

B:Music

Birmingham Classical

2023/24

Lang Lang
Tamsin Waley-Cohen
Nikolai Lugansky
Rachel Podger
The King's Singers

**All seats £10
for Symphony
Orchestra of India**





Join us before the performance in the Symphony Hall eatery, **B:Eats**, where we're now serving our daytime menu full of Brummie surprises alongside some breakfast, brunch, lunch, and sandwich classics, while our evening menus offer a contemporary take on some firm favourites and some quick bite options – **B:Eats** is the perfect place to relax and enjoy the incredible views of Centenary Square before the performance.

More information can be found on bmusic.co.uk/your-visit/beats

B:Eats



@ Eugene Hilton

Welcome to an exciting 2023/24 Birmingham Classical Season, packed with superb orchestras, world class soloists and unmissable programmes.

A towering giant of the classical music world, Lang Lang makes Symphony Hall one of just three UK recital venues this autumn. Also at Symphony Hall are the distinguished Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra (fresh from their role in

the award-winning film *Tár*), and Birmingham City Organist Thomas Trotter, who marks his 40th anniversary with a special recital. At Town Hall, look out for the final three of Schubert's piano sonatas with Paul Lewis, one of the all-time great performers of his music.

The 150th anniversary of Sergei Rachmaninov continues with a focus on his solo and multi-piano music and, later in the season, his Second Piano Concerto, featuring supreme Rachmaninov interpreters, Boris Giltburg and Nikolai Lugansky.

Alongside some of the pinnacles of orchestral music are newer discoveries: Tan Dun's thrilling *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, is performed by the China Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra, while Armonico Consort has uncovered two large-scale choral masterpieces by a forgotten baroque composer, Francesco Scarlatti.

I know that the pricing for orchestral concerts can be mystifying for newcomers to classical music, so every seat is just £10 when the Symphony Orchestra of India return to Symphony Hall in December. With Zakir Hussain performing his new Triple Concerto this is a chance to hear an outstanding evening of music at a very accessible price.

With concerts at Symphony Hall, Town Hall and the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space, we hope you'll find plenty to entice you. We're offering cumulative package discounts this year which means you can keep adding concerts, and keep saving, throughout the year.

Nick Reed

Chief Executive, B:Music

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

Front cover, Alpesh Chauhan conducts the Symphony Orchestra of India (see page 12). Image credit: Maggio Musicale

welcome

Ways to save

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Book 3+ concerts at any time and unlock great discounts

Buy 3–5 concerts & save 10%	Buy 6–11 concerts & save 20%	Buy 12+ concerts & save 30%
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This year, we're offering cumulative discounts so you can add more concerts to your package throughout the year to increase your discount further. For instance, you might book 5 concerts and save 10%, then later on, you book a sixth concert* and see your saving increase to 20% on concerts 6–11. If you were to then book a twelfth* concert, your saving would increase to 30% on concerts 12+.

*Please note, whilst the initial package can be booked online, subsequent additions must be booked by phone in order to unlock the additional discounts.

More ways to save

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Telephone lines open
Monday to Saturday, 10am – 2pm

See **How to Book** (page 33) for further details

Please note, concert packages and other discounts are not available for Lang Lang (27 October)

Thomas Trotter

Celebrating 40 years as Birmingham City Organist

Fri 6 Oct | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Thomas Trotter organ

Bach	Fantasia & Fugue in G minor, BWV 542
Schumann	Study in A flat
Cheryl Frances-Hoad	new work (world premiere)
Wagner (arr. Lemare)	Overture to Rienzi
Liszt	Fantasia & Fugue on the chorale 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam'

"One of the greatest players of this, or any, age" declared Choir and Organ magazine of Thomas Trotter. Awarded The Queen's Medal for Music 2020, he is among the world's most celebrated organists and has elevated the tradition of the virtuoso organist to new heights.

As Birmingham City Organist since 1983 – only the seventh post-holder since 1834 – he has had a major influence on Birmingham's musical life, and this concert celebrates a remarkable 40th anniversary with a typically captivating programme. There's Baroque brilliance in Bach's 'Great' Fantasia and Fugue; fiendish difficulty for both hands and feet in Edwin Lemare's transcription of Wagner's Rienzi Overture; and Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue, based on music from Meyerbeer's opera *Le prophète*, which made an emphatic case for the organist as a concert performer, not solely a church musician.

In 40 years, Trotter has commissioned many exciting new works (you can hear some of them in his lunchtime concert series). Expect a suitably celebratory piece from Cheryl Frances-Hoad whose music, says the American Record Guide, is "melodic, passionate, equal parts humour and reverence".

