

GBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Kazuki conducts Tchaikovsky
Symphony Hall
Saturday 8 February 2025,
2:15pm

Concert programme £4

GBS.CO.UK

GBSO BENEVOLENT FUND CONCERT



Georgia Hannant
Chair of the Committee, CBSO Benevolent Fund

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the annual fundraising concert for the CBSO Benevolent Fund.

As Chair of the Benevolent Fund, may I warmly welcome you to our Annual Concert. This year, as always, we gather together to celebrate the players and staff of the CBSO, past and present. Every CBSO Season - for one day in the year - all the players, alongside both the conductor and soloist, you will see on stage this afternoon have given their services for free, as do the CBSO staff and management in the organisation of the event. All profit we make from this concert goes right back into the Fund.

For those unfamiliar, the CBSO Benevolent Fund was set up by the members of the orchestra in the 1950's to provide financial assistance and support to active and retired players in times of need. Nowadays, it has expanded to contribute towards treatments and therapies, enabling members to continue to perform at this high level. Our benefits include anything from physiotherapy, massage and counselling to bereavement relief and support for long term sick leave. Within the context of a difficult economic situation, financial and medical aid is more important than ever to our members. Our 'Fitness to Work' Scheme collaboration with the CBSO still brings specialist practitioners into our workplace, on tour and throughout our schedule.

This year, we welcome back our remarkable Music Director Kazuki Yamada to conduct our concert, alongside beloved friend of the orchestra, James Ehnes, who will perform Tchaikovsky's vivacious Violin Concerto.

We are deeply grateful to both of them for donating their time and efforts for such a worthy cause. This concert allows us to continue to support our members, so we owe these artists endlessly.

The CBSO Benevolent Fund would equally struggle to survive without the generosity of our donors, and the Committee would like to thank everyone who has donated to the Fund since our last concert. In particular, the generosity of the Muntz Trust has been hugely beneficial and deeply appreciated.

The Fund invests all monies received from subscriptions, donations and profits from our annual concert to ensure its longevity. Should you wish to make a further donation - either in the form of a deed of covenant, regular standing order, or a legacy - please write to: The Treasurer, CBSO Benevolent Fund, CBSO Centre, Berkley Street, Birmingham B1 2LF.

Further details on how to donate can be found at www.cbsobenefund.org.uk

We wish you a joyous concert,



THANK YOU

On behalf of all our members, The Benevolent Fund Committee would like to sincerely thank our dear friends Kazuki Yamada and James Ehnes for giving up their time and musical energies for this evening's concert. We acknowledge their generosity in giving their services free of charge and ensuring that our concert will be a great success. Alongside the wonderful assistance of the CBSO management and staff at Symphony Hall, we know it will be a very special occasion.

On behalf of all the players, we would also like to thank the Fund's Medical Adviser Dr Chris Boyson for his medical support and advice throughout this year. Our thanks go too to our physiotherapy consultant, Sarah UpJohn, whose expertise and advice continues to enable the Fitness to Work Scheme to flourish. We're eternally grateful to our sports massage therapists Alison Hunt and Ben Levine, and another of our physiotherapists, Kiran Franklin, whose combined knowledge and treatments have greatly improved the working lives of our players and staff.

We must thank our wonderful Trustees: Sangeeta Ambegaokar, Jane Clarke, Robin Daniels, and Jon Lloyd, who have brought their wide-ranging expertise, wisdom and support to successfully run the Fund for another year, and deftly navigated us through complex financial times.

Thanks also go to our financial adviser Simon Woolf at Evelyn Partners for his help towards fulfilling our financial objectives, together with our accountant John Taheny of Bissell & Brown, and our legal advisor Nick Makin.

Finally, our Committee of Management volunteer their free time to maintain the operations of the Fund. Our most recent line-up includes Vice-Chair Nathan Isaac, Treasurer Aidy Spillett, Secretary Helen Benson and Medical Co-ordinator Rachael Pankhurst. The running of the Fund is a big commitment and responsibility, which they meet with energy and generosity. They are a fantastic team of people and I am personally grateful to each of them for their dedication and commitment to our members.

