

**80th Birthday
Season 2025/26**

**Wagner, Strauss and
Tchaikovsky : Last Songs
Thursday 6 November 2025
Royal Festival Hall**

Phil har mo nia



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In a nutshell...

Why the title *Last Songs*? Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 was his last, premiered nine days before his untimely death, and Strauss's *Four Last Songs* were the last major work he completed, at the age of 84. Wagner was in his prime when he wrote his opera *Tristan and Isolde*, but its theme is a love so passionate that it will transcend death. In the opera, Isolde's 'Liebestod' (love-death) is her final song over her beloved's body, before she too dies – a common fate for soprano heroines throughout the history of opera.

Strauss wrote to soprano Kirsten Flagstad saying she should give the premiere of *Four Last Songs* with 'a first class conductor and orchestra'. And it was with the Philharmonia that she gave the first performance, at the Royal Albert Hall in 1950.

The Russian title of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony comes from the Greek root *pathētikós*. It signifies passionate emotion and suffering, whereas the French title we are used to has more melancholy associations. There's no direct English translation, but think of concepts like 'pathos', 'passion' and 'empathy' rather than 'pathetic' in its modern sense.

Welcome to this evening's concert

Philharmonia **80**

Wagner, Strauss and Tchaikovsky: Last Songs

Thursday 6 November 2025, 7.30pm
Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Thomas Søndergård – conductor
Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha – soprano

WAGNER Prelude and Liebestod from
Tristan and Isolde (8 mins)
STRAUSS Four Last Songs (25 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 6,
'Pathétique' (45 mins)

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory of Christoph von Dohnányi, former Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra.

This performance finishes at approximately 9.20pm

His Majesty King Charles III
Patron

Santtu-Matias Rouvali
Principal Conductor

Marin Alsop
Principal Guest Conductor

Esa-Pekka Salonen KBE
Conductor Laureate

Christoph von Dohnányi
Honorary Conductor 2008 - 2025

Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay
Concert Master

Philharmonia Social

Philharmonia Social is our new initiative to help everyone feel welcome at our concerts.

Our staff, players and volunteers will be on the Clore Ballroom on Level 2 before and after the concert.

6.30pm: a short, informal introduction to the orchestra and this evening's performance

6.45pm: your chance to join the conversation, ask questions and connect with your fellow audience members



Christoph von Dohnányi © Clive Barde

Christoph von Dohnányi

8 September 1929 - 6 September 2025

Christoph von Dohnányi had a profound relationship with the Philharmonia extending over 50 years. He was our Principal Conductor from 1997 to 2008, and conducted more than 200 performances and recordings with us. He had a lasting impact on the Philharmonia's sound and repertoire, and the calibre of our music-making.

Maestro von Dohnányi conducted Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with the Philharmonia on several occasions. With its message of gratitude for a long life well lived, it seems a particularly fitting tribute.

We dedicate this evening's concert to his memory.

Christoph von Dohnányi was born in Berlin. He initially studied Law in Munich, intending to help restore justice in Germany after the Second World War. But after two years he moved to the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München to study composition, piano and conducting.

In the early years of his career, he held posts with opera houses and orchestras around Germany, most notably in Frankfurt and Hamburg. His first performances with the Philharmonia Orchestra were in the early 1970s, with repertoire including Schoenberg, Bruckner, Schubert and Brahms; composers whose music would figure heavily in his later work with us.

From 1984 - 2002 he was Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra, elevating it to new heights and instigating the foundation of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra and Youth Chorus. He was a guest conductor with many of the world's great opera companies and orchestras.

Dohnányi began working with the Philharmonia on a regular basis from 1992. He was appointed Principal Guest Conductor in 1994, and Principal Conductor in 1997. During his tenure he led a focus on the music of the Second Viennese School, spearheaded a multi-concert celebration of the music of Harrison Birtwhistle and conducted complete cycles of Beethoven's symphonies and piano concertos.

Dohnányi led Philharmonia tours all over Europe, three residencies at the Musikverein in Vienna, and two major

tours of the US. A relationship with the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris took us there for productions of operas by Strauss, Humperdinck, Stravinsky and others. His tenure included appearances at the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival. He had a deep commitment to the Orchestra's work outside of London, appearing regularly everywhere from Cardiff and Bristol to Birmingham and Southend.

