

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 5 programme complementary content

A quartet of star soloists join the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and conductor Matthew Halls to perform Beethoven's magnificent and moving *Mass in C*.

Ahead of that, expect fireworks from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and a musical joke from Joseph Haydn.

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.

Matthew Halls

Versatile British conductor [Matthew Halls](#) is renowned for probing and vibrant interpretations and dynamic work with major orchestras, choirs and opera companies.

Halls studied music at Oxford where he was an organ scholar and later assistant organist at New College, and spent five further years teaching at the university.

A former Artistic Director of The King's Consort, he founded the Retrospect Ensemble, and with a background in period-performance was one of the first to conduct Nikolaus Harnoncourt's *Concentus Musicus Wien*.

As an organist, harpsichordist and pianist he has given recitals all over the world and has appeared on dozens of recordings. Halls is the current Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the [Tampere Philharmonic](#).

Jennifer France

[Jennifer France](#) is in demand in concert halls and on the opera stage, where she has been described as 'the living jewel in opera's crown'.

The British soprano [attended a performing arts school](#) from the age of 13 with ambitions to appear in the West End, before changing focus and studying singing at the Royal Northern College of Music where she trained with Sandra Dugdale.

She won the Song Prize at the 2014 Kathleen Ferrier Awards, the 2018 Critics' Circle Emerging Talent Award and was an emerging artist at Scottish Opera. She has worked with a wide range of national and international companies including the Royal Opera House, ENO, Garsington Opera and Dutch National Opera.

A prolific concert artist, she has sung with orchestras including the Britten Sinfonia, Royal Philharmonic, CBSO, Huddersfield Choral Society, Bergen Philharmonic and Swedish Chamber Orchestra. She made her *BBC Proms* debut in 2017 and her Salzburg Festival debut in 2019.

Future concert engagements include appearances with the CBSO at Symphony Hall, and Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Philharmonic at the Festival Hall.

Listen to Jennifer France sing [Neghitossi or voi che fate?](#) from Handel's *Ariodante*.

Claire Barnett-Jones

British mezzo-soprano [Claire Barnett-Jones](#) is fast becoming one of the most sought-after voices on both the operatic stage and the concert platform.

In 2021 she won the [Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize](#) at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, after having been called to take part with just 12 hours' notice while she was [fixing a fence](#) to keep her cat Molly in the garden!

Barnett-Jones was born in Taunton in 1990 and learned a number of instruments at school, becoming Principal Violist of the National Children's Orchestra.

She started singing lessons at the age of 17 and went on to study at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Academy of Music and Opera School and Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

A Harewood Artist from 2019 to 2022, she made her [English National Opera](#) debut in 2019 in Harrison Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus*. The same year she won the Lilian Baylis Award for Outstanding Potential in Opera.

Forthcoming engagements include *Jenůfa* with Sir Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra, and Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* with the London Philharmonic.

Watch Claire Barnett-Jones perform [Cruda Sorte!...Già So Per Pratica](#) from Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers* at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World final.

Oliver Johnston

London-born tenor [Oliver Johnston](#) has won praise for his 'tender, contemplative style' and impresses with his 'presence, perfect voice and diction'.

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, Johnston went on to become a member of the 2016 Salzburg Young Singers' Project.

His concert engagements have included Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Georg Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra, Mozart's *Requiem* with the Kyoto Symphony and Beethoven's Ninth with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Recent performances include Tichon in *Katja Kabanova* at Opera de Lyon, Don José in *Carmen* for Opera Holland Park and Jenik in *The Bartered Bride* with Garsington Opera.

He returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after singing in Handel's *Messiah* in January 2020.

Listen to Oliver Johnston sing Rimsky-Korsakov's [The Dream](#).

Dominic Sedgwick

[Dominic Sedgwick](#) also returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after singing in Handel's *Messiah* in January 2020.

The award-winning British baritone was a [boy chorister](#) who went on to train at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Robert Dean.

He is an alumnus of the Jette Parker Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera House, where he made his debut in December 2017 playing Marullo in *Rigoletto*. He is also a Samling Artist and an Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment Rising Star.

Sedgwick has a busy career on both the opera stage and as a concert soloist and recitalist.

Engagements this season include Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in London and Paris, and Britten's *Albert Herring* with Opera North.

Watch Dominic Sedgwick perform [*There's Nothing Too Good For My Baby*](#).

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

When the Liverpool Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840 it saw the birth not only of an orchestra but of a chorus too. [The Choir](#) added 'Royal' to its title in 1990.

