

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
October 2 programme complementary content

Alpesh Chauhan

British conductor Alpesh Chauhan OBE is Principal Guest Conductor of the Düsseldorfer Symphoniker and Music Director of Birmingham Opera Company. With his ‘exceptional musical talent’ (*GB Opera*), he has firmly established himself on the international stage, working with orchestras around the world including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Adelaide Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, and BBC Symphony. He regularly collaborates with artists such as Sir Stephen Hough, Hilary Hahn, Pablo Ferrández and Benjamin Grosvenor.

Born in Birmingham, Alpesh studied cello at the Royal Northern College of Music, before completing the conservatoire’s prestigious Master’s Conducting Course. He has since served as Principal Conductor of Parma’s Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini, and Associate Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony.

He is particularly known for his interpretations of late Romantic and twentieth century repertoire, plus contemporary music too, and his recordings of the Tchaikovsky cycle with the BBC Scottish Symphony have been released to great critical acclaim.

A keen advocate of music education, he is patron of Young Sounds UK, a charity supporting talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds on their musical journeys. He has worked with the National Youth Orchestras of Great Britain and Scotland, and conducted the BAFTA-winning BBC music education film, *Ten Pieces*.

Simone Lamsma

Dutch violinist [Simone Lamsma](#) – a former Artist in Residence returning to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall – is respected by critics, peers and audiences as one of classical music’s most striking and captivating musical personalities.

With an extensive repertoire, she has performed with some of the world’s most eminent conductors and has been the guest of many leading orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin, Oslo Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

She is also a busy recording artist, her most recent release being *Pärt über Bach* in 2024, on which Lamsma, violinist Candida Thompson and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta explored connections between the two composers.

Her previous performances with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra include Korngold’s *Violin Concerto* in 2021, Shostakovich’s *Violin Concerto* in July 2022, [Sibelius’ Violin Concerto in January 2024](#), Brahms’ Double Concerto with cellist Victor Julien-Laferrière and Bach’s *Concerto for Two Violins* (alongside Eva Thorarinsdottir). Later this season, Lamsma will also appear in recital with pianist Jonathan Fournel at the [Tung Auditorium](#).

Aaron Copland

One of the most important American musical voices of the 20th Century, [Aaron Copland](#) was born in Brooklyn in 1900, the child of Russian Jewish immigrants who ran a neighbourhood department store. He started making up tunes on the piano as a child, and at 14 started taking lessons from his first professional piano teacher. As a young composer he was influenced by Stravinsky and studied with the hugely influential Nadia Boulanger in Paris. [Copland's](#) early works were written in a modernist style and included jazz elements (notably his 1926 *Piano Concerto*), although his music would develop in a more populist direction.

Perhaps his most productive time came in the 1940s, during which he produced a catalogue of enduring and popular works including *Fanfare for the Common Man*, ballets *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring*, his *Symphony No.3*, *Clarinet Concerto*, and scores for the film version of Thornton Wilder's romance drama *Our Town* and *The Heiress*, which garnered him an Oscar.

Copland's music was championed by Leonard Bernstein, and the two enjoyed [a close 50-year friendship](#). From the 1950s onwards, Copland increasingly turned to conducting, both his own works and those of other American composers. He toured internationally, lectured about American music, and taught at institutions like Tanglewood and Harvard.

During his final years he suffered from dementia, finally retreating from public performance in his early 80s. The man *The New York Times* praised as "a gentle yet impassioned champion of American music" died in December 1990, at the age of 90.

Benjamin Britten

"Composing is like driving down a foggy road towards a house," explained Benjamin Britten. "Slowly, you see more details of the house – the colour of the slates and bricks, the shapes of the windows. The notes are the bricks and the mortar of the house." [Britten](#) himself was one of the most important musical housebuilders in 20th Century British music. And his own bricks-and-mortar home for almost two decades, [The Red House](#) at Aldeburgh (which he shared with his life partner Peter Pears and which now houses the Britten-Pears Foundation), was also a place of great creativity for him. It was just down the road in 1948 that he started what became the Aldeburgh Festival.

A prolific child prodigy, he had started composing by the age of 10 and as a teenager studied with composer Frank Bridge, really taking on board Bridge's maxim of being true to your own artistic vision. He later attended the Royal College of Music on a scholarship, where his tutors included Vaughan Williams and John Ireland. He developed a distinctive musical voice, informed by [a diverse range of influences](#), from Henry Purcell to Schoenberg and Anton Berg, English folk music and Japanese Noh theatre.