For details of Thomas Trotter's regular lunchtime concert series, see page 32

Thomas Trotter is an Associate Artist of B:Music

Tickets: £23



© Adrian Burrows



ECHO Rising Stars: Sonoro Quartet

Sun 15 Oct | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Haydn
Annelies van Parys
Shostakovich

String Quartet in B flat major, Op 76 No 4 'Sunrise'
new work
String Quartet No 8 in C minor, Op 110

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The Belgian Sonoro Quartet have been making waves throughout Europe with a busy schedule of over 40 concerts a year, coupled with a host of radio broadcasts and competition successes, not least, recognition at the Bartók World Competition for string quartets.

Their programme, entitled 'Reflections', looks to the past and the 'father of the string quartet' with Haydn's radiant 'Sunrise' Quartet, and to the future with a new commission from the Belgian composer Annelies van Parys whose music "feels like an overwhelming encyclopedia of colours" (De Standaard).

Shostakovich's most popular Quartet, his Eighth, was written as a result of a trip to see the bombed out ruins of the city of Dresden. It's full of self-quotation, including his own musical motto, and steeped in an enigma of profoundly personal meaning.

ECHO artist nominated by BOZAR Brussels

Tickets: £15
Includes coffee/tea and a slice of cake,
available before the concert



National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

Tue 24 Oct | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Volodymyr Sirenko conductor
Antonii Baryshevskiy piano

Lyatosynsky
Beethoven
Sibelius

Grazhyna
Piano Concerto No 4
Symphony No 1

Symphony Hall is thrilled to welcome the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine as part of its biggest UK tour to date. One of the most distinguished European orchestras, it's achieved world-wide recognition through its many international tours, which include Australia, the US, Europe and Asia. This visit is particularly important, following the tragic invasion of Ukraine by Russia and ongoing war and, with hostilities expected to continue for some time, it's vital that we continue to support the rich, musical culture of Ukraine.

Music Director Volodymyr Sirenko is joined by pianist Antonii Baryshevskiy, a prize-winner at the Arthur Rubinstein International

Piano Master and F Busoni International Piano Competitions. He'll play Beethoven's magnificent Fourth Piano Concerto, widely regarded as one of the greatest in the repertoire, and expressing a huge range of mood from deep introspection to joyful exuberance. Bookending the concerto are Boris Lyatosynsky's symphonic poem, Grazhyna, an appealing example of this leading Ukrainian composer's dramatic music, and Sibelius's First Symphony. Expansive and lyrical, it's the most overtly romantic of the Finnish composer's work, and has long been an audience favourite everywhere.

Tickets: £13 - £45

Lang Lang plays the Goldberg Variations

Fri 27 Oct | Symphony Hall | 8PM

Lang Lang piano

Bach Goldberg Variations

Lang Lang is one of the world's great figures in modern classical music, an artist who has had a profound effect as a pianist, educator and philanthropist, as well as an influential ambassador for the arts. He's given concerts the world over, played for billions of viewers at the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony in Beijing and is a recent star of Channel 4's 'The Piano', through all of which his charisma and artistry shine through.

This is an incredible opportunity to hear this magical performer live on stage in one of just a handful of UK dates this autumn. Bach's magnificent Goldberg Variations were reputedly composed to soothe the insomniac Count Keyserlingk in his sleepless nights, and Bach crafts 30 variations on a beautiful aria to create a timeless masterpiece.

"I've moved into new terrain with the Goldberg Variations and really immersed myself fully in this project," says Lang Lang. This has included consulting period performance experts for the latest thinking in Baroque music. "I've been studying this piece for more than 20 years, and recording it has been a lifelong dream".

Tickets: £39 – £94

PLEASE NOTE, this concert is not available as part of a concert package, and discounts are not available

"there's something about the spontaneity of a live concert – those special moments, that you don't get in the studio"

Lang Lang



Rachmaninov 150



MultiPiano Ensemble

Rachmaninov in forty fingers

Thu 16 Nov | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Rachmaninov	Russian Rhapsody for 2 pianos
Scriabin	Fantasy for 2 pianos
Rachmaninov	Suites Nos 1 & 2 for 2 pianos
Rachmaninov	Romance & Waltz for piano in 6 hands
Medtner	Round Dance for 2 pianos
Arensky	Polichinelle for 2 pianos

MultiPiano describe themselves as a “unique modular piano ensemble” and it’s easy to see why: from one piano with four hands to several pianos in a variety of multi-hand combinations, they are as fascinating to watch as they are to hear. The Israeli ensemble have been performing and recording their way through repertoire from Mozart to Shostakovich and attracting international attention from the very first note, with tours across North and South America, Europe and the Far East.

