# Brahms and Shostakovich

## Thursday 29 February 2024 7–9.30pm Barbican

**Johannes Brahms** Violin Concerto

*Interval*

**Dmitri Shostakovich** Symphony No 4

**Sir Simon Rattle** conductor

**Isabelle Faust** violin

**London Symphony Orchestra**

# Welcome

Welcome to this LSO concert. Tonight, Sir Simon Rattle, Conductor Emeritus, returns to the Barbican following his highly acclaimed concert performances of Leoš Janáček’s opera *Jenůfa* at the start of this year.

We are delighted to welcome Isabelle Faust, a long-standing friend of the Orchestra, with whom we collaborated earlier in the season on Béla Bartók’s Violin Concerto No 1 and Ernest Chausson’s Poème, and who this evening performs Johannes Brahms’ Violin Concerto.

After the interval, we hear Dmitri Shostakovich’s Symphony No 4, a work that we had originally intended to perform with Sir Simon in the season that was so seriously interrupted by the pandemic, when works on this scale were simply too large to perform on the Barbican stage.

This concert is generously supported by The Huo Family Foundation, to whom we are very grateful. It is being live-streamed on medici.tv, and recorded for live broadcast by our partner Mezzo. We look forward to performing this programme on tour for audiences in Dortmund, Luxembourg and Paris at the beginning of March.

I hope that you enjoy the concert and will be able to join us again soon. This Sunday, Sir Simon Rattle returns to conduct a world premiere by John Adams, alongside music by American greats before him: George Gershwin and Roy Harris. Also in March, François-Xavier Roth, LSO Principal Guest Conductor, continues his ‘Beethoven and Modernism’ series with two of the composer’s most surprising symphonies, alongside Unsuk Chin’s Piano Concerto, performed by Bertrand Chamayou, as part of his LSO Artist Portrait.

**Dame Kathryn McDowell DBE DL  
Managing Director**

## Violin Concerto in D major Op 77

## Johannes Brahms

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Adagio
3. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

1897

45 minutes

Programme note by Andrew Huth

Johannes Brahms didn’t play the violin, but his understanding of it was second only to that of his own instrument, the piano. When he left his native Hamburg for the first time, it was to accompany the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi on a concert tour during which a famous episode demonstrated the 21-year-old composer’s astonishing musicianship. One evening he discovered that the only available piano was tuned a semitone flat, and coolly transposed Ludwig van Beethoven’s C minor sonata up into C-sharp in order to play it at the right pitch. It was through Reményi that Brahms met the violinist Joseph Joachim, with whom he formed one of the closest friendships of his life, and whose playing was at the back of his mind whenever he composed for the violin. Joachim knew better than to pester the obstinate composer for a concerto, but must have known that it was only a matter of time before one eventually appeared.

It came in the summer of 1878, soon after the Second Symphony, with which it shares something of its character. Not only is there a clearly symphonic cast to the music, but also the open lyricism that Brahms associated with the key of D major. Both works were composed at the same lakeside village in Carinthia; coincidentally, 50 years later another composer, Alban Berg, would write his Violin Concerto on the shores of the same lake.

Since Brahms tended to cover his tracks and say little about the gestation and composition of his music, we know very little about its background. It is quite possible that ideas for the Concerto had been in his mind for some time; but during its composition there was a revealing correspondence with Joachim. We learn, for example, that the Concerto was originally to have had four movements rather than the expected three (an idea Brahms reserved for his Second Piano Concerto, composed three years later). Joachim was himself a gifted composer, and in the past, Brahms had often sought his advice on compositional matters. Now it was the solo violin part that Brahms sent to Joachim for his comments and technical help. Interestingly, he hardly ever actually took the advice his friend offered. He knew perfectly well what was effective and playable.

The first performance of the new Concerto was given in Leipzig on 1 January 1879. Joachim played, of course, and Brahms conducted. It was entirely Joachim’s decision, though, to begin the concert with the Beethoven Concerto, of which he was the most famous player of the day. Brahms didn’t care for the idea. ‘A lot of D major’, he commented, but his unspoken objection was that he always disliked inviting comparisons with Beethoven, who was a very different type of composer. The only real similarities between the two concertos are that they are roughly equal in length and proportion, with a first movement longer than the other two together.

