

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra June 27 programme notes

Let the Orchestra whisk you away to warmer climes with Tchaikovsky's glorious *Souvenir de Florence*, a piece inspired by the composer's happy memories of time spent in Italy. Tchaikovsky struggled to complete the work – but you wouldn't be able to tell. The piece came at the height of the composer's career, and its power and passion really stop you in your tracks. Here, it sits in between the Overture from Rossini's comic opera *The Barber of Seville* – a piece whose high energy and drama even inspired a 1950 episode of *Looney Tunes* – and Bizet's impressive *Symphony in C*, a work the composer created when he was just 17 years old.

### 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 musical 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 his position in September 2021. He has now extended his contract with the Orchestra to 2028.

Along with concerts in Liverpool, other engagements this season include Puccini's *Turandot* at the Opera du Rhin in Dijon and *Madama Butterfly* at the State Opera in Berlin.

### Rossini Overture, *The Barber of Seville*

More than 200 years after it was composed, [Gioachino Rossini's](#) glorious comic opera *The Barber of Seville* remains one of the most popular and performed pieces in the operatic repertoire. The plot, based on the character also found at the heart of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, follows the adventures of the titular barber Figaro as he helps Count Almaviva win his one true love, Rosina.

Its composer was born at Pesaro on the Adriatic coast, the only child of a charming but somewhat feckless town trumpeter father and a seamstress mother who worked hard to support the family. He started writing operas at 14 and the first to be staged, to some success, was *The Marriage Contract* in 1810 when he was still only 18. In total, Rossini would compose 39 operas between 1806 and 1829, although the most famous remains [The Barber of Seville](#).

Some reports suggest Rossini ran out of time to write a new *Overture*, and others that the original piece went missing after *The Barber of Seville's* premiere. Whatever the truth of the matter, the witty and energetic piece audiences know today was something Rossini partially repurposed from his earlier, lesser known 'opera seria' *Aureliano in Palmira*, and (as with many operas of the time) doesn't actually contain any of the musical themes to be found in either of the works.

**Did you know? When *The Barber of Seville* was premiered in Rome in 1816, it was plagued by mishaps. One singer tripped and was left with a bloody nose, and a cat walked on stage and refused to leave. Some audience members chanted the name of Rossini's rival Giovanni Paisiello who had already written an opera of the same name.**

Listen to the [Overture](#) from *The Barber of Seville*.

## **Tchaikovsky** *Souvenir de Florence*

Florence is a beautiful city which has attracted many artists and creatives over its long history. And in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one fan of the Tuscan capital was Russian [Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky](#) who visited no fewer than eight times over the course of 16 years – on some occasions just as an overnight stop and at others staying for extended periods of time. His patroness (and confidante) [Nadezhda von Meck](#) had a home, Villa Oppenheim, near the Boboli Gardens. He didn't see her there however, as famously the pair made an agreement never to meet.

Tchaikovsky marked his love of the city in the title of his [Souvenir de Florence](#), although it was a difficult birth. He started jotting down ideas for a string sextet in 1887, but he found the sextet form (two violins, two violas, two cellos) challenging, the composing muse wasn't with him, and he failed to get very far.

In the end it took him three years to complete the score, and a further two working on revisions. During that time, he continued to compose other works, including his Fifth Symphony and *The Nutcracker*.

A visit to Florence in 1890 inspired the title. Yet despite that, it remains Russian in tone. The piece is notable for its varying moods and rhythm structures. The first movement, an intense allegro con spirito, opens with a rich melody in the violins which is developed and then recapped, while the second is marked adagio cantabile con moto (slowly, in a song-like way) and boasts a romantic theme – first heard in the violas – with a pizzicato accompaniment. A Russian folk melody informs the third movement, and the finale, a 'bright and vivacious' allegro, also hints at a traditional folk melody, albeit juxtaposed with a more romantic theme.

Enjoy Tchaikovsky's [Souvenir de Florence](#).

## **Bizet** *Symphony in C*

[Georges Bizet](#) had barely celebrated his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday when, in the autumn of 1855, he composed his *Symphony in C*. Bizet's father was a singing teacher and his mother a gifted pianist. Their son proved a precocious talent and had been just nine when he was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire (where his equally precocious maternal aunt-by-marriage had been a teacher at the age of 13).

His mentors at the Conservatoire included [Charles Gounod](#), and in Bizet's *Symphony in C* there's the unmistakable influence of – and even some very close similarities with – Gounod's own First Symphony, dating from a year earlier. It's thought by some that Bizet's symphony could have been written as an assignment. But although the work was composed in 1855, it was never performed in Bizet's lifetime and was rediscovered in the archives of the Conservatoire nearly 80 years later. It was finally premiered in Basel in February 1935 and enjoyed its London premiere the following year.

