

## Welcome to the 2023 BBC Proms



A very warm welcome to the 2023 BBC Proms. It's thrilling to be sharing in an experience in which tradition and innovation sit side by side, and I hope these concerts continue to delight you with familiar favourites and entice you to discover new composers and artists.

Our composer celebrations reflect both sides of that coin, from the works of Sergey Rachmaninov (born 150 years ago) – whose music has featured regularly at the Proms since 1900 – to the less familiar worlds of Dora Pejačević and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. This summer's extensive opera and choral programme brings you landmark operas by Berlioz and Poulenc alongside the UK premiere of György Kurtág's Beckett-inspired *Endgame* and the first complete performance at the Proms of Schumann's ravishing *Das Paradies und die Peri*. Opera also forms part of our family offering this year, with the *Horrible Histories* team taking an irreverent look at the art form, while a bank holiday concert delves into fantasy, myths and legends from TV, film and video games. And, following our series last year of 'Proms at' chamber music Proms around the UK, this year there are performances by leading soloists, ensembles and chamber choirs in Aberystwyth, Dewsbury, Gateshead, Perth and Truro.

The Proms celebrates genres and artists from around the world. This year we bring Portuguese fado and Northern Soul to the Proms for the first time, as well as a tribute to Bollywood playback singer Lata Mangeshkar. We also welcome four very individual artists in special orchestral collaborations – Rufus Wainwright with the BBC Concert Orchestra, Cory Henry with the Jules Buckley Orchestra, Jon Hopkins with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and – as part of our weekend at Sage Gateshead – Self Esteem with the Royal Northern Sinfonia. Visitors from further afield include orchestras from Berlin, Budapest and Boston. The Proms continues to redefine the boundaries of a classical music festival but one thing remains constant – we seek out and showcase the very best.

Every Prom here at the Royal Albert Hall and in our 'Proms at' series is broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, where the station's expert engineers and presenters bring you the live experience wherever you are – and you can listen again on BBC Sounds. You can also enjoy 24 Proms on BBC TV, all available for 12 months on BBC iPlayer.

**David Pickard**  
Director, BBC Proms

## Tonight *at the* Proms

The Budapest Festival Orchestra celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and visits the Proms as part of its celebrations, giving three concerts this weekend under founder-conductor Iván Fischer. Tomorrow night they explore music from their Hungarian homeland but tonight the focus is on three 19th-century German masterworks.

To open, the overture to Weber's *Der Freischütz*, an opera much admired by Wagner and one whose engagement with the supernatural and diabolical would exert an inescapable influence on German Romantic opera.

Schumann bemoaned the frivolity that had infested the concerto form since Beethoven but became its saviour with his Piano Concerto in A minor, in which he renegotiates the relationship between soloist and orchestra. Sir András Schiff is the soloist in a work with which he has long been associated.

The concert reaches its climax with Mendelssohn's atmospheric 'Scottish' Symphony, partly inspired by a visit to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, haunted by memories of Mary, Queen of Scots.



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### Royal Albert Hall

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# Prom 37

SATURDAY 12 AUGUST • 7.30pm–c9.35pm



**Carl Maria von Weber** Der Freischütz – overture 10'

**Robert Schumann** Piano Concerto in A minor 31'

INTERVAL: 20 minutes

**Felix Mendelssohn** Symphony No. 3 in A minor, 'Scottish' 40'

**Sir Andrés Schiff** *piano*

**Budapest Festival Orchestra** Suyoen Kim *leader*

**Iván Fischer** *conductor*

**RADIO 3 FOUR SOUNDS iPLAYER**

This concert is broadcast live by BBC Radio 3 (repeated on Friday 25 August at 2.00pm) and shown on BBC Four on Friday 18 August at 7.00pm. You can listen on BBC Sounds, and watch on BBC iPlayer for 12 months.



## Budapest or Bust

As the Budapest Festival Orchestra celebrates its 40th anniversary, Richard Bratby speaks to its innovative founder-conductor Iván Fischer and discovers how he is reinventing the role of an orchestra

There must have been hundreds of encores over the past 128 years of the Proms – and, if you wanted to bottle the essence of this great music festival, there's surely nothing more potent than that instant when the applause falls silent, a conductor turns to their orchestra with a knowing smile and, after an evening of sublime music-making, they give something of themselves. It's always



Members of the Budapest Festival Orchestra on the streets of the Hungarian capital



a moment of magic. But, even so, no-one present at the second of the Budapest Festival Orchestra's 2018 Proms appearances is likely to forget what happened next. Half of the orchestra put down their instruments, and – as their colleagues coiled and caressed their way around the opening bars of Brahms's *Hungarian Dance* No. 4 – they sang. Before a breathless Royal Albert Hall audience, Brahms's folk-inspired melody was returned to its folk roots by artists willing to lay aside the tools of their trade – all that hard-won virtuosity – and make music straight from the heart.

Unexpected. Yes. Captivating. Without question. And yet, to anyone who's followed the development of this orchestra over the four decades since its foundation in 1983, it was almost business as usual. If the spontaneity and verve of that evening's Prom under the BFO's Music Director Iván Fischer hadn't already been sufficient proof, that encore demonstrated – once again – that the BFO is not like other orchestras. But then, it was never meant to be. 'The Budapest Festival Orchestra is a kind of laboratory for the orchestra of the future,' says Fischer. The orchestra of the future! Oceans of ink have been spilt in recent years over that vexed but unavoidable subject: talk of new concert formats, of a refreshed repertoire, of experiments in structure and governance. The Budapest Festival Orchestra is one of a handful of international ensembles that have actually done something about it.

'We have always been a reform orchestra,' says Fischer. 'We're reforming this art form, fundamentally, because I don't think symphony orchestras will exist in the same way in centuries to come. One aspect is the repertoire. We extend the repertoire – not only in terms of earlier or later music, but through specialised groups in the orchestra. We have a group playing Baroque music on period instruments. We have another group specialising



Transport of delight: Iván Fischer arrives by bicycle for the Echo Klassik 2011 awards ceremony at the Berlin Konzerthaus

in Hungarian instrumental folk music. We have a group specialising in improvisation, and we have jazz groups. The philosophy is that orchestral music is only a narrow segment of our musical heritage. So in our last subscription concert, for example, we started with *Scherzi musicali* ['Musical Jokes'] by Monteverdi, with half of the orchestra playing on period instruments and the other half singing. It's just an example, but we want to be much more open to experiments than other symphony orchestras.'

