

Philharmonia

2026/27 season

Philharmonia

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The Philharmonia is supported by the Philharmonia Orchestra in Bedford Trust. To find out more about the endowment, and how you can support and play a part in its work, contact development@philharmonia.co.uk



Welcome to the Philharmonia Orchestra's 2026/27 season at the Bedford Corn Exchange. Our longest-standing residency, it is so wonderful to return here each year and to see so many familiar faces – as well as new ones – come and support our musicians at our concerts.

We have quite the season in store for you this coming year. I'm excited to see our Principal Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali conduct Shostakovich's 11th Symphony in October. This music is right up Santtu's street and with 100 musicians on stage, it will absolutely pack a punch!

We welcome many frequent collaborators to the Corn Exchange stage, including pianist Seong-Jin Cho, guitar superstar Sean Shibe, and conductor Ryan Bancroft, who joins us for Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony as part of our concert series honouring 200 years since Beethoven's death.

You'll hear a range of remarkable repertoire, too. Vaughan Williams's beloved *The Lark Ascending* in the hands of violinist Clara-Jumi Kang is the perfect way to ease into spring. Or if you're looking for something a bit sunnier, Mendelssohn's sprightly 'Italian' Symphony closes our season in April. Plus, a rare chance to see the guitar front and centre in Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*.

Thank you to our audiences in Bedford – your unwavering commitment to our concerts makes us proud to be Bedford's resident orchestra. If you want to get to know the Orchestra better, you can join the Philharmonia family by becoming a Friend and enjoy benefits like access to Open Rehearsals, discounts on tickets and opportunities to meet the players.

Whether you come to every concert each season, or tonight is your very first experience of live orchestral music, thank you for joining us and I hope you enjoy your evening.

With my best wishes,



© Tommy Gai-Ken Wan

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thorben".

Thorben Dittes
Chief Executive

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About the Philharmonia



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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 Orchestra returned in February 2026 with a 50-piece orchestra for a Festival featuring concerts of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

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.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)

Fantasy Overture, Romeo and Juliet

(1868, rev. 1880) (19 mins)

Adagio – Allegro molto

Largo

Molto vivace

Allegro con fuoco

Tchaikovsky's 'Fantasy Overture', *Romeo and Juliet*, was written at the suggestion of Balakirev, one of the Russian 'Five' nationalist composers. The famous story of this "pair of star-cross'd lovers" proved irresistible to Tchaikovsky, who was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare's plays; his output also included music inspired by *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*.

Balakirev severely criticised the first draft of the piece, and Tchaikovsky made many of the suggested revisions, but the premiere, conducted in 1870 by Nikolai Rubinstein, was overshadowed by the controversy of a court case surrounding Rubinstein and a female student. Tchaikovsky wrote of the occasion: "After the concert we dined... No one said a single word to me about the overture the whole evening. And yet I yearned so for appreciation and kindness." Balakirev finally approved Tchaikovsky's 1880 version, heard on this programme.

The work opens with mysterious woodwind writing, Tchaikovsky adding harp and upper woodwinds to create a gleaming, nocturnal atmosphere. Pizzicato (plucked) strings bring an injection of energy, and the orchestral texture opens out with the addition of brass and deeper, bowed strings. The scene is set, and Tchaikovsky picks up the pace, creating further drama with ominous timpani. The different orchestral sections tussle, leading into an agitated main theme in which alternating orchestral sections

seem to evoke the feuding families of Montague and Capulet. The tension softens, yielding one of the most beautiful love themes ever written: an exquisitely shaped melody, brimming with longing. Even the critical Balakirev could not deny the power of this ravishing theme, declaring to Tchaikovsky: "I play it often, and I want very much to hug you for it".

But of course, "the course of true love never did run smooth" (as Shakespeare wrote in a happier play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and the blissful theme gives way to heightened drama. The love theme is reprised to ecstatic effect, before Tchaikovsky masterfully reintroduces the music of conflict, building to a devastating conclusion. The lovers are dead, but the exquisite serenity of Tchaikovsky's coda transcends the tragedy to remind us that love never dies.

Programme note by Joanna Wyld

Edvard Grieg (1843 – 1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 (1868)
(30 mins)

Allegro molto moderato

Adagio

Allegro moderato molto e marcato

Aged fifteen, the young Edvard Grieg was sent to Leipzig to be taught the art of writing music, German-style. But the Leipzig lessons left him cold. Later in Copenhagen, Grieg met fellow Norwegian Richard Nordraak, who introduced him to folk songs and national dances from back home. Next, Grieg encountered the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, who urged his young colleague to explore his roots.

Grieg was awakened to his musical destiny: “to find expression for something that lay thousands of miles from Leipzig and its atmosphere”. By that, Grieg meant Norway’s dramatic west coast, where the country dissolves into North Sea and slender fjords protrude inland between colossal mountainous peaks. Grieg mostly wrote his own tunes, he but cast them in the temperament and harmonic mood of the folk music of this area, capturing the atmosphere of a small country “full of mystery and promise” that showed little interest in industrialization.

