

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra February 9 programme complementary content

There's only one Víkingur Ólafsson, and if you haven't yet heard him, Beethoven's *Emperor* concerto offers a magnificent introduction to this Icelandic piano sensation. Domingo Hindoyan and the Orchestra will take care of the rest, and they'll be bringing fire, as well as ice, in orchestral showpieces by Dvořák and Kodály.

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.

Víkingur Ólafsson

Icelandic pianist [Víkingur Ólafsson](#) renews his partnership with Domingo Hindoyan and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra after first appearing at the hall in [January 2023](#).

The 40-year-old has made a profound impact with his remarkable combination of highest-level musicianship and visionary programmes. His recordings for Deutsche Grammophon – *Philip Glass Piano Works*, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, *Debussy Rameau*, *Mozart & Contemporaries*, *From Afar* and the 2023 release of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* – have captured the public and critical imagination and have led to career streams of more than 600 million. Ólafsson dedicated the entire 2023/24 season to a [Goldberg Variations](#) world tour across six continents, including a date at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall in November 2023.

One of the most sought-after artists of today, his multiple awards include Opus Klassik Instrumentalist of the Year in 2023, Opus Klassik Solo Recording Instrumentalist (twice), CoScan's International Nordic Person of the Year (2023), the Rolf Schock Prize for Music (2022), Gramophone's Artist of the Year (2019) and Album of the Year at the *BBC Music Magazine* Awards 2019.

A captivating communicator both on and off stage, Ólafsson's significant talent extends to broadcasting and he was artist in residence for three months on *BBC Radio 4's* flagship arts programme, *Front Row*. Future engagements this season include concerts in Toronto, Carnegie Hall, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Reykjavik, Zurich, Hamburg, Paris and Vienna.

Zoltán Kodály - *Dances of Galánta*

When [Zoltán Kodály](#) was commissioned to create a work celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, he turned to the sounds of his childhood for inspiration.

The composer had spent seven years – from the ages of three to 10 – living in Galánta, then a small town in the Kingdom of Hungary (now part of Slovakia), about 35 miles east of Bratislava. It was where his father Frigyes, an amateur musician, was the stationmaster on the Budapest to Vienna line. It was there that Kodály's impressionable young ears heard what he later described as 'the first orchestral sonority', which came from a famous town gypsy band and fired his interest in the folk music tradition of his nation. Throughout his career, he would dedicate himself to [ethnomusicological research](#) as well as composing.

Along with those youthful memories, *Dances of Galánta* (or *Galántai Tácok* in Hungarian) was also informed by late 18th/early 19th Century books of Hungarian dances which included music 'after several gypsies from Galánta' and whose melodies he celebrated in this new work.

Friend and fellow composer Dohnányi conducted the Budapest Philharmonic at the premiere in the city in October 1933. And the *Dances* went on to become one of Kodály's best-loved orchestral pieces.

Enjoy Zoltán Kodály's [Dances of Galánta](#).

Antonin Dvořák – *Scherzo capriccioso*

1883 was a busy year for [Antonin Dvořák](#). In early March his son, also called Antonin, was born – a happy event for the family coming not long after the death of Dvořák's mother – and three days later the composer's *Stabat Mater* was performed to acclaim in London.

Summer arrived with a visit from friend and fellow composer Leoš Janáček, who stayed in the Dvořáks' apartment while the family decamped to the village of [Vysoká](#). Then autumn brought with it the premieres of his *Violin Concerto* and *Hussite Overture*.

In the midst of all this, the 41-year-old Czech sat down to compose his *Scherzo capriccioso*, an orchestral piece that can be seen as a tribute both to his [mentor Brahms](#) and a celebration of the folk music of his Bohemian home.

The *Scherzo capriccioso* was given its inaugural performance by Prague's National Theatre Orchestra on May 13, under the baton of Adolf Čech, and in its first few years it was played in programmes all over Europe and the United States, becoming a firm favourite with audiences.

Listen to Dvořák's [Scherzo capriccioso](#).

Did you know? Dvořák's cousin Anna described how Antonin would often start to compose as soon as he woke up – tapping out musical ideas on the quilt with his fingers.

Ludwig van Beethoven – *Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat major, 'Emperor'*

Beethoven began working on his fifth piano concerto – which would be his last – in 1808. The work is known for its grandeur and heroism, and its military symbolism perfectly reflects the context in which it was composed.

Beethoven completed the piece as his home city of Vienna was under siege from Napoleon's armies. As fighting intensified, the composer fled to his brother's cellar and covered his ears with pillows to preserve his already deteriorating hearing – he wrote to his publisher in 1809 that there was "nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts" all around him.

But despite this – and Beethoven's reputation as being somewhat tempestuous – his *Piano Concerto No.5* is a work of real splendour and beauty. The piece sits at the end of the Classical period and the dawn of the Romantic, and Beethoven can be seen to be playing with convention.

