

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 16 programme complementary content

Two years ago, Nicolas Altstaedt performed Elgar's *Cello Concerto* with Andrew Manze and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Now the cellist returns to play Walton's *Cello Concerto* in a concert which also includes the feelgood Overture from Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, and Beethoven's intoxicating Seventh Symphony.

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.

Andrew Manze

Since 2018, [Andrew Manze](#) has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and he's a great favourite of Liverpool audiences. He made his debut with the Orchestra more than a decade ago and has appeared regularly on the Hope Street stage ever since.

With boundless energy and warmth – and an extensive and scholarly knowledge of the repertoire – Manze is in great demand as a guest conductor from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles. He began his career as an Early Music specialist, becoming Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music at the age of 31. Along with a busy conducting career he also teaches, edits and writes about music and is in demand as a broadcaster. He is currently Chief Conductor of the [NDR Radiophilharmonie](#).

This season, along with these two November concerts, he'll conduct Sheku Kanneh-Mason performing Weinberg on April 4 and Nielsen's *Violin Concerto* on April 11.

Nicolas Altstaedt

German-French cellist [Nicolas Altstaedt](#), returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after making [his debut](#) with the Orchestra and Andrew Manze in a special platinum jubilee concert in 2022.

Born in Heidelberg in 1982, the soloist, conductor and artistic director is one of the most sought-after artists today and has a repertoire which spans centuries from early to contemporary music, played on both period and modern instruments. Altstaedt has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras and as a chamber musician. He is artistic director of the Lockenhaus Chamber Music Festival and the [Haydn Philharmonie](#), and as a [conductor](#) he works closely with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

During his career, Altstaedt has won a host of awards and was a *BBC* New Generation artist from 2010-12. In 2020, he received the Gramophone Chamber Award for his recording of the *String Trio* by Sandor Veress and Bartók's *Piano Quintet*.

This season's engagements include a concert with the Tapiola Sinfonietta in Helsinki, Elgar's *Cello Concerto* with the Belgrade Philharmonic, and in Paris with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

Gioachino Rossini

[Gioachino Rossini](#) must certainly have been inspired, because he claimed it took him less than three weeks to write his comic opera – or ‘melodramma giocoso’ – *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. But despite only being a youthful 21, *The Italian Girl in Algiers* was actually the eleventh opera the precocious Italian had composed.

Rossini was born at [Pesaro](#), on the Adriatic coast, and was the only child of a town trumpeter father and a seamstress mother who worked hard to keep the family afloat. In 1802, when Gioachino was ten, the family moved inland, and he studied music with a priest who had works by Mozart and Haydn in his collection. They made a huge impression on the young Rossini.

He started composing operas aged 14 and the first to be staged, to some success, was *The Marriage Contract* in 1810. In total, the prolific Rossini would compose 39 operas between 1806 and 1829, the most famous remaining *The Barber of Seville*.

Rossini conducted the premiere of *The Italian Girl in Algiers* at Venice’s Teatro San Benedetto in May 1813.

Listen to the [Overture](#) from *The Italian Girl in Algiers*.

William Walton

In 1956, [Sir William Walton](#) and his wife Susana moved from Britain to the island of Ischia, nestling in the Bay of Naples. The couple had visited the lush volcanic island regularly since their marriage in Argentina eight years before, and now decided to make its northwest tip their permanent home. There, under the blue skies of southern Europe, Susana Walton created a garden paradise [Giardini la Mortella](#) while her husband settled down to compose in the scented, balmy surroundings of their island paradise.

The composer had recently been commissioned by the Liverpool Philharmonic Society to write his [Second Symphony](#) with the aim of premiering it the following year to mark the 750th anniversary of Liverpool’s charter.

In the event, Walton would miss that deadline and the symphony would not be staged at Hope Street until 1960. One reason was that he was distracted by other compositions including his [Cello Concerto](#) which he was working on at the same time. The concerto had been commissioned by the Ukrainian-born American cellist [Gregor Piatigorsky](#) who played it in a premiere in Boston in January 1957. It received a mixed reception, with some critics finding it old-fashioned and tame. It received its British premiere a month later, where the *Manchester Guardian* declared it to be “a modern masterpiece”. And in the 66 years since its composition, it has continued to gather admirers – cellist Steve Isserlis calls it “poetic, dramatic, intensely lyrical”.

Did you know? Among Walton’s many cinematic scores was the music for the 1942 film *The First of the Few*. Its Spitfire Prelude and Fugue was premiered by the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at Hope Street in January 1943.

Listen to Nicolas Altstaedt play Walton’s [Cello Concerto](#).

Ludwig van Beethoven

The year 1811 didn’t begin particularly well for [Ludwig van Beethoven](#). While he was riding high after a [rapturous review](#) of his Fifth Symphony the previous summer, in March 1811 Austria’s currency was devalued – hitting the composer in the pocket through a reduced annuity.

Added to which, his health was also causing him concern. After being advised to rest by his doctor, Beethoven decamped to the Bohemian spa town of [Teplitz](#) to take the waters, and while there he started to compose a [new symphony](#).

