Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
April 4 programme complementary content

The talented Sheku Kanneh-Mason is no stranger to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, but this latest visit will be an extra special concert for the young cellist – as it's also his 25th birthday!

Kanneh-Mason will play Weinberg's haunting and unfairly neglected *Cello Concerto* in a programme which also features two very different works by British contemporaries Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Sir Edward Elgar.

Andrew Manze

Andrew Manze is Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – a role he has held since 2018 – and a great favourite of Philharmonic audiences. He made his debut with the Orchestra more than a decade ago and has appeared regularly on the Hope Street stage ever since.

With boundless energy and warmth, and an extensive and scholarly knowledge of the repertoire, Manze is in great demand as a guest conductor from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles.

He began his career as an Early Music specialist, becoming Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music at the age of 31. Along with a busy conducting career he also teaches, edits and writes about music and is in demand as a broadcaster. He is currently Chief Conductor of the **NDR Radiophilharmonie**.

This season, along with this concert and two performances last November, he is also conducting Nielsen's *Violin Concerto* on April 11.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Sheku Kanneh-Mason is in great demand from major orchestras and concert halls nationwide. But he needs little introduction to Liverpool audiences who have been able to enjoy his unfolding career first hand through several performances at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall over the last six years.

Whether playing at an underground club, in the world's leading concert venues, or for children in a school hall, the 24-year-old's mission is to make music accessible for all.

The third of seven siblings in the **Kanneh-Mason** family of talented musicians, he started learning cello at the age of six and went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music, where in 2022 he was appointed the first Menuhin Visiting Professor of Performance Mentoring.

He won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition in 2016, performed at the 2017 BAFTA ceremony, and in 2018 became internationally famous after being invited to play at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. He also appeared at the Royal Variety Performance.

Kanneh-Mason was the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's **Young Artist in Residence for 2018-19** and shortly before lockdown in 2020, he and sister Isata performed a recital on the main stage. Sheku returned in 2021 to play Dvořák's ***Cello Concerto*** and reprised the performance with the Orchestra at the **BBC Proms**.

Forthcoming engagements include a performance of Weinberg's *Cello Concerto* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko, concerts in Cincinnati, New York, Detroit and San Francisco, and recitals with sister Isata in Switzerland, Amsterdam and London,

Kanneh-Mason, who plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700, was made an MBE in the 2020 New Year's Honours.

Watch an **interview with Sheku Kanneh-Mason** from his appearance at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in 2021.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Born in 1875 in London to an English mother and a father from Sierra Leone, **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** showed an early aptitude for music, and particularly the violin. At 15, he entered the Royal College of Music where he studied with Charles Villiers Stanford, and by the time he was 21 he was already gaining a reputation as a composer. Publisher August Jaeger declared Coleridge-Taylor a genius, and Edward Elgar called him "far and away the cleverest fellow going among the younger men".

It was Elgar, 18 years his senior, who helped secure a commission for Coleridge-Taylor from the Three Choirs Festival, which in 1898 premiered his ***Ballade in A minor*** – the same year his **Hiawatha's Wedding Feast** received its first performance at the Royal College of Music.

Ballade in A minor helped to establish the career of the young composer, and he went on to conquer America, touring several times, being hailed as the 'African Mahler' and meeting President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House.

His first visit to the States came in November 1904 when he sailed from Liverpool to Boston on the Saxonia. Incidentally, Coleridge-Taylor appeared in Liverpool in person in October 1908 when he conducted several of his own works **in a concert** at the Sun Hall in Kensington.

Sadly, the composer's career was cut tragically short just four years later when he died of pneumonia at home in London at the age of 37.

Enjoy Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's ***Ballade*** performed by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Mieczysław Weinberg

Born in Warsaw in 1919 to a composer and conductor father and an actress mother, **Mieczysław Weinberg** was ten when he joined his father, playing piano in the city's Yiddish theatre, and 12 when he entered the Warsaw Conservatory.

While the budding young composer fled Poland for Russia at the outbreak of war in 1939, his parents and sister remained behind and later died in a Nazi concentration camp.

Weinberg first settled in Minsk, but when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union two years later he moved to Tashkent where he wrote for the opera and composed his first symphony and also made contact with **Dmitri Shostakovich** – an event which had a profound and lasting effect on him, with the two composers becoming lifelong friends.

He lived in Moscow from 1943, but later fell foul of Stalin's regime, becoming a victim of the 1948 purge (in which his father-in-law was murdered), with several of his works banned. In February 1953 he was imprisoned for 'Jewish bourgeois nationalism', with Shostakovich reportedly intervening on Weinberg's behalf. Stalin's death the following month led to his release.

Weinberg was a prolific composer, with his output including 22 symphonies, seven operas, three ballets, more than 200 songs and 60 film scores. The *Concerto for Cello in C minor* dates from the time of the 1948 purge, although it was set aside by its composer and not brought out until the late 1950s, when it was championed by **Rostropovich**.

Did you know? The UK premiere of Weinberg's *Cello Concerto* was performed by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's Principal Cello Jonathan Aasgaard with Vasily Petrenko in 2019.

Watch Jonathan Aasgaard and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra perform Weinberg's ***Cello Concerto***.

Edward Elgar

While Haydn had composed 78 by the same age, and even Brahms – a late starter – had completed three, it took **Edward Elgar** until the age of 51 to unveil his **First Symphony**. Still, it turned out to be worth the wait for Edwardian audiences. The A-flat major work was premiered at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on December 3, 1908, by the Hallé Orchestra with its dedicatee **Hans Richter** conducting, but it had actually been a decade in the offing.

