

**80th Birthday
Season 2025/26**

**Paavo Järvi conducts
Bruch and Sibelius
Sunday 9 November 2025
Royal Festival Hall**

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In a nutshell...

Paavo Järvi, one of today's great musical communicators, conducts three uplifting favourites of the orchestral repertoire – the perfect way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

The concert begins with Brahms's *St Anthony Variations*, a masterclass in creativity and craftsmanship as Brahms transforms a simple theme into a dazzling sequence of variations.

Renowned violinist Alena Baeva makes her Philharmonia debut in Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 – a Romantic classic full of rich melodies, tenderness and brilliance.

After the interval comes Sibelius's Symphony No. 5, inspired by the composer's awe at the sight of swans soaring across the Finnish sky. Listen out for the majestic horn theme that brings the symphony, and the concert, to a triumphant close.

Welcome to this evening's concert

Philharmonia **80**

Paavo Järvi conducts Bruch and Sibelius

Sunday 9 November 2025, 3pm
Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Paavo Järvi – conductor
Alena Baeva – violin

BRAHMS *St Anthony Variations*
(17 mins)

BRUCH Violin Concerto No. 1
(24 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

SIBELIUS Symphony No. 5
(30 mins)

This performance finishes at approximately 4.45pm

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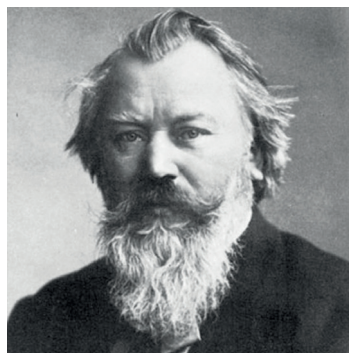
Philharmonia Social

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

Our staff, players and volunteers will be in the Clore Ballroom before and after the concert.

2pm: a short introduction to the orchestra and this evening's performance

2.15pm: your chance to join the conversation, ask questions and connect with your fellow audience members.



Johannes Brahms, Public Domain

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

St Anthony Variations, Op. 56
(1873) (17 mins)

In 1873, Brahms wrote his first significant orchestral work, the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* – producing a version for two pianos at much the same time. The variations are based on a memorable theme from a ‘St. Anthony Chorale’ for winds; Haydn’s authorship of the original has since been discredited. Brahms wrote several sets of variations on music by other composers during his life, consistently elevating a form that risks being episodic or workmanlike into something much more sophisticated. Here, via orchestration of exceptional textural subtlety, eight variations culminate in a passacaglia (when a recurrent bass-line is varied and decorated), which itself encompasses 17 variations, followed by a coda.

In the first variation, Brahms creates distinctive contrasts between rhythmical groupings of two and three – a hallmark of his style – while the second variation is characterised by skipping dotted rhythms. There are allusions to Baroque style in the four-part writing of the third variation, although the harmony, anticipating Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 2, leaves us in no doubt as to the composer. This antique sensibility continues in the winding counterpoint of the fourth variation, but any cobwebs are swept away by the playful fifth.

Rapid, vigorous notes dominate the sixth variation, and the seventh is all limpid, lilting grace. The breathless eighth variation includes a mesmerising, spacious sonority spread across six octaves. Then comes the passacaglia with its own variations – a masterful achievement.

© Joanna Wyld

Max Bruch (1838 – 1920)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor
(1866, rev. 1867) (24 mins)

I. Vorspiel: Allegro moderato

II. Adagio

III. Finale: Allegro energico

Bruch was, like Mendelssohn, well travelled, and counted Scotland amongst his sources of inspiration. But it is Bruch’s Violin Concerto No. 1 that has endured above all his works – much to the composer’s distaste, as its enormous popularity has led to the neglect of his other compositions. The concerto was written while Bruch was working at the Koblenz court, where he was music director between 1865 and 1867. He was friends with virtuoso violinists, including

Joseph Joachim, Pablo Sarasate, Ferdinand David and Willy Hess, musicians who advised him during the composition of nine major works for violin and orchestra. Bruch’s affinity with the violin was sincere; he argued that the instrument “can sing a melody better than a piano, and melody is the soul of music”.

According to Joachim, the work is one of four great German violin concertos, alongside those of Beethoven, Brahms and Mendelssohn. Joachim declared that, of these works, “The richest, the most seductive, was written by Max Bruch”. Joachim helped to revise the work, as he had with the Brahms concerto. The original version was completed in 1866 and was first performed on 24 April of the same year by Otto von Königsloew, conducted by Bruch himself.