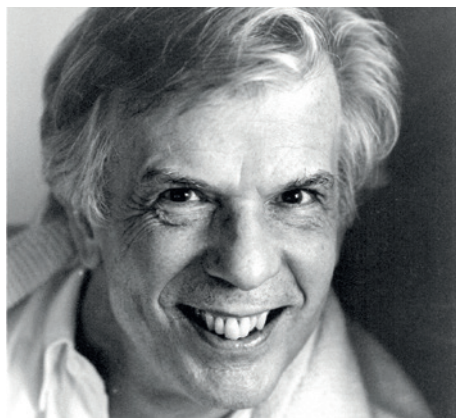
When Dohnányi stepped down as Principal Conductor in 2008 he was appointed Honorary Conductor for Life. In 2013 he conducted a birthday concert for our Patron King Charles III (then Prince of Wales) at Buckingham Palace. His last Philharmonia performance was in 2018.

His work with us is immortalised in the recordings we made together, including a Brahms symphony cycle, Bruckner's Symphonies 4 and 9, and music by Strauss including *Ein Heldenleben* and *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*.

Christoph von Dohnányi's relationship with the Philharmonia was deep and enriching. His work with us re-affirmed the orchestra's identity with the Austro-German tradition, while also placing recent masterpieces front and centre of our music-making. He raised our standards every time we worked together.

He will be very much missed by everyone at the Philharmonia.

Memories of Christoph von Dohnányi



Christoph von Dohnányi, Philharmonia archive

The appointment of Christoph von Dohnányi as Principal Guest Conductor in 1994, and shortly afterwards as Principal Conductor, led to a golden period in the life of the Philharmonia Orchestra. The catalyst for the appointment was the Philharmonia's relationship with the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, which provided the conditions which Christoph believed necessary for the Orchestra to grow, develop and strengthen its position in the global market.

Christoph led the Philharmonia to new artistic heights. Tours to Europe and North America, opera cycles in Paris and magnificent concerts in the Royal Festival Hall and around the UK were all greeted with great acclaim. His respect and admiration for the musicians of the Philharmonia knew no bounds; musical excellence was his only concern.

Building programmes with Christoph was a pleasure. He was endlessly curious, a champion of new music but always sensitive to the importance of attracting audiences to his Orchestra. His planning was meticulous, based on a constant search for the essence of each score he conducted.

Christoph was cultivated, widely read, interested in politics and a shrewd judge of character. We became close personal friends and I look back with great affection on the many evenings Christoph, Barbara, Caroline and I spent together, not least when we discussed our mutual enjoyment of *Faulty Towers* and *Yes, Prime Minister!*

I stayed in touch with Christoph until the end of his long and remarkable life. He retained a close interest in the Orchestra and the players from his time. Less well known was his personal generosity to players when they were in need, or unwell.

Christoph leaves a legacy which continues to inspire and shape the Philharmonia today – we will treasure his memory, now and in the years to come.

**David Whelton LVO OBE Hon FRAM
Hon RCM, former Chief Executive**

It was with profound sadness that I learned of the death of Maestro Christoph von Dohnányi, and I send my deepest condolences to his widow Barbara and all his family.

Christoph began working with the Philharmonia Orchestra in the 1990s – a turbulent decade for London's orchestral profession, and particularly for the Philharmonia, with well-publicised tensions over funding and concert hall provision. The members of the Orchestra quickly recognised his deep musical integrity and vision, and in swift succession he became first Principal Guest Conductor and then Principal Conductor.

His uncompromising artistic standards and passionate commitment to musical excellence rapidly bore fruit. Under his leadership the Philharmonia entered a golden period, with major residencies at the Royal Festival Hall and at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, where we performed a memorable Richard Strauss cycle. I will also never forget the experience of playing *Ein Heldenleben* in the Musikverein in Vienna under his baton.

I also remember the great warmth and generosity shown by Christoph and Barbara to me personally. Amongst many other memories I recall that during the Covid crisis he telephoned me to ask whether he could offer financial help to any struggling musicians, a typically generous gesture.

It is deeply fitting that the Philharmonia should honour Christoph von Dohnányi's memory with this concert – a tribute to a man who did so much to secure the Orchestra's future.

**Keith Bragg, former Principal Piccolo
and President**

Maestro von Dohnányi had an amazing ability to purify the sound of the Philharmonia through his intensive, surgical rehearsal process. It was not always easy! But we came out of it sounding better every time. He could be very strict but behind this there was a deep kindness and care for the orchestra and its players.