Britten is perhaps best known for his operas – among them *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Albert Herring*, *Death in Venice* and *The Turn of the Screw* – but he also produced song cycles, choral works, film music (notably his 1936 documentary soundtrack *Night Mail* with words by poet, and friend, WH Auden) and chamber and orchestral pieces. His popular Christmas choral piece *A Ceremony of Carols* dates from 1942 and was composed at sea as Britten and Pears were returning from a three-year stay in America. Twenty years later, he was commissioned to write the *War Requiem* for the consecration of Coventry's new cathedral.

In the final year of his life, Britten was made a life peer, taking the title Baron Britten of Aldeburgh. And it was there that he died in December 1976, aged 63.

Did you know? The British premiere of Britten's *Violin Concerto* was given at the Queen's Hall in London in 1941. The soloist was Birkenhead-born Thomas Matthews, former leader of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. In March 1947, Matthews also gave the first performance of the work at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, conducted by Charles Groves.

Listen to Antonio Brosa perform Britten's [*Violin Concerto*](#) in 1952.

Carlos Simon

"My dad...he wants me to be a preacher, but I always tell him, 'Music is my pulpit. That's where I preach.'" (*The Washington Post*)

Greatly inspired by his family's background in gospel music, Carlos Simon is a multi-faceted and highly sought-after composer whose music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores, with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism.

The *Los Angeles Times* describes him as a composer who "refashions musical history as excitable new realms with an unmistakable musical purpose essential for our times," and this vibrant and vital work has seen him earn commissions from the likes of New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Los Angeles Opera, while his BBC co-commission *Hellfighters' Blues* received its world premiere from the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Last Night of the Proms in 2024.

Hailing from Atlanta, Georgia, Simon is the Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the inaugural Boston Symphony Orchestra Composer Chair. He was nominated for a 2023 Grammy Award for his album *Requiem for the Enslaved* – an original work infused with African American spirituals and familiar Catholic liturgical melodies, commemorating enslaved people sold by Georgetown University in 1838.

He has taught at Spelman College and Morehouse College, and now serves as Associate Professor at Georgetown University. Simon was also a recipient of the highly esteemed 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, recognising extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians.

Maurice Ravel

While chiefly known by the wider public for the five minutes of music which carried [*Torvill and Dean*](#) to ice dancing victory, there is much more to Maurice Ravel than just *Boléro*. Over a four-decade career, the Frenchman became a master craftsman of imaginatively orchestrated, vividly textured work, rich with elegant (and eloquent) melodies.

Born in 1875 in Cibourne, across the harbour from St Jean de Luz on France's border with the Basque country, Ravel was attracted to all things Spanish – although he only set foot in the country for the first time at the age of 38. Musically, he was also influenced by Erik Satie, Stravinsky (a friend), by jazz, and by French Romantic composer and poet Emmanuel Chabrier.

[*Ravel*](#) started music lessons at seven and gave his first piano recital aged 14, entering the Paris Conservatoire, where he won first prize in piano in 1891. Later, he would study composition there with Gabriel Fauré. A master orchestrator as well as a gifted composer, Ravel's catalogue embraces concertos and chamber works, piano pieces and operas, including the 1899 piece *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, orchestral work *Mother Goose*, *Piano Concerto No.1*, the 1920 *La Valse*, and ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, commissioned in 1909 by Diaghilev for the Ballet Russes.

When the First World War broke out, Ravel enlisted in an artillery regiment, driving munitions under bombardment. But war scarred the composer both physically and mentally, and in its aftermath he decamped from Paris [to a small commune](#) where he lived for the rest of his life – and from where he embarked on a host of international tours throughout the 1920s. In his final years Ravel suffered from a mystery neurological disorder, and he died in 1937, aged 62.

Did you know? Ravel's father was an engineer who invented the Whirlwind of Death loop-the-loop machine which was displayed at Barnum and Bailey's Circus in the early 1900s, but which ultimately was a failure – one story suggests it was involved in a near-death accident.

Watch Vasily Petrenko conducting a performance of [La Valse](#).

About the Music

Aaron Copland (1900-90): *El Salón México*

Composed: 1932-6

First Performed: 27 August 1937, Mexico City, Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico Symphony Orchestra, cond. Carlos Chávez

Aaron Copland was fascinated by Mexico, and he made several visits there during the 1930s. On one trip he was taken by the composer and conductor Carlos Chavéz to a popular dance hall called the Salón México. He was entranced: 'In some inexplicable way, while milling about in those crowded halls, one really felt a live contact with the Mexican people — the atomic sense one sometimes gets in far-off places, of suddenly knowing the essence of a people — their humanity, their separate shyness, their dignity and unique charm'. Copland later wrote that he despaired of doing justice to the vibrant complexity of the country and its culture, and that *El Salón México* was only a portrait of the 'visible' Mexico. But others have disagreed. The music represents the three contrasting musics of the Salón's three dance halls: elegant upper-class dance, urban working-class music, then the powerful, almost pagan energy of the peasantry. In the end, one might feel, it's the third kind of music that really conquered Copland's heart.

