

Nobu Returns

Thu 29 Oct, 7:30pm

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

Carmel Smickersgill A Brick Thrown With Love (14')
Shostakovich Piano Concerto No.2 (20')

INTERVAL – (20')

Mussorgsky Night on the Bare Mountain (12')
Sibelius Symphony No.6 (27')

Andrew Manze *conductor*
Nobuyuki Tsujii *soloist*

First Violins

Thelma Handy *
Mihkel Kerem
Peter Liang
Martin Richardson *
Concettina Del Vecchio
Stephan Mayer *
Susanna Poole
Elizabeth Lamberton
Emily Mowbray
Qian Wu
Kelvin Ng
Daniel Lewis
Nathan Fenwick
Marino Capulli

Second Violins

Kate Richardson *
Kate Marsden
James Justin Evans
David Rimbault
Olga Smoleń
James Pattinson
Frances Evans
Chu Yu Yang
Rachel Stonham
Claire Stranger Ford
Celia Goodwin
Ruth Sanderson

Violas

Alexander Mitchell
Nadia Debono
Sarah Hill
David Ruby
Fiona Stunden
Daniel Sanxis
Ray Lester
Joanna Claire
Emily Davies
John Hird

Cellos

Victoria Simonsen
Hilary Browning *
Ian Bracken *
Gethyn Jones
Alexander Holladay
Mark Lindley
Anna Crawford
Esther Harriott

Double Basses

Marcel Becker
Nathan Knight
Ashley Frampton *
Nigel Dufty *
Anthony Williams
Filipe Dandalo

Flutes

Cormac Henry
Helen Wilson

Piccolo

Abi Fletcher

Oboes

Helena Mackie
Catrin Ruth Davies *

Cor Anglais

Drake Gritton

Clarinets

Miquel Ramos Salvadó
Emma Burgess

Bass Clarinet

Isaac Prince

Saxophones

Carl Raven
Anthony Brown
Gilly Blair

Bassoons

Jordy Meulenbroeks
Rebekah Abramski

Contrabassoon

Gareth Twigg

Horns

Timothy Jackson
Erin Cooper Gay
Stephen Nicholls
Timothy Nicholson
Robert Ashworth

Trumpets

Jonathan Holland
Hannah Mackenzie
Jac Thomas

Trombones

Simon Cowen
Simon Powell

Bass Trombone

Simon Chappell

Tuba

Robin Haggart *

Timpani

Neil Hitt

Percussion

Matthew Brett
Scott Lumsdaine
Ben Gray
Ed Cervenka

Harp

Elizabeth McNulty

Nobu Returns

Programme Notes

About the Music

Carmel Smickersgill: *A Brick Thrown With Love*

Composed: 2026

First Performed; 4 September 2026, London, Royal Albert Hall, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Andrew Manze

Manchester-based composer Carmel Smickersgill's music throws its embrace wide, taking in classical, electronic, modern jazz, rock and pop music. She's also performed on keyboards and guitar with her own group Bunny Hoova. Add to that her experience as composer and sound designer for various theatre groups, including Manchester's Royal Exchange and London's Shakespeare's Globe and you have a composer who can draw on a wealth of experience in strikingly contrasted musical arenas and fuse it into something uniquely vital.

A Brick Thrown With Love is both an act of protest – passionate defiance in the hope of building a better world – and a work about the nature of protest: essentially, who is protesting, on behalf of whom, and with what ideal in mind? A colour-enhanced modern orchestra is used, with three saxophones to the fore. The three parts move from mockery and distortion to elation, and finally violence.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75): *Piano Concerto No. 2* in F major, Op 102

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Allegro

Composed: 1957

First performed: 10 May 1957, Moscow Conservatory, Great Hall, USSR Symphony Orchestra, Maxim Shostakovich (piano), cond. Nikolai Anosov