They mark the 150th anniversary of Rachmaninov’s birth with several of his major works for two pianos, including the brilliant and

virtuosic Russian Rhapsody, a set of variations from an 18-year-old composer, and the unashamedly romantic Suite No 1 which hints at its dedicatee, Tchaikovsky. Suite No 2 was one of the first works written after the devastatingly critical reception to his First Symphony three years earlier and is characteristically lyrical, with a demanding tarantella. Interspersed are more wonders from this golden age of multipiano music with Medtner’s charming Round Dance, Arensky’s vivacious Polichinelle (the commedia dell’arte character, Pulcinella) and Scriabin’s Fantasy that’s both wistful and stormy.

Tickets: £15 – £30



Boris Giltburg plays Rachmaninov

Thu 23 Nov | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Boris Giltburg piano

Rachmaninov	Prelude in C sharp minor, Op 3 No 2
	Preludes, Op 23
	Preludes, Op 32

Perhaps the most romantic of all composers, Sergei Rachmaninov’s gorgeous piano concertos are among the most popular in the repertoire. But the glorious melodies often belie the fiendish difficulty of his music. Rachmaninov could famously stretch well over an octave and his technical abilities went far beyond that of most pianists.

With his “vivid skill, colour and poetry” (Guardian), Boris Giltburg is the perfect interpreter of Rachmaninov and his recording of the Complete Preludes has won him high critical praise. He’ll bring all his sensitivity and panache to these exquisite miniatures – 24 pieces in each of the major and minor keys with as rich a variety of character and mood as you can imagine – beginning with the early

Prelude in C sharp minor that was demanded as an encore by audiences wherever Rachmaninov appeared.

“Two of the Preludes were the beginning of my own discovery of Rachmaninov, and I fell in love, completely and hopelessly,” says Giltburg. Come and be enchanted.

Tickets: £15 – £30

Nikolai Lugansky plays Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto with the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra on 15 Feb 2024.

See page 19 for details.

Symphony Orchestra of India

with Zakir Hussain

Fri 1 Dec | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Symphony Orchestra of India

Alpesh Chauhan conductor

Zakir Hussain tabla

Niladri Kumar sitar

Rakesh Chaurasia bansuri

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Strauss	Rosenkavalier Suite
Hussain	Triple Concerto
Stravinsky	Petrushka (1947)

Representing an entire country and a population of 1.4 billion, India's first and only professional symphony orchestra chose Symphony Hall as the launchpad for its first, highly successful, UK tour in 2019. Birmingham's own Alpesh Chauhan guest conducts the orchestra in its return visit. His meteoric rise now sees him as Music Director of Birmingham Opera Company, Principal Guest Conductor of the Dusseldorf Symphoniker, and a regular at the helm of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

From the whooping horns of the opening, to the rapt intensity of the 'Presentation of the Rose' and the final rousing waltz, Strauss's Rosenkavalier Suite shows off the orchestra in glorious technicolour. Petrushka is also an orchestral showcase as Stravinsky magically portrays the puppet characters in tales of servitude, love, jealousy and murder through music with a sinister undercurrent. This was one of the major works for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes that made Stravinsky's name.

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain has appeared many times at Symphony Hall and was soloist in his own tabla concerto, Peshkar, with the orchestra in 2019. Creating a fusion of Indian and Western classical music traditions, he uses the solo instruments and orchestra to the full, in a way that makes this combination seem the most natural thing in the world.

Tickets: £10



Symphony Orchestra
of India



© Sophia Hegewald

ECHO Rising Stars: Mathis Stier

Sun 3 Dec | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Mathis Stier bassoon

Philipp Böddecker
Paula Matthusen
Camille Saint-Saëns
Maria Sigfúsdóttir
Clara Schumann
Alain Binaud
Daniel Schnyder

Sonata sopra 'La Monica'
of an implacable subtraction
Bassoon Sonata
new work
Three Romances
Hallucinations
Sonata for bassoon and piano

Already principal bassoon player with the WDR Sinfonieorchester in Cologne, Mathis Stier's virtuosity and musicianship are beyond doubt. An accomplished soloist and chamber musician, he took home the second prize and coveted Audience Prize at the 2019 ARD Competition.

As a solo instrument the bassoon is among the least familiar to audiences, but Stier reveals a whole world of possibilities for this versatile instrument, from the courtly 17th century sonata of Böddecker and the rich and tonal sonorities of Saint-Saëns's Sonata, to the

contemporary sounds of Paula Matthusen's work for bassoon and fixed media. Stier's new commission for this tour is by Maria Sigfúsdóttir, an Icelandic composer and violinist whose band, amiina, toured and collaborated with Sigur Rós.

