

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
March 29 programme complementary content

Daniela Candillari

Celebrated for her dynamic artistry and insightful leadership, conductor [Daniela Candillari](#) is equally at home premiering bold new works and interpreting classical repertoire. Her international career spans major operatic and symphonic stages, where she is praised for performances that combine “confidence and apparently inexhaustible verve” (*The New York Times*) with “incisive leadership” (*The Wall Street Journal*).

Her 2025-2026 season includes guest engagements with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Canadian Opera Company, London Philharmonic, Cabrillo Festival, Colorado Springs Philharmonic, and Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal. She will also return to the Juilliard School, Louisiana Philharmonic, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), and others.

Recent engagements have included an acclaimed world premiere of *This House* by Ricky Ian Gordon, Lynn Nottage and Ruby Aiyo Gerber as part of the 50th anniversary season at OTSL, the world premiere of Nina Shekhar’s *Accordion Concerto* with the St Louis Symphony Orchestra, Camille Saint-Saëns’ rarely performed French masterpiece, *Samson and Delilah*, at the New Orleans Opera and debuts with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony and Tucson Symphony Orchestra.

As a composer, Candillari has been commissioned by established artists including instrumentalists from the Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh Symphonies, as well as the three resident orchestras of Lincoln Center: the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and the New York City Ballet.

She was Principal Opera Conductor with Music Academy of the West from 2022-2024 and has been Principal Conductor of the [Opera Theatre of St Louis](#) since 2022. [Candillari](#) grew up in Serbia and Slovenia. She holds a Doctorate from the Universität für Musik in Vienna; a MM from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music; and a MM and bachelor’s degree from the Universität für Musik in Graz.

Alexandra Dariescu

Romanian-born British pianist, educator, mentor and producer [Alexandra Dariescu](#) is a trailblazer who demonstrates fearless curiosity in performing diverse and thought-provoking programmes.

Creator of the internationally acclaimed [The Nutcracker and I](#), a groundbreaking multimedia recital exploring the traditional Nutcracker story which premiered at the Barbican in 2017, she stands out as a distinctive and original voice on the piano stage.

A sought-after soloist worldwide, Dariescu has forged strong relationships with orchestras such as the BBC Symphony, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Detroit Symphony and Melbourne Symphony. Other collaborations include London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, London Philharmonic, the Royal Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen Philharmonics and the Sydney, Houston, Detroit, Seattle and Vancouver Symphonies. Among the renowned conductors she has worked with are Ádám Fischer, Cristian Măcelaru, Alain Altinoglu, Sakari Oramo, John Storgårds, Fabien Gabel, Vasily Petrenko, Ryan Bancroft, James Gaffigan, and JoAnn Falletta.

In the 2025/26 season, she performs with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali at the Enescu Festival in Bucharest, followed by season opening concerts in Tallinn with the Estonian National Symphony and Olari Elts, and in Belgium with the Brussels Philharmonic and Kazushi Ōno. New debuts include performances with the Pacific Symphony and Tianyi Lu in the US, as well as engagements with the Malmö and Aalborg Symphony Orchestras. In the UK, along with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic she reunites with the Royal Philharmonic and makes her much-anticipated debut in the Southbank Centre's Piano Recital Series.

Dariescu has released nine albums to critical acclaim, most recently the Clara Schumann and Grieg Piano Concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Tianyi Lu. Mentored by Sir Andrés Schiff and Dame Imogen Cooper, [Dariescu](#) studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and in her hometown Iasi with Mihaela Constantin and Cornelia Apostol. She was a Laureate of the Verbier Festival Academy, receiving the UK's Women of the Future Award in the Arts and Culture category.

Among many accolades are Cultural Ambassador of Romania, Officer of the Romanian Crown from the Royal Family and Young European Leader by Friends of Europe. In 2020, she received the Order 'Cultural Merit' in the rank of Knight from the Romanian President and became an Associated Member of the Royal Northern College of Music, where she also held the distinguished position of Professor of Piano for two years. She has been [Professor of Piano](#) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London since 2024.

