

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

March 30 programme complementary content

Bold musical statements and beautiful melodies fill the programme of this Thursday night concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall.

There's a warm welcome for rising star violinist Johan Dalene, playing Barber's popular concerto, and a warm welcome back for the genial American conductor Joshua Weilerstein.

This page draws together a range of complementary content which we hope will help shine additional light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Joshua Weilerstein

[Joshua Weilerstein](#) has become a regular and welcome visitor to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall over the last few seasons.

Born into a musical family, his first experience was as a violinist with the Youth Philharmonic Orchestra in Boston. He went on to study for a masters in violin and conducting at the New England Conservatory of Music.

He enjoys a flourishing guest conducting career across the globe and is praised for his expressive and dynamic performance on the podium.

Formerly assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic and artistic director of the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, he has also recently been announced as the new chief conductor of Denmark's [Aalborg Symphony Orchestra](#), a role he will take up in the 2023/24 season.

With a repertoire which spans from the Renaissance era to contemporary music, he combines a love for canonical masterpieces with a commitment to uncovering the work of under-represented composers.

In 2017, Weilerstein launched a classical music podcast called [Sticky Notes](#) which has had two million downloads in 165 countries.

Johan Dalene

Born in Norrköping in 2000, Swedish violinist [Johan Dalene](#) began playing the violin at the age of four and made his professional concerto debut three years later.

He studied at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, and has won prizes at a number of competitions including in 2019 at the prestigious [Carl Nielsen Competition](#) where he took First Prize with a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto in D major*.

He has performed with some of the world's leading orchestras and in major recital halls at home and abroad and in 2021/22 he was selected as an [ECHO Rising Star](#).

Last summer he performed Barber's *Violin Concerto* at the [BBC Proms](#) where he was praised for his 'superb intonation, honeyed tone and seamless phrasing'.

Recent engagements have included recitals in the United States – at venues like Carnegie Hall and San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall, and Barber's *Violin Concerto* in Paris, Hamburg and Gothenberg, while in May he will play a series of dates in Japan.

Dalene plays a 1736 Stradivarius.

Florence Price

Pioneering African American composer [Florence Price](#) was born Florence Beatrice Smith in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1887 to a dentist father and a music teacher mother.

It was her mother who encouraged Florence who exhibited musical talent from a young age, and would go on to study piano and organ at the [New England Conservatory of Music](#) in Boston – also the alma mater of conductor Joshua Weilerstein.

Price graduated with honours and became head of the music department at Clark Atlanta University before marrying the lawyer Thomas J Price, returning to Little Rock to bring up their two daughters.

In 1927, and with racial tensions mounting, the family moved to Chicago where Florence, who had previously composed some short piano works for students in Arkansas, studied composition and orchestration and had four pieces for piano published.

She and husband Thomas divorced in 1931, and Florence made ends meet by playing the organ in a cinema and composing songs for radio ads.

Her big break came in 1932 when she entered the Wanamaker Foundation Awards, set up by American businessman Rodman Wanamaker, winning both first and third prizes with her *First Symphony* ([she would compose four in total](#)) and *Piano Sonata* respectively.

The winning *Symphony in E minor* was premiered by the [Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933](#) – and Florence became the first Black woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra.

Her tone poem *Ethiopia's Shadow in America* also dates from 1932 and was given an honourable mention in the awards that year. But like other of Price's works, its score was lost for many decades and only rediscovered in 2009.

Samuel Barber

[Samuel Barber](#) was born into a musical family in Pennsylvania in 1910. He learned piano from an early age and in the 1920s entered Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music where he trained as a singer as well in composition.

Many of his future compositions would centre around the human voice, including song sets, two operas, and the 1947 work *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* for soprano and orchestra.

In 1933, he sang at the New York premiere of his work [Dover Beach](#), based on a poem by Matthew Arnold and scored for baritone and string quartet.

However, Barber – who had a talent for luxurious melodies, expressive lyricism and nostalgic soundworlds – perhaps remains best known today for orchestral works like his *Adagio for Strings*, and his [Violin Concerto](#).

The concerto was originally commissioned in 1939 for his old Curtis Institute friend [Iso Briselli](#) but the violinist and composer could not agree over the final movement, and the work would not be premiered until 1941, and then by American virtuoso Albert Spalding.

Despite Briselli's misgivings, the piece soon entered the classical repertoire and has become one of the most played 20th Century violin concertos.

Did you know? During the Second World War Barber served in the US Army Air Force, which in 1944 commissioned his *Second Symphony*. The work contains an imitation of navigation radio signals which was originally created by an electronic instrument but is now played by an E flat clarinet.

Ludwig van Beethoven

The year 1803 was a busy and productive one for [Ludwig van Beethoven](#).

He started the year by being appointed composer at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, premiering his *First and Second Symphonies* in the city that spring, along with his *Third Piano Concerto* in which he took the soloist's role.

Then in May, Britain declared war on France after Bonaparte refused to withdraw from occupying Dutch territory, starting what would be 12 years of conflict between the French Empire and other European states.

