

**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**April 6 programme complementary content**

All the right notes in rather more than just the right order! Grieg's *Piano Concerto* is one of those pieces that absolutely everyone knows. The real skill is making it sound as fresh as new – and when the 2015 Leeds International Piano Competition winner Anna Tsybuleva joins forces with guest conductor Erina Yashima, we think the results will be magical. As for Humperdinck's fairytale prelude and Dvořák's *New World Symphony*...well, enough said, really. It's just tune after tune after tune.

**Erina Yashima** *conductor*

German-born conductor [Erina Yashima](#) is the First Kapellmeister at the Komische Oper Berlin. She was previously the Assistant Conductor at the Philadelphia Orchestra between 2019 and 2022, where she assisted music director Yannick Nezet-Seguin and conducted the orchestra in concerts in Philadelphia and Saratoga.

As a rising star in the industry, Yashima has performed all over the world with acclaimed orchestras and ensembles including the Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra. Recent highlights include debuts with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Beethoven Orchester Bonn, Seoul Philharmonic and North Carolina Symphony.

At the [Komische Oper Berlin](#) Yashima has conducted a variety of productions and programmes including *The Magic Flute*, *Così fan tutte*, a new children's opera – *Wondrous Adventures* – from Nils Holgersson and the 75 Years KOB Anniversary Gala. Last season she also made her English National Opera debut conducting *The Magic Flute*.

Since winning the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Sir Georg Solti conducting apprenticeship in 2015, she has been mentored by Riccardo Muti. Yashima began her training at the Institut zur Früh-Förderung musikalisch Hochbegabter (IFF) at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien in her hometown of Hanover, and studied piano with Bernd Goetzke. She received her first conducting lessons at 14 and after studying in Freiburg with Scott Sandmeier and in Vienna with Mark Stringer, she completed her conducting studies at the Hans Eisler School of Music Berlin with Christian Ehwald and Hans-Dieter Baum.

**Anna Tsybuleva** *piano*

Russian pianist [Anna Tsybuleva](#) shot into the international spotlight in 2015 when she was crowned first prize winner at the [Leeds International Piano Competition](#). She received wide acclaim for her winning performance and was described as 'a pianist of rare gifts: not since Murray Perahia's triumph in 1972 has Leeds had a winner of this musical poise and calibre' (*International Piano Magazine*).

Now a regular performer in major cities worldwide, Tsybuleva's early experiences were more modest. Born in 1990, she was raised in the mountains of Nizhny Arkhыз, a small village of around 500 inhabitants, in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic of Greater Caucasus. Her surroundings proved a constant inspiration and have served to feed directly into the development of her unique performance style today, which is described as one of captivating intimacy.

She received her first piano lessons from her mother aged six before attending the Shostakovich Music School in Volgodonsk at nine. From the age of 13 she continued her studies at the Moscow Central Music School and Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, graduating in 2014 with the title of 'best student'.

Tsybuleva has gone on to triumph in recital on many of the greatest international stages including Concertgebouw Amsterdam, KKL Luzern, Palais Des Beaux-Arts, Philharmonie Luxembourg, Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, Tonhalle Zurich and at the Wigmore Hall. Recent and forthcoming highlights include engagements with the Dortmunder Philharmoniker, hr-Sinfonieorchester Frankfurt, Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, Orquesta Extramadura and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra.

Keen to share the beauty of her home with others, in 2022 she launched the AlterSono festival in her hometown (also now the site of the world's largest space telescope), which combines music, science, space and people.

Tsybuleva is signed to Signum Classics for a multi-disc deal, with her most recent release being the 2024 recording [\*Debussy's Preludes for Solo Piano\*](#).

[Learn more](#) about Anna Tsybuleva.

### **Humperdinck** *Prelude, Hansel and Gretel*

His parents were set on him becoming an architect – but a young [Engelbert Humperdinck](#) had other ideas. The German teenager, born in Sigburg just outside Bonn in 1854, had started learning piano at the age of seven and composing soon after, and was keen on a musical career.

In 1872, at the age of 18, he started music classes at the Cologne Conservatory and later went on to win a scholarship to study in Munich where the budding composer shone, winning a Mendelssohn Award and spending his prize money travelling to Italy. There he met Wagner who invited him to come to Bayreuth and assist with a production of [Parsifal](#).

