Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
February 13 programme complementary content

When East meets West, anything becomes possible. For Russian-American conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya, it can mean Missy Mazzoli seeing heaven in a Detroit steelworks, or Brahms embracing his inner Hungarian in one of the sweetest and sunniest of great violin concertos. And above all, it can mean Dmitri Shostakovich combining tragedy, irony and pure knockabout farce in his extraordinary Sixth Symphony. A fitting tribute in his anniversary year.

Lidiya Yankovskaya

Lidiya Yankovskaya is a fiercely committed advocate for Slavic masterpieces, operatic rarities and contemporary works on the leading edge of classical music. She has conducted more than 40 world premieres, including 17 operas, and her strength as a visionary collaborator has guided new perspectives on repertoire from *Carmen* and *Queen of Spaces* to Price and Prokofiev.

During seven years as musical director of Chicago Opera Theatre, she spearheaded the commissioning of 11 new operas, advancing the work of seven female composers and seven creators of colour, and led the Chicago premieres of many other works. She is currently the organisation's **Artistic Director of the Vanguard Initiative**. Meanwhile her daring performances before and amid the pandemic earned her recognition from the *Chicago Tribune* which named her Chicagoan of the Year.

The in-demand **Yankovskaya** also enjoys a busy opera and concert career nationally and internationally. She made her London debut in 2023 conducting a rare staging of Górecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* at the English National Opera. In recent seasons she has worked with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Utah Symphony and North Carolina Symphony.

She was born in St Petersburg and emigrated to the United States as a refugee when she was nine, later studying piano, voice and conducting at Vassar College and conducting at Boston University. Her own experience led to her founding the Refugee Orchestra Project which has an international profile.

Alena Baeva

Described as a 'magnetic presence' and a 'constantly fascinating sound technician' (*New York Classical Review*), violinist **Alena Baeva** is considered one of the most exciting, versatile and captivating soloists active on the world stage today. Possessing a passionate musical curiosity, Baeva holds an already vast and rapidly expanding repertoire including more than 50 violin concerti. She is a champion of lesser-known works along with the more mainstream, with recent performances promoting composers such as **Grażyna Bacewicz**, Faradzh Karaev, Mieczysław Karlowicz and Valentin Silvestrov.

Baeva's career as an international soloist of highest renown has grown at an extraordinary pace over recent seasons, performing with orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, NHK Symphony, London Philharmonic, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Gothenburg Symphony. She enjoys a long standing and rewarding relationship with the Orchestra of the XVIII Century, performing and recording a variety of repertoire on period instruments. Forthcoming engagements include Sibelius' *Violin Concerto* with the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto No.1* with the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, and dates in Italy, Poland and Germany. Baeva is also **artist in residence** with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra this season.

Chamber music holds a particularly special place in her musical life, and she enjoys collaborations with esteemed artists including celebrated Ukrainian pianist **Vadym Kholodenko**.

Baeva, who records exclusively for Alpha Classics, was born in Kyrgyzstan and took her first violin lessons aged five, later studying in Russia. She also took lessons with Mstislav Rostropovich, Boris Garlitsky and Shlomo Mintz. She has been a naturalised Luxembourg resident since 2010.

She plays the 'ex-William Kroll' Guarneri del Gesù of 1738 – on a generous loan from an anonymous patron, with the kind assistance of J&A Beares.

Watch a video '**portrait**' of Alena Baeva.

Missy Mazzoli – *River Rouge Transfiguration*

Recently deemed 'one of the most consistently inventive, surprising composers now working in New York' (*New York Times*) and 'Brooklyn's post-Millennial Mozart' (*Time Out NY*), **Missy Mazzoli** has had her music performed by the Kronos Quartet, LA Opera, eighth blackbird, **BBC Symphony**, Scottish Opera and many others. In 2018 she became, along with Jeanine Tesori, one of the first two women to receive a main stage commission from the Metropolitan Opera and was nominated for a Grammy award. She has previously been composer in residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Opera Philadelphia.

Detroit, a city she first fell in love with while on tour with her all-female electro-acoustic band Victoire in 2010, is **the inspiration** for Mazzoli's *River Rouge Transfiguration*, originally commissioned by the Detroit Symphony.

