

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 19 programme complementary content

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko's recorded Shostakovich symphonies cycle has garnered worldwide acclaim. But Petrenko has never conducted the great composer's *Symphony No. 11* at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall – until tonight that is. Plunge into its revolutionary atmosphere, amplified by the Orchestra's 'Forever Bells'.

Before that, rising star violinist Christian Li – not yet 16 – makes his Liverpool debut playing Tchaikovsky's romantic *Violin Concerto*.

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](#) returns to the Hope Street stage once more in his formal role as Conductor Laureate. Petrenko left the city in 2021 after 15 years as Chief Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and is currently music director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and chief conductor of the European Union Youth Orchestra. He is also associate conductor at the [Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León](#).

Recent appearances have included Mussorgsky's *Boris Gudonov* at the Munich Opera Festival, concerts in Italy with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Mahler's Fifth Symphony with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra.

He last appeared at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in May when he conducted the UK premiere of a [new work by Bernd Richard Deutsch](#). He returns in February 2024 to conduct [Simon Trpčeski](#) in Grieg's *Piano Concerto*.

### Christian Li

Australian-Chinese teenage violin sensation [Christian Li](#) makes his Liverpool debut with Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto*.

Li was born in Melbourne in 2007, and first picked up a violin as a five-year-old. At the age of seven, he won first place in the Golden Beijing violin competition, and in 2018 he was joint winner of the junior prize at the [Yehudi Menuhin International Competition for young violinists](#) – at 10, the youngest ever winner of the competition.

He became the youngest artist to ever sign with [Decca Classics](#) three years ago, and has recorded two albums. The latest, *Discovering Mendelssohn*, was released in July.

Along with Liverpool, other debuts this year include performances with the Auckland Philharmonia, Oslo Philharmonic, Gavle Symphony in Sweden and Denmark's Aalborg Symphony.

Apparently he enjoys a pre-concert banana to maintain his energy levels, and his on-stage composure was shown when, in 2019, he [suffered a nosebleed](#) while playing with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and calmly carried on to finish his performance. He is currently the Melbourne orchestra's Young Artist in Association.

Watch Christian Li [perform](#) in the junior finals of the 2018 Menuhin Competition in Geneva.

## Anatoly Liadov

While the names and reputations of Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov have endured over the last 100 years, that of their contemporary – the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian composer, conductor and teacher [Anatoly Liadov](#) – seems to have fallen from public consciousness.

However, both the man and his work were [highly regarded](#) during his lifetime.

Liadov was born into a family of musicians in St Petersburg in 1855 and taught at the city's Conservatory, where his pupils included Prokofiev and Myaskovsky.

He was one of the first to join the 'quartet Friday' gatherings organised by the timber baron and philanthropist [Mitrofan Belyayev](#), an important patron of young Russian nationalist composers.

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra played Liadov's 1904 supernatural tone poem *Baba Yaga* in a White Nights concert in 2022.

*Kikimora* dates from 1905 and was originally part of an opera score which Liadov failed to complete. Kikimora was a female spirit in Slavic mythology who could be either good or bad.

The composer's [Kikimora](#) lives in the mountains with her guardian the Wizard, hearing strange fairytales from the Wizard's wise old cat. During the day the spirit dances, and at night she spins her silken threads and dreams up pranks to annoy the world of man.

In 1916, two years after Liadov's death, choreographer Léonide Massine created a *Kikimora* dance piece which was performed by the Ballet Russes.

**Did you know? Anatoly Liadov's grandfather Nikolai, a soldier-turned-musician, was second conductor of the Russian Opera Company, and his father Konstantin was chief conductor of the same company at the Mariinsky Theatre.**

Listen to Anatoly Liadov's [Kikimora](#).

## Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

In the spring of 1878, [Tchaikovsky](#) was staying at Clarens on the shores of Lake Geneva. He had fled Russia and his disastrous marriage of the previous July to his former student [Antonina Miliukova](#). Here in Switzerland, he was paid a visit by friend and former student (and witness at his wedding) the violinist [Iosif Kotek](#), who had been badgering him for a new work for some time.

Whether it was the stunning Swiss mountain scenery or playing music with Kotek (with whom Tchaikovsky had been infatuated) which fired his imagination, the composer was inspired to start work on what would become his only [Violin Concerto](#).

Composed in the space of a few weeks, including revising the sweetly melancholy second movement, the work includes one of Tchaikovsky's most beautiful themes.

In the event, it was not Kotek but violinist [Leopold Auer](#) who was scheduled to give the first performance of the concerto at a Russian Musical Society concert in St Petersburg in March 1879. However, some reports suggested the Hungarian felt it was too difficult. Instead, it was Adolph Brodsky who championed the work, playing it himself in Vienna in the autumn of 1881.

Watch Joshua Bell perform the ['Allegro Vivacissimo' finale](#) of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto*.

