

Philharmonia

2026/27 season

Philharmonia

**Bruckner 4
with
Esa-Pekka
Salonen**

Sunday 4 October 2026
Royal Festival Hall

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In a nutshell...

This afternoon, we journey to Austria – where both pieces we hear today were composed and premiered.

Beethoven composed his Third Piano Concerto as he was experiencing the torment of turning deaf. If you listen carefully, you might hear the march-like motifs in the opening movement, suggesting the influence of the French Revolution on the work. Whatever the inspiration, the concerto was supposedly still unfinished at the time of its premiere! However, Beethoven was a talented pianist as well as a composer – he performed the solo part himself and was able to improvise any missing sections mid-performance.

Having grown up in Austria himself, it's not surprising that the scenic, forest-filled Austrian landscapes were Bruckner's inspiration for his 4th Symphony. Listen out for the hunting-like horn call that opens the opening melody.

You might be surprised to learn that this piece was written for an orchestra similar in size to the one Beethoven wrote for, despite Bruckner having access to a wider range of instruments. Unlike Beethoven, however, Bruckner didn't start composing seriously until he was in his late thirties and was mostly self-taught.

Welcome to this afternoon's concert

Bruckner 4 with Esa-Pekka Salonen

Sunday 4 October 2026, 3pm
Royal Festival Hall

Esa-Pekka Salonen – conductor
Leif Ove Andsnes – piano

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 3
(35 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

BRUCKNER Symphony No. 4, 'Romantic'
(70 mins)

This performance finishes at
approximately 5.20pm

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Programme notes



Ludwig van Beethoven by Joseph Karl Stieler

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37
(c.1800)
(35 mins)

Allegro con brio
Largo
Rondo: Allegro

This concerto represents a major turning point in Beethoven's career. Some of its material dates from the late 1790s. Otherwise, it was effectively the composer's first large-scale orchestral creation of the nineteenth century.

Even more significant than the calendar date is the concerto's pivotal position in the composer's own life story. Beethoven was at work on the piece as he began to realise that the problems with his hearing weren't going to improve – that they were, in fact, likely to lead to complete deafness.

That realisation had a cataclysmic effect on Beethoven as a person and shot entirely new sentiments and concepts into his music, starting with this piece. One of the most obvious implications of his impending deafness was his potential inability to perform and improvise on stage, as a pianist, with an orchestra.

Beethoven got wise to that new reality in this piece. The solo piano part in the third concerto is more clearly defined, on the page, than in its predecessors. The soloist takes on a more individual, imposing and energetic role. Cadenzas – the passages in which the soloist would traditionally improvise to demonstrate their prowess – are written out in full, instructions for future pianists to obey to the letter long after Beethoven himself could no longer provide demonstrations.

The pianist's more controlling role is also felt in the first movement's coda - its last word. Here, the soloist plays along with the orchestra, a strikingly presumptuous act with only one tentative precedent in a concerto by Mozart. That Mozart concerto (No. 24, K. 491) looms over many aspects of Beethoven's No. 3. Both use the tempestuous key of C minor; both use a principal tune based on the interval of a third.

Still, the heroic levels of conflict and tension in Beethoven's score were entirely new. Here, the piano initiates a stand off against the orchestra in a manner unusual even for this composer. Major keys tussle with minor ones throughout the opening

movement, marked 'Allegro con brio' ('fast and with spirit').

In the slow middle movement, Beethoven reaches for expressive tools that look forward to the full flowering of Romanticism. The music's meditative qualities conjure a picture of the composer clinging on dearly to music's beauty, as if he knew he'd soon be unable to hear it.

Beethoven certainly knew that his audience in 1803 Vienna expected a gregarious final flourish. The main tune of the finale – heard initially on the piano, before transferring immediately to the oboe – sounds impish and witty but actually stretches over a whole eight bars. It is the longest tune in any Beethoven concerto – fitting for a score that changed the dimensions of the genre.

Programme note by Andrew Mellor



Anton Bruckner by Josef Büche

Anton Bruckner (1824 – 1896)

Symphony No. 4 in E flat major, 'Romantic'
(1878-80, ed Leopold Novak)
(70 mins)

Bewegt, nicht zu schnell
Andante, quasi Allegretto
Scherzo: Bewegt – Trio: Nicht zu schnell
Keinesfalls schleppend – Scherzo
Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell

There's a tendency to portray Bruckner as an outsider in the Romantic Era – an unworldly mystic, creator of 'cathedrals in sound', whose music only superficially resembles other 'true' romantics like Wagner or Schubert. But Bruckner's symphonies are all products of the Romantic Age, however much they may owe to the counterpoint of Palestrina and Bach, or to the architecture of the splendid cathedrals in which Bruckner (a brilliant organist and a fervent Roman Catholic)

worked and found emotional refuge. And the Fourth Symphony actually came into the world with the title 'Romantic': at the first performance the audience was issued with a substantial programme note (written by one of his leading advocates) claiming to outline the kind of images Bruckner had in mind. In fact, Bruckner quickly took against this effusive essay, probably rightly. And yet for many listeners the Fourth Symphony does have a special power to evoke moods or mental pictures, especially the kind of pictures associated with German (or Austro-German) romantic art and literature, and with the rural Upper Austrian landscapes where Bruckner grew up.

