

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Kazuki & Sheku Kanneh-Mason
Symphony Hall
Saturday 16 September, 2023
7:00pm

CBSO.CO.UK



**KAZUKI
& SHEKU
KANNEH-MASON**

Concert programme £4

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Beethoven, Leonore Overture No.1

9mins

Shostakovich, Cello Concerto No.1

28mins

Interval

Walton, Symphony No.1

43mins

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor
Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Cello

MEMBERS' EVENT

From 6:15pm: Members' Reception.
 Pre-concert and during the interval.

We are very happy for you to take photographs at CBSO concerts, but please do be discreet to avoid disturbing other audience members. We would suggest dimming the brightness on your phone, taking pictures during applause breaks, and not using your flash. Please note that filming is not allowed.

We also regularly take photographs for promotional use, so you may see a professional photographer at our concerts. Please ask a member of the front of house team if you have any questions about this.

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From a closer insight into the music and rehearsals, to hearing about life as a musician, CBSO members can get more from their concert-going experience by getting to know the people behind the instruments.

From priority booking to members' events and behind-the-scenes information, there are plenty of reasons to join the CBSO. But it is the people themselves who are at the very heart of our membership. CBSO members can enjoy the chance to share the company of musicians and artists and meet new like-minded friends. In addition, through their annual donation, they help to provide vital support towards our Sound of the Future Campaign, a fundraising campaign launched to help the orchestra recover from the pandemic and reinvigorate its future, giving musical experiences to even more people.

To join us as a CBSO member, simply visit cbsoco.uk/membership to sign up online or call Rachel Cooper on 0121 616 6510.

We look forward to welcoming you to the family!



KAZUKI & SHEKU KANNEH-MASON

You must have heard of Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the brilliant young British cellist who's transforming the way we listen to classical music. Here at the CBSO, we're always excited to welcome him back, and tonight he stars in Shostakovich's gripping First Cello Concerto – the dark heart of a concert that begins with Beethoven and ends with Walton's explosive First Symphony.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

BEETHOVEN, LEONORE OVERTURE NO. 1

Beethoven's 'Leonore' overture is associated with his only opera, *Fidelio*, first performed in 1805. The plot is intriguing and apparently based on a true story: the rescue of Florestan, a political prisoner, by his wife Leonore in disguise as a prison guard named 'Fidelio'. Beethoven would have preferred to call his opera 'Leonore, or the Triumph of Married Love', but there was another opera doing the rounds at the time called 'Leonore', so 'Fidelio' it was.

But the name of Leonore survives in the shape of not one, but three separate overtures, with a somewhat complex history. In sum: number 1 was thought to have been written first but now isn't, was never performed in public, and only discovered after Beethoven's death; while number 2 was composed first and used at the premiere, and number 3 written for

a revised version of the opera, and later thrown in between scenes in Act 2 (a fourth overture isn't called Leonore at all and is the one generally used in opera performances today). All clear?

Leonore 1 was probably written for a planned performance of the opera in Prague in 1807 that never in fact happened, but it would have worked brilliantly as a curtain-raiser. Its opening section has a slowly-gathering sense of anticipation: an initial theme in the strings, followed by a series of scales passed around from section to section. The music surges towards a series of C major chords springing triumphantly upwards, very like Beethoven's symphonic style. The lyrical central section links the overture definitively to *Fidelio*, quoting Florestan's beautiful 'prison' aria from the second act, during which he sees a vision of his wife. The music then returns to the 'triumphant' themes, evolving from a quiet start through a boisterous crescendo, then a teasing sudden pianissimo before the final climactic chords.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

SHOSTAKOVICH, CELLO CONCERTO NO. 1 IN E FLAT MAJOR

Shostakovich's Cello Concerto, composed in 1959, was inspired by the remarkable gifts of cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, who was constantly hungry for new works. (A rumour persists that the composer's wife told Rostropovich that the way to get Shostakovich to write for him was not to ask him to write for him. This strategy, if such it was, eventually worked). Shostakovich raced through the composition in about six weeks, and Rostropovich – somehow – learned the cello part, including its five minute solo cadenza, in only six days.



SHOSTAKOVICH IN 1958.
HOLGER EKLUND, PUBLIC DOMAIN,
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Other than the unaccompanied cadenza, the orchestra and soloist are engaged in a passionate dialogue (sometimes a blistering argument) throughout, sharing much of the same material.

The orchestra is small for a Shostakovich work: strings, woodwind, a single horn, plus timpani and celesta in the percussion. The celesta makes only a brief, disturbing cameo in the second movement, while the horn is effectively a second soloist, appearing regularly to heckle the cellist. This is particularly the case in the first movement, a tightly-wound Allegretto. It begins with a four-note motif that pervades the entire work (apart from the second movement), starting with the cello's opening statement, echoed by woodwind, and followed later by a sinister version in the strings. When the solo horn appears, it does little but repeat it, somewhat belligerently. The Allegretto ends abruptly with a bang, leaving the only gap in the work before the end.