Brahms misses no opportunity to show off the essential character of the violin. There is brilliance, power and lyricism in the solo part, which makes enormous demands on the player. For all its depth and subtlety of construction, though, the overall form of the Concerto is almost obstinately traditional, ignoring the innovations of Felix Mendelssohn in his famous Violin Concerto or even those found in the later Beethoven concertos.

The first movement is a spacious design, with a long orchestral exposition. Although the themes are not in themselves extensive, they evolve from one another into long developments by soloist, orchestra, or both in partnership. This is the last of the great violin concertos in which the composer left it to the soloist to provide their own solo cadenza passage (rather than it being written out for them). Numerous composers have since written cadenzas for Brahms’ Violin Concerto, and in tonight’s concert, Isabelle Faust performs the cadenza by Ferruccio Busoni.

After so symphonically conceived a first movement, the other movements are more relaxed in mood and structure. The Adagio is coloured by the sound of the wind instruments, the soloist weaving delicate traceries around the main theme, but never playing it in its full form. The rondo finale pays tribute to Joachim’s own concerto ‘in the Hungarian style’, which he had dedicated to Brahms.

# Johannes Brahms

## 1833 (Germany) to 1897 (Austria)

Composer profile by Andrew Mellor

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, a north German city known for its Lutheran sobriety and seriousness. His father played the double bass in an orchestra and his mother was a seamstress. Brahms was neither privileged nor poor, and developed a strong work ethic. He seemed destined to pursue a career as a pianist, but composing gradually took over – ‘gradually’ being the operative word.

Brahms was conscientious and severely self-critical, predicaments exacerbated by the timing of his birth – very much in the shadow of Ludwig van Beethoven, dead for six years but still music’s towering genius figure. Aged 40, Brahms had completed only four orchestral scores and sketched the first of four symphonies (it would take him two decades to finish). Despite his struggles, he would prove the natural successor to Beethoven in the arenas of symphonic and chamber music.

Other influences were vital. Robert and Clara Schumann became important companions and advisers. The multi-voiced weave of ‘past’ music by Johann Sebastian Bach would increasingly shape Brahms’ view of music’s future. Early in his career as a jobbing pianist, Brahms was introduced to Hungarian gypsy music by the violinist Ede Reményi. That music cut a gregarious path through Brahms’ default musical severity.

Like Beethoven, Brahms was a lifelong bachelor despite a possible desired romance with Clara Schumann. He enjoyed simple pleasures, among them his daily walk to The Red Hedgehog inn in his adopted home of Vienna, hands clasped behind his back. Despite his reputation as brusque and sarcastic, Brahms was unusually generous.

# Symphony No 4 in C minor Op 43

## Dmitri Shostakovich

1. Allegretto poco moderato – Presto
2. Moderato con moto
3. Largo – Allegro

1935–36

61 minutes

Programme note by Elizabeth Wilson

In 1935, the 29-year-old Dmitri Shostakovich was riding the crest of a wave. His opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, widely acclaimed in Leningrad and Moscow, had received a record 100 performances over two seasons. Now, to match this achievement, he started writing a Fourth Symphony. Only a few months later, Joseph Stalin attended a Moscow performance of Lady Macbeth, with disastrous consequences. Two days later, on 28 January 1936, an article titled ‘Muddle Instead of Music’ appeared in Pravda: a crude but devastating attack on the opera and its composer. Refusing to be distracted from his task, Shostakovich completed the Fourth Symphony, and oversaw the initial rehearsals with the Leningrad Philharmonic in December 1936. The orchestra’s administration, wary of official condemnation, strongly advised that the performance be cancelled. Shostakovich reluctantly agreed. He had to wait 25 years for the symphony’s public premiere, given by the Moscow Philharmonic and Kirill Kondrashin on 30 December 1961.

The Fourth Symphony was conceived in two massive outer movements framing a shorter middle one. The music is steeped in the influence of Gustav Mahler, while also alluding to pieces by Ludwig van Beethoven, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Igor Stravinsky, as well as Shostakovich’s theatrical works.