It's hard to overstate just how liberating those ideas can feel in an orchestral world that is still dominated by the cult of specialism – of excellence in a rich but necessarily circumscribed field. For any professional orchestral musician, the idea of anything less than technical perfection goes against the grain. The notion of symphony orchestra players swapping their instruments and adjusting their technique to play period instruments would, until recently, have raised eyebrows (and lowered expectations). But the BFO has been



Iván Fischer conducting the Budapest Festival Orchestra on their last visit to the BBC Proms in 2018

demonstrating that – with the right players and the right philosophy – excellence and experimentation needn't be mutually exclusive. Rather the opposite: in 2008 the BFO was named by *Gramophone* as one of the 20 greatest orchestras in the world.

'One thing which we don't do is auditions,' says Fischer. 'We don't believe in auditions: we believe in inviting people and talking to them, testing them in all kinds of musical activities. We are not only interested in, say, their horn playing. We are interested in the individual – in their creativity, in the human aspects.' Fischer has said that he has little interest in being a conductor purely for its own sake.

'I absolutely think the conductor must lead. I'm a terrible tyrant when I conduct, but I do it because I want to encourage the musicians' creativity. What I really don't like is the jaded, bored attitude which usually comes because people have had to follow instructions all their life. I give them a lot of freedom. I'm interested

in a symphony orchestra that plays with the creativity, risk-taking and emotional impact of a chamber group: an orchestra should be like a magnified string quartet. For example, the last time we performed a Schubert symphony, I seated the strings as a number of string quintets, so the sections were not sitting together. It was so much more musical, because people heard the structure of the music better. I don't understand why people don't think about these things!

The Budapest Festival Orchestra has a long history of experimentation, and the folk bands and the singing aren't the half of it. There have been major successes: 'Cocoa Concerts' for the 5–10 age group – 'I don't know if the children come to hear the music because of the cocoa,' says Fischer, 'or they drink the cocoa because of the music, but the concerts are hugely popular' – and midnight gigs aimed at a student crowd. 'The audience mixes with the orchestra members,' he explains, 'so you can sit in between two cellos, for example. You sit on a beanbag, and you can carry your beanbag anywhere. If you prefer to be in the middle of the horn section, then you're free to sit there. It's a clear message to the young generation that it's their concert – and they love it.'

There have been occasional misfires, too: the BFO's concert performances of operas – in which Fischer also acts as stage director – have sometimes drawn mixed reviews. But that doesn't matter. Experimentation is, by its nature, a learning process. What matters is that something new has been tried – that the art is moving forwards. It's hard to imagine any orchestra taking a gamble as daring as the BFO's Prom tomorrow afternoon, in which the audience will vote for the programme from a 'menu' of some 250 orchestral works. How can an orchestra – any orchestra – have 250 pieces up its sleeve, ready to play? The answer is that it can't. The BFO is going to wing it, and the players are not even slightly

fazed at the prospect. ‘This type of music-making – which is basically sight-reading in front of the audience – is one example of our innovations,’ says Fischer, cool as you like.

And yet you just know with absolute certainty that it’s going to be amazing. That’s one advantage of an orchestra that consistently thinks and plays differently: doing the impossible comes as standard. ‘I’m actually amazed that most orchestras don’t do these things,’ says Fischer. ‘I don’t know why they prefer to be so incredibly conservative, I really don’t.’ Fischer’s only regret, after four decades with the BFO, is that he hasn’t gone far enough.

“I must say, I love the Proms because – finally! – we’re playing to an unconventional audience. This appeals to me very much ...”

‘I think, if I started again, I would be more radical. For example, the idea of having principal players and *tutti* players is one I kept from the conventional system, but I think in my next life I would abandon it, because in this orchestra there simply isn’t a more important cellist and a less important cellist.’ He wouldn’t stop there, either. ‘Playing from sheet music and playing seated are two conventions that unfortunately I wasn’t radical enough to abolish. Sheet music is a compromise. An actor learns their part by heart; so does an opera chorus member. So it’s not impossible. If the musician takes the job as seriously as an actor plays a part in a play, then this wouldn’t be a problem.’

So watch this space. And, in the meantime, experience the sound of the orchestra of the future. Or, equally, just enjoy the music in the knowledge that, when the Budapest Festival Orchestra takes the stage – and whether they’re playing Mozart, Ligeti or something entirely unexpected – there isn’t a musician present who takes your reaction for granted. Fischer, for one, can’t wait. ‘I must say, I love the Proms because – finally! – we’re playing to an unconventional audience,’ he says. ‘This appeals to me very much. There is an incredible harmony between the mentality of the Promenaders and the Budapest Festival Orchestra. They always surprise us. And I think, this year, that the Promenaders can expect a few surprises too!’

*Introduction © Richard Bratby*

Richard Bratby writes on music and culture for *The Spectator*, *Gramophone*, *The Arts Desk* and *The Birmingham Post*. His book *Forward: 100 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra* was published in 2019.

*Revised version of an article that first appeared in the BBC Proms Festival Guide 2023*



**CARL MARIA VON WEBER** (1786–1826)

## Der Freischütz – overture (1821)

First staged in Berlin in 1821, based on a tale from a popular collection of ghost stories published little more than a decade earlier, Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* ('The Freeshooter' or 'The Marksman') was a success beyond his wildest hopes: by 1830 it had been performed all around Europe, in 10 different languages.



Samiel, the Black Huntsman, is summoned to the Wolf's Glen to forge seven magic bullets, a scene from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, whose vivid depiction of the diabolical and supernatural was to exert a pervasive influence over German Romantic opera: an illustration for a 19th-century trading card issued by Liebig's Meat Extract Company

It would be enormously influential in the establishment of a distinctively German kind of opera, with Wagner among its most ardent admirers.

