

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra January 14 programme complementary content**

Liverpool welcomes the thrilling young Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson. The multi-award winning Ólafsson will join Chief Conductor Domingo Hindoyan and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in a memorable night of music-making at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall.

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**

Domingo Hindoyan was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme, El Sistema.

He studied conducting at Haute école de musique in Geneva, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor's Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to Daniel Barenboim at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as successor to Vasily Petrenko in 2020, taking up this position in September 2021.

### **Víkingur Ólafsson**

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has made a profound impact with his remarkable combination of high-level musicianship and visionary programmes. He has been described as “the new superstar of classical piano” and a “breathtakingly brilliant pianist”.

Born in Reykjavík, Ólafsson started learning piano at an early age (his mother is a piano teacher), and went on to study at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York.

He has won a number of awards, including the *BBC Music Magazine Awards* Recording of the Year for his recording *Johann Sebastian Bach* and *Gramophone Magazine* Artist of the Year, both in 2019.

His latest album, *From Afar*, was recorded on both grand and upright pianos and released by Deutsche Grammophon in October. The recording features works by Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Brahms and Bartók, alongside Icelandic folk songs and a world premiere from Thomas Adès.

Future engagements include concerts at the Royal Festival Hall, and in Lucerne, Bergen, Frankfurt and Tallinn.

## **Witold Lutosławski**

Polish composer and conductor Witold Lutosławski was born in Warsaw in 1913 and studied piano and composition in the city.

During the First World War, the young Witold, his two brothers and parents fled east to Moscow, where his politically active father and uncle were killed by firing squad after the 1918 Revolution.

In the Second World War, Lutosławski served in the Polish army but was captured when the country was invaded by the Germans and Russians. He escaped while being marched to a prison camp and made his way back to Warsaw, where he spent the war playing piano in cafés.

His early works – full of rich musical textures – were influenced by his country's folk melodies, while his extensive output included four symphonies, a cello concerto, song cycles, opera, and *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*.

Lutosławski originally scored *Little Suite*, a commission from Warsaw Radio, for chamber orchestra, but then revised and extended it for symphony orchestra. It was premiered by the Warsaw Radio Symphony Orchestra in April 1951.

The work is based on folk melodies from the region east of Krakow.

## **Robert Schumann**

Although Robert Schumann composed a host of works for keyboard, he completed just one piano concerto during his career – a piece which has since become one of the most widely performed in the entire Romantic repertoire.

The concerto, which had started life in 1841 as a *Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra*, was premiered in Dresden in December 1845 with Clara Schumann as the soloist.

It came during a particularly fertile time in the German composer's working life, sandwiched between his marriage to Clara in 1840 and a debilitating wave of ill health (including nervous exhaustion and aural nerve trouble), which over the next decade would lead to him ending up in an institution.

It was Clara who had encouraged her husband to expand the *Fantasy* into a full concerto, and after his death in 1856, she continued to promote the work herself.

Did you know? A teenage Clara Wieck composed her own *Piano Concerto in A minor* a decade before her future husband – and Schumann uses a four-note motif from it in his own work.

## **Pyotr Tchaikovsky**

In December 1876, Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky – rising star of Russian music but a tortured soul in private – forged a relationship which was to greatly influence his life and music.

It wasn't, however, with Antonina Milyukova, the young and impressionable music student he married (disastrously and briefly) in the summer of 1877, but with the widow of a rich railway tycoon.

Nadezhda von Meck was an admirer of the 36-year-old composer's music, and it was her patronage which would ultimately allow him to fully concentrate on composition.

Over the next 14 years the pair never met in person, but they corresponded regularly, and von Meck's financial support enabled Tchaikovsky to leave the Russian winters for warmer climes.

He started what would become his Fourth Symphony in early 1877 and completed it in Rome, where he had fled in emotional turmoil from the fall out of his ill-advised marriage. He dedicated the work, perhaps unsurprisingly, to his patroness – or as he inscribed, “to my best friend”.

The work was premiered in Moscow in February 1878 at the tenth concert of the Russian Music Society, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein.

## About the Music

### Witold Lutosławski (1913-94): *Little Suite*

1. Fujarka (Fife)
2. Hurra Polka
3. Piosenka (Song)
4. Tanice (Dance)

Composed: 1950

First Performed: 20 April 1951, Warsaw Radio Symphony Orchestra cond. Grzegorz Fitelberg

In the years following the Second World War, the USSR redoubled its efforts to clamp down on ‘bourgeois individualism’ in art. The climax came in 1948 with the announcement of a purge on ‘formalism’ – essentially all forms of modernism and ‘art for art’s sake’. The effect was soon felt in Communist Poland. Lutosławski’s daring First Symphony (1947) was roundly condemned, and the composer was ordered to go back to folk music, the true ‘music of the people’.

