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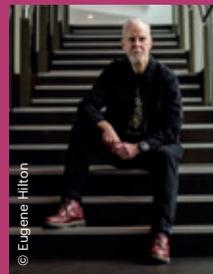
Birmingham Classical

2025/26

Sir Simon Rattle
Tan Dun
Jennifer Pike
Freddy Kempf
Alexandra Dariescu
Paul Lewis



© Paul Dixon Photography



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Welcome to an exciting new Birmingham Classical season which brings superb orchestras, stellar soloists, exclusive concerts and innovative Rising Stars to Symphony Hall.

Among the season's hottest tickets will be Sir Simon Rattle and the world-renowned Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra who are visiting just three cities on their first UK tour, and Birmingham is

one of them. And we're equally delighted that multi award-winning composer Tan Dun conducts Beethoven's mighty 'Choral' Symphony and unveils a major new work of his own in the only UK performance outside London.

Among popular returning guest artists are Jennifer Pike, Paul Lewis and András Keller, while pianist Freddy Kempf is joined by a trio of musicians for Gershwin and Dave Brubeck in a fascinating classical-meets-jazz concert. There's a sunny Spanish debut from the Galicia Symphony Orchestra and a long-awaited return from the esteemed Warsaw Philharmonic with pianist Alexandra Dariescu. The superbly talented Rising Stars bring exceptional musicianship and fresh new ideas to invigorate Sunday mornings in the informal setting of the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space. Rising Stars are nominated by our fellow concert halls in the European Concert Hall Organisation and represent the finest emerging classical music talent in Europe.

£15 tickets are available as standard for every concert and, for most, the top price is £40. Alongside package savings, we're proud to continue to offer significant discounts – for families, 16–30s, benefit recipients, groups and more – to help make Birmingham Classical accessible to all.

We hope you'll find plenty to tempt you this season and look forward to welcoming you soon.

Nick Reed
Chief Executive, B:Music

Brochure compiled and written by Fiona Fraser | Brochure designed by Louise Gale

Front cover: Sir Simon Rattle conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (see page 9)

Image: © BR/Astrid Ackermann

welcome

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ECHO Rising Stars: Maat Saxophone Quartet Blackbird

Sun 5 Oct | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Maat Saxophone Quartet

Programme includes music by Hildegard von Bingen, Lili Boulanger, Henriëtte Bosmans, George Gershwin, Paul McCartney and Aleksandra Vrebalov



“Devilishly good and heavenly contagious”. That’s how De Luister magazine described Dutch/Portuguese foursome the Maat Saxophone Quartet’s playing on their debut recording. As boundary-pushing as they themselves are, Blackbird is an inventive tribute to female creativity, equality and musical freedom.

The medieval chants of Hildegard of Bingen thread together nine centuries of music, the ethereal sound translating perfectly to the solo saxophone. Lili Boulanger lends two short pieces originally written for violin and piano, and Henriëtte Bosmans’s string quartet adds both romantic and modern styles. Nina Simone’s version of a Gershwin favourite, Porgy, I Is Your Woman, and Paul McCartney’s Blackbird nod to

struggles for rights and freedoms, while Gershwin’s jazzy Rhapsody in Blue also features. The world premiere of a new commission from Aleksandra Vrebalov explores the full range of the instrument with a fresh, modern voice.

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

Rising Stars are nominated by the artistic directors of Europe’s most prestigious venues which are members of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO).