Max Bruch, Public Domain

Once Joachim's revisions had been incorporated, the concerto was completed in its definitive form in 1867 and then performed by Joachim on 5 January 1868, with Karl Martin Rheintaler conducting.

Bruch sold the concerto for a lump sum to the publisher Simrock, but kept a copy for himself. By the end of the First World War, Bruch was destitute; royalties had been impossible to chase during the conflict. In desperation, he sent his manuscript of the Violin Concerto to pianist sisters Rose and Otilie Sutro, in the United States, asking them to sell it there for him. But the money never appeared, and Bruch died in October 1920 without receiving anything more for his concerto. His estate did not fare any better, and eventually it seems that the sisters had sold the autograph much later, in 1949. It is now housed in the Pierpont Morgan Public Library in New York City.

The first movement is, unusually, a Vorspiel: a 'prelude' to the second movement. This dramatic prelude begins and ends slowly, with brief cadenzas in the opening and closing passages framing a turbulent central section. The prelude flows into the second movement – the focal point of the concerto – its achingly romantic, slowly-building melodic lines inseparable from the work's popularity. The concerto is rounded off by a joyful finale, the violin's spirited tune contrasted with more lyrical material which briefly evokes the ravishing slow movement.

© Joanna Wyld



Jean Sibelius Public Domain

Jean Sibelius (1865 – 1957)

Symphony No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 82

(1915, rev. 1919) (30 mins)

I. Tempo di moderato – Allegro moderato

II. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto

**III. Allegro molto – Un pochettino
largamente**

Jean Sibelius reimagined the structure and grammar of orchestral music. In imitating the cyclic, mutating patterns of the Finnish rune singers, he moved the symphony away from the Germanic tradition of musical argument and gave the Nordic region a distinctive symphonic voice of its own.

Sibelius's life and career are directly linked to the changing fortunes of his native Finland. In the early 1910s, Sibelius could add to his own financial and health problems those of the country itself, which he hoped would soon be free from Russian rule. But the Tsar was

strengthening his grip on the province, suspending parliament and suppressing the Finnish language.

As Europe slipped towards war, Finland, aligned with Russia, faced mass slaughter and the annihilation of its timber exporting industry. 'In a deep mire again, but already I am beginning to see dimly the mountain I shall ascend', wrote Sibelius in his diary; 'God opens his door for a moment and his orchestra is playing the Fifth Symphony.'

A new symphony was rapidly forming in Sibelius's mind in the early 1910s. Themes included the onset of spring and the spirit of the composer's home on the shores of Lake Tuusula. Then, on 12 April 1914, Sibelius witnessed a sight that would affect him profoundly and write the Fifth Symphony's main theme for him. It was a flock of sixteen swans, soaring upwards from the lake for their migration. 'One of my greatest experiences' Sibelius wrote in his diary, 'the Fifth Symphony's final theme...legato in the trumpets.'

At the time of the symphony's premiere in Helsinki on 8 December 1915, the score had four movements. In amalgamating his first two into the opening movement we know today, Sibelius streamlined momentum by mimicking the impulses of improvisation. As a result, the symphony feels like a self-perpetuating journey – as though the music is developing its own language even as it proceeds.

The symphony opens with a blossoming on glowing horns and woodwinds, before the music gains momentum and appears to fold outwards. Soon we hear the distinctive interval of a major fourth (think of the first two notes of *Away in a Manger*) spelled out on a trumpet. When the music from the opening returns in a different guise, the symphony is injected with optimism by an upward-pining melody – again on trumpets.

Those gestures sow the seeds for the symphony's finale, a musical manifesto for Sibelius's belief that through nature, man can transcend agony of life. Characteristically, the music is built from the bottom up. Double basses are heard spelling out the two notes that make the interval of a fifth, which augments as the bottom note drops twice and steps back up, forming a looping pattern. Here are the Lake Tuusula swans.

Taken up by the horns, this pattern gains the pace and grandeur of flight. Suddenly, the music shifts key: the pedal note drops out like the falling away of a runway. Magically, gloriously, the swans take off. Soon they can be heard in the distance, returning as if for a last salute. Again they soar upwards, cutting through a tangling orchestral texture in a final bid for freedom. Six full orchestral jabs bid them a final farewell.

© Andrew Mellor

Get to know Alena Baeva



Alena Baeva © Marco Borggreve

This concert marks your Philharmonia debut. What are you most looking forward to?