Benjamin Britten (1913-76): Violin Concerto, Op. 15

1. Moderato con moto

2. Vivace -

3. Passacaglia: Andante lento

Composed: 1939

First Performed: 29 March 1940, New York, Carnegie Hall, New York Philharmonic, Antonio Brosa (violin), cond. John Barbirolli

Britten was only 25 when he completed his Violin Concerto, shortly after moving to the USA, but he was already an experienced composer with an international reputation. The Concerto shows how much Britten had absorbed from Mahler and Prokofiev. It also shows him thinking more ambitiously than before in terms of form and expression, and particularly in the powerful and spacious Passacaglia (variation) finale

Britten had mixed feelings about Beethoven, and his Violin Concerto begins with a half-ironic tribute to the German master. Like Beethoven, Britten's opens with just solo timpani, here answered not by a march-like woodwinds but by languorous sighs from strings. A more sinister

dance episode follows, but eventually the opening returns, the timpani's motif now transformed with virtuoso panache by the violin.

Next comes a wild, driven scherzo, caustically brilliant at first, but with a much more soulful, folk-like violin theme at its heart. The violin's solo cadenza – showy at first, but with a growing note of anguish – eventually rises stratospherically as soft trombones intone the Passacaglia theme, heavy with sadness and foreboding. Britten's variations traverse a wide range of moods and characters, but after a noble orchestral climax, the slow coda is unmistakably elegiac, the violin's final trills hovering poignantly between major and minor.

Carlos Simon (b. 1986): *Four Black American Dances*

1. Ring Shout
2. Waltz
3. Tap!
4. Holy Dance

Composed: 2022

First Performed: 9 February 2023, Boston, Symphony Hall, Boston Symphony Orchestra, cond. Andris Nelsons

Spirituals are a stirring reminder of how important singing was to enslaved and oppressed Black people in America. But dance was vital too. Carlos Simon's *Four Black American Dances* are a vivid, captivating celebration of how, in these four dance forms, suffering could be transformed, for a moment at least, into joy. Ring Shout is a religious dance form, originating in the West Indies and the United States, but with its roots deep in African ritual. Worshippers move in a circle, half shuffling, half stomping, and clapping their hands. Originally the Waltz was exclusively a white upper-class dance, but as Black Americans began to rise socially, they claimed it as their own. The sound of shoes rhythmically striking the floor is evoked by the snare drum in Tap!, then Holy Dance immerses us in the kind of wild, exuberant worship of a Pentecostal church, with 'dancing and singing in the spirit' and 'speaking in tongues' – the latter portrayed by the orchestral musicians' half-improvised figures – ending with a warmly affirmative 'A-men'.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *Pavane pour une infante défunte*

Composed: 1899 (solo piano version)

First Performed: 5 April 1902, Paris, Ravel (piano). Orchestral version published 1910

'Pavane for a dead princess' - Ravel insisted that he'd only chosen the title because he liked its tongue-twisting sound. But this intensely private composer was rather fond of making self-distancing remarks, and whatever he may have said in public, there is a strange, haunting sadness behind the elegant, exquisite mask in this music. The pavane was a slow dance popular at the old Imperial Spanish court. It could easily be an elegy, though Ravel warned against taking it too slowly: 'It's the princess that's dead, not the pavane.'

La Valse

Composed: 1919-20

First Performed: 12 December 1920, Paris, Salle Gaveau, Orchestra Lamoureux, cond. Camille Chevillard

Ravel originally wrote his 'choreographic poem', *La Valse*, as a ballet score. The title immediately evokes Imperial Vienna, home of so much great music and art, birthplace of the most elegantly sensuous of all ballroom dances, the waltz. The year before Ravel began work on *La Valse*, 1918,

the centuries old Austrian Habsburg Empire had finally collapsed, a victim of the dreadful war which it had initiated. Ravel was intensely distrustful of the culture of the German-speaking world, especially after his experience as a driver at the front in World War One. But he confessed soon afterwards that he'd always loved the 'wonderful rhythms' and *joie de vivre* expressed in the waltz.

Both qualities are very much in evidence in *La Valse*, but there's something else too. There's an ominous, ghostly quality about the strange fragmentary low sounds heard at the opening, and even as the dancing turns more brilliant and opulent, there's also a feeling for many that there's a demonic presence here too. That sense grows as *La Valse* builds to its thrilling, yet undeniably savage ending. Ravel insisted that *La Valse* wasn't intended a commentary on the darker sides of Imperial Vienna, still less a portrait of its final catastrophic downfall. But whatever his intentions, many have heard a profoundly tragic message in this music.