



City of Birmingham
Symphony Orchestra

OSBORNE PLAYS RACHMANINOFF

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Thursday 30 September, 7.30pm

Ilan Volkov – Conductor

Steven Osborne – Piano

Turnage Go For It (CBSO Centenary Commission – World Premiere) 7'

Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No.3 39'

Interval

Brahms Symphony No.1 45'

Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto has been called the "Everest of piano concertos", but if anyone can scale its peaks, it's Birmingham favourite Steven Osborne. Mark-Anthony Turnage is another old friend of the CBSO: he's created a very personal 100th birthday gift, specially for us. And then Ilan Volkov conducts Brahms' First: a symphony that begins with the pounding of a broken heart and ends in a hymn of triumph.

We are sorry that Cristian Macelaru has had to withdraw from tonight's concert for family reasons. We are extremely grateful to Ilan Volkov for taking his place at short notice.



You are welcome to view the online programme on your mobile device, but please ensure that your sound is turned off and that you are mindful of other members of the audience. Any noise (such as whispering) can be very distracting – the acoustics of the Hall will highlight any such sound. If you use a hearing aid in conjunction with our infra-red hearing enhancement system, please make sure you have collected a receiver unit and that your hearing aid is switched to the 'T' position, with the volume level appropriately adjusted.

Audiences are welcome to take photographs before and after the concert, and during breaks in the music for applause. If you would like to take photos at these points please ensure you do not use a flash, and avoid disturbing other members of the audience around you. Please note that taking photographs or filming the concert while the orchestra is playing is not permitted as it is distracting both for other audience members and for the musicians on stage.

Keeping you safe: Please ensure that you are following all of the covid-safe measures that are in place, including: arriving at the time indicated on your ticket, wearing a face covering whilst in the building (exemption excluded), keeping a social distance from other audience members and staff, following signage and/or guidance from staff, and using the hand sanitising stations provided. Thank you.

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OSBORNE PLAYS RACHMANINOFF

Mark-Anthony Turnage (b.1960)

Go For It

(CBSO centenary commission – world première)

Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff

(1873-1943)

Piano Concerto No.3 in D minor, Op.30

Allegro ma non tanto

Intermezzo: Adagio

Alla breve

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

Symphony No.1 in C minor, Op.68

Un poco sostenuto – Allegro

Andante sostenuto

Un poco allegretto e grazioso

Adagio – Allegro non troppo ma con brio

A birthday gift

This is a special occasion, so let's hear, first of all, from an old friend of Birmingham and its music: Felix Mendelssohn. "To me, the music that I love expresses feelings that are not too vague to put into words – but on the contrary, too precise", he wrote to his friend Marc André Souchay in 1842 (a year before he first visited Birmingham). It's a paradox that many composers have experienced. After all, if an emotion can be adequately expressed in words, there's no need to put it into music – is there?

Jump forward to Birmingham Town Hall on the evening of 5 October 1989 (perhaps you were actually there), where the CBSO and Simon Rattle are about to give the world premiere of a brand new piece by a controversial 29-year-old composer from Essex called Mark-Anthony Turnage. The idea behind the piece is clear enough: it's called *Three Screaming Popes*, after a painting by

Francis Bacon. But the sounds – and the feelings they created – were shockingly new. One critic heard "defiant gestures and desperate eruptions". Other audience members couldn't put it into words – they just knew they'd heard something urgent, something real; something they'd never forget. Soon afterwards, Turnage became the CBSO's first ever Composer in Association.

"... it does exactly what it says on the tin. It's like an old-fashioned opener. An upbeat overture."

In the years since 1989 Turnage has written music inspired by jazz and by R 'n' B; he's composed operas about footballers and Playboy models – as well as a magical retelling of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. But like any composer, he knows that there's a point at which music becomes too precise – too direct – to be contained by words or images. The CBSO invited him to write something for its 100th anniversary, and after three decades of friendship, some things don't need to be spelled out. "Go for It" is Turnage's message to us here in Birmingham, as we emerge, cautious but hopeful, from a traumatic 18 months. It's scored for a jam-packed symphony orchestra, complete with (a classic Turnage touch) an electric bass guitar. Turnage asks them to play "with brilliance". And beyond that, he says, "it does exactly what it says on the tin. It's like an old-fashioned opener. An upbeat overture". The music does the rest.

The piano sings

Rachmaninoff never liked talking about inspiration either. But when you're an international star – possibly the greatest piano virtuoso of the twentieth (or any) century – people are going to speculate. Finally, he relented – and gave his own description of the long, expressive melody that opens his Third Piano Concerto.