Tickets: £15

Brno Philharmonic with Freddy Kempf

Wed 15 Oct | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

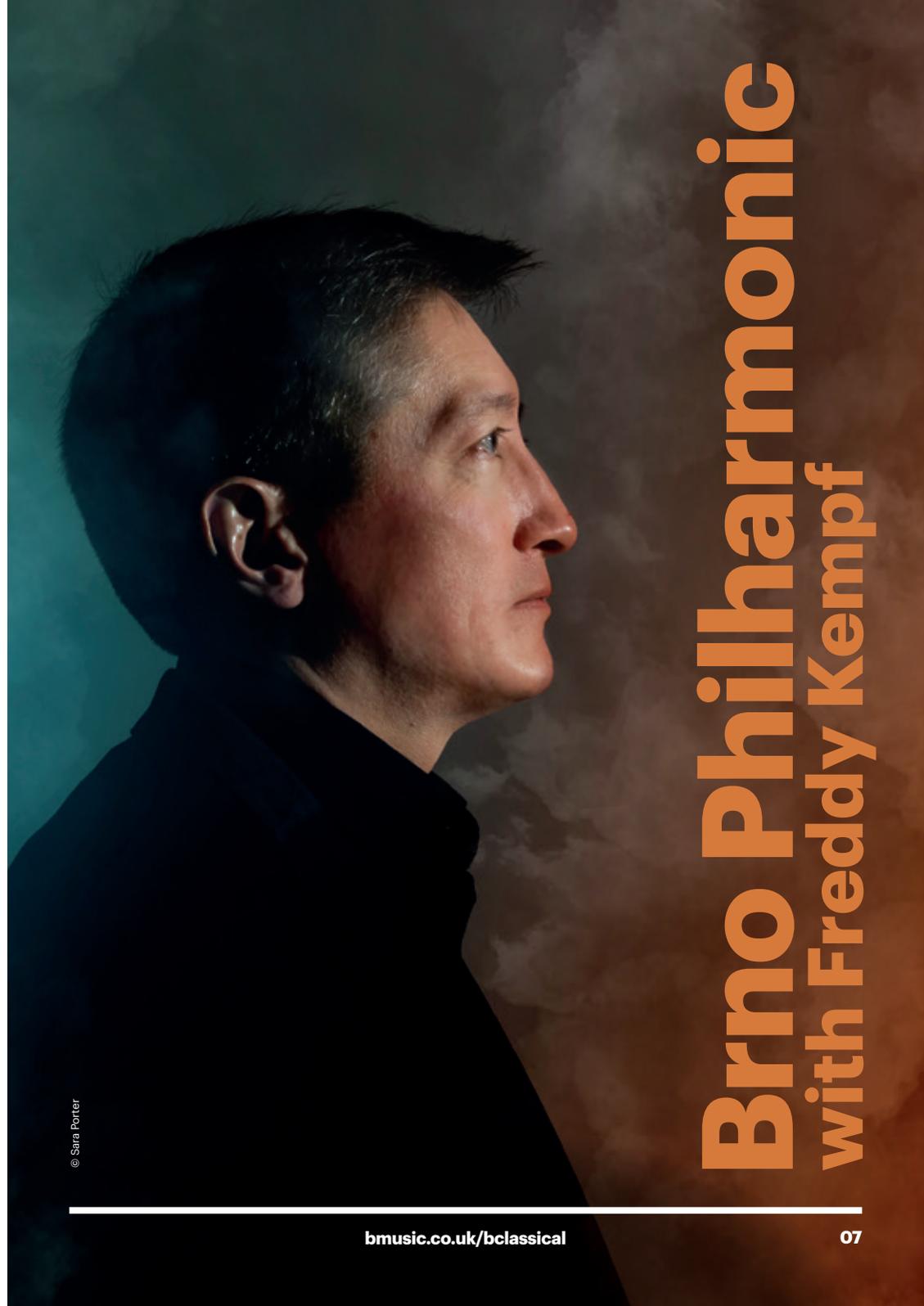
Brno Philharmonic
Dennis Russell Davies conductor
Freddy Kempf piano
Pavel Zlámal saxophone
Marek Švestka double bass
Radek Tomášek drums

Janáček	Lachian Dances
Gershwin	I Got Rhythm Variations
Brubeck	Brandenburg Gate: Revisited
Dvořák	Symphony No 7

The Brno Philharmonic traces its roots to the 1870s when a young Leoš Janáček endeavoured to establish an orchestra in the city. Janáček remains close to the players' hearts – his stirring and characterful regional folk dances open the concert – as does another of their compatriots, Antonín Dvořák. The huge success of his Slavonic Dances led to international fame, and triumphant visits to London and Birmingham saw him dubbed 'The Bohemian Brahms'. With Brahms's Third as his inspiration, his Seventh Symphony is his most intense and compelling, yet Slavic melodies and dance rhythms are never far away.

