

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

3 November programme complementary content

The National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine arrive in Liverpool on their UK tour.

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.

Volodymyr Sirenko

Volodymyr Sirenko was born on 1960 in the Poltava region of Ukraine. His conducting debut took place at the Kyiv Philharmonic Hall in 1983 with works by Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Boulez. In 1989, Sirenko graduated from the Kyiv Conservatoire where he studied conducting under Prof. Allin Vlasenko. In 1990, he was a finalist at the International Conducting Competition in Prague. A year later, he was appointed as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Ukrainian Radio Symphony Orchestra, a position which he held until 1999. During this period, he made over 200 recordings with the orchestra, including Mozart Symphonies Nos. 38 and 41, Beethoven Symphony No. 9, Brahms A German Requiem, Dvorak Symphonies Nos. 7 and 9, R. Strauss Macbeth, Janacek Taras Bulba.

Since 1999 he has been the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine. Highlights include cycles of Gustav Mahler's Complete Symphonies, Bach's four Passions and Mass in B Minor, Lyatoshynsky's Complete Symphonies, Honegger's Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher, Berlioz's La damnation de Faust, and Debussy's Le Martyre de St. Sebastien. He has recorded over 50 recordings with the orchestra and the CD of Silvestrov's Requiem for Larissa was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2005. He has premiered many works by Ukrainian composers including Sylvestrov's Symphonies Nos. 7, 8, 9, Stankovych's Symphony No. 6, oratorios A Tale of Igor's Campaign and Taras Passion.

Sirenko has toured Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, China, Korea, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

He has worked with many international orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonia Warsovia, NOSPR (Katowice), the Bratislava Radio Symphony, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Israel Sinfonietta, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic. Sirenko has appeared in numerous concert halls around the world, including Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Berliner Philharmoniker, Brucknerhaus (Linz), Barbican Hall and Cadogan Hall (London), Theatre des Champs-Élysées and Opera Comique (Paris), Teatro La Fenice (Venice), Seoul Art Center, Palau de la Musica in Valencia and Centro Manuel de Falla in Granada, Filharmonia Narodowa (Warsaw), the Roy Thomson Hall (Toronto), the Tokyo City Opera and the Osaka Symphony Hall. He is also Professor of Opera and Symphonic Conducting at the National Music Academy of Ukraine.

Aleksey Semenenko

The refined, impassioned and commanding playing of Ukrainian violinist Aleksey Semenenko identify him as inheritor of the great Odessa violin tradition and earned him places on both the BBC New Generation Artists scheme and Young Concert Artists in New York, bringing him to the attention of audiences across Europe and the US.

He has given recitals at Snape Maltings, Wigmore Hall, the Kennedy Center and Alice Tully Hall, and performed concertos with orchestras including BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC

Philharmonic, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Seattle Symphony, Orchestra of St Luke's, National Orchestra of Belgium, Ulster Orchestra, Kyiv Symphony and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. His festival performances include invitations at the Hay, Cheltenham and Edinburgh festivals. This season, Semenenko tours with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine under the baton of Volodymyr Sirenko.

The most recent addition to Semenenko's discography is his new album 'Crossroads' on BIS, with pianist Artem Belogurov, featuring sonatas by Previn, Schemmer and Gay. The launch of the album was marked by a Wigmore Hall recital in which the duo performed a selection of American works.