I invited him to conduct the orchestra in 2020, and he showed amazing generosity by agreeing not to accept any fee for the performance. This planned concert sadly didn't come to pass because of the pandemic, and his health was never strong enough again to return to conduct. This bittersweet reality makes the memories of so many wonderful performances over the years even stronger. Rest in peace, Maestro.

**Michael Fuller, Double Bass and former
President and Interim Chief Executive**



Christoph von Dohnányi © Times Newspapers



Christoph von Dohnányi, Philharmonia archive

Maestro von Dohnányi (Christoph in person offstage, but always Maestro at work) could seem an intimidating figure, relentless in his detailed rehearsals and with an endlessly searching ear. But his personal warmth, deep affection and care for the music and for individual players quickly became apparent. You could never get the better of him, though. Once, in a Schumann rehearsal, with a clarinet duet looming, I said to my 2nd clarinet (new to CvD), “He thrives on communication, so if we’re already looking at him when he looks at us, he’ll leave us alone.” The duet arrived, we looked at him, he looked at us. Christoph stopped and said, “Mark, why is your G always a little too sharp?”

Christoph always left the orchestra in a superb state after we’d worked with him. Conductors in the weeks following his visits would benefit from this. His successors, Esa-Pekka Salonen and

Santtu-Matias Rouvali, did so long-term, and we will all continue to benefit from what we absorbed from Christoph. The Philharmonia never had a more caring friend.

Mark van de Wiel, former Joint Principal Clarinet

Many of my formative concerts with the Philharmonia were led by Maestro von Dohnányi, and I feel so fortunate to have arrived on the scene just in time to witness and enjoy his conducting and musicianship. From the Royal Festival Hall to Buckingham Palace, I will never forget the sense of awe I experienced as he guided us through the most thrilling musical moments.

His presence is felt even in his absence, with players often commenting on lessons they learnt from him. Christoph has left a mark on this orchestra that will be there for years to come. His legacy truly is outstanding.

James Buckle, Principal Bass Trombone and President

Christoph von Dohnányi lived through the upheavals of the earlier part of the 20th century and I imagine his experiences, particularly as a child and young man, served to inform and contextualise his future life and work. Although Christoph didn’t talk to me about what he had seen

and felt during the years before or during the war, or its impact on him, he did let slip that in 1945 he escaped through the window of his Berlin apartment when an invading Russian soldier walked in and levelled his machine gun at him.

Unsurprisingly little else seemed to faze him and he could be uncompromising in rehearsals, working the orchestra extremely hard for days to acquire what he felt was the best quality of sound for Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms. However, off stage he was the most ‘human’ of conductors, willing to listen, and offer good advice if asked for. He would show a keen sense of humour and also a degree of shyness not always visible when on the podium.

Gideon Robinson, Second Violin



Santtu-Matias Rouvali meeting Christoph von Dohnányi, 2024 © Thorben Dittes

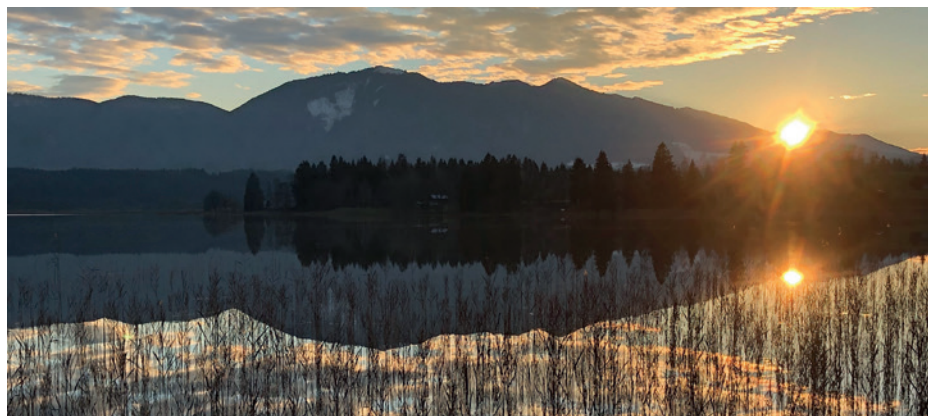
I have many fond memories of Christoph von Dohnányi, and of the wonderful concerts I was privileged to share with him and the Philharmonia. I will always remember his meticulous rehearsals, which invariably paid such dividends in performance.

