

Thomas Adès Three Studies from Couperin
(for Chamber Orchestra) (13')

Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No.2 (23')

- INTERVAL - (20')

Debussy La Mer (23')

Ravel Boléro (14')

Boléro

Thurs 22 Oct, 7:30pm

Please note that all timings are approximate and may be subject to change. Performers are correct at time of printing.

Dinis Sousa *conductor*
Mariam Batsashvili *piano*

First Violins

Sophie Rosa
Andrew Harvey
Peter Liang
Ian Watson
Martin Richardson *
Concettina Del Vecchio
Stephan Mayer *
Ruth McNamara
Susanna Poole
Elizabeth Lamberton
Emily Mowbray
Qian Wu
Nathan Fenwick
Gary Ngan

Second Violins

Kate Richardson *
Sophie McQueen
Sophie Coles
Kate Marsden
James Justin Evans *
Sally Anne Anderson
David Rimbault
Olga Smoleń
Frances Evans
Chu Yu Yang
Pak Ho Hong
Claire Stranger Ford

Violas

Alexander Mitchell
Gwendolyn Cawdron
Sarah Hill
Nadia Debono
David Ruby *
Fiona Stunden *
Rachel Jones
Ian Fair
Amy Hark
Daniel Sanxis

Cellos

Ren Ford
Hilary Browning *
Ian Bracken *
Gethyn Jones *
Ruth Owens
Alexander Holladay
Mark Lindley
Anna Stuart
Georgina Aasgaard
Esther Hariott
Lizzie Elliott
Chian Chian Hsu

Double Basses

Marcel Becker
Ashley Frampton *
Nigel Dufty *
Anthony Williams
Filipe Dandalo
Imogen Fernando

Flutes

Cormac Henry
Lily Vernon Purves

Piccolo

Sameeta Gahir

Oboes

Helena Mackie
Catrin Ruth Davies *

Cor Anglais

Drake Gritton

Clarinets

Max Welford
Emma Burgess

Bass Clarinet

Marianne Rawles

Soprano Saxophone

Carl Raven

Tenor Saxophone

Gilly Blair

Bassoons

Jordy Meulenbroeks
Rosie Burton
Bia Carvalho

Contrabassoon

Gareth Twigg

Horns

Stephen Nicholls
Robert Ashworth
Catherine Hewitt
Timothy Nicholson
Mary Fair

Trumpets

Jonathan Quirk
Hannah Mackenzie
Ben Jarvis
James Nash
Tim Barber

Trombones

Simon Cowen
Simon Powell

Bass Trombone

Simon Chappell

Tuba

Robin Haggart *

Timpani

Neil Hitt

Percussion

Matthew Brett
Josephine Frieze
Scott Lumsdaine
Gareth Ceredig
Jenny Marsden

Harp

Mary Reid
Eira Lynn Jones

Celeste

Richard Casey

Boléro

Programme Notes

About the Music

Thomas Adès (b. 1971): Three Studies from Couperin

1. Les Amusmens ('Entertainments')
2. Les Tours de Passe-Passe ('Sleights of Hand')
3. L'Âme-en-Peine ('The Lost Soul')

Composed: 2006

First Performed: 21 April 2006, Basel, Martinskirche, Basel Chamber Orchestra
cond. Thomas Adès

The idea of taking a work of art from the past and giving it a makeover is not at all new. But in the 1900s, when musical neo-classicism burst onto the scene in post-WW1 Paris, this 'freshening up' began to take on a particularly modern edge. A great example would be Stravinsky's ballet *Pulcinella*, which featured imaginative, sharply flavoured reworkings of music by the composer Pergolesi. It's ironic, almost to the point of mockery, but it also radiated affection for the music it half-parodied.

