## Mendelssohn and Schubert ‘The Great’

## Thursday 7 November 2024 7pmBarbican

**Franz Liszt**

Les préludes

**Felix Mendelssohn**

Violin Concerto in E minor

Interval

**Franz Schubert**

Symphony No 9, ‘The Great’

**Daniele Rustioni** conductor

**Francesca Dego** violin

**London Symphony Orchestra**

# Welcome

In tonight’s LSO concert, we are thrilled to welcome Daniele Rustioni, who makes his LSO debut with a programme featuring three contrasting pieces from the Romantic period.

We are delighted to be joined by Francesca Dego, who is soloist for Felix Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, a staple work in the repertoire. After collaborating with her in 2022 for a streamed concert, we at the LSO now have the pleasure of working together in a live context. Franz Liszt’s Les préludes opens the performance, with Franz Schubert’s lyrical Symphony No 9, ‘The Great’, after the interval.

We are extremely grateful to the Huo Family Foundation for their generous support for tonight’s concert and across the year. Thanks also to Classic FM for recommending this performance to their audiences.

I hope that you enjoy the concert and that you will be able to join us again soon. This Sunday, Klaus Mäkelä makes his debut with the Orchestra, conducting Igor Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring and Sergei Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto No 2, with LSO Leader Andrej Power as soloist. The ‘Beethoven and Modernism’ series continues at the end of November with the thrilling Seventh Symphony alongside 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

## Les preludes

## Franz Liszt

1848–54

16 minutes

Programme note by Kate Hopkins

# In 1848, Franz Liszt gave up his career as a touring virtuoso pianist to become Kapellmeister (Director of Music) in Weimar. He hoped the position would allow him more time for composition. One of the first pieces he worked on in Weimar was an overture to a cantata he had begun in 1844: Les quatres élémens (The Four Elements), to poems by Joseph Autran. However, he became disillusioned with Autran’s poetry and set the work aside.

# In 1853, he decided to rework the overture as an independent composition, which he completed in 1854 and entitled Les préludes. He called it a ‘symphonic poem’: a new term used to describe a single-movement orchestral work inspired by an extra-musical narrative, image or concept. Les préludes was first performed in a pension-fund benefit concert for the Weimar Court Orchestra on 23 February 1854. Liszt was the conductor. Although the work initially had a mixed reception, it has since become one of his most popular orchestral compositions.

# Liszt claimed that his inspiration for Les préludes was an ode by the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine. In fact, he may well have completed the piece before he made this connection. In 1854, his partner Carolyne zu Sayn–Wittgenstein wrote a preface summarising the work’s narrative (or programme). When Les préludes was published in 1856, this was included in an abridged form. The preface describes life as a ‘series of preludes’ to death and the afterlife; these include the ‘first delights’ of love; the ‘tempests’ that disrupt it; the ‘calm serenity’ we can achieve by contemplating nature; and the experience of conflict, through which we gain courage and self-knowledge. Musicologists have used the preface to divide the piece into five sections: ‘Questions’, ‘Love’, ‘Storm’, ‘Bucolic calm’ and ‘Battle and victory’.

# Les préludes demonstrates Liszt’s technique of thematic transformation, in which a theme recurs throughout a work in multiple guises. In fact, nearly all the musical material in this piece derives from the opening theme. Striking features of each section include a pensive opening dialogue between strings and woodwind; an ardent cello melody that portrays ‘Love’; whirling strings and stabbing brass that depict the ‘Storm’; and woodwind solos imitating a shepherd’s pipe in ‘Bucolic calm’. The final section’s triumphant march and exultant transformation of the main theme provide an appropriately heroic conclusion.