He would return to the composition (and Teplitz where he famously had a not-altogether successful encounter with Goethe) in 1812. Interestingly, while the symphony is considered one of his most ebullient, it was its sombre and profound second movement which proved an instant hit, with the audience at its 1813 premiere demanding an immediate encore. Beethoven too was pleased with the four-movement work, calling it his “most excellent symphony”.

Listen to the Vienna Philharmonic play the '[Allegretto](#)' from Beethoven's *Symphony No 7 in A major*.

About the Music

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868): Overture, *The Italian Girl in Algiers*

Composed: 1813

First Performed: 22 May 1813, Venice, Teatro San Benedetto

'The genius of sheer animal spirits' was how the English writer Leigh Hunt described Rossini, and his opera *The Italian Girl in Algiers* is a glorious, farcical display where a very spirited young Italian woman manages to run rings around an Algerian governor who tries to trap her in his harem. Rossini was just 21 when he composed it, and already an experienced opera composer (he claimed to have written this one in just 18 days), but it was *The Italian Girl in Algiers* who set him on course to dominate the world of comic opera in the 19th Century. The Overture (soon a concert favourite across the world) is a wonderful appetiser for the opera, overflowing with catchy tunes and bursting with cheeky, joyous life. But it's just so much fun in its own right – a brief but perfect antidote to a world which can seem rather short on joy at the moment.

William Walton (1902-83): Cello Concerto

Composed: 1957

First Performed: 25 January 1957, Boston, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Gregor Piatigorsky (cello), cond. Charles Munch

1. Moderato
2. Allegro appassionato
3. Tema ed improvvisazioni (Theme and Improvisations)

William Walton had been hailed as an iconoclastic modernist in his youth, but with time he'd revealed himself as a tender-hearted romantic, much more inclined to enchant and seduce than to provoke. At the Concerto's premiere, one critic grumbled that there was nothing in it that would 'alarm an elderly aunt'. But the Concerto's dedicatee, the outstanding cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, predicted that it would be taken up by cellists all over the world. It turned out Piatigorsky was right.

Piatigorsky was a great help to Walton during the composition process. But Walton held out against the cellist's urging on one point: Piatigorsky wanted a more rousing, showy ending, but Walton decided to keep his original hushed, mysteriously luminous coda. There is a special quality of colour and atmosphere in this Concerto, for many reflecting the magical lights and moods of the Italian island of Ischia where Walton had made his final home, and that's nowhere more evident than in that deeply poetic ending.

The Cello Concerto begins with shimmering orchestral textures, a glowing vibraphone chord and soft 'tick-tock' figures on plucked strings, above which the cello sings a long, heartfelt melody. On the surface the second movement seems a fairly typical Walton firework display, but impassioned lyricism keeps pushing its way into the foreground. The finale then presents us with a theme on muted cello, then after a dark, ruminative solo, this theme is subjected to four contrasted 'improvisations', the second and fourth being impressive display pieces for unaccompanied cello. At the end however, the Concerto's first theme returns, the cello's arching lyricism falling steadily down to the instrument's bottom string (C); and it is with this sound, slowly fading, that the work ends.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Symphony No 7 in A major, op 92

Composed: 1811-12

First Performed: 8 December 1813, Vienna, cond. Beethoven

1. Poco sostenuto – Vivace
2. Allegretto
3. Presto – Assai meno presto – Presto – Assai meno presto – Presto
4. Allegro con brio

Increasingly plagued by a variety of ailments, Beethoven decamped in the summer of 1811 to the Bohemian spa-town of Teplitz, a place of relative peace and safety in turbulent times (Napoleon's warmongering was still causing huge suffering in Europe). Invigorated, he returned to Vienna with plans for two symphonies. He began writing the first of these, his Seventh, almost immediately; the second emerged twelve years later as the monumental choral Ninth. *Symphony No 7* feels like a celebration of renewed hope and physical energy – Wagner famously described it as 'the apotheosis of the dance'. Its sheer dynamism, expressed in bracing muscular rhythms and brilliant orchestration, can in some performances border on the unnerving.

Slow woodwind phrases open the symphony, brusquely punctuated by full orchestral chords – not much to dance about here, one might think. But then faster string figures galvanize the music into physical action. Eventually the Vivace begins, at first with just a simple repeated rhythm: an emphatic long note followed by two short ones (ONE – two-three), which not only dominates this bright, exuberant movement but plays a crucial part in the other three. You can also hear it in main theme of the following Allegretto, after the initial minor key wind chord. This magically atmospheric movement, with its hypnotic, sleep-walking tread (again ONE – two-three), was such a success at its first performance that it had to be repeated.

The Presto has all the racing forward momentum of a typical Beethoven Scherzo, twice interrupted by a slower Trio section. One last fading echo of the slower Trio theme is dismissed by five crisp orchestral chords. After this the finale is magnificent dance of triumph, pounding out almost to frenzy the symphony's seminal rhythm. After a moment of dark mystery, the coda builds in two huge waves, leading to a stamping gesture like the final flourish of an elemental flamenco.