The second movement begins with a richly scored melody in the strings, and a further starring moment for the horn. The cello arrives with a beautifully sad, folk-like tune. These themes evolve and transform throughout the movement, and the ending is disconcerting in the extreme: cello harmonics, lightly accompanied, with the celesta playing fragmented themes in a ghostly echo. The cadenza is long enough to qualify as a separate movement, gaining in momentum before ushering in the fourth movement.

As with many Shostakovich finales, this one has a diabolical energy, bristling with obsessive repetitions and characteristically grotesque humour. In a back and forth tune between low strings and woodwind we hear a snatch of the folk melody 'Suliko', known to be a favourite of Stalin's: quite possibly this is what Stephen Johnson has described as 'the aural equivalent of a nose-thumbing, or possibly a ruder gesture' towards the late Russian dictator (Shostakovich reportedly had to restrain himself from laughing

out loud every time this passage was performed). In the final moments, the horn appears once more to remind us of the motif from the first movement. The movement finally hurtles towards its conclusion with an abrupt seven-note burst from the timpani.

Sir William Walton (1902-1983)

WALTON, SYMPHONY NO. 1

Walton's first symphony was commissioned by the Irish conductor Hamilton Harty in 1932, but not completed until 1935.

The composer was at the time suffering a paralysing bout of composer's block, which may be surprising, given how big and bold the Symphony is. He sailed past several deadlines before finally presenting the ever-patient Harty with an 'Unfinished Symphony' – minus its final movement – in December 1934.

The reason for his blockage was partly that he often found composing a difficult and painstaking process. But he was also experiencing a great deal of personal turbulence in this period. He had heard ominous reports about Hitler's rise to power and was extremely worried about friends in Germany; plus, his colourful affair with the dramatic Imma von Doernberg was going through a crisis, and she ultimately abandoned him. However, he turned a corner in late 1934, invigorated by the start of a new romance (with heiress Alice Wimbourne) and by the successful completion of his first film score. He eventually produced a finale for the Symphony and it was premiered – in its complete form – in November 1935.

The Symphony appears to follow the trajectory of Walton's life at the time: a stormy first movement, a spiky Scherzo (marked 'with malice'), a deeply-felt, tragic slow movement, and an optimistic, vivacious finale which speaks of the rebirth of his 'muse'.

There is a powerful sense of anticipation right from the opening timpani rumble. The rest of the orchestra then wakes up to gather for an impressive crescendo, before taking a dramatically darker turn and introducing a surging theme in the lower strings, coupled with Walton's trademark rhythms and jazz-inspired harmonies. This pattern of build/crescendo/dramatic explosion plays out across the whole movement. The most sustained example is towards the end: an extraordinary passage of about five minutes, full of obsessive repetition, heavy on the brass and with an energetic workout for the timpanist. The tension is finally released through an emotionally exhausted coda.

The 'malicious' second movement crackles with a wild, unpredictable energy – Walton's rhythms here have an unhinged quality, suggesting a volatile argument. A 'false' ending is followed by what sounds like a snarky 'final word', complete with metaphorical door-slam.

By total contrast, the *Andante con melinconia* is full of sorrow and regret, with a heartbreaking opening melody. The music begins in a suitably 'melancholy' mood, but becomes more emotionally raw as it continues – darker, even, than the more dissonant parts of the previous two movements.

The long-awaited finale, then, comes as a surprise in its bustling cheerfulness. The composer's rhythms are here lively and dance-like, rather than unsettling, while each section of the orchestra indulges in playful fugues and canons with each other. The timpani plays a further major role, joined in this movement by percussive comrades, including tam-tam and cymbals. Some dissonance remains, and there is a more reflective 'chorale' for solo trumpet towards the end. But, after the fraught atmosphere of the previous movements listeners may feel – as undoubtedly Walton did – that this finale is a well-earned celebration.

Programme notes © Lucy Walker

Conductor

KAZUKI YAMADA



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As the Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Kazuki Yamada builds upon the deep musical bond formed with players during his time as Principal Guest Conductor of the orchestra, a role held by him since 2018. Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo. Having already worked with the two organisations in partnership, conducting collaborative performances of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in Monaco in 2019, Yamada's new appointment sees a continuing link forged between Monaco and Birmingham, with the CBSO Chorus set for a return to Monaco in 2023 for a performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Time spent under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan as Principal Guest Conductor of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

SHEKU KANNEH-MASON

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason's career and performances span the globe. Whether performing for children in a school hall, at an underground club or in the world's leading concert venues, Sheku's mission is to make music accessible to all. After winning the BBC Young Musician competition in 2016, Sheku's performance at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle in 2018 was watched by two billion people worldwide. Highlights of the 23/24 season include the Last Night of the Proms with the BBC Symphony and Marin Alsop, performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, Orquesta Nacional de España, National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Oslo Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Gävle Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic on tour in Germany, Cincinnati Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Detroit Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony. Sheku is a graduate of London's Royal Academy of Music where he studied with Hannah Roberts and in May 2022 was appointed as the Academy's first Menuhin Visiting Professor of Performance Mentoring.



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