The work's unusually long first movement, its second movement flowing into its third, and its true grandeur foreshadow what would come in a new musical era.

How the piece earned its nickname 'Emperor' is unknown – some say it was coined by the work's English publisher, others say it derives from praise given by one of Napoleon's officers. Regardless of its origin, it's certainly a fitting title.

About the Music

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967): *Dances of Galánta*

Composed: 1933

First Performed: 23 October 1933, Budapest, Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Ernő Dohnányi

National borders in Central and Eastern Europe have rarely been stable for long, and the town Galánta, which Zoltán Kodály knew and loved as part of his native Hungary, now belongs to Slovakia. Kodály remembered being stirred as a boy by its pungent, muscular Gypsy music before he'd ever heard a classical orchestral concert. When he later found an old collection of folk dances from the area, he decided to work some of them up into a musical evocation of the spirit of Galánta and its surrounding countryside. Most of the dances are in the 'verbunkos' style – originally military recruiting music but developing into a vibrant dance form that became hugely popular with Hungarian nationalists. It's usually divided into two sections: slow (*lassú*), typically to a jerky dotted rhythm, and fast (*friss*), with intricate rapid running figures. Kodály elaborates on that, but the dynamism of that slow-majestic/fast-virtuosic contrast remains. The clarinet has a particularly important part to play in the slower music, imitating the edgy sound of the Hungarian folk instrument the *tárogató*. Kodály may never have been as radical as his countryman Bartók, but you can still feel the raw native vitality in this flavoursome, compelling dance music.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): *Scherzo capriccioso*, Op 66

Composed: 1883

First Performed: 16 March 1883, Prague, National Theatre, National Theatre Orchestra cond. Adolf Cech

At first glance, it looks like we're going to get something along the lines of Dvořák's earlier smash-hit *Slavonic Dances* (1878): captivating folk music-inspired dance music, often joyous, occasionally a little melancholy, but always good natured. The title seems to confirm that, twice over. 'Scherzo' originally means a joke, and 'capricious' can mean 'jokey' – but it can also mean changeable, unpredictable, perhaps alarmingly so, and there is an element of that in the *Scherzo capriccioso*. Dvořák's large, colour-enhanced orchestra includes a significant part for bass clarinet, whose dark, faintly sinister lower tones will do a lot to undermine the 'let's party' assertiveness of the opening horn solo and the cymbal-enhanced folk-dance orchestral tutti that follows soon afterwards. In fact, there are shadows from early on – playful ones perhaps, but with a touch of the demonic. Later Dvořák would develop this side more lavishly in his opera *The Devil and Kate* and his symphonic poems *The Water Goblin* and *The Noonday Witch*. Here though, dancing high spirits win in the end – just about.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): Piano Concerto No 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 ('Emperor')

1. Allegro
2. Adagio un poco mosso –
3. Rondo: Allegro

Composed: 1809

First Performed: Gewandhaus, Leipzig, 28 November 1811, soloist Friedrich Schneider, cond. Johann Schulz

In English-speaking countries, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto is known as the 'Emperor', which gives the impression that it was written in praise of Revolutionary France's military hero Napoleon Bonaparte – as, originally, was the *Eroica* Symphony of 1803-4. In fact, Beethoven's feelings about Napoleon had darkened by the time he came to write this concerto, and they grew darker still when Napoleon's forces invaded his home city Vienna while he was in the midst of composing it. On all sides there was 'nothing but drums, canon, soldiers, misery of all sorts', Beethoven wrote, and in a desperate effort to save what was left of his hearing he fled to his brother's cellar and covered his ears with pillows. Granted, there is something magnificently 'imperious' about the Fifth Piano Concerto's opening, in which the piano storms in with cascades and runs, claiming the stage for itself at once – in defiance of classical convention, which normally brings in the soloist after the orchestra has prepared the scene. But as the long first movement unfolds, the orchestra seems to question the pianist's grand self-assertion, and a much more complex, nuanced dialogue begins to develop. There's much more to heroism, it seems to say, than attention-grabbing self-assertion.

That message is underlined in a wonderful slow movement. The hushed, hymn-like string writing at the opening seems to take us to another plane, and the piano writing has an almost fabulous delicacy (remember that the man who created this crystalline sound was now barely able to hear a piano). Then comes a moment of magical stillness. The piano seems to try out a new idea dreamily – then a titanic waltz-like finale bursts onto the scene. The waltz was beginning to emerge as 'the' Viennese dance form at this time. Could this be an act of solidarity with Beethoven's besieged home city – a way of saying 'You shall dance again'? Whatever, it makes a rousing ending. Once again though the soloist's 'imperial' role can be subtly challenged. In what ought to be the soloist's big solo moment just before the end, the timpani won't stop playing and the piano's voice gets quieter and quieter – before pulling itself together for a final loud flourish. Even in this mighty work Beethoven's sense of humour won't be repressed.