

**80th Birthday
Season 2025/26**

**Marin Alsop conducts
Scheherazade
Thursday 12 March 2026
Royal Festival Hall**

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In a nutshell...

The Philharmonia's Principal Guest Conductor Marin Alsop brings together fairytales, folk traditions and the joy of dance in a programme full of colour and storytelling.

We begin in Mexico with the irresistible rhythms of Arturo Márquez's *Danzón No. 2*. It's music that pulses and sways, full of warmth and nostalgia - a vibrant tribute to Mexico's people and culture. From there, cellist Alisa Weilerstein joins us for Gabriela Ortiz's *Dzonot*. Inspired by the natural sinkholes of the Yucatán peninsula, the piece captures the mystery of the landscape and its deep roots in Mexico's ancient past. Ortiz, the

Philharmonia's Featured Composer for 2025/26, blends shimmering textures and earthy energy to powerful effect.

Finally, we step into the world of *Scheherazade*. Rimsky-Korsakov's dazzling showpiece brings the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* to life. Listen for the solo violin as Scheherazade herself, spinning story after story to soften the heart of the Sultan. You'll hear his dark, commanding theme in the brass but each night her music returns, more beautiful and persuasive than before, until fear gives way to wonder.

Welcome to this evening's concert

Philharmonia **80**

Marin Alsop conducts Scheherazade

Thursday 12 March 2026, 7.30pm
Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Marin Alsop – conductor
Alisa Weilerstein – cello

MÁRQUEZ *Danzón No. 2*
(10 mins)

ORTIZ *Cello Concerto, 'Dzonot'*
(London premiere)
(25 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV *Scheherazade*
(42 mins)

This performance finishes at approximately 9.30pm



Tonight's concert is being broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. It will be available on BBC Sounds for 30 days.



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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 at the Level 2 Blue Side, before the concert.

6.30pm: a short 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



Arturo Márquez © Public Domain

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950)

Danzón No. 2
(1994) (10 mins)

Born in 1950 in Sonora, northwestern Mexico, Arturo Márquez grew up in a family of town musicians, absorbing the rhythms and spirit of popular Mexican music. After moving to California as a teenager, Márquez began studying violin and deepened his commitment to music, later returning to Mexico to attend the National Conservatory, where he studied piano and composition. He forged a distinctive compositional voice by blending classical technique with the popular and traditional sounds of his childhood, creating music that is both refined and deeply rooted in lived experience.

Danzón No. 2 is perhaps Márquez's most beloved work. Written in the early 1990s, it was one of his first major explorations

of combining Western symphonic writing with the rhythms and spirit of Latin American dance.

The danzón itself originated in Cuba in the late nineteenth century. A graceful, elegant ballroom style that fuses European formal structure with African rhythmic vitality.

Márquez's Danzón No. 2 begins quietly and elegantly, with woodwinds offering expressive, almost intimate lines that invite us into the scene. The piano then introduces a livelier episode, and soon the brass enter with bold, rhythmic accents that give the music its unmistakable swagger.

Just as the energy seems to crest, the mood shifts again. Sliding trombones add a playful edge, and new melodic ideas emerge. The piano returns, guiding us into the atmosphere of a palm-court ballroom. The warm air, polished floors, and dancers gliding beneath soft lights. But serenity never lasts long. Earlier surges of energy reappear, highlighted by a stylish trumpet solo, and the momentum builds toward a thrilling climax.

A fleeting hush from the piccolo and piano, suspended in a brief breath precedes the final rush. Then the full orchestra drives forward into a brilliant, exuberant conclusion. Danzón No. 2 is, in many ways, Márquez's love letter to the ballroom dance traditions of his homeland. In his hands, the danzón is transformed and expanded for the concert stage, but without losing its heart.