Humperdinck had written his first tentative compositions for the stage aged 13, and while leading a peripatetic existence during the 1880s he wrote several works for chorus. Then in 1890, when the 36-year-old was a professor at the Hoch Conservatory, he received a letter from his younger sister Adelheid Wette, a poet, who explained she had written a puppet play based on the well-known tale of [Hansel and Gretel](#) to be performed for her husband's birthday, and asked Humperdinck to set some of it to music. Over the following two years, he expanded that brief score into a full opera and the resulting work was premiered in Weimar at Christmas 1893, conducted by none other than [Richard Strauss](#).

Humperdinck went on to create [a number of other stage works](#), juggling his compositional career with teaching – one of his many pupils was Kurt Weill – but *Hansel and Gretel* remains by far his most popular piece.

**Did you know? In 1965, singer Gerry Dorsey changed his name to Engelbert Humperdinck following a suggestion from pop Svengali Gordon Mills.**

Enjoy the [Prelude](#) to *Hansel and Gretel*.

## **Grieg** *Piano Concerto*

As a teenage keyboard and composition student at the [Leipzig Conservatory](#) in the late 1850s, [Edvard Grieg](#) was a regular visitor to the city's Gewandhaus. It was there he heard Clara Schumann play her husband's *Piano Concerto in A minor*. The performance, and particularly the work, stayed with the young Norwegian long after he returned to his homeland, not least in the summer of 1868 when he sat down, not at home in Norway but in a rented holiday cottage at Søllerød, just north of Copenhagen, to compose his own A minor work. Grieg may have been in Denmark, but the folk music of his homeland was also never far from his thoughts as he put pen to manuscript.

The new concerto received its premiere in Copenhagen in [April 1869](#) where the soloist was Eduard Neupert, a Danish pianist and composer. Neupert performed on a grand piano loaned for the event by Anton Rubinstein, who was on tour in the country at the time, and the Queen of Denmark (mother of the future Queen Alexandra, wife of Edward VII) was among the audience.

The [concerto](#) was an instant hit with its Danish audience, but received a cooler reception elsewhere, and Grieg was never entirely satisfied with it, revising it at least seven times before his death nearly 40 years later.

Watch Lang Lang play Grieg's [Piano Concerto in A minor](#).

## **Dvořák** *Symphony No.9, 'From the New World'*

It was a deal [Antonín Dvořák](#) eventually found hard to turn down. In 1892, with his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday just behind him, the Czech composer was approached by [Jeannette Meyer Thurber](#), the wealthy American music patron and founder of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, to see if he would agree to become the institution's new director. It was a generous offer – the salary alone was more than 20 times what he had been earning teaching at the Prague Conservatory, and Thurber promised he would only have to teach the American college's most talented students. In addition, he would get four months' holiday each summer so he could go home to Europe.

Dvořák was eventually swayed, and in September 1892 he, wife Anna and two of their six children embarked on what was a stormy transatlantic passage from Bremen to New Jersey. The following spring, having decided not to make the trip home to Bohemia for the summer but instead to go to [Iowa](#) where there was a large expat Czech community, the Dvořáks called for their other children to join them and they enjoyed a contented summer together.

Meanwhile in January 1893, inspired by his new surroundings and by his discovery of Afro-American and American Indian song, Dvořák embarked on a new symphony. What became *Symphony No.9, 'From the New World'* – more often known simply as his [New World Symphony](#) – was completed in May, ahead of the family's summer break in Spillville, and it received its premiere courtesy of the New York Philharmonic Society on December 13. The symphony quickly made its way across the Atlantic, and was included in the opening concert of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society's 56<sup>th</sup> season in October the following year, conducted by [Sir Charles Hallé](#).

Listen to the [fourth movement](#) of *Symphony No.9, 'From the New World'*.