*ECHO artist nominated by
Elbphilharmonie and Kölner Philharmonie*

Tickets: £15
**Includes coffee/tea and a slice of cake,
available before the concert**

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Paul Lewis

Schubert Piano Sonatas: 3

Tue 5 Dec | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Sonata for Piano No 4 in A minor, D537
Sonata for Piano No 9 in B major, D575
Sonata for Piano No 18 in G major, D894

"Every now and again a recording comes along that makes you want to dance in the street ... this is one of those instances." In its review of Paul Lewis's Schubert D894 sonata recording, Gramophone magazine marvelled at his confidence and sureness, his finesse and musicality. And it's those qualities that mark Lewis out as an authority on Schubert's piano music.

In this third recital of his survey, Paul Lewis brings his magic to three more sonatas. The first two are among six that Schubert started in 1817, a year after he'd given up a teaching post at his father's school to become a freelance composer and was full of hope and expectation for his burgeoning career.

The lilting drama of the A minor's first movement and simplicity of the song-like second, written in March, give way to a more developed 'Schubertian' style in the lively D575, written in August. Contrast that with one of his most original sonatas, the much later D894. Robert Schumann, who did much to champion Schubert's works after his death, called this sonata "the most perfect in form and substance".

Tickets: £15 - £30

*The final concert in Paul Lewis's Schubert Piano Sonatas cycle is on 11 April 2024.
See page 26 for details*



The King's Singers

When you wish upon a star

Wed 20 Dec | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Programme includes music by Grieg, Byrd and Saint-Saëns, traditional and modern carols, and a celebration of 100 years of Disney

A concert that celebrates the 400th anniversary of the Renaissance composer William Byrd and 100 years of the magic of Disney has the unmistakable hallmark of The King's Singers stamped right across it.

From their first performances in 1968, the vocal supergroup have delighted in performing an unprecedented range of styles and genres, pushing the boundaries of their repertoire, while at the same time honouring their origins in the British choral tradition.

Now riding the crest of a wave and with a whole new generation of admirers, The King's Singers offer a winter warmer of festive music from their recent travels across the world. They'll also remember their spiritual home at King's College Cambridge through the choral splendour of Byrd, and sing a selection of seasonal Disney hits plus arrangements of traditional and modern carols. Finally, there's a Christmas stocking full of festive favourites and brand-new surprises from their world-famous, close-harmony library.

Tickets: £15 – £25



ECHO Rising Stars: Sebastian Heindl

Charlie Chaplin's The Gold Rush

Sun 4 Feb | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Sebastian Heindl organ

Silent Movie Special: Charlie Chaplin's The Gold Rush (1925)

Virtuoso organist Sebastian Heindl treads in mighty footsteps: he's a former chorister at the famous St Thomas's Boys' Choir, Leipzig, where J S Bach was director of music, and he returned there recently to conduct Bach cantata services. Already with numerous prestigious competition wins, alongside tours across Europe and the US, and a lively social media profile that reaches a wide audience, Germany's Die Zeit newspaper was prompted to call him "a miracle musician from Leipzig".

Sebastian Heindl is especially known for his own transcriptions, and as an improviser and composer where he combines elements of modern jazz and classical music in a highly individual style. He'll undoubtedly be in his element improvising a soundtrack to Charlie Chaplin's classic silent comedy 'The Gold Rush'.

ECHO artist nominated by Konzerthaus Dortmund and Festspielhaus Baden-Baden

Tickets: £15





© Peter Marsh, Ashmore Visuals

Armonico Consort and Rachel Podger

The Forgotten Scarlatti

Mon 12 Feb | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Armonico Consort
Christopher Monks director
Rachel Podger violin

Francesco Scarlatti	Dixit Dominus
Francesco Scarlatti	Messa a 16
Bach	Violin Concerto in A minor
Vivaldi	Violin Concerto in G major, Op 4 No 12

Rachel Podger is one of the most dynamic and recognisable Baroque violinists around today, with superlatives like inspirational, breath-taking and spellbinding regularly attached to her reviews. A regular collaborator with period instrument specialists Armonico Consort, she'll bring her unique and inspirational approach to Bach's virtuosic Violin Concerto in A minor and Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in G major from 'La Stravaganza'.

Armonico Consort also reveal two spectacular choral discoveries from a lesser-known member of the Scarlatti dynasty, Francesco, who was very much overshadowed by his elder

brother Alessandro and nephew Domenico. His Dixit Dominus and Mass have been hidden in the Bodleian Library for centuries and are being dubbed 'the classical music find of the century'. Now brought back to life in exclusive brand new editions, these two masterpieces are written for 16 completely independent lines which engage in all sorts of vocal acrobatics. If you love the choral grandeur of Bach and Handel, the colossal polychoral compositions of the Venetian Baroque, or the spatial complexity of Tallis's 40-part Spem in Alium, this concert is an absolute must.

