



City of Birmingham
Symphony Orchestra

PROKOFIEV & SIBELIUS

Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Wednesday 22 February 2023, 7.30pm

CONCERT PROGRAMME: £4

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PROKOFIEV & SIBELIUS

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Wednesday 22 February 2023, 7.30pm

Ilan Volkov – Conductor

Isata Kanneh-Mason – Piano

Sibelius The Oceanides	10'
Prokofiev Piano Concerto No.3	28'
<i>Interval</i>	
Waley-Cohen Demon (CBSO Centenary Commission: World Premiere)	10'
Sibelius Symphony No.5	30'

Sibelius conjured up the final tune in his Symphony No.5 after hearing swans taking flight, and his Mediterranean water-spirits, *The Oceanides*, call out from Greek mythology. On holiday up the coast in Brittany, Prokofiev let loose in his shimmering Piano Concerto No.3. Over a century later, the creative force is going strong in Freya Waley-Cohen's brand-new work.

You are warmly invited to join us for a pre-concert performance from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Seal. The performance will begin at 6.15pm in Symphony Hall, and is FREE to all those with tickets to Prokofiev & Sibelius. Programme: Stravinsky's *Petrushka*

This concert will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3



Cover photo: Isata Kanneh-Mason © Robin Clewley

We are very happy for you to take photographs at our concerts, and we'd love for you to share them with us on social media @TheCBSO. Please do be discreet to avoid disturbing other audience members – we would suggest dimming the brightness on your phone, taking pictures during applause breaks and not using your flash. Please note that filming is not allowed. We also regularly take photographs for promotional purposes at our concerts, so you may see a professional photographer at our concerts. Please ask a member of the front of house team if you have any questions about this.

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If you have downloaded one of our digital programmes and are reading it during the performance, we would just ask you to please be mindful of other audience members and ensure that the light from your device doesn't disturb them. Thank you.

If you have any queries about the CBSO, please visit our Information Desk situated in the ground floor foyer. CBSO staff are available from 30 minutes before the concert and again at the interval and will be happy to help.

PROKOFIEV & SIBELIUS

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

THE OCEANIDES

As we'll also discover in tonight's closing piece, Jean Sibelius was inspired by the natural world throughout his career. By the time of his final completed work, 1926's *Tapiola*, he was listening to harmonies in the wind or the lapping of waves, and imagining how he might capture these sounds in his music.

But the previous decade, rather than the lakes and forests of his native Finland, Sibelius found inspiration in the vast expanses of the open ocean. *The Oceanides* are the countless water nymphs of Greek mythology, daughters of the Titan Oceanus, and the embodiment of water in all its forms, from raindrops to great swelling seas.

Sibelius had received a commission from renowned arts patron Carl Stoeckel – via Horatio Parker, Dean of the Yale School of Music – for a new orchestral piece to be unveiled (and conducted by Sibelius) at Stoeckel's Norfolk Music Festival in Connecticut in 1914. Unusually, the composer took inspiration from Greek rather than Finnish mythology, and began work on *The Oceanides* during a winter stay in Berlin in early

1914, duly dispatching it to Parker. But he remained unconvinced by his first thoughts on the piece, especially when he encountered the vastness of the ocean at first hand during his long sea voyage to the US, on what would prove his only trip across the Atlantic. He duly produced a revised, almost recomposed version of the piece, one that greatly intensifies the work's elemental drama.

The Oceanides might be a relatively brief tone poem, but it charts a powerful journey from a calm sea (perhaps even sunrise over a limitless ocean), through a gathering storm, to thunderous crashing waves at its mighty climax. Two fragmentary themes at the opening – the first sounding almost like seabird calls on flutes, the second a slower-moving melody on oboes and clarinet – serve as the spring from which the rest of the watery material flows, its swelling power held firmly in check until it surges forth at its all-engulfing culmination.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

PIANO CONCERTO NO.3

I Andante – Allegro

II Andantino

III Allegro ma non troppo

Sergei Prokofiev also enjoyed something of a sea view while he was composing his Third Piano Concerto. Unlike Sibelius, however, he was firmly on dry land, holidaying in Brittany, where he encountered several fellow Russian expats who, like him, had fled the country in the wake of the 1917 Revolution.

