# Brave New World: Sibelius’ Second Symphony

## Sunday 4 February Barbican

**Lotta Wennäkoski** Om fotspår och ljus (Of Footprints and Light – Helsinki Variations)
**Ludwig van Beethoven** Piano Concerto No 5, ‘Emperor’
Interval
**Jean Sibelius** Symphony No 2

**Thomas Søndergård** conductor

**Leif Ove Andsnes** piano
**London Symphony Orchestra**

# Welcome

Welcome to tonight’s LSO concert with guest conductor Thomas Søndergård, with whom we last had the pleasure of working back in 2016. Tonight he conducts a programme celebrating Finnish music from past and present, alongside a well-loved piano work by Ludwig van Beethoven.

We are delighted to be joined by Leif Ove Andsnes, a pianist with whom we have collaborated numerous times over the years at the Barbican, on tour and in recording sessions. Tonight he performs Beethoven’s majestic ‘Emperor’ Concerto, the composer’s Fifth Piano Concerto.

Lotta Wennäkoski’s work has become increasingly well known over the past 15 years beyond her native Finland, and we are delighted to open the concert with a performance of her shimmering tone poem *Om fotspår och ljus*(Of Footprints and Light – Helsinki Variations). The Concerto follows, and, after the interval, we hear Jean Sibelius’ daring Symphony No 2, a staple of the orchestral repertoire.

Thanks to Classic FM for recommending this concert to their listeners. This Thursday, Nathalie Stutzmann conducts Anton Bruckner’s Symphony No 7, with Leif Ove Andsnes returning as soloist for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Piano Concerto No 22. On Sunday, Nathalie Stutzmann continues her focus on Bruckner, in this, the 200th year of his birth, with a performance of his Ninth Symphony, followed by his choral work *Te Deum*. We hope to see you there.

**Dame Kathryn McDowell DBE DL
Managing Director**

# Om fotspår och ljus (Helsinki Variations)

## Lotta Wennäkoski

Programme note by Leah Broad

*Om fotspår och ljus* (Of Footprints and Light) quite literally begins with footsteps – Lotta Wennäkoski adds a pair of shoes to the percussion section, tapping out the work’s first notes. The footsteps we hear belong to the Finnish composer Ida Moberg. Born in Helsinki in 1859, Moberg was one of the few Finnish women who built a career as a professional composer in the 19th century. Wennäkoski says that she was fascinated by ‘the thought of a colleague who walked the same streets a hundred years earlier’, so incorporated her predecessor’s tread into her work to create a direct aural link between past and present.

*Om fotspår och ljus* is one of a set of ‘Helsinki Variations’ commissioned by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 2019, each of which takes a Finnish work composed before 1945 as its starting point. Wennäkoski chose a scene from Moberg’s unfinished opera *Asiens ljus* (The Light of Asia). Moberg was fascinated by theosophy (a religion established in the United States during the late 19th century), and spiritualism, and the opera’s libretto is based on a text by Swedish poet Viktor Rydberg about the life of the Buddha. In the scene that underpins Wennäkoski’s piece, Siddhartha begs to be released from his palace to see the real world, asking, ‘Why are you afraid to show me life as it really is?’.

The work moves in waves, with Wennäkoski creating a cornucopia of shifting timbres and textures. Woodwind calls enliven the ensemble, and tender moments are interrupted by the orchestra suddenly exploding into more energetic material. The piece doesn’t so much end as fade away into silence, closing with glissandos (slides between notes) in the violins. Moberg’s romantic, lyrical music occasionally peeps through the score, as Wennäkoski weaves together the 20th and 21st centuries seamlessly.

# Lotta Wennäkoski

## b. 1970 (Finland)

Composer profile by Leah Broad

Lotta Wennäkoski’s compositions usually begin with an image, a texture or the sound of a word. ‘I readily take impulses from the extra-musical world,’ she says. Her Flute Concerto *Soie* (2009) was inspired by the textures of cotton, linen and silk, and the title means ‘silk’ in French, but is similar to the Finnish word for ‘sound’. Wennäkoski writes ‘timbral music’ imbued with ‘a sense of airiness and space’, but these spaces always cohere around a single central idea. ‘I most definitely conceive of music as being communication,’ she explains. ‘I could think of nothing more wonderful than for my music to tell a story, or speak or mean something, while also being innovative.’

