

**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**January 22 programme complementary content**

**Andris Poga**

Award-winning [Andris Poga](#) was born in Riga in 1980 and studied trumpet and conducting at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, philosophy at the University of Latvia and conducting at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

From 2007-10 he was artistic director and principal conductor of the Professional Symphonic Band Riga, from 2011-14 he was assistant conductor at the Orchestre de Paris and in 2012-14 he was also assistant conductor at the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He was also musical director at the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra for eight years, where he continues to collaborate as artistic advisor. He is currently chief conductor of the [Stavanger Symphony Orchestra](#).

Poga, who is widely praised for his outstanding technical prowess and artistic finesse, has appeared as a guest with many of the world's leading orchestras. Recent highlights include engagements with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic, NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, Hiroshima Symphony, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Orchestre National de France, and the [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#).

As well as having a diverse and extensive repertoire, Poga is a passionate champion of the music of his homeland and, together with the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, has recorded works by underrepresented Latvian composers such as Volfgangs Dārziņš, Jānis Ivanovs, Juris Karlsons (*Skani*) and Tīvaldis eņi (*Ondine*) to critical acclaim.

**Ksenija Sidorova**

Latvian [Ksenija Sidorova](#) is the world's undisputed leading ambassador for the classical accordion. Her charismatic performances not only showcase the instrument's unique capabilities but also her own intense passion and breathtaking skill. She has proved herself a great favourite with Liverpool Philharmonic audiences in previous appearances, including the 2016 [Spirit of Christmas concerts](#) and the world premiere of Claudia Montero's [Vientos del Sur](#) in 2022.

Sidorova's grandmother, steeped in the folk tradition, encouraged her to take up the accordion at the age of eight. After studying in Riga, she became a prize-winning undergraduate at the Royal Academy of Music under [Owen Murray](#), subsequently receiving her masters' degree with distinction. In 2012 she won the International Award of the Bryn Terfel foundation and in 2015 appeared at Terfel's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations at the Royal Albert Hall, performing with Sting.

Her repertoire spans three centuries, from Bach to Piazzolla, Erkki-Sven Tüür and Václav Trojan. A passionate advocate of new music, several accordion works have been composed especially for her including Tõnu Kõrvits' *Dances* with Paavo Järvi and the Estonian Festival Orchestra at the Pärnu Festival, Sergey Akhunov's *Chaconne* with the Riga Sinfonietta and London Chamber Orchestra, Arturs Maskat's *Accordion Concerto* with the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, and a new accordion concerto from Dobrinka Tabakova.

In demand as a concert artist, and an active chamber musician, Sidorova has released a number of critically acclaimed recordings, including her most recent, *Crossroads*.

## Sergei Prokofiev

Like many of his fellow composers, [Sergei Prokofiev](#) could be included in the category of child prodigy. Born in modern day Ukraine in 1891, his keen amateur pianist mother spotted the young Sergei's early promise, which included playing the piano, and at five, starting to compose. At eight he produced his first opera, *The Giant*. In 1904, aged 13, Prokofiev was accepted into the St Petersburg Conservatory, the youngest student ever to be admitted. He studied piano, composition and conducting, his tutors including Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Anatoly Liadov.

A decade later, the young avant-garde composer met the great Sergei Diaghilev. In the same year he also started working on what became his first full-length opera, *The Gambler*, based on a novella by Dostoyevsky. It had taken six years of writing and heavy revision, but in 1921 his first completed ballet *Chout* was staged by the Ballet Russes in Paris with the composer conducting.

In the meantime, revolution at home had turned the world upside down. Prokofiev had been initially enthusiastic – he was a member of the Council Workers in the Arts. However, in 1918 he decided (with an official nod) to seek opportunities abroad. While he retained his connection with the new Soviet Union, he spent more than 15 years living and working in Europe and the United States. In the late 20s, he started to make trips back to Russia and [in 1936](#) he decided to come home for good. In America he had resisted the lure of Hollywood, but in the Soviet Union he composed the score for Sergei Einstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*, and in 1945 for *Ivan the Terrible*. His later work also included the much-loved 'symphonic tale for children' *Peter and the Wolf*, and the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* which was performed by the Kirov in 1940.

