

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra September 17 programme complementary content

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory of Rhys Owens, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's former Principal Trumpet who sadly passed away on Friday 25 March 2022. We are pleased to welcome members of Rhys' family to the concert.

Rhys' talent was evident from a very young age. He began playing the cornet in a local brass band at the age of eight. At 17 he was Principal Cornet of the National Brass Band of Wales and Principal Trumpet of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. He studied at Chetham's School of Music and the Royal College of Music, during which time he was a brass finalist in the 1986 BBC Young Musician of the Year and also finalist in the Shell LSO competition.

Rhys joined the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 1991, shortly before his twenty-fourth birthday. He joined as fourth trumpet and became Section Leader in 1998. He was a much valued and loved musician and colleague in the Orchestra for almost thirty years, during which time his brilliant musicianship illuminated countless concerts both here in Liverpool, and around the world. His playing lives on in the many Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra recordings of which he was part, including the 2016 recording of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No.1 with Boris Giltburg and Vasily Petrenko on the Naxos label.

Rhys was, for many years, a Trumpet Tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music. He was an inspiration to many, as teacher, mentor, colleague and musician.

Rhys sadly had to step down from his position in July 2021, having been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. He faced this illness with his typical calmness and was more concerned for his family and loved ones than himself, and for any opportunity his illness provided to raise awareness of and money for research into this disease.

All of us at Liverpool Philharmonic miss him deeply and we are proud to remember him as a colleague, friend, and outstanding player in the history of the Orchestra.

Domingo Hindoyan's second season as Chief Conductor starts in fine style with this programme of Central European masterpieces.

Janáček's mighty orchestral *Sinfonietta* is paired with Mahler's heavenly song-symphony to herald – with trumpets and sleighbells respectively – the musical delights to come, including the Liverpool debut of the brilliant Czech soprano, Kateřina Kněžíková.

In addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content that we hope will help shine further light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Domingo Hindoyan

Domingo Hindoyan was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme, El Sistema.

He studied conducting at Haute école de musique in Geneva, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor's Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to Daniel Barenboim at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as successor to Vasily Petrenko in 2020, taking up this position last September.

Kateřina Kněžíková

Lyrical soprano Kateřina Kněžíková is much sought after, thanks to her ravishing tone.

Born in Bohumín near Ostrava on the Czech/Polish border, Kněžíková studied at the Prague Conservatory and at the city's Academy of Performing Arts.

One of the most acclaimed operatic sopranos in Czechia, she has performed in all of the country's prestigious opera houses, and regularly sings with the Czech Philharmonic. She also has a busy international schedule.

Her repertoire includes works by Janáček, Dvořák, Mahler, Ravel, Brahms, Beethoven and Mozart. Last year she appeared in Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová* at Glyndebourne.

In 2008 Kněžíková sang on a new recording of the Czech national anthem, while the following year she sang during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI.

Earlier this year she won the *BBC Music Magazine* vocal award for her debut solo album *Phidyle*, recorded with the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava and conductor Robert Jindra.

Forthcoming engagements include the title role in Dvorak's *Rusalka* at the National Theatre in Prague, Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* in Brno, and Mahler's Fourth Symphony, conducted again by Domingo Hindoyan, at Katowice.

Leoš Janáček

Leoš Janáček is not just one of the most important and original composers in Czech culture – he was also a theorist, teacher, collector of folksong and passionate nationalist.

Born in Hukvaldy, Moravia in 1854, the gifted Janáček went on to study music in Prague (where the impoverished student, too poor to have a piano, made do with a keyboard drawn on a tabletop), Leipzig and Vienna.

In his early 20s, he became a music teacher in Brno, where he later took on roles as a choirmaster, conductor and director of what would become the Brno Conservatory, fostering musical life in the town. It was also in Brno that he started to collect and publish folksong.

While his first opera, *Šárka*, was in the spirit of Wagner and Smetana, his later work embraced a more distinctive Czech ‘voice’. But despite being a major musical figure in Brno, acclaim in Prague eluded him until the success of *Jenůfa* in the city in 1916 – more than a decade after its Brno premiere.

Janáček was also greatly inspired by the foundation of a Czech free state in 1918, and along with dramatic changes in his personal life, this led to a huge burst of creative energy during the 1920s. It was from this energy and enthusiasm that his monumental orchestral work *Sinfonietta* emerged in 1926.