She explains: "In my research I was struck by how often the landscape of Detroit inspired a kind of religious awe, with writers from every decade of the last century comparing the city's factories to cathedrals and altars, and *Vanity Fair* even dubbing Detroit 'America's Mecca' in 1928. In Mark Binelli's recent book *Detroit City Is the Place to Be*, he even describes a particular Sheeler photograph, Criss-Crossed Conveyors, as evoking 'neither grit nor noise but instead an almost tabernacular grace. The smokestacks in the background look like the pipes of a massive church organ, the titular conveyor belts forming the shape of what is unmistakably a giant cross.' This image, of the River Rouge Plant as a massive pipe organ, was the initial inspiration for *River Rouge Transfiguration*. This is music about the transformation of grit and noise (here represented by the percussion, piano, harp and pizzicato strings) into something massive, resonant and unexpected."

Enjoy a clip of Missy Mazzoli's ***River Rouge Transfiguration***.

Johannes Brahms – *Violin Concerto in D major*

March 1848 in Hamburg, and a 14-year-old **Johannes Brahms** found himself rapt listening to a fellow teenager playing Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*. The young musician, already famous for his prodigal talent, was **Joseph Joachim**, and although it would take another five years for them to meet, when they did it proved a musical match made in heaven. The pair became firm friends and concert collaborators, while Brahms looked to Joachim for advice and support – it was the Hungarian virtuoso who suggested making himself known to Robert Schumann.

The friendship would founder disastrously in the 1880s when a jealous and paranoid Joachim feared his wife was having an affair with the publisher Fritz Simrock and Brahms took Mme

Joachim's side. But before that, Brahms – just back from a creatively fortifying trip to Italy – celebrated a 25-year long partnership by writing his dear friend a ***Violin Concerto***.

It was composed while the German was holidaying in the Carinthian mountains in the summer of 1878, with Brahms writing regularly to Joachim about its progress and welcoming feedback on the scoring which the violinist was happy to provide. Joachim premiered the work under Brahms' baton at the finale of a concert in Leipzig on **New Year's Day 1879** which opened with him playing Beethoven's mighty *Violin Concerto*. Six weeks later Joachim played the Brahms piece at Crystal Palace in London with August Manns on the podium. He played it twice more in London during his stay, including for the Philharmonic Society at St James' Hall – a performance he repeated 12 months later.

As for the later, great falling out? It would eventually be resolved by Brahms composing another work - a peace offering in the form of a *Double Concerto* for Joachim and cellist Robert Hausmann.

Listen to Brahms' ***Violin Concerto in D major***.

Dmitri Shostakovich – *Symphony No.6 in B minor*

When **Dmitri Shostakovich's** Fifth Symphony was premiered in Leningrad in the winter of 1937, the ovation it received went on for half-an-hour and conductor Evgeny Mravinsky reportedly lifted the score above his head in triumph. Audiences and – crucially – state critics loved it which meant its 31-year-old composer, previously denounced for the crime of 'formulism' and fearing for his safety, could breathe more easily.

But how to follow the Fifth and the overwhelming adulation it prompted? How to satisfy the anticipation?

In September the following year the composer revealed he was in the process of sketching what he described as a monumental new **'Lenin' symphony** for orchestra and voices (presumably much in the vein of Beethoven's Ninth) with inspiration coming from a poem about the Russian revolutionary leader by Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Yet in the event it all appeared to prove creatively impossible to incorporate Lenin-related content into his unfolding musical vision, and when *Symphony No.6 in B minor* was finally revealed to the world in November 1939, again by the Leningrad Philharmonic under Mravinsky's baton, it was purely as an orchestral piece. Not just that but there were no references to Lenin, little evidence of the folkloric tradition people had lobbied him to include, and no big heroic moments. Its **composer described** how "music of a contemplative and lyrical order predominates – I wanted to convey in it the moods of spring, joy, youth".

While the Leningrad audience responded enthusiastically, for many years the experimental Sixth would remain overshadowed by its heroic predecessor – and by the legend-forming *Leningrad Symphony* which followed.

Watch the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra perform **the opening** of Shostakovich's *Symphony No.6 in B minor*.

Did you know? During the Siege of Leningrad, which lasted from September 1941 to January 1944, Shostakovich was famously photographed in a fireman's outfit on the burning rooftops – although the composer was evacuated after a month to Moscow.

About the Music

Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980) *River Rouge Transfiguration*
Composed: 2013
First Performed: 31 May 2013, Detroit, Orchestra Hall, Detroit Symphony Orchestra., cond. Leonard Slatkin

It isn't only rural or dramatic natural landscapes that can inspire a kind of religious awe. Industrial landscapes too can have an impressive magic, as the New York composer Missy Mazzoli found when she first visited the American city of Detroit in 2010. For many years Detroit was the hub of the country's automobile industry – it's from this that the hugely influential Motown ('Motor-town') record company took its name. For some years now the industry has been in sad decline, but when Mazzoli first saw it, the factories were still full of life. A sentence from the novel *Journey to the End of the Night*, by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, seemed to sum it up for her:

'...all around me and above me as far as the sky, the heavy, composite, muffled roar of torrents of machines, hard wheels obstinately turning, grinding, groaning, always on the point of breaking down but never breaking down.'