Prokofiev had – to his surprise – been granted leave to depart in May 1918 by the Soviet authorities, and tried establishing himself in America before wondering whether France might prove more welcoming to his pianistic and compositional talents. By the time he completed the Third Piano Concerto in October 1921 – among the stunning coastal views of Étretât – he was dividing his time between both countries.

But, taking fellow Russian émigré Sergei Rachmaninov as a role model, Prokofiev still had hopes for a life in America. And when it came to putting together a new, virtuoso Concerto for himself to perform there, he'd done quite a bit of the work already. The Third Piano Concerto draws heavily on several of Prokofiev's earlier works and



Sergei Prokofiev

“... the Concerto’s remarkable freshness, vividness and colour make it hard to believe that some of its music had been around for almost a decade before finding its final form.”

sketches: he'd written a few of its themes as early as 1913, composed sections of the second movement in 1916, and even recycled an abandoned 1918 string quartet for the finale. That said, the Concerto's remarkable freshness, vividness and colour make it hard to believe that some of its music had been around for almost a decade before finding its final form.

Indeed, it's just those dazzling qualities that make the Third Piano Concerto one of Prokofiev's most enduringly popular works with audiences today. At its premiere – in Chicago on 16 December 1921,

with Prokofiev at the piano and Frederick Stock conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – it was politely received, but it got a critical mauling later in New York (Prokofiev likened the New York critics to “a pack of dogs” who were out to “tear my trousers to shreds”). In April 1922, however, the Concerto was adored at its Parisian premiere – just one more reason for Prokofiev to conclude he would be better appreciated in Europe. He’d had something of a premonition when he played a few sketches for the piece in Brittany to the poet Konstantin Balmont, a fellow Russian expat. Balmont had been so impressed that he responded in verse:

Prokofiev! Music and youth in bloom,

In you, the orchestra yearns for forgotten summer sounds,

And the invincible Scythian beats on the tambourine of the sun.

In gratitude, Prokofiev dedicated the Concerto to him.

And though there are more than enough keyboard fireworks in Prokofiev’s piano writing to ensure listeners are thoroughly entertained, the Third Concerto is nonetheless a work of passionate expression as much as a virtuoso showpiece. A thoughtful clarinet theme kicks off the quickfire

opening movement, before strings and flutes make way for the piano’s glittering first entry, with a dashing melody that’s thrown back and forth between piano and orchestra. An oboe later introduces the movement’s second main theme, a humorous march with castanet accompaniment. The second movement is a set of five variations on a slinky opening tune first heard in the flute and clarinet, while the brilliant, breathless finale highlights Prokofiev’s uncanny ability to meld together luscious, heart-on-sleeve melody with almost mechanical, machine-like energy, building inexorably to a blazing, pounding, percussive finish.

Freya Waley-Cohen (b. 1989)

DEMON

(CBSO Centenary Commission: World Premiere)

Nature – here, perhaps, more red in tooth and claw – also forms one possible backdrop to the brand new piece in tonight’s concert. Freya Waley-Cohen is a London-based composer, and she’s written widely across orchestral works, chamber music, songs and choral pieces, and also the 2022 one-act opera *Witch*. She writes:

“In many old folk tales from the British Isles, there’s often a hidden

horror waiting to be revealed. As you start to read the story you know this darkness will appear somewhere, often connected to the landscape or earth, sometimes within a character or even the narrator – but until it is revealed, the demon is potentially anywhere or everywhere.

This is a piece with a demon simmering away within it. Sometimes menacing, sometimes playful, it's a speed demon; a moto perpetuo, with a constant energy in the depths that rises up to the surface."

Freya Waley-Cohen



British-American composer Freya Waley-Cohen demonstrates an "instinct for colour" (*The Arts Desk*), proving her ability to move from "a bubbling, popping, feathered array of orchestral sounds" to a "quiet, eerie, interior world" (*The Guardian*). Waley-Cohen's music is characterised by contrasts between earthy rhythmic play with bold colours, fragility, luminous spaces, and a sense of the otherworldly. Many of her recent works play with myths, magic and the occult as lenses through which to look at the contemporary world.