In recent years, the Choir has performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B minor*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mahler's *Symphony No.2*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan's *St John Passion*, the Durufle *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

It has also appeared in many of the UK's major concert venues, including the Royal Albert Hall, and has sung on a number of foreign tours.

This season the Choir welcomes a new chorus master, with [Matthew Hamilton](#) being appointed the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's Director of Choirs.

During this season, the Choir will also sing Fauré's *Requiem*, Poulenc's *Gloria*, and appear in the Classic FM Hall of Fame concert on March 16, as well as in the Spirit of Christmas concert series and the popular annual performance of Handel's *Messiah*.

George Frideric Handel

It was [April 27 1749](#) and George II was preparing to celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession and the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle with a giant display of pyrotechnics in Green Park. As with other key royal occasions, [Handel](#) was commissioned to provide a stirring orchestral suite, this time to accompany the display.

So public a performance of new music – and one attended by the king – caused huge excitement in London, and a dress rehearsal attracted an audience of 12,000 who each paid half a crown to attend and caused gridlock in the streets.

At the actual premiere a week later, the orchestra of brass and wind instruments and timpani (Handel had been told to leave out a string section) gathered in a specially built new pavilion to perform.

The five movement [Music for Royal Fireworks](#) was a triumph, but not everything went to plan with the fireworks themselves. Many of them either failed to go off or misfired in rainy conditions, and a soldier was blinded while a woman had her dress set on fire. A month after the fireworks, Handel rescored the piece for full orchestra for a concert at the [Foundling Hospital](#), of which he was a supporter.

Did you know? When Handel moved to London in 1712, he was given a salary of £200 per year by Queen Anne which put him in the top 3% of income earners. It is the equivalent of around £33,000 today.

Watch [Music for the Royal Fireworks](#) performed at the 2012 *BBC Proms*.

Joseph Haydn

[Joseph Haydn](#), history's most prolific symphonist, found an enthusiastic audience for his work in Britain where he became a celebrity. The Austrian rewarded his supporters with [arguably some of the finest](#) of his 104 symphonies, which also turned out to be his last.

His first visit, organised by German violinist and impresario [Johann Peter Salomon](#), came in 1791 and was a huge success, so much so that he arranged a second trip for 1794.

Between 1791 and 1795, Haydn composed 12 works which together have become known as his [London Symphonies](#).

Symphony No 94 in G major, popularly known as the '[Surprise](#)', was composed in London itself and written for a concert series he presented during his first stay in the city. It was given its nickname due to a sudden fortissimo Haydn – who was conducting the work himself – introduced near the start of its gentle andante second movement.

Listen to the '[Andante](#)' from Haydn's *Symphony No 94 in G major*.

Ludwig van Beethoven

In 1807, Nikolaus II, Prince Esterházy, commissioned the 37-year-old [Beethoven](#) to compose a sacred mass to mark the name day of his wife Maria Josepha.

It was a tradition that stretched back into the last decade of the 18th Century, when Haydn had written an annual mass for the occasion.

With the spectre of (a still very much alive) Haydn looming over his shoulder, Beethoven put quill to manuscript, creating a five-movement work with four soloists, choir and orchestra.

The [Mass in C](#) received its first performance in Eisenstadt on September 13 that year – but despite the mass containing some of Beethoven's most sublime and moving writing for voices, Esterházy was disappointed with it, his bemused reaction reportedly causing the composer to stalk off in a huff.

Beethoven returned to the work the following year when he included its Gloria and Sanctus in a landmark concert which also included the public premiere of his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies.

Listen to the [Kyrie](#) from Beethoven's *Mass in C*.

About the Music

George Frederick Handel (1665-1749): *Music for the Royal Fireworks*

1. Overture (Adagio – Allegro – Lentement – Allegro)
2. Bourrée
3. *La Paix* (Largo alla siciliana)
4. *La Réjouissance* (Allegro)
5. Menuets I and II

Composed: 1749

First Performed: 27 April 1749, Green Park, London, dir. Handel

It sounds stupendous: a grand outdoor concert with a spectacular firework display and plenty of musicians, attended by tens of thousands, all to celebrate the glorious victory that had ended the War of the Austrian Succession the previous year. In fact, the war was long, complicated and

costly, and the peace settlement drawn up in 1748 was a fudged compromise that baffled even some of the participants. Handel, directing the music, endured frustrating stand-offs with the authorities, and he wasn't best pleased when King George II informed him that it had to be martial instruments only, and definitely 'no fiddles'. On the day, rain dampened the proceedings, rockets misfired causing several injuries, and a stand seating a group of worthy ladies and gentlemen collapsed into a pond.

