



Large Print Concert Programme

Sunday 6 February 7 to 9.05pm

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Piano Concerto No 5, 'Emperor' (1809)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Adagio un poco mosso
- 3 Rondo: Allegro

The first movement opens with extravagant flourishes from the piano punctuated with stoic orchestral chords, leading us with unerring sense of direction towards the sturdy first theme.

This march-like tune presents two important thematic reference-points in the shape of a melodic turn and a tiny figure of just two notes (a long and a short) which Beethoven refers to constantly in the course of the movement. The latter ushers in the chromatic scale with which the piano re-enters, and the same sequence of events later serves to introduce the development section. Here the turn dominates, dreamily passed around the woodwind, but the two-note figure emerges ever more strongly, eventually firing off a stormy tirade of piano octaves.

Towards the end of the movement Beethoven makes his most radical formal move. In the early 19th century it was still customary at this point in a concerto for the soloist to improvise a solo passage (or cadenza); Beethoven did this in his first four concertos, but in the Fifth, for the first time, he includes one that is not only fully written out, but involves the orchestra as well. It was a trend that many subsequent composers, glad of the extra control, would follow.

The second and third movements together take less time to play than the first. The 'Adagio', in the distant key of B major, opens with a serene, hymn-like tune from the strings, which the piano answers with a theme of its own before itself taking up the opening one in ornamented form. This in turn leads to an orchestral reprise of the same theme, now with greater participation from the winds and with piano decoration. At the end the music dissolves, then eerily drops down a semitone as the piano toys idly with some quiet, thickly scored chords. In a flash, these are then transformed and revealed to be the main theme of the bouncy 'Rondo' finale, which has followed without a break.

The concerto's nickname was not chosen by Beethoven, and, given the composer's angry reaction to Napoleon's self-appointment as Emperor in 1804, it may seem more than usually inappropriate. Yet there is an appositeness to it if we take the music's grandly heroic stance as a picture of what, perhaps, an emperor ought to be. Beethoven once remarked that if he had understood the arts of war as well as he had those of music, he could have defeated Napoleon. Who, listening to this concerto, could doubt that?

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770 (Germany) to 1827 (Austria)

Beethoven showed early musical promise, yet reacted against his father's attempts to train him as a child prodigy. The boy pianist attracted the support of the Prince-Archbishop, who supported his studies with leading musicians at the Bonn court.

By the early 1780s Beethoven had completed his first compositions, all of which were for keyboard. Encouraged by his employer, the Prince-Archbishop Maximilian Franz, Beethoven travelled to Vienna to study with Joseph Haydn. The younger composer fell out with his renowned mentor when the latter discovered he was taking lessons from several other teachers.

His public performances in 1795 were well received, and he shrewdly negotiated a contract with Artaria & Co, the largest music publisher in Vienna. He was soon able to devote his time to composition or the performance of his own works. In 1800 Beethoven began to complain bitterly of deafness, but despite suffering the distress and pain of tinnitus, chronic stomach ailments, liver problems and an embittered legal case for the guardianship of his nephew, Beethoven created a series of remarkable new works, including the *Missa solemnis* and his late symphonies and piano sonatas. It is thought that around 10,000 people followed his funeral procession on 29 March 1827.

Symphony No 15 (1970–71)

Dmitri Shostakovich

- 1 Allegretto
- 2 Adagio – Largo – Adagio – Largo –
- 3 Allegretto
- 4 Adagio – Allegretto – Adagio – Allegretto

Late in 1970, not much more than a year after the premiere of his Fourteenth Symphony, Dmitri Shostakovich was at work on another, of which he had completed a draft by early April the following year. In June and July, working first in a clinic and then at his summer home in Repino, 30 miles out of St Petersburg on the Gulf of Finland, he finished the full score. The first performance was planned to take place in the autumn, but Shostakovich had a heart attack and was in hospital for over two months. Rescheduled, the work was introduced to Moscow on 8 January 1972, conducted by the composer's son Maxim, who also took charge of the UK premiere later that year.

