CBSO

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Kazuki & Isata Kanneh-Mason
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 5 November 2025, 2:15pm

CBSO.CO.UK

Concert programme £4

KAZUKI & ISATA KANNEH-MASON

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Isata Kanneh-Mason
Piano

INTRODUCTION

I am extremely excited to be returning to perform with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The last time I played with the orchestra I had such a great experience; often it can be quite intimidating to join an orchestra as a soloist as you feel like an outsider, but the CBSO are such a friendly orchestra, I know I will be made to feel warmly welcomed.

Birmingham also feels special for me to perform in as I have some family that live here and it's not too far from Nottingham, which is where I grew up. Having family in the audience is always such a treat for me.

Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No.3 is a piece that I've known for years; I've listened to it so many times and it's one of those pieces where I felt like I had such a strong feeling for the music before I even had the chance to play it. I last performed the concerto in March and I always crave the next time I get to play it, so I'm extra excited for today's concert. The more I play it, the more imaginative and emotionally involved I become with the music.

There are so many magical moments that you can listen out for in this piece. The middle section of the first movement sees the opening theme return but developed in a really interesting way. The movement builds to a climax and you should be able to follow that same opening theme all the way through to the cadenza. Rachmaninoff's music is so thrilling in the way he develops his musical ideas, I particularly think the harmony is just incredible.

The second movement begins almost turbulent in style with quite discordant piano writing, mirrored also in the orchestral parts. But then it's like the music just melts away and we're left with the most beautiful melody in the piano – it's one of my favourite moments in Rachmaninoff's writing.

We're left with the most exuberant final movement; it's virtuosic and buzzing with energy, the middle section humorous whilst also graceful in style. It is the perfect end to the musical journey Rachmaninoff takes us on.

I am delighted to be working with Kazuki Yamada and the CBSO once again – I hope you enjoy this performance as much I am looking forward to playing it for you.

Rachmaninoff, Piano Concerto No.3 in D minor, Op.30, 39mins
I. Allegro ma non tanto
II. Intermezzo
III. Finale

Interval

Walton, Symphony No.1 in B Flat minor, 43mins
I. Allegro assai
II. Presto con malizia
III. Andante con malinconia
IV. Maestoso – Brioso ed ardamente - Vivacissimo

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor
Isata Kanneh-Mason, Piano

This concert is supported by Dr Charley Johnston in memory of Dolores.

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Wednesday 5 November 2025
Symphony Hall, Birmingham

KAZUKI & ISATA KANNEH-MASON

Rachmaninoff's third Piano Concerto is both famously beautiful and famously difficult. While Isata Kanneh-Mason tackles its joys and challenges, for audiences this magnificent piece feels like stepping into a luxurious bath. Walton's Symphony is a kind of diary of his emotional state when writing it. Join him on his roller-coaster, from the dark days of 'composer's block', to a snarky commentary on a failed relationship, to devastating heartbreak and finally to the upsurge of elation (and new love) by the end. Kazuki Yamada leads the CBSO in this rousing and deeply cathartic programme.

A GUIDE TO MUSICAL TERMS

Turn to page 17 to see key words linked to this programme.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

PIANO CONCERTO NO.3 IN D MINOR, OP.30

Rachmaninoff never liked talking about inspiration. But when you're an international star – possibly the greatest piano virtuoso of the twentieth (or any) century – people are going to speculate. Finally he relented, and gave his own description of the melody that opens his Third Piano Concerto.

The first theme of my Third Concerto is borrowed neither from folk songs nor from church sources. It simply 'wrote itself'! If I had any plan in composing this theme, I was thinking only of sound. I wanted to 'sing' the melody on the piano, as a singer would sing it...

True: musicologists in the 1960s spotted that this great melody bears a close resemblance to a Russian Orthodox religious chant, Thy Tomb, O Saviour, Soldiers Guarding. But that doesn't mean that Rachmaninoff (an irregular churchgoer at best) was conscious of the fact. One relative recalled seeing Rachmaninoff walking the avenues of his family's country estate at Ivanovka: "From a distance, one could see his tall figure in a Russian smock. He would walk, head bowed, drumming his fingers on his chest and sort-of singing to himself". Rachmaninoff worked on the Third Concerto at Ivanovka throughout the summer of 1909.

The effort paid off. The Third Concerto is the largest of Rachmaninoff's concertos: colossally virtuosic, and yet somehow, at the same time, deeply personal. The key is in that opening melody. Its rhythms and melodic patterns recur, giving an

inner logic to the vast, arching span of the first movement, with its massive central cadenza. They find an echo in the desolate, falling theme that opens the Intermezzo second movement, and float softly behind the whirling, glittering scherzo that emerges from the gloom. And they drive the finale – from galloping opening to soaring climax, before a final euphoric rush to the finish.