Grieg didn’t shun German traditions altogether. Writing his Piano Concerto while holidaying in the Danish countryside in 1868, Grieg took his cue from the German romantic Robert Schumann. “Each tempo is indelibly imprinted on my soul,” Grieg said of Schumann’s own Piano Concerto, which captured the composer’s love for his musician wife just as the recently married Grieg’s did. In Schumann’s concerto, Grieg also found the inspiration behind his own work’s opening flourish and the contrast between the first movement’s perky initial melody and song-like secondary one.

That Norwegian tenderness, however, is all Grieg’s. He communicates it through direct triadic harmonies and song-like themes built of an almost naïve simplicity. The concerto’s very first musical idea, enshrined in that opening piano flourish, is built on a descending third – an interval that underpins Norwegian folk music. Its final movement is Grieg’s personal homage to the Halling, a swift Norwegian fling. In the aching beauty of the slow movement, Grieg gets closest to the innocence of spirit and open vistas he was trying to convey.

A year after Edmund Neupert gave the concerto’s first performance in Copenhagen on 3 April 1869, Grieg had the chance to show the score to Franz

Liszt. Liszt admired the touch of melancholy Grieg brought to the grand, hymn-like repeat of the secondary tune that closes the piece. When the orchestra plays the slowed-down tune for the second time, just after the pianist hammers it out on ground-shaking chords, the third note is changed – suddenly dropped a semitone, from G sharp to G natural. It re-tints the majestic tune with a minor key, lending it a dignified reticence that speaks so much of Norway and its people.

Programme note by Andrew Mellor

Interval (20 mins)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 (1804-08)
(37 mins)

Allegro con brio
Andante con moto
Scherzo (Allegro) – Trio
Allegro

Beethoven had begun sketches for what would become his Fifth Symphony shortly after completing the Third, the ‘Eroica’, in 1804. Its gestation would be relatively long; the Fourth Symphony was begun and finished before Beethoven returned to No. 5, which was pronounced by E.T.A. Hoffmann to be “one of the most important works of the age”.

The famous opening motif is not melodic, but is characterised by its strong rhythm (three repeated notes descending to an emphatic lower note), so powerful and memorable that it becomes the basis for an entire movement, germinating from this initial seed and growing organically into a full-scale argument. The motif has come to be associated with the image of Fate

knocking at the door; the audacity of beginning a symphony in this way shows Beethoven at his most boldly innovative. Moments of lyricism, such as a poignant oboe solo, do little to diminish the prevailing mood of tension and urgency.

Following this uncompromising muscularity comes an Andante in which Beethoven takes variation form to new heights, with exquisite inventiveness and fluidity, as well as vibrant contrast in the form of a proud, military theme – a reminder of the war-torn, revolutionary years during which the work was composed.

The rhythm of the first movement's 'Fate' motif is audible in the Scherzo, the mysterious opening of which Beethoven worked at for some time, and with some difficulty. After a lively, intricate Trio, the reprise of the Scherzo undergoes an extraordinary transformation, fading almost to nothingness, a repeatedly drummed C underpinning the shift from C minor to C major, heralding the finale, into which the music flows without a break. The effect is stunning: into an eerie, shadowy world suddenly shines a blaze of dazzling light.

Beethoven was not the first composer to shift the weight of a symphony from first movement to last, as he does here: Mozart had already set that precedent in his 'Jupiter', Symphony, No. 41. Yet Beethoven's instrumentation was new, with the addition of piccolo and three trombones, and further prominent use of timpani. Beethoven developed the blurring of boundaries and cross-referencing he had used in his Fourth Symphony by unifying the Fifth's movements; he refers back to the ghostly rendition of the Scherzo just before the finale's final section, which concludes with a vitality that is nothing short of overwhelming.

The Philharmonia dedicates this concert to the memory of Michael Blackledge (1932-2026). Michael was the inspiration and founder of the Orchestra's residency in Bedford over 30 years ago.

Programme note by Joanna Wýld

Delyana Lazarova – conductor



© Marco Borggreve

As a conductor, Delyana Lazarova sees herself as a musician among musicians. Collaboration, openness and sensitivity to the unique sound and character of each orchestra form the foundation of her work, always in service of the music. Orchestras around the world value her ability to communicate artistic ideas and create an environment in which music can unfold freely.

In the 2026/27 season, Delyana Lazarova continues her positions as Principal Guest Conductor of both the Utah Symphony and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, returning to the BBC Proms with the latter. Further highlights of the season include debuts with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, WDR Sinfonieorchester, MDR Sinfonieorchester, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and San Diego Symphony. She also returns to Aspen, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Netherlands Philharmonic and many others.

