

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra May 1 programme complementary content**

Richard Wagner's epic *Ring Cycle* tells a tale of gods, monsters and heroes set in a thrillingly imagined world of ancient myth. But the story he's really telling is startlingly modern – and the ravishing, all embracing power of Wagner's music goes straight to your heart. A full performance takes four days but don't worry – tonight Domingo Hindoyan and the great Wagnerian soprano Elena Pankratova bring you all the highlights.

### **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.

### **Elena Pankratova**

Russian soprano Elena Pankratova was born in Yekaterinburg and received musical training in her hometown, first as a pianist, choral conductor and music teacher. She then earned a diploma with distinction as an opera and concert singer, and as a singing teacher, at the Saint Petersburg State Conservatory Rimsky Korsakov.

Her international breakthrough came in 2010 in the role of Die Färberin (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, going on to sing this part with overwhelming success at La Scala in Milan, as well as performances in Buenos Aires, Munich, London, Copenhagen and Berlin.

Pankratova has established herself internationally in both the German and Italian dramatic repertoire. In 2016, she became the first Russian high dramatic soprano in the 140-year history of the Bayreuth Festival to make her sensational debut as Kundry (*Parsifal*). She has performed in the world's most prestigious concert houses, appearing in works including *Attila*, *Elektra*, *Fidelio*, *Siegfried*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tosca*, *Falstaff*, *Die Fledermaus* and *Un Ballo in Maschera*. In 2023, she made her house debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

As a concert singer, she has sung works such as Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Shostakovich's *Symphony No.14*, Mahler's Second Symphony and Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*.

Pankratova gives masterclasses all over the world, and has a singing professorship at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz.

## About the Music

### Highlights from Wagner's Ring Cycle

Composed:

Das Rheingold ('The Rhine Gold'): 1853-4

Die Walküre ('The Valkyrie'): 1854-6

Siegfried: 1856-7 & 1864-71

Götterdämmerung ('Twilight of the Gods'): 1869-74

First Performed (as a complete cycle): 13, 14, 16 & 17 August 1876, Bayreuth, Festspielhaus, cond. Hans Richter

Wagner's Ring is a stupendous achievement. Four operas, fourteen hours of music, a colossal orchestra including specially invented instruments, a huge cast facing unprecedented technical and emotional challenges, action demanding lavish theatrical effects, and a truly epic plot which takes us from the origin of all things to the end of the world. But perhaps the most stupendous facet of The Ring is the music itself, which expresses human agony and ecstasy, love and hatred, nature in its glory and terror, with a raw, elemental power beyond anything achieved in music before. And when Wagner began it, he was in political exile, under threat of execution in his own country, and with barely a penny to his name!

So, what's it all about? And why is it so controversial today? Well, the first thing that's important to say is that, despite its notorious appeal to a certain Adolf Hitler, The Ring of the Nibelung isn't a fascist, or even in the modern sense a racist tract. Wagner's nationalism was closely interwoven with his socialism. He wanted his grand fusion of music, theatre, literature, design – all the arts, in fact – to unite communities through the exploration of their national myths. But the story itself seems designed to thwart any kind of utopian dream, left wing or right wing. The pursuit of power, as personified by the Norse gods, is shown to be a terrible corrupting force. So too is the pursuit of wealth. The dwarf Alberich steals the primordial gold from the River Rhine to make a ring of awesome power, but to get it, he must first forswear love. (Take note, would-be dictators!) Eventually, he's tricked out of it by Wotan (Odin), chief of the gods, and his assistant, fire god Loge (Loki), but Alberich places a curse on the ring. Whoever wears the ring will eventually be destroyed.

Thus, Wotan's triumph in getting back the ring turns out to be his tragedy. But gradually Wotan begins to realise this, that the 'true hero' he had hoped would redeem everything will in fact destroy everything – and that this is how it must be. Siegfried – whom we meet for the first time in the cycle's third opera – is fearless, steadfast, and strangely naïve. His actions do a lot to precipitate the final catastrophe, but for some, the true hero of The Ring is Wotan's daughter, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, who defies her father, and thereby ensures Siegfried's survival. Plots and counterplots mount as various figures strive furiously, and vainly, to possess the ring, but finally Brünnhilde takes it from the slain Siegfried's hand and, rejecting wealth and power forever, rides magnificently into the flames of his funeral pyre, bringing about the destruction of – well, just about everything.

What are we to make of this apocalyptic ending? Could the destruction of the gods, the earth, humanity, bring about the dawning of a new innocent, hopeful era? Or does greed, the will to power, lead inevitably to extinction? In that, Wagner's message seems as timely today as ever – if you hear an environmentalist message in The Ring, Wagner certainly wouldn't have complained. But in his impassioned portrayal of the sheer complexity of human desires, he's also speaking directly to us, right now. Humans, gods, dwarves, dragons – we're all the same: complicated, with huge potential for light and darkness, and at the mercy of forces (within us as well as outside us) of which we're barely even aware, let alone understand.