Semenenko began his violin studies at the age of six with Zoya Mertsalova at the Stolyarsky School, making his solo debut with orchestra only a year later with the Odessa Philharmonic. He completed his studies with Zakhar Bron and Harald Schoneweg at Cologne's Hochschule für Musik and was a prize winner in the 2015 Queen Elizabeth Violin Competition. Alongside his performing career, Semenenko is Violin Professor at the Folkwang Universität der Künste. He is kindly supported by the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Formed by the Council of Ministers of Ukraine in November 1918, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine is considered to be one of the finest symphony orchestras in Eastern Europe. Its first conductor was Oleksander Horilyj. Natan Rachlin was the Artistic Director of the Orchestra from 1937 until 1962. Stefan Turchak, Volodymyr Kozhuchar, Fedir Hlushchenko, Igor Blazhkov and Theodore Kuchar have conducted the Orchestra as its Principal Conductors. Other conductors who worked with the NSOU include Kostiantyn Simeonov, Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevitch, Kurt Sanderling, Kiril Kondrashin, Kurt Masur, Hermann Abendroth, Willy Ferrero and others. Soloists who performed with the NSOU include Artur Rubinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Gidon Kremer, Oleh Krysa, Monserrat Caballe, Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo, Andrea Bocelli and Juan Diego Flores. The NSOU was entrusted with the premier performances of the works of the following composers: Boris Lyatoshynsky, Valentyn Sylvestrov, Myroslav Skoryk, and Evgen Stankovych.

The Orchestra has gained international recognition over a remarkably short period of time. Since 1993, the NSOU has released more than 100 sound recordings which include both Ukrainian and international repertoires. Most of these recordings have received the highest international acclaim. In 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) rated NSOU's recording of Boris Lyatoshynsky's Symphonies No. 2 and No. 3 as "The Best Recording of the Year".

The CD of Sylvestrov's Requiem for Larissa was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2005. The CD of Bloch and Lees' Violin Concertos was nominated for a Grammy Award four years later. The NSOU has performed in successful concert tours throughout Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, England, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America. Volodymyr Sirenko is the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine. Oleksandr Hornostai is Managing Director and Producer of the Orchestra.

About the Music – Timothy Dowling

Boris Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968)

Grazhyna, *Symphonic Ballade after Adam Mickiewicz*, Opus 58 (1955)

Andante sostenuto – Allegro risoluto – Poco meno mosso – Con moto e poco agitato – Andante – Allegro – Poco sostenuto

The Symphonic Ballade, *Grazhyna*, was composed to mark the centenary of the death of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855); Mickiewicz was the prominent Polish writer in the first half of the nineteenth century. He wrote the narrative poem, *Grazhyna*, in 1822 whilst staying in Vilnius and it celebrates the life of a mythical Lithuanian chieftain and her battles against the army of the Order of the Teutonic Knights leading to her death at the hands of her enemies. *Grazhyna* had disguised herself as her husband in order to lead the Lithuanian troops into battle and her death is marked at the climax of the symphonic poem.

Lyatoshynsky wrote a detailed programme note at the head of the orchestral score, highlighting the events being portrayed. The seven tempo markings listed above mark the turning points in the story.

The structural pillars of western sonata-form can be detected, the work opening in the depths with a slow introduction (*Andante sostenuto*); lower strings intone a chant that seems to have been proceeding before the music begins. After two minutes, a memorably expressive cor anglais solo makes its first appearance, and this can be heard as a musical portrayal of the eponymous heroine. We are then hurtled into the first battle sequence (*Allegro risoluto*), marked by trumpet fanfares and solemn brass chords. Emotional relief (*Poco meno mosso*) comes with what can be described as sonata-form secondary subject material, with prominent harp and falling string phrases depicting the pity of war.

Increasingly busy timpani and relentless forward motion (*Con moto e poco agitato*) suggest that we are moving towards the climax of the battle, with a powerful brass chorale-like theme. After we reach the climax, there is a quieter plateau (*Andante*) as two tam-tam strokes mark the death of *Grazhyna*, with the timpani providing an appropriate funereal tread, alongside lamentation by strings and horns. However, her death is transfigured through an emotional apotheosis (*Allegro*), with a more optimistic major mode suggesting her ultimate victory in the struggle. Finally, the slow introductory music returns (*Poco sostenuto*), with *Grazhyna*'s cor anglais melody once more prominent in the texture. The symphonic poem gradually ebbs away to silence, ending with two plucked notes on lower strings.

Lyatoshynsky composed this work just two years after the death of Stalin, at a time when there was increased hope for greater freedom in the USSR. Here we have a Ukrainian composer marking the anniversary of a Polish poet, who was describing the Lithuanian struggle for independence. All three countries can no doubt identify with the emotions expressed in what many consider to be Lyatoshynsky's greatest orchestral composition.