Shostakovich, Festive Overture, Op.96, 7mins

Tchaikovsky, Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35, 33mins

I. Allegro moderato

II. Canzonetta: Andante

III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

Interval

Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.4 in F minor, Op.36, 44mins

I. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima

II. Andantino in modo di canzone

III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato. Allegro

IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor

James Ehnes, Violin

FREE PRE-CONCERT PERFORMANCE

Join us in the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space at 1:30pm for a performance by the CBSO Children's Chorus and Youth Chorus. This performance is unticketed and free to attend.

We are happy for you to take photos and short videos at our concerts during applause breaks. We ask that you are mindful of disturbing artists and other audience members. Please dim the brightness on your phone, 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.

Principal Funders:

KAZUKI CONDUCTS TCHAIKOVSKY

Tchaikovsky's stunning Violin Concerto famously flopped at its premiere – one critic saying that "The violin is no longer played; it is tugged about, torn, beaten black and blue". Today it's a firm favourite with violinists, and James Ehnes rises spectacularly to its challenges. Tchaikovsky triumphs over fate in his dramatic Symphony No.4, while Shostakovich has a blast in his Festive Overture (composed in just 3 days!).

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

FESTIVAL OVERTURE, OP.96

It's Revolution Day in Moscow. A fanfare sounds, the massed bands swell to a grand climax, and the festivities begin. Bright, bold and unmistakably upbeat, Shostakovich's Festival Overture is the musical equivalent of one of those giant revolutionary posters that used to be seen in the USSR – but a lot more fun. This is Shostakovich letting his hair down: one of his few unreservedly cheerful contributions to public life in the Soviet Union.

But then, writing festive pieces for big public occasions had been part of the job description for Russian composers as far back as 1880, when Tchaikovsky wrote his 1812 overture. The festival that Shostakovich had in mind was the 37th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, in November 1954. Something had gone wrong at the Bolshoi Theatre: they needed a new celebratory piece, and fast.

They turned to Shostakovich, and his friend Lev Lebedinsky was present when the commission arrived. "I'll write the overture in no time at all!" announced Shostakovich – and duly did so in three days flat.

"The speed with which he wrote was truly astounding" recalled the astonished Lebedinsky. "Dmitri sat there scribbling away and the couriers came in turn to take away each page while the ink was still wet". That manic, gleeful creativity bubbles and whirs through every note of the Festival Overture. The overture's swaggering opening fanfares launch a racing, sparkling five minutes of musical revelry that, like a third shot of vodka, can't fail to leave you feeling at least a little festive. The first performance – at the Bolshoi on 6 November 1954 – was one of Shostakovich's first major premieres after the death of Stalin the previous year. Now there was something worth celebrating – even if no-one dared say so...

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D, OP.35

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Canzonetta: Andante
- III. Allegro vivacissimo

Tchaikovsky married on 18th July 1877 and realised instantly that he'd made a terrible mistake. In early October he suffered a devastating nervous breakdown, and his brother Modest escorted him away from Russia (and the mushrooming scandal) to begin a long recuperation in the West. The process wasn't easy; they travelled through Rome, Venice, Paris and Vienna without finding the peace that Piotr needed. Only drink seemed to help, and attempts to compose – mostly piano miniatures – were painful.

But in March 1878 Tchaikovsky moved into a lakeside villa at Clarens, near Geneva, and five days later was joined by Iosif Kotek, a violinist friend from Moscow. Perhaps it was the change of scene, the arrival of spring, or the arrival of Kotek, but by 17th March he'd begun work on a violin concerto, and by 28th March the first draft was complete.

After the bleak months that had come before it, and the pain and sadness of the music (such as the Fourth Symphony) that came directly from them, the Violin Concerto was like a release – a sudden, grateful outpouring of sunshine, warmth and affection. Completed on 11th April 1878, it was premiered in Vienna in December 1881 and has never left the repertoire since. The concerto opens with a graceful orchestral introduction and then opens out to let the solo instrument sing. Despite the swaggering trumpets that crown the first movement's climaxes and a long, brilliant unaccompanied cadenza, it's music from a peaceful and sunlit landscape.

But that's not the whole story. "Mountains are very fine, but it's difficult for a Russian to stand them for long" Tchaikovsky wrote "I'm dying for a plain, for a boundless distant prospect". And in his Canzonetta, he distils his homesickness into a pure, expressive, and very Russian longing. The release, when it comes, is doubly joyous – a finale that's both a flamboyant virtuoso showpiece, and an exuberant celebration of Russian folkdance. He was ready to come home.

