# Adámek and Beethoven

## Thursday 31 October 2024 7pmBarbican

**Ludwig van Beethoven** Symphony No 1 in C major

**Ondřej Adámek** Follow Me (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, UK premiere)

Interval

**Ludwig van Beethoven** Symphony No 4 in B-flat major

**Thomas Adès** conductor

**Isabelle Faust** violin

**London Symphony Orchestra**

# Welcome

In tonight’s LSO concert, we continue our ‘Beethoven and Modernism’ series, programming two of Ludwig van Beethoven’s symphonies alongside the music of Ondřej Adámek. It is a pleasure to welcome back Thomas Adès to the podium for this concert, following his performances with us earlier in the year, featuring the UK premiere of his Air – Homage to Sibelius performed by Anne-Sophie Mutter, alongside a chamber concert at LSO St Luke’s with pianist Kirill Gerstein and an ensemble of LSO musicians.

We are pleased to be joined by Isabelle Faust, a long-standing friend of the Orchestra, with whom we have enjoyed many rewarding collaborations over the years, most recently in February of this year for a performance of Johannes Brahms’ Violin Concerto. Tonight she performs Ondrej Adámek’s Follow Me, a Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, a piece written specifically for her and one she has championed since its premiere in 2017.

I hope that you enjoy the concert and that you will be able to join us again soon. On 7 November, Daniele Rustioni makes his conducting debut with the Orchestra, with a colourful programme featuring Liszt, Schubert and Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, with Francesca Dego as soloist. Our ‘Beethoven and Modernism’ series continues at the end of November with the thrilling Seventh Symphony paired with Helmut Lachenmann’s My Melodies, featuring members of the LSO Horn section. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Dame Kathryn McDowell DBE DL

## Managing Director

# Symphony No 1 in C major Op 21

## Ludwig van Beethoven

1799–1800

26 minutes

1. **Adagio molto – Allegro con brio**
2. **Andante cantabile con moto**
3. **Menuetto: Allegro molto e vivace**
4. **Adagio – Allegro molto e vivace**

Programme note by Lindsay Kemp

Ludwig van Beethoven did not hurry to send his First Symphony into the world. When it was premiered in Vienna on 2 April 1800, he was approaching 30, and had already made a name for himself as a stirring virtuoso pianist (he had been performing his first two piano concertos for several years), and as a composer of muscular chamber works and piano compositions, some of which were strikingly forceful and modern. In fact, the symphony was not the only form with which he was slow to engage: his first string quartets were not published until 1801, and it is surely no coincidence that the string quartet and the symphony were precisely the genres at that time associated above all with Joseph Haydn. Beethoven’s relationship with Haydn – with whom he had studied in the early 1790s – was an uneasy one, but there is little reason to doubt that the idea of moving in on the vastly respected older composer’s ‘patch’ was a daunting one, even for Beethoven.

When he did enter the symphonic arena, it was with what seems a surprisingly cautious work, at least to ears familiar with the other eight symphonies. The influence of Haydn is clear, in its layout of four movements with slow introduction, in its orchestration, and in many of its compositional processes, not least the way that fragments of themes can be used motivically, sometimes to accompany, sometimes to provide a driving force. There are even echoes of Haydn’s C major Symphony No 97 in the main theme of the first movement, and in the perkily demure nature of its counterpart in the second.

Yet to listeners at the time, there were plenty of things to make them sit up and take notice, though not always favourably. ‘A caricature of Haydn pushed to absurdity’ was how one critic described the new symphony, no doubt disconcerted by the fact that the slow introduction meanders its way towards the main body of the first movement via some surprising discords, or that the third movement seems to get by without much in the way of a tune, or for that matter much feel of being a minuet. Perhaps, too, the sheer ebullience of the music was hard to bear, for there is no mistaking its Beethovenian energy and dash. Whether they actually liked it or not, its first audiences cannot have failed to be aware that there was something new in the air.

Only hindsight, however, can alert us to the prophetic nature of the slow introduction to the finale, in which timid upward scales eventually discover that they are part of the movement’s cheerful main theme. Here the context is comic, but it was an innovation to which Beethoven would return with more serious intent.

# Ludwig van Beethoven

# 1770 (Germany) to 1827 (Austria)

# Contemporaries: Gioachino Rossini, Luigi Cherubini

**Key events
1792**: Moved to Vienna **1803–15**: Napoleonic Wars **1824**: Premiere of the Ninth Symphony

# Listen to: Symphonies Nos 2 & 6 with Bernard Haitink

# Composer profile 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 also the standing of the artist in society. He introduced the concept of the ‘artist-hero’, paving the way for Romanticism and even for popular culture.