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26 (1866, revised 1867)

1. Vorspiel (*Allegro moderato*) –
2. Adagio –
3. Finale (*Allegro energico*)

For five years this work topped Classic FM's *Hall of Fame* and it remains Bruch's most popular work, indeed the only work by which he is widely known, other than his shorter *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra (1881).

Despite its appearance of having been composed in the white-heat of inspiration, Bruch's Concerto had a difficult gestation and he revised it thoroughly after its first performance in 1866

with advice from the greatest violinist of the nineteenth century, Josef Joachim. After some six re-writes (according to Bruch himself), the version we know today was premiered in early 1868.

Like Mendelssohn's Concerto the soloist opens Bruch's Concerto, but this first movement is unusually titled 'Vorspiel' (*Prelude*) and it has a sense of constant anticipation, as if it is an introduction rather than the Concerto's main centre of gravity. Thus Bruch's structure does not follow the classic example of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, as Brahms was to do just a decade later.

After the rather restless opening theme we are transported to a radiant episode in the relative major key (B-flat). An orchestral *tutti* passage then leads to a mini-cadenza section and the soloist exchanges questions and answers (or perhaps more questions) with the woodwind.

This leads directly to the central *Adagio* movement of the Concerto in a warm E-flat major, surely the slowly beating heart of this work. The *Adagio* is based on three inspired themes that combine together very effectively at its climax before drawing to a peaceful close.

However, not a full close, because the *Finale* clearly needs to follow directly, as its 'opening' in E-flat major carries on the tonality of the *Adagio* before moving back to the Concerto's home key of G, with a lively Hungarian dance-type tune in the major key. This alternates with a glorious second theme which could have Elgar's *nobilmente* inscribed as its marking in the score. But there is no Elgarian lingering here and Bruch rushes headlong towards an exultant ending.

There have been advocates for his later concertos, but in truth Bruch never recaptured the spontaneous rapture of this romantic warhorse. Sadly, he sold the rights for the work cheaply early on and its unending popularity (together with his failure to live up to the inspiration of the G minor Concerto) was a source of bitter regret in the later years of his long life. Like his close contemporary Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), Bruch remained oblivious to the developments in music across Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century and he died virtually in poverty and oblivion in 1920.

Bruch's G minor Concerto owes much to Mendelssohn's E minor Concerto, just as Grieg's A minor Piano Concerto is similarly indebted to Schumann's in the same key. The Concertos by Bruch and Grieg are often paired together with their respective role models. Perhaps the original models do strike deeper chords, but there is no denying the sheer romantic attraction of the two works inspired by the timeless masterpieces of Mendelssohn and Schumann.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
Don Juan, Tone Poem (1888)

Richard Strauss placed the following three extracts from the unfinished play by the Austrian poet and playwright Nikolaus Lenau (1802-1848) at the head of his orchestral score. The words quoted are all spoken by Don Juan and, rather than describe any dramatic action, they focus on Don Juan's hedonistic philosophy of life, trying to explain his state of mind that led to his libertine excesses. The first two quotes come from the earlier part of the play and capture Don Juan in the full throes of his excesses. In the third quotation, Don Juan has exhausted his life of sensual pleasures and he has run out of energy; he is left feeling cold and empty, as he faces his inevitable death:

1.
*Fain would I run the magic circle, immeasurably wide,
of beautiful women's manifold charms,
in full tempest of enjoyment,
to die of a kiss at the mouth of the last one.
O my friend, would that I could fly through every place
where beauty blossoms, fall on my knees before each one.
Yes! Were it but for a moment, conquer....*

2.

*I shun satiety and the exhaustion of pleasure;
I keep myself fresh in the service of beauty;
and in offending the individual
I rave for my devotion to her kind.
The breath of a woman that is
as the odour of spring today,
may perhaps tomorrow oppress me
like the air of a dungeon.
When in my changes, I travel with my love
in the wide circle of beautiful women,
my love is a different thing for each one;
I build no temple out of ruins.
Indeed, passion is always and only the new passion;
it cannot be carried from this one to that;
it must die here and spring anew there;
and, when it knows itself,
then it knows nothing of repentance.
As each beauty stands alone in the world,
so stands the love which it prefers.
Forth and away, then, to triumphs ever new,
so long as youth's fiery pulses race!*

3.

