

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra October 28 programme complementary content

Conductor Herbert von Karajan said of Mahler's Fifth Symphony that "a great performance...is a transforming experience". So prepare to be transformed as Domingo Hindoyan and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra perform the Austrian composer's masterpiece in this Saturday night concert. Ahead of that, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir joins conductor and Orchestra for two exquisite and stirring choral works by Johannes Brahms.

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 Ecole 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 the Orchestra's new Chief Conductor in 2020, taking up this position in September 2021. In July he announced he had extended his contract until 2028.

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*.

Johannes Brahms

He's undoubtedly one of classical music's great symphonists – and Liverpool Philharmonic celebrated this last month with a performance of his Fourth Symphony. But from the earliest part of his career [Johannes Brahms](#) was also a composer of vocal works, from songs for voice and piano to folk songs, cantatas, canons, and his mighty, seven-movement *A German Requiem*.

Perhaps not surprising as before he became a giant of 19th Century German Romanticism, he made his living conducting choruses and choirs, including a women's choir in Hamburg and a choral society at Detmold.

[Schicksalslied, or Song of Destiny](#), was composed over a period from 1868-71 and sits alongside *A German Requiem* as one of Brahms' finest and most important choral works.

Brahms started work on his new cantata in the wake of the premiere of *A German Requiem*, and while on a visit to a friend at Wilhelmshaven on the German coast. The words come from a poem by German poet and philosopher [Friedrich Hölderlin](#), and the piece would go on to be dubbed the composer's 'Little Requiem'.

A decade later, it was another Friedrich – this time Friedrich Schiller – that Brahms would turn to when he came to write his song for chorus and orchestra, *Nänie*.

Nänie means 'funeral song' and the 46-year-old composer started working on the piece in the spring of 1880 following the death of his good friend, the artist [Anselm Feuerbach](#), in Venice on January 4. He plumped for Schiller's verse because it encompassed Greek myths which Feuerbach also used in his artworks.

Did you know? Brahms had a long-standing interest in the art world. In addition to his friend Anselm Feuerbach, his favourite artists included William Hogarth, Adolph Menzel, symbolist and composer Max Klinger, and Henri Fantin-Latour who created the 1900 lithograph *À Johannes Brahms*.

Listen to Brahms' [Song of Destiny](#), performed at the 2019 *BBC Proms*.

Gustav Mahler

During his lifetime, [Gustav Mahler](#) was best known not as a composer but as a conductor. As the 20th Century dawned, the 40-year-old was at the top of his profession as director of the Vienna Court Opera and principal conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic. But while he had to carve out time around his substantial conducting duties, by 1900 he was also [the composer](#) of four symphonies along with a number of cantatas, orchestral songs and songs with piano.

Summer 1901 took Mahler to his holiday home at the lakeside Maiernigg in Carinthia, where his 'composing hut' is now a tiny museum. It was there that he started sketching what would become his [Fifth Symphony](#), set out over five movements which go on a soaring trajectory from funeral opening to triumphant finale. Mahler completed the work the following summer, having married in the meantime, and the symphony's soulful adagietto is believed to be a love letter to his new young wife, [Alma](#).

The composer himself described the work as 'an expression of incredible energy. It is a human being in the full light of day, in the prime of his life'.

Watch the BBC Philharmonic play the '[Adagietto](#)' from *Symphony No 5* at the 2014 Proms.

About the Music

Johannes Brahms (1833-97): Schicksalslied ('Song of Destiny'), Op. 54

Composed: 1868

First Performed: 18 October 1871, Karlsruhe, cond. Hermann Levi

Brahms' *Schicksalslied*, begun soon after the death of his mother, is a setting of verses by the mentally fragile, at times exquisitely visionary poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843). Many of the German Romantic poets used images from Ancient Greece to evoke a sublime creative freedom, but for Hölderlin the Grecian idyll was more fraught, and this seems to have appealed particularly to Brahms. However, Hölderlin's dramatic sequence – two stanzas of 'still serenity' followed by a sudden, devastating plunge into a bleak 'unknown' – bothered him. Was it too dark? And would it work musically?