Born in Helsinki, Wennäkoski studied composition with tutors such as Kaija Saariaho, Louis Andriessen, Eero Hämeenniemi and Paavo Heininen. The influence of her wide-ranging tuition is evident in her playful approach to the orchestra. She is always searching for new sounds and gestures; her expanded percussion sections have included shoes and shells, and her *Jong* concerto (2012–13) is written for juggler and chamber orchestra. Alongside this humour, though, a more serious and politically minded strain runs through Wennäkoski’s output. Her monodrama *Lelele* (2010–11) is about human trafficking, and her new opera *Regine* focuses on philosopher Søren Kierkegaard’s fiancée Regine Olsen.

Wennäkoski has received commissions from major institutions including the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra (Om fotspår och ljus, 2019) and the BBC Proms (Flounce, 2017). She was one of three featured composers for the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2021/22, and was composer-in-residence of the Tapiola Sinfonietta in 2010/11.Piano Concerto No 5 Op 73, ‘Emperor’

## Ludwig van Beethoven

## 1 Allegro2 Adagio un poco mosso3 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

## Programme note by Lindsay Kemp

One has to wonder whether the organisers of the concert at which Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Concerto received its Viennese premiere in February 1812 – the actual premiere having taken place in Leipzig the previous November – provided the ideal audience. A contemporary report of the combined concert and art exhibition mounted by the Society of Noble Ladies for Charity tells us that ‘the pictures offer a glorious treat; a new pianoforte concerto by Beethoven failed’. And it is true that, in its early years, the ‘Emperor’ Piano Concerto struggled for popularity. Perhaps its leonine strength and symphonic sweep were simply too much for everyone.

Cast in the same key as Beethoven’s Symphony No 3, it breathes much the same majestically confident air, though in a manner one could describe as more macho. Composed in the first few months of 1809, with war brewing between Austria and France, this Concerto is Beethoven in what must have seemed an overbearingly optimistic mood.

The Concerto is certainly not reticent about declaring itself. 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: 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. These two notes 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. The air quickly clears, however, and reappearances of the turn lead back to a recapitulation of the opening material.

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 that also involves the orchestra. 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. Physical joins between movements were a trend in Beethoven’s music at this time, but so too were thematic ones.

At one point in this finale, with the main theme firmly established, the strings gently put forward the ‘experimental’ version from the end of the slow movement, as if mocking the piano’s earlier tentativeness. The movement approaches its close, however, with piano and timpani in stealthy cahoots before, with a final flurry, the end is upon us.

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)

## Composer profile by Andrew Mellor

When Ludwig van Beethoven was a young man, France overthrew its monarchy and rebellion spread through Europe. Riding the crest of a wave of social change, Beethoven changed not just the sound of music but the standing of the artist in society. He introduced the concept of the ‘artist-hero’, paving the way for Romanticism and even popular culture.

Beethoven was born in a faraway corner of what is now Germany, to an alcoholic and abusive father. He chanced his way to Europe’s cultural capital, Vienna, where he studied with Joseph Haydn and probably associated with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

From musical foundations steadied by those two figures, Beethoven led music into the first-person passions of Romanticism. He wrote in every genre, and with the possible exception of opera, transformed each of them. He reimagined the scale and scope of the symphony and invested the string quartet with a level of psychological depth that dumbfounded his peers. Beethoven used rhythm like no other composer before him and pushed harmony to the boundaries of tangibility. He exploited the piano’s technological transformation to mine entirely new expressions from the instrument.

Writing for himself and not to deadlines, Beethoven was able to be more deliberate and considered in his compositions than many of his contemporaries. But the story of his career is one of the constant overcoming of colossal obstacles. From the age of 26, the composer knew he had serious problems with his hearing and for the last seven years of his life he could hear almost nothing. That made him irritable, sensitive and withdrawn. But Beethoven always remained ever sure of himself, and consistently creative.