Beethoven was born in a faraway corner of what is now Germany to an alcoholic and abusive father, and a mother who died young. He chanced his way to Europe’s cultural capital, Vienna, where he studied with Joseph Haydn and probably (during his first visit to the city) 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 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. 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 remained ever sure of himself, and consistently creative.

# Follow Me (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, UK premiere)

**Ondřej Adámek**

2017

24 minutes

Programme note by Timmy Fisher

The ‘narrative concerto’ has its roots in the early 19th century. Think Harold in Italy, Hector Berlioz’s ‘symphony with viola obbligato’, or Carl Maria von Weber’s Konzertstück for piano and orchestra, both of which cast the soloist as protagonist in a musical drama. In Follow Me, Ondřej Adámek takes this idea and adds a macabre twist. Across three movements, the soloist (‘leader’) and orchestra (her ‘followers’) act out a fizzing dialogue in which the former, having seduced and then provoked the latter, is ultimately overwhelmed – driven (literally) from the stage and ‘symbolically executed’.

If the end sounds violent, then the musical means is just as fierce. Insistent melodic fragments shared out between soloist and orchestra paint a terrifying, ritualistic picture. A battery of percussion – including whips, cymbals, flexatone, ‘lion’s roar’, gongs of various sizes and extractions and a set of 29 chromatically tuned cowbells – heighten the climaxes in the dynamic outer movements. Special or ‘extended’ techniques also reinforce Adámek’s earthy sound world. At the end of the first movement, for example, ‘breath noises’, achieved through various unorthodox means in the strings, brass and woodwind, take us from a wild outburst to a sudden sense of being ‘inside our body’, setting us up nicely for the surrealist calm of the Bach-inspired middle movement.

Exploration and manipulation of orchestral colour is a key aspect of Adámek’s style, as is the borrowing or imitation of techniques from non-Western musical cultures. As such, Follow Me opens with the soloist, unaccompanied, forming and reforming gestures with an ‘exaggerated vibrato that recalls a singer in Japanese Noh theatre’, while the responsorial sequences that follow were partly inspired by the calls of Nairobi market vendors and by katajjaq – a type of Inuit throat singing. The final-movement ‘execution’, meanwhile, echoes another of Adámek’s keen interests: imbuing concert performance with movement and gesture.

All this makes for a work that is equal parts dramatic, savage and unsettling. Still, peel back the modernist detail and Follow Me fits snugly into the traditional concerto model – one that precedes Berlioz and Weber. Its three-movement, fast–slow–fast structure has been commonplace since the beginning of the 18th century, and complex solo–orchestral dialogue is largely a legacy of Mozart. The composer bookending tonight’s concert feels particularly appropriate: Beethoven pioneered the idea of an unaccompanied solo introduction (in his Fourth Piano Concerto) and his interplay between soloist and orchestra, in particular the startling use of orchestral timbres with the solo line in his Violin Concerto, set the standard for subsequent composers, Adámek included.

# Ondřej Adámek

# b 1979 (Czech Republic)

# Key events 2010: Moved to Berlin as part of the The DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program 2018: Founded the vocal ensemble N.E.S.E.V.E.N.

# Listen to: Where Are You? for solo voice and orchestra, first conducted by Sir Simon Rattle in 2021

# Composer profile Timmy Fisher

‘I loved taking different objects – kitchen pots, glasses, toys – sorting them to create a scale and playing them together with tapes of Baroque music.’ This childhood anecdote, shared in an interview earlier this year, conjures a cheerful image of the young Ondřej Adámek. It also sums up, albeit rather crudely, his adult musical style: an emphasis on exploratory techniques and novel acoustic sounds (see his musical invention, the Airmachine), a direct and earthy intensity, a childlike delight in miscellany and a playful approach to tradition.

Born in Prague in 1979, Adámek came of age during the decline of Czechoslovak communism. He learnt to play the piano, organ, guitar and horn as a child and, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, eagerly soaked up the music of Western modernists (György Ligeti, Igor Stravinsky, George Crumb, Gérard Grisey), as well as that of non-western cultures. Ethnomusicology would later become a particular passion: time spent in countries from Spain to Kenya to Bali has had a strong impact on his work. After studying music in Prague, he moved to Paris, where, at the city’s conservatory, he took courses in conducting, electroacoustics, orchestration and Indian music, absorbing the techniques and refinements of the avant-garde. Though he never rejected the French school and what he saw as its ‘emphasis on detail, sound, craft’, Adámek would ultimately develop a more pluralistic modernism, honing his style during a residency at the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Programme. Prestigious awards and commissions would follow, and today Adámek is a sought-after talent, both as a conductor and composer.