Delyana Lazarova's wide-ranging repertoire reflects both her broad musical horizons and her heritage. Born in Bulgaria, she feels a particular affinity with the Eastern European repertoire, including Dvořák, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky and Bartók. At the same time, she is equally at home in the Viennese Classical tradition, shaped in part by her intensive studies with Johannes Schlaefli. She is also deeply passionate about

music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the 2024/25 season, she began her tenure as Artistic Partner of ROCO in Houston, a chamber orchestra renowned for its commitment to contemporary music. Her close connection to new music is further reflected in her debut recording with the Hallé Orchestra, released in October 2023 and featuring works by the Bulgarian composer Dobrinka Tabakova.

In recent seasons, Lazarova has appeared with leading orchestras including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, NDR Radiophilharmonie, Netherlands Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Göteborg Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, Sinfonieorchester Basel, and many others.

Following her victory in the inaugural Siemens Hallé International Conductors Competition, Delyana Lazarova served as Assistant Conductor to Sir Mark Elder at the Hallé Orchestra and Music Director of the Hallé Youth Orchestra from 2020 to 2023. She also assisted Cristian Măcelaru with the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln and the Orchestre National de France. In 2020, she was awarded the James Conlon Conductor Prize at the prestigious Aspen Music Festival, following earlier recognition through the Bruno Walter Conducting Scholarship at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in 2017 and 2018.

Lukas Sternath – piano

Philharmonia



© Peter Rigaud

Born in Vienna in 2001, Lukas Sternath caused a sensation at the 71st International ARD Music Competition in Munich in September 2022. In addition to the First Prize, he was awarded seven special prizes, including the Audience Prize and the Prize for the Best Interpretation of the Commissioned Composition.

Nominated by the Musikverein Wien, Konzerthaus Wien, and the Philharmonie Luxembourg, Lukas Sternath was named an ECHO Rising Star of the 2024/25 season. In September 2025, he made his spectacular debut at the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo. Earlier in the same year, the BBC selected Lukas Sternath as a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist through 2027. In the autumn of 2025, Lukas Sternath made his celebrated debut with the Vienna Philharmonic under the baton of Tugan Sokhiev in concerts both in Vienna and on tour to Bratislava, Hamburg and Luxembourg. Lukas Sternath is the winner of the prestigious Terence Judd-Hallé Award 2026, presented in association with Hallé in spring 2027.

In autumn 2026, Lukas Sternath's debut album will be released on the newly founded label NO SILENCE, featuring works by Franz Liszt and Franz Schubert.

In the 2026/27 season, Lukas Sternath makes his North American recital debut at Chicago's Symphony Center and continues on to tour to La Jolla's Music Society, Cal Performances in Berkeley, Vancouver's Recital Society, to Carnegie Hall's Weill Hall and Vivo Performing Arts Boston. Lukas Sternath also returns to the Lucerne Festival with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly and continues his close collaboration with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra and its chief conductor Jakub Hrůša. Further orchestral invitations include the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, and the Philharmonia Orchestra. He will give recitals, among others, at Wigmore Hall in London, Musikverein Wien, Wiener Konzerthaus, and at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam.

In past seasons, Lukas Sternath made his recital debuts at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Tonhalle Zurich, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Philharmonie Essen, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, Bozar and Flagey in Brussels, Palau de la Música Barcelona, and at Wigmore Hall in London. As soloist he collaborated amongst others with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra and SWR Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with conductors such as Adam Fischer, Daniele Gatti, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Tarmo Peltokoski, Lahav Shani and Kazuki Yamada.

Connecting with Bedford

Philharmonia



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Sparks of inspiration and participation

The Philharmonia's Learning & Engagement programmes take music beyond the concert hall at the Corn Exchange, meeting people where they live and learn. Through partnerships, community and schools projects, we share the transformative power of music with all generations, and with those who have never had the opportunity to see a live orchestra. Every year, thousands of people from all walks of life across Bedford take part, thanks to the support of the generous donors and foundations that make it possible.

Orchestra Unwrapped

More than just a schools' concert, *Orchestra Unwrapped* builds confidence, creativity and connection in children aged 7-11. Each year in Bedford, hundreds of children experience a live orchestra in concert for the first time and take part in creative workshops at their schools.

At a time when music education is in decline nationally, *Orchestra Unwrapped* is a vital education lifeline – inspiring creativity in young audiences and empowering teachers to bring music into the classroom.



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Hear and Now

Hear and Now is our longest-standing community project – it started out in Bedford over 15 years ago. Now also running in Leicester and London, it brings together people living with dementia, their carers, young instrumentalists from across Bedford, and Philharmonia musicians.

Through music, movement and memory-sharing, participants create and share work that celebrates identity and connection. For people living with dementia *Hear and Now* offers friendship, communication, and a renewed sense of belonging – a testament to the power of music to bring people together.

Play your part

Projects like these in Bedfordshire are only possible thanks to generous support. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to have access the transformational power of orchestral music, and have their life enriched by that engagement, regardless of age, situation, or economic circumstance. If you agree, and feel able to help us, please consider making a donation to the Philharmonia Orchestra in Bedford Trust today, or becoming a Philharmonia Friend.

Talk to a member of our team at a concert or contact development@philharmonia.co.uk
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