Having listened to countless recordings of this legendary orchestra, I feel honoured and excited to meet them on stage! I can't wait really to do what we both love the most – making music together – and to see what we can create when speaking this common language.

You've spoken about beauty being everywhere. How does this philosophy shape the way you approach music-making?

This space – one might call it imagination, where the creative flow originates – is always alive in the mind of an artist. To observe and to listen are, probably, some of the most rewarding actions, and making music is exactly about those. Being able to give and take, to share with fellow musicians and the audience during this enriching process is a true gift.

Do you have a favourite moment in the Bruch concerto?

Years ago, I was on tour in Germany playing Bruch. Imagine – the second concert, we are past the gorgeous violin introduction and the following exposition, violin builds up a big crescendo resulting in a fabulous tutti, and then the conductor is screaming at me, while carrying on waving his hands enthusiastically: "Bravo!! Better than yesterday!" Having "yesterday" quite a good concert, I always smile in this place.

You've spoken beautifully about the role of vulnerability in performance. What does this mean?

Music happens in time; it is never the same. There is no perfection in music, either, it's always a journey. When playing, one has to be open for this unique experience and have enough trust to enable this. I see this vulnerability as readiness to embark on a journey. There is always place for some magic to happen on stage. Of course, it is a lot about balance of control and letting go!

What three things are you listening to at the moment?

Can't make it three, sorry – but recently there was some Jesus Molina, jazz pianist; Mozart with Riccardo Minasi and Anna Prohaska; a lot of Thomas Adès, and I am in love with Alex Paxton's music; also, just discovered that Respighi's 'Il Tramonto' (The Sunset) from *Ottorino* exists for voice and string quartet.

About the Philharmonia

Philharmonia **80**

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. A major US tour in October culminated in two concerts at Carnegie Hall.

The Philharmonia's 80-year recording history includes many benchmark LP's 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 Allen

Paavo Järvi – conductor



Paavo Järvi © Kaupo Kikkas

Estonian Grammy Award-winning conductor Paavo Järvi is widely recognised as one of today's most eminent conductors, enjoying close partnerships with the finest orchestras around the world. He serves as Music Director of the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Artistic Director of The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and founder of the Estonian Festival Orchestra.

Highlights of Paavo Järvi's seventh season in Zürich include the continuation of their Mahler Symphony Cycle, a tribute to Arthur Honneger, performances with Sol Gabetta and Kirill Gerstein, and a year-long exploration of Thomas Adés. Alpha Classics releases Mahler Symphony No. 1 in autumn 2025, coinciding with a Mahler tour to Vienna, Cologne and Paris. Additional touring includes appearances at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, George Enescu Festival, La Scala Milan and a tour to Japan and South Korea.

With the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Järvi has performed and recorded the complete orchestral works of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms.

Highlights in 2025/26 include the final release of the London Haydn symphonies and performances of Schubert's symphonies in Bremen and across Europe. Each season concludes with the Pärnu Music Festival in Estonia, which Järvi founded in 2011. In September 2025, Alpha Classics releases the Estonian Festival Orchestra's sixth album *Credo*, celebrating Arvo Pärt's 90th birthday, followed by a tour to Tallinn, Zürich, Vienna, Hamburg and Carnegie Hall.

Järvi regularly appears with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic. This season includes engagements with the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Gewandhaus Orchester Leipzig and others.

Recent accolades include Opus Klassik, Gramophone and Grammy Awards, as well as honours from France, Finland and Estonia recognising his artistic achievements and cultural contributions.

Alena Baeva – violin



Alena Baeva © Andrej Grlic

Described as 'a magnetic presence' (*New York Classical Review*), violinist Alena Baeva is one of the most versatile and captivating soloists today. She champions lesser-known works alongside mainstream repertoire, including Bacewicz, Karaev, Karłowicz and Silvestrov. She has performed with orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, NHK Symphony, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Gürzenich-Orchester Köln.

This season includes appearances with Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Il Giardino Armonico. Baeva collaborates with artists like Yuri Bashmet, Misha Maisky and Vadym Kholodenko, with whom she performs at Wigmore Hall and records for Alpha Classics.

Her discography includes Beethoven sonatas, *Fantasy* (2024), and concertos by Wieniawski, Karłowicz, Schumann and Mendelssohn. Born in Kyrgyzstan, she studied in Kazakhstan and Russia, and took part in the Seiji Ozawa Academy. Naturalised Luxembourgish, she resides in Luxembourg and plays on the "ex-William Kroll" Guarneri del Gesù (1738), generously loaned via J&A Beares.

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