It tells the story of Max, a marksman of middling ability who must win a shooting tournament if he is to marry his beloved Agathe, the head forester's daughter. The villain of the piece is Max's jealous colleague Caspar, who is hoping to trick his way out of his Faustian pact with the supernatural Black Huntsman, Samiel. On the eve of the trial Caspar persuades the despairing Max to meet him at midnight in the Wolf's Glen, where – to music of a gothic imagination that can still make audiences' hair stand on end – he summons Samiel to help them make seven magic bullets. Caspar has plotted that Agathe will become the seventh bullet's victim, killed by Max, but evil is thwarted: it is Caspar who is shot, leaving Max and Agathe to live happily ever after.

The overture introduces several of the opera's musical themes. A pastoral duet for horns gives way to the unsettled harmonies that will come to be associated with Samiel, finally resolving in the joyful melody of Agathe's main aria.

*Programme note © Erica Jeal*

Erica Jeal is a music critic for *The Guardian* and Deputy Editor of *Opera* magazine.

## PREVIOUSLY AT THE PROMS

This curtain-raiser was a mainstay of Proms scheduling throughout Henry Wood's years at the helm. After first performing it in the fourth concert of his very first season of 1895, he directed it for the last time some 70 renditions later in 1942. In the early years, with every concert given on extremely limited rehearsal time by the same Queen's Hall Orchestra, popular favourites were often repeated within a single season. Tastes change. Having disappeared altogether between 1962 and 1989, its most recent stand-alone renderings came courtesy of Vladimir Jurowski in 2012 and Marc Albrecht in 2019. Exceptionally, the 2011 season found Sir John Eliot Gardiner championing the complete opera – not *Der Freischütz* but *Le Freyschütz*, because Weber's opera was heard in Berlioz's rarely performed Frenchification.

© David Gutman

David Gutman is a writer and critic who since 1996 has contributed extensively to the BBC Proms programmes. His books cover subjects as wide-ranging as Prokofiev and David Bowie, and he reviews for *Gramophone* and *Classical Source*.

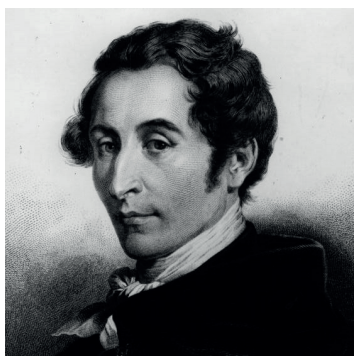
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“The intimacy and sense of place in *Der Freischütz* struck a chord with audiences across Germany who yearned, like children, for stories set in their own landscape.”

Stephen Walsh in *The Beloved Vision* (2022)



## CARL MARIA VON WEBER



Held in high regard by his contemporaries, Weber, whose life spanned the four decades between Mozart's death and the onset of Wagner's career, came to be regarded primarily as a great innovator and stimulator of musical developments. Today his achievements,

viewed in historical perspective, have once again earned him a place in the musical pantheon, while his key role in the development of German Romantic opera is undeniable.

Born into a bohemian family that earned its keep as a troupe of travelling players, and a first cousin of Mozart's wife Constanze, Weber received little in the way of a formal education. Following a series of composition lessons from Michael Haydn, he became a pupil of the Abbé Vogler, whose eccentricity and love of startling theatrical effects left their mark. Vogler secured for the 17-year-old Weber the position of conductor at Breslau (now Wrocław), a valuable experience for the formation of his theatrical imagination.

After a brief period in Karlsruhe, Upper Silesia (now Pokój, Poland), where he produced a couple of symphonies, Weber moved to Stuttgart to take a post with Duke Ludwig of Württemberg. Here he worked on an opera, *Silvana*, as well as incidental music for a production of Schiller's reworking of Gozzi's *Turandot*. Banished from Württemberg following a financial scandal – for which his feckless father rather than

he was responsible – he began to make his reputation with *Silvana* and a Singspiel, *Abu Hassan* (1810–11).

He took up the post of conductor at the Opera in Prague in 1813 and set about revitalising the institution, introducing thoroughgoing rehearsals, supervising staging, scenery and costumes, and creating a largely new repertoire of no fewer than 62 operas. The standard Italian fare was replaced by French opera and, where possible, German. Administrative and literary endeavours – not to mention conducting – left Weber little time or energy for his own composition in Prague.

His next appointment, as Kapellmeister in Dresden (1817), however, was heralded by the composition of *Der Freischütz* (1817–21), and now the creation of a specifically German style of opera became his primary objective. His next major opera, *Euryanthe* (1822–3), was a qualified success but by this time he was in the grip of the tuberculosis that was eventually to kill him. The strain of rehearsals and performances of his final opera, *Oberon* (1825–6), composed for Covent Garden, hastened his untimely end and he died on 5 June, the night before his planned return from London to Germany.

*Profile* © Barry Millington

Barry Millington is Chief Music Critic of the *Evening Standard* and a Wagner scholar whose most recent book is *Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth*. He is also editor of *The Wagner Journal*.



**ROBERT SCHUMANN** (1810–56)

## Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 (1841–5)

- 1 **Allegro affettuoso – Andante espressivo – Allegro**
- 2 **Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso –**
- 3 **Allegro vivace**

**Sir Andrés Schiff** *piano*

When Schumann came to the concerto in the early 1840s, it was a genre in a strange state of flux. Beethoven had led it to a place mere mortals could not follow, so many pianist-composers in the 1820s and 1830s reverted to the earlier model of Mozart, creating the ‘Biedermeier’ concerto, where showmanship was uppermost. Few works from that period remain at all familiar today, though their lack of profundity was certainly made up for by their sheer number. With such fecundity came debasement, the concerto becoming little more than a musical ego trip. And so the form that had found perfection in Mozart eventually buckled under the weight of so much frippery. It died a death in the late 1830s, prompting this reaction from Schumann – as brilliant a musical commentator as he was a composer – in 1839:

What once was regarded as an enrichment of instrumental forms, as an important discovery, is now voluntarily abandoned. Surely it would have to be counted a loss if the piano concerto with orchestra were to pass from the scene ... and so we must await the genius who will show us in a newer and more brilliant way how orchestra and piano may be combined, how the soloist, dominant at the

keyboard, may unfold the wealth of his instrument and his art, while the orchestra, no longer a mere spectator, may interweave its manifold facets into the scene.