A flagbearer for the Modernist movement of the 1900s, Prokofiev's work across ballet, orchestral suites, concertos and symphonies embraced lyrical melodies and vivid storytelling, but also dramatic shifts in dynamics, dissonance, chromaticism and rhythmic propulsion.

The composer suffered a brain haemorrhage and died in Moscow on March 5, 1953, at the age of 61. He wasn't the only major Soviet figure to die that day. Eight miles away, Joseph Stalin – who had been all but comatose since a stroke several days earlier – also drew his last breath.

## Dobrinka Tabakova

Award-winning Bulgarian-British composer [Dobrinka Tabakova](#) creates rich, expressive music that has been described as 'riveting, piercingly beautiful and frequently radiant'. Among her many accolades are the prize for an anthem for Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee, and First Prize and Medallion at New York's Sorel Choral Composition Contest.

Tabakova composes across a range of genres, with a substantive body of work for string orchestras, a catalogue of chamber and orchestral works, and choral music too. Significant projects include: *Immortal Shakespeare*, a cantata commemorating Shakespeare's 400th anniversary in 2016; the multi-commissioned double piano concerto *Together Remember to Dance*; and *Centuries of Meditations* for the Three Choirs Festival. As composer in residence with the BBC Concert Orchestra from 2017-21, her work included the orchestral triptych *Earth Suite*. She served as composer in residence for Orchestra of the Swan from 2014-16, and MDR Leipzig Radio Orchestra in 2017-18. In 2022, she was named The Hallé's artist in association, and in 2023 she received an [Ivor Novello Award](#) for 'best community participation composition' for *Swarm Fanfares*, written for the Hallé Youth Orchestra. Recent work includes her new *Accordion Concerto* which was given its [world premiere](#) in May 2025 by Ksenija Sidorova and the Stuttgart Philharmonic.

Born in Plovdiv in 1980, at the age of 11 Tabakova moved to the UK with her family and went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music. She later attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and holds a PhD in composition from King's College London.

## **Sergei Rachmaninov**

In 1932, the 59-year-old composer and piano virtuoso [Sergei Rachmaninov](#) was asked to define 'music'. "Music is born only in the heart, and it appeals only to the heart. It is love!" was (part of) [his reply](#). And the Russian composer's music, with its luscious melodies and emotional resonance, has certainly appealed to the hearts of generations of listeners.

While he remains renowned for his piano concertos, Rachmaninov also composed for orchestra, chamber ensemble and choir, as well as completing three operas, and works for voice. His earliest surviving piece for orchestra, his *Scherzo in D*, dates from 1887 when he was 14 and studying at the Moscow Conservatory. He produced three symphonies over the course of 40 years, although after the [famously disastrous premiere](#) of his *Symphony No.1* in 1897, he could have been forgiven for never approaching the musical form again.

Rachmaninov was so deeply scarred by the whole experience he fell into a depression and practically stopped all composing, reporting feeling pains in his hands and legs just thinking about it. He underwent therapy, and coming out the other side, in 1901 he produced his most beloved work, the Second Piano Concerto (dedicated to the hypnotherapist who had helped him), the response to which galvanised him back into action.

Rachmaninov's most productive composing years came while he was still living in his native Russia. But in the wake of the October 1917 revolution, he and his family left everything, including their beloved summer estate Ivanovka, and headed west from Petrograd by train and sledge, eventually reaching Stockholm. From there, they travelled to Copenhagen and then on to New York, where the Rachmaninovs settled on the [Upper West Side](#).

