

European Classics: *Pastoral*



PROGRAMME

Tuesday 25 October 2022

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London Firebird Orchestra's 10th Anniversary Season

Welcome to the second concert of the London Firebird Orchestra's 10th Anniversary Season. Tonight we are performing Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven in a dazzling programme conducted by one of our two Principal Guest Conductors, Michael Thrift. We are delighted to welcome back Emmanuel Bach as soloists in Brahms's mighty Violin Concerto, performing with us for the second time.

Tonight's performance would not have been possible without the unstinting support of our Friends & Benefactors Society. I would like to thank each and every one of our donors who have provided support to the charity. If you are not yet a member, do please consider joining

us as your support would be extremely valuable to the orchestra - particularly in these challenging times. Just join online by visiting our website at www.londonfirebird.com.

Our full season programme is viewable on our website. Do book tickets online!

We hope you enjoy this evening's performance and look forward to seeing you again very soon.

Kindest regards,

Marc Corbett-Weaver

Artistic Director & Chief Executive

Programme design and digital support by Revolution Arts



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1891)

Overture to Don Giovanni, Op. K.527

The story of Mozart's composition of the Overture to his opera Don Giovanni is the ultimate 'essay crisis' success story. The night before the opera's first performance, he had still not written its overture. He stayed up all night, and by 7 am, when a copyist had been ordered to arrive, he had finished it.

The Overture opens with sonorous dark chords, throbbing sighs in the strings, and sinuous lines which go up and down, all ominously portending the protagonist's descent to hell that will occur at the end of the drama, as demons drag him down into the flames.

But after putting us on notice of Don Giovanni's fate, the music plunged into a happy allegro passage, which anticipates the comic scenes in the opera that will counterbalance the horror. Operas of the time were by convention either serious, opera seria, or comic, opera buffa. Mozart however, like Shakespeare, was clever at incorporating both into a single story, neither diminishing the other but instead providing dramatic contrast. Don Giovanni is a dark morality tale but with moments of comic relief.

The Overture resembles in scale and expressiveness the first movement of a symphony. It incorporates various themes that we will encounter in the opera itself, and at the end glides smoothly into the first aria of the opening scene.



Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

I Allegro no troppo

II Adagio

*III Allegro giocoso, ma non
trope vivace - Poco più
presto*

Brahms composed his first and only violin concerto in the summer of 1878, while in holiday in Pörtschach, an Austrian resort by the scenic lake, Wörthersee. His idyllic surroundings seem to have influenced the music. There is a grand, expansive and airy feel to this concerto, redolent of majestic vistas, just as there is in Brahms's Second Symphony – written in the same location, in the summer of the previous year. Talking of the musical inspiration he felt in Pörtschach, Brahms joked in a letter to a friend; “The melodies fly so thick here you have to be careful not to step on one”.

Brahms dedicated the concerto to his friend, Joseph Joachim, the most famous violinist of his time, who played it at the premiere, in Leipzig on New Year's Day, 1879. In fact, Joachim deserves credit for contributing to the composition of the piece – Brahms, himself a pianist with limited knowledge of violin technique, corresponded with him while writing it, asking for and receiving advice and suggestions.



The concerto is on the scale and with the character of a symphony. It is one of the most challenging pieces to play in the violin repertoire, with technically fiendish passages having to be belted in order to stand on par with the symphonic majesty of the orchestral parts. The contemporary virtuoso violinist Henryk Wieniawski declared the concerto to be “unplayable”. A famous quotation (attributed to various people) has it that the work is not so much for the violin but against it. Like many witty quotes, this is both unfair, and slightly true.

The first movement, marked *Allegro non troppo*, begins with a slow introduction from the orchestra. This contains the seeds for most of the themes later developed in the movement. The violin then enters with dramatic flair, before presenting the expansive warmth of the main theme and its counterpart, a longing melody. The movement combines Brahmsian intensity with gentler, lyrical passages. It ends with a cadenza composed by Joachim.

The slow *Adagio* second movement is notable and unusual in a concerto for the prominent part it gives to another solo instrument, the oboe. This presents the main theme, with the violin later joining in and elaborating on it. (The violin virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate refused to play the concerto on account of this, his celebrity ego affronted by having to stand around, with violin

in hand, while the oboist takes centre stage.) The mood of the movement is of inner longing and searing Romantic beauty.