Fortunately, Polish folk music is a remarkably rich and variegated field: rhythmically vibrant, using scales that can sound odd to Western European ears. If Lutosławski initially thought that immersing himself in folk music risked stifling his own creative voice, he soon began to realise that something quite different was happening. The first result, *Little Suite*, was a great success, and it shows the composer enriching his own language. The four movements are laid out like a miniature symphony. A piccolo imitates a folk pipe in *Fujarka*. The scherzo-like *Hurra Polka* is full of teasing cross-rhythms, then *Song* is all soulful lyricism, sometimes tartly harmonised. The finale takes the Polish ‘Lasowiak’ dance as its starting point, but now the rhythmic fun-and-games are more edgy and invigorating. Bolder musical adventures are only just around the corner.

### Robert Schumann (1810-56): Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

1. Allegro affettuoso
2. Intermezzo grazioso
3. Allegro vivace

Composed: 1841-45

First Performed: 4 December 1845, Dresden, cond. Ferdinand Hiller, soloist Clara Schumann

Schumann's exquisite Piano Concerto feels as though it must have been conceived in a single flight of poetic invention. In fact, it was written in two completely separate instalments. The first movement originally appeared as a self-sufficient 'Fantasie' for piano and orchestra in 1841. Then, in 1845, after a crippling mental breakdown, Schumann added two more movements, transforming it into the Piano Concerto. Without doubt composing them was a major step forward on his road to recovery.

Although the piano part is technically challenging, it is lyricism that dominates – above all, this is a 'singing' concerto. Schumann's first movement appears to be full of melodic ideas, yet most of these derive from the wind-piano tune that follows that dramatic opening. Earlier, Schumann had written of his hope that a new kind of concerto might emerge, in which 'the soloist, dominant at the keyboard, may unfold the wealth of his instrument and his art, while the orchestra, no longer a mere spectator, may interweave its manifold facets into the scene.' In the Piano Concerto he fulfilled his own prophecy.

This intimate poetic relationship continues through the gentle Intermezzo, and just before its end comes a wonderful inspiration. Clarinets and bassoons recall the seminal first phrase of the first movement's main melody - first in the bright major key, then in the melancholy minor - while the piano adds liquid figurations. Then the finale launches suddenly into an exhilarating, seemingly unstoppable waltz. The ending sounds like an outpouring of the purest joy.

### **Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93): Symphony No 4 in F minor, op. 36**

1. Andante sostenuto - Moderato con anima
2. Andantino in modo di canzone
3. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato. Allegro
4. Finale. Allegro con fuoco

Composed: 1877-78

First Performed: 22 February 1878, Moscow, Russian Music Society cond. Nikolai Rubinstein

In 1877, Tchaikovsky astonished his friends and family by suddenly marrying one of his students – surely, they'd thought, Tchaikovsky was a 'confirmed bachelor', with all the implications that phrase normally carried. The marriage lasted nine weeks, after which Tchaikovsky fled, attempted suicide, and experienced a serious mental collapse. The Fourth Symphony was evidently conceived as an attempt to come to terms with the whole disastrous episode. In a letter to his patron and confidante, Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky claimed that the symphony was dominated by the image of 'Fate', the implacable force that 'hangs over your head like the sword of Damocles, and unwaveringly, poisons the soul.'

So, is it all pure emotional outpouring – a kind of intense therapy session in music? In fact, the Fourth is one of Tchaikovsky's most brilliantly engineered creations. The starkly memorable horn fanfare, labelled 'Fate' in Tchaikovsky's sketches, not only proclaims the music's tragic character superbly, it sets out the terms on which the big first movement's musical argument is based. It

embodies the archetypal Wheel of Fate which carries the music forward with grim inevitability to its catastrophic conclusion. After this comes the songlike, deeply melancholic slow movement. But the Scherzo takes us somewhere else entirely: each section of the orchestra keeps to its own allotted theme, ideas rotating like a musical mobile, until the three elements are combined triumphantly at the end. The Finale then throws itself into wild, headlong rejoicing. Fate makes one dramatic attempt to spoil the party, but the merry-making returns with heightened vigour. In Tchaikovsky's own words, 'To live is still possible!'