That summer Beethoven, who was fighting his own battle with increasing deafness, left the sweltering city and took up residence in the nearby village of [Döbling](#) where he started to work on something new, inspired by the man who – it seemed to him – had come to liberate Europe.

Originally what became his [Third Symphony](#) was even named 'Bonaparte' by the composer.

But when the little Corsican general declared himself Emperor in 1804, Beethoven turned vehemently against his former hero, tore the title page from the hugely ambitious work and cancelled a planned tour of France.

What became known as the *Eroica* was finally premiered on April 5, 1805, in Vienna. Before the year's end, the Austrian city itself would be occupied by the erstwhile 'liberator' and his troops.

About the Music

Florence Price (1887-1953) *Ethiopia's Shadow in America*

1. Introduction and Allegretto: The Arrival of the Negro in America when first brought here as a slave.
2. Andante: His Resignation and Faith.
3. Allegro: His Adaptation, a fusion of his native and acquired impulses.

Composed: 1932

First Performed: January 2015, Arkansas, University of Arkansas Symphony Orchestra

The title bears eloquent testimony. When Florence Price wrote *Ethiopia's Shadow in America* in 1932, there were still many who rejected Antonin Dvorak's claim that the true roots of American classical music lay with its indigenous Black and Native American people. Although Price's family were relatively prosperous, and although young Florence's talent had been recognised and encouraged (by some), increase in racist violence in the USA's southern states forced the family to move to Chicago in 1927. It was there she wrote *Ethiopia's Shadow*, a moving attempt to remind modern America that its own roots spread far further than Western Europe. It's warmly pastoral tone, and especially its evocation of the rich 'Spiritual' tradition, would surely have delighted Dvorak. It is also surprisingly free from anger: at this stage at least, Price's focus is on celebration, love and hope.

Samuel Barber (1910-81): Violin Concerto, Op 14

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Presto in moto perpetuo

Composed: 1939

First Performed: 9 February 1941, Philadelphia, Academy of Music, Philadelphia Orchestra, Albert Spalding (soloist), cond. Eugene Ormandy

Samuel Barber wrote his Violin Concerto for a young violinist named Iso Briselli, but

Briselli never played it. For decades afterwards the official version was that he didn't like it, but it turns out that the real villain of the piece was Briselli's teacher Albert Meiff, who complained that the violin writing was 'highly unsuitable', that the first two movements were 'rather inconsequential', that the super-athletic finale was a 'risky tiresome ending', and that the concerto as a whole 'hasn't got enough backbone'. When one considers how popular the concerto has since become with violinists and audiences, one is tempted to ask what Meiff's *real* problem with the work was.

In fact, the first two movements are a glorious display of the lyrical soul of the violin. Gorgeous, tender long melodies proliferate, radiantly in the Allegro, more darkly in the following Andante. Barber wrote these two movements in Switzerland, at a time when things were becoming increasingly worrying across the borders in Germany and Austria, and the feeling of shadows lengthening in the music may at least partly reflect that. But the virtuosic 'perpetual motion' finale sounds like an attempt to dance away (or at least deflect) darkness, as the famous Italian tarantella was supposed to disperse the venom of spiders. It certainly caught the mood of the times, and within a couple of years the concerto was an international hit. One hopes that Meiff was suitably shamed.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Symphony No 3 in E flat major, op 55, 'Eroica'

1. Allegro con brio
2. Marcia funebre. Adagio assai
3. Scherzo. Allegro vivace
4. Finale. Allegro molto

Composed: 1803-4

First Performed: June 1804, Vienna, Lobkowitz Palace (private premiere)

7 April 1805, Vienna, Theater an der Wein (public premiere)

Beethoven's feelings about Revolutionary France's military hero Napoleon Bonaparte wavered from the start; but at some stage he made the decision to dedicate his 'Heroic' Third Symphony to Napoleon. Then, in 1804, Beethoven heard that Napoleon had proclaimed himself Emperor, and he tore out the dedication in fury, shouting, 'So he's just an ordinary being! Now he will trample the rights of men under foot and pander to his own ambition; he will place himself high above his fellow creature and become a tyrant!' The printed title page stated simply, 'Sinfonia eroica, composed in memory of a great man'. That 'in memory' is very telling.

Beethoven's belief in heroism and in the possibility of human beings transforming their political destiny proved more robust, and that belief resounds throughout the *Eroica* Symphony. The first movement is one of Beethoven's most truly heroic creations, brilliantly conveying the effect of epic conflict. It seems to end in triumph – or at least the promise of triumph; which only makes the contrast with the sombre Funeral March that follows all the more extreme. This movement's emotional range,

culminating in a depiction of grief in which the music almost literally 'breaks down', is breathtaking; but so too is the formal control.

An exhilarating symphonic dance movement follows, the writing for the three horns in the central trio section suggesting battlefield celebrations to some, the exuberance of the hunt to others. Finally comes an epic set of variations on a skeletal *pizzicato* figure heard first in the bass, blending elements of classical variation, sonata form and fugue into a new kind of dynamic super-structure which, at the same time, completes the 'story' presented in the first movement. Beethoven knew he had achieved something special here. Years later, in 1817, when asked which was his favourite amongst his symphonies, he replied without hesitation, 'The Eroica'.