

**Concert programme**

# Phil har monic nia



**Bedford Season 2025/26**

# Programme notes

## Friday 10 April

### Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)

**Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*** (1945)  
(16 mins)

In June 1945, shortly after the surrender of Germany, Benjamin Britten's new opera *Peter Grimes* was premiered at Sadler's Wells Theatre to universal acclaim. *The Times* reported that in honour of the occasion, "Gallery oldtimers had set up their camp stools in ticket queues 24 hours in advance. Ecstatic music-lovers kept throwing bouquets at the cast and composer until the historic old stage was carpeted with flowers." The young composer's gripping depiction of the proud, unstable and rough fisherman Peter Grimes, persecuted and driven to suicide by the vicious gossips of his native town, secured his reputation in his home country.

For all that the vocal characterisation of Peter and the other principals was crucial to its success, Britten also took particular care over the opera's instrumental sections, which covered scene changes and depicted the shifting moods and characters of the Borough. Shortly after the premiere of *Grimes*, he extracted four of the six instrumental interludes from the opera, reordered them, and performed them as 'Four Sea Interludes' at the Cheltenham Festival. He also provided each of them with a title: 'Dawn' (from Act I), 'Sunday morning' (Act II), 'Moonlight' (Act III) and 'Storm' (a return to Act I). Annotations in Britten's manuscript suggest further details of each: the slow waves of 'Dawn'; waves, wind and spray in 'Storm'; and the specific image of "boats in river at anchor" for 'Moonlight'. The movement sequence also bears a striking resemblance to the orchestral suite *The Sea* by Britten's teacher and friend Frank Bridge:

Seascape – Sea-foam – Moonlight – Storm. Bridge had died in 1941. Perhaps these Interludes were a means of Britten offering a memorial tribute to his beloved mentor.

### Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

**Piano Concerto in G** (1931)  
(23 mins)

**Allegramente**  
**Adagio assai**  
**Presto**

In April 1919, the virtuoso pianist Marguerite Long gave the first performance of Ravel's elegant suite *Le tombeau de Couperin* in Paris. It was the latest of a string of vivid, virtuosic piano pieces that Ravel had composed – but ten years after this impressive new work, he still hadn't written any other big works for the keyboard. And then, all of a sudden, two came along at once.

The Piano Concerto in G major is, technically, the first of these two new pieces: Ravel claimed to have been thinking about it since 1928 (the year in which he composed his famous *Boléro*), and later admitted that the theme of the first movement had come to him when he was riding the Oxford to London train that year! But in early 1929 he was commissioned by the German pianist Paul Wittgenstein to write a Concerto for Left Hand, and put his original Concerto to one side to meet Wittgenstein's deadline. So it was only on 14 January 1932 that the Concerto in G was finally finished and premiered in Paris, conducted by Ravel and with Marguerite Long – its dedicatee – at the piano.

This is a brilliant kaleidoscope of a work, the orchestra pinging with energy in its jittery, opening bars before the languorous entry of the solo pianist. The first movement switches effortlessly from high excitement to magical moments of stillness, melancholy and lyricism, full of little stepout solos from the ensemble. Crucially, Ravel didn't believe that you could meaningfully 'blend' a piano into an orchestral texture, so he doesn't even try: this is all about the pianist stepping to the fore to showcase virtuosic writing against the rainbow of sounds provided by other players. Mozart and Bach are in the mix here, as is Ravel's fellow countryman Camille Saint-Saëns, and – of course – jazz music. ("What is being written today without the influence of jazz?", he told a journalist who asked him about his inspiration.)

A gently pensive, singing slow movement follows, driven by the pulsing of the piano's left hand as it invites one wind player after another to join the song. And we return to high-octane scampering and witty percussive bangs for the zippy finale. "What is my opinion of this Concerto?", Ravel mused shortly after its premiere. "A rather good one... I think that I found what I was looking for. Or rather, not entirely – let's not exaggerate: you never realised exactly what you are looking for. Fortunately, by the way... If some day I think that I have succeeded, I'll be finished."

Interval (20 mins)

## Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)

**Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64** (1888)  
(45 mins)

**Andante – Allegro con anima**

**Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza**

**Valse. Allegro moderato**

**Finale. Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace –  
Meno mosso**

Whilst some composers (like Ravel) seem to write musical works at a kind of emotional arm's length, Tchaikovsky's music is often read as heart-on-sleeve autobiography. The turbulence of his romantic life (a doomed marriage in 1877 as an attempt to curb gossip about his homosexuality) and his endless poor health is seemingly depicted in works such as the Fifth Symphony, which Tchaikovsky once described as "a complete resignation before fate".

For some years – from about 1885 if not earlier – Tchaikovsky had been grappling with the idea of writing an orchestral piece on the subject of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Although this did eventually bear fruit in late 1888, sketches from a year earlier suggest the first thoughts that the composer had about his new symphony were intimately tied up with the *Hamlet* story, even though the two eventually emerged as separate works. He composed the majority of the Symphony between May and August 1888, and a partial (private) programme survives for the first movement. In it, he describes the mournful opening clarinet motto as "Total submission before Fate – or, what is the same thing, the inscrutable design of Providence". The faster section falls into two parts, briefly explained: "1. Murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against... XXX" and "2. Shall I cast myself into the embrace of faith?". It is certainly possible to map this onto the restless urgency and later, tender lyricism

of this opening Allegro, although the composer gives us no more specific details as to how the scenario might end: the grumbling descent into stillness at the close of the movement suggests only continued uncertainty. There is some consolation in the lush Andante which follows, leading us gently to major keys and soaring strings – but these are brutally interrupted by the fate motto from the Symphony’s opening, now raucous on trumpets. A lilting waltz comes next, the motto creeping in at the very close; and only in the finale do we finally reach a hard-won sense of closure, fate reworked in a major key with a new sense of nobility and purpose.