# Symphony No 2 in D major Op 43

## Jean Sibelius

## 1 Allegretto2 Tempo andante, ma rubato3 Vivacissimo4 Finale: Allegro moderato

## Programme note by Andrew Huth

The beginning of 1901 found Jean Sibelius in Italy, his mood tense and gloomy. The death of his 16-month-old daughter Kirsti the previous year had been a severe blow, and although the First Symphony was beginning to meet with international success, he was uncertain about his musical future. Various unfocused ideas came to him. One evening, for example, he jotted down a musical phrase and over it wrote: ‘Don Juan. I sit in the twilight in my castle, a guest enters. I ask who he is – no answer. I make an effort to entertain him. Still no answer. Eventually he breaks into song and then Don Juan notices who he is: Death.’ Two months later he sketched another idea which he labelled ‘Christus’.

These two themes later formed the basis of the Second Symphony’s Andante, but Sibelius was not then thinking of a new symphony: rather of a series of four tone poems on the Don Juan legend, or perhaps something related to Dante’s poem *The Divine Comedy*. ‘Several of my projects will not be ready for many years,’ he wrote to a friend; but after his return to Finland that summer, the Second Symphony took shape. ‘I have been in the throes of a bitter struggle with this symphony,’ he complained. It was nearly finished in November, but further revisions caused two postponements of the planned premiere. It was at last completed in January 1902, and Sibelius conducted four performances that March in Helsinki.

When Finnish audiences heard Sibelius’ Symphony No 1 in 1899, they expected it to reflect the world of the heroes of the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala* depicted in his earlier tone poems. In fact, Sibelius’ main concern was not to illustrate anything at all, but to explore a personal approach to purely symphonic momentum. The Second Symphony marks a significant step in this direction. Nevertheless, it still looks both forward and backwards, perhaps more so than any other work by Sibelius, giving rise to some curious contradictions in the relation and balance between the four movements.

The first movement is certainly a very original structure, pointing toward the new Classicism Sibelius aimed for in later works. The cool Nordic atmosphere is unmistakable, and so is the personal character of the themes, with such Sibelius fingerprints as swelling dynamics and long held notes ending in a flourish. The freshness of the colouring is initially achieved by the use of unmixed strings, woodwind and brass. Ideas are presented in turn, then in different combinations and changing perspectives. The movement ends modestly, with a sense of completion.

The Andante, on the other hand, is more sectional, with a fluid tempo moving from the slow, bleak opening towards passages of dissonant anguish that are almost expressionistic. At a time when Finland was an oppressed province of the Russian Empire, the Second Symphony was often regarded from a nationalistic viewpoint. Thus Sibelius’ staunch champion the conductor Robert Kajanus could write:

‘The Andante strikes one as the most heart-broken protest against all the injustices that threaten at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent … The Scherzo gives a picture of frenetic preparation … the Finale develops towards a triumphant conclusion intended to arouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future’.

Sibelius either kept a sensible silence about such associations or denied them outright. The various poetic ideas that filled his mind before composing the work – Don Juan, Christ, Dante, or anything else – may not be very significant in themselves, but they certainly have nothing to do with Finnish mythology or nationalism.

Taking a stylistic position somewhere between the cool Classicism of the first movement and the unbridled Romanticism of the second, the last two movements owe a clear debt to Beethoven, and in particular his Fifth Symphony, with its transition from Scherzo to Finale. The sound of the music is, of course, very different, and the build-up of tension towards the end of the Finale shows Sibelius as a master of symphonic momentum as the chorale theme, first announced softly by the woodwind, is subjected to repetition with suppressed dynamics and a rigidly controlled tempo before the final major-key resolution.

From the many tributes that the Symphony earned him, Sibelius was especially pleased with comments from two fellow composers. After conducting it in Berlin in 1905, he wrote to his wife: ‘[Ferruccio] Busoni is totally enamoured of my symphony and understands its chaste concentration. In particular he thinks the second movement the best music in existence.’ Unreserved praise came after the Stockholm premiere in October 1902 from the Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar:

‘You have reached into the deepest depths of the unconscious and the ineffable and brought forth something of a miracle. What I suspected has been proved true: for me you emerge as the foremost, indeed the only major figure at this moment.’

