

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra January 27 programme complementary content

It's Mozart's birthday and we're celebrating with some of the most beautiful music ever written.

Two of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's very own star players – Cormac Henry and Elizabeth McNulty – step forward in Mozart's enchanting *Flute and Harp Concerto*, while Nil Venditti conducts the majestic 'Jupiter' symphony and the playful *Symphony No.29*.

Everyone's invited as we say: happy 268th, Wolfgang Amadeus!

Nil Venditti

Italian-Turkish conductor [Nil Venditti](#) returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after making her debut with the Orchestra in June 2022.

Venditti, who was [born in Perugia](#), is former principal cello of the Santa Cecilia Youth Orchestra in Rome. She holds a master's degree in cello from the conservatoire at Perugia, and in conducting from the conservatoire at L'Aquila. Her tutors and mentors have included Bernard Haitink, Donato Renzetti and Jonathan Stockhammer.

In 2015, aged 20, she won first prize at the Premio Claudio Abbado for Young Musicians and won two prizes at the Jeunesses Musicales competition in Bucharest in 2017.

She has a strong affinity for the core classical repertoire of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and has also expanded her scope into the operatic field, conducting performances of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, as well as *Carmen*, *Nabucco*, and Peter Maxwell-Davies' *The Lighthouse*.

Recent engagements included conducting *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Swedish Opera, while future engagements include concerts with the BBC National Orchestra and National Chorus of Wales, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, *Rigoletto* at Staatsoper Stuttgart and Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* with the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Elizabeth McNulty interview

The harp has enjoyed a place at the heart of [Irish culture and history](#) for many centuries – Irish kings had their own personal harpists and today the harp symbol remains emblazoned on everything from passports to pints (of Guinness).

For [Elizabeth McNulty](#), it was seeing the harp on the back of coins during childhood visits to her father's family in Ireland that inspired her to want to take up the instrument herself.

The desire was fuelled further when she spotted an Irish harp in a shop window, and by family visits to the ballet to see performances of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*.

"I just always knew I wanted to play; I was absolutely determined," she recalls. "I told all my friends at school I was going to play the [harp](#), even when I wasn't sure I necessarily would.

"My mum got me put on a waiting list with the local music service [in Kent where Elizabeth grew up], because they had two harps to hire – and I had to wait for two years before having lessons because the harps they had were already out.

"So I finally had my first harp lesson when I was nine. And it was the best thing ever!"

At the age of 11, she graduated from the trad harp sized instrument she had begun learning on to her first full-size instrument, bought new for her by her parents.

“It was really exciting - I still remember the day,” she smiles.

That passion for the instrument has endured, with Elizabeth studying at Trinity Laban – where she was awarded a Leverhulme Scholarship – after taking a music degree at Royal Holloway, University of London. She has forged a busy recitalist, chamber and orchestral career, and also teaches the next generation of young harpists.

She was living and working in London (where she played with the Kantanti Ensemble) when the Principal Harp position in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra became available in 2016.

“Harp jobs in orchestras rarely come up,” she explains. “You’ll look on the internet and it will be ‘oh there’s one in the USA, one in Asia’. I saw it and got excited and applied and I was really overjoyed when I was offered a trial.”

Auditioning was the first time she had played in the city. In fact, she had only visited Liverpool once before, on a family trip to the docks when she was a child.

“When I came, I stayed on the Wirral for the first week,” Elizabeth recalls. “The person I was staying with worked for the Orchestra, so I followed her in in the car and we came through the Birkenhead Tunnel. I remember coming out and seeing these beautiful buildings and just thinking – wow, this is Liverpool!

“It’s so beautiful here in the Georgian Quarter. One of the things I really love, you always get a wonderful sunset. Whatever the weather is, there’s always a really interesting sky.

“And I was living in London before - and I still can’t get over how you can live 10 minutes away from work!”

Eight years on, she is starting 2024 in a starring role – playing Mozart’s [Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra](#) with Cormac Henry as part of an all-Amadeus programme to mark the composer’s birthday.

It’s a piece she’s performed before, although not here in Liverpool.

“Each time you come back to a piece you might decide to do things a bit differently to the time before, whether that’s interpretational or technical or fingering perhaps,” she says of her preparation for the concert.

“Even this time around now, there’s a few different things in the preparation I’ll be trying out. It’s always good to try and look at it in a new way to keep things fresh. Or as you develop as a musician, you notice new things in a piece. And you learn from each performance.

“But what’s nice is that Cormac and I have performed [chamber music](#) before a few times. I guess you learn about each other’s playing a little more so even than when you’re in an orchestra.

