

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Pictures at an Exhibition
Symphony Hall
Wed 1 May 2024,
7:30pm

CBSO.CO.UK



PICTURES
AT AN
EXHIBITION

Concert programme £4

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Anna Clyne

Composer, ATLAS (CBSO Commission: UK Premiere)

INTRODUCTION

I'm thrilled that the CBSO will be giving the UK premiere of my first piano concerto, ATLAS, as part of their 24-25 season launch evening.

I'm also delighted that it's on the same program as Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (this is my most memorable experience playing cello in a youth orchestra back in the 90s), Ravel's Pavane pour une infante défunte (Ravel is an important influence on my orchestration - and what a sublime opening melody), and who can resist the tunes and riffs in Gershwin's An American in Paris - a sound-world that I have grown to love as a Brit living in America for 22 years, half of my life.

I had the great joy of writing ATLAS for the renowned American pianist Jeremy Denk, who also happens to be somewhat of a neighbour - both living in the Hudson Valley in New York (myself full-time and Jeremy part-time). Jeremy's breadth of repertoire, his album c. 1300–c. 2000 being a great example of this, presented an opportunity to write a piece that draws inspiration from a wide variety of musical styles.

Set in four movements, ATLAS is also inspired by (and titled after) the monumental, four-volume publication ATLAS, which maps the ideas, processes, and inspirations of the German artist Gerhard Richter. Conceived and closely edited by Richter himself, this comprehensive compendium cuts straight to the heart of the artist's thinking, collecting more than 5,000 photographs, drawings and sketches that he has compiled or created since the moment of his creative breakthrough in 1962. My music responds to the imagery contained in these four volumes to create a musical montage and a lucid narrative.



Gershwin, An American in Paris, 17mins

Clyne, ATLAS (CBSO Commission: UK Premiere)*, 29mins

- I. Fierce
- II. Freely, intimate
- III. Driving
- IV. Transparent

Interval

Ravel, Pavane for a Dead Princess, 6mins

Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition (orch. Wood), 34mins

- I. Promenade
- II. Gnomus
- III. Il Vecchio Castello
- IV. Les Tuileries
(dispute d'enfants après jeux)
- V. Bydlo
- VI. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
- VII. Samuel Goldberg and Schmuyle
- VIII. The Market at Limoges
- IX. Catacombs
 - a. Sepulcrum romanum
 - b. Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
- X. The Hut on Hen's Legs (Baba Yaga)
- XI. The Great Gates of Kiev

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor
Jeremy Denk, Piano*
Rita Castro Blanco, Assistant Conductor

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Join us as we announce another year of joyful music with a free event.

Complete with live music and a showcase of our new season of concerts, hear from Music Director Kazuki Yamada, Chief Executive Emma Stenning and some of our musicians about what they're most looking forward to.

The event will begin at 6:15pm in the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space.

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.

Principal Funders:

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Dancing chickens, glowing skulls, a Paris jazz-bar and a lost princess. Tonight, every note tells a story, as Kazuki Yamada opens his musical paintbox for a dazzlingly different version of Mussorgsky's famous Pictures at an Exhibition orchestrated by Henry Wood. First, though, we're making history. Jeremy Denk gives the UK premiere of a brand new Piano Concerto by one of Britain's most imaginative living composers: the remarkable Anna Clyne.

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

The city of Paris has long been a subject of fantasy and romance across all art-forms – perhaps most extravagantly in Hollywood films, where the figure of the 'American' gazing in enchantment at the Eiffel Tower, the Seine or simply a cobbled street often generates movie magic (see French Kiss, Before Sunset, and any number of Audrey Hepburn films for perfect examples).

In *Midnight in Paris*, the main character finds himself transported back from 2011 to the 1920s and hangs out with Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein. This is the era in which George Gershwin – another American in Paris – found himself walking the streets, and inspired to compose a gloriously evocative orchestral piece. As well as depicting the city itself, Gershwin's own starry-eyed enthusiasm is written into the chipper rhythms of the opening section as listeners are led through Paris accompanied by the sound of car-horns (he brought back to the US some authentic

Parisian taxi horns to use in the early performances). The more jazz-imbued sections are suggestive of the American's homesickness, with a slinky melody and a passage resembling the Charleston. The 'strolling' melody returns, as the American begins to sink into Parisian life.