The internationally-acclaimed pianist, Freddy Kempf, absolutely thrives on the spontaneity of live performance, so you can expect plenty of pizzazz in two works that blur the line between jazz and classical. Gershwin's I Got Rhythm Variations spins technical brilliance and intimate jazz club vibes into an exciting showpiece. Dave Brubeck's Brandenburg Gate: Revisited is a Bach-like set of variations. According to Darius Brubeck, "exchanges with improvisers evoke feelings from sombre recollection of what the Gate symbolises, to infectious Baroque jolliness, as the spotlight moves from orchestra to soloist and back again."

Tickets: £15–£40





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ECHO Rising Stars: Giorgi Gigashvili

Sun 9 Nov | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Giorgi Gigashvili piano



Scarlatti
Chopin
Natalie Beridze
Lili Boulanger
Ravel

Sonatas in C major K487; D major K29; A major K113
Ballade No 4
ECHO new commission
D'un vieux jardin; D'un jardin clair, from Trois Morceaux
Miroirs

Giorgi Gigashvili is currently hitting the headlines as a much sought-after pianist: a protégé of Martha Argerich and winner of eight prizes at the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master competition, he's also a newly-announced BBC New Generation artist and is currently touring Europe as an ECHO Rising Star. But that's not the direction he expected his career to take. In fact, his first love is singing, and he even won the Georgian version of 'The Voice' at the age of 13.

Gigashvili brings an intuitive and creative personality to all he plays, from the romance of Chopin's Fourth Ballade to Ravel's glimmering Miroirs. Expect electric energy and sparkle in three technically-demanding miniature sonatas by Scarlatti that Gigashvili chose

for his acclaimed recording debut. He's also commissioned a new work from composer, songwriter, and fellow Georgian, Natalie Beridze, specially for the tour.

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

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Tickets: £15

Sir Simon Rattle and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

Tue 11 Nov | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra
Sir Simon Rattle conductor

Schumann
Stravinsky

Symphony No 2
The Firebird (complete)

Without doubt one of the most anticipated concerts of recent years, Sir Simon Rattle makes a homecoming appearance at Symphony Hall with his new orchestra – one of just three dates on their first UK tour together. It's twenty years since the world-leading Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra last came to Birmingham and, since Rattle took the reins in 2023, they say he's "blown fresh air under the wings of all of us".

They open with the symphony Schumann wrote after completing his piano concerto. During the year it took to finish, his mental health was at times fragile, yet this is an optimistic and exciting work, with a fast-paced scherzo and heartfelt slow movement.

Stravinsky's spellbinding music to the extravagant ballet The Firebird was his first commission from impresario Serge Diaghilev for his Ballets Russes, and it sealed the young composer's reputation. It was also the work Rattle chose for the first concert in Symphony Hall in 1991. We'll hear every magical note of the complete ballet score as the tale of a prince, evil ogre, enchanted princesses and magical phoenix unfolds in vivid orchestral technical colour.

Not to be missed!

Tickets: £15–£60



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Concerto Budapest Symphony Orchestra play Beethoven 5

Wed 3 Dec | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Concerto Budapest Symphony Orchestra
András Keller conductor
Paul Lewis piano

Shostakovich	Symphony No 9
Beethoven	Piano Concerto No 3
Liszt	Les préludes
Beethoven	Symphony No 5

With well over 100 years of history, Concerto Budapest may be one of Hungary's oldest ensembles, but under the 18-year leadership of celebrated violinist/conductor András Keller, it is also one of the most progressive and youthful.

Soloist Paul Lewis is a Symphony Hall favourite and superlative interpreter of Beethoven. His Third Concerto, written during the years when Beethoven realised he was losing his hearing, is full of tension and conflict right until the end, when the sun bursts joyously through the clouds. The iconic Fifth Symphony followed just a few years later. Its famous four-note 'fate' motto sets a dark undercurrent that brings intensity throughout this best-known of all symphonies.

Contrast that with the opening work: Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony thumbs its nose at tradition. It's playful and cheeky, everything a Ninth Symphony 'shouldn't' be, and it's totally brilliant as a result. With the poetic drama of Liszt's pioneering symphonic poem Les préludes, this is a concert full of light and shade.