The first theme of my Third Concerto is borrowed neither from folk songs nor from church sources. It simply wrote itself! If I had any plan in composing this theme, I was thinking only of sound. I wanted to 'sing' the melody on the piano, as a singer would sing it – and to find an orchestral accompaniment that would not muffle this singing. That is all!

True: musicologists in the 1960s spotted that this great melody does indeed bear a close resemblance to a Russian Orthodox religious chant, *Thy Tomb, O Saviour, Soldiers Guarding*. But that doesn't mean that Rachmaninoff (who was such an irregular churchgoer that he had to get married on an army base – the only place where he could find a priest willing to perform the ceremony) even knew the chant. Russian-ness runs deeper than borrowed folksongs. One relative recalled seeing Rachmaninoff walking the avenues of his family's country estate at Ivanovka: "From a distance, one could see his tall figure in a Russian smock. He would walk, head bowed, drumming his fingers on his chest and sort-of singing to himself". Rachmaninoff worked on the Third Concerto at Ivanovka throughout the summer of 1909.

The effort paid off. The Third Concerto is the largest and the most formally perfect of all Rachmaninoff's concertos: flamboyantly virtuosic, eye-wateringly difficult and yet somehow, at the same time, serious and deeply personal. The key is in that opening melody, with its quiet-but-urgent orchestral introduction. Its rhythms and melodic patterns (and particularly the rocking of the orchestra) occur over and over again throughout the concerto's epic length. They give an inner logic to the vast, arching span of the first movement, and power the stupendous unaccompanied **cadenza** at its climax. They find an echo in the desolate, falling theme that opens the **Intermezzo** second movement, and float softly behind the whirling, glittering scherzo that emerges from the gloom. And they drive the finale – from galloping opening to soaring climax, before a final euphoric rush to the finish.

"Rachmaninoff continued to perform the concerto for the rest of his life, and for many years he remained one of the only pianists in the world who could actually play it."

Rachmaninoff finished the concerto in late September 1909, and practiced it, silently, on a dummy keyboard onboard a liner bound for New York. There, he performed the concerto for the first time on 28 November 1909. Seven weeks later, he gave a third New York performance, this time conducted by Gustav Mahler – who was so determined to do the concerto justice that he over-ran the rehearsal time by a full hour. Rachmaninoff continued to perform the concerto for the rest of his life, and for many years he remained one of the only pianists in the world who could actually play it. Indeed its dedicatee, the great

Polish virtuoso Josef Hofmann, never performed it in public: it was simply beyond him. "Rachmaninoff", he recalled years later, "was made of steel and gold – steel in his arms, gold in his heart". The Third Concerto demands both.

Standing on the shoulders of giants

With some composers, however, reticence is practically a survival strategy. In 1853, at the age of 20, the young Brahms had been "discovered" by Robert and Clara Schumann. Schumann didn't mince his words: Brahms, he announced, was "the chosen one, destined to give ideal expression to our times" – the composer who

"The opening bars of Brahms' First Symphony surely mean exactly what they sound like – the relentless pounding of a heart in torment."

would, at last, write a symphony worthy to stand alongside Beethoven's nine. It was a lot to live up to, and for two decades, Brahms struggled to write a symphony that critics were already anticipating as "Beethoven's Tenth". We know that he made at least one false start (it ended up as his First Piano Concerto). "You don't know what it's like" he told a friend, "always to hear that giant [Beethoven] marching along behind me". At last, in the summer of 1876, he announced that his First Symphony was complete.

During those years, Brahms had lived through the most painful experiences of his life. Months after he moved in with the Schumanns, Robert attempted suicide and was committed to a mental hospital. Throughout this trauma, the 20-year old Brahms helped Clara look after the Schumanns' seven children – falling deeply (and as it turned out, hopelessly) in love with the heartbroken Clara. Meanwhile, he wrestled with his craft. The result, as it emerged two decades later in his First Symphony, is a first movement as taut and as powerful as Beethoven. Musicologists have traced the inner logic of every bar of this movement, but in music – as in life – first impressions can often be the most truthful. The opening bars of Brahms' First Symphony surely mean exactly what they sound like – the relentless pounding of a heart in torment.

The Symphony's middle movements confused early listeners. Still reeling from the first movement, they didn't know what to make of an *Andante* that seemed to come from another world – a deep, tender song, rounded off with a heart-rending violin solo. Beethoven

PROGRAMME NOTES

didn't write violin solos in his symphonies (though Schumann, as it happens, did)! The same goes for the sweetly-flowing third movement (marked *grazioso* – gracefully). Beethoven would have written a thunderous scherzo, and he would never have left it floating on a gentle woodwind chord. But Brahms is writing his own symphony – emotion recollected in tranquillity – and as we're about to find out, he's merely taking a breath. The opening of the fourth movement plunges back into the darkness. As the woodwinds cry and the strings fumble and struggle, you can almost hear Brahms searching, painfully, for a way forward.