Nowhere is that truer than in the symphony's breath-taking opening. Through quietly rustling strings a solo horn calls softly, as though from an immense distance. This is surely music of the great Austrian and German forests, recalling Weber's nationalist classic *Der Freischütz* or the so-called 'Forest Murmurs' from Wagner's *Siegfried*. At the same time this opening and its continuation displays Bruckner's new-found confidence as a symphonist. From the horn theme, through the long following crescendo (with its echoes of the famous Gounod-Bach *Ave Maria*) to the arrival of the next theme, *fortissimo*, on heavy brass, the music flows forward like a great river – like the Danube. perhaps, which flows past Bruckner's first home city, Linz. As the movement unfolds, the horn theme returns twice in its original form: about

two-thirds of the way through, touchingly embellished by flute, and the very end of the movement, where it sounds out thrillingly on massed horns.

Bruckner's slow movements tend to be profound, songful meditations, but this one has more of the character of a nocturnal processional, magical, thoughtful, at times almost eerie. Once again, we are amongst trees, but this is no cosy English woodland, rather a big Central European forest in which it's possible to see considerable distances between the trunks of high-arching trees, giving even the most resolute walkers the impression that they're hardly moving at all. There are moments of mesmerising stillness, in which woodwinds and horns call to each other like distant birds, an atmosphere beautifully conveyed by the German word *Waldeinsamkeit*: the sense of solitude that comes uniquely in spacious woodlands. Eventually this movement rouses itself, building gradually to a magnificent, Wagnerian climax with resplendent brass and cascading strings. But the splendour fades, leaving just the bare march rhythm on timpani with lamenting phrases on horn, viola and clarinet: now there's a mysterious sense of loss.

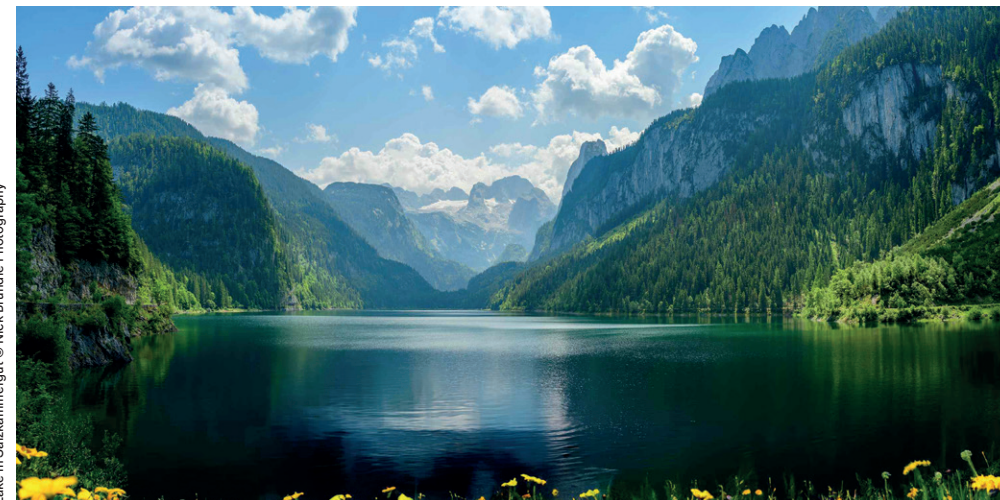
The bracing, sunlit Scherzo is sometimes nicknamed 'The Hunt', but there's something elemental, almost cosmic about this music, as though the horses were careering across the skies rather than pounding solid earth. Then the central Trio section offers rest and recuperation: a cosy, rustic slow *Ländler* (country cousin of the

sophisticated Viennese waltz) unwinds on woodwind, then on violins. (One can almost taste the local wine.) The Scherzo is then heard again, in full, after which begins the longest and most exploratory of the four movements, the Finale.

