



GBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Kazuki & Benjamin Grosvenor
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 10 April 2024,
2:15pm

Concert programme £4

GBSO.CO.UK

KAZUKI & BENJAMIN GROSVENOR



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to tonight's concert featuring our incredible soloist and good friend Benjamin Grosvenor.

We begin with Fauré's *Masques et Bergamasques* which is a very gentle piece and good for the opening of the concert. I love this piece. The overture is so great. It's fantastic. We can feel the many French flavours, French perfumes, French colours, from this piece. The last movement can be a little philosophical. So, they are four very interesting pieces.

Next, we have Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3. Actually, this concerto is related with Japan. Prokofiev went to Japan, and we hear the sound elements from Japan. Prokofiev didn't mention exactly that it was a Japanese theme, not like that. But somehow people can feel the connection. Especially for the Japanese people.

Prokofiev loved the ballet so much. His music is always like dance music. People can dance and it's so beautiful.

Now, the beginning of the piece... it's a C major opening, and the beginning of the piano solo is only a scale, very simple but so exciting. It's like opening a door and through it, a C major scale is coming. Wow! We're then immediately invited into Prokofiev's world.

The second movement is always a little deeper, typical Prokofiev, introspective. And the third movement, again dancing, exciting, enthusiastic music. Also, the melody is so beautiful. But not only the melody, the rhythm is so important. A very simple rhythm but it can have such power. It's very, very interesting, and it's a very tough piece for the pianist actually. But I know Benjamin, and I can imagine he'll play so well. He's incredible. You will love it.

For the second time this season we finish the concert with *Symphonie Fantastique*, another very special piece for me. I have conducted this piece many times – it was one of my first professional orchestra performances. It is a part of my body; it's very strong, and it requires some madness and crazy feelings.



Fauré, Masques et Bergamasques Suite, Op. 112, 14mins

- I. Ouvertue
- II. Menuet
- III. Gavotte
- IV. Pastorale

Prokofiev, Piano Concerto No.3, 28mins

- I. Andante – Allegro
- II. Tema con variazione
- III. Allegro ma non troppo

Interval

Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique, 55mins

- I. Rêveries – Passions (Dreams and passions)
- II. Un bal (A ball)
- III. Scène aux champs (Scene in the country)
- IV. Marche au supplice (March to the scaffold)
- V. Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat (Dream of a witches' Sabbath)

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor

Benjamin Grosvenor, Piano

Charlotte Corderoy, Assistant Conductor

FREE PRE-CONCERT CONVERSATION

Join music journalist and writer Jessica Duchén. The event will take place in the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space from 1:15pm.

We are very happy for you to take photographs and short video clips at our concerts, but please refrain from recording the whole performance. We'd love you to share them with us @TheCBSO.

We do ask that you are mindful of disturbing other audience members and therefore ask that you dim the brightness on your phone, take pictures during applause breaks and do not use your flash.

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.

To ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the performance, please make sure your mobile phone is set to silent.

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KAZUKI & BENJAMIN GROSVENOR

Crazy in love: when Berlioz fell, he fell hard, pouring all his passions and fantasies into an epic, opium-fuelled orchestral showstopper. He didn't call it "Symphonie Fantastique" for nothing! But that's not the only good story we'll be hearing today, as Kazuki Yamada evokes French poetry, and our good friend Benjamin Grosvenor takes the spotlight in Prokofiev's firecracker of a Third Piano Concerto.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

MASQUES ET BERGAMASQUES SUITE, OP.112

- I. Overture
- II. Menuet
- III. Gavotte
- IV. Pastorale

"The characters Harlequin, Gilles and Colombine, whose task is usually to amuse the aristocratic audience, take their turn at being spectators at a *fête galante* on the island of Cythera. The lords and ladies, who as a rule applaud their efforts, now unwittingly provide them with entertainment by their coquettish behaviour."

Close your eyes, if you like, and imagine an eighteenth century that never was: a world of blue skies and swirling silk, where elegant gentlemen pay courtesies to beautiful ladies and the dancers and clowns of the *Commedia dell'arte* amuse them with

tales of witty and tender flirtation. That's the world that the poet René Fauchois dreamed up in 1918 at the request of Prince Albert of Monaco – whose realm might have been tiny but whose opera house and orchestra were superb (ask Kazuki Yamada). *Masques et bergamasques*, when staged in Monte Carlo in April 1919, was like a painting by Watteau come to life.

