

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra February 22 programme complementary content

The original 'dream team' is reunited in this Thursday evening concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. You can guarantee that Simon Trpčeski will play all the right notes AND in the right order when he performs Grieg's much-loved *Piano Concerto* in a programme conducted by Vasily Petrenko which also features Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů's dramatic *La Bagarre*, and Stravinsky's fairytale *The Firebird*.

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 with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He is currently music director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, chief conductor of the European Union Youth Orchestra and also associate conductor at the [Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León](#).

Recent appearances have included Mussorgsky's *Boris Gudanov* 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 October when he conducted an all-Russian programme of Liadov, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich.

Watch Vasily Petrenko and Simon Trpčeski talk about [working together](#).

Simon Trpčeski

[Simon Trpčeski](#) needs little introduction to Liverpool audiences. The Macedonian piano virtuoso has become a favourite at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall over the past two decades, not least for his compelling partnership with conductor [Vasily Petrenko](#).

[Trpčeski](#), praised for his powerful virtuosity and charismatic stage presence, was born in Macedonia in 1979 and studied at the School of Music at the University of St Cyril and St Methodius in Skopje. He was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2001-3, and in 2003 was honoured with the Young Artist Award by the Royal Philharmonic Society.

As a much-demanded soloist, during his career he has collaborated with more than 100 orchestras on four continents as well as a long list of prominent conductors. As an acclaimed recitalist he has also appeared in major concert halls across the globe, and has a busy schedule as a chamber musician, regularly partnering cellist Daniel Muller-Schott.

He is also committed to strengthening the cultural image of his [native Macedonia](#).

Did you know? Trpčeski's 12-year-old daughter Lara represented North Macedonia in the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2022.

Watch a short excerpt of Simon Trpčeski playing Grieg's [Piano Concerto](#).

Bohuslav Martinů

The son of a cobbler and fire watchman, [Bohuslav Martinů](#) was born in 1890 high in a church tower apartment in the small Czech market town of [Polička](#), south-east of Prague. As a boy, he studied the violin, giving his first public concert in 1905.

He attended – and was expelled from – the Prague Conservatory and in 1913, aged 22, he joined the city's Philharmonic Orchestra, later touring with them to London, Geneva and Paris.

He would go on to become a prolific composer. His earliest success came a decade later with the ballet *Istar* and the symphonic poem *Vanishing Midnight*, and he went on to study with Josef Suk and then, from 1923, in Paris with Albert Roussel.

When Germany invaded France in 1940, Martinů escaped across the Atlantic to the United States where he taught at Princeton and at Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Center.

La Bagarre dates from 1927 and was inspired by the crowds that met American aviator [Charles Lindbergh](#) as he completed his famous solo non-stop transatlantic flight. It was premiered by the Boston Symphony the same year, after Martinů bumped into the orchestra's conductor Serge Koussevitzky in a Parisian café and gave him the score.

Enjoy a performance of Martinů's [La Bagarre](#).

Edvard Grieg

[Edvard Grieg](#) was 25, not long married and had recently become a father when – in the summer of 1868 - he wrote what would be his [only concerto](#).

The Griegs had rented a small cottage at Søllerød, just north of Copenhagen, where the piano teacher and composer put pen to manuscript, inspired by the folk music of his homeland. Grieg had also long been inspired by Robert Schumann's *Piano Concerto in A minor*, which the young Norwegian had heard Clara Schumann play when he was a student in Leipzig.

These two influences came together in his new work which was premiered in Copenhagen on [April 3 1869](#) with Danish composer and pianist Edmund Neupert as soloist. [Anton Rubinstein](#) loaned his own grand piano for the occasion.

It was an instant success, although its composer was never completely satisfied with the concerto and revised it at least seven times between its completion and his death nearly 40 years later.

Did you know? Grieg's great-grandfather Alexander Grieg emigrated to Norway from Scotland in the wake of the Battle of Culloden.

Watch rare footage of a forerunner to Morecambe and Wise's famous [Grieg Piano Concerto TV sketch](#).

Igor Stravinsky

When the great Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev heard a *Scherzo Fantastique* at a concert in St Petersburg in 1909, he was impressed enough to engage its young composer to write some short pieces for his [Ballet Russes](#).

But [Igor Stravinsky](#) wasn't the first choice when it came to creating the music for the company's full-length production *The Firebird*. Instead, Diaghilev approached fellow Russian Anatoly Liadov to provide the score. Unhappily for Liadov, he failed to come up with the goods – but Stravinsky, approached in his place, had no such problem.

[*The Firebird*](#) opened at the Paris Opera on June 25 1910 and turned its composer into a star overnight. It also became the first of a trio of collaborative works which continued in 1911 with *Petrushka* and culminated in the famously riotous *The Rite of Spring* two years later.