## **Dmitri Shostakovich**

[Dmitri Shostakovich](#) wasn't born when the event which gave his Eleventh Symphony its title took place – but it was certainly part of the family lore the young Dmitri would have heard around the dinner table growing up.

It was a bitterly cold morning in January 1905 when thousands of Russians suffering real hardship gathered in front of St Petersburg's Winter Palace in the hope Tsar Nicholas II would hear their grievances and perhaps [open his food stores](#).

But Nicholas had quit the city before they arrived, and instead the frustrated crowd became restless – prompting a few trigger-happy Cossack soldiers to open fire. In the ensuing chaos, hundreds were mown down by the guns. One of those petitioners who thankfully survived the slaughter was a young engineer called Dmitri Boleslavovich Shostakovich, and 18 months later, his wife Sofiya gave birth to a son.

Although Shostakovich announced his intention to write [Symphony No 11](#) in 1955, saying it was to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that 'Bloody Sunday', it was actually not completed until 1957, and in the wake of another historic uprising brutally suppressed by the authorities – this time in Hungary.

Listen to two short sections of Shostakovich's [Symphony No 11, 'The Year 1905'](#).

## **About the Music**

### **Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914): Legend for Orchestra, *Kikimora***

Composed: 1909

First Performed: 12 December 1909, St Petersburg, Hall of the Nobility, cond. Alexander Siloti

Hugely gifted and highly imaginative, the Russian composer Anatoly Liadov was one of classical music's great under-achievers. Prokofiev dismissed him as 'astonishingly lazy', but it's quite possible that genuine depression played a part too – alcohol certainly did. But he did leave three brilliant, atmospheric tone poems based on Russian fairy tales, *Baba Yaga* (about a terrifying witch), *The Enchanted Lake*, and *Kikimora*, about a tiny but powerful wicked spirit, raised by a magician in the mountains. During the seven years it takes her to grow, she was entertained by the magician's cat, who tells her fantastical tales as she spins flax in a cradle made of crystal and nurtures her evil intentions – especially towards sleeping children.

### **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 his bride to be, the 29-year-old Antonina Miliukova, clearly either misunderstood or refused to accept the terms

and conditions of their marriage, and a distraught 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 *joie de vivre* returning 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’s brilliance and vitality that triumphs at the end. The *Canzonetta* that follows is a long outpouring of sweetly melancholic melody, led by violin, unusually, muted throughout. 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.

### **Shostakovich: Symphony No 11 in G minor, op 103, ‘The Year 1905’**

1. Palace Square (Adagio)
2. The Ninth of January (Allegro)
3. Eternal Memory (Adagio)
4. The Alarm Bell (Allegro non troppo - Adagio - Allegro)

Composed: 1957

First Performed: 30 October 1957, Moscow, USSR Symphony Orchestra, cond. Natan Rakhlin.

When Shostakovich’s Eleventh Symphony first appeared, there was nothing about it that was likely to offend the Soviet authorities – provided they didn’t probe too deeply. The title invoked a suitably revolutionary theme: the failed Russian uprising of 1905, brutally put down by Tsarist troops. The Soviet authorities greeted the new symphony with hymns of praise, noting Shostakovich’s use of workers’ revolutionary songs in all four movements. But there were others who heard a different message: after the Leningrad premiere, the poet Anna Akhmatova remarked, ‘those songs were like white birds flying against a terrible black sky’. In fact, the songs expressed despair, rage against tyranny, grief for sufferings past – but no consoling hope. Years later, Shostakovich told a colleague, ‘don’t forget that I wrote the symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising’ – brutally put down by Russian troops. Bear that in mind, and the words of the songs, and the manner in which Shostakovich treats them, take on a wholly new meaning.

Throughout, the Eleventh Symphony reflects Shostakovich’s experience in writing for the cinema: one can imagine a long, slow tracking shot, taking in the immensity of the Palace Square before the arrival of the revolutionaries in the first movement. Flutes intone the song ‘The night is black as treason, as the tyrant’s conscience’, and a hushed drum tattoo portends dark events to come. Then another workers’ song: ‘Oh Tsar, our dear father!’, an appeal for justice, launches the convulsive second movement, culminating in an outburst of unprecedented violence: martial rhythms for timpani and five percussionists depict the crushing of the uprising.

In another cinematic touch, we are suddenly transported from the thick of the violence to its aftermath, the vast square filled with the bodies of the victims. A slow, quiet processional begins: pizzicato cellos and basses introducing the song ‘You fell as heroes’ on violas. A grand elegiac climax subsides, then the finale erupts, with a protest song on brass and timpani: ‘Rage, you tyrants!’ Eventually a cor anglais broods plaintively, then deep bell sounds ring out from bass instruments, drums, gong and harp, a sound which in the great Russian tragic opera, Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, is said to symbolise the implacable judgement of history. The message is underlined in the final pages: angrily lamenting wind and brass, more pounding militaristic percussion, and the drum tattoo from the opening of the symphony now sounded out threateningly by bells.