*It was a beautiful storm that urged me on;
it has spent its rage, and silence now remains.
A trance is upon every wish, every hope.
Perhaps a thunderbolt from the heights
which I contemned, struck fatally at my power of love,
and suddenly my world became a desert and darkened.
And perhaps not; the fuel is all consumed
and the heart is cold and dark.*

(English translations of Lenau's text, as quoted in footnotes from Volume One of Norman Del Mar's *Richard Strauss, a critical commentary on his life and works*, Barrie and Rockliff, 1962)

'I would ask those of you who are married to play as if you were engaged and then all will be well.'

This was Richard Strauss's later advice to an orchestra whilst rehearsing his tone poem, *Don Juan*. With this work he burst onto the musical scene in Germany and was recognised as the new hope for German music. His parents had been perhaps understandably concerned about his numerous amorous relationships during the mid-1880s. In early 1888 Strauss had been to Bologna where he saw Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and, as can be heard in every bar of *Don Juan*, he clearly fell under its intoxicatingly sensual spell.

Prior to *Don Juan* (premiered in 1889) Strauss had produced his 'symphonic fantasy' *Aus Italien* in 1886 and had then composed *Macbeth* over the next two years. With *Macbeth* he turned to the description 'tone poem', which he continued to use for his following compositions which either told a story or painted a musical picture.

The legend of the Spanish libertine Don Juan had fascinated dramatists since the middle of the seventeenth century, as witnessed by stage versions by Molière, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the epic nineteenth century poem by Lord Byron. However, Strauss turned to an unfinished play by the Austrian poet and playwright Nikolaus Lenau to inspire his own tone poem.

The very start is notoriously challenging for the orchestra and one conductor allegedly dealt with this by striding to the podium and, whilst the audience continued to applaud, he signalled for the

orchestra to launch into the music just as he mounted the podium. Hopefully, the orchestra had reached a unison by the time the applause had died down.

Strauss did not leave any clear storyline for his tone poem, but the opening is undoubtedly a portrayal of Don Juan in the heights (or depths!) of his excess. The 'love' (or perhaps that should be 'lust') music foreshadows the opening of *Der Rosenkavalier*, composed nearly a quarter of a century later. Some of the more tender woodwind music, including melting solos for oboe, remind us that the twenty-year-old Strauss composed a Suite for thirteen wind instruments: he was a natural orchestrator from an early age.

Who can fail to be stirred by the sight and sound of the four horns triumphantly blasting out Don Juan's characteristic motif, *molto espressivo e marcato*? Strauss was unerring in scoring and pacing the climactic moments in the score. Whilst the denouement is perhaps shockingly brief and bleak, it undoubtedly reflects Lenau's words:

*And suddenly my world became a desert and darkened.
And perhaps not; the fuel is all consumed
and the heart is cold and dark.*

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Mazeppa, Symphonic Poem, after Victor Hugo (1851)

Victor Hugo published his collection of poems, *Les Orientales*, in January 1829, having been inspired by the Greek War of Independence. The poems contrast the freedom-seeking Greeks and the imperialist ambitions of the Ottoman Turks. Lord Byron had written his epic poem, *Mazeppa*, a decade earlier in 1818, publishing it the following year; Liszt turned to Hugo's version for his Symphonic Poem. However, the musical themes of *Mazeppa* had occupied his mind as early as 1826 when the fifteen-year-old published twelve piano pieces titled *Étude en 48 exercices dans les tons majeur et mineur*. In 1851 Liszt reworked the fourth étude and titled it *Mazeppa*. This version formed the basis for the Symphonic Poem that he initially composed in 1851, and later revised for publication in 1854.