## About the Music

### **Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921): Prelude to *Hänsel und Gretel***

Composed: 1891-2

First Performed: 23 December 1893, Weimar Hoftheater, Weimar Court Orchestra, cond. Richard Strauss

The Brothers Grimm's *Fairy Tales* – collected (and somewhat cleaned-up) from German folk sources – were a colossal influence on the Romantic movement, in their home country and way beyond. Scores of fine musical works took them as their starting point, including the most famous fairy-tale opera of them all, Humperdinck's children's classic, *Hänsel und Gretel*. Humperdinck loved the lush, sensuous romanticism of Wagner, and shared some of his nationalist ideals, but in one respect he went further than his hero, creating folk-style themes that were so successful that many people mistook them for genuine folk songs. The Prelude is a delicious piece of orchestral scene-setting - innocently charming, yet you just know there's a witch waiting deep in the forest.

### **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907): Piano Concerto in A minor, op 16**

1. Allegro molto moderato
2. Adagio
3. Allegro moderato molto e marcato – Poco animato

Composed: 1868

First Performed: 3 April 1869, Copenhagen, Edmund Neupert (piano), cond. Holger Simon Pauli

'Keep going. You've got what it takes – don't let them intimidate you!' With these words, the virtuoso pianist and composer Franz Liszt handed Grieg back the manuscript of his newly completed Piano Concerto. Liszt had just played through the concerto privately for Grieg, with mounting enthusiasm. At the end of the finale, where the lyrical second theme returns in triumph, Liszt had leapt up from the keyboard, thrown his arms wide and exclaimed, 'Splendid!'

The beginning of the Piano Concerto echoes Robert Schumann's famous concerto (also in A minor), but it's striking enough on its own terms – so much so that it remains one of the most famous openings to a concerto in the repertory: a timpani roll, a shout for the full orchestra, then a series of downward cascading figures for the piano. After this the movement is based on two main themes: the first introduced quietly by winds, answered by strings; the second a singing melody first heard on cellos. After the magical hushed orchestral introduction, the song-like Adagio is dominated by the piano, not so much developing the melodies as decorating them deliciously. This leads without a break to the finale, full of vigorous folk-dance tunes at first, then introducing the Concerto's 'star tune' in its slower middle section on solo flute. Grieg builds up the excitement impressively in the faster coda, to the point where the flute tune returns first in full orchestral splendour, but with one note magically changed, and with rich harmonisation on the piano. No wonder it made Liszt shout 'Splendid!'

### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): Symphony No.9 in E minor, Op 95, From the New World**

1. Adagio – Allegro molto
2. Largo
3. Scherzo: Molto Vivace
4. Allegro con fuoco

Composed: 1893

First Performed: 16 December 1893, Carnegie Hall, New York, New York Philharmonic, cond, Anton Seidl

Having shown his fellow Czechs how to write truly 'national' classical music in his Slavonic Dances, Dvořák set out to do the same for the much younger nation of North America in his Ninth Symphony, composed while he was director of the newly-formed New York Conservatory. As in his native country, Dvořák hoped to show how turning to indigenous folk music could provide the roots of a national American style, and in a newspaper article he argued that it was the music of the Black and Native Americans who provided the most vibrant and fertile examples. Dvořák wasn't prepared for the indignation this provoked, much of it unashamedly racist in character. But he soldiered on: if White Americans wouldn't accept his thesis expressed in words, would it be different if he expressed it in music?

It turns out he was right. The premiere of the New World Symphony was a sensational success, and it has been hugely popular – and influential – ever since, and not just with classical musicians. Steeped in folk music from boyhood, it's not surprising that Dvořák could create 'Czech' melodies of his own at will. What is really surprising is how much he was able to do the same with North American music, particularly Black American spirituals. The beautiful cor anglais melody in the Largo sounds so 'authentic' that for years it was taken to be a genuine spiritual – one that Dvořák had perhaps heard sung by his Black pupil Harry Burleigh. The debt to Native American music is less obvious, but apparently the pounding rhythms of the Scherzo were inspired by seeing and hearing native dancers at the Czech community in Spillville, Iowa. What is most remarkable though is the way Dvořák draws all these elements together into a panoramic symphonic statement – there's so much more to this than a collection of musical postcards.

But finally, a question: what about the ending? The symphony seems to be powering to a loudly affirmative conclusion, but the final chord dies away slowly, on winds. Not so affirmative after all? Is doubt mixed in with the hope? Given the way race relations developed (or failed to develop) in the 20th Century, this could be genuine foresight.