The third and final movement is full of energy and fire. Brahms is often serious and brooding, but when the sun occasionally comes out, it shines brightly. The main theme requires extreme skill on the soloist's part with a succession of double-stops (playing two notes simultaneously), to be played both lyrically and thunderously, as an equal partner with orchestra. The dance-like exuberance of the main theme is balanced by a poignant, song-like interlude. After a final, brief farewell theme played by the soloist, the movement, and concerto, ends with stately and triumphant chords played by the full orchestra.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op.68 Pastoral

I Allegro ma non troppo

Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the countryside

II Andante molto mosso

Scene by the brook

III Allegro

Merry gathering of country folk

IV Allegro

Thunder, storm

V Allegretto

Shepherd's song Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm



Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, in F, also known as the *Pastoral*, was inspired by the composer's deep love of nature. "No one can love the country as much as I do", he once said, "for surely woods, trees and rocks produce the echo which man most desires to hear".

His favourite pastime of taking walks in the countryside surrounding Vienna evoked in him an almost religious awe: "In the country I seem to hear every tree repeating 'Holy, Holy, Holy'".

Beethoven's English pianist friend Charles Neate said that he had "never met anyone who so delighted in Nature, or so thoroughly enjoyed flowers or clouds or other natural objects".

Similarly, one of his students, the Countess Theresa von Brunswick, recalled that he would escape the agitations of his mind by absorption in natural beauty: "He loved to be alone with Nature, to make her his only confidante. When his brain was seething with confused ideas, Nature at all times comforted him".

Completed in 1808, the *Pastoral* Symphony was premiered on 22 December later that year in Vienna. The four-hour long concert was in a freezing cold, unheated theatre and with an under-rehearsed orchestra. It also featured, among other pieces, the first performance of his fiery 5th Symphony as well as a performance of the 4th Piano Concerto with Beethoven himself as the piano soloist.

The *Pastoral* is one of Beethoven's few explicitly programmatic works, although he himself described it as "more the expression of feeling than painting". Each of its five movements contain a verbal description of a scene telling the story of a walk through the country and the sights and sounds encountered

The sonata form first movement begins with a relaxing, expansive and deeply happy theme depicting the feelings of arriving in the country. As its motifs are extensively developed there is a sentiment of returning to one's spiritual home.

The second movement, also in sonata form, opens with a motif on the strings depicting flowing water in a setting beside a flowing brook. The feelings of peace, serenity and the eternality of the flowing waters are rapturously conveyed. Towards the end of the movement there is a cadenza for woodwind instruments imitating various bird calls.

The third movement is a lively scherzo depicting a peasants' festival, or country fair with a village band and merry dancing.

The wind instruments heard most prominently are appropriately those of rustic artists with flute, oboe and bassoon.

In the fourth movement the revellers must disperse as dark clouds gather and thunder rumbles. As the music moves to the darker key of F minor it erupts into a violent storm with thunder claps, lightning, high winds and torrential rain. But the storm gradually passes as the thunder recedes into the distance. The sun finally emerges from behind the clouds in a seamless transition into the fifth and final movement, a lilting and charming shepherd's hymn of thanksgiving.

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I Allegro no troppo
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INTERVAL

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Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op.68 Pastoral

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II Andante molto mosso
Scene by the brook
III Allegro
Thunder, storm
IV Allegretto
Shepherd's song. Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm

Michael Thrift conductor
Emmanuel Bach violin
London Firebird Orchestra

Programme notes by Michael Manning Clark

Members of the audience are respectfully requested to refrain from filming or recording any part of this evening's performance on phones or other electronic devices. Recording is strictly prohibited.

Michael Thrift

In 2022/23 Australian-British conductor Michael Thrift continues his long-standing relationship with the London Firebird Orchestra, having conducted the orchestra during the past several seasons. In addition to tonight's concert, Michael will lead concerts later in the season.

In addition to his symphony work, Michael is a fervent conductor of opera. In 2014 he joined the team at Fulham Opera for Verdi's *Falstaff*, returning to lead Puccini's *Il Tabarro* in 2015. Since then, he has conducted the revival of *Falstaff*, as well as new productions of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo*, and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. For Ormond Opera, he has conducted Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Bizet's *Carmen*. In 2017, Michael conducted several works at the Blue Danube Opera Conducting Competition at the Rouse State Theatre, Bulgaria, leading the company's forces in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* and Saint-Saens *Samson et Delilah*. Elsewhere, Michael has led productions of Wagner's *Parsifal*, as well as performances of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. In 2021 he led an acclaimed performance in the London Opera Company's debut production of *Tristan & Isolde*. 2022 performances include Verdi's *Aida*, and Janacek's *Katya Kabanova*.

Educated in Sydney, Michael undertook studies in composition at Sydney University, alongside conducting. Notable achievements include winning the Young Composer of the Year Award in 2001 (ASME) and performances by the Adelaide Symphony and the Sydney University Symphony Orchestra.