Thomas Adès' *Three Studies from Couperin* achieves something similar with the music of François Couperin, the great French master of keyboard music. You could follow Adès' music with Couperin's scores in front of you and see how closely Adès follows what Couperin wrote. Sometimes Adès adds details, enriches textures, occasionally with surprising results. But normally it's subtler than that. With rhythmic or harmonic tweaks, and delicious use of his very modern colour palette, Adès transforms Couperin from a courtly 18th Century composer, secure in his own time, place and position, to a ghostly visitor from another age. The music acquires a strange new pathos, which can speak to all of us.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921): Piano Concerto No 2 in G minor, Op 22

1. Andante sostenuto
2. Allegro scherzando
3. Presto

Composed: 1868

First Performed: 13 May 1868, Paris, Salle Pleyel, Orchestre de Paris, Saint-Saëns (piano), cond. Anton Rubinstein

When Camille Saint-Saëns first began to make his name as a composer, he gained a bad reputation in some circles for going against the musical grain. The 1875 premiere of his now hugely popular *Danse Macabre* (made famous here as the theme music for the TV detective series *Jonathan Creek*) saw critics raging. By the end of his long life many saw him as a real traditionalist – which wasn't fair either. A lively imagination, a gift for memorable melody and a

respect for the great music of the past were always part of him, as this fine concerto – the most popular of his five for piano – shows particularly well.

Saint-Saëns wrote his Second Piano Concerto in three weeks, and he left it so late that he had very little time to learn the piano part (that fact that he'd written it gave him no advantages). The first performance didn't go well, and it took the piece a little while to establish itself on the concert stage – but once it had, it really took off, and pianists were soon playing it all over the world. It's easy to see why. Not only are the themes instantly appealing, but there's a superbly engineered sense of build-up and acceleration, from the slow beginning of the first movement to the whirlwind of the ending. Unusually for this time, the first movement begins with what sounds like a soulful improvisation for solo piano, very much in the style of the great Johann Sebastian Bach's writing from 200 years before. Feelings and tempo heat up a bit towards the climax, but the spirit of Bach restores order at the end. Then comes maximum contrast in a light-hearted, playful second movement. Finally we have a tarantella – the folk-dance which, according to legend, was the only cure for the bite of the tarantula. It finishes in a flurry of cascading notes. There's no way of telling whether the cure has been successful!

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): *La mer* (Trois esquisses symphoniques)

1. De l'aube à midi sur la mer (Dawn to midday on the sea)
2. Jeux de vagues (Games of the waves)
3. Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue between the wind and the sea)

Composed: 1903-5

First Performed: 15 October 1905, Paris, Orchestre Lamoureux, cond. Camille Chevillard

As a boy, Debussy loved the sea and dreamed of joining the French navy. But when he came to write his orchestral masterpiece *La mer* ('The Sea'), he did the opposite of what we might expect, staying far from the sea and trusting his imagination alone to guide him. It's true that when he finished the score he was staying in a hotel in Eastbourne, but that English seaside resort is a long way from the kind of seascape that many people picture when listening to this music.

La mer is full of the many moods and colours of the sea: the play of light on the surface and in the depths, the motion of tiny ripples and giant waves, the sense of power and cross currents. But it is also something else, hinted at in that subtitle *Trois esquisses symphoniques* – 'three symphonic sketches'. What Debussy produced in *La mer* was a work that both is and isn't a symphony. On one level, it's full of purpose, with a stream of striking ideas growing and developing organically throughout. But it's also full of details, or 'impressions', that seem to stand out from the flow of the piece, living portraits of the sea in all its moods, colours and textures.

The opening pictures a grey, possibly cold dawn breaking over a fretful sea, but as the sun rises, a warm, hushed theme for horns sounds warmly through

rippling strings and harp. Everything builds steadily to the final depiction of the sea's extremes: real stillness one moment, then a colossal wave rising and breaking. The 'Jeux de vagues' is a brilliantly scored, bracing dance movement, a ballet of sea-spray, tossing white horses and surging surf, and then at the end a sudden luminous calm. Finally, the sea turns angry as storm winds agitate the waters. At the end, the first movement's breaking wave is transformed into a majestic brass chorale, sounding though choppy strings and shrill woodwind, leading to a last great shout of triumph.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): Boléro

Composed: 1922

First Performed: 6 January 1924, Paris, Lamoureux Orchestra cond. Paul Paray

Maurice Ravel is often depicted as quintessentially French – fastidious, elegant, charming, tactful and calm. But Ravel was very proud of the fact that his mother was of Basque heritage, and he often returned to Basque or Spanish themes in his music. Like quite a few central European artists before him, he saw Spain – so near to his birthplace, yet so hard to reach across those challenging Pyrenean mountains – as a dream-like land full of magic and mystery. His hugely popular orchestral work *Boléro* was written in 1928 to a commission from the dancer Ida Rubinstein for a ballet of a Spanish dance character – surely this would have been a labour of love?