Hugo's poem introduces Mazeppa as a Ukrainian nobleman who became a page at the court of John Casimir, King of Poland. Mazeppa became involved in a love affair with the wife of a Podolian Count and was duly punished by being tied naked to the back of a wild horse. The symphonic poem traces his ferocious journey, the horse collapsing in death and Mazeppa being saved by Ukrainian Cossacks who then hailed him as their leader. Under his leadership, the Ukrainians subsequently won major victories in the battlefield. The story thus commemorates Mazeppa's steadfast resilience, his transformation from errant lover to responsible leader of his people.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of the twelve symphonic poems, together with the *Faust* Symphony, that Liszt composed during his Weimar years (1848-1861). In these works, Liszt fully espoused the principle of narrative music, music that tells a story or paints a picture. And, musically, we can hear the effect that his symphonic portraits had on Wagner's later music-dramas.

Liszt's portrait of Mazeppa falls distinctively into two halves. The first half hurls us straight into the ferocious journey and is unrelenting in its destructive power. The main musical theme (inevitably on brass) is simple and straightforward, an easily memorable tune that can be modified as the story progresses.

As the horse finally expires, it seems that Mazeppa too has died, but trumpets (perhaps reminiscent of the trumpets signalling Leonora's final triumph in Beethoven's *Fidelio*) portray the apparent resurrection of Mazeppa, now ready to lead his troops into victorious battle. Liszt indicates in the orchestral score that the final victory-song can be played as a separate item. Debussy, as music critic, wrote of Liszt's symphonic poem: "This symphonic poem is full of the worst faults; sometimes it is even vulgar. Yet all that tumultuous passion exerts such force that

you find yourself liking it, without quite knowing why. The fire and abandon which Liszt's genius frequently attains are much preferable to white-gloved perfection.'

The tale of Mazeppa continued to be popular through the nineteenth century; the poems of Lord Byron and Victor Hugo have already been mentioned. Tchaikovsky wrote an opera, *Mazeppa*, its text being based on a version of the tale by Alexander Pushkin.

Otherwise, listeners might want to explore a very alternative journey through the night, as depicted in the tone poem by Jean Sibelius, *Nightride and Sunrise* (1908). The ride section is as dogged and determined as Mazeppa's journey, but the exquisite sunrise is another world away from Mazeppa's song of victory.

About the Music – Stephen Johnson

Borys Lyatoshynsky (1895-1968): Symphonic Picture: Grazhyna, op 58

Composed: 1955

Most composers who worked under Russian Soviet rule had frightening run-ins with the authorities at some stage in their careers, but for Ukrainians there was extra peril in their artistic tightrope walk. Officially, Soviet Communism was pro 'The People', but Stalin's paranoia about what nationalism might lead to in terms of the Russian Soviet power bloc meant that anything that smelled of dissidence had to be stifled. Ukrainian composers and musicians were honoured one minute, roundly condemned the next. As the Party tightened its grip following the end of World War Two, Borys Lyatoshynsky's Second Symphony was held up as a heinous example of 'anti-national' (i.e. anti-Russian), 'dissonant' and 'bourgeois individualist' tendencies. 'As a composer, I am dead', wrote Lyatoshynsky, 'and I do not know when I will be resurrected'. Lyatoshynsky continued to compose – the brooding and atmospheric *Grazhyna* dates from 1955, but it had to wait to be heard.

Expressing one's true feelings under such conditions required an element of disguise. Lyatoshynsky had Polish roots, and the works of the 19th century Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz were officially in favour in the 1950s, so Lyatoshynsky chose the story of the legendary Polish heroine Grazhyna, who has to choose between love and duty to her homeland. She chooses love, but expresses great pain for the future of her homeland. In identifying with her, Lyatoshynsky is able to convey his own grief about Ukraine's fate in the 20th Century under a mask of official respectability. It is an eloquent testimonial.