Recent successes include the world premiere of her work *Pocket*

Cosmos (2022) in June 2022 and a performance at Longborough Festival Opera in its first complete staging of her contemporary dramatic song cycle *Spell Book* (2020) in July/August 2022.

Her position as Composer in Residence at the London Chamber Orchestra last season included performances of her works *Happiness* (2018) and *Saffron* (2016) as well as two new commissions for the orchestra. She was the 2019/20 Associate Composer of Wigmore Hall, which featured a day of concerts focusing on her music. She is also associate composer of St. David's Hall's contemporary music series, *Nightmusic*. Winner of a 2017 Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, Waley-Cohen held an Open Space Residency at Snape Maltings (2015-17) and was Associate Composer of Nonclassical (2016-18). She is a founding member and artistic director of 'Listenpony' concert series and record label.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

SYMPHONY NO.5

- I Tempo molto moderato –
Allegro moderato
(ma poco a poco stretto)
- II Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
- III Allegro molto

“Today I saw 16 swans. One of my greatest experiences. Lord God, that beauty! They circled over me for a long time. Disappeared into the solar haze like a gleaming silver ribbon.” That’s Jean Sibelius, writing in his diary on 21 April 1915. And it was precisely this moment that the composer sought to evoke in the joyful finale of his Fifth Symphony, one of the most euphoric moments in all classical music, from the rush of anticipation in the strings’ scurrying figurations, to the ecstatic arrival of the swans themselves in the horns’ rocking melody (dubbed the ‘Swan Hymn’), and a distant glimpse or memory of them later in the movement.

But it had been a long road to reach that point. And it didn’t help that the Fifth Symphony had originally been commissioned for Sibelius’ own 50th birthday by the Finnish government, with a national holiday declared in celebration. It was duly unveiled in Helsinki on 8 December 1915, to a rapturous reaction from the Finnish audience.



Jean Sibelius

As a year earlier with *The Oceanides*, however, Sibelius wasn’t convinced. As well as the pressure of being a national cultural hero celebrating an important anniversary, he’d long felt an additional burden to prove himself as a significant, “modern” European composer. He’d set out his modernist credentials in his austere, challenging, somewhat dissonant Fourth Symphony four years earlier, but he wondered if he’d gone too far. What really drove him was cultivating a sense of organic growth and unity in music. When he’d met Gustav Mahler in Helsinki in 1907, not for nothing did Sibelius explain that what he most admired in a symphony were ‘strictness and style and deep logic, which requires that all its motifs must be linked to each other.’ (Mahler’s famous reply took a very different perspective: ‘No, the symphony must be like the world. It must encompass everything!’)

With this in mind, Sibelius put his Fifth Symphony through two

rounds of substantial revisions, concerned not about his music's quality, but about the unity, coherence and sense of organic development across what were currently its four movements. In the process, it shrank down to three movements: Sibelius cunningly combined his original introduction and playful scherzo into a single span of music. The first four notes of this new movement's opening horn call plant the seeds that will later bloom into virtually all of the rest of the Symphony's material, and a constant but almost imperceptible acceleration not only drives us via a smooth gear change from introduction to scherzo, but also continues once we've arrived, propelling the movement to a frenetic conclusion.

Sibelius' slow second movement begins almost as if we're already partway through, and its charming main theme feels like it might circle round and round forever

in contrasting instrumental combinations. And to crown his swan-inspired finale, Sibelius devised some of the most distinctive, memorable closing chords in all classical music.

Did Sibelius mark himself out as a true 'modernist' with his Fifth Symphony? If anything, it's probably a step back from the rigour and austerity of the Fourth. But to call it more conservative is to ignore its remarkable sense of unstoppable organic growth, and its ability to cultivate towering textures from the tiniest musical cells. They're all things Sibelius would push even further in the remarkable, four-movements-in-one concentration of his Symphony No.7. Here, though, he achieved something similar in what's undeniably his most-loved piece of music.