But it was *The Firebird* that Stravinsky returned to when he made his conducting debut in December 1915 (two wartime concerts in aid of the Red Cross) – and many times again over the rest of his long career.

Watch the Royal Danish Ballet perform [*The Firebird*](#).

About the Music

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959): *La Bagarre*

Composed: 1927

First Performed: 1927, Boston, Symphony Hall, Boston Symphony Orchestra, cond. Serge Koussevitzky

The Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů, was to become the leading musical voice of his homeland during the ordeal of World War Two and the subsequent communist dictatorship. But at the time he wrote *La Bagarre* he was still a student in Paris, drinking in influences, not only from French classical music, but also from jazz and French popular song. *La Bagarre* is one of two pieces that vividly depict the exhilaration of being part of a crowd. In *Half-Time* (1924) it's a football crowd, at a match between France and Czechoslovakia (no prizes for guessing who Martinů was cheering on!). The title *La Bagarre* means 'the brawl', but by the time of the music's premiere, Martinů's idea of the work seems to have shifted: now he was comparing it to the mass of people who swarmed the streets of Le Bourget to welcome the aviator Charles Lindbergh as he landed from his historic transatlantic flight. Either way, it's bracing, bustling, uplifting fun, full of the kind of joyous energy that remained a feature of his music right through to the end.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907): Piano Concerto in A minor, op 16

1. Allegro molto moderato
2. Adagio
3. Allegro moderato molto e marcato – Poco animato

Composed: 1868

First Performed: 3 April 1869, Copenhagen, Edmund Neupert (piano), cond. Holger Simon Pauli

'Keep going. You've got what it takes – don't let them intimidate you!' With these words, the virtuoso pianist and composer Franz Liszt handed Grieg back the manuscript of his newly completed Piano Concerto. Liszt had just played through the concerto with growing enthusiasm. At the end of the finale, where the second theme returns in triumph, Liszt had leapt up from the keyboard, thrown his arms wide and exclaimed, 'Splendid!'

The beginning of the Piano Concerto echoes Robert Schumann's famous concerto (also in A minor), but it is arresting enough on its own terms – so much so that it remains one of the most famous openings to a concerto in the repertory: a timpani roll, a shout for the full orchestra, then a series of downward cascading figures for the piano. After this the movement is based on two main themes: the first introduced quietly by winds, answered by strings; the second a singing melody first heard on cellos. After the magical hushed orchestral introduction, the song-like Adagio is dominated by the piano, not so much developing the melodies as decorating them. This leads without a break to the finale: full of vigorous folk-dance tunes at first, then introducing the Concerto's 'star tune' in its slower middle section on solo flute. Grieg builds up the excitement

impressively in the faster coda, to the point where the flute tune returns first in full orchestral splendour, but with one note magically changed, and with rich harmonisation on the piano. No wonder it made Liszt shout 'Splendid!'

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): *The Firebird* (complete ballet)

Composed: 1909-10

First Performed: 25 June 1910, Paris, Palais Garnier, cond. Gabriel Pierné

The hugely influential ballet impresario Serge Diaghilev was also a talent-spotter of genius. When he first floated the idea of adapting the Russian folk legend of the Firebird for performance by his Paris-based Ballets Russes in 1909, the composer he had in mind was his old teacher Anatoly Liadov. But when it became clear that Liadov wasn't up to the job, Diaghilev remembered the young composer he'd worked with on an adaptation of the ballet *Les Sylphides*, Igor Stravinsky. Stravinsky had no reputation to speak of in 1909, but Diaghilev seems to have sensed a potential major talent. Surprised and flattered, Stravinsky dropped work on his opera *The Nightingale* and began work in November, finishing the full orchestral score in just five months.

The premiere of *Firebird* was a sensation. As Stravinsky noted, 'The stage and the whole theatre glittered'. He could have added that his music glittered too. For all his later expressions of distaste for all forms of 'illustrative' music, Stravinsky's *Firebird* score is a triumph of musical storytelling and scene-painting. We can sense the magic and nocturnal menace in the ogre Kashchei's enchanted garden as the young Prince Ivan strays into it in pursuit of the magical Firebird. We hear her heart-rending cries when he catches her, then frees her in exchange for one of her magical feathers. A delicate round dance portrays the thirteen captive princesses, with one of whom Ivan falls in love. The music darkens as Ivan is captured, and Kashchei performs a terrifying dance of triumph. But Ivan remembers the feather, and the Firebird reappears, to reveal the secret of Kashchei's immortality - his soul is contained in a hidden egg. The egg is destroyed and Kashchei's power ebbs away. Finally, there is a magnificent long crescendo on a nobly beautiful Russian folk theme (first heard on horn) as Ivan and his Princess are betrothed in full splendour.