With the phrase ‘no longer a mere spectator’ Schumann had hit the nail on the head. And it was he who came up with a solution only a couple of years later, in his mould-breaking A minor Concerto, where piano and orchestra are more fully integrated than in the old Biedermeier style, and where virtuosity – while still much in evidence – is integral to the music rather than sprayed on like graffiti.

Four years after writing a free-standing *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra, he added two more movements, much to the relief of his wife Clara: ‘Robert has composed a last beautiful movement for his *Fantasy* ... I am very happy about it, for I have always lacked a major bravura piece by him.’ It’s difficult to believe that his concerto wasn’t always intended as a three-movement work, so naturally does it fit together, with much of its material growing out of a single idea. And while it’s true that the finale, in particular, makes virtuoso demands, as a whole it is anything but a showpiece; indeed, its difficulties tend to be concealed. What Schumann instead gives us is a dialogue between piano and orchestra with a strong lyrical impulse (Liszt went so far as to call it a concerto without piano!), a solution to his own call for a ‘new way’ that in turn created a model for Brahms, Grieg and perhaps even Busoni.

...

After the pianist’s dramatic entry, the soloist is rarely silent, sometimes leading the seemingly unstoppable thread of melodies, sometimes accompanying. The main theme, out of which so much blossoms, is first heard on the oboe after that pianistic flourish but it constantly reappears in new guises, forming not



'I have always lacked a major bravura piece by him': Clara Schumann, composer, virtuoso pianist, wife of Robert Schumann and first performer of his Piano Concerto, depicted on a 100 Deutschmark banknote in 1996

only the second subject but also the melody of a slower passage (marked *Andante espressivo*) where the piano duets with clarinet, one of many instances in which the wind instruments come to the fore: in that regard Schumann learnt much from Mozart. The temperature hots up as the piano develops the main idea in new harmonic colours, until arriving at the reprise of the opening material. There's a fully composed cadenza, which starts in a mood of great determination, before giving way to a more lyrical and intimate impulse, leading to a heightened climax. The orchestra then dispels the tension with a perky coda (another variation on the main theme), closing the movement in upbeat fashion.

This is followed by a dancing middle movement. It's a light and buoyant affair, as Schumann makes apparent in his designation of 'Intermezzo' and a relatively swift tempo indication – though often pianists are tempted to linger, especially during the middle section, where the soloist duets with a luscious melody initially heard on the cellos. The theme for the outer sections is yet another recycling of the *Allegro affettuoso*'s main theme, this time based on its short rising motif. There's another clear reminiscence towards the end of the *Intermezzo*, as clarinets and bassoons toy with the opening phrase of that main idea, veering between major and minor, before the pianist springs to the fore, introducing the finale with a flourish.

This is a sparkling triple-time Allegro vivace (even here you can trace the main theme's outline back to that prevalent opening idea), displaying a gleeful sense of fun, once again with a starring role for the wind, and a resolutely major ending, triumphantly announced by timpani.

*Programme note © Harriet Smith*

Harriet Smith is a writer, editor and broadcaster, contributing regularly to *Gramophone* and BBC Radio 3's *Record Review*. She is co-editor of the Proms programmes and former editor of *BBC Music Magazine*, *International Record Review* and *International Piano Quarterly*.

## PREVIOUSLY AT THE PROMS

There have been well over 100 performances of Schumann's Piano Concerto at the Proms and there will doubtless be many more. However, no pianist is likely to trump the record of Myra Hess, who between 1916 and 1958 gave 11 of them. Fanny Davies, a Clara Schumann pupil, played the work in 1921 and 1923 but Irene Scharrer, a friend and colleague of Dame Myra's often erroneously described as her cousin, clocked up six between 1915 and 1936. The distinguished protagonists of more recent times have included Lars Vogt (1996, 2002), Alfred Brendel (1997), Maria João Pires (1998), Martha Argerich (2000), Hélène Grimaud (2006), Christian Zacharias (2004, 2010), Jan Lisiecki (2013), Jonathan Biss (2014), Beatrice Rana (2017), Alexander Melnikov (2019) and, most recently, Kirill Gerstein (2021). He was joined by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Semyon Bychkov, who also presented Mendelssohn's 'Scottish' in the second half. Sir András Schiff, whose most recent Prom was last year's daytime solo recital focusing on the last three Beethoven piano sonatas, played Bartók's First Piano Concerto (and other shorter piano works) in the company of Iván Fischer's Budapest Festival Orchestra in 1997.

© David Gutman

## ROBERT SCHUMANN



Robert Schumann's development as man and composer followed a strange, ultimately tragic course of its own. He was born in the Saxon city of Zwickau in 1810 into a cultured but emotionally somewhat fragmented bourgeois family. His father, a

bookseller and publisher, was distant and prone to nervous illness, and his younger sister Emilie committed suicide when he was 16. (His father died the same year.) Often lonely, young Robert developed an intense passion for literature and music. Initially he dreamt of being a poet, but the allure of the piano and composition grew, even when his mother virtually strong-armed him into studying Law at Leipzig University – where, he claimed, he spent most of his time reading, playing, smoking cigars and drinking champagne. Around the age of 20 he probably also contracted syphilis. Privately he began piano lessons with the formidable teacher Friedrich Wieck, who recognised both Schumann's talent and his need for discipline.

While Schumann's dreams of becoming a concert pianist came to nothing, partly as a result of a mystery 'ailment' affecting his fingers, he continued to develop as a composer, though in a characteristically eccentric and obsessive way. During his twenties he composed virtually nothing but solo piano music, including the wild but magnificent cycles *Kreisleriana* and *Davidsbündlertänze* ('Dances of the Brotherhood of David'). But in 1840 marriage to Wieck's daughter



Clara – a union strenuously opposed by Wieck himself – released a torrent of songs and song-cycles, including the exquisite but powerfully unsettling *Dichterliebe* ('A Poet's Love').

Marriage meant creative compromise for Clara, a brilliant pianist and fine composer herself, but their union seems to have been fundamentally happy, and it provided the psychologically fragile Schumann with the stability he needed. In 1841 he set about mastering orchestral music, producing three major symphonic works and the first movement of his much-loved Piano Concerto. The following year saw a concentration on chamber works, not least his three string quartets, then in 1843 Schumann turned to choral music: one result was his first international hit, the 'oratorio for happy people' *Das Paradies und die Peri* ('Paradise and the Peri'). But in 1844 he experienced what he called a 'violent and nervous attack'. Profound depression and compositional paralysis followed until well into the following year.