His important works include the 2016 ‘a cappella’ opera Seven Stones, written for four soloists and a 12-person chorus ‘playing instruments and objects’, the 2020 song cycle Where Are You?, which sets Jewish, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu texts, and Let me tell you a story for voice and ensemble, which combines Korean pansori narrative devices with a storyline by Icelandic poet Sjón. All exhibit Adámek’s fascination with the human voice, especially when presented in combination with ‘gesture’, a language of movement that, he believes, enhances the power of concert performance.

# Symphony No 4 in B-flat major Op 60

## Ludwig van Beethoven

1906

34 minutes

1. **Adagio – Allegro vivace**
2. **Adagio**
3. **Scherzo-Trio: Allegro vivace**
4. **Allegro ma non troppo**

Programme note by Jan Swafford

Robert Schumann is said to have observed that Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony is ‘like a slender Greek maiden between two Norse giants’, the latter meaning the heroic outings of the Third and Fifth. This is a good indication of something fundamental about Beethoven, that with each symphony he demanded an entirely new direction – an approach that applied to his major works in all media and genres. The Fourth was written during his stupendously productive year of 1806, when, despite chronic illness, growing deafness and a shattering romantic disappointment, he completed a series of historic masterpieces including the three ‘Razumovsky’ string quartets, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto and the ‘Appassionata’ Piano Sonata.

Following on from the towering and complex ‘Eroica’ Symphony, the Fourth, among other things, represents a radical simplification of form and content, contributing to a work of enormous geniality. Two elements may have contributed to its forthright personality. First, while Beethoven was in the midst of creating some of his most ambitious pieces, including the Fifth Symphony, this was a commission that he wrote quickly for a private premiere in a nobleman’s castle. Second, he perhaps wanted to give himself and his audience something on the order of a break from storming the heavens.

The Fourth, along with the Second and Eighth, can be called his operatically tinged symphonies, and inevitably that summons the spirit of Mozart, always Beethoven’s prime model and influence. It has a parade of atmospheres, starting with the mysterious nocturnal opening, like the beginning of an opera. Soon, with a series of up-rip figures, we are tossed into the gaily dancing first movement proper, the mood distinctly comic, specifically Mozartian comedy. (Beethoven rarely gets credit for his joking side, in which he was as gifted as in everything else.) Beginning the second movement is a drifting melody of great tenderness, prophetic of the long-breathed themes of the composer’s late music, its accompaniment a lilting figure that our time would call a tango rhythm. There follows a romping scherzo with a two-beat theme that kicks against the three-beat meter. The finale is a dizzy and breathless moto perpetuo, like the gayest of final scenes in an opera.

With the Fourth, Beethoven took a turn to a more straightforward and transparent approach for his symphonies. Here, it is simplicity plus wit and charm. In the Fifth, it would be simplicity plus maximal intensity.

# Thomas Adès

## Conductor

Thomas Adès’ compositions include three operas; he conducted the premiere of the most recent, The Exterminating Angel, at the 2016 Salzburg Festival and subsequently at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, and the Royal Opera House, London. He conducted the premiere and revival of The Tempest at the Royal Opera House, and a new production at The Metropolitan Opera, Wiener Staatsoper and in November 2022 at La Scala, Milan. Adès led the world premiere of his full-evening ballet, The Dante Project, at Covent Garden in 2021 and conducted it in May 2023 at the Opéra Garnier, Paris. He conducted a new production of The Exterminating Angel, featuring a critically acclaimed staging from Calixto Bieito, in spring 2024 at the Opéra Bastille in Paris.

October 2024 sees Adès conduct the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester as part of his two-season residency with the ensemble, for which he appears as conductor, pianist and composer in various concert formats. Last autumn, Adès also began a two-season residency with the Hallé orchestra – for the first appearance of this 2024/25 season, on 21 November 2024, Adès conducts Aquifer, alongside his Air – Homage to Sibelius for Violin and Orchestra, which received its UK premiere with the London Symphony Orchestra in May 2024. Further 2024/25 highlights include concerts with the Orchestre de l’Opéra national de Paris, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin.

As a conductor, Adès appears regularly with the London Symphony, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Boston Symphony, Cleveland, Finnish Radio, Royal Concertgebouw, Santa Cecilia, Toronto Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic and London Philharmonic Orchestras. In opera, in addition to The Exterminating Angel, he has conducted Stravinsky’s The Rake’s Progress at the Royal Opera House and Zurich Opera, and the premieres of three operas by Gerald Barry, including the Los Angeles world premieres of The Importance of Being Earnest and Alice’s Adventures Under Ground, of which he also gave the European premiere at Covent Garden.