And that, in essence, is the spirit of *River Rouge Transfiguration*, which depicts Detroit's famous River Rouge Plant in its vibrant heyday, grit and grinding noise somehow creating an atmosphere like a gigantic, clamorous cathedral. At the end though, the energy seems to dissipate – like that of the city that once embodied so many American hopes and dreams. This is a hymn of praise, but in the end, it might also be an elegy.

Johannes Brahms (1833-97): Violin Concerto in D major, op 77
1. Allegro non troppo
2. Adagio
3. Allegro, giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

Composed: 1878
First Performed: 1 January 1879, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Gewandhaus Orchestra, soloist Joseph Joachim, cond. Josef Hellmesberger.

Brahms' *Violin Concerto*'s reputation as one of the brightest gems in the concerto repertoire seems secure as ever. But in some ways it's not a typical classical-romantic concerto. Josef Hellmesberger, who directed the first performance, called it a concerto 'not for, but *against* the violin'. Others have suggested that what Brahms created here is more like a symphony for violin and orchestra, in which the violin leads (mostly), but the orchestra is far from subservient.

Some soloists have grumbled that Brahms gives the Adagio's lovely long opening melody to the oboe, and that the violin never gets to play it. Perhaps this was Brahms' way of reminding the soloist (and the audience) that the concerto is not simply a 'star vehicle', but a work in which the violin is first amongst equals. Brahms wrote the concerto for his close friend, the internationally renowned violinist and composer Joseph Joachim. Brahms was so concerned to tailor the solo part to Joachim's style that he consulted him frequently while writing the concerto, humbly deferring when Joachim suggested improvements. But he wasn't above teasing him, as the Adagio's oboe tune shows.

The concerto begins with a kind of slow, graceful waltz motion. The soloist enters dramatically in the minor key, but this is soon calmed by lyrical woodwind. Towards the end of the movement, after the solo cadenza, the tempo notches up, and the violin writing becomes thrillingly athletic; but memories of the meditative melodic writing still linger. And these are expanded in the wonderful Adagio, the long oboe tune followed by ecstatic, quasi-improvisatory outpourings from the violin. Then comes the finale, the violin writing full of the kind of Hungarian 'gypsy' figurations Brahms loved – probably a tribute to the Hungarian-born Joachim, who had already

composed an impressive *Concerto in the Hungarian Style*. But the end isn't just a virtuosic firework display. After a brief, downward plunging cadenza, a brilliant faster coda starts, but then comes a surprise hush before the three emphatic final chords.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75): Symphony No 6 in B minor, Op.53

1. Largo
2. Allegro
3. Presto

Composed: 1939
First Performed: 5 November 1939, Leningrad (now St Petersburg), Leningrad Conservatory, Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Yevgeni Mravinsky

With his Fifth Symphony (1937), Shostakovich brought off a near-impossible balancing act, restoring his own reputation after traumatic official denunciation in the newspaper *Pravda*, but managing to convey searing tragedy in the first and third movements and caustic mockery in the second. Tragedy was now permissible in 'Soviet Realist' art, provided it was shown to have a suitably 'optimistic' ending.

Shostakovich then announced that his next symphony, No 6, would be a grandiose choral work in memory of the revolutionary hero Lenin. But when it appeared it turned out to be startlingly different from anything anyone had expected. Despite the premiere's resounding success (the finale was encored!), the press were baffled: a huge elegiac first movement followed by a brilliant, demonic scherzo, and then a wild, exhilarating, gallop-like finale that seemed to have no logical connection with what went before. Where was the sequence – the connecting story?

The truth is that many of Shostakovich's most important works contain surprising dramatic reversals. The mood and tone can turn radically in an instant. In such moments Shostakovich seems to say, 'You want a logical, orderly emotional sequence, but life's just not like that' - especially, one might add, in such a bewildering, terrifyingly illogical place as Stalin's Communist Russia. The opening Largo is a big, sometimes anguished slow movement, but at its heart it is still, contemplative, and charged with desolate, seemingly timeless woodwind solos. The long pent-up tension is released in the terrific scherzo that follows: again there are plenty of ear-catching woodwind solos, but now the tone is often wickedly playful. Then comes the finale. Life goes on, it seems to say - it has to. Later on, bassoon and solo violin offer a momentary glance back over the shoulder, but the gallop returns, and the end is unabashed raucous fun.