Right from the first, the piece seems designed to disconcert. A couple of tings from the glockenspiel set off a perky little flute tune, repeated with accompaniment from pizzicato (plucked) strings. The tune spells out a name in German musical notation: Es-As-C-H-A, ie Sascha. Who is meant by Sascha? A child, and Shostakovich suggested the image of a toyshop. But behind these marching tin soldiers there are dark shadows.

The first movement gallops on, swerving this way and that, with the 'Sascha' motif always near at hand. A second theme is introduced by high woodwind, fully chromatic and yet ironically carefree. The trumpets sound a summons into a new section. Everything is reviewed, including the chromatic line, appearing at one point in an extraordinary rhythmic canon where the parts go at speeds in the ratios 8:6:5.

After this, anything might happen. What does is a 15-minute slow movement: serious, introduced by sonorous brass and an answering cello solo. Taken eventually by a violin, the solo part touches off a piquant woodwind chord to which a response comes from the strings. Flutes foreshadow a solo trombone introducing a central funeral march. This brings in the whole orchestra, clamorous, before the episode fades out on muted trumpets.

Among several quotations in the final movement is the 'Annunciation of Death' from the second act of Richard Wagner's opera *The Valkyrie*, in which the immortal Brünnhilde appears to the hero Siegmund to tell him his fate: impending death. A quotation from another Wagner opera, *Tristan and Isolde*, turns instead into a waltz allegretto for strings. An oboe solo initiates a passacaglia that eventually rises to a colossal tutti (the whole orchestra playing together). The passacaglia crumbles, reconvenes and is outpaced by yet another appearance of the 'Annunciation of Death'. The celeste ultimately conveys the music, through a restatement of the symphony's very first 'Sascha' motif, into a final zone of ice and clockwork.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906 to 1975 (Russia)

After early piano lessons with his mother, Dmitri Shostakovich enrolled at the Petrograd Conservatoire in 1919. Shostakovich announced his Fifth Symphony of 1937 as 'a Soviet artist's practical creative reply to just criticism'. A year before its premiere he had drawn a stinging attack from the official Soviet mouthpiece Pravda which condemned his work for its 'leftist bedlam' and extreme modernism. With the Fifth Symphony came acclaim not only from the Russian audience, but also from musicians and critics overseas.

Shostakovich lived through the first months of the German siege of Leningrad serving as a member of the auxiliary fire service. In July he began work on the first three movements of his Seventh Symphony, completing the defiant finale after his evacuation in October and dedicating the score to the city.

In 1948 Shostakovich and other leading composers, Sergei Prokofiev among them, were forced by the Soviet Cultural Commissar, Andrey Zhdanov, to concede that their work represented 'most strikingly the formalistic perversions and anti-democratic tendencies in music', a crippling blow to Shostakovich's artistic freedom that was healed only after the death of Stalin in 1953.

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Principal Guest Conductor

Gianandrea Noseda is one of the world's most sought-after conductors, equally recognised for his artistry in the concert hall and opera house. He is Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra.

A native of Milan, Noseda is a Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana, marking his contribution to the artistic life of Italy. In 2015, he was Musical America's Conductor of the Year, and was named the International Opera Awards Conductor of the Year in 2016.

Beatrice Rana

piano

Beatrice Rana performs at the world's leading concert halls including Vienna's Konzerthaus and Musikverein, the Berlin Philharmonie, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, New York's Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, Washington's Kennedy Center, Zurich's Tonhalle, London's Wigmore Hall, the Philharmonie de Paris, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, KKL Lucerne, Cologne Philharmonie, Munich's Gasteig, Prinzregententheater and Herkulessaal, Frankfurt's Alte Oper and Milan's Società dei Concerti. She also appears at festivals including Verbier, Klavier Festival Ruhr and the Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival.

London Symphony Orchestra

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Today, we are ranked among the world's top orchestras. As Resident Orchestra at the Barbican, we perform 70 concerts here every year. Our family of artists includes Music Director Sir Simon Rattle, Principal Guest Conductors Gianandrea Noseda and François-Xavier Roth, and Conductor Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas.

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