Tickets: £15–£40

For Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, see 12 February; for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, see 29 March



© V. Einarsson

ECHO Rising Stars: Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir Migrations: Story of a Bird

Sun 8 Feb | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir soprano
Kunal Lahiry piano



Programme includes music by Barber, Nico Muhly, Sibelius, Errollyn Wallen, Judith Weir, Rachmaninov, Deborah Pritchard, María Huld Markan, Haydn and Bonds

With her captivating and ethereal voice, Icelandic soprano Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir is an artist at one with nature. Inspired by her home country, she has a keen eye for visual storytelling and uses her passion for photography and videography to create video projections that complement her performances.

This recital weaves together themes of migration, transformation, and the cycles of nature, using the metaphor of a bird's journey to explore deeper human experiences. From the stark landscapes of the north to the warmth of distant lands, and the changing of seasons to the inevitability of time, myriad short pieces capture the sense of longing and

the search for a place to belong. Step into Álfheiður's world for a fleeting moment, and contemplate the paths we travel, the places we leave behind, and the destinations we seek, both known and unknown.

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

Rising Stars are nominated by the artistic directors of Europe's most prestigious venues which are members of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO).

Tickets: £15



© Arno

Czech Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra

Thu 12 Feb | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Czech Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra

Daniel Raiskin conductor

Jennifer Pike violin

Janáček	Prelude & Pantomime, from The Cunning Little Vixen
Bruch	Violin Concerto No 1
Shostakovich	Symphony No 10

Praised for its musical excellence and flawless performances, the Czech Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra (CJPO) has a long musical tradition rooted in Czech culture. Its distinguished new Chief Conductor designate Daniel Raiskin believes it's also one of very few international orchestras to have retained a truly distinctive sound. Hear for yourself in two delightful excerpts from Janáček's opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*, based on a comic strip character. Soloist Jennifer Pike is a violinist of unique artistry and compelling insight who can "hold an audience spellbound" (*The Strad*), making her the perfect advocate for Bruch's universally popular First Violin Concerto with its ravishingly beautiful slow movement, the beating heart of the work.

Shostakovich unleashed his Tenth Symphony in December 1953, nine months after Stalin's death (and just months before the CJPO was formally established). There's an ever present sense of danger, a maniacal march, a forced-sounding waltz, plaintive solos and an over-excited finale at the end of which, Shostakovich's musical monogram triumphs. This monumental work creates a shattering live experience and leaves a profound sense of Shostakovich's life under Stalin.

Tickets: £15-£40

For Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony, see 3 December



© Thomas Nikolaus Schrott

ECHO Rising Stars: Valerie Fritz

Learn to Unlearn

Sun 29 Mar | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Valerie Fritz cello



Programme includes music by Manuel Zwerger, Georges Aperghis, Jennifer Walshe, Simon Steen-Andersen, Michael Beil, Peter Eötvös, Bach and Britten

Austrian cellist, Valerie Fritz, is a musical adventurer who loves nothing better than to create unique concert programmes and invent new performance formats. Already an established soloist and chamber musician, she's played at major festivals, and is a regular with Camerata Salzburg and contemporary music group ENSEMBLE NAMES.

Unburdened by tradition, in *Learn to Unlearn* Valerie places classical music alongside performance works that are about more than just cello playing. With Manuel Zwerger's *Violin Tuition* with visuals as a starter, she delves back to the music of Bach and Britten, through mid-century avant-garde composer George Crumb, and forward to experimental works with visuals and electronics by Michael Beil, Simon Steen-Andersen and others.

Plus, there's a cutting edge new commission from Jennifer Walshe, "The most original compositional voice to emerge from Ireland in the past 20 years" (*The Irish Times*).

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

Rising Stars are nominated by the artistic directors of Europe's most prestigious venues which are members of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO).

Tickets: £15

Tan Dun and the London Philharmonic Orchestra

Sun 29 Mar | Symphony Hall | 5PM

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Tan Dun conductor

Elizabeth Watts soprano

Hongni Wu mezzo-soprano

John Findon tenor

Dingle Yandell bass

London Philharmonic Choir

London Chinese Philharmonic Choir

Tan Dun **Nine (new work)**

Beethoven **Symphony No 9 'Choral'**

Afternoon
MUSIC

Globally successful musician and composer Tan Dun conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra in Beethoven's visionary Ninth Symphony. On its own, that would make this concert the hottest of hot tickets, but when it's coupled with a major new work by the Grammy award-winning composer himself – the only performance outside London – it's elevated it to a new level.