Naturally, Fauchois asked his friend Gabriel Fauré to write the music. Fauré was 73 at the time, and almost completely deaf: he was unwilling to write a wholly new score. Instead, he reworked a sequence of pieces from different periods of his life, and he included three of them in this suite from the drama. The sparkling, dancing *Overture* and the lilting *Menuet* both came from a symphony that the student Fauré had started in 1869, at the age of 24, and then withdrawn – as did the sprightly *Gavotte*. Inspired, he did in the end write one new, original piece for *Masques et bergamasques*, and it closes the suite: the lovely *Pastorale* – emotion recollected in luminous tranquillity.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

PIANO CONCERTO NO.3 IN C, OP.26

- I. Andante – Allegro
- II. Tema con variazione
- III. Allegro ma non troppo

In the spring of 1927, the violinist David Oistrakh heard Prokofiev play the piano in Odessa, and was bowled over. "What struck me about Prokofiev's playing was its remarkable simplicity" he recalled later. "Not a single superfluous gesture, not a single exaggerated expression of emotion, no striving for effect."

That could almost do as a description of one of the pieces Prokofiev had played on that Russian tour, his Third Piano Concerto, which he'd written in France and premiered in Chicago on 16th December 1921. Prokofiev had planned "a large virtuoso concerto" as far back as 1911, he explained. "In 1913, I had composed a theme for variations...in 1916-17 I tried several times to return to the Third Concerto. I wrote a beginning for it...[themes] were composed in St Petersburg, some in the Pacific Ocean and others in America...Thus when I began working on the [third concerto] I already had the entire thematic material..." But somehow it all fits beautifully together. That shouldn't surprise us; composers often let ideas gestate for years until their final shape and destiny becomes clear.

And the Third Concerto is gloriously clear. The clarinet sings a lyrical melody, the orchestra joins in, enraptured - and with a sudden, thrilling acceleration, the piano makes a high-speed entrance. From then on, the keyboard is both an energising and a subversive force – steering this first movement into its spiky second melody, and only gradually (at the centre of the movement) letting itself be dragged into the orchestra's dreamy reminiscences of that lyrical opening melody. The voltage

increases relentlessly as the first movement hurtles to its end. Next comes the theme – deadpan and balletic – that Prokofiev had noted down before the war. Now, in the brave new world of 1921, the piano leads it on a series of five variations, by turns delicate, angular and energetic, rhapsodic, martial and finally, well, what? Resigned? Nostalgic, even?

Regardless: Prokofiev the joker is back at the opening of the *Finale* – as awkward bassoon and ringing piano launch a movement of steadily mounting energy that finds room for episodes of soaring, luminous song before the piano ignites the final conflagration. The Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont, hearing the concerto, responded with a sonnet:

An exultant flame of a crimson flower,
A verbal keyboard sparkling with flames
That suddenly leap forth in fiery tongues...
Prokofiev! Music and youth in bloom...



PORTRAIT OF SERGEI PROKOFIEV (C. 1918).
BAIN NEWS SERVICE, PUBLISHER, PUBLIC DOMAIN,
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE, OP.14A

- I. Rêveries – Passions
(Dreams and passions)
- II. Un bal (A ball)
- III. Scène aux champs
(Scene in the country)
- IV. Marche au supplice
(March to the scaffold)
- V. Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat
(Dream of a witches' Sabbath)

"Fantastic Symphony: Episode in the life of an Artist.

A young artist of an unusually sensitive nature and a vivid imagination has taken opium in the depths of lovesick despair. The drug has thrown him into a deep sleep, accompanied by the most extraordinary visions. In this state, his feelings and his memories take on the form of musical ideas. Even his Beloved One takes the form of a melody in his mind – an *idée fixe* [an obsessive idea], which returns constantly, and which he sees everywhere."

That's the story that Hector Berlioz claimed to tell in his *Symphonie Fantastique* – and at least one part of it was entirely true. He really was "a young artist of an unusually sensitive nature and a vivid imagination", and in the spring of 1830, he was studying in Paris in the grip of not one, but three overpowering passions.

The first was Shakespeare. In September 1827, an English theatre company had performed *Hamlet* in Paris: it "struck me like a thunderbolt", he recalled. The second was Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony: "Beethoven opened before me a new world of music". And the third was love: crazy, unrequited love. Harriet Smithson was an Irish actress in the Shakespeare company; Berlioz had never even spoken to her, but he was smitten all the same. Meanwhile Camille Moke, a 21-year old pianist, took that as a

challenge: "She set my senses on fire till all the devils of hell danced in my veins".