There's far more to Dmitri Shostakovich than darkly probing, emotionally harrowing symphonies, concertos and string quartets. He also composed wonderful light music and popular, uplifting film scores, and tunes that people literally hum in the street, even if they don't know the title – the Waltz from the Second Suite for Jazz Orchestra leaps to mind. (Look it up on YouTube and you'll recognise it instantly.) This piano concerto is one of the most joyous, memorably tuneful things in the modern concerto repertory. Shostakovich wrote it as a 19th birthday present for his son Maxim to play at his graduation concert at the Moscow Conservatory. It's beautifully conceived for a young student pianist to play – in other words, there's plenty of the kind of writing

Maxim would have practised in his technical studies, and although it can sound dazzlingly brilliant, it's not actually terribly difficult to play

The first movement is a lively discussion between two themes, the first almost cheekily upbeat, the second more lyrical and reflective, but it is that gentler second theme that returns in spectacular triumph at the climax, leading to a showcase solo for the piano. High spirits prevail at the end, which means that the Andante, with its soothing hymn-like string theme comes as a refreshing contrast. The piano's following solo recalls the rapturous slow melodies of Chopin and Rachmaninov, but with little twists and turns that could only be Shostakovich. Then the finale erupts with a rapid dance tune, followed by a folk-like theme in seven beats to the bar (One-two One-two One-two-three): you may hear hints of balalaikas in the strings' accompaniment (though it's said Shostakovich hated balalaikas!). The ending is guaranteed to bring the house down – one can imagine Shostakovich's pride in his son's attention-grabbing achievement.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-81): *Night on the Bare Mountain* (arr. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov)

Composed: 1867

First Performed (Rimsky-Korsakov's version): 27 October 1886, St Petersburg, Kononov Hall, Orchestra of Russian Symphony Concerts, cond. Rimsky-Korsakov

'If my memory doesn't deceive me, the witches used to gather on this mountain, ... gossip, play tricks and await their chief—Satan. On his arrival they, i.e. the witches, formed a circle round the throne on which he sat, in the form of a goat, and sang his praise. When Satan was worked up into a sufficient passion by the witches' praises, he gave the command for the sabbath, choosing for himself the witches who caught his fancy.'

In his original score Mussorgsky divided up the piece into four sections: 1. Assembly of the Witches, 2. Satan's Journey, 3. Obscene Praises of Satan, 4. Sabbath. Mussorgsky was very proud of the result, but his mentor and artistic father-figure Mily Balakirev was scathing, and Mussorgsky was so stunned he never released it for performance or publication. He did try reworking it later, however, in his opera *Sorochinsky Fair*, and it was this version – with its added 'happy ending' (church bells are heard, the sun rises and the witches vanish) – that Rimsky-Korsakov adapted for the piece's first performance, five years after Mussorgsky's shockingly premature, alcohol-fuelled final decline. With a bit of technicolour sprucing-up from the conductor Leopold Stokowski this was how it was triumphantly presented to the world in the Disney animation *Fantasia*. Mussorgsky's original may be more, well, original – to the point of borderline craziness at times, but Rimsky-Korsakov makes it far easier to grasp and enjoy on first hearing, and it's no surprise that that's the version one normally hears today.

Sibelius: *Symphony No 6* in D minor, op 104

1. Allegro molto moderato
2. Allegretto moderato
3. Poco vivace
4. Allegro molto

Composed: 1914-1923

First performed: 19 February 1923, Helsinki, Great Hall, Helsinki University, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Sibelius

For some Sibelius lovers, the Sixth Symphony is simply one of the most beautiful and fascinating things he ever wrote, yet it has never been anywhere near as popular as Symphonies 5 and 7. The musical landscape is recognisable: luminous, mysterious or stormy writing for the strings, woodwind birdcalls, elemental brass chords like great slabs of basaltic rock. But there are no heroics, and no readily identifiable 'big tunes' - instead the music seems to be almost constantly singing intimately, at times as though to itself.