A passionate advocate for new music, he is an active part of the London new music scene. In 2013, he helped to inaugurate the Composer's Academy at the Cheltenham Festival and has worked with the Dr. K Sextet in both Cheltenham and London. He has lead premiers of new music with the London Firebird Orchestra, and has worked closely with composition students from the University of Middlesex during LFO's collaborations in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

In his free time, Michael enjoys sharing the joys of South-Australian red wines as well as decrying the state of New Zealand whites. An unabashed love of sci-fi literature provides escapism. Michael regularly lives a vicarious, alternative existence through the Australia cricket team, though his duties to music inevitably snap him back into reality. He lives with wife and son in Manchester.

www.michaelthrift.co.uk

Emmanuel Bach

Winner of the Royal Over-Seas League Strings Competition, Emmanuel has performed as a soloist at venues including Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wigmore Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields and St James' Piccadilly. A former Countess of Munster Trust Recital Artist, he has given recitals and played concertos across the UK and abroad. He has performed over twenty solo works with orchestra, including Beethoven, Brahms, Bruch (No.1 and Scottish Fantasy), Glazunov, Lalo, Mendelssohn, Paganini, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky. He has performed as soloist with conductors including David Hill MBE, Jonathan Willcocks, Maxim Vengerov, Darrell Davison, Rob Hodge, Chris Hopkins and others. Maxim Vengerov described his playing of the Brahms Concerto as 'a superb rendition, a deep and emotional performance.' Emmanuel's awards include being semi-finalist and JS Bach prize-winner in the Lipizer International Competition, being a prize-winner in the Mirecourt International Competition, winning the Una Clark Competition and receiving an English-Speaking Union Scholarship.

He has performed live and been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and been broadcast on Classic FM South Africa and French television. In 2022, Emmanuel had the honour of playing in the City of London's Holocaust Memorial Ceremony. He also had the distinction of performing as co-soloist with Anne-Sophie Mutter in JS Bach's Double Concerto, on her receipt of an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. In 2018, he gave a concerto-recital



tour of South Africa, returning in 2022, with invitations for 2023. As a chamber musician, he has performed at Norfolk Festival (USA), IMUSE Enghien (Belgium), Johannesburg International Mozart Festival (South Africa), CreArt Box (Spain), BBC World Music Day, Beaminster Festival, Parry Festival, Shute Festival and elsewhere. He received a Full Fellowship on the Yale Summer School, working with the Emerson, Artis and Brentano Quartets. He held an Edison Fellowship at the British Library, London, researching historic violin and chamber music recordings. As a teacher, he teaches privately and has coached young musicians on Pro Corda as a Leverhulme Fellow.

Emmanuel's teacher was Natasha Boyarsky, with whom he studied while reading Music at Magdalen College, Oxford, gaining a Double First. He then took a Masters as a scholar at the Royal College of Music and an Artist Diploma latterly studying with Radu Blidar. He has also studied with Dr Felix Andrievsky. He has benefitted from masterclasses with eminent musicians such as Pierre Amoyal, Miriam Fried, Shlomo Mintz, Maxim Vengerov and Dong-Suk Kang. Emmanuel's CD releases include 'Bach to the Future' (Salon Music), 'Musical Mosaics' (Willowhayne) and most recently 'Lennox in Paris' (Willowhayne), which received five stars from Musical Opinion and was described by Pizzicato as 'an intense journey through time'. He has been generously supported by Talent Unlimited, the English-Speaking Union, Tompkins Tate Trust, Joan Conway Bursary, Woking Young Musicians' Trust, HR Taylor Trust, Joanna Leach Foundation and Worshipful Company of Drapers.



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Calyssa Davidson

Award-winning American violinist Calyssa Davidson is a versatile artist whose wide range of interests has led her to perform throughout the world with major orchestras, bands, in musicals, and record solo violin for several feature and independent films as well as television including the BBC.

Along with performing in venues such as the Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Cadogan Hall, and Wigmore Hall, Davidson has led recording sessions at Abbey Road, Air Edel, and Angel Studios and has recorded the solo violin score for the BBC2 documentary series *The Story of China* and wrote and recorded the solo violin scores for the BBC2 documentary *Normandy '44: The Battle Beyond D-Day* and BBC4 documentary *Shakespeare's Mother: The Secret Life of a Tudor Woman*. She can also be heard on the *Harry & Meghan: A Royal Romance* soundtrack from the Lifetime original movie with the same title.

Davidson has been featured on soundtracks for various video games, trailers, and adverts and has performed alongside Grammy-award winner Rick Springfield, Alfie Boe, and Rick Wakeman. She can also be seen in Springfield's music video, *Christmas With You*.

Most recently, she was solo violinist for Tim Firth's (*Calendar Girls*, *Kinky Boots*) new musical *Now Is Good* at the Storyhouse Theatre, which earned a 4-star review in *The Guardian*. Within the last year, Davidson has also been the solo violinist for the West End premiere of the musical *Broken Wings* and co-led the 29-piece orchestra at the London Coliseum for the world premiere of *Rumi: The Musical*.