© Linton Stephens



Gabriela Ortiz © Maira Arteaga

Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964)

Cello Concerto, 'Dzonot'
(London Premiere)
(2024) (25 mins)

- I-Luz Vertical**
- II-El Ojo del Jaguar**
- III-Jade**
- IV-El vuelo de Toh**

Dzonot (cenote in Spanish) is a term used solely in Mexico, derived from the Mayan word *dzonot*, meaning abyss. In Mayan culture, cenotes were considered to be sources of life itself. They also represented entrances into the underworld, or Xibalbá – a sacred place where darkness reigned, inhabited by shadows, gods, and spirits.

Dzonot is a concerto for cello and orchestra inspired by the cenotes of the Yucatán peninsula, which comprise an intricate, delicate system of subterranean rivers and caves that require careful conservation in order to protect their

biodiversity and natural beauty. Moreover, the cenotes of southeastern Mexico supply drinking water to the entire region.

Cenotes frequently contain openings of various sizes that admit rays of sunlight, in such a way that their effect on the water within these dark caves creates an aura of mystery – their beams of iridescent illumination doubtless reinforcing the profound spiritual connection experienced by the Mayans.

Cenotes also possess unique biodiversity. They provide shelter to endemic species of flora and fauna that cannot be found in any other place in the world, making habitat preservation indispensable for their conservancy. However, many of these ecosystems are under threat of destruction, largely due to the construction of residential units, tourist venues, and transportation infrastructure in the forested regions of the Mayan Riviera.

In the first movement, 'Vertical Light,' the sound of the orchestra and song of the cello evoke the subaquatic environment and hypnotic effects produced by rays of sunlight among the shadows prevalent inside cenotes. In the second movement, 'The Eye of the Jaguar,' the cello transforms subtly and metaphorically into the voice and body of this elegant feline, through diverse percussive sounds and passages of great virtuosity that dialogue with the orchestra with agility and skill. The third movement, 'Jade,' is a sonorous, intimate reflection on the meaning and history of these

subterranean rivers, where everything comes to life: the limestone eroded by the sands of time, the jade-green color and sound of the water, the cascades of reflected light, and even the humid aroma of the damp earth lining its banks.

It has also been my wish that toward the end of this movement, the music shall metaphorically represent the natural disaster caused by major human industries and their relentlessly predatory machinery through constant, yet diverse rhythmic motifs that are repeated insistently with a mechanical pulse that brings us to a final climax, dissolved by the hopeful song of the cello. Finally, in the fourth movement, 'Toh's Flight,' the music nimbly unfolds with absolute freedom, manifested as a sonorous presage of sorts, in hopes that the toh bird will not lose its place in the rainforest, despite the deforestation and ecological destruction that threaten its existence.

As a form of protest, *Dzonot* constitutes my way of calling for an end to our neglect of the challenge presented by the urgent need to preserve these ecosystems within the context of the ongoing climate crisis. This composition is dedicated to the cellist Alisa Weilerstein, and was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the direction of Gustavo Dudamel.

© Gabriela Ortiz

Interval (20 mins)



Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov © Public Domain

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)

Scheherazade
(1888) (42 mins)

Rimsky-Korsakov was himself the product of a union worthy of folklore: a marriage between peasant and nobility that defied convention. It is perhaps no surprise then, that he developed a lifelong fascination with folk tales and legends, both of his native Russia and lands further afield. Born into a family with aristocratic connections, Nikolai was one of a long line of Korsakovs destined for service. Many relatives held posts in government or the military, and that future seemed set before him. As an officer in the Russian Navy, he drew upon his early musical education and gradually turned toward composition, despite the absence of formal conservatory training.

Though musically educated from childhood, it was his introduction at eighteen to

Mily Balakirev that truly cultivated his talent. Guided from afar while at sea, he began his First Symphony, but isolation led his musical ambitions to wane. Returning to shore, renewed contact with Balakirev revived his creative energy and strengthened his commitment to composition.

Scheherazade is inspired by the tales of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, a vast and layered collection of Middle Eastern stories compiled over centuries by many authors, some known, some anonymous. In choosing this subject, Rimsky-Korsakov united several of his artistic passions; literature, fairy tale and folklore, and a fascination with distant, 'exotic' (read foreign) cultures.

