

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 19 programme complementary content

Vasily Petrenko

[Vasily Petrenko](#) needs little introduction to Liverpool Philharmonic audiences. The multi-award-winning Leningrad-born conductor returns in his role as Conductor Laureate in what for many years was an annual concert celebrating the music of his homeland around the date of his own birthday.

Petrenko left the city in the summer of 2021 after 15 years with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and is currently Music Director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – where he has [extended his contract to 2030](#) – and Associate Conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León. He also served from 2015-24 as the Chief Conductor of the European Union Youth Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic (2013-20), and Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain from 2009-13. In 2021, Petrenko stood down as the Artistic Director of the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia ‘Evgeny Svetlanov’.

Along with conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra he is in demand by the world’s leading orchestras and festivals. Recent appearances include European Union Youth Orchestra concerts in Austria, Germany and Italy, the Aspen Music Festival with Sheku Kanneh-Mason, and a trio of concerts in Australia earlier in October, while future engagements this season include the Oslo Philharmonic with pianist Nobu Tsujii, and a tour of the United States with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Victor Julien-Laferrière

Multi-award-winning French cellist [Victor Julien-Laferrière](#) is one of the most exciting young talents playing today. He is in demand on major concert stages worldwide and his recitals and chamber concerts have seen him perform at venues including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Konzerthaus Wien and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

Born in Paris in 1990, he studied with cellist René Benedetti then with Roland Pidoux at Paris CNSM Conservatoire, Heinrich Schiff at Vienna University and Clemens Hagen at Salzburg Mozarteum. He won first prize and two other awards at the 2012 Prague Spring International Competition, was first prize winner at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2017 (the first year dedicated to the cello) and in 2018 he was awarded the Victoire de la Musique in France as Instrumental Soloist of the Year.

Along with his busy performing career with some of the world’s most renowned orchestras, [Julien-Laferrière](#) is also developing his skills as a conductor, working with orchestras including the Wiener Kammerorchester, Orchestre de l’Opera de Rouen and Orchestre de Chambre de Paris. In 2021 he founded his own ensemble, Consuelo, and he has also recorded numerous critically acclaimed albums.

He plays a [cello by Domenico Montagnana](#) with a bow by Dominique Peccatte.

Anatoly Liadov

While his contemporaries – Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov among them – are household names, 19th Century Russian composer [Anatoly Liadov](#) hasn’t retained the same level of public consciousness. Yet the composer, conductor and teacher’s work was [highly regarded](#) during his lifetime.

Born in 1855 in St Petersburg, where his father Konstantin was conductor of the Russian Opera Company at the Mariinsky Theatre, Liadov was accepted into the city’s Conservatory as a teenager where he studied piano, violin and music theory and was taught by Rimsky-Korsakov...although the young future composer was expelled a few years later, reportedly for being lazy. That early misstep

didn't put paid to his career before it began however, and he later taught at the Conservatory, where his pupils included Prokofiev and Myaskovsky.

Liadov 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. And he was well regarded by his contemporaries – Mussorgsky for example described the young composer as a “thoroughly original, thoroughly Russian talent”. Much of Liadov's earlier compositional work was for [piano and is recognised for its quality](#). But elsewhere, while he talked about projects, relatively few came to fruition. One was a score for *The Firebird*, although failing to produce the goods did give former pupil Stravinsky his big break. Among Liadov's later pieces were the 1904 supernatural tone poem *Baba Yaga, Kikimora* – a ‘fantastic scherzo’ dating from 1905 (and which was originally part of an opera score its composer failed to complete) – and the 1909 symphonic poem *The Enchanted Lake*.

After suffering ill health for the final few years of his life, he died in August 1914 at his country estate Polinovka and was buried in the city of his birth.

Did you know? Liadov came from a musical family. In addition to his father, three of his uncles were professional musicians and his grandfather Nikolai, a soldier-turned-musician, was second conductor of the Russian Opera Company.

Listen to Liadov's [Baba Yaga](#).