Soong Choo, First Violin and Joint Vice-President

Christoph von Dohnányi was Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia when I first heard them together in the autumn of 1999, as a student sitting in the choir seats, being completely mesmerised by the unique Philharmonia sound in Schumann’s Symphony No. 2. He had a deep and personal connection to the Austro-German repertoire and was one of its finest interpreters, nourishing that tradition, as well as the sound, with the Philharmonia.

I was lucky to meet him in person in April this year for an extended interview on the occasion of the orchestra’s 80th birthday. He was completely charming and generous in his anecdotes of his many years of collaboration with the Philharmonia, while also uniquely insightful on the role of music in an ever-changing world. I’d like to extend my deepest condolences to his family for their loss.

Thorben Dittes, Chief Executive



Sunset near Garmisch-Partenkirchen, from Wikimedia Commons

Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883)

Liebestod from Tristan and Isolde
(1859) (8 mins)

Tristan and Isolde is Richard Wagner's most revolutionary opera. It tells of the accidental, all-encompassing love between two people – a love so strong it can only be fully realised through death.

Tristan is purposefully overwhelming, philosophically and emotionally. Wagner's music does the legwork. Much of it is founded on the broad implications of the four-note 'Tristan chord', a leading chord that leads nowhere. Unable to resolve musically – and by implication, sexually – the chord sets in motion a huge crescendo of longing.

We hear the 'Tristan chord' at the start of the opera's Prelude, after three preliminary notes on low strings. A broad, arch-like structure is set in motion.

The opera's pivotal moment comes when Isolde, having held the dying Tristan in her arms, sees their love continuing in death. Isolde sings her *Verklärung* (her transfiguration, often referred to as her *Liebestod* – 'love death'), played here by orchestra alone.

The *Liebestod* solves the riddle of the 'Tristan chord'. Eventually, the orchestra runs aground on the key of C sharp major, forcing a standard resolution into G sharp. Through the portal of the Tristan chord, the music then floats onto B major. You don't need to recognise those keys to sense a shift in the music's footing – its discovery of the ecstasy of death-defying love.

© Andrew Mellor

Richard Strauss (1864 - 1949)

Four Last Songs (1948) (25 mins)

Frühling (Spring)

September

Beim Schlafengehen (Going to Sleep)

Im Abendrot (At Sunset)

*"In dimly-lit caverns, long I dreamed
of your trees and blue skies..."*

*Now you lie revealed ... like a miracle
before me!"*

With every passing year, the coming of spring seems to acquire greater poignancy and beauty; qualities that are equally applicable to the music of German composer Richard Strauss. His *Four Last Songs*, composed at the end of his long career, are both an emotional testament to a life in music, and a paean to nature.

Born in 1864 in Munich, Strauss found success relatively early on: the royalties from his 1905 opera *Salome*, based on the Oscar Wilde play, paid for the construction of his villa in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a Bavarian village nestled in the valley below the Alpspitze and Zugspitze mountains. It was in this picturesque setting, close to nature, that Strauss composed many of his subsequent works: operas including *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Capriccio*, as well as his *Metamorphosen* for 23 string instruments.

He lived through two World Wars, during the latter of which he left his villa and took up conducting roles at Bayreuth and the Reich Chamber of Music in Nazi Germany, frequently using his position to advocate for suppressed Jewish composers and librettists, as well as ensuring that his Jewish daughter-in-law, Alice Grab Strauss, was placed under protected house arrest. She survived the War, unlike many of her family, who perished in the concentration camps.

Through it all, Strauss's wife, the soprano Pauline (née de Ahna) remained by his side, although their stormy relationship wasn't without its challenges. Five decades after they first met in 1947, and both plagued by ill-health, they returned to the countryside and were spending time in Switzerland, when the composer read a poem by the 19th-century poet, Joseph von Eichendorff. The words of *Im Abendrot* ('At Sunset') depict an old couple who gaze at the horizon and ask, "Is this perhaps death?" The poem struck a chord with him and, taking three other verses by the Nobel Prize-winning writer Herman Hesse, he began working on the song-cycle that would become his *Four Last Songs*.

In the first song, 'Frühling' (Spring), with its giddy harmonies, sumptuous string writing and exquisite word-setting (just listen to the skyward soar of the soprano at "Lüften"!), it is as if a breath of spring air has wafted into the concert hall, and Strauss greets it like a long-awaited lover, all hushed wonder and intoxication.



