

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**

### **March 21 programme complementary content**

Beautiful melodies are the order of the day in this concert which sees the welcome return of violin virtuoso Arabella Steinbacher – here playing Prokofiev’s zingy Second Violin Concerto.

Meanwhile there’s symphonic perfection from Brahms, while conductor Lawrence Foster is a champion of the music of George Enescu, so who better to lead a performance of the composer’s *Romanian Rhapsody*?

#### **Lawrence Foster**

Award-winning conductor [Lawrence Foster](#) is known for his exhilarating and expressive performances in a wide range of music, and enjoys a career spanning the US, Europe and Asia.

After being the Music Director of Opera de Marseille for nine years, and Artistic and Chief Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra for four, he is conducting an exciting variety of programmes this season.

Foster, born in Los Angeles in 1941 to Romanian parents, studied conducting with Fritz Zweig and piano with Joanna Grauden, becoming conductor of the San Francisco Ballet at 18 and in 1966 won the prestigious Koussevitzky conducting prize at Tanglewood.

He was later appointed Assistant Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and guest conductor of the Royal Philharmonic, and over the course of more than six decades he has forged a busy and successful international career working with world class orchestras and musicians.

Foster was the artistic director of the [George Enescu Festival](#) in Bucharest from 1998 to 2001, and as a champion of the music of [George Enescu](#) his interpretations are known for their faithfulness to the Romanian composer’s score.

In 2003 he was decorated by the Romanian president for services to Romanian music.

#### **Arabella Steinbacher**

Celebrated worldwide as one of today’s leading soloists, [Arabella Steinbacher](#) is known for her extraordinarily varied repertoire from the classical and romantic eras to modernist concertos, as an extensive and diverse discography demonstrates.

She enjoys a busy performance career with some of the world’s leading orchestras and conductors and opened this season with the European premiere of a new concerto written for her by [Georges Lentz](#).

Steinbacher was born into a family of musicians and first picked up a violin at the age of three, beginning her studies with Ana Chumachenco at Munich’s University of Music and Theatre when she was eight.

She cites the late Israeli violinist Ivry Gitlis as a source of musical inspiration and guidance.

[Steinbacher](#) currently plays the 1718 ex Benno Walter Stradivarius and the Guarneri del Gesu Sain-ton, dating from 1744, both generously provided by a private Swiss foundation.

Listen to Arabella Steinbacher play [the Allegro Moderato](#) from Prokofiev’s Second Violin Concerto with the Russian National Orchestra, conducted by Vasily Petrenko.

## **Johannes Brahms**

[Johannes Brahms](#) liked to decamp to spa towns or the country in the summer months. In 1883 the 50-year-old found himself in the picturesque Rhineland resort of [Wiesbaden](#) and ready to compose.

It was six years since his Second Symphony (itself composed in the tiny Austrian lakeside village of Pörtschach), and in the intervening years Brahms had produced some of his finest and best-loved work including several lieder, two sets of *Hungarian Dances* and his *Violin Concerto* and *Piano Concerto No 2*.

The stay in Wiesbaden was evidently a fruitful one, and by the start of the autumn Brahms had completed what would become his [Third Symphony](#). He even played some of it for his good friend [Antonin Dvořák](#) who was enraptured by its beautiful melodies.

The symphony was premiered by Hans Richter and the Vienna Philharmonic in December 1883. In his response to the work, influential critic [Eduard Hanslick](#) declared that “many music lovers may prefer the titanic force of the First, others the untroubled charm of the Second. But the Third strikes me as artistically the most perfect.”

Listen to the [fourth movement](#) of Brahms’ *Symphony No 3 in F major*.

## **Sergei Prokofiev**

Sergei Prokofiev’s [Second Violin Concerto](#) has distinctly international roots. The work, premiered in Madrid in December 1935, was composed as [Prokofiev](#) was on a concert tour with violinist [Robert Soetens](#), with its themes and movements variously composed in France, Russia and Azerbaijan.

It came 18 years after the composer’s poetic and ethereal First Violin Concerto and would prove to be a very different proposition to that earlier work, starting in sombre fashion but ending in a furiously fast dance complete with – presumably as a nod to its Spanish premiere - castanets.

Prokofiev himself described in his [autobiography](#) how he “wanted it to be all together different from No 1 both as to music and style”.

The two works also bookend Prokofiev’s self-imposed exile from the Soviet Union which had started with the Revolution in 1917 and ended when the homesick composer returned in 1936 with his family, settling in Moscow.

**Did you know? Prokofiev died on March 6, 1953 – the day after Joseph Stalin.**

Watch a performance of Prokofiev’s [Violin Concerto No 2 in G minor](#) at the 2019 Proms.

## **George Enescu**

Little can Costache and Maria Enescu have known when their eighth (and only surviving) child was born in 1881 that he would go on to become one of Romania’s most famous sons. In fact, so famous that Liveni, the Moldavian village birthplace of composer, conductor, virtuoso violinist, pianist and teacher [George Enescu](#) would later be renamed in his honour.

When he was three, Enescu heard some [village fiddlers play](#) and was entranced, trying to copy them by using a piece of wood with thread sewn to it to create strings. The village boy turned out to be a gifted child prodigy. He started composing at the age of five and at seven became the youngest ever student to study at the Vienna Conservatory, graduating five years later – in between, he performed a private concert for Emperor Franz Joseph.

The [adult Enescu](#) composed a wide range of works including five symphonies, chamber music, songs, and an opera *Oedipe*, based on Sophocles' mythological tale of Oedipus. In 1904 he founded the Enescu Quartet, playing with musicians like [Pablo Casals](#) and Jacques Thibaud.