Gustav Mahler

In 1899, Austrian composer Gustav Mahler was two years into his decade long tenure as director of the Vienna Court Opera, and had also just taken on the role of conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic.

These two appointments kept the 39-year-old busy, and along with his work, Mahler was also in love with one of the opera’s leading ladies, Selma Kurz, although it proved to be a short-lived affair.

Still, as the final months of the 19th Century went on, along with conducting the Vienna premiere of his *Second Symphony*, Mahler started to concentrate on composing once more and his remaining years in the Austrian capital were to be a fruitful time for him.

The close of what was called his ‘Wunderhorn’ period included the song *Revelge*, and his *Symphony No 4 in G major* – composed over 1899 and 1900 but incorporating an earlier song, *Das Himmlische Leben*, in its final movement.

Did you know? Colorado holds an annual MahlerFest to celebrate the Austrian composer’s work, with the festival celebrating its 35th anniversary next May.

About the Music

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928): *Sinfonietta*

Composed: 1926

First Performed: 26 June 1926, Prague, cond. Václav Talich

A passionate Slavophile and a deeply patriotic Czech, Leoš Janáček was thrilled when his homeland at last achieved independence at the end of World War I. Janáček’s *Sinfonietta*, dedicated to the new Czech Army, was composed, he said, to celebrate ‘contemporary free man, his spiritual beauty and joy, his strength, courage and determination to fight for victory’. Opting for the diminutive title ‘*Sinfonietta*’ seems to have been a kind of joke: ‘a nice little Sinfonietta with fanfares’ was how he described it at the time. ‘Little’ it certainly isn’t, and as for ‘nice’ – well, it’s a whole world more than that.

All five movements have subtitles. From the second movement onwards, these relate to Janáček’s beloved home city of Brno: ‘The Castle, Brno’, ‘The Queen’s Monastery, Brno’, ‘The Street Leading to the Castle’ and ‘The Town Hall, Brno’. These four movements are striking for the way Janáček uses a large, colour-enhanced orchestra to create constant shifts in texture, tempo and mood – it can be like watching someone put together a mosaic where the pieces reflect each other yet remain sharply distinct. Before these, however, comes the spectacular ‘Fanfare’ for a huge brass and timpani ensemble, featuring nine trumpets as well as bass trumpets and tenor tubas.

At the high point of the finale, this Fanfare returns to create a thrilling ode to joy which Beethoven himself would surely have loved. 'Music isn't about notes,' Janáček once told a clinically analytical musicologist, 'It's about life, blood and nature!' In the *Sinfonietta's* quietest, tenderest moments, and in the colossal massed song of its final pages, you can almost hear the music speaking those words.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911): *Symphony No 4*

Composed: 1899-1900

First Performed: 25 November 1901, Munich, cond. Mahler

On the face of it, Mahler's Fourth is his sunniest, least complicated and generally most accessible symphony. The fact that it's also his shortest certainly helped it gain popularity in the years following Mahler's death, and the relative smallness of the orchestra made it a much more practical proposition for nervous concert-planners. But for Mahler himself, there were deep emotional complexities here. He'd started, he said, by imagining it was going to be a kind of 'humoresque', but then, to his surprise, it had turned into something quite different – 'just as in a dream one imagines oneself wandering through the flower-scented garden of Elysium and it suddenly changes to a nightmare of finding oneself in a Hades full of terrors'. This may seem startling, even to people who know the symphony. So much of this music seems to evoke idyllic images of childhood: the sleighbells and Mozartian play-elegance of the opening, the flutes' evocation of children's pipes later on, then finally the portrayal, led by a soprano soloist, of a child's idea of Heaven that rounds off the whole symphony with daring originality.

But there are shadows here too, not least in the eerie second movement, where a solo violin tuned up a tone (to sound more 'highly strung') leads us on a kind of trance-like dance journey through ghostly territory. The slow movement too has many moods, some apparently serene and happy, others where elegiac sadness seems more to the fore. As for that 'Heavenly' song in the finale, here are troubling images too – the evocation of 'the butcher Herod', the pitiful animal cries as those innocents are led to the slaughter. At the end, as the child falls asleep, is the harp's low bell-like tolling contented or faintly sinister? Each of us must find the answers to these questions for ourselves.