Richard Strauss, from Wikimedia Commons

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74
'Pathétique' (1893) (45 mins)

Adagio – Allegro non troppo
Allegro con grazia
Allegro molto vivace
Adagio lamentoso

In 1891 Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky started to plan an ambitious symphony that would explore all aspects of life, and end in a depiction of death. He composed it between May and November 1892, only to discard it as musically and emotionally uninteresting. Spells of depression followed, during which he wondered if his creative career was over. However, in February 1893 he was suddenly inspired to begin an entirely new symphony. This time, he had no self-doubt. Indeed, he told his nephew Vladimir ('Bob') Davydov, the dedicatee of his new composition, that 'the work went so fast and furious that I had the first movement completely ready in less than four days, and the remaining movements are already clearly outlined in my head. [...] There will be much formal innovation [...] and, incidentally, the finale will not be a noisy Allegro but, on the contrary, a most long-drawn-out Adagio. You cannot imagine what bliss I feel, being convinced that my time is not yet passed and that I can still work.'

By 5 April he had sketched out the entire work, writing on its final page 'O Lord, I thank thee!' His enthusiasm remained constant throughout its orchestration – he wrote to Bob on 14 August that 'I love [the symphony] as I have never loved any other of my musical offspring.' The premiere of this, his Sixth Symphony, took place on 28 October 1893 in St Petersburg. Tchaikovsky himself conducted.

The symphony's title remains a mystery: it is unclear whether the composer or his brother Modest chose it, when it was selected and what exactly it means. (The Russian 'pateticheskaya' signifies passionate emotion; the French 'pathétique' has more melancholy associations.) What Tchaikovsky did say was that his symphony had a narrative (or 'programme') that should 'remain an enigma' to everyone. The fact that he died in mysterious circumstances nine days after the premiere has led to speculations that it is no less than a musical suicide note. However, there is no evidence for this other than Tchaikovsky's confession that he had 'wept a great deal' while composing it.

Sepulchral double basses and solo bassoon dominate the Symphony's brooding introduction. The volatile ensuing Allegro contains two contrasting themes, the first rapid and agitated, the second ardent and lyrical, with some resemblance to Don José's 'Flower Song' from *Carmen* (one of Tchaikovsky's favourite operas). Striking episodes

include an extended clarinet solo based on the second theme, and a dramatic brass quotation from the Russian Orthodox Requiem chant: 'With thy saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant.' The second movement is a playfully unstable waltz, with five beats in a bar rather than the usual three. The outer sections are delicately scored and elegant; the central episode is darker in mood, with a wistful descending violin melody over throbbing timpani and double-bass accompaniment.

The exuberant third movement opens with spirited exchanges between high strings and woodwind. These evolve into a swaggering march in which the clarinet initially plays a prominent role. The march music grows ever louder as the movement progresses, culminating in a noisy coda dominated by brass and percussion. Such heroism might seem appropriate for a finale. But instead, Tchaikovsky abandons traditional symphonic structure to end with an Adagio whose principal theme – a descending string melody – creates an ambience of mourning. From a quiet, stoical opening section the music gradually builds to an anguished climax; then, after a single tamtam stroke, it fades away in one of the bleakest but most moving of symphonic conclusions.

© Kate Hopkins

The score of 'September' still bubbles with life and birdsong, but it is tinged with melancholy at the passing of summer: could that lingering horn solo be a nod to Strauss's father, a professional horn-player?

As for 'Beim Schlafengehen' (Upon Going to Sleep) – what can words add to the inexpressible? Strauss sublimely portrays the ascent of a soul unfettered – "Die Seele unbewacht" – from earthly cares, first in the violin solo where time itself seems to stop, and then echoed by the voice. The quartet of songs finishes, fittingly, 'Im Abendrot' (At Sunset). "Is this perhaps death?" asks the elderly couple – and note Strauss's subtle change to the Eichendorff text, making the question more immediate, more urgent – as a radiant arc of E-flat major music unfolds above them. Well, if it is, mortality has never sounded so good.

© Sophie Rashbrook

Interval (20 mins)

Frühling

In dämmrigen Grüften
Träumte ich lang
Von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,
Von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen
In Gleiß und Zier,
Von Licht übergossen
Wie ein Wunder vor mir.

Du kennst mich wieder,
Du lockst mich zart,
Es zittert durch all meine Glieder
Deine selige Gegenwart.