In terms of form too, the Sixth Symphony is unique. Sibelius once said that a symphony should be like a river, and this particular musical river follows its own secretive course throughout. The almost choral writing for the strings at the opening builds eventually to a brass-enhanced climax. Then woodwind with rustling strings and harp lead us into more rapid river-like movement. But the ending is mysterious – there may not be many people in this far-northern landscape, but there may be ghosts. The second movement starts as a kind of slow waltz, but this is suddenly cut off and we are transported to a hushed Nordic forest, with whispering strings and snatches of birdsong on woodwind.

The third movement starts like a fairly conventional dancing scherzo, but before long the dance rhythms seem to get stuck in a groove, while flutes and harp pick out a folk-like tune in imitation. The whole process is repeated, then with a sudden dramatic gesture the movement comes to an abrupt close. More folk-like phrases set the finale in motion, and eventually the music turns stormy. Calm slowly returns, leading to a rapt, hymn-like coda, led by more choral strings with woodwind responses. At the end, only violins, violas and hushed timpani are left, bringing the symphony to a strangely peaceful close in the minor mode. Sibelius's sketches suggest that he thought of calling this symphony 'Winter' - if so, then it's a reminder that winter has its own magic and serenity.

About the Artists

Andrew Manze

Since 2018, [Andrew Manze](#) has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. A great favourite of Philharmonic audiences, he made his debut with the Orchestra over a decade ago and has appeared regularly on the Hope Street stage ever since.

With boundless energy and warmth and an extensive and scholarly knowledge of the repertoire, Manze is in great demand from some of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles and is widely celebrated as one of the most stimulating and inspirational conductors of his generation.

He began his career as an Early Music specialist, becoming Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music at the age of 31. Along with a busy conducting career he also teaches, edits and writes about music and is in demand as a broadcaster. As a violinist, he has released an astonishing variety of recordings, many of them award-winning.

He was Chief Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie from 2014-2023, and last September he took up his role as Principal Guest Conductor of the [Scottish Chamber Orchestra](#).

Nobuyuki Tsujii

Japanese pianist – and Liverpool favourite - [Nobuyuki 'Nobu' Tsujii](#) channels his phenomenal technical skills and command of tonal colours to craft interpretations that reveal the essence of the works in his wide repertoire.

And his artistry appears all the more remarkable given that he was born blind. Nobu created headline news in 2009 when he was named joint winner of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition's coveted Gold Medal.

He has gone on to appear on the world's most prestigious stages including New York's Carnegie Hall, London's Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall, the Vienna Musikverein, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris and the main auditorium of Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

In 2014 he also became the subject of a documentary directed by film-maker Peter Rosen, [Touching the Sound: The Improbable Journey of Nobuyuki Tsujii](#). Having long since established his place among today's leading pianists, Nobu signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon in April 2024.

His debut Deutsche Grammophon album, released in March 2025, featured a Beethoven programme that paired the *Hammerklavier Sonata*, op. 106 with Liszt's transcription of the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* ("To the Distant Beloved").

His [second album](#), released in January 2026, was recorded with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Domingo Hindoyan and it presents a selection of works by Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky.

In recent seasons Nobu has appeared as concerto soloist with, among others, Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Vladimir Jurowski and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Klaus Mäkelä and the Oslo Philharmonic, and Hindoyan and the RLPO.

Other career highlights include performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, with the BBC Philharmonic and Juanjo Mena, and with the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg and Kent Nagano.

Recent highlights include a recital tour of Japan, Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 2* with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Purchase College (New York state) and Carnegie Hall and three performances of the Grieg Piano Concerto at the Philharmonie de Paris with Klaus Mäkelä and the Orchestre de Paris.

Born in Tokyo in September 1988, [Nobu](#) displayed his innate musicality at the age of two when he began picking out tunes on a tiny toy piano. After just a few hearings he was able to play the songs his mother sang to him, and he began improvising miniature compositions spontaneously during early childhood.

