



Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra

Music Director
Joanna MacGregor CBE

A NEW WORLD

Junyan Chen piano
Joanna MacGregor conductor

Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra
Ruth Rogers leader

Sunday 28 September
2.45pm

Brighton
Dome

Welcome to Brighton Philharmonic's new season!
Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Bartók - turbulent new
worlds of the early twentieth century.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Interval

Maurice Ravel

Béla Bartók

Piano Concerto no.3

La Valse

Suite from The Miraculous Mandarin

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
Piano Concerto no.3 in D minor Op.30 40'

Junyan Chen piano

Allegro ma non tanto
Intermezzo
Finale

BPO's new season opens with three pieces symbolising the revolutionary years of the early twentieth century. Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Bartók all composed through turmoil and political upheaval, living through the cataclysm of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Rachmaninoff appears the most conservative, but his volcanic third concerto - the Everest of piano concertos - changed pianism forever.

During his lifetime Rachmaninoff negotiated two Russias: the Czarist Russia he was born into, and the new Soviet regime. Rachmaninoff's father Vassili was an aristocrat and a fine amateur pianist; by the time Sergei was nine, the family estate had been sold and the family plunged into poverty. His parents separated, and he and his mother moved to St Petersburg, then to Moscow, where he studied composition with Arensky and Taneyev. Rachmaninoff's double life as a successful composer and phenomenal pianist soon began. He wrote his first piano concerto at nineteen, followed by the Prelude in C sharp minor - one of the most popular piano compositions ever written, and one he dutifully played as an encore (he grew to hate it!). Rachmaninoff had a reputation for gloom: Stravinsky described him as 'six-and-a-half feet of scowl.' Undeniably charismatic onstage, he was the pianist's pianist: he had an astonishing technique, elegance and leanness of line, and clarity. He is considered one of the greatest pianists in history. When the Bolshevik revolution erupted in 1917 he left Russia forever, settling his family first near Lake Lucerne then in Los Angeles, where his home

was an exact replica of the one he'd left in Moscow. Rachmaninoff loved fast cars and speedboats, and worshipped Art Tatum, often slipping into the back of a jazz club to watch him.

1909 marked the beginning of Rachmaninoff's last years in Russia. He began his third piano concerto in the summer at his home at Ivanovka, in southern Russia, for a planned American tour that autumn. He premiered the concerto with New York Symphony and Walter Damrosch on November 28th; the second performance was conducted by Gustav Mahler, an experience Rachmaninoff treasured. The work had excruciatingly difficult piano writing with massive chords and magnificent lines, lush orchestral textures, and moody, bittersweet melodies. Today it's considered the pinnacle of concerto writing, but it took a while to convert the public; Vladimir Horowitz's recording in 1930 established it as a masterpiece.

The themes of the entire work are presented in the first movement. The opening, unsettled *Allegro* begins in the orchestra, while the piano overlays a melancholic first theme. Fragments of the second theme are introduced by the horns, clarinets, trumpets, oboes, and piano, then it is fully stated in the strings, a staccato-figure variation that evolves into a sweet, singing melody. The development is a long crescendo and accelerando, with pianist and orchestra in full flight. Rachmaninoff wrote two versions of a cadenza for this movement. The longer, more difficult version was written first; a shorter version was the one Rachmaninoff played. Van Cliburn made the original, uncut version the one all pianists now perform. A wintry *Intermezzo* is introduced by the orchestra, a theme and variations of brooding passion and calm. One last grand gesture explodes directly into the *Finale*. There's velocity, rhythmic ferocity, and a hammering staccato that motors along, as well as a scherzando character. The movement concludes with a furious drive, triumph and passion.



Sergei Rachmaninoff

In February 1934 Brighton Philharmonic Society invited Rachmaninoff to give a recital in Brighton Dome. The press wrote: *“His gaunt figure moving across the stage gave little indication of the romantic ardour and volcanic passion characteristic of his art.”* He returned for three more recitals in 1935 and 1936 - to roses thrown on the stage.

Interval

Maurice Ravel 1875-1937 **La Valse 13'**

‘Through swirling clouds, glimpses of waltzing couples appear. The clouds gradually disperse, revealing a vast hall filled with a whirling throng. The stage slowly brightens until, in a fortissimo burst, the full splendour of the chandeliers is ablaze. An imperial court around 1855.’ Ravel’s description in the score sets the scene: an opulent, gilded ballroom in mid-century Vienna. What those words don’t tell you is where the music is headed: to a chilling catastrophe.