Victoria Borisova-Ollas

Russian-Swedish composer [Victoria Borisova-Ollas](#) was born in Vladivostok and studied in Moscow, Malmö and at the Royal College of Music in London. She received her first international recognition when her symphonic poem *Wings of the Wind* won second prize at the 1998 Masterprize International Composition Competition. Her opera *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, an adaptation of the epic Salman Rushdie novel, was premiered as part of the [2007 Manchester International Festival](#), with Mark Elder conducting and actor Alan Rickman as narrator.

Borisova-Ollas uses an original and unusual vocabulary of sounds to create acoustic spaces of great beauty and intensity. Her music has been performed by orchestras, ensembles and soloists around the world and she has won a number of awards for her works including several in Sweden, where she has lived since 1992, along with the prestigious Royal Academy of Music's Christ Johnson Prize for her *Symphony No.1 'The Triumph of Heaven'* which was inspired by a painting by Kazimir Malevich. Meanwhile her clarinet concerto *Golden Dances of the Pharaohs* is a double award-winner, receiving a Swedish Music Publishers Association's Annual Music Publisher's Award in 2010 and, in 2011, the Royal Swedish Academy of Music Christ Johnson Prize.

Along with orchestral pieces including two symphonies, Borisova-Ollas' work covers a range of mediums from large and small ensemble to piano, choral compositions and the 2017 opera *Dracula*.

Dmitri Shostakovich

Composer, pianist and a figure both celebrated and condemned in his homeland whose struggles were chronicled through his music – [Dmitri Shostakovich](#) was a giant of 20th Century music. Born in St Petersburg in 1906, his talent as a pianist was recognised early on and at 13, he entered the city's Conservatory where his tutors included Alexander Glazunov.

As the only major musical figure to remain in Russia following the 1917 Revolution (Stravinsky, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev all either already lived abroad or absented themselves from the country), Shostakovich was feted as the great hope for music in the new Soviet Union. But when Stalin, who had implacable views on what kind of music was acceptable in the Soviet state, rose to power, and especially after he consolidated his position as supreme leader in the early 1930s, Shostakovich – his

music informed by suspiciously Western modernist influences – found himself yo-yoing in and out of favour. In January 1936 he was [publicly denounced by Stalin](#) as ‘an enemy of the people’, and he was cancelled again in the 1940s for the crime of so-called ‘formulism’. So perhaps it’s no surprise that he kept a packed bag by the door in case of a midnight knock from the secret police and a sudden relocation to somewhere much further east. The Siberian sojourn never came to pass however, with Shostakovich carefully maintaining a balancing act between mollifying the system and retaining his own musical ideals, and after Stalin’s death in 1953 he enjoyed more creative freedom.

Amid the decades of political and social turmoil, Shostakovich kept working and his catalogue of compositions covers a wide range of orchestral and chamber pieces, along with works for piano, voice, opera and ballet, and many film scores. Renowned for his symphonies (the subject of an acclaimed [set of recordings](#) by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko), Shostakovich composed his first at 19, as a graduation piece from the Petrograd Conservatory, and his 15th and final symphony in 1971 to mark his 65th birthday. His final completed work was a violin sonata, written not long before he died in August 1975.

Did you know? While orbiting in space in 1961, Russian Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin sang Shostakovich’s song *The Homeland Hears* – part of the composer’s 1951 work *Four Songs for Voice and Piano*. It later became the theme song of the Soviet space industry.

Listen to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra playing the [opening movement](#) of the *Leningrad Symphony*.

About the Music

Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914): *Baba Yaga*, Op 65

Composed: 1904

First Performed: 21 February 1909, St Petersburg, cond. Liadov

Anatoly Liadov could have been one of Russian music’s brightest stars. It was clear early on that he was hugely talented but his productivity was hampered, partly due to depression, and not helped by a fondness for vodka. The tragedy is that when he did manage to compose, the results were often magical, as in this vivid little tone poem. It portrays one of the grimmest figures in Russian folk-legend, the witch Baba-Yaga. Skeletally thin, she has a terrifying appetite for human flesh (she’s particularly fond of children) which she devours with her iron teeth! Her home is a fantastical hut on fowl’s legs, deep in the forest, from which she flies out in search of her prey on a mortar, using the pestle as a rudder. Liadov’s vivid score follows her on one of her adventures. Does she succeed in her quest, or does her intended victim escape? That’s for the listener to find out.