It was the conductor Hermann Levi who came up with the solution: have the orchestra alone bring back the prelude to the first section. The chorus remains silent, so the last words we hear are Hölderlin's '*ins Ungewisse hinab*' – 'down into the unknown', but the orchestra has more to tell us. The result is a work which, whilst remaining movingly true to Hölderlin's vision, achieves its effects within a musically satisfying form of its own. The orchestral postlude reminds us of the gorgeous opening vision, but without those warmly consoling voices, is this anything more than the ghost of a vanished possibility?

Johannes Brahms (1833-97): Nänie ('Threnody'), op 82

Composed: 1880-81

First Performed: 6 December 1881, Zurich, Tonhalle Gesellschaft Chorus, cond. Brahms

This concise, but far from 'little' masterpiece was composed in memory of the painter Anselm Feuerbach, and was dedicated to his widow. Like Brahms, Feuerbach had striven to reconcile strong romantic impulses with equally strong neo-classical ideals. Brahms chose the poem *Nänie*, by the pioneering German Romantic writer/dramatist Friedrich Schiller, which set him thinking in specific orchestral terms: no bright trumpets, but three solemn trombones and timpani, plus a harp – highly appropriate for a text that evokes the divinely inspired harpist Orpheus.

Nänie begins with a long, tenderly expressive solo for oboe, which the choral voices then develop, their lines intertwining sensuously like the idealised human forms on a Grecian funeral urn. A more impassioned central section tells us that the gods are moved by beautiful beings, yet all must eventually pass away. Schiller's poem ends with the stark image of an ordinary human being sinking unsung into the underworld. But Brahms repeats the previous phrase, 'Even to be an elegy in the mouth of the beloved is glorious', to which horns, woodwind and harp add a serene, touching benediction.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911): Symphony No 5

Part I

1. Funeral March: In gemessenem Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt. [With measured tread. Strict. Like a procession]

2. Sturmisch bewegt. Mit grösster Vehemenz [Stormy. With utmost vehemence]

Part II

3. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell [Vigorous, not too fast]

Part III

4. Adagietto: Sehr langsam [Very slow]

5. Rondo-Finale: Allegro

Composed: 1901-2

First Performance: Cologne, Gürzenich Orchestra, cond. Mahler, 18 October, 1904

Mahler's Fifth is the first of his symphonies to appear without a title, an explanatory programme note or any kind of sung text. As Mahler had discovered, when you provide audiences with pointers to deeper meanings, some of them will keep getting the wrong end of the stick. This is clearly a symphony with a story to tell, but what kind of story? Fortunately for us, Mahler does provide several helpful clues. Even if he hadn't called the first movement 'Funeral March', it would be brazenly obvious that Death is portrayed here, first in magnificent ghastly pomp, then in poignant, wintry lamentation. The second movement is clearly a life-and-death struggle, culminating in a radiant hymn-tune on full brass – so, is faith the answer? And if so, what kind of faith? But in this instance affirmation collapses pathetically. Apparent defeat is followed by a manic waltzing Scherzo, all wild escapism, except for those moments when dark memories peer out from behind the curtain, or horn calls evoke the vast spaces of Mahler's beloved Alps. Then comes the famous Adagietto, an exquisite love song without words for just strings and harp, leading to a joyously determined, energetically fugal Finale, at whose height the hymn-tune returns, now apparently in unqualified triumph.

As so often with Mahler there's a personal side to all this. In 1901, just before beginning the Fifth Symphony, Mahler had survived a near-fatal haemorrhage – no wonder death is such a strong presence. Mounting anti-Semitism in Vienna had soured his feelings about his adopted home city, hence perhaps the weirdly equivocal character of the waltz-parody in the Scherzo. But he'd also met his future wife, Alma Schindler, who is clearly the beloved hymned so poignantly in the Adagietto, and the final triumph of the hymn-tune may be inspired by her too: if divine love can't help us face death, then perhaps human love can. But this is a symphony, not a novel: as Mahler's great precursor Felix Mendelssohn put it, 'Music is a language too precise for words.' These are only prompts. The real adventure begins, as Mahler realised, when we discover the meaning of the music for ourselves.