The world premiere recording of Adès’ Dante given by Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic won the Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance at the 66th Annual Grammy Awards in February 2024.

In September 2024, Adès received the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal, presented live onstage at the BBC Proms by conductor Sir Simon Rattle – himself a recipient of the RPS Gold Medal in 2000. Adès is based in London, UK.

# Isabelle Faust

**Violin**

Isabelle Faust captivates her audiences with her compelling interpretations. By combining the greatest possible authenticity with a contemporary perspective, she continuously creates meaningful encounters with a wide variety of works for diverse audiences.

After winning the renowned Leopold Mozart Competition and the Paganini Competition at a very young age, she soon gave regular 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. This led to collaborations with conductors such as Andris Nelsons, Giovanni Antonini, François-Xavier Roth, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Daniel Harding, Philippe Herreweghe, Jakub Hrůša, Klaus Mäkelä, Robin Ticciati and Sir Simon Rattle.

Faust’s vast artistic curiosity embraces all eras and all forms of instrumental cooperation. In addition to symphonic violin concertos, his includes repertory ranging from Schubert’s Octet played on historical instruments to Stravinsky’s L’Histoire du soldat with Dominique Horwitz and Kurtág’s Kafka Fragments with Anna Prohaska. She also renders an outstanding service to the performance of contemporary music: her recent world premieres include works by Péter Eötvös, Brett Dean, Ondřej Adámek and Rune Glerup.

Highlights of the 2024/25 season include concerts with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Boston Symphony, the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich. She also tours with Il Giardino Armonico in Europe and in Japan. Faust is Artist in Residence at the Beethovenfest Bonn 2024.

Her recordings have been unanimously praised by critics and awarded prizes including the Diapason d’or, the Gramophone Award and the Choc de l’année. Recent recordings include Benjamin Britten’s Violin Concerto (with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra), works for violin and orchestra by Pietro Locatelli (with Il Giardino Armonico) and works for solo violin by Biber, Matteis, Pisendel, Vilsmayr and Guillemain. Other recordings include Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, as well as Violin Concertos by Ludwig van Beethoven and Alban Berg under the direction of Claudio Abbado.

**London Symphony Orchestra**

**On Stage**

**Leader**

Carmine Lauri

**First Violins**

Clare Duckworth

Ginette Decuyper

Laura Dixon

William Melvin

Claire Parfitt

Elizabeth Pigram

Sylvain Vasseur

Caroline Frenkel

Hilary Jane Parker

Aleem Kandour

Dmitry Khakhamov

Tanya Swiery

Preston Yeo

**Second Violins**

Thomas Norris

Miya Väisänen

David Ballesteros

Matthew Gardner

Naoko Keatley

Belinda McFarlane

Iwona Muszynska

Csilla Pogány

Andrew Pollock

José Nuno Matias

Shoshanah Sievers

**Violas**

Eivind Ringstad

Gillianne Haddow

Anna Bastow

Mizuho Ueyama

Thomas Beer

Sofia Silva Sousa

Robert Turner

Annie-May Page

Claire Maynard

Jill Valentine

**Cellos**

Rebecca Gilliver

Alastair Blayden

Salvador Bolón

Daniel Gardner

Amanda Truelove

Judith Fleet

Henry Hargreaves

Silvestrs Kalniņš

**Double Basses**

Rodrigo Moro Martín

Patrick Laurence

Thomas Goodman

Joe Melvin

Jani Pensola

Adam Wynter

**Flutes**

Gareth Davies

Imogen Royce

**Piccolo**

Sharon Williams

**Oboes**

Juliana Koch

Rosie Jenkins

**Cor Anglais**

Aurélien Laizé

**Clarinets**

Chris Richards

Chi-Yu Mo

**Contrabass Clarinet**

Sarah Watts

**Bassoons**

Daniel Jemison

Joost Bosdijk

**Contra Bassoon**

Martin Field

**Horns**

Diego Incertis Sánchez

Timothy Jones

Angela Barnes

Jonathan Maloney

**Trumpets**

James Fountain

Adam Wright

**Trombone**

Jonathan Hollick

**Bass Trombone**

Paul Milner

**Tuba**

Ben Thomson

**Timpani**

Nigel Thomas

**Percussion**

Neil Percy

David Jackson

Calum Crosbie

**Harp**

Bryn Lewis