In spring 1935, Shostakovich’s friend Ivan Sollertinsky, artistic director of the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, lectured a gathering of composers on problems of Soviet Symphonism. Mahler’s symphonies, he believed, should serve as a ‘democratic’ model, for they incorporated street life and popular idioms into the traditional genre. Manipulating Marxist terminology, Sollertinsky presented Mahler as a ‘protesting petit-bourgeois humanist!’.

Shostakovich was already a Mahler fan. Indeed, the Fourth Symphony borrowed the tragic C minor key, grandiose marches and narrative forms from Mahler’s epic Second ‘Resurrection’ Symphony. The shorter middle movement – as musicologist Pauline Fairclough has noted – can be regarded as a shadowy paraphrase of the Scherzo (In ruhig fliessender Bewegang), where Mahler refers to his Wunderhorn song about St Anthony preaching to the fishes.

Created under the looming shadow of Stalin’s dictatorship, the Fourth Symphony was supposed to glorify Communist ideology through use of a socialist realist lexicon. However, Shostakovich perceived reality as something far more menacing, for which he utilised enormous orchestral forces, grandiloquent forms and extreme dynamics. A shrill alarm of woodwind trills marks the work’s opening, and immediately develops into a theme of mechanical character, suggested by the dry percussive sound of the xylophone. Arriving with a crash in C minor, the March theme proper takes over. Its high-voltage aggression provokes the opposite reaction of numbness, whereby the loud, grotesque nature of the first subject group is offset by the indifference of the second subject’s meandering themes. Similarly, in the finale, Shostakovich throws the main material into relief, pitting it against themes of extreme banality. Polkas, waltzes and galops rush past in kaleidoscopic episodes, providing futile distraction from cataclysmic tragedy.

Shostakovich controls the enormous structures by interconnecting his many themes and motifs. For example, a two-note staccato (detached) motif derived from the fourth bar of the Symphony later transforms into a bizarre cuckoo call, and becomes an important building block in the Symphony’s outer movements, not least when it blossoms into a rough, fully fledged fugato in the finale.

The massive orchestral forces, including an impressive percussion section, do not exclude music of solo and chamber proportions. In the Finale’s slow opening Funeral March, a suffocated bassoon solo is sparsely accompanied by timpani and double bass. The finale’s enormous gamut of emotion ranges from overwhelming grief to the biting satire of a topsy turvy world.

Shostakovich’s idea of two consecutive and contrasting codas • is a master stroke. The first emerges from a C major section which is characterised by the cello’s moving ostinato patterns, and marked morendo (dying). Suddenly, in a steep, short crescendo, the timpani and gran cassa (a bass drum) lead us to the triumphant C major, and a theme reminiscent of the Gloria from Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex. Here, continuously thundering timpani suggest a positive end, but the sentiment is corrupted by discord and troubled reminiscence. Just as suddenly as it appeared, the first coda dissolves into C minor and a chilling pianissimo – the start of a second coda. Over a throbbing bass we hear strands of the initial March theme, weird woodwind dissonances and the odd pizzicato (plucked strings) accent. The final gloom is only alleviated by the celeste’s ascending notes, a seeming glimmer of hope relayed from a distant galaxy. Unlike Mahler, Shostakovich offers us no solace or redemption.

# Dmitri Shostakovich

## 1906 to 1975 (Russia)

Composer profile by Andrew Stewart

After early piano lessons with his mother, Dmitri Shostakovich enrolled at the Petrograd Conservatoire in 1919. In the 1920s he wrote large-scale works that included the satirical opera The Nose (1927–28) and his first three symphonies. Shostakovich announced his Fifth Symphony of 1937 as ‘a Soviet artist’s practical creative reply to just criticism’. A year before its premiere, he had drawn a stinging attack from the official Soviet mouthpiece Pravda, in which his initially successful opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk was condemned for its ‘leftist bedlam’ and extreme modernism. With the Fifth Symphony came acclaim not only from the Russian audience, but also from musicians and critics overseas.