Tickets: £15 – £35



© Nikita Laktionov

Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra

Fairy tales and Legends

Thu 15 Feb | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra
Marko Letonja conductor
Nikolai Lugansky piano

Berlioz	Overture, Le Carnaval romain
Rachmaninov	Piano Concerto No 2
Franck	Le chasseur maudit
Ravel	Ma mère L'Oye, suite
Ravel	La valse

Some of the most vivid and magical orchestral portrayals of fairy tales and stories are woven through this concert, providing the perfect showcase for the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra. Berlioz, a master of orchestration, makes a thrilling overture out of themes from his opera Benvenuto Cellini (the opera may not have been a success, but the overture most certainly was). In Franck's symphonic poem, The Accursed Huntsman gets his comeuppance for skipping church to go hunting, and is condemned to be pursued by devils. And Ravel's dream-turned-nightmare, La valse, also reaches a maniacal conclusion in a torrent of notes. In gentler territory, Ravel's

enchanting Mother Goose suite contains some of his most exquisite music, including a captivating violin solo, in scenes of Sleeping Beauty, Tom Thumb and the Fairy Garden.

With playing of grace, power and passion, Nikolai Lugansky is one of the outstanding Rachmaninov interpreters of our time. He has a special affinity with the composer whose Second Concerto is, he says, "full of love, full of beautiful melodies". This was the work that propelled Rachmaninov to stardom, and it has remained one of today's most-loved concertos.

Tickets: £15 – £45



© Ben Wright

Royal Northern Sinfonia

with Julian Bliss

Wed 21 Feb | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Royal Northern Sinfonia
Dinis Sousa conductor
Julian Bliss clarinet

Prokofiev	Symphony No 1 'Classical'
Mozart	Clarinet Concerto
Beethoven	Symphony No 3 'Eroica'

With its sunny and cheerful character, dancing rondo finale and dreamy slow movement, you'd never guess that Mozart completed his Clarinet Concerto just weeks before his death. Written for his friend, the clarinetist and instrument inventor, Anton Stadler, it exploits the full range of the clarinet and has remained an enduring favourite. Julian Bliss is one of the world's finest and most versatile clarinetists, excelling as a concerto soloist, chamber musician and jazz artist – he dazzled with The Genius of Gershwin with his own Septet in the last Birmingham Classical season.

Prokofiev's witty 18th-century inspired 'Classical' Symphony, updated to the early 20th century, is the perfect concert opener,

just as Beethoven's ground-breaking Third Symphony is a fitting conclusion. A work that changed musical history when Beethoven unleashed it on an unsuspecting Viennese public, it was an illustration of the capabilities and potential of a full and unfettered symphony orchestra.

From their home at Sage Gateshead, Royal Northern Sinfonia, and its recently-appointed Principal Conductor Dinis Sousa, has been flying the flag for the North East for over 60 years, collaborating with internationally-renowned artists and engaging with an ever-widening audience.

Tickets: £15 – £35



ECHO Rising Stars: Axelle Fanyo

Sun 25 Feb | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM



Axelle Fanyo soprano
Kunal Lahiry piano

Weill	Trois Chansons
Schoenberg	Brettli Lieder
Sofia Avramidou	new work
Gershwin (arr. Wild)	The Man I Love
Trad.	Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Florence Price	Song to the Dark Virgin
Margaret Bonds	The Negro Speaks Rivers
William Bolcom	Cabaret Songs

Taking her French-African descent and the jazz, gospel and soul music of her childhood as inspiration, soprano Axelle Fanyo's 'Heritage' programme explores the influence of cabaret on classical music. In music by Kurt Weill, early Schoenberg and Gershwin, she charts a path through backroom Berlin and the creative hotbed of early 20th century Paris, across the pond to 1920s America. Exploring the heritage of African-American spirituals on pioneering Black classical composers like Florence Price and Margaret Bonds, she brings the story up to date with William Bolcom's Cabaret Songs.

"Axelle Fanyo doesn't only play a character, she narrates its story," says Forum Opéra, so you can be assured of a perfect hour's entertainment in the hands of such a skilled story-teller.