And then – the clouds part, and as if from some alpine summit, a solo horn gives a long ringing call. The flute calls back and for the first time in the symphony, the trombones are heard, in a quiet hymn (Brahms believed that trombones were “too sacred” to use in any but the most serious music). And now comes the moment for which the world had been waiting since the death of Beethoven: as Brahms launches his finale with a once-in-a-lifetime tune unmistakably based on the *Hymn to Joy* from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. (“Any idiot can see that” was Brahms's gruff retort to listeners

who pointed out the likeness). And the broad, jubilant hymn that crowns the symphony's final bars makes his point unmistakably clear. This isn't Beethoven's Tenth. After a truly epic struggle, Brahms has found his own, very personal, path into the open. In a letter to Clara (they remained lifelong friends) he set his own words to that stirring horn call that heralds that dawn: “High on the mountain, deep in the vale: a thousandfold I send you my greeting”.

Programme note © Richard Bratby

GLOSSARY

Cadenza: A heavily embellished and extended passage of music for solo instrument that occurs towards the end of a movement. Traditionally, the cadenza would have been improvised by the performer, however later composers wrote them out in full.

Intermezzo: A light-hearted, sometimes comic piece of music inserted as an interlude.



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ILAN VOLKOV

CONDUCTOR



Since his prodigious breakthrough as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the age of 19, Ilan Volkov has matured into a versatile conductor whose interpretations of familiar repertoire are sought after internationally. He enjoys a long-standing relationship with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, as Principal Conductor from 2003 and Principal Guest Conductor since 2009. A musical omnivore, Volkov also serves as a dynamic figurehead of the international contemporary music scene.

He launched the Tectonics Festival in 2012, which has since become one of the world's most diverse and acclaimed celebrations of new music, with festivals in Adelaide, Oslo, New York, Tel Aviv, Krakow, Athens, Glasgow and Reykjavik. In 2020 he co-founded the I&I Foundation with Ilya Gringolts to support the development and performance of new music.

Volkov's repertoire with a variety of ensembles spreads far and wide, and he often appears at the world's foremost festivals, such as Salzburg, Edinburgh, BBC Proms, Lucerne, Unsound Krakow, Musikprotkoll and Berlin. Between 2011 and 2014 he was Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra.

Equally at home in opera, his extensive operatic ventures have included Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* for San Francisco Opera, Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Glyndebourne Festival, *Peter Grimes* for Washington National Opera and Glyndebourne Festival, and Gerald Barry's *The Importance of Being Ernest* at the Lincoln Center with New York Philharmonic, Bach's *Actus Tragicus* at Stuttgart Opera, and Olga Neuwirth's *The Outcast* in Vienna and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. Most recently he conducted Samir Odeh-Tamimi's new creation *L'Apocalypse Arabe* for the Aix Festival 2021.

Volkov's diverse discography includes Stravinsky's ballet scores and a Gramophone Award-winning recording of Britten's complete works for piano and orchestra, both for Hyperion, and a critically-acclaimed survey of Liszt's three *Funeral Odes* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He has a podcast for Radio Halas, in which he explores his extensive musical tastes and interviews colleagues. ■

Photo © Astrid Ackermann

“Israeli conductor Ilan Volkov is a blur of manic energy, a font of curiosity and advocacy...”

National Sawdust Log



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These concerts have been made possible by funding from Arts Council England's Culture Recovery Fund, plus generous support from thousands of individuals, charitable trusts and companies through *The Sound of the Future* fundraising campaign.

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STEVEN OSBORNE

PIANO



“... always
a player in
absolute
service to the
composer.”

The Observer

Steven Osborne is one of Britain’s most treasured musicians whose insightful and idiomatic interpretations of diverse repertoire show an immense musical depth. His numerous awards include The Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year and two Gramophone Awards. His residences at London’s Wigmore Hall, Antwerp’s deSingel, the Bath International Music Festival, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra are a testament to the respect he commands.

Steven Osborne’s two most recent recordings, Prokofiev’s War Sonatas, and French works for piano duet with Paul Lewis, his 30th and 31st recordings for Hyperion, were both shortlisted for a Gramophone Award.

Steven Osborne’s recitals are publicly and critically acclaimed without exception, and 2021/22 sees his focus shift to works by Debussy and Rachmaninoff in preparation for his next recordings. He has performed at many of the world’s prestigious venues including the Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Kennedy Center Washington and is a regular guest at both Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall.