Rachmaninoff finished the concerto in late September 1909, and practiced it on a dummy keyboard onboard a liner bound for New York. There, he performed the concerto for the first time on 28th November 1909 – and for many years, he was one of the only pianists alive who was capable of doing so. Indeed the concerto's dedicatee, the Polish virtuoso Josef Hofmann, never played it in public: it was simply beyond him. "Rachmaninoff", he recalled years later, "was made of steel and gold - steel in his arms, gold in his heart". The Third Concerto demands both.

William Walton (1902-1983)

SYMPHONY NO.1

The man

In the autumn of 1935, William Walton was 33 years old. He'd been too young to fight in the First World War; he'd grown up in Oldham and - thanks to a musical father and a beautiful voice – he'd won a choral scholarship to Oxford University. But it was after his voice broke that the fun really started. Shunning a job as a mill clerk back in Lancashire, he'd started trying to compose. Happily, his teachers at Oxford knew talent when they saw it, and so did his new college pals. He was taken up as an "adopted brother" by three aristocratic writers, the ultra-Bohemian (and wonderfully named) siblings Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell.

For the rest of the swinging twenties, Walton's feet hardly touched the ground. In 1922 he wrote Façade, a bizarre "entertainment" that combined Walton's jazzy, sardonic music with Edith Sitwell's surreal poetry. London was scandalised ("rubbish they paid to hear" sniffed one newspaper) but Walton and his friends didn't care. He wrote a powerful, poetic Viola Concerto and in 1931, Belshazzar's Feast: a choral work so raucous and irreverent that some cathedrals banned it. By the early 1930s Willie Walton from Oldham had become the hottest new thing in British music.

Now, in response to a commission from Hamilton Harty (the Irish-born conductor of Manchester's Hallé Orchestra) he confronted the supreme musical challenge: a symphony. He started work in 1932, and as rumours of a symphony by Walton began to circulate, few doubted that it would be a musical reflection of the times. But Walton's friends knew something else – that he'd fallen wildly in love with a young German princess called Imma von Doernberg. It was a fiery relationship, and when Imma ditched William in 1934, the symphony wasn't even finished. For a while, it looked like it never would be.

"It is almost hopeless for anyone to produce anything in any of the arts these days" wrote Walton to Harty. "It is practically impossible to get away from the general feeling of hopelessness and chaos which exists everywhere...But I'm trying my best". In fact, the turbulent social and political climate of the time unlocked his imagination; so too did the experience of heartbreak. "Symphonies are a lot of work to write" he told his wife Susanna, years later. "Too much. One has to have something really appalling happen to one, that lets loose the fount of inspiration."

WILLIAM WALTON, 1976.
D. BENJAMIN, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

The music

Walton's model was Beethoven: a symphony that spoke on no terms but its own, driven by unstoppable musical logic and emotional force. The emotion came from his private life. The musical logic proved more challenging, and when Walton finally allowed an impatient Harty to premiere the symphony in December 1934, only three movements were ready: the finale was still beyond him. The breakthrough came the following year, and the completed symphony was premiered in London on 3 December 1935 – to an overwhelming response. Walton's fellow-composer John Ireland wrote to him in person. "It is simply colossal, grand, original, and moving to the emotions to the most extreme degree...It has established you as the most vital and original genius in Europe. No-one but a bloody fool could fail to see this".

The music begins quietly – with a distant rumble, a note from the horn and a quiet, nervous rhythm from the violins. The oboe plays a long opening melody: its little two-note fall (plus the swirl of notes that follows) is the seed from which the whole symphony grows – the atoms, if you like, that Walton is about to split. Even the singing, bittersweet second theme can't halt the first movement's escalating power. If the stormclouds are building, the second movement is like a flash of lightning – a furious, steel-toothed scherzo that Walton marked con malizia – "with malice".

In the symphony's slow movement, anger has passed but sorrow remains. A flute plays the melancholy opening theme (apparently it was the very first melody that came to Walton when he began work on the symphony) though passion (the strings) and pain (stabbing trumpets) are never far away, too. As the finale begins, the music suddenly seems to pull itself together – and leaps up into the light.

And after that majestic (Walton's word) first flourish, the music almost seems to dance – though Walton understands that a simple switch from pain to joy is too easy an answer. He solved the problem by building the movement in stages: a huge, muscular fugue, and a desolate soliloquy for a solo trumpet (a powerful symbol in a decade haunted by war). But for now, we're headed for triumph – as Walton, brass blazing and percussion thundering, blasts a very personal path into the open. "Truly marvellous" exclaimed Sir Henry Wood, founder of the Proms, after the first complete performance. "It was like the world coming to an end".

Conductor

KAZUKI YAMADA

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Kazuki Yamada is Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Yamada is also Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo and from 2026/2027, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. Time spent with Seiji Ozawa underlines the importance of Yamada's "Japanese feeling" for music. Born in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan every season. The current season begins at the BBC Proms with CBSO, followed by returning to Tanglewood Festival with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He recently took the CBSO on tour to Japan and in March 2026 they embark on a European tour. Following his debut with the Berlin Philharmoniker he makes debuts with the Bamberger Symphoniker, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Rotterdam Philharmonic and Wiener Symphoniker. Yamada appears annually as a guest artist at the Seiji Ozawa International Academy Switzerland and is strongly committed to the outreach programme at CBSO. Yamada studied music at the Tokyo University of the Arts and first achieved international attention upon receiving first prize in the 51st Besançon International Competition for young conductors in 2009.