SYMPHONY NO.4 IN F MINOR, OP.36

- I. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima
- II. Andantino in modo di canzone
- III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato. Allegro
- IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

Never the most confident of men, Tchaikovsky brooded for years on the idea of Fate. He had good reason - as a gay man in a society that published homosexuality with public disgrace (and in some cases, hard labour in Siberia), he was anything but paranoid. If he came to feel that his life was being shaped by forces beyond his control, it's easy to understand why. And yet his art seems to tell a very different story – a composer dancing with, battling and openly defying that same brutal Fate. We've already heard about his disastrous marriage; astonishingly, throughout that traumatic year of 1877 he continued to work on two large-scale masterpieces – the opera Eugene Onegin and a new symphony, his Fourth.

The Fourth Symphony was premiered in Moscow on 22nd February 1878, and Tchaikovsky's musical friends immediately sensed a subtext. The composer Sergei Taneyev wrote to him that "It's like a symphonic poem with three more movements slapped on...it makes you think this is programme music": in other words,



CABINET CARD PORTRAIT OF PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1888).
ÉMILE REUTLINGER, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

music that tells a story. Tchaikovsky's defence was robust – "In essence it imitates Beethoven's Fifth...don't you think there's a programme in that?" Touché. Any romantic symphony worthy of the name tells an emotional story of some sort, and Tchaikovsky's Fourth is probably the toughest, most tightly constructed symphonic work he ever wrote, bound together by a web of related motifs, phrases and keys.

But as Tchaikovsky had confessed a few weeks earlier to his patron Nadezhda von Meck, this symphony very definitely has a story to tell. His confidante was a wealthy music-loving widow, devoted to Tchaikovsky's music. In March 1877 she had begun an intimate correspondence with the composer – one that would continue, without them ever meeting, for 13 years. But within months, Tchaikovsky was convinced that she understood him like no-one else. He dedicated the Fourth Symphony to Mme von Meck (whom he described on the score as "My best friend"). What he told her about "her" symphony would be worth knowing for that reason alone.

The opening is crucial: a savage, ringing fanfare. "This", explained Tchaikovsky "is Fate, that force which keeps us from happiness, which hangs over your head and constantly poisons the soul. It is invincible..." (and here he quotes the long, sobbing violin melody that follows) "...you just have to get used to the idea". To Tchaikovsky, the quiet, tender music that comes after the first storm of despair is "a sweet and gentle daydream" – one shattered, again and again, by the implacable Fate fanfare.

The middle of the symphony is a dream of escape – the Andantino, with its doleful, folksong-like melody for oboe, is "the melancholy feeling which comes in the evening...a host of memories, sad yet somehow sweet". The scherzo portrays "the images which rush through the mind when you're a bit tipsy...drunken peasants" (the brilliant balalaika-sound of the full string section plucking en masse) "a street musician" (a dizzy woodwind dance) "... a military procession" (marching brass). It's a scene as colourful as any of Tchaikovsky's ballets.

And the finale, bursting in with a crash of cymbals and a cascade of violins, seems at first to be a happy ending. "If you can't find happiness in yourself, go amongst the people...share their enjoyment" – and the oboe plays a Russian folksong. In the field stood a birch-tree. But as the celebrations reach their height, the Fate fanfare makes a terrible return. Tchaikovsky can't beat it, do he simply refuses to acknowledge it, and turns back to the carnival for a final burst of wild enjoyment. "Don't say everything in the world is sad. Rejoice in others' rejoicing – to live is still possible!"

© Richard Bratby

Conductor

KAZUKI YAMADA



Kazuki Yamada is Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO). Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo (OPMC). His time 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 performs in Japan every season. Highlights this season include returning to the BBC Proms with the CBSO, closely followed by his return to Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. In May 2025, he takes the CBSO on tour to Europe and on tour to Japan, and has debuts with Berliner Philharmoniker, The Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony to name only a few.

© ZUZANNA SPECIAL

JAMES EHNES

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after musicians on the international stage. Recent orchestral highlights include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, London Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra. Throughout the 24/25 season, Ehnes will be Artist in Residence with Melbourne Symphony and will tour to Asia, where he will perform the complete Beethoven sonatas at Kioi Hall, Tokyo, as well as performances with Hong Kong Philharmonic and Singapore Symphony Orchestras. Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule, performing regularly at concert halls all over the world. A devoted chamber musician, he is the leader of the Ehnes Quartet and the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society. Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including two Grammy's, three Gramophone Awards and twelve Juno Awards. He made his orchestra debut with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal aged 13 and studied at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School. Ehnes plays the "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715.