Programme note © David Kettle



ILAN VOLKOV

Conductor

Ilan Volkov proved to be enormously expressive digging deep but allowing his players just the right amount of freedom. “This was less a ‘played’ performance – it was a white-hot interpretation created for the moment.” (*Opera Today*)

Since his prodigious breakthrough as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the age of 19, Ilan Volkov has matured into a versatile conductor whose interpretations of familiar repertoire are sought after internationally. He enjoys a long-standing relationship with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, as Principal Conductor from 2003 and Principal Guest Conductor since 2009. The 2022/23 season sees the start of Volkov’s tenure as Principal Guest Conductor with the Brussels Philharmonic.

A musical omnivore, Volkov also serves as a figurehead of the international contemporary music scene. He launched the Tectonics Festival in 2012, which has since become one of the world’s most diverse and acclaimed celebrations of new music, with festivals in Adelaide, Oslo, New York, Tel Aviv, Krakow, Athens, Glasgow and Reykjavík. In 2020 he co-founded the I&I Foundation with Ilya Gringolts to support the development and performance of new music.

Volkov’s repertoire with a variety of ensembles spreads far and wide. He appears at festivals such as Salzburg, Edinburgh, BBC Proms, Lucerne, Unsound Krakow, Musikprotkoll and Berlin.

Equally at home in opera, his extensive operatic ventures have included Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* for San Francisco Opera, Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Glyndebourne Festival, *Peter Grimes* for Washington National Opera and Glyndebourne Festival, and Gerald Barry’s *The Importance of Being Ernest* at the Lincoln Center with New York Philharmonic, Bach’s *Actus Tragicus* at Stuttgart Opera, and Olga Neuirth’s *The Outcast* in Vienna and Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. Recently he conducted the world premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s new work *The Listeners* with Norwegian National Opera, and Samir Odeh-Tamimi’s new creation *L’Apocalypse Arabe* for the Aix Festival.

His diverse discography includes Stravinsky’s ballet scores and a Gramophone Award-winning recording of Britten’s complete works for piano and orchestra, both for Hyperion, and a critically acclaimed survey of Liszt’s three Funeral Odes with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He has a podcast for Radio Halas.

ISATA KANNEH-MASON

Piano

Pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason is in great demand internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She offers eclectic and interesting repertoire, with her recital programmes encompassing music from Haydn and Mozart, via Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms, to Gershwin and beyond. In concerto, she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, whose piano concerto featured on Isata's chart-topping debut recording, as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

In 2022/23 Isata steps into her role as Artist in Residence with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, performing three concerti across the season at London's Cadogan Hall. She returns to Dortmund's Konzerthaus as one of their Junge Wilde artists and makes multiple visits to both the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Other highlights of the season include recital performances at the Barbican, Queen Elizabeth, and Wigmore halls in London, the Philharmonie Berlin, National Concert Hall Dublin, Perth Concert Hall, Prinzregententheater Munich, and the Sala São Paulo. As concerto soloist, Isata appears

with the Orchestra of Opera North, New World Symphony Miami, City of Birmingham Symphony, Duisburg Philharmonic, Barcelona Symphony, Geneva Chamber Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, and Orchestra of Norwegian Opera. She returns to the Baltimore Symphony and recently made her long-awaited debut with the LA Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

Isata is a Decca Classics recording artist. Her 2019 album, *Romance – the Piano Music of Clara Schumann*, entered the UK classical charts at No.1, *Gramophone* magazine extolling the recording as "one of the most charming and engaging debuts". This was followed in 2021 by *Summertime*, an album of 20th-century American repertoire featuring Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata and a world premiere recording of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Impromptu in B minor*. In 2021, along with her cellist brother, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Isata released her first duo album entitled *Muse*, beautifully demonstrating the siblings' musicality and refined skill borne from years of playing and performing together.

She was an ECHO Rising Star in 2021/22, performing in many of Europe's finest halls and is also the recipient of the coveted Leonard Bernstein Award and an Opus Klassik award for best young artist.



Photo: Isata Kanneh-Mason © John Davis



CBSO

Photo: Mark Allan

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) is the flagship of musical life in Birmingham and the West Midlands, and one of the world's great orchestras.