So those were the ingredients. Mixed together in the mind of a young composer in love with the gothic and the Romantic, the result was the *Symphonie Fantastique*, written early in 1830 and first performed on 9th December 1832. Harriet was in the audience. Amazed by its programme, she made enquiries about the composer – "That poor young man...I hope he's forgotten me". Instead she learned, to her astonishment, that the piece was actually inspired by her. They were married within the year.

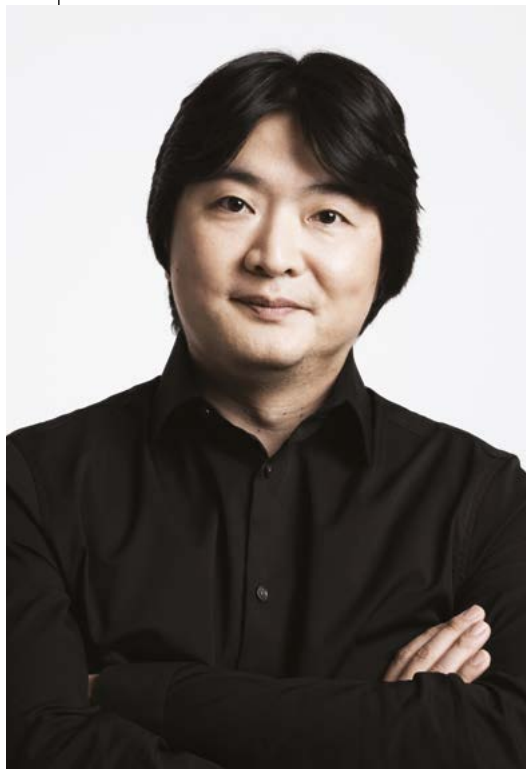
Berlioz insisted that his music should speak without words and the *Symphonie Fantastique* is definitely graphic enough to speak for itself! The one idea to bear in mind is the *idée fixe* – the tune representing the Beloved, which recurs throughout the Symphony. It's the long, lilting melody played by the violins immediately after the start of the fast Passions section of the first movement – coming after the long, wandering *Rêveries*.

Un bal is just that – an elegant Parisian *valse*, with harps glittering like diamonds. The Beloved appears, on oboe, in the centre of the movement – and our hero's heart is still skipping beats. In the peaceful *Scène aux champs* a lonely shepherd (cor anglais) pipes to his offstage sweetheart (oboe). By the end of the movement, his only reply is a distant rumble of thunder.

In the *Marche au supplice* the drugs have kicked in: our artist hallucinates that he's being executed, and the *idée fixe* makes a final appearance on clarinet before the guillotine blade falls and the head bounces into the basket. But it's not over: the scene darkens for a hellish supernatural fantasy of witches rejoicing in his doom. There are orchestral bells as midnight strikes, and the tuba belts out the *Dies Irae* funeral plainchant. As the dance spirals into madness, Berlioz unleashes everything he has left in a riotous orgy of sound.

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KAZUKI YAMADA



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Kazuki Yamada is Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), a role he commenced in Spring 2023. Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo (OPMC). Yamada has forged a link between Monaco and Birmingham having conducted collaborative performances with CBSO Chorus of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in both cities in 2019 and Orff's *Carmina Burana* in 2023. Time spent under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Kazuki Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan every season with NHK Symphony Orchestra and in his position as Principal Guest Conductor with Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. Shortly after assuming his position in Birmingham, Yamada gave a series of concerts on tour around Japan with the CBSO in summer 2023 and will take OPMC on tour to Japan in 2024.

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR

British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is regarded as one of the most important pianists to emerge in several decades, with Gramophone recently acknowledging him as one of the top 50 pianists ever on record. Concerto highlights in the 23/24 season include debuts with DSO Berlin and Iceland Symphony Orchestra featuring Busoni's Piano Concerto in the composer's anniversary year. He also performs with Gurzenich Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, CBSO, Hallé Orchestra, Washington National, and Indianapolis and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. In recital Grosvenor makes his debut in the Luzerns KlavierFestival and premieres at Chicago Symphony Master series and the Wigmore Hall. He also gives recitals in Yokohama, Cologne, Paris, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Klavier Festival Ruhr, Hong Kong City Hall, Bridgewater Hall, and Sala Verdi Milan. A keen chamber musician, he tours Japan with violinist Sayaka Shoji and Modigliani Quartet, including his debut at Suntory Hall, Tokyo. He also tours with his Piano Quartet at venues including the Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and Laeiszhalle, Hamburg. In 2011 Benjamin signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever, and the first British pianist in almost 60 years, to sign to the label.



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