# Franz Liszt

# 1811 (Germany) to 1886 (Germany)

# Contemporaries: Felix Mendelssohn, Frédéric Chopin

**Key events
1832:** Begins a successful 15-year career as a virtuoso pianist **1848:** Failure of the Hungarian Uprising, which leads Liszt to compose Funérailles for piano (1849) **1848–61:** Composes many substantial works while serving as Kapellmeister in Weimar **1865:** Takes minor holy orders in the Catholic Church

# Listen to: Totentanz with Alice Sara Ott youtube.com/lso

# Composer profile by Kate Hopkins

Franz Liszt was born in 1811 in Doborján in the Kingdom of Hungary (now Raiding, in Austria). His musical talents were apparent from an early age: he wrote his first composition at the age of eight and gave his first public concert aged nine. He followed this with studies in Vienna – where he may have met Ludwig van Beethoven – and Paris. In April 1832, he heard the violinist Niccolò Paganini and determined to equal him in virtuosity. He achieved his aim: for 15 years, he had an immensely successful career as a touring virtuoso pianist. During this time, he developed important friendships with fellow composers Frédéric Chopin, Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann and Richard Wagner. He also had a passionate affair with the married countess Marie d’Agoult, who bore him three children.

In 1847, Liszt’s new partner Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein persuaded him to give up touring to concentrate on composition and conducting. From 1848 to 1861, he was Kapellmeister (Director of Music) at the court of Weimar. During this period, he wrote many of his large-scale orchestral compositions and greatest piano works. Following the deaths of his children Daniel and Blandine in 1859 and 1862, he became increasingly religious, and spent some time in a monastery near Rome, where he worked on his oratorio Christus. In 1865, he took minor orders in the Catholic Church. From 1869 until his death, he divided his time between Rome, Weimar – where he gave acclaimed piano masterclasses – and Budapest, where he founded what is now the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. He died in Bayreuth in 1886, on a visit to see his surviving daughter Cosima, Wagner’s widow.

Liszt’s music is notable for its use of thematic transformation, in which a theme or motif recurs throughout a work in numerous guises. He was also a key figure in the development of programmatic music: compositions inspired by extra-musical concepts, images or narratives. His piano works are often flamboyant, as in his operatic transcriptions, Hungarian Rhapsodies and Mephisto Waltzes. However, many of the Années de pèlerinages and Harmonies poétiques et religieuses display a more reflective side, as do his harmonically adventurous late compositions, with their themes of mortality and nostalgia. In addition to a vast body of works for piano, he wrote songs, choral pieces, two piano concertos, 13 symphonic poems and two choral symphonies inspired by Goethe’s Faust and Dante’s Divina commedia.

**Violin Concerto in E minor Op 64**

**Felix Mendelssohn**

**Francesca Dego** violin

1. **Allegro molto appassionato**
2. **Andante**
3. **Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace**

1838–44

26 minutes

Programme note by Alison Bullock

In 1825, the 16-year-old Felix Mendelssohn met the 15-year-old violinist Ferdinand David; the two prodigies would become great friends and musical partners. Thirteen years later, in one of his many letters to the violinist, Mendelssohn mentioned that he wanted to write a violin concerto for him; however, it was not until 1843 that he was able to give the work his full attention, and it was not completed until late 1844. Mendelssohn referred often to David for advice on matters both technical and artistic; the violinist made numerous changes to the Concerto, and was in fact responsible for its unusual combination of technical feasibility and virtuosic gloss.

The E minor Concerto’s enduring popularity is due in no small part to its ease on the ear, and so it is easy to forget that it is also full of innovations. The immediacy of its first theme is one example: instead of the usual full-orchestral opening, Mendelssohn has the soloist open the door on the Concerto after barely a bar of introduction, playing an ardent, insistent melody. The orchestra is allowed to introduce the wistful second theme before the soloist takes it over; however, the gentler mood disappears as suddenly as it came. The central development section opens dramatically, later dissolving into virtuosic solo figurations that turn out to be the cadenza (written by David), whose dancing arpeggios melt away over the orchestra’s reprise of the main theme.

Mendelssohn, it is said, disliked applause between movements, and therefore decided to link the first two movements by way of a single bassoon note that hangs in the air. After a brief prologue, the solo violin plays the movement’s sweet, singing main melody. The orchestra initiates the more agitated central section, but the mood here is one of passion rather than disruption, and the atmosphere soon returns to the quiet reverence of the opening.