“Because when you’re playing in an orchestra you’re listening to a whole wall of sound. But when you’re doing a chamber piece, you really get to see how someone works musically.”

Despite being such a prolific composer, the concerto was the only harp piece Mozart ever wrote. And the 246-year-old work remains a popular part of the canon – named as one of *Classic FM*’s [top 10 pieces for harp](#).

While it’s a great piece in great company, it turns out Elizabeth also has a soft spot for a work that doesn’t make the list – and would love to perform it for Liverpool audiences one day.

She reveals: “I’ve only had the chance to play it once. But I love the Ginastera [Harp Concerto](#) – every harpist will say they love it.

“It’s really meaty. It’s lyrical but percussive and has all those elements that a harp can do.”

Cormac Henry

[Cormac Henry](#) has been Principal Flute of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra since 2002 and has also appeared as guest principal with orchestras across the UK and abroad.

As a soloist, he has appeared and recorded many times with the Orchestra, performing a wide range of music including Mozart’s concerti for flute, Bach’s *B minor suite* and *Brandenburg Concerto No.5*, the world premiere of Kurt Schwertsik’s *Atmen, du unsichtbares Gedicht!* and, most recently, Nielsen’s *Flute Concerto*.

He has also worked with other orchestras and given many solo recitals, along with performing a wide range of chamber music.

He studied at the Kerry School of Music and in Dublin. He then attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he studied with Averil Williams, followed by a postgraduate year in Stuttgart with Jean Claude Gerard.

Watch a [2016 interview](#) with Cormac Henry (in the pub!) where he talks about playing Mozart’s *Concerto for Flute and Harp*.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

It was 8pm on a cold January day in 1756 when [Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgang Theophilus](#) was born in the Mozart family apartment in Salzburg’s Getreidegasse.

His father [Leopold](#) was a respected composer, teacher and writer of books about the violin who was in the service of the city’s archbishop, while his mother [Anna Maria Pertl](#) was the daughter of a government official (and talented musician).

Wolfgang (named after his maternal grandfather) was the youngest of seven Mozart children, five of whom died in infancy, leaving just the precocious ‘[Amadeus](#)’ and his talented elder sister Maria Anna ‘[Nannerl](#)’.

The three pieces on tonight’s programme come from different periods in the composer’s life.

An 18-year-old Mozart completed his [Symphony No.29 in A major](#) at home in Salzburg in [April 1774](#), following his return from Vienna where he had gone – with his father – to seek employment. At home in Salzburg, where the family had recently moved to north of the river, Mozart busied himself with composing, including masses for the city’s archbishop, and his bassoon concerto. *Symphony No.29* shows a maturing of his musical voice.

The [Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra](#) was composed four years later during Mozart’s seven-month stay in Paris where he travelled with his mother, again to try and find work. It was commissioned by the Duc de Guines, a flautist, to play with his teenage daughter Marie-Louise-Philippine who was a keen harpist and a pupil of Mozart. In the event, De Guines never paid the young Austrian for the piece.

Finally, what has been nicknamed his ‘Jupiter’ symphony dates from the summer of 1788, and would become his final symphonic work. It is also his longest – and is celebrated as one of the great pieces in the classical symphonic canon. Mozart was nothing if not prolific, and [Symphony No.41 in C major](#) was composed over two months in which his relentless creative energy also delivered symphonies number 39 and 40. None of the three late symphonies were published in his lifetime, and there’s also no concrete evidence that they were performed ahead of his death in 1791.

Did you know? In 1890, Salzburg confectioner Paul Fürst invented the Mozart-Bonbon, a sweet made from pistachio, marzipan and nougat and then covered in dark chocolate. Around three-and-a-half million of what are now called Mozartkugeln are made and sold annually.

Listen to the [second movement](#) of the *Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra* from the soundtrack of the 1984 film *Amadeus*.

About the Music

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91): Symphony No.29 in A major, K.201

1. Allegro moderato
2. Andante
3. Menuetto: Allegretto
4. Allegro con spirit

Composed: Salzburg, 1774

First Performed: ?

Mozart's 29th Symphony is a landmark in his brilliant but all-too-brief career. There seems to be universal agreement amongst scholars, critics and performers that it's his first truly great symphony – and he was just 18! In earlier symphonies, however impressive they might be, there's often a sense that Mozart is striking an attitude – borrowing his musical costume from the general store of 18th century styles. Now he's fully himself: confident, dramatic yet also elegant, enjoying the power and brilliance of the new-fangled 'symphony orchestra', but at the same time retaining something of the intimacy, wit and subtlety of chamber music.