As a French impressionist composer and a sublime orchestrator, Ravel’s art was subtle, often nostalgic: the aching melancholy of *Pavane for a Dead Infanta*, or the little boy who speaks to toys and flying furniture in his opera *L’enfant et les sortilèges*. But there was a darker, expressionist side to Ravel. It surfaced in the tone poem *La Valse* and his *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, a far more advanced piece of music than the perennially popular G major concerto.

Ravel confided to his student Alexis Roland-Manuel, he was ‘mad about waltzes,’ so he was delighted when Diaghilev requested a new ‘Viennese’ score for Ballets Russes. The trouble was what had started as a homage to Johann Strauss had become, by 1920, a nightmarish portrayal of the dissolution of



Maurice Ravel

society; the seismic conflict of the 1914-18 war distorted the complexion of the music. Opening with mysterious mistiness, fragments of waltz themes gradually emerge. A sumptuous ballroom swirls into view, but - like a film where the camera starts swooping up and down - rhythms and harmonies start clashing wildly. The glittering dancers enter an apocalyptic nightmare. The old social order is over.

When Ravel presented the feverish finale to Diaghilev, Stravinsky and Poulenc, performing it with pianist Marcelle Meyer, the impresario told him: *‘Ravel, this is a masterpiece, but it is not a ballet. It is a painting of a ballet!’* He was right: *La Valse* was never established as a dance piece, but this intoxicating elegy for the Viennese waltz had its triumphant premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, on 12th December 1920.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) **Suite from The Miraculous Mandarin Sz.73 20'**

A shabby room in the slums
First decoy game: the old man
Second decoy game: the shy young man
Third decoy game: the Miraculous Mandarin
Hesitant waltz, then the chase

‘At the end of the performance there was a concert of whistling and catcalls! Bartók was present, sitting in the auditorium as he had at all the rehearsals. The uproar was so deafening the fire curtain had to be brought down. We weren’t afraid to appear in front of the curtain, at which point the whistles resumed with a vengeance... then the next day came the reviews. What was there can hardly be repeated. Still, my good friend didn’t let it get to him; he simply wanted to make a small correction to the clarinet part!’ So wrote the Hungarian conductor Eugen Szenkár of the premiere of Bartók’s ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin* in Cologne, on November 27th

1926. After the riot at the first performance, all further performances were withdrawn; it wasn't performed played again until after Bartók's death, in 1945.

Bartók composed the ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin* between 1918-19, living with his wife in a small village to the east of Budapest. The defeat of Austria-Hungary in World War I translated into enormous hardship: the Bartóks had no electricity, no running water, little fuel and not much food, and, even worse, the composer contracted Spanish flu in 1918. Moving to Budapest wasn't much better; in autumn 1919 a right-wing government took power and the left-leaning Bartók fell under suspicion for his ethnomusicological activities, which had taken him to Transylvania and Slovakia. Attacked for being a Romanian Nationalist and a traitor to Hungary, Bartók set the work aside until a first performance was arranged for Cologne. It was a disaster. Bartók knew it was one of his best scores.

The Miraculous Mandarin is a fable about the power of love - with a brutally horrible plot, like a film noir. Three tramps force a girl to entice passers-by, so they can rob them. The first - an old man - has no money, so the tramps throw him back onto the street; the second, a shy young man, meets the same fate. But the third is something extraordinary: a towering, otherworldly

Mandarin. His piercing gaze frightens them all, but the tramps force the girl to dance for him. The Mandarin is overcome with love; he chases her. Rather like Rasputin, miraculously the Mandarin won't die. Shocking scenes of violence ensue, until the girl realises she must embrace him: then he can die. Yes, this didn't go down well with the Cologne public, or the Catholic press!

Bartók's orchestral Suite takes us up to the chase scene, opening with the unsettling dynamism of a modern urban landscape. A languorous melody unfolds seductively on the clarinet as the girl appears at the window to attract her first victim. Stuttering rising glissandos in the trombones characterize the dishevelled old man; a variation of the clarinet melody lures the young man, represented by the oboe. The clarinet theme now shudders with strings, glissandos in the harp and piano: the trombones, reinforced by cymbals and bass drum announce the arrival of the Mandarin, with terrifying majesty. Bartók uses the Mandarin's motive as the basis of the girl's dance. The chase music, the end of the suite, erupts with rhythmic energy unmatched in Bartók's music: terrifying, exhilarating and utterly new.