Once again, Mendelssohn denies the audience the chance to shuffle in their seats between the Andante and the finale, creating a bridge passage that refers to the Concerto’s opening theme. An unexpected brass fanfare heralds carefree arpeggios in the violin – and suddenly we are carried headlong into a movement whose technical wizardry is peppered with flashes of fun and wit. Throughout this wonderful, delicate flight of fancy, Mendelssohn introduces several new ideas and melodies. But it is the graceful, effervescent opening melody that holds the movement just about under control, eventually bringing this most inventive yet approachable Concerto to its dancing conclusion.

# Felix Mendelssohn

# 1809 to 1847 (Germany)

**Contemporaries:** Robert Schumann, Hector Berlioz

**Key events**

**1825:** Composes his Octet for strings, his first mature masterpiece  **1829:** Conducts the first performance of the St Matthew Passion since J S Bach’s lifetime **1842:** Meets Queen Victoria, who becomes one of his greatest admirers **1843:** Founds the Leipzig Conservatoire

**Listen to Symphonies** Nos 1 and 4; Symphony No 3 **lsolive.co.uk**

**Composer profile by** Jessica Duchen

# Grandson of the influential Jewish Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn was a remarkable child prodigy. Born in Hamburg, he grew up in Berlin, where the family settled in 1811. His parents converted to Lutheranism and, like his three siblings, Felix was baptised in childhood; nevertheless, he refused to change his surname entirely to his father’s chosen ‘Bartholdy’.

# With an intense work ethic, he took great interest in culture of all kinds: he was a fine writer and painter, and corresponded with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe while still a boy. He remained close all his life to his elder sister Fanny, also a prodigiously gifted composer, who was forbidden by their father to follow music as a profession. (Fanny’s husband Wilhelm Hensel subsequently encouraged her to compose, and to publish her music.)

# Mendelssohn became one of the most significant musical figures of his day, as composer, conductor, pianist and educator. While he was still a teenager, his grandmother presented him with the remarkable gift of the manuscript of J S Bach’s St Matthew Passion, which had lain unperformed for decades; the youthful composer resuscitated and conducted it in 1829. He travelled widely, visiting Britain ten times and becoming a personal favourite of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Appointed conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835, he settled in the city, where he went on to found a music conservatory that became one of the most important in Europe. Somehow, he also found time to compose a large body of orchestral works, oratorios and other choral compositions, songs, much chamber and solo piano music – and to marry Cécile Jeanrenaud and have five children.

# His propensity for overwork nevertheless led to tragedy: he died at the age of 38 in 1847, having suffered a series of strokes, just six months after his sister Fanny had succumbed to the same fate.

## Symphony No 9 in C major D944, ‘The Great’

## Franz Schubert

1. **Andante – Allegro ma non troppo – Più moto**
2. **Andante con moto**
3. **Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio – Scherzo**
4. **Finale: Allegro vivace**

1825–26

47 minutes

Programme note by Kate Hopkins

• A Scherzo is a lively, often humorous movement with a contrasting central Trio, which often serves as the third (or occasionally the second) movement in a symphony.

In March 1824, Franz Schubert was already suffering from the syphilis that would kill him in 1828. He wrote a low-spirited letter to his friend Leopold Kupelwieser, declaring that his most ‘brilliant hopes had perished’ and that he was in danger of losing his enthusiasm for ‘all things beautiful’. His description of Beethoven’s forthcoming concert (in which the Ninth Symphony would receive its premiere) also suggests that he felt daunted by the older composer’s achievements. Nevertheless, he told Kupelwieser that he had been busy composing two quartets (now nicknamed ‘Death and the Maiden’ and ‘Rosamunde’) and had plans to embark on a ‘grand symphony’.