Samuel Barber

Twentieth Century American composer [Samuel Barber](#) was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania in March 1910. Barber came from a musical family – his mother played the piano, his aunt was the American contralto Louise Homer, and his uncle Sidney Homer was a composer. And the young Samuel began writing music as a child, including an opera at the age of 10.

Aged 14, he became one of the first students to enrol in the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and where he studied composition, piano and singing. And it was at the Curtis Institute where the teenage Barber also met Gian Carlo Menotti (composer of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*) who became Barber's partner for more than 40 years. A regular visitor to Europe, Barber was in Austria in 1936 when he composed a string quartet. Two years later he repurposed its slow central movement and his [Adagio for Strings](#) was born.

Such was its success, that he was able to shed many of his commitments as a singer (he had a rich baritone voice), choral conductor and teacher and instead concentrate on composing. Barber's other most notable works over a 50-year career included his [Violin Concerto](#), premiered in Philadelphia in 1941, the orchestral works *Essays for Orchestra* and *School for Scandal*, the *Piano Sonata in E flat minor* which was commissioned by Irving Berlin and Richard Rodgers for the 25th anniversary of the League of Composers, and his 1962 *Piano Concerto* which won him both a Pulitzer (his second after the opera *Vanessa*) and a Music Critic Circle Award. He also composed two symphonies and set dozens of poems for voice and piano among other pieces.

However, his 1966 opera *Antony and Cleopatra*, composed for the opening of the New York Met and with a libretto by Franco Zeffirelli who also produced, was a flop. Barber would continue to compose, on and off, until his death from cancer in January 1981 at the age of 70.

Did you know? In an interview in the New York Times in 1971, Barber said of his own music: “It is said that I have no style at all but that doesn’t matter. I just go on doing, as they say, my thing. I believe this takes a certain courage.”

Listen to the Overture to Barber’s [*The School for Scandal*](#).

Edvard Grieg

Norway’s most celebrated musical son, [Edvard Grieg](#) was actually an eighth Scottish – his great-grandfather Alexander Greig having arrived in Scandinavia in the wake of the Battle of Culloden. By the time Edvard was born in Bergen in 1843, the family had swapped the ‘ei’ in the middle of its surname to ‘ie’.

Bergen would remain Grieg’s home for most of his life, and the house he shared with his wife Nina – [Troldhaugen](#) – is now a museum dedicated to the composer. Taught piano by his mother as a child, at 15 Grieg became a keyboard and composition student at Leipzig Conservatory. And it was in Leipzig that he heard Clara Schumann play husband Robert’s *Piano Concerto in A minor* which would have a deep and lasting effect on the young student.

Aged 20 he moved to Copenhagen where he studied with Niels Gade and met the young composer [Rikard Nordraak](#) who was interested in the sagas, landscapes and music of their shared homeland and who, before he died at the age of 23, composed the music that became Norway’s national anthem. Grieg was inspired to himself learn more about the traditional folk music of Norway, which would go on to influence his own compositions.

The two main pillars of his career were composed within its first decade - his *Piano Concerto in A minor* was an instant (and, as it turns out, enduring) hit when it was premiered in 1867, while in the mid-1870s, playwright Henrik Ibsen asked for a Grieg when it came to creating the incidental music for a production of his play [Peer Gynt](#).

Among Grieg’s other best-known works are the *Holberg Suite*, *Lyric Pieces* – 66 short pieces for solo piano including *Wedding Day at Troldhausen*, and *Violin Sonata in C minor*.

Grieg died of heart failure in 1907, aged 64, and was buried, aptly, in a mountain cave at his Trolldhausen home.

Jean Sibelius

On December 2, 1905, Jean Sibelius stepped onto the stage at Liverpool's (original) Philharmonic Hall – the first time the Finnish composer had appeared on an English platform. Sibelius was [in the city](#) to conduct his First Symphony and his 1899 tone poem *Finlandia*. Sibelius had been due to appear in Liverpool a year earlier, but political events at home in Finland had delayed his visit. But it was worth the wait, with the Philharmonic Hall audience reportedly giving him an “effusive” welcome – “a token of real admiration for the virility and originality of his genius”.

[Johan Julius Christian Sibelius](#) was born on December 8, 1865, one of three children of the Swedish-speaking Christian Gustav, municipal Doctor of Health in the southern city of Hämeenlinna, and his wife Maria Charlotta. Dr Sibelius died when his son was a toddler.