200 years ago, Beethoven shook the world with his final symphony, not least by introducing a chorus into the last movement to sing his setting of Schiller's Ode to Joy, a declaration of friendship and brotherhood. It's the defining moment of the Symphony and creates an ecstatic blaze of glory that stirs the soul.

Beethoven wanted his Ninth Symphony to embrace all humanity, so when Tan Dun set out to compose his own tribute to Beethoven, he aimed just as high, combining ancient poetry from China and Europe to create an 'ode to peace' worthy of Beethoven's Ode to Joy. His choral concerto Nine is everything you'd expect from the composer of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. His creative and artistic language spans East and West, and the result transcends both.

Tickets: £15–£60



Tan Dun
and the London Philharmonic Orchestra



Good Friday St John Passion

with Ex Cathedra

Fri 3 Apr | Symphony Hall | 2PM

Ex Cathedra Choir, Baroque Orchestra & Academy of Vocal Music

Jeffrey Skidmore conductor

Sebastian Hill Evangelist

Thomas Lowen Jesus

Lawrence White Pilate

Bach

St John Passion

In 1724, for his first Easter in charge of music in Leipzig, Bach presented a new work for the Good Friday liturgy: the St John Passion. Dramatic choruses place us at the heart of the story, while poignant solo arias and achingly beautiful orchestration explore the characters' emotional depth – and offer us space to pause and reflect. Three centuries after that first performance, it is a masterpiece that still speaks to us profoundly, regardless of belief.

Jeffrey Skidmore's insightful approach takes us closer still to Bach's day by incorporating motets, chorale preludes, readings and congregational hymns.

Symphony Hall's Good Friday Bach Passion is a tradition that stretches back over 30 years. For much of that time it has been safe in the hands of Birmingham's stellar early music group Ex Cathedra, hailed by the New York Times as "one of Britain's very best choirs".

Sung in German with English surtitles

Ex Cathedra is an Associate Artist of B:Music

Tickets: £15–£50

Afternoon
MUSIC



Spanish Galicia Symphony Orchestra

Sat 11 Apr | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Spanish Galicia Symphony Orchestra

Roberto González-Monjas conductor

Thibaut Garcia guitar

Falla
Rodrigo
Ravel
Turina
Ravel

Three Dances, from The Three-Cornered Hat
Concierto de Aranjuez
Mother Goose Suite
Sinfonia Sevillana
Boléro

Escape to the warmth of sunny Spain with a popular concert of foot-tapping dances, evocative folk melodies, a Ravel classic, and the world's most famous guitar concerto.

From the north-west tip of Spain, the Galicia Symphony Orchestra and charismatic music director Roberto González-Monjas, reach a wide audience through extensive tours and the huge success of their online videos.

Their Symphony Hall debut brings colourful picture postcards of Spain, from Falla's folk dances rich in national character, to Turina's depictions of Moorish architecture and the honey tones of his native Seville. With his own Spanish heritage, the dazzling French guitarist

Thibaut Garcia has a deep connection to Rodrigo's much-loved concerto.

Maurice Ravel was equally inspired by his Spanish roots. We'll hear his enchanting fairy tale suite Mother Goose. And as Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean hang up their ice-skates for the final time, who better to play them out with Ravel's iconic Boléro, a 15-minute crescendo wound around an increasingly hypnotic theme.

Tickets: £15–£40



ECHO Rising Stars: Áron Horváth

Sun 12 Apr | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Áron Horváth cimbalom

Programme includes music by Bach, Kurtág, László Sáy, Emma Nagy, Charlotte Bray, Áron Horváth and Debussy



If you've not come across the cimbalom before, here's a chance to explore its unique sound in the hands of Áron Horváth, a master musician from Hungary who's been playing it since the age of 7. A stringed instrument played with two mallets, the cimbalom's distinctive metallic sound is traditionally associated with Eastern Europe folk music. Horváth is on a mission to bring it to wider attention, and he's already made great strides with interests spanning folk to classical, improvisation and jazz, electronics and performance effects, to add to his many collaborations and several recordings.

Showcasing a range of styles, he'll create an intimate, meditative atmosphere shared between performer and audience, with a focus on slow, spiritual music. Bach's Chaconne and Debussy's Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum

feature, as do works by fellow Hungarians Sáy and Kurtág. There's also an up-to-the-minute new piece by the outstanding British composer, and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire graduate, Charlotte Bray, whose works have been performed at the Proms and the Royal Opera House.