How had Mozart arrived at this new freedom and mastery? No doubt his recent visit to Vienna with his father, Leopold, had been a major stimulus. However, Mozart would have found little encouragement from his employer. The Archbishop of Salzburg, Count Hieronymus Colloredo, was a cultivated man, but – in common with many aristocrats of the time – he regarded musicians as servants, and seems to have taken little, if any pride in the young Mozart's growing international reputation. Music, for the Archbishop, was either light entertainment or purely functional – to provide a bit of background glamour to a church service or grand courtly event. Perhaps Mozart was hoping his new symphony might find favour somewhere else. Whatever, there's no record of a performance during his time in Salzburg. It's extraordinary to think that this wonderfully rich symphony, so full of striking ideas and still more striking developments, probably remained unheard for years while significantly lesser composers basked in praise and financial rewards. Fortunately for us, Mozart wasn't just phenomenally gifted, he was also remarkably determined.

Mozart: Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra in C major, K.299/297c

1. Allegro
2. Andantino
3. Rondeau: Allegro

Composed: Paris, 1778

First Performed: ? ? 1778, Paris, Adrien-Louis de Bonnières, duc de Guînes (flute), Marie-Louise-Philippine de Bonnières (harp)

Mozart's letters are a joy, bursting with lively and scurrilous wit, tender, playful, sometimes offering shafts of insight into his musical thinking. But one comment has puzzled many commentators: in a letter to his father he dismisses the flute as 'an instrument which I cannot

bear.' How could it be that the composer of this much-loved concerto, other gorgeous flute concertos and quartets, not to mention the countless exquisite solos in his orchestral works, could have hated the flute? Well, the simple answer is that he didn't, but after several heated run-ins with rich or aristocratic (and invariably stingy) flautists, he probably thought he did, at least for a while. This Concerto is a case in point. Mozart wrote it for the Duke de Guines and his daughter, who played it during Mozart's seven-month stay in Paris, where he hoped – in vain alas – to find a wealthy, cultured employer and escape from servitude in Salzburg. Mozart wrote to his father that the duke played his part 'extremely well', and that Marie's performance at the harp was 'magnificent'. But the duke never paid Mozart for the Concerto, and only offered him half the agreed fee for tutoring Marie in composition. In disgust, Mozart refused the money, and poured scorn on the duke.

And yet the duke and his daughter clearly were fine musicians (their parts are far from easy), and writing for them set the 22-year-old Mozart's imagination working on a high level, hence the Concerto's enduring popularity. This is Mozart at his most cloudless and serene, with moments of good humour but always in exquisite taste. In Mozart's later works the courtly manners embodied here could be subjected to robust or subtle challenge (a sign of Mozart's growing democratic sympathies), but here the world evoked is idyllic, dreamlike.

Mozart: Symphony No 41 in C major, K.551 ('Jupiter')

1. Allegro vivace
2. Andante cantabile
3. Menuetto: Allegretto
4. Molto allegro

Composed: Vienna, 1788

First Performed: 1789/90?

Astonishingly little is known about the creation and performance history of Mozart's last symphony – and we're talking about one of the most important and influential symphonies ever written! Mozart gave concerts featuring symphonies in Leipzig, Frankfurt and his home city Vienna in 1789-90, so it's *likely* that his newest symphony would have been amongst them, but more than that it's hard to say. The nickname 'Jupiter' is a bit of a mystery too. According to Mozart's son Franz Xaver, it was invented by the London concertmaster Johann Peter Salomon, who rightly assumed it would enhance the Symphony's commercial appeal. For many though it was a good choice: there is something uniquely majestic and masterly about this music.

But is that the whole story? The stern, unison opening idea is followed by questioning strings, and after the massive C major 'entry of the god' fortissimo that follows, the quiet questioning intensifies, now enriched by solo woodwinds. Part of the drama of the first movement lies in the contrast between massive, regal assertion, the old order resplendent with ceremonial trumpets and drums, and these smaller, fainter, but persistent voices of doubt. It isn't too far-fetched to hear this as a musical cross-section of life in Mozart's Vienna.

In the *Andante cantabile* the strings are muted throughout, giving a strangely veiled quality to their tone. Throughout the movement, yearning for peace alternates with restless ambiguity, even moments of genuine anguish. And despite its breezy opening, the Minuet also has its darker moments, not least the angular fortes that disturb the complacency of the central Trio section. Six different motifs are introduced near the start of the finale. Mostly they are played off against one another to exhilarating and moving effect but in the grand coda, five of them are combined in a superb demonstration of fugal mastery – each 'voice' in the texture 'first amongst equals'. There's no evidence Mozart had any inkling that this Symphony was to be his last, but if he had, he could hardly have signed off with a more impressive flourish.