Originally from California, Davidson moved to London in 2010 to attend the Royal College of Music where she earned her Master's Degree in Violin Performance and Composition for Screen and Bachelor of Music Degree in Violin Performance where she was supported by an Alice Templeton Scholarship and a Robert McFadzean Whyte Award Scholarship. Whilst at the RCM, Davidson studied with former Associate Leader of the Philharmonia Orchestra and former Co Leader of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Adrian Levine, and film and television composers Maurizio Malagnini (*Call the Midwife*, *The Paradise*) and Howard Davidson (*Death Games*, *The Battle for Malta*). Amongst others, Davidson has also studied with world-renowned violinists Ivry Gitlis, Gilles Apap, LA Phil Concertmaster Martin Chalifour and former BBC Concert Orchestra Leader Cynthia Fleming.

Davidson frequently returns to California for work in Los Angeles and is set to perform as soloist debuting a new violin concerto with the Santa Barbara Symphony in their next season.

London Firebird Orchestra

London Firebird Orchestra's 10th Anniversary Season

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Michael Thrift

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George Harliono

Leader

Calyssa Davidson

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Viola

Elizabeth Tobald

James Cullen

Jamie Howe

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Megu Huang

Cello

Elizabeth Elliott *(Sponsored by Philip & Suzy Rowley)*

Elia Benhamou

Chian Chian Hsu

Bass

Adam Churchyard

(Sponsored by David & Ellis Baty)

Flute

Nika Pinter *(Sponsored by Ann Scott)*

Doroti Vincler

Oboe

Polly Bartlett *(Sponsored by Trevor & Elizabeth Gore)*

Oboe / Cor Anglais

Dorothea Delbrück

Clarinet

Thomas Gant

(Sponsored by Ken Watters & Robin Wilkinson)

Diogo Bandola

Bassoon

Hugh Woolley

Kei Yin Lu

Horn

Caoime Glavin

Emma Edwards

Trumpet

Jack Wilson *(Sponsored by Professor Thomas Hale & Dr Sam Webster)*

Samantha Barnhart

Alto Trombone

Felix Fardell

Tenor Trombone

Joe Smales

Timpani

Lewis Blee

Stage Manager

Gabriella Coomber



London Firebird Orchestra is an orchestra of young musicians comprising talented orchestral players who are making the journey from study into the profession.

Through Firebird's annual season of concerts, players perform core repertoire at central London concert venues, while collaborating with renowned soloists, composers and conductors of the younger generation.

By providing this experience, Firebird offers a helpful platform at the crucial early stages of professional life.

The Orchestra has collaborated with many renowned soloists, including Mathieu van Bellen, Thomas Gould, Aleksei Kiseliov, James Meldrum, Jennifer Pike, Yury Revich, Leonard Schreiber and Raphael Wallfisch.

Each Season, Firebird showcases a small number of prize-winning conductors of the younger generation who conduct the concerts.

The Orchestra also organises an annual composition competition for young composers, with a cash prize and live performance for the composer of the winning work.

Outreach is an important part of Firebird's mission. Since 2013, the Orchestra has held a residency at Middlesex University, involving large-scale concerts, conducting and composition workshops, ensemble and dance performances.

The 2018/19 season saw the launch of a new outreach project for the orchestra "Firebird for Schools" – a tailor-made children's concert for London schoolchildren.

London Firebird Orchestra operates as a registered charity, governed by a Board of Trustees.

The Orchestra is supported by Dame Judi Dench as Patron, the Firebird Friends & Benefactors Society and a series of generous sponsors.

A complete list of Friends & Benefactors can be found on page 2 of this programme.

Concert programme 2023

Join us for more European Classic concerts in London



European Classics: Magic & Mayhem

Our first concert in 2023 features the Turkish cellist **Jamal Aliyev** performing one of the greatest of all cello concertos. Music in this concert on **7 February** includes:

Mozart Overture to Die Zauberflöte, K.620

Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto No.1 in A minor, Op.33

Beethoven Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.67



Firebird Chamber Platform:

Trio de Beauvoir

Firebird is delighted to launch this chamber music concert on **21 March** – the first of our new chamber concerts. This one features:

Beethoven Piano trio in B flat, Op. 11

Fanny Mandelssohn Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 11

Gabriela Lena-Frank Four Folk Songs

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European Classics:
Garden of Fire



Firebird for Schools 2023



European Classics:
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At the heart of our Orchestra is the Firebird Friends & Benefactors Society. Launched at the Orchestra's inception in 2012 and now with around 100 members, the Friends & Benefactors Society is a growing association of supporters forming the core of our audience.

Members commit an annual donation to the charity, providing a vital bedrock of funding for the orchestra. Without this vital income stream, the Orchestra's concerts would not be possible. Why not join to today to become part of our family and help us continue to grow?

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or speak to one of our team.**