

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra January 11 programme complementary content

This season's Artist in Residence Simone Lamsma returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall for what is sure to be an unmissable performance of Sibelius' haunting *Violin Concerto*. Elsewhere there's also plenty of musical drama in a programme that includes Suk's delightful *Scherzo fantastique* and Rachmaninov's powerful First 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. He has now extended his contract until 2028.

### Simone Lamsma

Multi award-winning Dutch violinist [Simone Lamsma](#) has won acclaim for her "polished, expressive and intense" performances and "impressive dynamic range".

Born in Leeuwarden, Lamsma started playing the [violin at five](#) and when she was 11, she moved to Britain to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School with Professor Hu Kun. She continued to work with him at the [Royal Academy of Music](#), where she was also a student of Professor Maurice Hasson, graduating at the age of 19 with first class honours and three awards including the HRH Princess Alice Prize for exemplary studentship.

In 2011 she became an associate of the Royal Academy, and in 2019 Lamsma was made a [Fellow](#) – an honour limited to just 300 alumni.

She made her solo debut aged 14 performing Paganini's *Violin Concerto No.1* with the Northern Dutch Orchestra, and over the last two decades has forged a busy and successful career in concert halls worldwide where she is in demand as both a soloist and recitalist.

Lamsma, whose extensive repertoire includes around five dozen violin concertos, plays the 1718 Mlynarski Stradivarius which is on generous loan from an anonymous benefactor.

She is this season's Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Artist in Residence, and along with this concert she also performed Brahms' *Double Concerto* at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in November.

Watch Simone Lamsma answer [20 quickfire questions](#).

## Josef Suk

[Josef Suk](#), born in Bohemia in 1874, was immersed in music from an early age and learned initially from his father who taught him violin, piano and organ.

But it was when the teenage Josef attended the Prague Conservatory that he came to the attention of fellow Czech Antonin Dvořák who had been persuaded to take the position of professor of composition. Suk was, reputedly, one of the older composer's favourite students and in 1898 would go on to marry Dvořák's 20-year-old daughter Otilie, herself [a gifted musician and composer](#).

The couple had a son, an engineer who was also a talented amateur pianist and violinist, while their [grandson Josef](#) became a leading violinist and conductor.

Otilie was a great inspiration to Suk, and when she died in 1905 (aged just 27 and barely 12 months after her father had also passed away), Suk was devastated, pouring his grief into perhaps his best-known work, the [Asrael Symphony](#).

While Suk spent the bulk of his life as second violinist with the Czech String Quartet, he did also have a busy parallel career as a composer and his output covered piano, choral and vocal, and chamber and orchestral pieces.

His energetic and evocative *Scherzo fantastique* was premiered at the Rudolfinum in Prague in April 1905.

Listen to Josef Suk's [Scherzo fantastique](#).

## Jean Sibelius

His father was interested in the instrument, and his [Uncle Pehr](#) had several violins in his collection. So perhaps it's not surprising a young [Jean Sibelius](#) picked up a bow before a pen and by his teenage years he was serious about becoming a full-time fiddler.

At the age of 16, Sibelius started lessons with Gustav Levander – then the best violin teacher in his hometown Hämeenlinna – and later with Russian Mitrovan Wasilieff at the Helsinki Music Institute.

But an accident meant despite dreaming of a career as a virtuoso violinist, Sibelius could never draw the bow to its full length. When he failed an audition for the Vienna Philharmonic, he turned away from performing and towards the composing which had already started to take up more and more of his time.

What is perhaps surprising given his youthful passion, is that he only ever composed [one concerto](#) for the violin. In fact, it's his only concerto full stop. Sibelius completed the technically demanding work in 1904, although after a somewhat calamitous premiere in Helsinki (with the composer on the podium), he revised it before it was staged again the following year, this time in Berlin and with Richard Strauss conducting.

Watch Simone Lamsma playing Sibelius' [Violin Concerto](#).

## Sergei Rachmaninov

What do Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Verdi's *La Traviata* and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony have in common? Well, despite being some of the most admired and popular works in the classical canon, they all had famously disastrous or disappointing premieres.

So [Rachmaninov](#) finds himself in good, nay great, company when it comes to the birth of his stirring [First Symphony](#), premiered in St Petersburg in March 1897 with fellow composer Alexander Glazunov conducting. It should have been a triumph. But something went wrong. Some reports suggest [Glazunov](#) was drunk, others that the symphony was under-rehearsed and the orchestra ragged and dull.

Whatever the cause, the 24-year-old Rachmaninov was so distressed he left before the end, and the negative response to the performance destroyed his confidence, crippling his ability to put pen to manuscript until – [following years of therapy](#) – he came out fighting again with his sublimely romantic Second Piano Concerto.

Meanwhile, although the First Symphony was not performed again in his lifetime, it has enjoyed a deserved renaissance since its composer's death.