Programme notes written by Joanna MacGregor



Béla Bartók

1st Violins

Ruth Rogers LEADER

Nicky Sweeney
Nikki Gleed
Daniel Stroud
Caryn Cohen
Anna Giddey
Katy Wilmshurst
Rachel Mackenzie
Susanna Griffin
Emily Trubshaw*

*The position of Leader
is sponsored anonymously*

2nd Violins

Jessica Coleman

Jeremy Metcalfe
Hazel Correa
Maria-Fiore Mazzarini
Keith Lewis
Jonathan Newton
Joanne Davies
Gillian Brightwell
Emma Penfold
Lauren Abbott

*The position of Principal
Second Violin is sponsored
by Julian Pelling*

Viola

Mike Briggs

Joanna Patrick
John Rogers
Cameron Howe
Rachel Benjamin
Susan Appel
Anna Barsegjana
Athalie Armon-Jones*

Cello

Ben Rogerson

Ricardo Tauber
Joe Giddey
Hannah McFarlane
Claire Constable
Sarah Davison

*The position of Principal Cello
is sponsored by David House*

Double Bass

Stephen Warner

Caroline Harding
Adam Precious
Will Henderson

*The position of Principal
Double Bass is sponsored
by Frances Lindsay-Hills*

Flute

Abigail Burrows

Clare Bennett DBL PICCOLO
Susie Hodder-Williams DBL PICCOLO
*The position of Principal Flute
is sponsored by Jane Wilford*
*The position of Principal Piccolo
is sponsored by Simone Keane*

Oboe

Ben Marshall

Eugene Feild
Clare Hoskins DBL COR ANGLAIS
*The position of Principal Oboe
is sponsored anonymously*

Clarinet

James Gilbert

Laurence Cuttriss DBL E♭ CLARINET
Helen Bishop DBL BASS CLARINET
*The position of Principal
Clarinet is sponsored by
Peter & Jackie Lythell OBE*

Bassoon

Jonathan Price

Alex Davidson
Emma Westley DBL CONTRA
*The position of Principal Bassoon
is sponsored by Anthony Hyde
& Vaughan Rees OBE*

French Horn

Alexei Watkins

David Wythe
Ed Lockwood
Paul Cott
Henry Ward

*The position of Principal
Horn is sponsored by
John & Frances Colban*

Trumpet

John Ellwood

Julie Ryan
Oliver Preece
*The position of Principal Trumpet is
sponsored by Gavin Henderson CBE*

Trombone

Lindsay Shilling

William Brown
*The position of Principal Trombone
is sponsored by Caroline House*

Bass Trombone

Ian Fasham

Tuba

John Elliott

*The position of Principal Tuba
is sponsored by Janet Foster*

Timpani

Graham Reader

Percussion

Donna-Maria Landowski

Chris Brannick
Cameron Gorman*
Donal O'Neill
Chris Goody

Harp

Alex Rider

Anneke Hodnett
*The position of Principal Harp
is sponsored by Keith Armitage*

Piano

Xiaowen Shang*

Celeste

Leon Chen

Patrons

The BPO is grateful to its Patrons for their support of the orchestra: Keith Armitage, Ian Birksted, Lloyd Bradley, Jonathan Brigden & Marnie Middlemiss, Laurie Cearley, Kate Fargher & Rob Kent, James Findon, Valerie Hart, Oliver Homewood, Steven Foster & Martin Hume, Vaughan Rees OBE & Mr Anthony Hyde, Cliff Jenkins, Elizabeth Lamb, Mark Linford, Nicholas Menges, Susan Pigden, Kenneth Richardson, Robert & Pamela Stiles, Paul Tofts, Stuart & Ann Watson, Michael & Alan Wright and those that wish to remain anonymous.

*Spring Forwards

Four of today's musicians are part of our newly launched Spring Forwards scheme, offering orchestral experience and mentoring to exceptional young players launching their careers. Spring Forwards has been generously supported by Joanna MacGregor CBE, Laurie Cearley, and Sue Trimingham in memory of her husband Adam Trimingham. With thanks to The Garrick Charitable Trust for their grant in support of this scheme.