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

Rising Stars are nominated by the artistic directors of Europe's most prestigious venues which are members of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO).

Tickets: £15



ECHO Rising Stars: Trio Concept

Sounds of Europe, odes to freedom

Sun 17 May | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Trio Concept

Programme includes music by Dvořák, Elgar, Alba Rosa Viëtor, Frank Martin, Clemens K Thomas and Ravel



Trio Concept was formed in 2013 by three musicians from Turin – Edoardo Grieco (violin), Francesco Massimino (cello), and Lorenzo Nguyen (piano) – who first came together as young artists. A decade later, and still in their mid-twenties, they are one of Italy's most award-winning chamber ensembles with international debuts lined up for the foreseeable future.

In their special programme 'Sounds of Europe, odes to freedom', Trio Concept take a musical journey to explore borders and relationships, and question identity as a connecting and separating narrative. Music from Dvořák's 'Dumky' Trio features alongside a Swedish Folk Song from Alba Rosa Viëtor, a March by Elgar and an Irish folk tune from Frank Martin.

Their commissioned new work comes from Clemens K Thomas, a composer who looks to pressing issues of our time; and Ravel's glorious Trio rounds off their celebration of freedom in musical diversity.

An hour-long Sunday morning concert, with coffee/tea and a slice of cake available beforehand, included in your ticket.

Rising Stars are nominated by the artistic directors of Europe's most prestigious venues which are members of the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO).

Tickets: £15

Warsaw Philharmonic

Sun 17 May | Symphony Hall | 3PM

Warsaw Philharmonic
Krzysztof Urbański conductor
Alexandra Dariescu piano

Lutosławski	Little Suite
Chopin	Piano Concerto No 2
Bacewicz	Scherzo
Beethoven	Symphony No 7

Afternoon
MUSIC

The grand finale of Birmingham Classical 2025/26 welcomes back the esteemed Warsaw Philharmonic who last played at Symphony Hall in 1998. A cherished national institution established in 1901, it's credited with establishing Warsaw as the country's musical centre. Krzysztof Urbański is the latest in a succession of Polish chief conductors that has ensured the orchestra retains a distinctive national character.

It's also spent its musical life bringing an authentic voice to Poland's own composers, not least Witold Lutosławski whose delightful Little Suite is a musical snapshot of Polish folk culture, with its folksy fife tune and polka. Mid 20th-century composer Grażyna Bacewicz gained international recognition during her lifetime and her dancing scherzo for piano, now deftly orchestrated by Urbański, shows just why. From Poland's most famous musical son, Fryderyk Chopin, we'll hear his best-known Piano Concerto, performed by trailblazing pianist Alexandra Dariescu, one of today's most exciting and charismatic musicians. Written when he was just 20 and premiered in Warsaw, its beautiful slow movement is pure, dreamy romance. Finally, Beethoven's Seventh Symphony fizzles with energy from first to last. It's a deservedly popular work and the perfect symphony to end this afternoon's concert on a high.

Tickets: £15-£40



© Grzesiek Mart



© Nick Rutter

Lunchtime Organ Concerts

With Thomas Trotter



Declared “Britain’s greatest living organist” by Gramophone magazine, Thomas Trotter is among the world’s most celebrated players and has elevated the tradition of the virtuoso organist to new heights. His fortnightly lunchtime concerts last around an hour and showcase the organ’s sublime delicacy and awesome power – as well as his own technical wizardry – in some of the most inventive programmes you’re ever likely to hear.

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Mon 3 Nov | Town Hall

Mon 17 Nov | Town Hall
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Mon 8 Dec | Town Hall
Sing Carols with the City Organist

with Lichfield Cathedral Choir
Ben Lamb, conductor
Jeremy Nicholas, presenter

Mon 15 Dec | Symphony Hall*
Lunchtime Christmas Music

with Hereford Cathedral Choir
Geraint Bowen, conductor

Mon 12 Jan | Symphony Hall

*Tickets for this concert are £16 but are still available as part of a Lunchtime Organ Concert package discount

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See page 23 for how to book

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Thomas Trotter is an Associate Artist of B:Music

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