Getting the Finale right caused Bruckner a lot of trouble. There were two discarded attempts, and there is evidence that he wasn't entirely satisfied with his third version even after he'd revised it in 1880. For some, and especially for those hearing the symphony for the first time, the formal cohesion can be hard to make out. Few would deny that there are splendid ideas, but there are also those sudden, abrupt discontinuities, after which it can often seem that Bruckner has momentarily lost

his way. But then Bruckner is aiming for something radically new here: not a fast classical finale, but a huge summing up that contrasts dramatic assertion with moments of uncertainty or with meditative calm. And as with meditation, patience is ultimately rewarded. The final long crescendo begins in minor-key darkness with the first theme sounding softly through more shimmering strings. It then rises steadily to one of Bruckner's most thrilling symphonic summations, ends in a blaze of major-key glory, the symphony's opening theme now sounding out triumphantly on horns. We have travelled far, but we have also come full circle. Somehow, looking back, it all seems to make sense.

Programme note by Stephen Johnson



Lake in Salzkammergut © Nick Brundle Photography

Get to know Leif Ove Andsnes



Leif Ove Andsnes ©Helge Hansen

What draws you to Beethoven's 3rd Piano concerto?

The solo cadenza of the first movement is a highlight: dramatic, and experiments with sound, like those long trills that will also occur so much in his later piano music.

And then there is the haunting end of the first movement, with the orchestra entering with the open-string chords and the silent heartbeat motif in the timpani. It is one of those places I remember hearing as a child and thinking: "Wow, this is something else."

Then suddenly the stillness, beauty and space of the second movement, in E major – so very far from the C minor of the first. Magical.

How would you describe your relationship with Beethoven and his music?

He feels essential in my life. Sometimes, when I have been in a darker or uncertain place, I have literally felt that Beethoven's music takes my hand and holds on to it.

You regularly perform as a chamber musician as well as a soloist. How does preparing for a concerto differ from a chamber concert?

Less than one might think. Obviously, I might have to project more in a hall when playing with 50 or 70 orchestra members than when playing in a duo with one partner. But both are about give and take.

You have to give a clear voice to your own part, but listen very attentively to your surroundings too. There are many places in concertos where the soloist is accompanying different groups or individual players in the orchestra.

The nature of a concerto might sometimes be more of a virtuoso display than in most chamber music, but most pianists would probably tell you that playing a Beethoven violin sonata, like the 'Kreutzer', can be as demanding as playing any of the concertos.

If you didn't play piano, which instrument would you choose and why?

I adore the violin, but I think I would have to choose singing. Somehow, using your own voice feels like the most natural of all forms of musical expression. And when it works, nothing moves me more.

*Read the full Q&A on our website:
philharmonia.co.uk*

About the Philharmonia

Founded in 1945, the Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras.

Finnish 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 figures who have shaped the renowned Philharmonia sound over eight decades.

The Orchestra has premiered works by Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Kaija Saariaho, Errollyn Wallen, Laufey and many others, and performs with many of the world's most admired soloists. The Philharmonia thrives on creative collaborations: in the 2026/27 season, pianist Nobuyuki Tsujii and cellist Sol Gabetta are Featured Artists. The Philharmonia's Emerging Artists Programme nurtures and develops the next generation of instrumentalists and composers, with a focus on increasing diversity within the classical music industry.

The Philharmonia is resident at the Southbank Centre in the heart of London, and also holds residencies in Basingstoke, Bedford, Canterbury and Leicester, at Garsington Opera and at the Three Choirs Festival. In each of these residencies, the Orchestra is deeply embedded in the community. Projects with primary and secondary schools, children in foster care,

people living with dementia and their carers, young people learning instruments, and adults who face barriers to experiencing the arts, all testify to the many ways music enriches our lives.

The Philharmonia tours extensively throughout Europe and has performed in China, Colombia, Japan and the United States. In October 2025 the Orchestra celebrated its 80th birthday with a major US tour culminating in two performances at Carnegie Hall. In 2024, the Philharmonia became the first major international symphony orchestra to perform in Mauritius.

The Philharmonia is known for embracing innovative technology. The Orchestra's recordings include benchmark LPs, more than 150 film and videogame soundtracks, and streamed performances. The Philharmonia Records label was established in 2023 and has released live recordings of major works by Strauss, Mahler, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, with Santtu at the helm. Its recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is travelling through interstellar space on board the Voyager spacecraft, and its immersive installations and virtual reality (VR) experiences have introduced many thousands of people to orchestral music.

The Philharmonia is a registered charity. It is proud to be supported by Arts Council England and grateful to the many generous individuals, businesses, trusts and foundations who make up its family of supporters.

Esa-Pekka Salonen – conductor



Esa-Pekka Salonen © Josh S Rose

Esa-Pekka Salonen is renowned as both a composer and conductor. He is the Creative Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and will assume the titles of Creativity and Innovation Chair of the Philharmonie de Paris and Principal Conductor of the Orchestre de Paris in 2027–28. He is the Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, LA Phil, and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, all of which he has led as Music Director or Principal Conductor, and formerly served as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony. He is the founder and director of the Colburn School's Negaunee Conducting Program, which he directs as a member of the faculty. Salonen co-founded, and until 2018 served as the Artistic Director of, the annual Baltic Sea Festival.