ECHO artist nominated by Philharmonie de Paris, Auditorium de Lyon and Gulbenkian Foundation

Tickets: £15
Includes coffee/tea and a slice of cake, available before the concert

China Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Mon 11 Mar | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

China Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra

Daye Lin conductor

Tamsin Waley-Cohen violin

Jiapeng Nie cello

Tan Dun

Chausson

Saint-Saëns

Respighi

Respighi

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (excerpts)

Poème

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso

Fountains of Rome

Pines of Rome

In the late 1970s, the fishing village of Shenzhen began its transformation into China's third most populous city and global technology hub. Against this backdrop, an orchestra was founded which, with Music Director Daye Lin, now represents the rich culture of Shenzhen on the world stage. Its principal honorary conductor is Tan Dun, composer of the Academy Award-winning film score for Ang Lee's fantasy martial arts world, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. And it's a cello concerto created from the soundtrack that opens their sumptuous programme, blending Chinese ceremonial and classical music, Western and Eastern instruments, in an action-packed drama.

Acclaimed British violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen's adventurous spirit will perfectly suit the sultry, gypsy character of the Saint-Saëns, and contrast with Chausson's introspective and utterly beautiful *Poème*. Respighi's lavishly orchestrated tone poems capture the very essence of Rome, both in its nature and landscape, and its history and visions. You'll find pictures of a bustling city, pastoral scenes, the Trevi fountain, pines against a moonlit sky, and the marching tread of a Roman army along the Appian Way.

Tickets: £15 - £45





© Marco Berggreve

ECHO Rising Stars: Sean Shibe

Sun 24 Mar | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Sean Shibe guitar

Poulenc	Sarabande
Mompou	Canción y Danza X (sobre dos Cantigas del Rey Alfonso X)
Scottish Lute Manuscripts, compiled by Lady Margaret Wemyss	
Couperin	Ordre (excerpt/s)
Mompou	Suite Compostelana
de Falla	Homenaje, pour le Tombeau de Claude Debussy
Thomas Adès	new work

The first ever guitarist to be selected as a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and a Gramophone magazine cover star, Sean Shibe is a creative force of nature. His questing spirit to explore, experiment and expand the repertoire has led to his own transcriptions of historical Scottish lute manuscripts, recordings on electric guitar of music from Hildegard von Bingen to Moondog, and a slew of new commissions for his instrument.

The centrepiece of his Spanish/French Camino is Thomas Adès's first piece for solo guitar ('Habanera' from his opera 'The Exterminating Angel') which references

a Spanish dance form seen through the prism of 20th century French ideas. Lady Margaret Wemyss's lute pieces demonstrate continental relationships with the 'Auld Alliance' through pieces from Scotland as well as France and Spain, and there's music by Couperin, de Falla and Mompou, whose Suite Compostelana is a homage to the Camino de Santiago.

ECHO artist nominated by Barbican Centre, London

Tickets: £15
Includes coffee/tea and a slice of cake, available before the concert



Good Friday St John Passion 300th anniversary

with Ex Cathedra

Fri 29 Mar | Symphony Hall | 2PM

Ex Cathedra Choir, Baroque Orchestra & Academy of Vocal Music

Jeffrey Skidmore conductor

James Robinson Evangelist

Themba Mvula Jesus

Lawrence White Pilate & bass

Bach

St John Passion

The gravitas and magnificence of the opening chorus of Bach's St John Passion sets the scene for an unfolding human drama and a work of art that is as fresh and immediate today as it must have been when it was first heard 300 years ago, on Good Friday 1724, for Bach's first Easter in Leipzig. Pilate's dilemma, Peter's denial, and the sheer emotion of the characters make this a compelling pilgrimage, whatever your belief. And then there is the supreme beauty of Bach's music, heightened by the colours and poignancy of the period instruments – not least in the majestic acceptance of 'Es ist vollbracht' (It is finished).

Giving Symphony Hall's traditional Good Friday Bach Passion is the choir and early music ensemble, Ex Cathedra, widely regarded for their dynamic performances underpinned by detailed research. In this 300th anniversary performance, Ex Cathedra's visionary director Jeffrey Skidmore incorporates chorale preludes, motets, congregational hymns and readings to offer a richer experience of the Good Friday Vespers of Bach's day.

Sung in German with English surtitles

Ex Cathedra is an Associate Artist of B:Music

Tickets: £15 – £53



© Kaupo Kikkas

Paul Lewis

Schubert Piano Sonatas: 4

Thu 11 Apr | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Piano Sonata No 19 in C minor, D958
Piano Sonata No 20 in A major, D959
Piano Sonata No 21 in B flat major, D960

The last months of Schubert's life saw his creativity flourish through an unstoppable flow of musical masterpieces including the famous string quintet and song cycle Schwanengesang (Swan Song). As his health declined further, he wrote three last piano sonatas, together, in the summer and autumn of 1828 just weeks before his death. Full of emotional intensity, there's drama, passion, anger, humanity, beauty and melancholy throughout these works, along with signposts to his admiration for Beethoven (Schubert had been a pall-bearer at Beethoven's funeral the previous year).

