

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Jasdeep Singh Degun

October 11 programme notes

Jasdeep Singh Degun *sitar*

Composer, arranger and improviser; consummate soloist and generous collaborator; custodian of tradition and restless innovator, multi-award winning sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun is an anomaly indeed. Unconstrained by genre, the Leeds-born virtuoso's extraordinary skill and creativity are reshaping the musical landscape for his peers, and for generations to come.

Amid artist residencies and fellowships, an international concert schedule, royal command performances and the well-deserved laurels of recent years, Jasdeep's lifelong training in gayaki ang – a lyrical approach to the sitar that mimics the human voice – has remained his anchor and his passion. "In our tradition, you're always a student", he explains. "My teacher, Ustad Dharambir Singh MBE, shows me how big the music is, and how much we still have to explore".

As Artist in Residence at Opera North in 2022, Jasdeep continued in pursuit of his vision to combine the scale of orchestral music with the spontaneity of Indian classical improvisation. The tapestry of Indian and European music that he wove as composer and co-music director on a new staging of Monteverdi's opera *Orpheus* thrilled audiences and critics alike. 2023 saw him take home the Asian Achievers' Art and Culture Award, and Best Newcomer at the *Songlines Awards*, then in 2024 Jasdeep received the Royal Philharmonic Society's Award for Best Instrumentalist, the first sitar player, and the first British Asian musician, to be so recognised.

"It's really not a matter of different worlds meeting", he reflects. "It's just me: as much as I'm immersed in Indian classical music, I'm a product of this country; I'm a British composer". Whether completing his sitar concerto during a residency at Benjamin Britten's home in Aldeburgh, working simultaneously in raag and western counterpoint in the *Orpheus* rehearsal room, or trading quicksilver improvisations in the moment with an Indian classical percussionist, his approach to music-making is always instinctive, organic, and unprejudiced.

(Credit: Rowland Thomas)

Chloe Rooke *conductor*

British conductor Chloe Rooke was Assistant Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic. Coming to international attention after winning prestigious prizes, she was invited to conduct the LSO in family concerts at the Barbican and made her mark at Kings Place with the London Sinfonietta and in a New Year's concert with the BBC Concert Orchestra. She has also led orchestras including the Orchestre National de Lille, Opera North and London Mozart Players.

Passionate about music's role in bringing around social transformation, Chloe is Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of Street Orchestra Live, the UK's first street orchestra. In every performance, they aim to share the joy of music in the everyday and invite unassuming passers-by to join in the party for a moment in time.

Chloe began her conducting journey with a passion to bring people together to forge meaningful relationships and powerful performances, initially working with student and amateur orchestras at Oxford (where she graduated with first class honours in 2018) and in London.

Harkiret Bahra *tabla*

Harkiret Bahra has been a student of tabla for more than thirty years under the tutelage of noted tabla artists from Giani Gian Singh Surjit Ji to his current teacher Ustad Harkirat Singh Rayatt. During his tabla education, he has been fortunate to take learnings from the legendary late artist Pandit Shankar Ghosh Ji. Amongst the most distinguished UK-based tabla players and now

himself a devoted teacher, his music has taken him to perform internationally and collaborate across genres with an array of virtuoso instrumentalists.

Sergei Prokofiev *Classical Symphony*

Sergei Prokofiev's earliest musical influence was his mother, who would play piano in the evenings at home.

He was five when he started composing, and at nine had written his first opera. The young Prokofiev was encouraged by his mother, who arranged trips to the opera in Moscow.

In 1904, at the age of 13, he entered the St Petersburg Conservatory (after being urged to apply by future conservatory director Alexander Glazunov) where he would spend a total of 10 years. His time there is said to have inspired his *Symphony No.1* – or 'Classical' Symphony – quite considerably.

As part of his studies, Prokofiev was instructed in conducting Classical composers, and his First Symphony certainly features flavours of great figures of that era, such as Haydn and Mozart. It is however, most definitely a reinterpretation of the Classical style. The work is airy and sunny, plus it's scored for a Classical-period sized orchestra, but Prokofiev's own style remains, as he inserts a handful of modernist twists into the piece. In the past, he'd angered professors by breaking Classical traditions, so here he embraces them, exaggerates them, but his unmistakable flair remains.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *Symphony No.36, 'Linz'*

During the summer of 1783, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart took his new wife Constanze to Salzburg to meet his father and sister. When the time came to travel home to Vienna, they stopped off at the northern Austrian city of Linz, where an old family friend – and Mozart's patron – Count Thun hosted the couple. Delighted by Mozart's presence, Count Thun announced that he would arrange a public concert to take place in just four days' time. That gave Mozart – who had travelled without a single symphony – four days to come up with something completely new.

He set to the challenge, writing to his father that he was composing "at breakneck speed", and of course he met his deadline. What's perhaps even more impressive however, is that he found the time to play around and introduce some new ideas to his composing. This is Mozart's first symphony to begin with a slow introduction, and his use of trumpets and timpani in the second movement is a relatively rare feature for the time. Playfully, Mozart also instructed the musicians performing the work's premiere that its finale should be played as quickly as possible.

Even though the whole work came together in just a matter of hours, it still stands as a masterpiece today.