A champion of contemporary Romanian music and musicians, arguably his best-known and most popular work remains his two *Romanian Rhapsodies*, composed not in his home country but in France in 1901 and premiered together in 1903 in Bucharest with Enescu conducting.

*Romanian Rhapsody No 1*, completed when Enescu was still a teenager and echoing the folk songs and dances of his childhood, is a swaggering, effervescent delight.

**Did you know? In January 1927, a 10-year-old called Yehudi Menuhin approached Enescu after a concert in Paris and asked to study with him. It was the start of a long friendship and musical collaboration.**

Enjoy a performance of Enescu's [Romanian Rhapsody in A major](#).

## About the Music

### **George Enescu (1881-1955): Romanian Rhapsody No. 1, Op 11, No 1**

Composed: 1901

First Performed: 23 February 1903, Bucharest, Romanian Atheneum, cond. Enescu

'Just a few tunes thrown together without thinking about it', was how the Romanian composer George Enescu described his smash-hit First Romanian Rhapsody. But composers have a habit of dismissing their most successful works, particularly when (as in this case) they overshadow their more serious, ambitious efforts. Privately Enescu's sketches show he took a great deal of trouble over it. In any case, Enescu's love and understanding of his native folk music was profound, and it's unlikely that he'd ever have been content with a mere musical postcard. Three melodies form the basis of this deliciously colourful piece: first comes the perky 'I'm going to spend my money on drink', clarinet and oboe in dialogue, then a waltz-like theme on violins (probably Enescu's own composition), and finally a whirling, foot-stomping climax is built up on the tune 'The Skylark'.

### **Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953): Violin Concerto No 2 in G minor, Op 63**

1. Allegro moderato
2. Andante assai
3. Allegro, ben marcato

Composed: 1935

First Performed: 1 December 1935, Teatro Monumental, Madrid, Madrid Symphony Orchestra, Robert Soetens (violin), cond. Enrique Fernández-Arbós

In 1935, Prokofiev finally came to a decision that puzzled many of his friends – he decided to move back to his homeland. Russia was approaching the height of 'Terror', a period of public denunciations, terrifying show trials, of countless executions and late-night arrests. Why then, of all times? In fact, the Soviet Union had been courting him for some time, exploiting his growing disillusionment with life in Paris and America, his weariness with his career as a concert pianist and his evident acute homesickness. There were also rumours of heavy gambling debts, effectively cancelled by his move to Communist Russia. The Second Violin Concerto was written at a time when Prokofiev's rootless professional lifestyle was proving excessively trying, however much he might have tried to make light of it. 'The number of places in which I wrote the Concerto

shows the kind of nomadic concert-tour life I led then', he wrote. 'The main theme of the 1st movement was written in Paris, the first theme of the 2nd movement at Voronezh, the orchestration was finished in Baku and the premiere was given in Madrid.'

Perhaps the music itself provides the answer. The first movement's opening theme may have been born in Paris, but for many it cries out 'Russia!' The violin leads off unaccompanied with what could easily be a Russian folk song. Edgy humour obtrudes from time to time, but much of the music is tender, reflective. This mood intensifies in the wonderful *Andante assai*, built around repetitions of a long, high-soaring violin melody, singing out above a kind of slow waltz accompaniment. A three-in-a-bar dance tempo dominates the finale too, though this is far too comically harsh and vibrant to be a sophisticated Viennese waltz, and the addition of clicking castanets indicates that Prokofiev had Spain very much in mind, where the Concerto would soon have its hugely successful premiere. It has been a concert favourite ever since.

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-97): Symphony No 3 in F major, op. 90**

1. Allegro con brio
2. Andante
3. Poco Allegretto
4. Allegro

Composed: 1883

First Performed: 2 December, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Hans Richter

*Frei aber froh* – 'Free but happy'. Brahms's personal motto, spelt out musically as F – A – F, is sung out boldly by the wind instruments right at the start of his Third Symphony, though Brahms flattens the second note of the opening motif, A, and adds a questioning dissonance underneath. The word *aber* ('but') is therefore emphasized – a shadow of doubt?

Immediately after this comes a magnificent downward plunging violin theme, a direct quotation from another Third Symphony: that of the young Brahms' mentor, and for a painfully brief time surrogate father, Robert Schumann. Schumann's attempted suicide and final descent into madness in 1854 was a profound shock for Brahms. Much of Brahms' first movement is carried along by a strong, buoyant forward current; but just before the return of the 'Schumann' theme, the tempo slows, the mood darkens and Brahms quotes one of his own choral works, *Begräbnisgesang*, 'Funeral Song', composed not long after Schuman's death. Then, suddenly, the original F–A–F motif returns with full force. It's as though a shadow of remembered grief has passed over the music – so much so that Brahms has to rally himself and grasp again the happiness of freedom.

The opening woodwind melody of the *Andante*, with its answering phrases on low strings, is like an idyllic pastoral hymn, but the second theme (clarinet and bassoon) leads into more troubled regions. Pastoral imagery is also suggested in the following *Poco Allegretto*. The gorgeous cello melody, later taken up by horn, seems to sound through lush, atmospheric woodland. The finale brings the stormiest, most driven music in the whole symphony. Perhaps this will lead to a noisily triumphant, or perhaps even a tragic conclusion? But at the end it is romantic reverie (again woodwind) that prevails, leading to a quiet return of the symphony's original motto and 'Schumann' themes. No triumph, no tragedy, the music seems to say, just peaceful acceptance.