The [symphony](#), in four movements, is a mixture of French-style melody and Viennese classicism and in its vibrant colours and exhilarating orchestration it shows a sophistication which belies its composer's tender years.

Listen to Bizet's [Symphony in C](#).

## **Other notable teenage symphonists...**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed a total of 13 symphonies as a child – the first at the age of eight.

Felix Mendelssohn wrote his First Symphony as a 15-year-old, later conducting the piece when he made his first visit to Britain in 1829 having just turned 20.

Camille Saint-Saëns was also 15 when he put pen to manuscript to produce his weighty *Symphony No.1 in A major*.

After a trial run at 14, Franz Schubert was 16 when he composed his first official symphony – within three years he had six to his name.

And a 19-year-old Dmitri Shostakovich penned his First Symphony as a graduation piece at the Petrograd Conservatory. It was later premiered by the Leningrad Philharmonic.

## About the Music

### **Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868): Overture, *The Barber of Seville***

Composed: 1816

First Performed: 20 February 1816, Teatro Argentina, Rome

Look at the composition and first performance dates above and you might wonder if there's been a misprint. But no, Rossini actually did write the whole of his opera *The Barber of Seville* in just three weeks – which was impressive even by his standards. The Overture was composed, or rather cobbled together from earlier operas, last of all. No matter, it's one of the most successful operatic overtures of all time, an enduring hit in the concert hall, and famously the inspiration for Bugs Bunny's riotous animated fantasy, *The Rabbit of Seville*. It's the sheer spirit of the Overture that carries it through, from one deliciously memorable tune to the next, and prepares the scene perfectly for the opera, one of the few masterpieces of the classical stage that regularly provokes real belly laughs rather than polite titters.

### **Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93) *Souvenir de Florence*, Op 70**

1. Allegro con spirito
2. Adagio cantabile e con moto
3. Allegretto moderato
4. Allegro vivace

Composed: 1890 (rev. 1891-2)

First Performed (string sextet version): 6 December 1892, St Petersburg Imperial Russian Music Society, leader Leopold Auer

A musical 'Souvenir of Florence' – it would be lovely to think of Tchaikovsky strolling around the streets of that glorious Italian city, enjoying the sights, immersing himself in Renaissance art, or leaning pensively on one of the bridges over the River Arno, drinking in the atmosphere. The lovely long arching melody that begins the slow second movement does sound like something he might have heard in the opera house – even if the singer does have a slight Russian accent.

In fact, Tchaikovsky was much too busy to do much sight-seeing. The main purpose of his visit in 1889 was to compose his brilliant but decidedly sinister opera *The Queen of Spades* – a task which he managed to accomplish in a breath-taking and very fraught forty-four days. But the *Souvenir*, which he wrote the following summer (originally for string sextet), does convey the impression that the experience was largely positive. The first movement may be like a driven, impassioned waltz, but there is something exultant about the minor-key ending. Then a hymn-like introduction leads to the gorgeous 'operatic' theme mentioned above, but the middle section of this slow movement is hushed, all nervous string figures and enigmatic pizzicatos, which Tchaikovsky compared to the eerie flickering of summer lightning. A dance movement follows, initially gentle but growing more robust, based on a theme that sounds more Russian folksy than Italian operatic. Then the dancing becomes wild and ultimately joyous in the finale: no composer knew how to restore the soul through abandoned dancing better than Tchaikovsky.

## **Georges Bizet (1838-75): Symphony in C**

1. Allegro vivo
2. Andante. Adagio
3. Allegro vivace
4. Finale: Allegro vivace

Composed: 1855

First Performed: 26 February 1935, Basel, cond. Felix Weingartner

Most composers, whatever their age, would be delighted to have created a joyous little gem like Bizet's Symphony in C and, no doubt, would want as many people as possible to hear it. But Georges Bizet clearly wasn't most composers. Having finished the score in a month, just after turning 17, he showed it to his teacher Charles Gounod at the Paris Conservatoire, then apparently forgot about it. At his death, at 37, no one had any idea it even existed, and it wasn't unearthed until the 1930s, when it was played and immediately recognised as a precocious masterpiece, comparable to Mendelssohn's Overture *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – also composed at 17.

It's possible Bizet felt that it was too derivative of Gounod's own Symphony in D, which was quite a hit in its time. 'You were the beginning of my life as an artist', Bizet wrote to his former tutor. 'I spring from you. You are the cause, I am the consequence.' Yes, there are resemblances – if you look closely enough. But just about everybody now agrees that Bizet's Symphony is fresher, more atmospheric and more appealingly tuneful. Sparkling vitality and playful good humour pervade the three fast movements, but the second focuses on a slow, winding oboe melody that already seems to foreshadow the tangy melodic invention of *Carmen*, composed nearly twenty years later.