For the rest of his life Schumann wavered between spells of exhilarating, almost fanatically productive creativity and periods of intense melancholia and anxiety. While he was almost certainly beginning to feel the effects of syphilis, there is also strong evidence of an inherited bipolar tendency. His appointment as Music Director in Düsseldorf in 1850 seemed at first to promise a new dawn: growing confidence is reflected in the Third ('Rhenish') Symphony, the revised Fourth and the Cello Concerto. The arrival on the family doorstep of the hugely talented 20-year-old Johannes Brahms in 1853 was another spur to Schumann's imagination. But catastrophic mental decline soon followed. Early in 1854, after several nights of torment, Schumann threw himself into the River Rhine. He was rescued, but taken to the nearby asylum at Endenich, a fate he had long dreaded. He died there two years later, aged just 46.

*Profile* © Stephen Johnson

Stephen Johnson is the author of books on Bruckner, Wagner, Mahler and Shostakovich, and is a regular contributor to *BBC Music Magazine*. For 14 years he was a presenter of BBC Radio 3's *Discovering Music*. He now works both as a freelance writer and as a composer.

## MORE SCHUMANN AT THE PROMS

TUESDAY 22 AUGUST, 7.30pm • PROM 49  
*Das Paradies und die Peri*

THURSDAY 24 AUGUST, 7.30pm • PROM 51  
*Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, 'Spring'*

For full Proms listings, and to book tickets, visit [bbc.co.uk/proms](http://bbc.co.uk/proms).

## INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

*Now playing on BBC Radio 3...*

Professor John Mullan joins Radio 3's Ian Skelly to discuss artistic visitors to Scotland, with a focus on the 83-day journey around the Western Islands made in 1773 by James Boswell and Samuel Johnson.

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**FELIX MENDELSSOHN** (1809–47)

## Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56, 'Scottish' (1829–42)

- 1 **Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato – Assai animato – Andante –**
- 2 **Vivace non troppo –**
- 3 **Adagio –**
- 4 **Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai**

Mendelssohn knew all about Scotland long before he ever set foot in the country. It was the misty and Romantic land of Ossian and the ancient Gaelic bards; of the unhappy Mary Stuart, immortalised in Schiller's tragedy; and of the turbulent history that Walter Scott had brought to life in his ballads and novels, eagerly devoured by all literate Germans as soon as they could be translated.

The reality did not disappoint. In April 1829 Mendelssohn took a steamer from Hamburg and, after three days of seasickness, arrived in London to begin his life-long and reciprocal love affair with Britain. At the end of July he travelled north with his friend, the diplomat Karl Klingemann. There was a visit to Walter Scott at Abbotsford (the elderly writer was ill and distracted), and then came Edinburgh, with the Palace of Holyroodhouse and its memories of Mary, Queen of Scots:

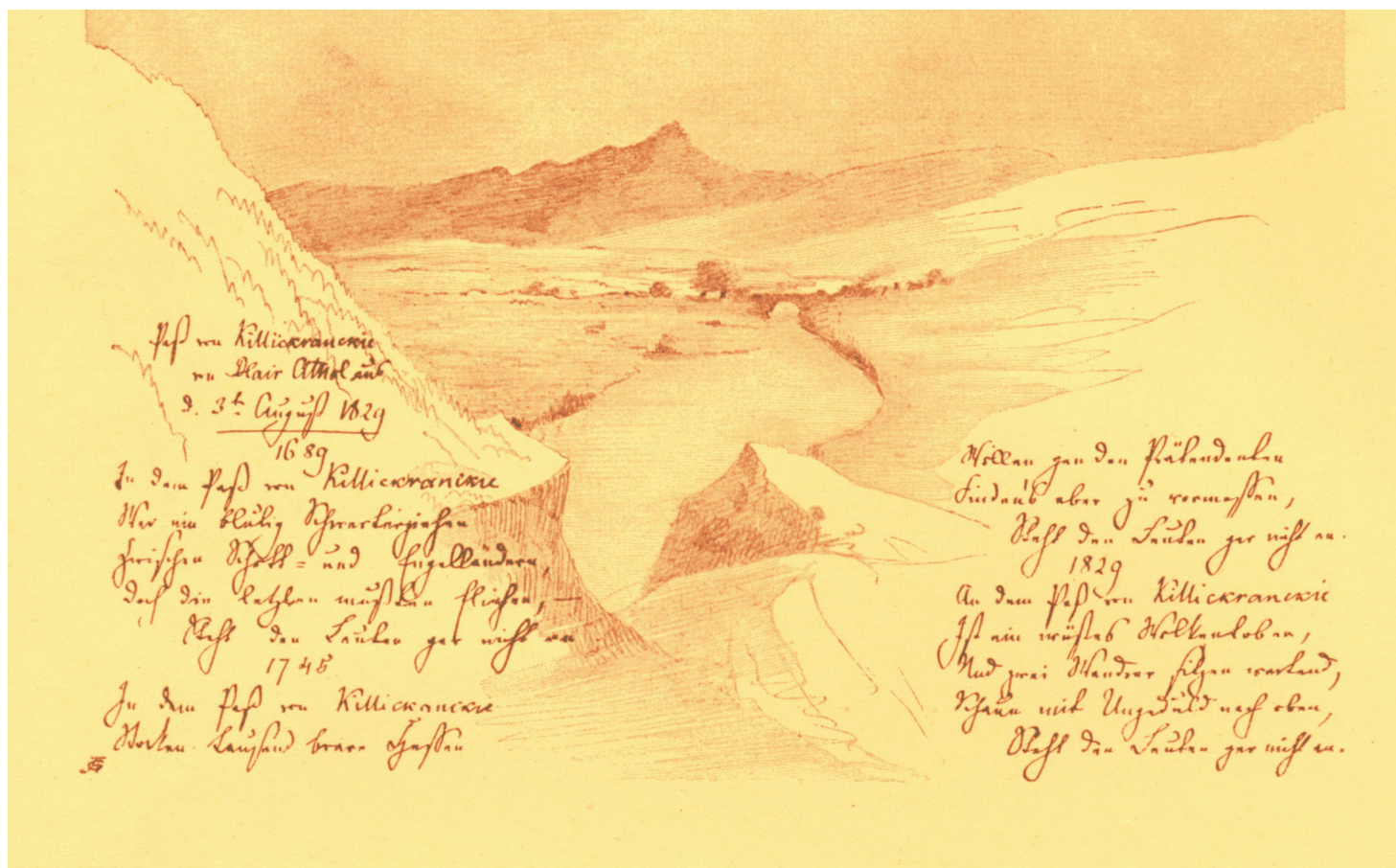
The chapel close to it is now roofless, grass and ivy grow there, and at that broken altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything around is broken and mouldering

and the bright sky shines in. I believe I today found in that old chapel the beginning of my 'Scottish' Symphony.