Victoria Borisova-Ollas (b. 1969) *Oh Giselle, remember me...* (UK premiere / RLPS co-commission with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra)

Composed: 2018

First Performed: 15 November 2019, Berwald Hall, Stockholm, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Truls Mørk (cello), cond. Christian Macelaru

Like many before her, the Russian-born composer Victoria Borisova-Ollas fell early on for Adolphe Adam’s ballet *Giselle*, both for its dark fairy-tale story and its wonderful music. But with time she came to feel that the story could be retold in more modern terms. Now the central musical character is the solo cello, standing for Giselle’s bereaved lover, Albrecht, who acts as a kind of narrator throughout this one-movement piece, a concerto in all but name. The orchestra sets the scene, creates the atmosphere – sometimes sumptuous, sometimes harsh and threatening – and introduces the other characters, or at least gives impressions of them. There is something dreamlike about *Oh*

Giselle, remember me... Albrecht searches for Giselle's grave in a wild forest, tormented by guilt that his betrayal caused her to kill herself. Her spirit appears to forgive him, but an enchantress appears with her attendant spirits (ghosts of betrayed virgins), demanding revenge. Giselle's defiance and forgiveness saves Albrecht, at the same time bringing her the rest she has yearned for. But for Albrecht there is nothing left but regret and remorse.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75): Symphony No.7 in C major, Op 60, *Leningrad*

1. Allegretto
2. Moderato (poco allegretto)
3. Adagio
4. Allegro non troppo

Composed: 1941

First Performed: 5 March 1942, Kubyshev (Russia), Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra, cond. Samuil Samosud

The story of the creation and early performance of Shostakovich's 'Leningrad' Symphony is the stuff of legend. Towards the end of 1941, invading Nazi troops had encircled the city of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg). But despite desperately dwindling food supplies and the dire effects of the worst winter for over a century (at one point temperatures reached minus 45), Leningrad managed to hold out for two and a half years, by which time the tide of the war had turned irreversibly in Russia's favour.

In the midst of all this horror, Shostakovich was hard at work on a new symphony. Eventually the Soviet authorities realised that it could be a major propaganda weapon. With three movements of the symphony already completed, Shostakovich was evacuated in October 1941 to Kuibyshev, safely east of Moscow. The symphony was premiered there in December, then in Moscow the following March, and the score was then flown to the US on microfilm for a performance under Arturo Toscanini in New York. Then on August 13, 1942, the symphony was played by a freshly augmented Leningrad Radio Orchestra in the still-besieged city, and broadcast on the streets and beyond on huge loudspeakers, an achievement which at that time seemed little short of miraculous. At the end, the applause lasted over an hour.

It's hard to miss the mood of stern defiance that animates the opening section of the first movement. Quieter lyrical reflection seems to convey a sense of more innocent times; but peace is gradually shattered by a sequence of martial variations over a sustained side-drum rhythm. Initially perky, the tune gradually turns horrific. Catastrophe follows, then devastation, but the theme associated with the city at the symphony's beginning is not quite destroyed. Hope still flickers in the ashes.

The lighter Moderato that follows hints at further memories of happier times. These are shattered by the acid-toned, much faster-paced middle section, which has come to be known as a 'dance of death'. The ending is hushed, delicately scored, and now more clearly elegiac. The wind and harp chorale that opens the Adagio, alternating with anguished recitatives for full violins, has a quality of an austere ritual. Shostakovich is said to have been inspired by the Biblical Psalms when writing this symphony, especially those that call for vengeance for bloodshed. At length, then comes an expectant hush, and the finale begins to rouse itself. More intense struggles follow, then comes a long slow section, funereal in character, before the symphony rouses itself for the last time. The thunderous ending may be heard as resolute, even triumphant, but there is room for doubt. It is music that seems to shout 'I will survive!', whilst at the same time registering the appalling human cost.