Shostakovich lived through the first months of the German siege of Leningrad serving as a member of the auxiliary fire service. In July he began work on the first three movements of his Seventh Symphony, completing the defiant finale after his evacuation in October and dedicating the score to the city. A micro-filmed copy was despatched by way of Tehran and an American warship to the US, where it was broadcast by the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Toscanini.

In 1943 Shostakovich completed his emotionally shattering Eighth Symphony. Five years later in 1948, he and other leading composers, Sergei Prokofiev among them, were forced by the Soviet Cultural Commissar, Andrei Zhdanov, to concede that their work represented ‘most strikingly the formalistic perversions and anti-democratic tendencies in music’, a crippling blow to Shostakovich’s artistic freedom that was healed only after the death of Stalin in 1953. Shostakovich answered his critics later that year with the powerful Tenth Symphony, in which he portrays ‘human emotions and passions’, rather than the collective dogma of communism.

Shostakovich struggled with ill health in his later years, but continued to compose prolifically. His late works included String Quartets Nos 13–15, Symphonies Nos 14–15 and settings of poems by Marina Tsvetaeva and Michelangelo Buonarroti. He died in Moscow in 1975.

# Sir Simon Rattle

## Conductor Emeritus



Sir Simon Rattle was born in Liverpool and studied at the Royal Academy of Music. From 1980 to 1998, he was Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and was appointed Music Director in 1990. In 2002 he took up the position of Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, where he remained until the end of the 2017/18 season. Sir Simon was appointed Music Director of the London Symphony Orchestra in September 2017, a position he remained in until the 2023/24 season, when he became Conductor Emeritus. That same season, Sir Simon took up the position of Chief Conductor with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks in Munich. He is a Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Founding Patron of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. In February Sir Simon was announced as the Principal Guest Conductor, Rafael Kubelik Chair, of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

Sir Simon has made over 70 recordings for EMI record label (now Warner Classics) and has received numerous prestigious international awards for his recordings on various labels. His most recent recordings include Berlioz’s The Damnation of Faust, Helen Grime’s Woven Space, Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande, Turnage’s Remembering and Beethoven’s Christ on the Mount of Olives, which were all released by the LSO’s own record label, LSO Live.

Sir Simon regularly tours within Europe, the United States and Asia, and has long-standing relationships with world-leading orchestras. He regularly conducts the Staatskapelle Berlin, Berlin Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Czech Philharmonic. He has conducted opera productions at the Metropolitan Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin and at the Festival d’Aix en Provence.

Music education is of supreme importance to Sir Simon. In 2019 Sir Simon announced the creation of the LSO East London Academy, developed by the LSO in partnership with ten East London boroughs. This free programme aims to identify and develop the potential of young East Londoners between the ages of 11 and 18 who show exceptional musical talent. His partnership with the Berlin Philharmonic broke new ground with the education programme Zukunft@Bphil. He and the Berlin Philharmonic were appointed International UNICEF Ambassadors in 2004, the first time this honour has been conferred on an artistic ensemble.

Sir Simon was awarded a knighthood by Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1994 and received the Order of Merit in 2014. He received the Order of Merit in Berlin in 2018. In 2019 he was given the Freedom of the City of London.

# Isabelle Faust

## Violin

Since winning the renowned Leopold Mozart Competition and the Paganini Competition at a very young age, Isabelle Faust has given performances with the world’s major orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Les Siècles and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. She has collaborated with conductors such as Andris Nelsons, Giovanni Antonini, François-Xavier Roth, Daniel Harding, Philippe Herreweghe, Jakub Hrůša, Klaus Mäkelä, Robin Ticciati and Sir Simon Rattle, with whom she will tour in March 2024 with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Faust’s artistic curiosity encompasses all eras and forms of instrumental collaboration. In addition to big symphonic violin concertos, her collaborations have included Franz Schubert’s Octet with historical instruments, as well as Igor Stravinsky’s L’histoire du soldat with Dominique Horwitz and György Kurtág’s Kafka Fragments with Anna Prohaska. She has recently given world premieres of works by composers Péter Eötvös, Brett Dean, Ondřej Adámek and Rune Glerup.