At the heart of the legend lies a tale of despotism and of one woman's intelligence and courage.

Long ago, a powerful sultan discovered his wife's betrayal and, in fury, executed her. Soon after, he witnessed his brother's wife behaving just as faithlessly. Convinced that all women were untrustworthy, he vowed revenge. Each night he would marry a new bride; each morning she would be executed. Fear spread throughout the kingdom.

The vizier, desperate to save his daughters, urged them to flee. But his eldest, Scheherazade, refused. Instead, she chose to marry the sultan, determined to end his deadly vow.

For one thousand and one nights she captivated him with stories, each

left tantalisingly unfinished at dawn. Compelled to hear the conclusion, the sultan spared her life night after night. In time, her wisdom and imagination transformed him.

In his symphonic poem Rimsky-Korsakov does not narrate these events literally. Instead, he employs the tools of his craft: recurring themes, orchestral colour, and vivid musical imagery.

The Sultan is portrayed in the brass – heavy, commanding, ominous. Scheherazade herself appears in the solo violin, played by the leader – sinuous, enchanting, and luminous. Her theme returns at the opening of each movement like a sort of musical 'once upon a time' inviting us back into the story, like the Sultan night after night.

The suite unfolds in four movements, their titles suggestive rather than prescriptive:

1. *The Sea and Sinbad's Ship*
2. *The Kalendar Prince*
3. *The Young Prince and Princess*
4. *Festival at Baghdad & Shipwreck*

In *Scheherazade*, Rimsky-Korsakov yields his most powerful artistic weapons – storytelling and orchestration – which are inseparable in painting the tapestry of colour, and imagination, spun night after night.

© Linton Stephens

Marin Alsop – Principal Guest Conductor



Marin Alsop © Nancy Horowitz

One of the foremost conductors of our time, Marin Alsop is the first woman to serve as the head of major orchestras in the United States, South America, Austria, and Great Britain. She is internationally recognized for her innovative approach to programming and is the first and only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship.

Alsop serves as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony; Principal Guest Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra; Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra; and Chief Conductor of the Ravinia Festival. She made history as the first female conductor of the BBC's Last Night of the Proms. Her long-awaited Berlin Philharmonic debut was in 2025.

To nurture the careers of women conductors, Alsop founded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship to empower extraordinary women conductors through intensive coaching, mentoring, and

financial support. Today, all 36 award winners hold over 30 music director or chief conductor positions.

Alsop is a 2025-26 Carnegie Hall Perspectives artist, leading concerts by the Philharmonia Orchestra, and America at 250 programs with The Philadelphia Orchestra, National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic, and The Juilliard Orchestra. Other season highlights include opening The Philadelphia Orchestra's season with the world premiere of John Adams's *The Rock You Stand On*, dedicated to her; concerts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Dallas Symphony Orchestra; Houston Symphony; Washington National Opera; Polish National Radio Symphony; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra; and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.

In 2021, Alsop assumed the title of Music Director Laureate and OrchKids Founder of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. During her 14-year tenure as Music Director, she led the orchestra on its first European tour in 13 years, conducted more than two dozen world premieres, and founded the music education program OrchKids. She is the winner of the 2025 the Golden Baton Award from the League of American Orchestras.

Alisa Weilerstein – cello



Alisa Weilerstein © Marco Borggreve

Alisa Weilerstein is one of the foremost cellists of our time. Known for her consummate artistry, emotional investment, and rare interpretive depth, she was recognized with a MacArthur Fellowship in 2011. Her career is global in scope, taking her to leading international venues for solo recitals, chamber concerts, and concertos in collaboration with major composers, conductors, and orchestras worldwide. Deeply committed to expanding the cello repertoire, she is celebrated not only for her interpretations of the core literature, but also for bringing new works to life through a significant body of solo and concerto commissions. As *The New York Times* writes, "Weilerstein inhabits a piece fully," while *The Telegraph* calls her "truly a phenomenon."

