

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra November 30 programme complementary content**

Love is in the air in this November concert which sees superstar soprano Sonya Yoncheva return to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Chausson does high romance in his *Poem of Love and the Sea*, while there's passion aplenty between the doomed lovers of Wagner's *Prelude and Liebestod* from *Tristan and Isolde*. Meanwhile, after the interval there's a chance to bask in the sunny delights of Dvořák's colourful Eighth Symphony.

This companion page draws together a range of complementary content which 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.

### **Sonya Yoncheva**

Superstar soprano [Sonya Yoncheva](#) returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after making her debut with the Orchestra in May 2022.

The multi award-winning Bulgarian was born in Plovdiv where she studied piano and voice at the National School for Music and Dance. As a teenager, she presented a show about music on Bulgarian television and won several music competitions, one with her younger brother [Marin Yonchev](#), who himself went on to triumph on the Star Academy reality show.

Yoncheva studied at the [Conservatoire de musique de Genève](#) and has gone on to forge a career as a much sought-after performer both of opera and in recital work. She has performed at leading venues across the world including the Metropolitan Opera, Milan's Teatro alla Scala, Paris Opera, Staatsoper Berlin, Teatro Real, Royal Opera House, and at the Salzburg Festival.

Among her many awards are Medici.tv Artist of the Year 2017, the Readers Award in the 2019 International Opera Awards, and the 2021 Opus Klassik Singer of the Year. Future appearances include the title role in Luigi Cherubini's *Médée* at La Scala in Milan, and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca* in Berlin. She will also return to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in May 2024 for [A Celebration of Puccini](#).

## Richard Wagner

Wagner's opera [Tristan and Isolde](#) – which premiered in Munich in 1865 – certainly excited strong views among the German composer's contemporaries. Verdi, on hearing it, said he stood “in wonder and terror”, while Clara Schumann declared it “[the most repugnant thing](#)” she had ever heard.

In the 158 years since it burst onto the stage, acclaim has far outweighed abhorrence. And the work, with its range of orchestral colour and harmony, influenced succeeding generations of composers from Berg to Britten.

Based on the 12<sup>th</sup> Century romance *Tristan and Iseult*, the tale of doomed love and adulterous passion was also inspired by the writing of philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer – along with Wagner's own idealised love for his mistress, the poet [Mathilde Wesendonck](#). The three-act opera was begun in 1857 while Wagner was still living in exile in Switzerland and continued in Venice where the married composer decamped – alone – the following year to escape his tangled love life.

The *Prelude and Liebestod* (which translates as ‘love-death’) comes from the beginning and end of the opera and was performed as a concert piece several years before *Tristan and Isolde* had its premiere.

**Did you know? Wagner had a devoted patron in King Ludwig II of Bavaria who became infatuated with the composer after he heard *Lohengrin* aged 15. He supported Wagner financially and bankrolled the building of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth.**

Listen to [Prelude and Liebestod](#) from *Tristan and Isolde*.

## Ernest Chausson

The history of classical music is awash with composers who died before their time, leaving a ‘what if?’ hanging in the air. Lili Boulanger passed away aged just 24, and Schubert, Mozart, Purcell, Bizet and Mendelssohn are just some of those who never reached their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.

[Ernest Chausson](#) achieved that landmark, but his life was cut short when in 1899, aged 44, he was cycling near his country retreat northwest of Paris when he lost control on a downhill stretch of road and crashed into a wall, with [fatal results](#).

Chausson, who was buried in Paris' famous [Père Lachaise cemetery](#) (the resting place of some 40 composers), left a wife and children and a catalogue of works including songs, a symphony, Poeme for violin and orchestra, string quartet and pieces for piano.

The song cycle [Poème de l'amour et de la mer](#) (*Poem of Love and the Sea*) was composed over a ten year period from 1882, and its structure features two separate sections – based on his friend Maurice Bouchor's poems *La Fleur des eaux* and *La Mort de l'amour* – divided by an orchestral interlude. It received its orchestral premiere in Paris in April 1893.

Listen to Chausson's [Poème de l'amour et de la mer](#).

## Antonin Dvořák

It was a happy and content [Antonin Dvořák](#) who spent the summer of 1889 at his Bohemian retreat at [Vysoká](#). The 48-year-old composer and conductor had recently been elected to the Czech Academy of Science, Literature and Arts, and in June he had received the Austrian Order of the Iron Cross.

Settled in his villa nestled near the banks of Lake Rusalka, ideas for a new symphony came tumbling out of his head and onto the page. He created the sketch for the work in 17 days and within three months he had completed the entire score. Dvořák went on to conduct the premiere of the work in February 1890 at Prague's National Theatre.

While his Ninth may be the more famous, its [sunny predecessor](#) is packed with delightful melodies both inspired by Bohemian folk tunes and straight out of the imagination of its creator.

Listen to a performance of [Symphony No. 8](#) by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, recorded in 2016.

