetta Andante second movement.

The *Violin Concerto* – the only one Tchaikovsky would ever write – was premiered in Vienna in 1881, not by Kotek but by Adolph Brodsky and with Hans Richter conducting.

Jean Sibelius

Swans in flight famously inspired the finale of Jean Sibelius' Fifth Symphony.

But 20 years earlier, Finland's most famous composer also immortalised the enigmatic birds in *The Swan of Tuonela*, a tone poem which tells the tale of a mystical bird on the isle of the dead.

The work, which came on the heels of the *Karelia Suite*, forms part of his four movement *Lemminkäinen Suite,* based on the Finnish national epic Kalevala.

Between *The Swan of Tuonela* in 1895 and the opening years of the 20th Century, Sibelius produced his first two symphonies – romantic and patriotic works.

But when the composer sat down at his house on the shore of Lake Tuusulanjarvi in 1907 to work on his Third Symphony*,* it would turn out to be quite a different beast.

In it, Sibelius started to move away from the past and explore his own personal vision for the symphonic form, which would eventually be refined into his single movement Seventh Symphony.

Symphony No 3 in C major was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic Society with its composer conducting and in a concert which also featured his suite from the incidental music to *Belshazzar's Feast*.

Did you know? British composer and conductor Granville Bantock was an early champion of Sibelius' work, and the Finnish composer dedicated his Third Symphony to him. After Bantock's death in 1946, a Bantock Society was formed, and Sibelius became its first president.

About the Music

Mikhel Kerem (b. 1981): Divertimento (UK Premiere)

Composed: 2007

First Performed: 29 September 2011, Carelia Hall, Joensuu (Finland), cond. Mikk Murdvee

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's assistant leader, Mikhel Kerem, is also a virtuoso soloist in his own right and a highly regarded composer. Born and raised in Estonia, when the Baltic nations were still annexed to the Soviet Union, he had first-hand experience of how oppressive that political system could be, and he later confronted it head-on in his Third Symphony (2003), subtitled *For the Victims of Communism*. But although Kerem has never shrunk from tackling difficult issues, his music remains fundamentally tonal which, for many, makes it easier to grasp at first hearing. Kerem's music can be challenging, but it can also offer entertainment and simple delight, as his new *Divertimento* shows. It's also a pleasure to play – as a musician, Kerem knows the value of getting an orchestra on the composer's side. Actually it's not quite new: this one-movement *Divertimento* was finished in 2007, but the manuscript was lost in an airline mess-up. Fortunately for us, it reappeared in time for its warmly received premiere four years later.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93): Violin Concerto in D major, Op.35

1. Allegro moderato - Moderato assai
2. Canzonetta. Andante -
3. Finale. Allegro vivacissimo

Composed: 1878

First Performed: 4 December 1881, Vienna, Adolph Brodsky (violin), cond. Hans Richter

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto is one of the most joyous things he ever created. It's hard to believe that it followed probably the deepest and most painful crisis of its composer's life. In 1877, the year before he composed the Concerto, the not-quite openly gay Tchaikovsky startled his friends by announcing that he was getting married to one of his students. But she misunderstood or refused to accept the 'terms' of their marriage, and Tchaikovsky fled the marital home, and then the country. As he later confessed, 'for some months on end I was a bit *insane*'.

Then in 1878, at a Swiss lakeside resort, Tchaikovsky found the peace and stimulation he needed. When the young violinist Iosif Kotek, with whom Tchaikovsky had once been in love, turned up with a pile of music, Tchaikovsky was soon working on a Violin Concerto, in which the sense of relief and returning *joie de vivre* speaks on almost every page. The long first movement balances

lyrical and virtuosic elements beautifully: the violin dazzles one moment, sings the next. But it is brilliance and vitality that triumphs at the end. The *Canzonetta* that follows is a long outpouring of sweetly melancholic melody, led by muted violin. Then a brief solo cadenza leads expertly into the scintillating Finale, full of the flavour of Russian folk-dance music – a heady aromatic cocktail of vodka fumes, fried onions and creaking, high-kicking leather boots. Even in voluntary exile, Tchaikovsky hadn't forgotten his motherland.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): The Swan of Tuonela, op. 22 No. 2

Composed: 1893 (revised, 1897, 1900)

First performed: 13 April 1896, Helsinki, cond. Sibelius

Sibelius first conceived *The Swan of Tuonela* as the prelude to a quasi-Wagnerian opera based on ancient Finnish legend. But opera turned out not to be his vocation, and he reworked it as part of a four-movement symphonic poem about the adventures of the roguish mythological hero, Lemminkäinen. Tuonela is the Hades of Finnish national legend, separated from the land of the living by a deep black river – like the Styx of classical mythology – on which the Swan of Tuonela swims and sings. Lemminkäinen is intent on killing the swan, but he himself is slain and only his mother's magic is able to bring him back to life. *The Swan of Tuonela* is a portrait of the Swan, endlessly swimming and singing. It was such a success that it soon began to enjoy life as a tone poem in its own right and it's easy to see why. The picture it paints is truly haunting. The strings create a sombre, misty background, against which a solo cor anglais laments in long, quasi-improvisatory phrases – a poignant image of loneliness and loss, yet also strangely peaceful.

Sibelius: Symphony No 3 in C major, op 52

1. Allegro moderato
2. Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto
3. Moderato - Allegro (ma non tanto)

Composed: 1904-7

First Performed: 25 September 1907, Helsinki, cond. Robert Kajanus

Sibelius was always careful never to repeat himself. After the huge success of his ardently expressive, grandly conceived and, for many, deeply patriotic Second Symphony, he set himself a very different task in its successor. The Third Symphony was much more compressed, employing a smaller orchestra, and its manner was less emotive – on some levels you could say it's more 'classical' than the Second. But it's also more innovative. None of the three (or is it four?) movements is entirely self-contained. The first has tremendous energy, everything deriving organically from its opening bass theme. But instead of building to an impressive final climax, at the end it broadens out reflectively into new territory. Sibelius the magician is more in evidence in the next two movements. The second is a slow, lilting nocturnal dance, painted in muted colours. Dance music alternates with passages of thoughtful stillness, with occasional flickers of light, like the glimmering of the aurora borealis in a winter's night sky.

The finale is really two movements in one. It begins as a scherzo, but falteringly, with glances back at the previous movement. Like the slow movement, it's prevailingly quiet, with its own moments of mystery, as when nasal muted horns recall the eerie forestscapes of Sibelius's tone

poem *Nightride and Sunrise*. Gradually the horn figure is transformed into something brighter and more confident – a hymn-like tune on violas and cellos. The finale has emerged from the scherzo. Gradually the energy increases, and the hymn sounds in triumph above vigorously pulsating strings. Then a curt, three-note gesture on brass brings the symphony to a sudden but satisfying close.