Showing early talent, the young ‘Jean’ had piano lessons and at the age of 10 was given a violin by his uncle. In fact, he would start his musical career as a violinist, although not wholly successfully – he was devastated when he was rejected by the Vienna Philharmonic. Sibelius instead turned to composition, encouraged by his tutor at Helsinki's Institute of Music and inspired by the folklore of his homeland. Early success with his choral work *Kullervo* in 1892 brought him to public attention, while *Finlandia* – which remains his best-known work – would become the unofficial anthem of Finnish resistance to Russian rule. Yet it was the natural world around him, particularly the tranquillity of the landscape at his home [Ainola](#) on the banks of the crystalline Lake Tuusula, north of Helsinki, which would inspire much of his later work. It was at Ainola in September 1957 that Sibelius died, with his wife of 65 years, Aino, at his side.

About the Music

Samuel Barber (1910-81): Overture, *The School for Scandal*
Composed 1930

First Performed: 30 August 1933, Philadelphia, Verizon Hall,
Philadelphia Orchestra, cond. Alexander Smallens

For many people, even outside the world of classical music, the name Samuel Barber is immediately associated with the noble, gloriously tragic *Adagio for Strings*. There was a strong melancholic streak in Barber's character, and it shows in many of his finest pieces. But he also knew how to have fun, and he could be a brilliant entertainer. The *School for Scandal* Overture is a prime example. Barber wrote it when he was just twenty, and still a student at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute. It was an instant success, and established Barber as a 'young man to watch'. Barber took his title from the play by the hugely successful 18th century Anglo-Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan – quite a scandalous character in his own right. Was Barber thinking of the notorious, glamorous Sheridan as much as of his play? The Overture scintillates like Sheridan's famous wit, but there's also an elegant, gorgeous love theme that emerges towards the end, that Bernstein would have been proud to sign his name too. Well, after all, Sheridan's love life was as colourful as anything in his plays.

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 privately for Grieg, with mounting enthusiasm. At the end of the finale, where the lyrical 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's striking 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 deliciously. 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!'

Sibelius: Symphony No 2 in D major, op 43

1. Allegretto
2. Tempo Andante, ma rubato
3. Vivacissimo - Lento e suave - Tempo primo - Lento e suave -
4. Allegro moderato

Composed: 1901-2

First performed: 8 March 1902, Helsinki, Helsinki Philharmonic, cond. Sibelius

On first impression, Sibelius' Symphony No.2 seems the sunniest and most positive of his seven numbered symphonies. Add the fact that it was begun shortly after Sibelius' first trip to Italy and it all begins to make sense. Surely this has to be Sibelius' Mediterranean symphony, even if it is the Mediterranean viewed through Nordic eyes.

In fact, the holiday was a disaster. Sibelius' daughter became desperately ill; money ran short and then came worrying news from Finland: the Russians had intensified their efforts at cultural colonisation - the country's very identity was in peril. Sibelius deserted his family and fled to Rome, where he busied himself with plans for a tone poem about the legendary womaniser Don Juan - a figure with whom he clearly identified.

It was only after his return to Finland that Sibelius began to see the way his musical ideas were really heading. Soon he was busy on a four-

movement symphony, with no title or literary programme. The first movement is a joyous demonstration of Sibelius' new-found 'organic' thinking, in which everything grows from the opening three-note rising motif like a plant from a seed. But something of the Don Juan project survives in the slow second movement. It's possible to hear this darkly dramatic movement as a struggle between Death and Life for the soul of Don Juan - with Death ultimately the victor.

Life returns in abundance in the Scherzo: a hurtling, Beethovenian dance-movement, twice interrupted by the slower, more reflective Trio. Then the mood becomes increasingly stormy, and the first movement's three-note 'seed' motif returns, leading to a splendid song-theme on violins, trumpets and horns - the finale has begun. The ending is triumphant, with a new theme born from the old, fortissimo on trumpets. The beleaguered Finns welcomed it ecstatically, hailing it as 'Symphony of Liberation'. It can still sound like that today, well over a century later.