In his first season as Creative Director of the LA Phil, Salonen will lead four weeks of programming and a season-long festival, 'Rituals'; premiere new projects with Yuval Sharon and Reifik Anadol; and present the United States premiere of his critically-

acclaimed collaboration with Peter Sellars, *One Morning Turns Into An Eternity*. Other conducting highlights include a series of season-opening dates with the Vienna Philharmonic; two weeks of programming with the Orchestre de Paris in anticipation of his two Paris titles; a tour with the Philharmonia Orchestra; and concerts with the Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic.

Following last season's premiere of his acclaimed Horn Concerto and a new work for violin and cello, *Drømmelogikk*, Salonen conducts his own *Tiu* and *Nyx* this season. His *Helix*, Cello Concerto, and *kīnēma* will also be performed around the world.

Salonen also has an extensive recording career for both his conductor and composer credits. Recent releases include the GRAMMY® Award-winning (Best Opera Recording) world premiere recording of Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* on Deutsche Grammophon, a GRAMMY® nominated recording of Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*, and a Pentatone release of Bartók's three piano concertos with Pierre-Laurent Aimard. His concertos for piano (composed for Yefim Bronfman), violin (for Leila Josefowicz, featured in an ad campaign for the Apple iPad), and cello (for Yo-Yo Ma) all appear on recordings conducted by Salonen himself.

Leif Ove Andsnes – piano



Leif Ove Andsnes © Helge Hansen

Leif Ove Andsnes is "a pianist of magisterial elegance, power, and insight" (The New York Times). With his commanding technique and searching interpretations, the celebrated Norwegian pianist has won acclaim worldwide, playing concertos and recitals in the world's leading concert halls and with its foremost orchestras, while building an esteemed and extensive discography.

Highlights of Andsnes's 2026–27 season include the prestigious Berlin Philharmonic Europakonzert, broadcast worldwide from Turku, Finland, under Chief Conductor Kirill Petrenko; a residency with the Hamburg NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra; serving as Artist-in-Residence at the 75th Bergen International Festival; and a 16-city Beethoven recital tour, including an appearance in the New York Philharmonic's 'Artist Spotlight' series. In addition to the Berlin Philharmonic Europakonzert, Andsnes joins the orchestra for performances in the Berlin Philharmonie and on tour. For his NDR Elbphilharmonie residency, Andsnes performs Brahms's Second Piano Concerto with Music Director

Alan Gilbert in Hamburg, Budapest, and Vienna, and premieres Missy Mazzoli's new piano concerto at the 'Elbphilharmonie Visions' festival. The multifaceted residency also features Britten's Piano Concerto with Tabita Berglund, a solo recital of Beethoven's final three piano sonatas, and chamber music with NDR musicians. Andsnes's Elbphilharmonie Beethoven recital anchors a spring 2027 tour marking the 200th anniversary of the composer's death. Elsewhere in the season, Andsnes reunites with Harding for the North American premiere of Mazzoli's concerto with the New York Philharmonic, and Brahms's Second with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, performs the Britten Piano Concerto with both the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under Elim Chan and Detroit Symphony Orchestra under Tabita Berglund, and tours Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia.

The pianist's discography has been recognized with eleven GRAMMY® nominations, seven Gramophone Awards, BBC Music Magazine's 'Recording of the Year Award,' and numerous other international honors. Andsnes is also the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist Award, Gilmore Artist Award, Norway's Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav, and the prestigious Peer Gynt Prize.

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Philharmonia



2026/27 season highlights

**Tchaikovsky Piano
Concerto No. 1 with
Seong-Jin Cho**

Thu 22 Oct, 7.30pm

Paired with Borodin
and Shostakovich

**Dvořák Violin Concerto
with James Ehnes**

Thu 29 Oct, 7.30pm

A programme full of
irresistible energy

**Mendelssohn Violin
Concerto with Nicola
Benedetti**

Sun 1 Nov, 3pm

Plus Schumann's 'Rhenish'
Symphony

**Shostakovich Piano
Concerto No. 2
with Nobu**

Thu 5 Nov, 7.30pm

See our Featured Artist live

**Manfred Honeck
and Emanuel Ax**

Thu 12 Nov, 7.30pm

Experience one of Mozart's
greatest piano concertos

**Mahler 6 with
Marin Alsop**

Thu 19 Nov, 7.30pm

Violinist Esther Yoo joins
in music by Bernstein

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