By 1825, Schubert was in better health and spirits. He spent the summer travelling in Upper Austria with the baritone Johann Michael Vogl. During this trip, he did indeed embark on a ‘grand symphony’. For years, scholars believed that it had been lost, and that the Ninth Symphony was written early in March 1828, as the date on the autograph score suggests. However, recent analysis of the paper on which Schubert composed the Ninth demonstrates that he almost certainly began it during his 1825 vacation, and completed it in October 1826. Unable to afford a performance himself, Schubert approached the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde to see if they could fund one. But after a partial run-through of the work, they rejected it as too difficult. It would not be performed in the composer’s lifetime.

A decade after Schubert’s death, the composer Robert Schumann visited Vienna. He called on Schubert’s brother Ferdinand, who showed him the manuscript of the Ninth Symphony and gave him a copy. Schumann was much impressed by the work, which he later declared was composed for ‘the benefit and enjoyment of the whole world’. Thanks to his enthusiasm, Schubert’s Ninth Symphony finally received its premiere on 21 March 1839 at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Although the work was initially slow to catch on internationally – in 1842, a Parisian orchestra refused to play it due to its difficulty – it was soon widely acclaimed as Schubert’s finest orchestral achievement. It acquired the nickname ‘the Great’ both in recognition of its scale and majesty and to distinguish it from the composer’s Sixth Symphony, also in C major.

At around 50 minutes in length, Schubert’s Ninth Symphony – like Beethoven’s – is unusually long for its time. So is the first movement’s introduction, which is dominated by a dignified, broad-breathed melody introduced by the horns. The ensuing Allegro contains two main themes. The first, introduced by the strings, is boisterous, and elicits chattering responses from the woodwind. The second is an expansive woodwind melody. In the central (development) section, both themes undergo ingenious transformations. The movement ends with a massive full-orchestral restatement of the opening horn melody. The Symphony has no ‘slow movement’ as such; the second–movement Andante is marked ‘con moto’ (with motion). It opens with a sprightly, folk-like oboe solo with light string accompaniment. Both this and the movement’s other main theme – a gentle, chorale-like string tune – highlight Schubert’s skill as a melodist. The movement is notable for its dynamic and textural contrasts and for its shifts between pensive minor and sunnier major sonorities. Although there are occasional vehement episodes, it is predominantly serene.

The outer sections of the ebullient **Scherzo** • combine elements of a rustic folk dance and an elegant waltz. Forceful string passages alternate with quieter ones dominated by the woodwind. The woodwind are also prominent in the lilting and warm-hued central Trio, which has a relaxed ambience. As with the first movement, the high-spirited finale’s two main themes are respectively exuberant and song-like. The movement’s wild energy and constant momentum recall the finale of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, a work Richard Wagner dubbed the ‘apotheosis of the dance’. Another Beethoven composition makes a literal appearance: Schubert quietly quotes the ‘Ode to Joy’ (from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony) in his development section. Following a restatement of the finale’s main thematic material (recapitulation), a massive coda ends the work in triumph.

# Franz Schubert

**1797 to 1828 (Austria)**

**Contemporaries:** Gioachino Rossini, Robert Schumann

**Key events**

**1818:** Abandons teaching to become a full-time musician **1825–6:** Composes works including his Ninth Symphony and String Quartet in G major D887 **1827:** Acts as a torchbearer at Ludwig van Beethoven’s funeral. Composes his song cycle Winterreise. **1828:** First public concert of his music in March

**Listen to Symphony** No 8, ‘Unfinished’ **youtube.com/lso**

**Composer profile by** Andrew Stewart

In childhood, Franz Schubert was taught violin by his schoolmaster father and piano by his eldest brother. He rapidly became more proficient than his teachers, and showed considerable musical talent, so much so that in 1808, he became a member of Vienna’s famous Imperial Court chapel choir. He was educated at the Imperial City College, where he received lessons from the composer Antonio Salieri. His father, eager that Franz should qualify as a teacher and work in the family’s schoolhouse, encouraged the boy to return home in 1814. Compositions soon began to flow, although teaching duties interrupted progress. Despite his daily classroom routine, however, Schubert managed to compose 145 songs in 1815, together with four stage works, two symphonies, two masses and a large number of chamber pieces.