With his first Schubert recordings in the early 2000s, Paul Lewis anchored a reputation as a new authority in the composer's piano music with Gramophone magazine describing him as "arguably the finest Schubert interpreter of his generation". Performing and recording the piano sonatas has been a constant throughout Lewis's career, much as the sonatas formed a thread throughout Schubert's own life, each one transparent in its emotions. In this final recital of the series, we have a chance to reflect on what led the composer Franz Liszt to declare Schubert "the most poetic musician who ever lived".

Tickets: £15 – £30



© Nikolaaj Lund

Leonkoro Quartet

Schubert and Beethoven

Mon 15 Apr | Town Hall | 7:30PM

Jonathan Schwarz violin
Ameli Wallner violin
Mayu Konoe viola
Lukas Schwarz cello

Schubert
Janáček
Beethoven

String Quartet No 9 in G minor, D173
String Quartet No 1 'Kreutzer Sonata'
String Quartet No 7 in F major, Op 59 No 1 'Razumovsky'

Praised for their stage presence, fiery vitality and musical empathy, the dynamic Leonkoro Quartet are really going places ... and fast. Founded in Berlin in 2019, within just a couple of years they were snatching coveted awards from all the major competitions including First Prize at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition together with nine of the twelve special prizes – for performances of Haydn, Mozart and 20th century repertoire. So it will be a delight to hear them in Schubert's G minor Quartet – a natural successor to those of Haydn and Mozart and penned during one of Schubert's most prolific composing years, 1815.

Expect the Leonkoro Quartet to bring special insight, too, to Janáček's soulful and jagged First Quartet, known as the 'Kreutzer Sonata'. Janáček confided: "I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down" as in Tolstoy's novella of the same name. The first of Beethoven's three 'Razumovsky' Quartets predates the Schubert by nine years but seems light years ahead. It's almost orchestral in parts, and the slow movement contains one of the most ravishing and heartfelt melodies in all of Beethoven's chamber music.

Tickets: £15 – £30

Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra

Tchaikovsky's Pathétique

Tue 16 Apr | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra
Stanislav Kochanovsky conductor
Maria Ioudenitch violin

Mussorgsky Khovanshchina, Prelude
Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1
Tchaikovsky Symphony No 6 'Pathétique'

This illustrious orchestra, over 150 years old, is a byword for artistic quality and musical integrity with conductors such as Kurt Masur and Michael Sanderling leaving their mark, and Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and Strauss all conducting their own works. It was given a huge boost with the opening of a fabulous new concert hall in 2017 and recently played the on screen role of Lydia Tár's 'Berlin' orchestra in the award-winning film starring Cate Blanchett.

Stanislav Kochanovsky guest conducts the orchestra in a concert of heightened emotion that begins serenely enough with the shimmering Dawn over the Moscow River – the Prelude to Mussorgsky's opera Khovanschina – that opens into a lush Russian melody. Stalin's reign of terror heaped public damnation and personal fear on Shostakovich who kept his Violin Concerto hidden away until 1955. Astonishingly difficult, and with barely a moment's rest for the soloist, the multi award-winning Maria Ioudenitch will be the perfect challenger. Then have your heart wrung out by Tchaikovsky's final symphony and sign-off to the world. The bravado of the rousing March gives way to the emotionally-wrought finale and a double bass 'heartbeat' that fades away into nothing.

Tickets: £15 – £45



© Jenny Chou



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ECHO Rising Stars: Júlia Pusker

Sun 28 Apr | Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space | 11AM

Júlia Pusker violin

Lili Boulanger	Deux Morceaux, for violin and piano
Debussy	Violin Sonata
Eric Tanguy	Trois pièces, for solo violin
Ysaÿe	Poème Élégiacque
Brahms /Joachim	Hungarian Dance No 11
Brahms / Kreisler	Hungarian Dance No 17
Hubay	Carmen, Fantasie Brillante



A true “aristocrat” of the violin is how Belgian newspaper La Libre referred to Júlia Pusker, while The Strad has praised her “magical simplicity”. The Hungarian violinist is being snapped up for concerto appearances with orchestras such as the Belgian National Orchestra and London Mozart Players alongside recital and festival performances and collaborations as a chamber musician.