Yet the music was a huge success, and it stayed popular long after Handel's death. Handel was a consummate professional, and he could rise to any occasion, but the liveliness, grandeur and sheer tunefulness suggest that, however much he may have grumbled, his heart was in it after all. Once the event was over and the score was Handel's to do with as he liked, he added those proscribed fiddles, and indeed a whole compliment of strings, and made a more practical orchestral version, which is the one normally heard today.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809): Symphony No.94 in G major, Hob. H. 1/94, 'Surprise'

1. Adagio cantabile – Vivace assai
2. Andante
3. Menuetto: Allegro molto
4. Finale; Allegro molto

Composed: 1791

First Performed: 23 March 1792, Hannover Square Rooms, London, dir. Haydn

Haydn was a master of surprise. It's one of the main features that marks him off from Mozart. Although Mozart can often be witty, he loves elegant, almost vocal long melodic lines. Haydn however is forever twitching the rug from under our own feet, and the more impressive and luxurious the rug is, the more he enjoys pulling it. Most of his 104 symphonies include surprises – sometimes delightful, sometimes maddening, dramatic maybe, but on one or two occasions actually laugh-out-loud funny.

So why is this symphony in particular known as the 'Surprise' Symphony? Well, there's one moment that genuinely shocked some in its first audience, to be greeted seconds later by spontaneous applause. It was one of the big hits of the season during his first, hugely successful visit to England. One or two modern critics have claimed that the effect of Haydn's surprise has worn off with time, but when this passage was played on an episode of *University Challenge* recently, two members of the team were seen to jump – Haydn would have been delighted. In fact, this symphony rarely goes quite where we expect. The first movement's slow introduction is initially cheerful and relaxed, but the sky soon clouds over. Could we be in for something quite serious? But then a dancing Allegro begins, one minute weightless, the next decidedly weighty and muscular.

It's the second movement, gentle and modest at first, that packs the famous punch – but for those who don't know it, there'll be no spoilers here. A typical late Haydn Minuet follows: courtly and orderly one moment, affectionately (or slyly) teasing the next. Then comes one of those captivating finales – superfast, quick-witted, catlike – that never failed to bring the house down in Haydn's London concerts. 'Critical applause', one reviewer tells us, 'was fervid and abundant'.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Mass in C major, Op 86

1. Kyrie
2. Gloria
3. Credo

4. Sanctus
5. Agnus Dei

Composed: 1807

First Performed: 13 September 1807, Eisenstadt (now Hungary)

By no means everything Beethoven wrote provoked controversy or downright rejection. But the first performance of the Mass in C was one of the worst humiliations of his adult life. It had been commissioned by Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, whose Kapellmeister (court music director) had been no less than Joseph Haydn – who, in addition, had taught Beethoven. Beethoven handed over the newly completed score with ‘great trepidation, as Your Serene Highness is accustomed to having the inimitable masses of the great Haydn performed’.

Alas, Beethoven’s ‘trepidation’ was well-founded. Granted, the performance was badly prepared, and the vocal writing was particularly challenging. Beethoven famously confessed that he had more difficulty writing for voices than for instruments. (‘I keep having to ask myself, “Can this be sung?”’) In any case, by 1807, Beethoven’s style had moved on some way from Haydn’s – for one thing his brand of musical surprise had become far more unsettling. At the end, the Prince turned to Beethoven and said, ‘But, my dear Beethoven, what is it you have done this time?’ – cue laughter from assembled courtiers and musicians. Beethoven, so the story goes, swept out of the room. It turned out the Prince had been putting it mildly: Beethoven’s Mass, he confessed privately, was ‘unbearably ridiculous and detestable’. Unlike Beethoven’s late mass-setting, *Missa Solemnis*, the Mass in C has had to struggle for popularity ever since.

It’s possible, though, that Prince Nikolaus had sensed something spiritually subversive – something that went against all his ideas of what religious music should do. ‘I believe I have treated the text as it has seldom been treated before... The emphasis is not on God or princes, but on the human being entering the church’. Faith in God was important to Beethoven, but he was by no means orthodox, and his beliefs contained strong democratic inclinations, then regarded with suspicion mounting to horror by the Catholic Church. While the choral writing in the Mass might suggest a large community at prayer or worship, the solo voices take us to a much more subjective world – a world in which Beethoven’s struggles with vocal technique can be heard to reflect his own wrestling with faith and doubt. Let’s not forget that this was a man who had, at least once, seriously considered suicide. There’s real anguish in the final Agnus Dei, but the ending brings us back to the opening of the Mass, and to music in which, as Beethoven said, ‘cheerfulness pervades’.