Though the quantity of Schubert’s output is astonishing enough, it is the quality of his melodic invention and the richness of his harmonic conception that are the most remarkable features of his work. He was able to convey dramatic images and deal with powerful emotions within the space of a few bars, as he so often did in his songs and chamber works. The public failure of his stage works and the reactionary attitudes of conservative Viennese critics to his music did not restrict his creativity, nor his enjoyment of composition; illness, however, did affect his work and outlook. In 1823, Schubert was admitted to Vienna’s General Hospital for treatment for syphilis. Although his condition improved, he suffered side effects from his medication, including severe depression.

During the final four years of his life, Schubert’s health declined. However, during this period he also created some of his finest compositions, chief among them his last piano sonatas, the G major String Quartet and the String Quintet, the Ninth Symphony and the song cycles Winterreise and Schwanengesang. He continued to compose until just a few weeks before his death in Vienna in November 1828.

# Daniele Rustioni

## Conductor

Daniele Rustioni is one of the most compelling conductors of his generation both in opera and orchestral repertoire. In 2022, he was awarded ‘Best Conductor of the Year’ by the International Opera Awards. Rustioni has been Music Director of the Opéra National de Lyon since September 2017 and became Music Director of the Ulster Orchestra in 2022/23 after three seasons as Chief Conductor. Between 2014 and 2020, he was Music Director of the Orchestra della Toscana and served as their Artistic Director until January 2023.

Rustioni has been engaged by all major international opera houses. He made his debut at the Salzburg Festival in 2022 and is a regular presence at the Metropolitan Opera House, where he made his debut in April 2017. At the helm of the Opéra National de Lyon, he has regularly appeared at the Festival Lyrique in Aix-en-Provence.

Rustioni is in demand with many of the leading international orchestras. In February 2023, he made his Carnegie Hall debut, conducting the MET Orchestra. Future American symphonic debuts include performances with the New York Philharmonic, the Detroit Symphony and the San Diego Symphony, as well as returns to the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra. He has conducted all the major Italian symphony orchestras, including the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia Orchestra and the Filarmonica della Scala. His guest conducting engagements have included concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra and Danish National Symphony Orchestra. In September 2024, Daniele Rustioni conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra for the first time on tour in Switzerland and Italy and tonight he makes his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra.

As Music Director of the Ulster Orchestra, Rustioni has developed significant activities for the ensemble, including two European tours, Mahler’s Symphony No 2 in May 2024 and a successful return to the BBC Proms in August 2024. This year, he also ended his tenure, but remains Music Director Laureate.

His recording activity includes Italian symphonic repertoire of the first half of the 20th century (on Sony Classical) and a number of opera performances, including, most recently, the recording debut of Aigul Akhmetshina on Decca.

Rustioni is a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres of the French Republic for his cultural services as Music Director of the Opéra National de Lyon.

# Francesca Dego

**Violin**

Italian American violinist Francesca Dego is celebrated for her versatility, compelling interpretations, and flawless technique. Her 2024/25 season includes debuts with London and Dallas Symphony Orchestras with the Violin Concertos of Mendelssohn and Beethoven respectively. She also performs with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Sinfonica di Milano, Vancouver, Detroit, and San Diego Symphony Orchestras, and Orchestre de Cannes. In recital she appears at Wigmore Hall with Alessandro Taverna, and Belfast International Chamber Festival and Dubai Opera with Francesca Leonardi.

Recent and forthcoming highlights include appearances with NHK Symphony Orchestra, Washington National and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestras, Orquesta de Castilla y León, and Orchestre de Champs Elysées, as well as debuts with Swedish Radio Symphony, Bergen and London Philharmonic, West Australian, and Queensland Symphony Orchestras. Re–invitations include the Hallé, City of Birmingham Symphony, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, and Brucknerhaus Linz. She has also appeared with the Tokyo Metropolitan and Symphony Orchestras, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, the orchestra of the National Arts Centre Ottawa, and at St Petersburg’s renowned Stars of the White Nights Festival. Recent European highlights include at La Fenice; with Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice; Oviedo Philharmonic; Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo; Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne; Orquestra de Sevilla; L’Orchestra dell’Opera Carlo Felice Genova; and at the Teatro Regio di Torino. UK highlights include the BBC Symphony, Ulster Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, and Royal Scottish National Orchestras.