# Jean Sibelius

## 1865 to 1957 (Finland)

## Composer profile by Andrew Mellor

The landscape, language and culture of Finland continue to set the country apart from prevailing European norms. The same is true of music by Jean Sibelius.

In the faraway Finland of the late 19th century, it was possible to learn the basics of musical composition without having Austro-German methods baked in to your psyche. That suited Sibelius, who reimagined the structure of orchestral music by imitating the hypnotic, circular repetitions of Finland’s storytelling tradition, rune singing. In so doing, Sibelius moved orchestral music away from the Germanic tradition of thematic argument and gave the Nordic region a voice of its own.

Sibelius was born to a middle-class family outside Helsinki but quickly forced his way into the city’s cultural elite. He studied at the city’s Music Institute and became a competent violinist, rounding off his self-directed education in Berlin and Vienna.

Sibelius’ orchestral scores sound as unusual to the ear as they look to the eye. Tunes emerge from streams of identical notes. Motifs are molded gradually, through repetition. Foreground and background are merged. Rhythmic shifts at the bottom of the orchestra tease out transformations above. The music can appear beyond human control.

Sibelius perfected those techniques in his symphonies while his tone poems formed testing grounds for them. He anticipated American minimalism and French spectralism, while his role in creating an independent Finland put orchestral music at the centre of the country’s legislative agenda.

Finland took Sibelius to its heart, but the precious and pugnacious composer had an ambivalent relationship with his homeland and his place in the world. Nevertheless, he managed to produce an impressive body of work that included eight symphonies, a violin concerto, the symphonic work *Kullervo*, a number of tone poems, and many songs and chamber pieces, all of which are still performed today.

# Thomas Søndergård

## Conductor



The 2023/24 season sees Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård begin his tenure as Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra. In addition, Søndergård continues as Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, following six seasons as Principal Guest Conductor. Between 2012 and 2018, he served as Principal Conductor of BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW), after stepping down as Principal Conductor and Musical Advisor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

Søndergård opened his first season as Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra with two weeks of concerts featuring music by Mozart, Strauss, Auerbach, Debussy, Barber and Ravel, and led the orchestra in their new-year concerts. With the RSNO this season, in addition to its subscription series, he will conduct a residency at the Grosses Festspielhaus in Salzburg, joined by Lise de la Salle, as well as an extensive European tour with Ray Chen. This season, Søndergård also makes his return to the London Symphony Orchestra, as well as his debuts with the New York Philharmonic (where he will conduct the US premiere of Olga Neuwirth’s *Keyframes for a Hippogriff*), and with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich. In 2023/24 he also makes regular guest appearances throughout Scandinavia, debuting with Iceland Symphony Orchestra and at the Bergen International Festival, where he leads a full staging of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* to Grieg’s complete incidental music. Return visits include performances with the Bergen Philharmonic, the Aalborg and Aarhus Symfoniorkesters (a joint collaboration), and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, celebrating his receipt of the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen Foundation Award for his outstanding contribution to Danish musical life.

He has appeared with notable orchestras in leading European centres such as Berlin (Berlin Philharmonic, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Konzerthausorchester Berlin), Munich (Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks), Leipzig (Gewandhausorchester), Paris (Orchestre National de France), London (LSO, London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony and the Philharmonia) and Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic). He regularly works with Scandinavian orchestras such as the Oslo Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, Danish National Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic.

North American appearances to date have included appearances with the symphony orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, St Louis, Toronto, Atlanta, Montreal, Vancouver, Houston and Seattle. He has also made highly successful tours to China, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

# Leif Ove Andsnes

## Piano



With his commanding technique and searching interpretations, the celebrated Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes has won acclaim worldwide, playing concertos and recitals in the world’s leading concert halls and orchestras. An avid chamber musician, he is the founding director of the Rosendal Chamber Music Festival, co-artistic director of the Risør Festival of Chamber Music for nearly two decades and served as music director of California’s Ojai Music Festival in 2012. He was inducted into the Gramophone Hall of Fame in July 2013, and has received honorary doctorates from New York’s Juilliard School and the universities of Bergen and Oslo.