But the success of *Boléro* seems to have brought Ravel no pleasure at all. In fact, he went on to dismiss it haughtily as 'a piece for orchestra entirely without music'. Behind this extreme self-deprecation, however, there's an interesting point. *Boléro* is a great example of how to make a substantial musical work with very little material. In essence it's a steady build-up based on a repeated side-drum rhythm with a long melody which could easily be Spanish, but was apparently based on a memory of an Arabic dance tune. What holds the ear throughout – apart from the mesmeric effect of the repeated rhythm – is the way Ravel varies the orchestral colours, sometimes with stunning subtlety, so that each time we hear it, the tune seems the same but not the same. Eventually the intensity builds to such a level that the music seems to erupt like a volcano, with wild trombone flourishes. Then comes spectacular collapse, and suddenly it's all over.

About the Artists

Dinis Sousa

Portuguese conductor [Dinis Sousa](#) returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall after leading Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* in 2025.

Sousa is Music Director of the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Founder and Artistic Director of Orquestra XXI, an award-winning orchestra that brings together some of the finest young Portuguese musicians from around the world. He is the winner of the Critics' Circle Young Talent Award for 2023.

With the RNS he led a complete Schumann symphony cycle in 2023/24, in addition to a performance of Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* which received a 5-star review from The Times.

Other highlights in recent years with the Royal Northern Sinfonia (RNS) include a world premiere by Cassandra Miller, a UK tour, a return visit to the BBC Proms, collaborations with soloists including Christian Tetzlaff, Steven Isserlis and Elisabeth Leonskaja, a programme of modern works by Cage, Oliveros, Boulez and Ligeti, and a special community participation performance of Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha, Sarah Connolly, Nicky Spence, and Willard White.

Sousa's work with the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras, including for a complete Beethoven symphony cycle in London and at the Philharmonie de Paris, has earned him the highest critical acclaim.

He has worked with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw, Swedish Radio Symphony, BBC Symphony, Bergen Philharmonic, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, CBSO, National Symphony (Dublin), Royal Danish Opera and Orchestre Symphonique de Québec.

His operatic experience includes Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

In recognition of his work with Orquestra XXI, he was awarded the title of Knight of the Order of Prince Henry in Portugal.

Born in Porto in 1988, [Sousa](#) studied with Sian Edwards and Timothy Redmond at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he was the conducting fellow. He also studied piano under Philip Jenkins and Martin Roscoe.

Mariam Batsashvili

Charisma, brilliance and depth of expression are qualities with which Georgian pianist [Mariam Batsashvili](#) captivates live audiences. Her career has taken her to more than 30 countries and many of the world's most important concert halls, and she has also long secured her place among the top ranks in the recording and streaming market since signing exclusively with [Warner Classics](#) in 2019. Appearing in major music centres like London, Berlin, Paris and Vienna, Batsashvili is also a frequent guest at festivals such as the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, and the Beethovenfest Bonn.

She is among the world's most sought-after interpreters of great piano repertoire ranging from Bach to late Romanticism. Batsashvili's career has been closely linked to the name of Franz Liszt, who was the focus of her album *Chopin Liszt* in 2019. She enjoyed [acclaimed victories](#) at the Franz Liszt competitions in Weimar in 2011 and Utrecht in 2014.

Beyond Liszt's works, Batsashvili – a former ECHO Rising Star and BBC New Generation Artist – earns enthusiastic reactions from audiences and specialist press for her interpretations of the piano works of Schubert, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. Her most recent album, *Influences*, features the work of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, as well as Liszt.