She regularly collaborates with esteemed conductors, amongst them Jader Bignamini, Lionel Bringuier, Alpesh Chauhan, Philippe Herreweghe, Jonathan Heyward, Fabio Luisi, Gemma New, Markus Poschner, Donato Renzetti, Dalia Stasevska, Markus Stenz, Krzysztof Urbański, and Xian Zhang. A keen chamber musician, she enjoys performing with artists including Salvatore Accardo, Alessio Bax, Alessandro Carbonare, Federico Colli, Enrico Dindo, Mahan Esfahani, Narek Hakhnazaryan, Jan Lisiecki, Mischa Maisky, Antonio Meneses, Shlomo Mintz, Daniel Müller-Schott, Francesco Piemontesi, Timothy Ridout and Roman Simovic.

Signed exclusively to Chandos Records her most recent recording of the Violin Concertos of Busoni and Brahms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conductor Dalia Stasevska was released in March 2024. Her complete Mozart Violin Concertos with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Sir Roger Norrington were received to unanimous critical acclaim. In June 2024, Chandos released an album of horn trios of Brahms, Ligeti, Mozart and Schumann, for which she teamed up with Martin Owen, horn, and Alessandro Taverna, piano.

Dego is based in London and plays a rare Francesco Ruggeri violin (Cremona 1697).

**London Symphony Orchestra**

**On Stage**

**Leader**

Carmine Lauri

**First Violins**

Jérôme Benhaim

Clare Duckworth

Stefano Mengoli

Ginette Decuyper

Maxine Kwok

William Melvin

Claire Parfitt

Elizabeth Pigram

Laurent Quénelle

Harriet Rayfield

Sylvain Vasseur

Caroline Frenkel

Dmitry Khakhamov

Grace Lee

Savva Zverev

**Second Violins**

Julián Gil Rodríguez

Sarah Quinn

Miya Väisänen

David Ballesteros

Matthew Gardner

Naoko Keatley

Alix Lagasse

Belinda McFarlane

Iwona Muszynska

Csilla Pogány

Andrew Pollock

Paul Robson

Louise Shackelton

Helena Buckie

**Violas**

Nimrod Guez

Gillianne Haddow

Malcolm Johnston

Anna Bastow

Germán Clavijo

Steve Doman

Robert Turner

Mizuho Ueyama

Jenny Lewisohn

Alistair Scahill

Elisabeth Varlow

Amanda Verner

**Cellos**

David Cohen

Alastair Blayden

Salvador Bolón

Ève-Marie Caravassilis

Daniel Gardner

Amanda Truelove

Ana Beryl

Silvestrs Kalniņš

Morwenna Del Mar

Aristide du Plessis

**Double Basses**

Graham Mitchell

Patrick Laurence

Chaemun Im

Thomas Goodman

Joe Melvin

Adam Wynter

Evangeline Tang

William Puhr

**Flutes**

Gareth Davies

Imogen Royce

**Piccolo**

Sharon Williams

**Oboes**

Juliana Koch

Rosie Jenkins

**Clarinets**

Chris Richards

Chi-Yu Mo

**Bassoons**

Rachel Gough

Joost Bosdijk

**Horns**

Kenneth Henderson

Angela Barnes

Timothy Jones

Jonathan Maloney

**Trumpets**

James Fountain

Adam Wright

**Trombones**

Kris Garfitt

Jonathan Hollick

**Bass Trombone**

Paul Milner

**Tuba**

Ben Thomson

**Timpani**

Patrick King

**Percussion**

Neil Percy

Sam Walton

Jacob Brown

**Harp**

Bryn Lewis