ISATA KANNEH-MASON

Pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason is in high demand from concert halls and orchestras worldwide. In July 2024, she was invited to perform at the First Night of the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall with the BBC Symphony and conductor Elim Chan, a performance which resulted in stellar reviews in the mainstream press. Isata went on to appear as concerto soloist with the European Union Youth Orchestra and Iván Fischer in summer 2024 performing Dohnányi's Variations on a Nursery Tune at New York's Carnegie Hall. Isata is a Decca Classics artist and has recorded four solo albums for the label – Romance (2019), Summertime (2021), Childhood Tales (2023), and Mendelssohn (2024). Isata has received many awards, including the coveted Leonard Bernstein Award from the Schleswig-Holstein Festival and an Opus Klassik award for best young artist. She also enjoys composing and arranging and released two albums of her favourite works for intermediate and advanced piano students through ABRSM Publishing in 2023.

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The late Elizabeth Bathurst Blencowe
The late Mr Peter Black
The Late John Botham
The Late Miss G Brant
The late Robert Brooke
The late Mary Brown
The late Michael Brown
The late Richard Busby
The Late Anthony Carr
The late I M Chesner
The late Colin W Clarke
The late Roy Collins
The late Maureen Cullen
David in memory of Ruth
The late Mr Peter Day
The late K Draper
The late Ivor Dudley
The late Miss Margery Elliott
The late Eileen Fairhurst
The late Mary Fellows
The late Elnora Ferguson
The late Anne Fletcher
The late June Fluck
The late Wally Francis
The late Alan Goodwin
The late Colin Graham
The late Averil and Terry Green
The late Kenneth Guest
The late Roger Guest
The late Beryl Haughton
The late Mrs Marjorie Hildreth
The late Roger Hill
The late Estella Hindley
The late Patricia Homeshaw
The late Mr Hucker
The late Rosalind Jackson
The late William Jones
The late Michael Jordan
The late Mrs Thelma Justham
The late Beresford King-Smith
The late Professor Robert Knecht
The late Mr John Thomas Knight
The late Mr and Mrs F. McDermott and Mrs C. Hall
The late Peter Macklin
The late Blyth and Myriam Major
The late Mrs Mahon
The Late Vera Mason
The late Joyce Middleton
The late Christine Miller
The late Peter and Moyra Monahan
The Late Paul Morgan
The late Arthur Mould
The late June North
The late Martin Purdy
The late Cyril Reeves
In memory of David Reeve, a true music lover
The late J Renwick
The late Frederick Richardson
The late Mrs Edith Roberts
The late Patricia Roberts
The late Trevor Robinson
The late John Roe
The late Mr Andrew Roulstone
The late Carl Schwalbe
The late Thomas Edward Scott
The late Barbara Shields
The late Margaret Skene
The late Mrs C E Smith
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The late Marion Stone
The late Mrs Eileen Summers
The late Sheri Tullah
The late Lorraine Westcott
The late David Wilson

Our anonymous donors and those that have pledged to support the CBSO through a legacy gift in the future.

Credits correct as of
5 November 2025

A GUIDE TO MUSICAL TERMS

In an ongoing collaboration with the Shireland CBSO Academy, we are working with music students to jointly develop a glossary of useful terminology to ensure all audience members can understand the orchestral terms used in programmes.

Through workshops taking place since February 2025, students from Shireland CBSO Academy have developed a list of key words within orchestral music alongside their own definitions. We will continue to collaborate with students to develop and grow this list, which will be accessible on the CBSO website and in specific printed programmes going forward.

Below you can find a selection of key words and definitions linked to this programme. You can find the full glossary on our website. Thank you to the students who have contributed to this project so far, including Lewis, Emilia and Abigail.

Concerto	A musical structure that features a solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra, often organised in several movements to focus on the interchange between the soloist's skill and the orchestra's sound.
Melody	A melody is a pattern of sounds in different pitches also known as a tune. It may be used to form a theme (see definition for theme below).
Movement	A section of an enormous musical work, much like a chapter in a book, with its own expressions and speed. Often included in a symphony and intended to be played in a particular sequence. Movements are defined by numbers listed under the title of the work.
Symphony	A detailed, long piece of music divided into different sections, usually in four parts.
Theme	A melody or idea that forms the major focus of a piece, often serving as the signature tune.

Discover more definitions at **cbso.co.uk/a-guide-to-musical-terms**

UPCOMING CONCERTS...

KAZUKI CONDUCTS STRAUSS

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Wed 10 Dec 2025, 7:30pm

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Thursday 18 December 2025, 7:30pm

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Thu 9 Apr 2026, 7:30pm

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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.

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Simply visit **cbso.co.uk/membership** to sign up online, or call the development team on **0121 616 6510.**

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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@cbso.co.uk.**

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