In the 1890s Elgar had toyed with the idea of commemorating General Gordon (of **Gordon of Khartoum** fame) in a symphony. So much so that his good friend, Liverpool's **Alfred Rodewald**, apparently offered him a commission to write one. But enthusiasm for that subject had waned by the time he finally sat down in 1907 to work in earnest on his first symphony.

In November of that year the Elgars decamped to Rome for the winter, where the composer started to properly shape the symphony's four movements, in between sightseeing trips and walks along the Tiber with his daughter Carice. He carried on with it on his return in June, describing the work to Three Choirs Festival director **Ivor Atkins in a letter** as 'a squalling child with teeth and hair' and finally put the last note to manuscript late in September.

And so to the **premiere** on a cold, foggy December evening which failed to dampen the spirits of the audience, who were so enraptured by the slow third movement that their response prompted Richter to beckon its composer on stage. There was a similarly rapturous reaction at its first London performance a few days later, and so successful was the work that it was played more than 80 times within the first year, all around the world.

Did you know? Elgar was an amateur chemist and would carry out experiments in a home laboratory he called the Ark. In between scoring his First Symphony he found time to make soap, and he also designed and patented the Elgar Sulphuretted Hydrogen Apparatus for synthesising hydrogen sulphide which went into production in the same year.

Watch Andrew Manze conduct a performance of Elgar's ***Symphony No 1 in A flat***.

About the Music

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912): Ballade for Orchestra, Op 33

Composed: 1898
First Performed: 12 September 1898, Shire Hall, Gloucester, Three Choirs Festival Orchestra, cond. Coleridge-Taylor

Originally, the organisation of the Three Choirs Festival had wanted Elgar to write something for their 1898 programme, but Elgar was preoccupied with other projects, so he wrote to them with a suggestion – actually it was more of a plea: 'I am sorry I am too busy to do so, I wish, wish, wish you would ask Coleridge-Taylor to do it. He still wants recognition, and he is far and away the cleverest fellow going amongst the young men'. Fortunately, they agreed, and the result, the *Ballade* fully justified their act of faith. It was a huge success, even impressing Sir Arthur Sullivan, who proclaimed the 23-year-old composer a 'genius'. The *Ballade* turned out to be an

excellent ground-preparer for Coleridge-Taylor's smash-hit success, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, premiered just two months later. Like *Hiawatha,* it is impetuous, impassioned, with strongly memorable ideas, and it seems to tell a kind of story, in this case no doubt inspired by the swashbuckling Scottish ballades that were still very much the rage.

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-96): Cello Concerto in C minor Op. 43

1. Adagio
2. Moderato
3. Allegro – cadenza –
4. Allegro – Adagio

Composed: 1948
First Performed: 9 January 1957, Moscow, Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, Mstislav Rostropovich (cello), cond. Samuil Samosud

The Polish-born Jewish composer Mieczysław Weinberg wrote his hauntingly beautiful Cello Concerto five years after he'd settled in Moscow, and nine years after he'd fled Poland to escape the Nazi occupation – his parents and sister weren't so lucky, and Weinberg never saw them again. Initially things had gone well for him in the Soviet Union, but even as he was writing the Cello Concerto, official attitudes towards Jews were hardening, as an increasingly paranoid Stalin sought out more and more scapegoats. The Concerto was still unperformed in 1953, when Weinberg was suddenly arrested, on typically fabricated charges. When Stalin died that same year, Weinberg's new friend Dmitri Shostakovich was able to use his influence to secure his release. Even so the Cello Concerto had to wait several years for its first public airing, in politically more liberal times.

Although echoes of Weinberg's friend Shostakovich can be heard in this music (he compared hearing Shostakovich's music to 'the discovery of a continent'), it has a voice of its own, gentler – on the whole – but with a depth of highly personal sadness that expresses itself in wonderful melodies and memorable dance tunes. Jewish Klezmer music is a strong influence – you can hear it in the slow, mournfully dignified long tune that opens the first movement. But there's so much more to this than folksy colour. Through melodies like these, Weinberg becomes an eloquent spokesman for all of those who lost their lives in Hitler's 'Final Solution'. Livelier music follows in the next three movements, but the hushed ending is almost painfully touching, a tender lullaby for the lost.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934): Symphony No 1 in A flat major, Op. 55

1. Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro
2. Allegro molto -
3. Adagio
4. Lento - Allegro

Composed: 1907-8
First Performed: 3 December 1908, Manchester, Hallé Orchestra cond. Hans Richter

The premiere of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* in 1899 was the big breakthrough of his career, transforming the 42-year-old composer overnight from regional celebrity to national treasure. But it placed a huge burden of expectation on his shoulders: Elgar was now the chosen one, the composer who would provide his people with the first Great British Symphony. But Elgar was prone to dreadful self-doubt. It took nearly ten years, several false starts and a lot of encouragement from his friends before his Symphony No.1 was finished. Despite Elgar's fears, it was a sensation, and over a hundred performances followed in its first full year of existence, in Britain, the USA and on the continent. Elgar was now an international star.

In public, Elgar provided few clues as to what the symphony might be 'about', saying only that there was 'no programme beyond a wide experience of human life with great charity (love) and a *massive* hope in the future' – a rousing symphonic hymn, it would appear, to what Elgar was later to call the 'glad confident morning' of the Edwardian era. But Elgar was complex, as man and as composer. Though the symphony does appear to begin and end with 'massive hope', in the form of a wonderful slow march theme, there are shadows and enigmas in between, in the turbulent, impassioned first movement, in the darkly martial second movement and in the finale's atmospheric slow introduction. And the slow movement, which emerges seamlessly from the dying moments of the second, is one of those wonderful Elgarian orchestral 'songs without words' that seems half noble and aspiring, half achingly sad. Does 'massive hope' win out in the end, or does a note of self-doubt and regret linger even after the oceanic ending? That's for you to decide.