In 2023/24, Andsnes performs Beethoven’s ‘Emperor’ Concerto with orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and New World Symphony, as well as on a Japanese tour with the NHK Symphony. Other upcoming highlights include Rachmaninoff’s Third Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Danish National Symphony and Orchestre de Paris. He also embarks on high-profile solo recital tours of Japan and Europe, before joining the Dover Quartet for Brahms and Dohnányi piano quintets on a five-city North American tour, bookended by dates at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie’s Zankel Hall. *Leif Ove Andsnes: The Complete Warner Classics Edition 1990–2010*, a
36-CD retrospective, was released in October 2023.

Andsnes’ discography comprises more than 50 titles, spanning repertoire from the Baroque to the present day, and has been recognised with eleven Grammy nominations, seven *Gramophone* Awards and many other international prizes. His recordings of Grieg’s Piano Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic and of Mozart’s Piano Concertos Nos 9 and 18 were both named ‘Best CD of the Year’ by *The New York Times*. His Sony Classical series *A Beethoven Journey and Mozart Momentum 1785/86* were honoured with multiple *Gramophone* Awards, Belgium’s Prix Caecilia and *BBC Music Magazine’s* ‘Recording of the Year’. Andsnes’ other accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Instrumentalist Award, the Gilmore Artist Award, and Norway’s Peer Gynt Prize and Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St Olav. He was the first Scandinavian to curate Carnegie Hall’s ‘Perspectives’ series and has been Pianist-in-Residence of the Berlin Philharmonic, Artist-in-Residence of the New York Philharmonic and the subject of a previous LSO Artist Portrait series.

Andsnes was born in Karmøy, Norway, in 1970, and studied at the Bergen Music Conservatory. He is currently an Artistic Adviser for the Prof Jirí Hlinka Piano Academy in Bergen, where he lives with his partner and their three children.

# London Symphony Orchestra

## On Stage

Leader
Roman Simovic

First Violins
Clare Duckworth

Ginette Decuyper

Maxine Kwok
William Melvin
Stefano Mengoli
Claire Parfitt
Elizabeth Pigram
Laurent Quénelle
Harriet Rayfield
Sylvain Vasseur
Julian Azkoul
Richard Blayden
Caroline Frenkel
Mitzi Gardner
Alexandra Lomeiko

Second Violins
Olatz Ruiz de Gordejuela
Thomas Norris
Miya Väisänen
Matthew Gardner
Naoko Keatley
Alix Lagasse
Iwona Muszynska
Csilla Pogány
Andrew Pollock
Paul Robson
Juan Gonzalez Hernandez
Ricky Gore
Aleem Kandour
Olwen Miles \*
Erzsebet Racz

Violas
Eivind Ringstad
Gillianne Haddow
Malcolm Johnston
Matan Gilitchensky
Anna Bastow
Thomas Beer
Germán Clavijo
Julia O’Riordan
Robert Turner
Errika Collins
Philip Hall
Elisabeth Varlow

Cellos
David Cohen
Laure Le Dantec
Alastair Blayden
Ève-Marie Caravassilis
Daniel Gardner
Morwenna Del Mar
Anna Garde
Ken Ichinose
Kosta Popovic \*
Peteris Sokolovskis
Joanna Twaddle

Double Basses
Burak Marlali
Patrick Laurence
Thomas Goodman
Joe Melvin
Jani Pensola
Josie Ellis
Simon Oliver

Flutes
Amy Yule
Imogen Royce

Piccolo
Sharon Williams

Oboes
Juliana Koch
Rosie Jenkins

Clarinets
Maura Marinucci
James Gilbert

Bass Clarinet
Kenny Keppel

Bassoons
Daniel Jemison
Joost Bosdijk

Horns
Timothy Jones
Angela Barnes
Olivia Gandee
Jonathan Maloney
Phillippa Koushk-Jalali

Trumpets
James Fountain
Richard Blake
Kaitlin Wild

Trombones
Peter Moore
Jonathan Hollick

Bass Trombone
Paul Milner

Tuba
Ben Thomson

Timpani
Nigel Thomas

Percussion
Neil Percy
David Jackson
Sam Walton

Harp
Bryn Lewis