Gershwin had begun the piece during his first trip to Paris in 1926, and completed it following his second visit in 1928. In between, he met the French composer Maurice Ravel, who had visited New York and was in turn intoxicated by that city (and wrote a jazz-inspired Piano Concerto not long after). A Hollywood film was later inspired by Gershwin's work: Gene Kelly's *An American in Paris* in 1951 created a whole narrative out of the score, and choreographed numerous sequences to this and other pieces by Gershwin. In 1963's *Charade*, set in Paris (with Americans), Audrey Hepburn even refers to Gene Kelly dancing along the Seine in *An American in Paris*. Gershwin's colourful, continent-hopping work is a gift that keeps on giving.

Anna Clyne (b. 1980)

ATLAS PIANO CONCERTO

Anna Clyne has been described as a composer of 'uncommon gifts and unusual methods.' Her 'gifts' will be evident as soon as the baton goes down on her first piano concerto; and her 'methods' can be seen across the extraordinary range of influences she has embraced in her work. Her orchestral pieces, for example, have been inspired by the sound of an analogue videotape rewinding, the calligraphy of a Buddhist monk, and the colour orange. Other works have drawn on the visual arts, such as 2016's *Abstractions*, and the Piano Concerto, subtitled 'ATLAS'. This is a response to a huge collection of photography, sketches and cuttings compiled by the German artists Gerhard Richter, often assembled in beguiling montage-form. As with her orchestral pieces generally, Clyne deploys a colourful orchestral palette, with particular focus on a wide range of percussion. Expect to be transported into a startling, musical – and visual – world.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DÉFUNTE

Ravel composed *Pavane pour une infante défunte* while studying with Fauré at the Conservatoire de Paris. He was possibly influenced by Fauré's own *Pavane*, composed some twelve years earlier: both draw on the stately melancholy of the 'Pavane' dance form, and both have irresistible melodies. Ravel's work was originally a piano piece, and vaguely inspired by his love of all things Spanish, per the use of 'infante', the Spanish term for 'Princess' (though Ravel also responded to questions about his title that he merely like the sound of the words). He orchestrated

"It dreams and ruminates rather than swaggers, in line with Schumann's own deeply Romantic sensibility."

it in 1912 for small ensemble – winds, horns, strings and harp, with an especially prominent role for solo horn and flute (the flute in particular nodding to the Fauré *Pavane*). The horn sings the opening melody over plucked strings; a counter-melody follows. This sequence recurs twice more, with Ravel indulging in ever-more sumptuous orchestration. In between each repetition are elegiac, richly-scored interludes – for muted strings, for pairs of woodwind, and each time concluding with a sensuous, almost bluesy cadence. As always with his arrangements, Ravel has a wonderful time playing with combinations of instruments: in the second interlude, the harp weaves in and out of duetting woodwind in a particularly magical way. The *Pavane* has been used in numerous film and television soundtracks; its blend of romance and melancholy is perfect for a scene in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* in which Bruce Wayne and Selena (Catwoman) dance at a masked ball.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Mussorgsky's reputation as a composer rests on only a few works, but they are all hugely distinctive, and were often written in response to poetic or artistic inspiration. In his short life (he died of alcohol-related illness aged only 42), and while working mainly as a civil servant, he composed the opera *Boris Godunov*, the famous *Night on a Bald Mountain* (memorably used in Disney's *Fantasia*), a series of song-cycles, and perhaps his most famous work, *Pictures at an Exhibition*. He wrote it as a piano suite in 1874 in response to an exhibition of paintings in St Petersburg by his friend Viktor Hartmann who had died suddenly. Some of the paintings have been identified – such as 'Ballet of the Unhatched chicks,' which came from a costume for choreography; and 'The Hut on Fowl's Legs,' a clock designed with legs like a chicken.

