

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 19 programme complementary content**

Leave the winter behind and enjoy some musical sunshine in this programme which marries Rossini's dashing Mediterranean drama with Grieg's globetrotting chancer *Peer Gynt*. Add Beethoven's intoxicating Seventh Symphony and an elegiac slice of Vaughan Williams for cello, and it should be quite an evening.

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*.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams**

[Ralph Vaughan Williams](#) had a busy Second World War. Among his non-composing duties, he helped organise the daily concerts held at the National Gallery, chaired a Home Office committee for the release of interned alien musicians, and served on CEMA – the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts and the forerunner of the Arts Council. So perhaps it’s no surprise that not all the compositions he worked on during that time were ultimately completed.

The elegiac *Dark Pastoral* is based on sketches by Vaughan Williams for the slow movement of an unfinished *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, and arranged by [David Matthews](#). Vaughan Williams had planned the concerto for the great [Pablo Casals](#) – the cellist had previously premiered the composer’s *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* at a concert of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1930. It was in 1942 that Vaughan Williams started to sketch out the slow movement, but for one reason or another he never got any further. He was also working on his Fifth Symphony at the time and would conduct that at the Proms the following year.

But almost 70 years after Vaughan Williams abandoned them, David Matthews was commissioned by the *BBC* to take the fragments of music and turn them into a finished piece, and it was premiered at the Proms in 2010.

**Did you know? Adeline Fisher, who Ralph Vaughan Williams married in 1897, was a gifted cellist and pianist – and the first cousin of Virginia Woolf and artist Vanessa Bell.**

Listen to an excerpt of Steve Isserlis playing Vaughan Williams’ [Dark Pastoral for Cello and Orchestra](#) at the 2010 *BBC* Proms.

## **Edvard Grieg**

If there were two giants of the arts in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Norway it was undoubtedly composer [Edvard Grieg](#) and playwright and director [Henrik Ibsen](#) (artist Edvard Munch would make up a triptych). So it’s perhaps not surprising the two men would find each other – and the result would be one of the most popular and enduring pieces of music in the classical canon.

They first met in 1866 at the [Scandinavian Club in Rome](#) and kept in touch as each of their careers progressed.

The following year, while still living in Italy, Ibsen wrote his masterwork *Peer Gynt* – a five act drama telling the story of a peasant poet and braggart and his adventures in Norway and overseas.

Seven years on, the playwright, by then resident in Germany, wrote a lengthy letter to Grieg to ask if he would compose the music for a new [production of the play](#), which eventually opened in Oslo (then called Christiania) in February 1876. Grieg, who had expended both perspiration and exasperation on the composing of 26 numbers, could be found in the pit, conducting the orchestra. A decade later, Grieg created two suites from a much shorter selection of the wide-ranging incidental music, including *Morning Mood*, *Anitra's Dance* and *In the Hall of the Mountain King*.

Enjoy [Morning](#) from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*.

## 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)/David Matthews (b 1943): *Dark Pastoral for cello and orchestra***

Sketched (Vaughan Williams): 1942, completed (Matthews): 2010

First Performed: 5 September 2010, BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, BBC Concert Orchestra, Steven Isserlis (cello), cond. Paul Daniel

In 1942, Vaughan Williams began working on a cello concerto for the great Spanish cellist Pablo Casals. Why he never finished it isn't clear, but he'd got some way into the slow movement when he put it on one side – perhaps hoping to return to it later? Vaughan Williams always wrote wonderfully for strings, and cellists have long lamented the fact that this project came to nothing. The composer David Matthews however felt it had potential – the seeds were all there, you might say – and his affinity for Vaughan Williams' music is well known. So Matthews decided to provide his own completion, and the result is an intensely lyrical meditation, to which Matthews gave the title *Dark Pastoral*, a term originally coined to describe the more melancholic nature poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. It certainly fits here – beautiful it may be, but it isn't all nostalgic sweetness.

## **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907): Suite, *Peer Gynt***

Composed: 1875

First Performed (as theatre incidental music): 24 February 1876, Christiania (now Oslo)

1. Prelude to Act 1 (Im Hochzeitshof)
2. Morning Mood
3. Solveig's Song
4. In the Hall of The Mountain King

On the whole, Grieg liked to think on the small scale: exquisite miniatures for solo piano, heart-melting songs and lyrical, intimate chamber pieces. But there are two big exceptions: the lovely, ever-popular Piano Concerto (1868), and the incidental music he wrote for the first production of Henrik Ibsen's verse drama *Peer Gynt* in 1876. *Peer Gynt* is a chancer and a bit of a rogue, but in the process of travelling across the world and encountering all manner of colourful persons and beings, he learns a kind of wisdom – perhaps (Ibsen leaves that open).

Initially Grieg was thrilled to be asked by Ibsen, one of his heroes, to supply music for his play. But actually getting the score written proved a trial, and Grieg grumbled constantly. What he provided was a sequence of short pieces: background music, music to fill in while the scenery was changed, music to set scenes – not that far from film music in fact. But many of these make lovely character pieces in their own right. The two orchestral suites extracted from the theatre score in 1888 and 1893 soon became concert favourites, though since then many conductors have compiled their own sequences. Through these, tone portraits like the exquisitely fresh 'Morning Mood' and the deliciously sinister 'Hall of the Mountain King' have become some of the best-loved classical miniatures of all time. Grieg may not have been able to command the epic sweep of a Beethoven, but when it came to distilling a character or an atmosphere in a short timescale, he was unbeatable.

## 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.