Last season Batsashvili returned to major concert venues including the Wigmore Hall, Gross Festspielhaus in Salzburg, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie and the BBC Proms – where she performed Mozart's *Piano Concerto No.20*.

Meanwhile her [Instagram](#) tutorials on technical and performance practice issues have garnered her more than 70,000 followers.

About the Composers

Thomas Adès

British composer and conductor [Thomas Adès](#) was born in London in 1971 and studied at the Guildhall and at King's College, Cambridge.

He was artistic director of Aldeburgh Festival from 1999-2008 and is currently Principal Guest Conductor of the [Hallé](#), his first formal conducting title.

Renowned as both composer and performer, he works regularly with the world's leading orchestras, opera companies and festivals.

Adès' compositions include three operas: he conducted the premiere of the most recent, *The Exterminating Angel*, at the 2016 Salzburg Festival and subsequently at the Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Opera House. He conducted the premiere and revival of *The Tempest* at the Royal Opera House, and a new production at the Metropolitan Opera, Wiener Staatsoper and in November 2022 at La Scala, Milan.

He led the world premiere of his full-evening ballet *The Dante Project* at Covent Garden, and conducted it in May 2023 at the Opéra Garnier, Paris. He conducted a new production of *The Exterminating Angel*, featuring a critically acclaimed staging from Calixto Bieito, in spring 2024 at the Opéra Bastille in Paris. The opera is next due to be performed at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in January 2027.

Adès frequently leads performances of his orchestral works including *Asyla* (1997), *Tevot* (2007), *Polaris* (2010), violin concerto *Concentric Paths* (2005), *In Seven Days for piano and orchestra* (2103) and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (2019). Other recent works include *Shanty – over the Sea* for strings (2020); *Märchentänze* for solo violin and piano and a separate version with orchestra (2021), *Air – Homage to Sibelius* for violin and orchestra, a Roche commission for Anne-Sophie Mutter (2022) and *Aquifer* an orchestral work. His compositions also include numerous celebrated chamber and solo works.

Last season saw him debut with the Swedish Radio Symphony and Gürzenich-Orchester Köln, while return engagements included the BBC Symphony (Proms), London Symphony, Hallé, Czech Philharmonic, Concertgebouworkest, New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Vienna Radio Symphony.

Adès also served as the creative chair of the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich for the season and celebrated the 100th birthday of György Kurtág at the Budapest Music Centre.

His many awards include the Grawemeyer Award for *Asyla* (1999); Royal Philharmonic Society large-scale composition awards for *Asyla*, *The Tempest* and *Tevot*, Ernst von Siemens Composers' prize for *Arcadiana* and British Composer Award for *The Four Quarters*.

His CD recording of *The Tempest* from the Royal Opera House (EMI) won the Contemporary category of the 2010 Gramophone Awards; his DVD of the production from the Metropolitan Opera was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année (2013), Best Opera recording (2014 Grammy Awards) and Music DVD Recording of the Year (2014 ECHO Klassik Awards), and *The Exterminating Angel* won the World Premiere of the Year at the International Opera Awards (2017). In 2015 he was awarded the prestigious Léonie Sonning Music Prize and in Spring 2020 the Toru Takemitsu composition award at Tokyo Opera City.

Camille Saint-Saëns

Parisian pianist, organist and composer **Camille Saint-Saëns** was born in the French capital in 1835. A child prodigy, he first performed in public aged 10 and entered the city's Conservatoire at 13. Raised mostly in a female household after the early death of his father, he started piano lessons aged two, taught by his great-aunt Charlotte, herself a talented musician.

He was a church organist, before he joined the teaching staff at the École de Musique Classique et Religieuse in the 1860s, where one of his pupils was a teenage **Gabriel Fauré**. It was the start of a lifelong friendship. In 1871, he founded the National Society for French Music, and he was a pioneering figure in its development through the Romantic period. Saint-Saëns was the first French composer to write piano concertos, while his chamber music influenced those that followed him, including his pupil and friend Fauré and Maurice Ravel.