His progress was such that, aged seven, he won first prize at the All Japan Music Competition of Blind Students and, three years later, made his debut with orchestra. He gave his first piano recital, in the small hall of Tokyo's Suntory Hall, when he was 12 and soon reached audiences overseas with recital tours to the United States, Russia and France. He also began performing his own compositions.

Two years after reaching the semifinal of the International Chopin Piano Competition in 2005, Nobu enrolled at Tokyo's Ueno Gakuen University and made his professional debut. He achieved pop-star status in Japan and remains enormously popular in his homeland, as well as having a huge fanbase abroad.

About the Composers

Carmel Smickersgill

[Carmel Smickersgill](#) is a Manchester-based composer whose work spans classical and electronic genres.

A graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music, where she studied composition with Gary Carpenter, she is now an associate member of the college.

She has written for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Proms, Manchester Camerata, Laura Bowler, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Das Neue Ensemble, Galvanize Ensemble, Equilibrium Quartet and more. She released her debut LP [*We Get What We Get and We Don't Get Upset*](#) in 2022 with PRAH recordings.

As well as writing for herself and classical ensembles, Smickersgill often works as a composer and sound designer in a theatre context. Previously she has worked at Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Exchange, Plains Plough Roundabout, Shoreditch Town Hall and Junges Ensemble Stuttgart among others.

Smickersgill performs with her own band under her own name as well as with other artists. She is currently performing on keys, voice and guitar with She Drew the Gun and Marco Woolf and is also part of a duo with composer and saxophonist Andy Scott. She has previously performed as part of Bunny Hoova and Nwando Ebizie's bands as well as having toured as a supporting musician with New Order.

She is also one half of the group [Bothy](#), a group looking to create sustainable working and rehearsal space for musicians in Manchester.

Smickersgill won the [2018 Christopher Brooks Composition Prize](#) (now the Rushworth Prize) as part of which she was commissioned to compose a new work, with *Charcoal* given its world premiere by Ensemble 10:10 in November 2019 at St George's Hall Concert Room.

She was a 2021 recipient of the Jerwood Live Art Award and a 2020 nominee for the Ivor Novello Rising Star Award, after which she was mentored by Anna Meredith.

Dmitri Shostakovich

Composer, pianist and a figure both celebrated and condemned in his homeland whose struggles were chronicled through his music – [Dmitri Shostakovich](#) was a giant of 20th Century music. Born in St Petersburg in 1906, his talent as a pianist was recognised early on and at 13, he entered the city's Conservatory where his tutors included Alexander Glazunov.

As the only major musical figure to remain in Russia following the 1917 Revolution (Stravinsky, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev all either already lived abroad or absented themselves from the country), Shostakovich was feted as the great hope for music in the new Soviet Union. But when Stalin, who had implacable views on what kind of music was acceptable in the Soviet state, rose to power, and especially after he consolidated his position as supreme

leader in the early 1930s, Shostakovich – his music informed by suspiciously Western modernist influences – found himself yo-yoing in and out of favour.

In January 1936 he was [publicly denounced by Stalin](#) as ‘an enemy of the people’, and he was cancelled again in the 1940s for the crime of so-called ‘formulism’. So perhaps it’s no surprise that he kept a packed bag by the door in case of a midnight knock from the secret police and a sudden relocation to somewhere much further east. The Siberian sojourn never came to pass however, with Shostakovich carefully maintaining a balancing act between mollifying the system and retaining his own musical ideals, and after Stalin’s death in 1953 he enjoyed more creative freedom.

Amid the decades of political and social turmoil, Shostakovich kept working and his catalogue of compositions covers a wide range of orchestral and chamber pieces, along with works for piano, voice, opera and ballet, and many film scores. Renowned for his symphonies (the subject of an acclaimed [set of recordings](#) by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko), Shostakovich composed his first at 19, as a graduation piece from the Petrograd Conservatory, and his 15th and final symphony in 1971 to mark his 65th birthday. His final completed work was a violin sonata, written not long before he died in August 1975.