Highlights in the 2023/24 season include the celebration of György Ligeti’s 100th birthday with an extensive tour with Les Siècles and Roth, in which Ligeti’s work enters into a close dialogue with Mozart’s timeless oeuvre. She also looks forward to collaborating with orchestras such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, NDR Radiophilharmonie, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Orquesta Nacional de España, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse and NHK Symphony Orchestra, as well as touring with the London Symphony Orchestra. She will be Artist in Residence with the SWR Symphony Orchestra. In chamber music she will focus on projects with Antoine Tamestit, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Anne Katharina Schreiber, Kristin von der Goltz, Alexander Melnikov and Jean-Guihen Queyras.

Faust’s numerous recordings have been unanimously praised by critics and awarded the Diapason d’Or, the Gramophone Award, the Choc de l’année and other prizes. Recent recordings include Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto with Les Siècles and Roth and Schoenberg’s Violin Concerto under Daniel Harding with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, as well as Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with Alexander Melnikov, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Pablo HerasCasado and the Freiburger Baroque Orchestra. She has a long-standing chamber music partnership with the pianist Alexander Melnikov, with whom she has recorded sonatas for piano and violin by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms.

# London Symphony Orchestra

## On Stage

**Leader**Andrej Power

**First Violins**Benjamin Gilmore

Clare Duckworth

Ginette Decuyper

Maxine Kwok

William Melvin

Stefano Mengoli

Claire Parfitt

Laurent Quénelle

Harriet Rayfield

Caroline Frenkel

Alexandra Lomeiko

Hilary Jane Parker

Joonas Pekonen

Shoshanah Sievers

## Second Violins

Thomas Norris

Miya Väisänen

David Ballesteros

Matthew Gardner

Naoko Keatley

Alix Lagasse

Belinda McFarlane

Iwona Muszynska

Csilla Pogány

Andrew Pollock

Paul Robson

Momoko Arima

Doretta Balkizas

Ricky Gore

Victoria Lewis

Erzsebet Racz

## Violas

Eivind Ringstad

Gillianne Haddow

Anna Bastow

Germán Clavijo

Thomas Beer

Steve Doman

Robert Turner

Mizuho Ueyama

Errika Collins

Stephanie Edmundson

Matan Gilitchensky

Vanessa Hristova

Elisabeth Varlow

## Cellos

David Cohen

Laure Le Dantec

Alastair Blayden

Ève-Marie Caravassilis

Daniel Gardner

Amanda Truelove

Salvador Bolón

Silvestrs Kalnins

Ghislaine McMullin

Joanna Twaddle

## Double Basses

Rodrigo Moro Martín

Patrick Laurence

Thomas Goodman

Joe Melvin

Jani Pensola

Simon Oliver

Hugh Sparrow

Adam Wynter

## Flutes

Gareth Davies

Imogen Royce

Julian Sperry

Rebecca Larsen

## Piccolos

Sharon Williams

Patricia Moynihan

## Oboes

Olivier Stankiewicz

Rosie Jenkins

Maxwell Spiers

## Cors Anglais

Drake Gritton

## Clarinets

Sérgio Pires

Chi-Yu Mo

Andrew Harper

Sarah Thurlow

Maria Gomes

## Bass Clarinet

Ferran Garcerà Perelló

## Bassoons

Daniel Jemison

Joost Bosdijk

Dominic Tyler

## Contra Bassoon

Martin Field

## Horns

Timothy Jones

Diego Incertis Sánchez

Angela Barnes

Olivia Gandee

Jonathan Maloney

Finlay Bain

Jonathan Durrant

Anna Douglass

Phillippa Koushk-Jalali

## Trumpets

James Fountain

Jon Holland

Adam Wright

Toby Street

Kaitlin Wild

## Trombones

Matthew Gee

Jonathan Hollick

## Bass Trombone

Paul Milner

## Tubas

Ben Thomson

Adrian Miotti

## Timpani

Nigel Thomas

Patrick King

## Percussion

Neil Percy

David Jackson

Sam Walton

Tom Edwards

Helen Edordu

Oliver Yates

Benedict Hoffnung

## Harps

Bryn Lewis

Lucy Wakeford

## Piano

Elizabeth Burley