The friends made their way to the West Coast, marvelling at the landscapes ('stern, dark and very lonely'), and then to the island of Mull, where Mendelssohn jotted down the theme that later grew into the overture *The Hebrides* (also known as *Fingal's Cave*). After a stay in Wales and some further weeks in London, Mendelssohn returned home to Berlin, then in May 1830 set off on his travels again, arriving in Rome on 1 November. Here he composed the first version of *The Hebrides* and worked simultaneously on his 'Scottish' Symphony and a new 'Italian' Symphony, but in a letter of 29 March 1831 he confessed that he had to put aside the former because he could no longer evoke the right mood for it. Rome is not a city where you can easily feel 'stern, dark and very lonely'.

It was to be another 11 years before the symphony conceived in Edinburgh was completed. It was performed at a Leipzig Gewandhaus concert on 3 March 1842. Three months later Mendelssohn introduced it to London and dedicated it to the young Queen Victoria.

How Scottish is the symphony? The title is, after all, unofficial. Robert Schumann, writing after its premiere, pointed out 'the special folk tone that breathes from this symphony', but oddly enough, knowing that it had been begun in Rome, he seemed to believe that the folk atmosphere was Italian. Even without any specific literary or programmatic references, however, the colour and mood of this music leave no doubt that Mendelssohn was recapturing the deep impression that Scottish landscapes and history had made on him in 1829. How else can we hear the very opening bars, in the minor key, and scored for divided violas with woodwind and horns? Such 'Romantic' colourings, with a particularly poetic use of horns and clarinets, characterise the entire symphony.



One of a series of drawings by Mendelssohn from his 1829 walking tour of Scotland, including notes he took as he explored

Mendelssohn took great care to give the work unity. In his day it was customary to applaud between the movements of a symphony, so to prevent this interruption of the prevailing mood he composed transitions to connect each movement to the next. Another unifying device is the close connection between themes, which spans the whole symphony: the broad theme that crowns the coda of the last movement sounds new in its context, but is in fact a variant of the symphony's opening melody.

While most of the symphony's themes have a close motivic resemblance, they are treated with great variety: there is no repetition without variation, either of harmony, melody, accompaniment or, above all, orchestration. A particularly fine example occurs at the first movement's recapitulation, where a broad new cello tune emerging at the end of the development section continues through the reprise of the Allegro's agitated first theme. Another is the return of the slow movement's



eloquent violin melody, which reappears in the course of the movement in a rich, golden scoring for horn and cello.

The first three movements all end quietly: the first with an unexpected return to the misty, melancholy introduction; the second, as it were, evaporating into silence; and the third with short, disconnected memories of its themes. Structurally, this fading-away provides a means of transition to the following movements. Poetically, it suggests perhaps distance and antiquity. The only movement to end loudly is the finale. Originally headed *Allegro guerriero*, this warlike allegro also fades away as a solo clarinet plays a forlorn reminiscence of its march-like second theme; but from the silence emerges an entirely new type of music marked by a broad 6/8 metre, horn-heavy scoring and a tough major-key assertiveness that have not appeared before.

*Programme note* © Andrew Huth

Andrew Huth is a writer and translator working extensively in Russian, Eastern European and French music.

## PREVIOUSLY AT THE PROMS

Since its first appearance at a Prom in 1900 the 'Scottish' has amassed fewer renditions than Mendelssohn's 'Italian' but the lists include some very distinguished names. The symphony has been played by the orchestra with the most venerable Mendelssohn tradition of all, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, under Kurt Masur (1988) and Neville Marriner (1997). The Philharmonia was conducted by Riccardo Muti in 1978, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe by Claudio Abbado in 1987, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra by Alan Gilbert in 2003 and the BBC Symphony Orchestra by Jiří Bělohlávek in 2006. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment was then responsible for two renderings on period instruments, with Sir Roger Norrington in 2009 and Adám Fischer, brother of tonight's conductor, 10 years later. On that occasion the 'Scottish' brought down the curtain on an evening celebrating the 200th anniversary of Queen Victoria's birth. Mendelssohn, her favourite composer, loomed large and his First Piano Concerto was performed by Sir Stephen Hough on her own piano, on loan from the Royal Collection. In 2021 it was the turn of the BBC SO and the holder of the orchestra's Günter Wand Conducting Chair, Semyon Bychkov. The symphony's initial champion here was, predictably enough, Henry Wood, in charge of virtually every Prom between the opening season of 1895 and the early 1940s. His 'Winter' Prom series of 1901–2 offered additional opportunities to encounter the 'Scottish'. Two more were to follow in the summer season of 1902 but Arthur W. Payne, leader of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, was now left in charge. Destabilised by the bankruptcy of Robert Newman, the impresario managing the series, and overstretched by his own enormous workload, Wood's health had broken down and he was sent abroad to recuperate.

© David Gutman

## FELIX MENDELSSOHN



Felix Mendelssohn was the quintessential musical prodigy, a wunderkind whose adolescent accomplishments arguably surpassed even Mozart's. The son of a wealthy Jewish family that converted to Christianity during

his childhood, he was the grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and completed his justly famous string Octet and the masterly *A Midsummer Night's Dream* overture well before his 18th birthday. He quickly became a major player in European musical life, achieving fame not only as a composer but also as a conductor, pianist, organist, pedagogue and founder of the Leipzig Conservatory. In effect, he became an unofficial cultural ambassador for German Romanticism in Europe, a status enhanced by the fondness of Queen Victoria and aristocratic circles in general for both his music and his company.