Did you know? While orbiting in space in 1961, Russian Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin sang Shostakovich’s song *The Homeland Hears* – part of the composer’s 1951 work *Four Songs for Voice and Piano*. It later became the theme song of the Soviet space industry.

Listen to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra playing the [opening movement](#) of the *Leningrad Symphony*.

Modest Mussorgsky

Modest Mussorgsky may have been one of his country’s most innovative and exciting composers but, by all accounts, he wasn’t the easiest of men. The Russian was what some might describe as a ‘tortured genius’ whose dedication to alcohol saw him dead from heart failure at just 42. His demise in 1881 left a catalogue of work packed with original ideas which often harnessed the harmonies and rhythms of Slavic folk music, as he sought to forge music that spoke of a unique Russian identity.

[Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky](#) was born into a landowning family at Karevo, south of St Petersburg, in 1839. Something of a piano prodigy, he swiftly outgrew his early tuition under his mother and by 12 he had already started composing.

One of his earliest works was a bright keyboard polka. He was still a teenager when he befriended Alexander Borodin at a military hospital in St Petersburg

where the two were both serving, Mussorgsky having just graduated from cadet school and the older Borodin a military doctor.

The pair would later become the heart of what was known as '[The Five](#)' (or perhaps more descriptively 'The Mighty Handful'), a collective of Russian composers who aimed to develop a uniquely Russian musical identity drawing inspiration from the country's native culture. Mussorgsky, who enjoyed mixing with what have been described as 'wild intellectuals', was always seen as the most radical. He composed many of his pieces in his spare time from a day job as a civil servant, his style often raw and vividly painted. Among his works were four song cycles, including the dramatic and intense *Songs and Dances of Death*.

If opera audiences were asked about Mussorgsky's work, they would likely proffer *Boris Gudonov*, widely considered his masterpiece. Concertgoers on the other hand would no doubt namecheck his *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the 1874 piano suite which was later arranged by others to become a popular and much-played orchestral piece.

Listen to [Heroes at the Gate of Kiev](#) from Sir Henry Wood's arrangement of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Jean Sibelius

On December 2, 1905, Jean Sibelius stepped onto the stage at Liverpool's (original) Philharmonic Hall – the first time the Finnish composer had appeared on an English platform. Sibelius was [in the city](#) to conduct his First Symphony and his 1899 tone poem *Finlandia*.

Sibelius had been due to appear in Liverpool a year earlier, but political events at home in Finland had delayed his visit. But it was worth the wait, with the Philharmonic Hall audience reportedly giving him an "effusive" welcome – "a token of real admiration for the virility and originality of his genius".

[Johan Julius Christian Sibelius](#) was born on December 8, 1865, one of three children of the Swedish-speaking Christian Gustav, municipal Doctor of Health in the southern city of Hämeenlinna, and his wife Maria Charlotta. Dr Sibelius died when his son was a toddler.

Showing early talent, the young 'Jean' had piano lessons and at the age of 10 was given a violin by his uncle. In fact, he would start his musical career as a violinist, although not wholly successfully – he was devastated when he was rejected by the Vienna Philharmonic.

Sibelius instead turned to composition, encouraged by his tutor at Helsinki's Institute of Music and inspired by the folklore of his homeland. Early success with his choral work *Kullervo* in 1892 brought him to public attention, while *Finlandia* – which remains his best-known work – would become the unofficial

anthem of Finnish resistance to Russian rule. Yet it was the natural world around him, particularly the tranquillity of the landscape at his home [Ainola](#) on the banks of the crystalline Lake Tuusula, north of Helsinki, which would inspire much of his later work.

It was at Ainola in September 1957 that Sibelius died, with his wife of 65 years, Aino, at his side.

Listen to the finale of Sibelius' [*Symphony No.5*](#).