## About the Music

### **Richard Wagner (1813-83): Prelude & 'Liebestod' from *Tristan and Isolde***

Composed: 1857-9

First Performed: 10 June 1865, Munich, National Theatre, cond. Hans von Bülow

*'Since I have never, in my entire life, tasted the true happiness of love I intend raising a monument to that most beautiful of dreams, in which this love shall, for once, be utterly fulfilled. This is the plan I have in mind for Tristan and Isolde...'*

So wrote Wagner to his friend Franz Liszt in 1855. Was he right about 'never tasting true love'? Mathilde Wesendonck, the pretty, intelligent and cultured wife of a Zurich-based silk merchant, has gone down in history as the inspiration for Wagner's erotic masterpiece *Tristan und Isolde* – she and her husband gave him political sanctuary during his exile from Saxony in 1849. But it's quite likely that Wagner's relationship with Mathilde was never consummated. If so, that might partly explain why the music of *Tristan* often sounds like a sustained ode to the unattainable: sometimes ecstatic, sometimes desperate, never quite at peace. Of course, tragic operas do tend to end in death, but Wagner's rapturous final hymn to death as the true goal of love – the famous *Liebestod* ('Love's Death') – is without parallel in its oceanic intensity, or in the ambiguous release of its ending. And before that, listening to the opera's Prelude, one may sense that this astonishing, mould-breaking expression of unappeasable desire, of emotional as well as physical hunger, had been long in preparation in Wagner's restless mind. The aching opening cello phrase, and the exquisitely painful woodwind dissonances that grow from it, have together become the most potent symbol of longing in the classical repertoire.

### **Ernest Chausson (1855-99): *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* ('Poem of love and of the sea')**

1. La Fleur des eaux ('The Flower of the Waters')
2. Interlude
3. La Mort d'amour ('The Death of Love')

Text: Maurice Buchour (1855-1929)

Composed: 1882-92

First Performed: 21 February 1893, Brussels (voice & piano version), 8 April 1893, Paris, Société Nationale de Musique, Éléonore Bland (soprano), cond. Gabriel Marie (orchestral version)

Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* reverberated like a giant bombshell through late 19<sup>th</sup> century musical life. Few composers escaped its influence. In the year he began *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*, Ernest Chausson made a pilgrimage to Wagner's Festival Theatre in Bayreuth and came

back a changed man. On several levels, *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* is clearly a response to *Tristan*. As in Wagner's opera, the sea is a vital presence, its moods closely mirroring those of the drama. And the title of Chausson's finale sounds a lot like Wagner's 'Love's Death'. But the *Poème* is far from derivative. It is the death of love itself that Chausson half-mourns, half-embraces lovingly in 'La Mort de l'amour' and, unlike some of his contemporaries, Chausson was evidently more taken with the opera's quieter, more inward, delicately poetic passages than with the elemental, oceanic climaxes. He was, after all, far less extrovert, less self-assertive than Wagner, and his capacity for self-criticism bordered on the pathological – 'Another failure!' he noted on completing his Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet in 1891. Where *Tristan* strains constantly towards the unattainable, *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* seems to have accepted almost from the beginning that love is a beautiful illusion, and to be preparing itself for loss. And in place of Wagner's full-on self-revelation, we have a mode of expression which is much more French – delicate, rarely demonstrative, recalling powerful feelings at a distance, whether that distance be one of time, place, or something more inward. 'The time of lilacs and of roses is dead forever, along with our love' sings the soprano at the end, with a strange mixture of sadness and exquisite serenity.

### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): Symphony No 8, Op 88**

1. Allegro con brio
2. Adagio
3. Allegretto grazioso
4. Allegro ma non troppo

Composed: 1889

First Performed: 2 February 1890, Prague, National Theatre

After his turbulent, tightly constructed Seventh Symphony (1884-5), Dvořák set out to create something 'quite different' in his Eighth. While Symphony No 7 is a compelling demonstration of how to make a great deal from a few taut musical motifs, the Eighth Symphony overflows with strongly flavoured and instantly memorable themes. Above all, it's the expression of joyous, overflowing heart. In an age when tragic or heroic symphonies represented a challenging ideal, Dvořák had done something else – created a symphony that really is profoundly happy.

At the start cellos lead off with a solemn, chant-like theme in the minor key, but this is soon dispelled by a cheery birdcall on flute, and an exciting crescendo builds to a resolutely major-key hymn theme on violas and cellos, which in turn yields to pure dancing joy. This is the emotional template for the whole symphony: there are shadows, but warmth and light always prevail. The second movement echoes the third of Dvořák's *Poetic Mood-Pictures*, Op 85, 'At the Old Castle'. We take in the moods of the ancient fortress: grave one moment, sunlit the next, with fanfares suggesting memories of past strife in happier, safer times. Then comes the gorgeous Allegretto grazioso, half languid waltz, half sweetly melancholic folk dance. Finally, an arresting trumpet fanfare introduces a hymn-like tune led by cellos, but solemnity is soon put to flight in the following variations. The ending is pure, unbridled high spirits.