As a composer, he might be described as a classicising Romantic, preferring ingeniously to adopt and adapt traditional forms (as Brahms was later also to do) rather than cast them aside (as Berlioz and Liszt sometimes sought to do). Posthumously, and often unfairly, he became a standard-bearer for composers of conservative musical inclinations. He contributed to all the major orchestral, vocal, chamber music and solo genres of his time, and even pioneered a few of his own – the concert overture (evocative illustrative music, such as *The Hebrides*, unconnected to any stage production)

and 'songs without words' (elegantly lyrical piano pieces for ambitious amateur performers). Among his undisputed works of genius are the vigorous 'Scottish' Symphony (one of five symphonies), the imaginative Violin Concerto in E minor and his magisterial oratorio *Elijah*, the latter written for and loved by generations of British audiences.

Mendelssohn's fascination with the achievements of his great predecessors Bach and Handel prompted him to promote early music both as an editor and as a conductor of 'historical concerts' with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. He thus had a vital impact on the establishment of the standard concert repertoire we know today. His importance as an educator was just as profound, especially for subsequent generations of British composers, including Arthur Sullivan, who were sent to complete their studies at the Leipzig Conservatory – an institute perpetuating Mendelssohn's aesthetic attitudes long after his death.

Later in the 19th century, Mendelssohn's brisk, no-nonsense approach to performance and the supposedly 'superficial' aspects of his music were notoriously attacked by Richard Wagner. Partly as a consequence of this, the reputation of even his finest pieces was temporarily tarnished by anti-Semitic criticisms, and by a reaction against the 'bourgeois' Victorian sentimentality allegedly displayed in his works. But his music has always been popular in the concert hall: beloved by audiences, even when castigated by critics. And in recent decades his genuinely innovative genius has come to be fully recognised.

*Profile © Monika Hennemann*

Monika Hennemann is Dean for International Engagement at Cardiff University. Her work mainly explores the impact of Mendelssohn, Liszt and other cosmopolitan Romantics of the 19th and early 20th centuries.



# The Proms Listening Service

As Radio 3's *The Listening Service* revisits earlier episodes reflecting some of this summer's Proms programming, presenter **Tom Service** takes a wide-angle view of the common themes in this weekly feature

## Week 4 Transcendence

It's what it's all about, isn't it? Transcendence, I mean: the reason you're here at the Royal Albert Hall is to enter the magical realm of live music, in which, for the next couple of hours or so, you'll be transported to places of wildness and ferocity, as well as tranquillity and mindfulness, and everything in between, by the performers onstage and the music they're playing.

You're here because music like Walton's *First Symphony* or Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Caroline Shaw's and *the swallow* or György Ligeti's *Requiem* puts you in a place of transcendent emotional and visceral extremity. The intensity of these experiences is something we don't often encounter elsewhere in our lives. We can feel and empathise as powerfully as we like with the abyssal terror of the Kyrie of Ligeti's *Requiem* or the death-confronting final scene of Poulenc's *Carmelites*, as the 16 nuns go to the guillotine of the French Revolution, but we also know that, while our inner world might have been irrevocably shaken up, we're going to leave the Hall and safely return to the rest of our lives. We've been invited to experience the catharsis of terror and grief and the limits of life and death, but our actual existence and our emotional security aren't materially threatened. That's the precious, transcendent power of live music: opening bridges of empathy that are safe for us all to cross.

And yet this essential magic of the Proms experience – and of any live concert – is often lost amid the rituals and

conventions of orchestral music, which can seem like strictures of silence and enforced reverence rather than the creation of a parallel dimension of heightened feeling. That's why the Mindful Mix Prom this Wednesday seems like a meditative and unmissable exception within this summer's programme, inviting us to let go of our pressures and stresses with carefully curated music designed to put us in a hypnotic nocturnal reverie.

But it's also possible to de-stress and de-pressurise with the philosophical dialectic of Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* or the fearlessly agonised torment of Mahler's 10th Symphony: in the intensity of our reactions to any of the music you hear at the Royal Albert Hall this week, the fundamentally transcendent magic of the musical experience is at work, in music that gives us out-of-body chills and thrills, and as we're invited to hear the world in a different way, from the perspective of the composers and performers we're listening to, and the rest of the Proms audience we're sharing it with.

It's not only the Mindful Mix Prom – every concert this season is a chance to immerse yourself in transcendence of the musical moment: so take it as far as you dare!

*The Mindful Mix Prom – featuring music by Ken Burton, Ola Gjeilo, Philip Glass, Radiohead and Eric Whitacre – is on Wednesday 9 August at 10.15pm.*

→ Next week: **Why Are Classical Audiences So Quiet?**

Join Tom Service on his Proms-themed musical odysseys in *The Listening Service* on BBC Radio 3 during the season (Sundays at 5.00pm, repeated Fridays at 4.30pm). You can hear all 220-plus editions of the series on BBC Sounds. Tom's book based on the series was published last year (Faber).



### Iván Fischer *conductor*

Hungarian conductor Iván Fischer studied piano, violin and cello in Budapest before joining the conducting class of Hans Swarowsky in Vienna. He spent two years as assistant to Nikolaus Harnoncourt before launching his international career as winner of the Rupert Foundation conducting competition in London.

He is the co-founder and Music Director of the Budapest Festival Orchestra and has held principal conductorships with the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington DC, Opéra National de Lyon and the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra, of which he is now Conductor Laureate. The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra named him Honorary Guest Conductor following decades of working together. He is a frequent guest conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony and New York Philharmonic orchestras.

He has been active as a composer since 2004, writing mostly vocal music with instrumental ensembles. His opera *The Red Heifer* was premiered in 2013 and his children's opera *The Gruffalo* has enjoyed numerous revivals in Berlin. His most frequently performed work, *Eine Deutsch-Jiddische Kantate*, has been performed and recorded in several countries.

Iván Fischer is an honorary citizen of Budapest, founder of the Hungarian Mahler Society and patron of the British Kodály Academy. The president of Hungary awarded him the Gold Medal and the French government appointed him Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In 2013 he was named an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in London.



### Sir András Schiff *piano*

Born in Budapest in 1953, Sir András Schiff studied at the Franz Liszt Academy with Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados and in London with George Malcolm. Having collaborated with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, he now focuses primarily on solo recitals, play-directing and conducting.