**Did you know? Rachmaninov was a car enthusiast who bought his first vehicle in 1912 and then reportedly splashed out for a new model every year. In 1923 he invested \$5,000 in aviation pioneer Igor Sikorsky's fledgling company, becoming its first vice-president.**

Listen to excerpts from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's recording of Rachmaninov's [Symphony No 1 in D minor](#).

## About the Music

### **Josef Suk (1874-1935): *Scherzo fantastique***

Composed: 1903

First Performed: 18 April 1905, Rudolfinum, Prague

Josef Suk learned a lot from his beloved father-in-law, Antonín Dvořák. It's no insult to say that some of his earlier works sound rather like Dvořák – shared love of Czech folk music, a similar appealing freshness and generous melodic gift. But in later years, and especially after the death of his wife Otilie, Suk's style became more uneasy, probing, more edgily modern, most notably in his tragic masterpiece, the *Asrael* Symphony (1906). *Scherzo fantastique* sits on the cusp of this shift in language and tone. On one level it's a delightful, tuneful 'fantastic' scherzo in the tradition of Berlioz's fairy-tale 'Queen Mab' (from *Romeo et Juliette*) and Mendelssohn's magical *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture. But there are signs of something more inward-looking too, particularly towards the end, where the cellos intone in rich harmonies. What the story might be, we are left to guess – but it's hard to resist the impression that there might be one.

### **Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): Violin Concerto in D minor, Op 7**

1. Allegro moderato

2. Adagio di molto

3. Allegro, ma non tanto

Composed: 1903-4; revised: 1905

First Performed: 8 February 1904, Helsinki Philharmonic Society, Victor Nováček (violin)

'Dreamt I was twelve years old and a virtuoso', Sibelius noted sadly in his diary in 1915. Today, it may be hard to understand how a man with five magnificent symphonies, a growingly popular violin concerto and a sequence of superbly imaginative tone poems to his credit should feel in any way an artistic failure. But there was a time when a career as a violin virtuoso had been a real possibility. What destroyed Sibelius' prospects in this direction was his dreadful nervousness on the stage. And so he bowed to what he believed to be the ruling of Fate - he was to be a composer, not a violinist - but not without lasting regret.

Then, around the turn of the century, an insightful friend urged him to use his experience as a violinist to create a violin concerto. Composing it was torment. Sibelius' alcoholism was bad at the best of times, but while he was writing the concerto it got even worse: the wonderful slow second movement was apparently sketched out during a three-day hangover. His heroically patient wife Aino needed all her reserves of strength to help him through this ordeal. But the result was one of the most treasured, and ferociously challenging concertos in the violin repertory. It's also one of the most poignant – is this Sibelius' requiem for his career as a violinist? Yet for all its dark emotional intensity, there's also tremendous strength in this music. The long floating, soaring violin melody at the beginning is beautifully shaped, and even in the heart-wrenching slow movement one can sense the hand of Sibelius the master symphonist. The turbulent but unambiguously major-key ending suggests inner darkness confronted and defied. For Sibelius himself there may have been an element of wish-fulfilment here, but as art it's resoundingly convincing.

### **Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943): Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op 13**

1. Grave – Allegro non troppo
2. Allegro animato
3. Larghetto
4. Allegro con fuoco

Composed: 1895

First Performed: 28 March 1897, St Petersburg, cond. Alexander Glazunov

The fact that we're able to hear Rachmaninov's First Symphony at all is down to a remarkable stroke of good luck. The first performance was a catastrophe. Glazunov, the conductor, hated it - according to one account he was drunk – and the orchestra played badly. The critics were savage, and the 24-year-old composer fell into a terrible depression that left him creatively paralysed for three years. The symphony was never performed again in Rachmaninov's lifetime, and when he fled Russia for good after the Revolution of 1917, he left the score behind, where it vanished. It was only in 1944, the year after Rachmaninov's death, that a complete set of orchestral parts was discovered in the St Petersburg (then Leningrad) Conservatory, and the conductor Alexander Gauk was able to reconstruct the score and perform it.

It made quite an impression. The strength of the ideas, and the intensity and imagination with which they developed, immediately showed that Glazunov and those Russian critics had got it terribly wrong. Yes, it's the work of a young, inexperienced composer, and Rachmaninov later talked about revising it, which means that even he realised that in essence it was sound. Surprisingly perhaps, given Rachmaninov's later reputation as a conservative late-romantic, it's highly original, even radical, for its time – which may be another reason that it was greeted with incomprehension. In fact, the whole conception is bold. Rachmaninov was partly inspired by Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*, and he took the book's Biblical inscription, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay', as a motto for the whole work. There is lyrical tenderness in the slow third movement, and delicacy in the fast second, but the outer movements have a thrillingly doom-laden, ultimately catastrophic quality – like Rachmaninov's hero Tchaikovsky, yet at the same time quite different. Most remarkable of all is the ending. Was Rachmaninov thinking of Tolstoy's Anna, who despairing of happiness in this life, throws herself under the wheels of a train? It's hard to resist the feeling that something like that must have been in this hyper-sensitive young man's mind.