Concerto performances take Steven Osborne to major orchestras all over the world including recent visits to the Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Radio Symphonieorchester Wien, Oslo Philharmonic, Danish National Radio, the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Australian Chamber Orchestra, St Louis Symphony, Aspen Music Festival and Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center with repertoire ranging from Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich and Messiaen through to Tippett, Britten and Julian Anderson who dedicated his 2017 Piano Concerto to Steven. 2021/22 sees Steven as Artist in Residence with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, performing Brahms with Elim Chan and Beethoven with Philippe Herreweghe. Elsewhere he performs with the Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia, Orquesta Sinfonica do Porto, Royal Scottish National Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras.

Recording plans continue with French repertoire, with 2022 seeing the release of solo works by Debussy, his 32nd CD for Hyperion. A label artist since 1998, his 31 recordings have accumulated numerous awards in the UK, France, Germany and the USA including two Gramophone Awards, three Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik Awards and a Choc in Classica Magazine in addition to a clutch of Editor’s Choice in Gramophone and Recordings of the Year from *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. His recordings span a wide range of repertoire including Beethoven, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Liszt, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Medtner, Messiaen, Britten, Tippett, Crumb and Feldman.

Steven Osborne won first prize at the prestigious Clara Haskil Competition (1991) and the Naumburg International Competition (1997). Born in Scotland he studied with Richard Beauchamp at St. Mary’s Music School in Edinburgh and Renna Kellaway at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Patron of the Lammermuir Festival and in 2014 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. ■

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Under the baton of its Music Director Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) is the flagship of musical life in Birmingham and the West Midlands, and one of the world's great orchestras.

Based in Symphony Hall, Birmingham, in a normal year the orchestra performs over 150 concerts each year in Birmingham, the UK and around the world, playing music that ranges from classics to contemporary, film music and even symphonic disco. With a far-reaching community programme and a family of choruses and ensembles, it is involved in every aspect of music-making in the Midlands. But at its centre is a team of 75 superb professional musicians, and a 100-year tradition of making the world's greatest music in the heart of Birmingham.

That local tradition started with the orchestra's very first symphonic concert in 1920 – conducted by Sir Edward Elgar. Ever since then, through war, recessions, social change and civic renewal, the CBSO has been proud to be Birmingham's orchestra. Under principal conductors including Adrian Boult, George Weldon, Andrzej Panufnik and Louis Frémaux, the CBSO won an artistic reputation that spread far beyond the Midlands. But it was when it discovered the young British conductor Simon Rattle in 1980 that the CBSO became internationally famous – and showed how the arts can help give a new sense of direction to a whole city.

Home and Away

Rattle's successors Sakari Oramo (1998-2008) and Andris Nelsons (2008-15) helped cement that global

reputation, and continued to build on the CBSO's tradition of flying the flag for Birmingham. As the only professional symphony orchestra based between Bournemouth and Manchester, the orchestra tours regularly in Britain – and much further afield. The CBSO has travelled to Japan and the United Arab Emirates in previous seasons, and in December 2016 made its debut tour of China. And its recordings continue to win acclaim. In 2008, the CBSO's recording of Saint-Saëns' complete piano concertos was named Best Classical Recording of the last 30 years by Gramophone.

Now, under the dynamic leadership of Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Associate Conductor Michael Seal and Assistant Conductor Jaime Santonja Espinós, the CBSO continues to do what it does best – playing great music for the people of Birmingham and the Midlands.

Meet the Family

The CBSO Chorus – a symphonic choir made up of "amateur professionals", trained by Simon Halsey CBE – is famous in its own right. The CBSO Children's Chorus and Youth Chorus showcase singers as young as six. Through its unauditioned community choir – CBSO SO Vocal in Selly Oak – the CBSO shares its know-how and passion for music with communities throughout the city. The CBSO Youth Orchestra gives that same opportunity to young instrumentalists aged 14-21, offering high-level training to the next generation of orchestral musicians alongside top international conductors and soloists.

These groups are sometimes called the "CBSO family" – over 650 amateur musicians of all ages and backgrounds, who work alongside the orchestra to make and share great music. But the CBSO's tradition of serving the community goes much further. Its Learning and Participation programme touches tens of thousands of lives a year, ranging from workshops in nurseries to projects that energise whole neighbourhoods. And everyone's welcome at CBSO Centre on Berkley Street. As well as being a friendly, stylish performance venue for the lunchtime concert series Centre Stage and contemporary jazz concerts by Jazzlines, the CBSO's rehearsal base is home to Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Ex Cathedra. Having recently enjoyed its 100th birthday, the CBSO, more than ever, remains the beating heart of musical life in the UK's Second City.

The CBSO recently announced that Kazuki Yamada has been appointed as its Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor with effect from 1 April 2023. ■

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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The *Sound of the Future* is a £12.5m fundraising campaign – launched to mark the CBSO's centenary – which will ensure the orchestra's recovery from the pandemic and redefine its future for the benefit of everyone across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

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