Max Bruch (1838-1920): Violin Concerto No 1 in G minor, Op. 26

1. Vorspiel [Prelude]. Allegro Moderato -
2. Adagio -
3. Finale. Allegro energico

Composed: 1866, rev. 1868

First performed (revised version): 7 January 1868, Joseph Joachim (violin), cond. Karl Martin Rheinthal

It would be good to think that Max Bruch derived some material gain from the huge popularity of his First Violin Concerto. But no: he sold it to a publisher for a one-off payment, which meant that he had endure seeing it played all over the world whilst the takings went elsewhere. Unsurprisingly he turned against the concerto, which is particularly saddening as it really is an outstandingly beautiful and original work. In general Bruch aligned himself with the conservative trends in German music in his time. But formally speaking Bruch's First Violin Concerto is quite original. In most 19th century concertos, the first movement is the most substantial and dramatic. But Bruch calls his first movement *Vorspiel* - 'Prelude' - and its role is, in many ways preparatory.

The opening is hushed, expectant, then dark and turbulent, with plenty of ardent lyricism for the violin. It's after we've eased into the *Adagio*, and the violin enters with a long-breathed, exquisite

melody, that we sense that the first movement has in fact been an expert preparation for this moment. Nervously excited at first, the finale quickly gains in strength until the violin sweeps in with a majestic virtuosic theme, full of figures on two, three or even four strings at a time, bringing the full explosion of virtuosity anticipated, but never fully delivered, in that 'Prelude' first movement. No wonder it was such an instant hit.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949): Don Juan ('Tone Poem after Nicolaus Lenau'), op 20

Composed: 1888

First Performed: 11 November 1889, Weimar, Court Theatre cond. Strauss

Don Juan was another instant hit. Overnight, critics were talking of the twenty-five year old Richard Strauss as the most important German composer since Wagner. Strauss himself had little doubts that the work was going to be a success. 'The orchestra huffed and puffed but did its job famously', he wrote. 'One of the horn players sat there out of breath, sweat pouring from his brow, asking "Good God, in what way have we sinned that you should have sent us this scourge!"' Conducting *Don Juan* some years later he told the orchestra, 'I would ask those of you who are married to play as if you were still engaged and then all will be well'.

In this musical response to the poem by Nicolaus Lenau, Strauss spends rather more time dwelling on the 'beautiful storm' of the great womaniser's adventures than on his desolate end. The beginning is a great upward surge of exultant feeling, from which emerges a splendid, forward striding violin tune. A vision of alluring femininity (liquid harp and sweetly languishing solo violin) is followed by more ardent adventures. Suddenly, when the music seems at its height, comes the cut off (silence) followed by complete collapse. Is this the inner emptiness Juan has always been fleeing? There is no attempt to elicit sympathy, just dissolving string tremolos and three final bare pizzicato chords: in Lenau's words, 'the oil is burnt out, and the hearth is cold and dark'.

Franz Liszt (1811-86): Symphonic Poem *Mazeppa*

Composed: 1851-4

First Performed: 16 April 1854, Weimar, Court Theatre, cond. Liszt

For Liszt, the abstract symphony, perfected in the classical era by Haydn and Mozart, was a thing of the past. Beethoven had pointed the way to something new: a symphonic orchestral work that could paint pictures, tell stories, even communicate ideas – a 'symphonic poem'. Liszt wrote twelve of these during his years as music director at the Court Theatre in the duchy of Weimar. For most of them the reception was mixed, but *Mazeppa* fared particularly badly. Applause was faint, and one influential Austrian paper opined that 'People must not allow themselves to be persuaded that this is music with any claims to importance, or destined for a great future'.

That 'must not' is interesting. What danger was it that the critic sensed in *Mazeppa*? The music is certainly powerful, and already Liszt was stretching the fabric of tonal harmony in unsettling ways. But the message is more subversive still. In those days, nationalism was still regarded with alarm by European conservative regimes, and the tale of Mazeppa, a Ukrainian hero, who leads his people to freedom from oppressive foreign powers was inflammatory stuff. And Liszt tells it with such urgency and passion, not surprisingly, given that his Hungarian homeland had recently tried to free itself from Austrian domination, only to be put down by Russian troops. It is a manifesto in music, and one whose message still reverberates today.