Weilerstein's multi-season solo cello project *FRAGMENTS* reimagines the concert experience. Comprising six hour-long programs, the series interweaves Bach's six suites for unaccompanied cello with 27 newly commissioned works.

Presented in a multisensory production directed by Elkhanah Pulitzer, with responsive lighting and scenic elements, the project offers a fully immersive listening experience. Since its 2023 premiere in Toronto, *FRAGMENTS* has been presented at major venues including Carnegie Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Kennedy Center, Tanglewood, and Spoleto Festival USA. In 2025/26, Weilerstein gives the project's European, Czech, German, and UK premieres, including a residency at London's Southbank Centre.

A leading champion of contemporary music, Weilerstein has premiered major new concertos written for her by Pascal Dusapin, Matthias Pintscher, Joan Tower, Gabriela Ortiz, Thomas Larcher, and Richard Blackford. Highlights of the 2025–26 season include the UK premiere of Ortiz's *Dzonot*; performances of concertos by Elgar, Dvořák, Shostakovich, Unsuk Chin, Lutosławski, and Britten; and chamber music performances during her Southbank Centre residency.

Her Pentatone recording of Bach's complete works was a Billboard bestseller and a 2021 Gramophone Award nominee.

Born in 1982 into a musical family, Weilerstein made her professional debut at age 13 with The Cleveland Orchestra. She holds a degree in history from Columbia University and is a dedicated advocate for the type 1 diabetes community.

Get to know Alisa Weilerstein



Alisa Weilerstein @Luca Miglior

Gabriela Ortiz composed tonight's concerto for you. Has your interpretation of the piece changed the more you perform it?

It's such a pleasure and privilege to live with Gabriela Ortiz's wonderful concerto. It is so colorful and so complete – with real depth and variety. So of course it's impossible for any performance to remain the same as the one before it, and I expect to evolve with the piece as I continue to perform it.

Have you worked with Ortiz before? What is the process between composer and soloist for a work like this?

We did not work together before this collaboration. In this instance, it was fairly straightforward; we had a conversation before she wrote the concerto where she asked me if I had anything particularly in mind. I told her I wanted her to feel completely free to write exactly what she wanted and felt – and that I also enjoy challenge! I couldn't be happier with the

result. When the score arrived, I learnt it and then we worked together with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The chemistry between all of us was amazing, and we had a really wonderful time collaborating.

Are there any particular passages the audience should listen out for?

It's impossible to single out passages because the totality of her work is so engaging!

You're a frequent collaborator with the Philharmonia. What do you enjoy about performing with the Orchestra?

I love working with the Philharmonia. They are objectively a wonderful orchestra of course, but what I particularly enjoy about playing together is their sensitivity and flexibility. It really feels like playing chamber music in the best sense.

If you could give one piece of advice to the cello students in our audience, what would it be?

Listen to as many concerts as possible – take advantage of London as the incredible cultural center that it is. Also, practice performing as much as you practice by yourselves in the practice room. It's very important to know how to feel confident in front of an audience – and to know how step outside your comfort zone.

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 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.



Listen on SOUNDS

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Eugene Lee
Matthew Chin
Minhee Lee
Lulu Fuller
Soong Choo
Adrián Varela
Karin Tilch
Victoria Irish
Chair endowed by Gillian and Lionel Frumkin
Eunsley Park
Eleanor Wilkinson
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Jonathan Lee
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Arda Karakaya
Jane Kim

SECOND VIOLINS

Annabelle Meare

The Principal Second Violin
Chair is endowed by Nick and Camilla Bishop
Fiona Cornall
Nuno Carapina
The No. 3 Second Violin chair is endowed anonymously
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Julian Milone
Susan Hedger
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June Scott
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Bruce Liu plays Ravel

*The outstanding Canadian
pianist plays Ravel's jazz-
inflected Piano Concerto in G*

Sun 12 Apr, 3pm

**Santtu conducts a
Strauss extravaganza**

*A recreation of a 1947 concert
originally conducted by Strauss
himself*

Thu 4 Jun, 7.30pm

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