Hermann Hesse (1877 - 1962)

Spring

*In dimly-lit caverns
long I dreamed
of your trees and blue skies,
of your fragrance and birdsong.*

*Now you lie revealed
in radiance and splendour,
bathed in light
like a miracle before me.*

*You recognize me,
sweetly you beckon to me;
a shudder runs through my limbs
at your blessed presence.*

September

Der Garten trauert,
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.
Der Sommer schauert
Still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.
Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt
In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach Ruh.
Langsam tut er die großen
Müdigewordenen Augen zu.

Hermann Hesse

September

*The garden is in mourning,
the cool rain drenches the flowers.
Summer shudders
quietly to its close.*

*Leaf upon golden leaf
falls from the tall acacia tree.
Summer smiles faintly, in amazement,
on the garden's dying dream.*

*For a long time still it lingers
by the roses and yearns for rest.
Slowly it closes
its great weary eyes.*

Beim Schlafengehen

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
Soll mein sehnliches Verlangen
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn vergiß du alles Denken,
Alle meine Sinne nun
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht
Will in freien Flügen schweben,
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

Hermann Hesse

Im Abendrot

Wir sind durch Not und Freude
Gegangen Hand in Hand,
Vom Wandern ruhen wir
Nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Thäler neigen,
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
Nachträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her, und laß sie schwirren,
Bald ist es Schlafenszeit,
Daß wir uns nicht verirren
In dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot,
Wie sind wir wandermüde –
Ist dies etwa der Tod?

Joseph von Eichendorff (1788 - 1857)

While going to sleep

*Now that the day has made me weary,
let my yearnings be gently enfolded
by the starry night
like a tired child.*

*Hands, cease all your toil,
brain, forget all thoughts;
now all my senses
long to sink into sleep.*

*And my soul, unobserved,
will soar aloft on wings of freedom,
to live a thousand times more deeply
in the magic circle of night.*

At sunset

*Through sorrow and joy
we have walked hand in hand;
now above the silent countryside
we rest from our travels.*

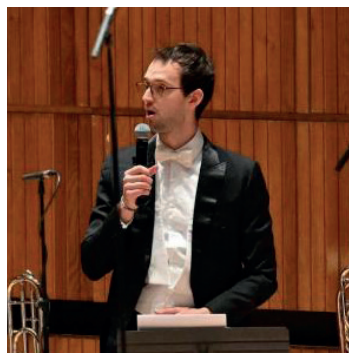
*Around us the valleys slope away,
the air is already growing dark;
nothing stirs but two larks,
soaring dreamily in the fragrant air.*

*Come here, and let them flutter:
soon it will be time to sleep,
We must not go astray
in this solitude.*

*O peace, boundless and calm,
so profound in the sunset!
We are so weary of our travels –
Is this perhaps death?*

Translations © Jonathan Burton

Get to know James Buckle, Principal Bass Trombone



James Buckle © Mark Allan

What made you choose to learn the bass trombone?

I began learning trombone aged 8 after I saw Mark Nightingale perform in Swanage Jazz Festival. A few years later I joined Wells Cathedral School and realised nobody played bass trombone. Being an overexcitable attention seeker, this was the perfect opportunity for me to stand out! Later still, I joined NYO [the National Youth Orchestra] which was the catalyst for me to pursue a career in music.

If you were planning a fantasy concert, with lots of great moments for the bass trombone, what would be on the programme?

Fantastic – and tricky – question! I'd like it to be in three parts: Bach, Schütz, and Monteverdi in the first part, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* in the middle, and to finish, Bruckner and Mahler 9. These pieces mean a lot to me and I have had some of my most formative moments playing them.

What do you enjoy most about playing with the Philharmonia?

The heart-on-the-sleeve commitment that the orchestra plays with, and the most incredible collection of colleagues that I could ask for.

As well as being Principal Bass Trombone, you're also the President of the Orchestra – in a nutshell, what does that involve?

I wear two hats – one as representative of the Orchestra, where I lead the Orchestra Committee as President, and the other as a trustee on the Board of Directors, where I work alongside the Chairperson. It's a privilege to hold this position, and I am very proud of the work we are doing together.

Which concerts in the Philharmonia's 80th birthday season are you most looking forward to, and why?