Meanwhile in 1887, Tchaikovsky had been on his first major conducting tour around Europe. In early 1888 he performed in Hamburg, and was approached by the 81-year-old Theodor Avé-Lallement, a vigorous and influential figure in the city’s musical life who numbered Brahms among his earlier protégés. Avé-Lallement was delighted to meet Tchaikovsky but told him without embarrassment that he thought the Russian’s music was too noisy and used too much percussion. He begged Tchaikovsky to move to Germany, “where classical tradition and conditions of the highest culture would quite certainly free me from my shortcomings,” as Tchaikovsky later recorded. He subsequently dedicated the Fifth Symphony to Avé-Lallement, as a mark of respect and friendship despite their aesthetic differences – though it’s perhaps not an accident that this piece involves only a single percussionist, playing timpani and nothing else.

*Programme notes by Katy Hamilton*

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# Ryan Bancroft

## Conductor



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Raised in Los Angeles, conductor Ryan Bancroft regularly appears with the world's leading orchestras. Since September 2021 Bancroft has been Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Following his first visit to work with the Tapiola Sinfonietta in Finland Bancroft was invited to become their Artist-in-Association from the 21/22 season onwards. In 2021, Bancroft was announced as Chief Conductor Designate of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, and took up the Chief Conductor position in September 2023. After opening his tenure as Chief Conductor in Stockholm with the orchestra's first performance of Sven-David Sandström's *The High Mass* in 2023, Bancroft's first two seasons have included performances of Mahler and Bruckner symphonies alongside world premieres by Chrichan Larson and Zacharias Wolfe, whilst working with renowned soloists including Leif Ove Andsnes, Maxim Vengerov and Víkingur Ólafsson.

Bancroft returned to Los Angeles to make his debut at the Hollywood Bowl Festival in August 2023, and has since become a regular with the LA Philharmonic. In the 25/26 season he returns to the Walt Disney Concert Hall in their subscription series, to follow on from his critically acclaimed debut at the venue in April 2025. Recent successful debuts include

the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco and Dallas Symphony Orchestras. He has close relationships in Canada with the Toronto Symphony and National Arts Centre, Ottawa.

In the 25/26 season, Bancroft will make major debuts with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican with Clara-Jumi Kang, and with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo with Thomas Hampson. He will also continue his relationships with orchestras such as the Philharmonia, who he appears with each season at their Royal Festival Hall series, the NDR Elbphilharmonieorchester, and the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse. He has led the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin at the Berlin Philharmonie, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Orquesta Sinfónica Castilla y León.

Since his success at the prestigious Malko Competition for Young Conductors in 2018, where he won both First Prize and Audience Prize, Bancroft has conducted a number of other leading European orchestras including the BBC Symphony, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Danish National Symphony. He studied trumpet at the California Institute of the Arts, and then received an MMus in orchestral conducting from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He continued conducting studies in the Netherlands and is a graduate of the prestigious Nationale Master Orkestdirectie run jointly by the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague.

# Bruce Liu

## Piano



© Christoph Koestlin

First Prize winner of the 18th International Chopin Piano Competition 2021 in Warsaw, Bruce Liu has emerged as one of the most compelling pianists of his generation – a musician praised not only for his dazzling technique, but for his curiosity and artistry that combines “nimble versatility” (*New York Times*) and “playing of breathtaking beauty” (*BBC Music Magazine*).

High in demand, he recently performed with many of the world’s finest ensembles including the London Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Wiener Symphoniker, with conductors including Manfred Honeck, Paavo Järvi, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Antonio Pappano, Lahav Shani, and Dalia Stasevska.

In summer 2025, Liu made his anticipated BBC Proms debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Chicago Symphony Orchestra with Marin Alsop at Ravinia, and goes on European tours with the NCPA Orchestra and Myung-Whun Chung, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with Vasily Petrenko.

Highlights of Liu’s 2025/2026 season include several major international tours including Japan with Bavarian State Opera Orchestra and Vladimir Jurowski, China with the Staatskapelle Dresden and Daniele Gatti, and Germany, Austria, Belgium and Paris with the City of

Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Kazuki Yamada. As a spotlight artist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Liu appears multiple times in the season to collaborate with Franz Welser-Möst and Gustavo Gimeno.

As an active recitalist, Liu has performed at major concert halls such as the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall, and Philharmonie de Paris. In 2025/26, he gives recital debuts at the Berliner Philharmonie and Lyon Opera House, and returns to the Carnegie Hall, Wiener Musikverein and major venues in Italy and Japan. He appears at various international festivals, including Edinburgh, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Verbier, La Roque-d’Anthéron, Rheingau, Aspen and Tanglewood Music Festivals.

An exclusive recording artist with Deutsche Grammophon, Liu was awarded Opus Klassik’s ‘Young Talent of the Year’ prize 2024 for his debut studio album *Waves*. His second studio album, featuring Tchaikovsky’s *Seasons*, was released in November 2024 receiving rave reviews such as “superbly polished, but wonderfully free of mannerisms, giving these charming salon pieces the respect and sincerity they deserve” (*The Guardian*).

Born in Paris and raised in Montréal, Bruce Liu’s artistry reflects his multicultural heritage - blending European refinement, North American dynamism, and the long tradition of Chinese culture. He studied with Richard Raymond and Dang Thai Son.