Contact gill.davies@brightonphil.org.uk to find out more about supporting Spring Forwards



Junyan Chen

The Shanghai-born pianist **Junyan Chen** leapt to international fame when she was awarded the Silver Medal, Chamber Music Prize and the Alexandra Dariescu Prize at Leeds International Piano Competition last year. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where she studied with Joanna MacGregor for six years, highlights of the 2025/26 season include her debut playing Rachmaninoff's 4th Piano Concerto with the Philharmonia; solo recital debuts in Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Fribourg and at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr; and a return to Wigmore Hall in London. As an enthusiastic performer of contemporary music, she regularly collaborates with the Manchester Collective; in January earlier this year Junyan performed *Sur Incises* at a London concert celebrating the centenary of Pierre Boulez, conducted by Susanna Mälkki. Junyan has worked closely with many composers including Hans Abrahamsen, Mark Anthony-Turnage and Dominic Muldowney. Her debut solo album, *It's Time*, was released on Linn Records in 2022 and features works by Fazıl Say, Unsuk Chin, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Eleanor Alberga. The disc explores cultural identity through a diverse range of musical genres and art forms. Junyan is also a curator, running her own ensemble, and is the new Artistic Director of the Leeds Chamber Music Series.



Joanna MacGregor CBE

One of the world's most innovative musicians, **Joanna MacGregor CBE** is only the fourth Music Director in the history of the Brighton Philharmonic. Described as '*a brilliant light in the music world*,' she'll be appearing as pianist, conductor and composer this season. Joanna has performed in over eighty countries, working with many eminent conductors including Pierre Boulez, Colin Davis and Simon Rattle; in 2025-26 she tours Europe and Scandinavia, US and Canada, China and India. Joanna is Dame Myra Hess Chair of Piano at the Royal Academy of Music and runs two annual piano festivals for young pianists, as well as a year-round Wigmore Hall series. She has been Artistic Director of Dartington Summer School, Bath International Festival and Deloitte Ignite at the Royal Opera House, as well as a curator for festivals around the world. She has released over forty solo recordings, ranging from Chopin and Piazzolla to Bach and John Cage, and has commissioned many landmark works. Joanna is a regular broadcaster on TV and radio, appearing many times at the BBC Proms; she performed Beethoven's thirty-two sonatas in 2020, followed by an immersive Schubert series in 2023. Her collaborative composing projects encompass jazz, film, visual art, contemporary dance and electronica. Joanna has five honorary doctorates; for many years she chaired the Paul Hamlyn Composers Awards and has been a Booker Prize Judge.



Ruth Rogers

Ruth Rogers is our wonderful Leader, now in her fourth season with the BPO. Ruth studied with Itzhak Rashkovsky at the Royal College of Music and was awarded the Tagore Gold medal, the College's highest accolade; further study followed at Amsterdam Conservatory with Herman Krebbers. Winner of the prestigious Manoug Parikian Award, Ruth made her London debuts at the Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room in 2003; from 2008-2012 she was Co-Leader of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and in 2015 she was appointed one of the Leaders of the London Mozart Players. Ruth regularly guest leads the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Aurora Chamber Orchestra and has appeared in principal roles with the Hallé, Philharmonia and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. She has led orchestras under maestros such as Lorin Maazel, Daniele Gatti, Sir Colin Davis and Sakari Oramo, and has performed concertos with the City of London Sinfonia, City of Oxford Orchestra, London Strings, and New London Soloists Orchestra. A keen chamber musician, Ruth has performed at Aldeburgh and Bath Festivals and is a member of the Iuventus String Quartet and Aquinas Piano Trio, also appearing at the Wigmore Hall with the Nash Ensemble. Recordings include Piazzolla's *History of the Tango* with guitarist Morgan Szymanski, and several discs with the Aquinas Piano Trio.

Welcome to the BPO Family

Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra has served audiences in Sussex for over one hundred years. Our vision is to be a regional orchestra with national significance, programming and presenting classical music in a bold, colourful way to build audiences of the future.

We continually seek out international names as well as brilliant younger soloists, conductors, and artistic collaborators – from jazz and contemporary music to film and the visual arts – to bring ambitious and thought-provoking concerts to Sussex and beyond. We're committed to developing young audiences, with an Under-30's club, sponsored tickets for school groups and £1 childrens' tickets. We're nurturing exceptional young musicians through our Spring Forwards programme, and as one of the partner organisations of Sussex music hub, Create Music, are working on several education outreach projects for the season ahead.



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