Among his prolific output were three symphonies – his first written when he was 17 – and 13 operas, including *Samson and Delilah*. His best-known piece of chamber music remains *The Carnival of the Animals*.

A performer to the last (his final public appearance came a month before his death), Saint-Saëns also wrote poetry, plays and criticism, was a passionate astronomer and an adventurous traveller – he drew his final breath in Algiers in December 1921.

Did you know? In 1881, Saint-Saëns visited Liverpool to perform at Philharmonic Hall. During his stay he also played two recitals on the organ at St George's Hall, which went down very well – he “created a most favourable impression by his vigorous yet refined manipulation of the instrument”.

Listen to **an excerpt** of Guy Johnston playing Saint-Saëns' *Cello Concerto* at the Proms.

Claude Debussy

The late 19th and early 20th Century was a time of brilliant creativity in French classical music, driven by the rise of a generation of superstar composers. Among those born between 1835 and 1875 were Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Delibes, Bizet, Massenet, Dukas, Satie, Roussel, Ravel and – in August 1862, just outside Paris – Achille Claude Debussy.

Debussy enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 10. And it was later, while still a student, that he was taken under the wing of none other than Tchaikovsky's patroness **Nadezhda von Meck**; over the course of three summer holidays he travelled to the von Meck's summer residences across Europe to play piano duets with her children.

Debussy won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1884 with his cantata *The Prodigal Son*, although he spent most of his year in the Italian capital socialising with artists and writers rather than composing. Over the next decade he developed and matured his own distinctive style, and it was his dreamlike symphonic poem *Prelude L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1894) which really brought him to the public's attention.

His other major works include *La Mer*, the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Suite Bergamasque* – which includes the iridescent *Clair de Lune* – and 24 piano preludes. His music, with its ethereal, shimmering soundscapes, has often been associated with **Impressionism**, but Debussy himself always rejected that label.

While he died in 1918, Debussy's influence lived on through the work of both fellow Frenchmen and composers like Stravinsky and Bartók, leading to him being seen as one of the father figures of 20th Century music.

Listen to Debussy's ***La cathédrale engloutie*** arranged by Henry Wood.

Maurice Ravel

While chiefly known by the wider public for the five minutes of music which carried **Torvill and Dean** to ice dancing victory, there is much more to Maurice Ravel than just *Boléro*. Over a four-decade career, the Frenchman became a master craftsman of imaginatively orchestrated, vividly textured work, rich with elegant (and eloquent) melodies.

Born in 1875 in Cibourne, across the harbour from St Jean de Luz on France's border with the Basque country, Ravel was attracted to all things Spanish – although he only set foot in the country for the first time at the age of 38. Musically, he was also influenced by Erik Satie, Stravinsky (a friend), by jazz, and by French Romantic composer and poet Emmanuel Chabrier.

Ravel started music lessons at seven and gave his first piano recital aged 14, entering the Paris Conservatoire, where he won first prize in piano in 1891. Later, he would study composition there with Gabriel Fauré. A master orchestrator as well as a gifted composer, Ravel's catalogue embraces concertos and chamber works, piano pieces and operas, including the 1899 piece *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, orchestral work *Mother Goose*, *Piano Concerto No.1*, the 1920 *La Valse*, and ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, commissioned in 1909 by Diaghilev for the Ballet Russes.

When the First World War broke out, Ravel enlisted in an artillery regiment, driving munitions under bombardment. But war scarred the composer both physically and mentally, and in its aftermath he decamped from Paris **to a small commune** where he lived for the rest of his life – and from where he embarked on a host of international tours throughout the 1920s. In his final years Ravel suffered from a mystery neurological disorder, and he died in 1937, aged 62.

Did you know? Ravel's father was an engineer who invented the Whirlwind of Death loop-the-loop machine which was displayed at Barnum and Bailey's Circus in the early 1900s, but which ultimately was a failure – one story suggests it was involved in a near-death accident.

Watch Vasily Petrenko conducting a performance of *La Valse*