She’ll show off all her skills in a terrific concert centred on music by, and for, violinists. There are contributions from virtuoso performer-composers Ysaÿe and Hubay, and arrangements of Brahms’s Hungarian Dances

by Joachim and Kreisler, two of the greatest and most influential violinists of the 19th century. The recital begins with two delightful miniatures by Lili Boulanger and Debussy’s wistful sonata. Júlia has also commissioned an exciting new work for her Rising Stars tour from leading French composer Eric Tanguy whose Second Violin Concerto she has recently recorded.

ECHO artist nominated by MÜPA Budapest

Tickets: £15
Includes coffee/tea and a slice of cake,
available before the concert



Czech National Symphony Orchestra Beethoven and Dvořák

Tue 21 May | Symphony Hall | 7:30PM

Czech National Symphony Orchestra
Steven Mercurio conductor
Mark Bebbington piano

Copland	Appalachian Spring
Beethoven	Piano Concerto No 5 ‘Emperor’
Smetana	Vltava
Dvořák	Symphony No 8

What a way to end the Season; with a concert of symphonic blockbusters. In music of their homeland, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra will bring out the sights and sounds of Smetana’s colourful river journey as the Vltava winds its way through the Bohemian countryside, from trickling stream to mighty river. There’s a strong nationalist flavour, too, in Dvořák’s Symphony No 8, and it’s coupled with an irrepressible joie de vivre. This genial and much-loved symphony is packed with folk melodies, bird calls and the sounds of nature that filled the forests around the country home where he wrote this work.

A former pupil of Leonard Bernstein, the Orchestra’s Principal Conductor Steven Mercurio took over the baton from Libor Pešek in 2019. Conductor and orchestra are joined in Beethoven’s pivotal ‘Emperor’ Concerto by soloist Mark Bebbington, a musician of the rarest refinement and maturity and “truly a remarkable pianist” in the words of The Times. With its mighty orchestral and piano writing, and a sublime slow movement that plunges into the rhythmic energy of the rondo finale, this is Beethoven at his finest.

Tickets: £15 – £45

Lunchtime Organ Concerts

With Thomas Trotter



Birmingham City Organist since 1983, Thomas Trotter is one of the world's top-ranking virtuoso organists and was awarded the 2020 Queen's Medal for Music. 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. Celebrating a milestone 40th anniversary in 2023, between 9 October and 8 April he'll include in his recitals some of the many exciting pieces commissioned over the past 40 years.

Mon 25 Sep | Symphony Hall | 1PM

with Roger Owens (piano)

Mon 9 Oct | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 23 Oct | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 6 Nov | Town Hall | 1PM

Angels and Demons

Mon 20 Nov | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 4 Dec | Town Hall | 1PM

Sing Carols with the City Organist

with Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir

Jeremy Nicholas compère

Mon 18 Dec | Symphony Hall | 1PM*

Lunchtime Christmas Music

with Salisbury Cathedral Choir

Mon 15 Jan | Symphony Hall | 1PM

Mon 29 Jan | Town Hall | 1PM

Pedal Power

Mon 12 Feb | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 26 Feb | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 11 Mar | Town Hall | 1PM

Celebrating International Women's Day

Mon 25 Mar | Town Hall | 1PM

Easter Week

Mon 8 April | Symphony Hall | 1PM

Mon 22 April | Town Hall | 1PM

Peter Holder, Sub-organist, Westminster Abbey

Mon 13 May | Town Hall | 1PM

Mon 3 Jun | Town Hall | 1PM

Organ Duets with Simon Gledhill

Mon 17 Jun | Town Hall | 1PM

Summer Requests

*Tickets for this concert are £15 but are still available as part of a Lunchtime Organ Concert package discount

Booking info

Tickets: £7.50 | Under 30s: £5

Book 3 to 4 organ concerts and get 10% off

Book 5 to 6 organ concerts and get 15% off

Book 7 or more organ concerts and get 20% off

See page 33 for how to book

Full programme details for Lunchtime Organ Concerts are available from the website.

Thomas Trotter is an Associate Artist of B:Music

How to Book

Online: bmusic.co.uk

By phone: 0121 780 3333

Telephone lines open

Monday to Saturday, 10am – 2pm.

In person:

Symphony Hall's Box Office is open

Monday to Saturday, 11am – 4pm

(Please check the website for full details as these are subject to change).

Closed Sundays and Bank Holidays

except when there is an event, where we will open 2 hours before the start of a performance.

Town Hall's Box Office is open

1 hour 30 minutes before the start

of a performance except for all family and organ concerts, where we will open 1 hour before the start of a performance.

(Please check the website for full details as these timings are subject to change).

How to reach us:

Symphony Hall is located in

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Birmingham, B1 2EA

Town Hall is located in

Victoria Square,
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