Like Gershwin in *American in Paris*, Mussorgsky places himself in the work during the 'Promenade' sections – in the original piano suite there are four versions of this, varying in mood. He wrote that he had conjured up a musical picture of himself 'roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly, in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention, and at times sadly, thinking of his departed friend.' The piece seems to have been considered a novelty – and not to be taken seriously – by both composer and his circle of friends, and it was not published in his lifetime. It subsequently appeared in print but is curiously un pianistic in places, particularly in the longer, sustained passages (such as 'Catacombs' and 'Great Gate of Kiev'). It works considerably better for ensemble, and many composers and musicians over the decades have gone to town with its vivid, sometimes bizarre imagery. There are indeed an extraordinary

number of arrangements, from Ravel's famous orchestration to a version by Yaron Gottfried for jazz trio, to Mekong Delta's take for thrash metal band.

Sir Henry Wood, the Proms conductor who introduced British audiences to a huge amount of contemporary music, was the second arranger to tackle it in 1915. (Somewhat modestly, after Ravel produced his in 1922, Wood banned performances of his own at the Proms in the 1930s). His own version takes more liberties with Mussorgsky's score than did Ravel, chiefly in omitting all but the first 'Promenade' (although it does emerge from the sombre texture at the end of 'Catacombs'). His orchestrations range from the delicate (a sprightly solo spot for the first violin in 'Tuileries' and playful woodwind for the 'Unhatched chicks') to atmospheric (sternly swaying trombones and off-stage camel-bells in 'Bydlo') to increasingly no-holds-barred by its final movement – throwing bells, pipe organ and the kitchen sink at the 'Great Gate of Kiev.'

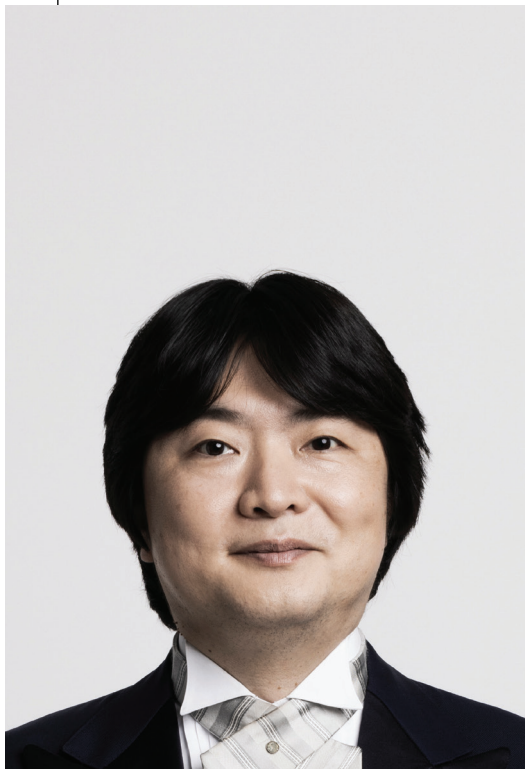
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MODEST PETROVICH MUSSORGSKY, C.1870.
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Conductor

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 MonteCarlo (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.

JEREMY DENK

Jeremy Denk is one America's foremost pianists, hailed by The New York Times as an artist 'you want to hear no matter what he performs.' Denk is also a New York Times bestselling author, winner of both the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and the Avery Fisher Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Denk has performed multiple times at Carnegie Hall and in recent years has worked with such orchestras as Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Cleveland Orchestra. Recent highlights include his extensive performances of the Well-Tempered Klavier Book 1, and performances of John Adams' Must the Devil Have All The Great Tunes? with the Cleveland Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, and Seattle Symphony.



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Saturday 29 June 2024, 7pm

MADAM BUTTERFLY

UPCOMING CONCERT



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Symphony Hall
Wednesday 15 May 2024, 7:30pm

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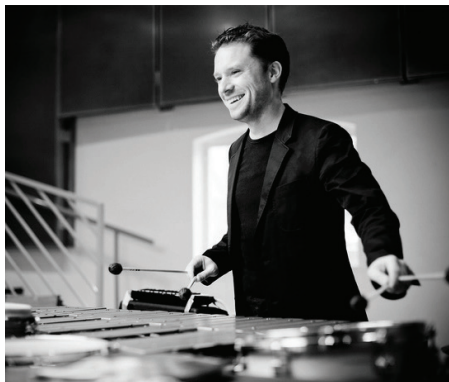
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Symphony Hall
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