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PROUD TO BE BIRMINGHAM'S ORCHESTRA

We are Birmingham's orchestra – loud and proud. An internationally celebrated symphony orchestra that makes music that matters to the people of Birmingham, the West Midlands and beyond.

A family of 90 incredible musicians, we exist to create exciting musical experiences for all. From brightening up the morning commute, to inspiring audiences and musicians of the future – we make epic, powerful, meaningful music that fills concert halls, communities, streets, schools and lives with passion, excitement, inspiration, hope and joy.

We've come from all over the world, but we're at home right here in Birmingham. See us at Symphony Hall playing some of the greatest symphonic music of all time, at pop-up performances around the city, at the CBSO Centre performing intimate small-scale gigs or in schools, community centres, libraries and even the occasional pub!

We're musicians, but we're also parents, teachers, runners, gardeners, writers, sports fans, foodies and so much more. We're part of your city, and we couldn't be happier to be here to play, share, write, sing, live and breathe music with you!

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VIOLIN I

Eugene Tzinkidelean*
Madeleine Pickering
Nathan Bomans*
Jane Wright#
Richard Thomas*
Robbie Bilson
Julia Aberg*
Bethan Allmand*
Mark Robinson#
Libby Golding#
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Lowri Porter*
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Richard Watkin*
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UPCOMING CONCERTS...



KAZUKI CONDUCTS DVOŘÁK 9

Kazuki Yamada leads the CBSO in Dvořák's famous 'New World' Symphony.

Fri 14 Feb, 7pm



KAZUKI CONDUCTS HAYDN'S CREATION

"Let there be light": The Creation of the whole world in Haydn's glorious oratorio.

Wed 26 Feb, 7:30pm



KAZUKI CONDUCTS ELGAR & TCHAIKOVSKY

A blazing symphony, and a stunning swansong for the cello.

Thu 19 Jun, 2:15pm

Book online at cbsoco.uk or call the B:Music Box Office on **0121 780 3333**

CBSO MEMBERSHIP

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.

JOIN THE FAMILY

Simply visit cbsoco.uk/membership to sign up online, or call Georgina Anderson on **0121 616 6510**.

We look forward to welcoming you to the family!



FITNESS TO WORK SCHEME

CAN YOU HELP US?

Many musicians who tell you the story of how they became a professional artist will say much along the same lines: dedication, excellent tuition, a LOT of practice. What they might not tell you about is the physical pain and mental endurance this vocation also requires. Much like a professional athlete, we must put our bodies through intense training, but unlike professional athletes we are almost never told how to look after them.

The Benevolent Fund collaborated with the CBSO in 2023 to help put health and wellbeing central to the company's core values. The Fitness to Work Scheme was devised to tackle a damagingly embedded culture within our industry that normalises exhaustion and injury in the pursuit of excellence. Throughout our co-funded trial, our aim has been to try to change this culture through regular free treatment, better support for those recovering from injury and access to knowledge about our bodies and our minds.

This started as a company-wide initiative, designed to promote physical wellbeing and readiness for work. This level of physical care-taking in a job like ours is incredibly important. Already we see the wide-ranging benefits of what we have achieved - including happier musicians, relief from stress and injury, and better working relationships across the company.

We are proud to be working with some of the best practitioners in and around Birmingham who provide us with in-house regular massage and physiotherapy, including on every international tour. We also commission workshops and handbooks from specialists in their fields.

GET IN TOUCH

If you would be interested in funding a scheme like this, or know of trusts or funding sources we should be aware of, please get in touch with us by email at development@cbs.co.uk



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CBSO Centre
Berkley Street Birmingham, B1 2LF
information@cbsoco.uk
0121 616 6500

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We'd love to hear from you!

Complete our survey and be in with the chance of winning a £50 voucher for a restaurant of your choice.

We're working to better understand our audiences, and by completing a survey following a CBSO concert, you can opt in to be entered into the prize draw.



If you'd like to share any additional feedback, or have any questions, please email us at marketing@cbsoco.uk.