I am particularly looking forward to Bruckner 8 with Donald Runnicles [Thursday 19 February]. I have never played Bruckner 8, but it was a requirement of my Philharmonia audition, almost 15 years ago when I was 18 years old, and I've been looking forward to playing it ever since.

In addition, replicating Richard Strauss's last concert with us, as our season finale with Santtu conducting, will be a special occasion [Thursday 4 June]. It will be a wonderful way to bring our 80th birthday season to a close.

About the Philharmonia

Founded in 1945, the Philharmonia Orchestra celebrates its 80th birthday in the 2025/26 season.

Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor in 2021, and Marin Alsop joined him as Principal Guest Conductor in 2023.

They follow in illustrious footsteps: Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Riccardo Muti, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Christoph von Dohnányi, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Esa-Pekka Salonen are some of the key conductors who have shaped the Philharmonia's reputation as one of the world's great orchestras.

The Philharmonia has premiered music by composers including Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Errollyn Wallen and performs with many of the world's most admired soloists. Víkingur Ólafsson is this season's Featured Artist, and Gabriela Ortiz is Featured Composer.

Resident at the Southbank Centre since 1995, the Philharmonia also holds residencies in Basingstoke, Bedford, Canterbury and Leicester, and tours extensively worldwide. The Orchestra has just returned from a major US tour culminating in two concerts at Carnegie Hall.

The Philharmonia's 80-year recording history includes many benchmark LPs and more than 150 film and videogame soundtracks. The Orchestra's recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is travelling through interstellar space on board the Voyager spacecraft, and immersive installations and virtual reality experiences introduce orchestral music to new audiences.

The Philharmonia is committed to nurturing and developing the next generation of instrumentalists and composers, with a focus on increasing diversity within the classical music industry.



Santtu-Matias Rouvali and the Philharmonia © Mark Allan

Thomas Søndergård – conductor



Thomas Søndergård © Martin Bubandt

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård is the Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He has previously held Principal Conductor roles at the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW) and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

He has appeared with many notable orchestras in leading European centres such as Berlin, Munich, Zurich, Leipzig, Paris, London, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. He is a familiar figure in Scandinavia, with such orchestras as Oslo Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, Danish National Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic. He has conducted the national opera companies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, as well as at several leading German opera houses.

His North American appearances to date have included the symphony orchestras of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, St Louis,

Toronto, Atlanta, Montreal, Vancouver, Houston and Seattle. He has also made highly successful tours to China, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

With the Minnesota Orchestra in 2025/26, Søndergård leads a diverse range of programmes, including the continuation of their *Nordic Composers Festival* and projects with leading soloists such as Joyce DiDonato, Yo-Yo Ma & Kirill Gerstein. In addition to their *Scotland* series and recording projects, highlights with the RSNO include extensive tours of Europe & China.

Søndergård is a member of the jury of the 2025 London Symphony Orchestra Donatella Flick Conducting Competition.

He is a passionate supporter and acclaimed interpreter of the music of Carl Nielsen. His discography covers a broad range of contemporary and mainstream repertoire, including music by Nielsen, Ruders, Sibelius, Strauss, Lutoslawski and Dutilleux.

In October 2023, Søndergård was a recipient of the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen's Foundation award for his outstanding contribution to Danish musical life. In January 2022, he was decorated with the prestigious Order of Dannebrog by Her Majesty Margrethe II, Queen of Denmark.

Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha – soprano



Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha © Vera Elma Vacek

Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha won the Song Prize at the 2021 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition and was awarded the 2024 Herbert von Karajan Prize at the Salzburg Easter Festival.

In the 2025/26 season, Rangwanasha makes her debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Liù in Puccini's *Turandot*, a role she will also sing at the Royal Ballet & Opera. Later in the season, she returns to RBO to make her role debut as Contessa Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and performs the role in concert with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal.

On the concert platform, Rangwanasha makes her debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Mahler's Symphony No. 4 conducted by Elim Chan, Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Mark Elder, and reprises Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Kevin John Edusei.

In previous seasons she has performed with major orchestras and opera companies around Europe and the US, as well as the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra and Cape Town Philharmonic.

In the UK she has performed with many leading orchestras, including the LSO and the Hallé, and taken part in the First Night of the BBC Proms, the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance and Classic FM Live at the Royal Albert Hall.

Rangwanasha's broad repertoire embraces Beethoven and Barber, Verdi and Vaughan Williams, Mozart and Mahler, Gluck and Tippett.

She is a former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist.

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