Based in Symphony Hall, the CBSO typically presents over 150 concerts each year in Birmingham, the UK and around the world, playing music that ranges from classics to contemporary, film scores and even symphonic disco. With a far-reaching community programme and a family of choruses and ensembles, it is involved in every aspect of music-

making in the Midlands. But at its centre is a team of 90 superb musicians, and over a 100-year tradition of making the world's greatest music in the heart of Birmingham.

That local tradition started with the orchestra's very first symphonic concert in 1920 – conducted by Sir Edward Elgar. Ever since then, through war, recessions, social change and civic renewal, the CBSO has been proud to be Birmingham's orchestra. Under principal conductors including Adrian Boult, George Weldon, Andrzej Panufnik and Louis Frémaux, the

CBSO won an artistic reputation that spread far beyond the Midlands. But it was when it discovered the young British conductor Simon Rattle in 1980 that the CBSO became internationally famous – and showed how the arts can help give a new sense of direction to a whole city.

Rattle's successors Sakari Oramo (1998-2008) and Andris Nelsons (2008-15) helped cement that global reputation, and continued to build on the CBSO's tradition of flying the flag for Birmingham. Now, with Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla as Principal Guest Conductor, the CBSO continues to do what it does best – playing great music for the people of Birmingham and the Midlands.

Meet the family

The CBSO Chorus is one of the world's great choirs – 180 people from all walks of life who come together to sing symphonic choral music. Trained for almost 40 years by Simon Halsey CBE, and supported by a professional staff team, the chorus is a hard-working group of singers who give up their own time to perform the most challenging works in the choral repertoire to the highest international standard. The CBSO Children's Chorus and Youth Chorus showcase singers as young

as six. Through its unauditioned community choir – CBSO SO Vocal in Selly Oak – the CBSO shares its know-how and passion for music with communities throughout the city. The CBSO Youth Orchestra gives that same opportunity to young instrumentalists aged 14-21, offering high-level training to the next generation of orchestral musicians alongside top international conductors and soloists. These groups are sometimes called the "CBSO family" – over 650 amateur musicians of all ages and backgrounds, who work alongside the orchestra to make and share great music. But the CBSO's tradition of serving the community goes much further. Its Learning and Participation programme touches tens of thousands of lives a year, energising whole neighbourhoods.

Now more than ever, the CBSO remains the beating heart of musical life in the UK's Second City. Kazuki Yamada has been appointed as its Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor with effect from 1 April 2023.

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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Savva Svirev
Imogen East
Mark Robinson *
Kirsty Lovie *
Stefano Mengoli *
Colette Overdijk *
Sophie Phillips
Wendy Quirk
Catherine Chambers
Katharine Gittings
Robert Bilson
Risa Sekine

VIOLIN II

Peter Campbell-Kelly *
Lowri Porter
Charlotte Skinner *
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From priority booking to members' events and behind-the-scenes information, there are plenty of reasons to join the CBSO. But it is the people themselves who are at the very heart of our membership. CBSO members can enjoy the chance to share the company of musicians and artists and meet new like-minded friends. In

addition, through their annual donation, they help to provide vital support towards our Sound of the Future Campaign, a fundraising campaign launched to help the orchestra recover from the pandemic and reinvigorate its future, giving musical experiences to even more people.

"Membership has really enhanced our experience of the CBSO. We enjoy talking to the team, the orchestra members and fellow CBSO supporters. We feel privileged to be able to support."

Chris and Eve Parker, Gold Patrons

GET IN TOUCH

To join us as a CBSO member, simply visit cbso.co.uk/membership to sign up online or call Rachel Cooper on 0121 616 6510. We look forward to welcoming you to the family!

THANK YOU

The Sound of the Future is a £12.5m fundraising campaign – launched to mark the CBSO's centenary – which will ensure the orchestra's recovery from the pandemic and redefine its future for the benefit of everyone across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

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WHEN: Sunday 26 February 2023

TIMINGS: 3pm

WHERE: Symphony Hall, Birmingham

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