Since 2004 he has performed the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in over 20 cities; the cycle was recorded live for CD in Zurich. Other recordings include solo recitals of Schubert, Schumann and Janáček, alongside Bach's Partitas, Goldberg Variations and *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

In recent years at the Proms he has performed recitals of Bach and Beethoven. Elsewhere, he regularly appears at the Verbier, Salzburg and Baden-Baden festivals, Wigmore Hall, Vienna Musikverein and Philharmonie de Paris, on tour in North America and Asia, and in Vicenza, where he curates a festival at the Teatro Olimpico.

Vicenza is also home to Cappella Andrea Barca, a chamber orchestra he founded in 1999. Together they have appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Lucerne Festival and Salzburg Mozartwoche; forthcoming projects include a tour of Asia and a cycle of Bach's keyboard concertos in Europe. He also enjoys close relationships with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Budapest Festival Orchestra and Orchestra of the Age Enlightenment; he was appointed Associate Artist of the OAE in 2018.

Sir András Schiff is the recipient of many honours and awards, and was knighted in 2014.



# Coming up at the Proms



IVÁN FISCHER

Alkos Stiller

## SUNDAY 13 AUGUST

### PROM 38 AUDIENCE CHOICE

2.00pm–c3.15pm • Royal Albert Hall

The Budapest Festival Orchestra and founder-conductor Iván Fischer hand over the reins to the Proms audience. We can't tell you what you'll hear at this concert, because we don't know yet. Be there on the day to have your say over which of more than 200 classical pieces the ensemble will play at a moment's notice.



MARTIN HELMCHEN

Giorgia Bertazzi

## MONDAY 14 AUGUST

### PROM 40 BRAHMS & PEJAČEVIĆ

7.30pm–c9.45pm • Royal Albert Hall

German pianist Martin Helmchen makes his Proms debut as soloist in Brahms's Second Piano Concerto. The concerto's late-Romantic spirit and generous scope find an echo in Dora Pejačević's Symphony in F sharp minor, which is given its Proms premiere by Sakari Oramo and the BBC SO.



ANNA-LENA ELBERT

Alan Ovaska

## SUNDAY 13 AUGUST

### PROM 39 LIGETI, BARTÓK & BEETHOVEN

7.30pm–c9.35pm • Royal Albert Hall

Iván Fischer, his Budapest Festival Orchestra and soprano Anna-Lena Elbert mark Ligeti's 100th anniversary with *Mysteries of the Macabre*. Sir András Schiff is the soloist in Bartók's Third Piano Concerto before Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony concludes the evening.



VASILY PETRENKO

Svetlana Tairfova

## TUESDAY 15 AUGUST

### PROM 41 LIGETI, BEETHOVEN & SHOSTAKOVICH

7.30pm–c9.55pm • Royal Albert Hall

Pianist Alexandre Kantorow makes a much-anticipated Proms debut, joining Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as soloist in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4. Shostakovich's impassioned Symphony No. 10 and Ligeti's *Lontano* complete the programme.

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### SOUNDS

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Most Proms repeated in *Afternoon Concert* (weekdays, 2.00pm)

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## Budapest Festival Orchestra

The Budapest Festival Orchestra was founded in 1983 by conductor Iván Fischer and pianist Zoltán Kocsis. It can be heard at the world's leading venues and on major streaming platforms.

It has won two *Gramophone* Awards (Orchestral in 1998 for Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* and Editor's Choice in 2007 for Mahler's Second Symphony) and was named Orchestra of the Year at last year's Awards.

The BFO has developed a reputation for its unique concert formats, including autism-friendly Cocoa Concerts, Surprise Concerts, Audience Choice concerts, marathons, Midnight Music performances and Community Weeks. Its members regularly form a choir at their concerts.

The Budapest Festival Orchestra stages an opera production each year, directed and conducted by Iván Fischer. These productions have been invited to events such as the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York and the Edinburgh Festival. In 2013 *The Marriage of Figaro* was named best classical music event in *New York Magazine*. The Vicenza Opera Festival, founded by Iván Fischer, was launched in 2018 at the Teatro Olimpico.

### Music Director

Iván Fischer

### First Violins

Suyoen Kim  
*leader*  
 Tamás Major  
 Violetta Eckhardt  
 Ágnes Biró  
 Balázs Bujtor  
 Csaba Czenke  
 Mária Gál-Tamási  
 Emese Gulyás  
 Erika Illési  
 István Kádár  
 Péter Kostyál  
 Eszter Lesták  
 Bedő  
 Gyöngyvér Oláh  
 János Pilz

### Second Violins

Tímea Iván  
 Antónia Bodó  
 Györgyi Czirók  
 Tibor Gátay  
 David Tobin  
 Pál Jász  
 Zsófia Lezsák  
 Noémi Molnár  
 Anikó Mózes  
 Levente Szabó  
 Zsolt Szefcsik  
 Zsuzsanna Szlávik

### Violas

Csaba Gálfi  
 Ágnes Csoma  
 Cecília Bodolai  
 Zoltán Fekete  
 Barna Juhász  
 Nikoletta  
 Reinhardt  
 Nao Yamamoto  
 Gábor Sipos

László Bolyki  
 István Polónyi

### Cellos

Péter Szabó  
 Lajos Dvorák  
 Éva Eckhardt  
 György Kertész  
 Gabriella Liptai  
 Kousay Mahdi  
 Orsolya Mód  
 Rita Sovány

### Double Basses

Zsolt Fejérvári  
 Attila Martos  
 Károly Kaszás  
 László Lévai  
 Csaba Sipos  
 David Tinoco

### Flutes

Anett Jóföldi  
 Bernadett Nagy

### Oboes

Victor Aviat  
 Eva Neuszerova  
 Marie-Noëlle  
 Perreau

### Clarinets

Ákos Ács  
 Roland Csalló  
 Rudolf Szitka

### Bassoons

Dániel Tallián  
 Péter Rapi

## Horns

Zoltán Szőke  
Dávid Bereczky  
András Szabó  
Zsombor Nagy

## Trumpets

Gergely Csikota  
Tamás Póti

## Trombones

Balázs Szakszon  
Attila Sztán  
Mariann Krasznai

## Timpani

Roland Dénes

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