He lived the rest of his life in exile, and predominantly worked as a pianist, embarking on a series of concert tours in Europe and the US. His final work, *Symphonic Dances*, was composed on Long Island in 1940. Two years later, and in declining health, Rachmaninov moved to the [West Coast](#) and died in March 1943 at home in Beverly Hills, just a few days shy of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## **About the Music**

### **Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953): Suite from The Love for Three Oranges**

1. The Clowns
2. The Magician and the Witch play cards
3. March
4. Scherzo
5. Prince and Princess
6. Flight

Composed: 1919-21

First Performed (Complete Opera): 30 December 1921, Chicago, Auditorium Theatre, cond. Prokofiev

Prokofiev's opera *The Love for Three Oranges* is a magical romp. Prokofiev the gleeful satirist and deflator of windy 'High Art' pomposity takes us to a magical realm, ruled by the King of

Clubs, whose languid aesthete son can only be cured of his acute hypochondria by laughter. It seems to work, until the Prince reveals a new obsession with three mysterious oranges, which turn out to contain three princesses, one of whom is the woman whose love will redeem him – though not before she has been transformed into a giant rat. The story is crazy and dreamlike – not unlike one of Spike Milligan’s Goon Show scripts. Fortunately, the music is brilliant, magical and wickedly funny enough in its own right, as this six-movement suite distilled from its orchestral highlights demonstrates. You may well recognise the March – since the premiere it’s been an orchestral hit in its own right.

**Dobrinka Tabakova (b. 1980): Accordion Concerto (UK premiere), co-commission with Stuttgart Philharmonic**

1. ‘Burning Ground’
2. ‘Whispered Memory’
3. ‘Ancient Patterns’

Composed: 2024-5

First Performed: 17 May 2025, Stuttgart, Kultur-und Kongresszentrum Liederhalle, Stuttgart Philharmonic, Ksenija Sidorova (accordion), cond. Michał Nesterowicz

In this fraught and confusing age, artificial intelligence seems to be threatening not only the ways we organise our lives, but even our very understanding of what it is to be human. Perhaps this is where art can help, engaging directly with our still mysterious inner nature – with what the writer Arthur Koestler called ‘the ghost in the machine’. The Bulgarian-born composer Dobrinka Tabakova had this very much in mind when she wrote her new Accordion Concerto. The accordion has fascinated Tabakova for some time, as an important voice in folk music, not least the music of the Balkans, but also as a seemingly mechanical instrument which nevertheless breathes – ‘a machine with a soul’ is her highly suggestive description. Perhaps, she felt, it could uniquely express our modern predicament, oppressed by algorithms, dictated to by chatbots, but with ‘souls’ which still ‘long for affection and understanding’.

The concerto’s three movements evoke, first the deep, powerful breath of the accordion (‘Burning Ground’), its capacity for intimacy (‘Whispered Memory’), and its flair for dance exultation (‘Ancient Patterns’).

**Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943): Symphony No 3 in A minor, Op 44**

1. Lento – Allegro moderato
2. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro vivace – Tempo come prima
3. Allegro

Composed: 1936

First Performed: 6 November 1936, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Orchestra cond. Leopold Stokowski

When Sergei Rachmaninov set off with his family for Sweden in December 1917, two months after the Bolshevik Revolution, he probably didn’t realise that he’d never see his home country again. But as Soviet Communism put down its steel roots during the 1920s it became increasingly clear that a return to Russia was impossible. Rachmaninov was able to build a completely new career as a star international concert pianist, but the demands of life on the road, and in the background the pain of exile and the destruction of the Russia he knew, made composition difficult. Eventually though he seems to have realised that composing might be the ideal arena in which to work through his feelings. And although Rachmaninov said very little on the subject, his friends

and family seem to have recognised quickly that there was something especially Russian about his Third Symphony.

In many ways the Third is quite different from its precursors: on one level there's a greater concentration and economy of thought; on another it is more colourful and imaginatively resourceful – there are magical sounds and textures here unlike anything in his previous output. But the ache of nostalgia can be felt throughout, and there are moments where Rachmaninov seems to be spiritually revisiting his beloved old Russia, especially in the first movement's noble, soaring second theme (introduced by cellos) and the second movement's slow outer sections. The lively finale, and particularly the symphony's surprisingly brusque ending, can suggest an attempt to put a brave face on irretrievable loss.

A chant-like 'motto' theme recurs throughout the Third Symphony. We hear it at the very beginning subtly scored for clarinet, muted horn and solo muted cello – a remote, ghostly sound, fuelling the suspicion that this is a kind of musical memory. Rachmaninov's fellow-exile Vladimir Nabokov entitled his memoir *Speak Memory*; that could also stand as a subtitle for this fascinating, moving symphony.