

barbican



Classical Music

Concert programme

**Sinfonia of London/
John Wilson with
Sheku Kanneh-Mason**

Tue 15 Oct 7.30pm

Hall

Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 9.50pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Please ...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't ...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid?

Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance, or during the interval.



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Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1, G and 2.



Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

Sinfonia of London/John Wilson with Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Tue 15 Oct 7.30pm, Hall

Sinfonia of London
John Wilson conductor
Sheku Kanneh-Mason cello

Kenneth Hesketh *PatterSongs*

Dmitri Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 2

- 1 Largo
- 2 Allegretto
- 3 Allegretto

Interval 20 minutes

Sergei Rachmaninov Symphony No 1

- 1 Grave – Allegro non troppo
- 2 Allegro animato
- 3 Larghetto
- 4 Allegro con fuoco

Produced by the Barbican

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John Wilson and his Sinfonia of London make an eagerly anticipated return to the Barbican, giving the London premiere of Kenneth Hesketh's orchestral show-stopper, before turning their attention to two mighty Russian masterpieces, with Sheku Kanneh-Mason as star soloist in Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto.

Patter songs are a staple of comic opera and musical theatre (think the Major-General's Song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*), but in the hands of Kenneth Hesketh (born 1968) the concept takes on the subtler qualities of relentless mocking and intrusive thoughts. *PatterSongs* (2008) is a fast-paced orchestral treatment of material from his opera *The Overcoat* (after Gogol); specifically, as Hesketh puts it, 'music associated with the ill-treatment of the main protagonist, the hapless clerk and copyist Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin.' Impoverished and perpetually underestimated, Akaky is 'the butt of all jokes and focus of much cruelty', who 'provides great "entertainment" to his antagonists in the government office and to the foul-mouthed Tailor' – whom he must approach for his new overcoat.

This dazzling score is by turns 'swaggering, pompous or comic', but, as Hesketh emphasises, there are darker undercurrents at play, and in the midst of a flurry of colourful orchestral solos we become aware of the persistent sound of the woodblock, 'particularly the constant repeated hammering towards the end of the work', which suggests that Akaky is haunted by 'the constant nagging and harassing voice of his tormentors'.



The theme of politically charged persecution was familiar territory for Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75), whose first opera, *The Nose*, was also inspired by Gogol; but the Cello Concerto No 2 of 1966 is a more personal, good-natured work. Shostakovich wrote both his cello concertos for the legendary Mstislav Rostropovich, who described his student days playing duets and learning composition with Shostakovich as ‘a real musical university’, referring to Shostakovich’s ‘deep humanity towards everything – in life, in his relationships and in his art’. Even so, they were very different characters, and Shostakovich paid knowing tribute to this by peppering this concerto with moments of humour.

Both musicians were friends with Benjamin Britten, whose *Cello Symphony* of 1964 was also written for Rostropovich; Shostakovich may have had this work in mind when he alluded to this concerto as his ‘Fourteenth Symphony with a cello part’. The year 1966 marked Shostakovich’s 60th birthday, but health problems almost derailed the celebrations: he finished the concerto in a sanatorium and nearly didn’t make it to its premiere at his birthday concert. Thankfully, he was well enough to hear Rostropovich’s performance of the piece, with its introspective opening Largo, and a scherzo based on the Odessa cabaret song ‘Bublik, kupite bublik!’ (‘Bagels, buy my bagels!’).

This suggestive song was an in-joke recalling a New Year’s Eve party at which both musicians were asked their favourite pieces of music – Shostakovich teasingly chose this tune. The finale, which features prominent percussion, opens with a cello cadenza accompanied by the tambourine, before evolving into an ominous dance of death that reaches its climax with a searing orchestral utterance of the

cabaret song. The orchestral material fades, and the cello, with percussion still in attendance, bids us farewell.

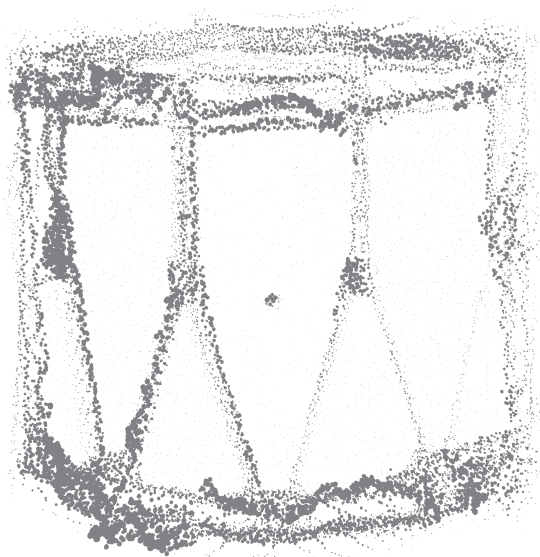
Shostakovich was fortunate in his collaboration with Rostropovich, and as a young man he had himself been generously mentored by Alexander Glazunov, a hugely respected figure in Russian music. Sergei Rachmaninov’s experience of Glazunov was less straightforward. It was the latter who conducted the disastrous premiere of his *Symphony No 1* in 1897, and Rachmaninov was left reeling: ‘How could a great musician like Glazunov conduct so badly? ... It is not even a question of stick-technique, though his is poor enough, but of musicianship: he beats time as if he has no feeling for music whatever.’ Rehearsals were similarly botched, with Glazunov making injudicious edits to the score, and Natalia Satina, who became Rachmaninov’s wife, suggested that Glazunov had been drunk in charge of a baton. The humiliation plunged the young man into a long period of writers’ block. He would never hear his *First Symphony* again; the orchestral parts languished in obscurity until they were rediscovered in 1944.

Rachmaninov’s *First Symphony* has further suffered from being overshadowed by the irresistible big themes and ravishing sweep of his *Second Symphony* and the piano concertos. Yet in recent years the work has been reappraised as one of exceptional beauty and perhaps even greater coherence, revealing different facets of the composer’s rich inner world. This was technically Rachmaninov’s second bite at the symphonic cherry following an early attempt as a student, and he found the writing process unusually laborious, working on the symphony – which was heavily influenced by Tchaikovsky – for most of 1895.

The piece begins with a noble slow introduction in which a unifying four-note idea or 'motto' is presented, and from which the Allegro's first theme grows; there are hints of the *Dies irae* ('Day of wrath') chant that Rachmaninov would regularly include in later works. A fugal central section based on the first theme culminates in chorale-like music reminiscent of Orthodox chant; Rachmaninov the Romantic also emerges in moments of glorious sensuality.

An intricate scherzo and sublime, subtly scored Larghetto follow, before Rachmaninov unleashes his full forces in the finale. Martial, rhythmically vivacious material based on the opening movement is juxtaposed with a singing second theme. The work culminates in resolute final reiterations of the motto surrounded by a wealth of orchestral sound including tam-tam and reaching a hard-won D major, leaving the listener astonished that the piece could ever have been considered anything other than a triumph.

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John Wilson

John Wilson is in demand at the highest level across the world, having conducted many of the world's finest orchestras over the past 30 years. In 2018 he relaunched Sinfonia of London: described as 'the most exciting thing currently happening on the British orchestral scene' (*The Arts Desk*), Wilson and the Sinfonia's much-anticipated BBC Proms debut in 2021 was praised as 'truly outstanding' (*The Guardian*) with its 'revelatory music-making' (*The Times*). They are now highly sought-after across the UK, regularly returning to the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh Festival and here at the Barbican Centre.

John Wilson's large and varied discography with Sinfonia of London has received near universal critical acclaim, and since 2019 they have released more than 20 albums.

Their recordings have earned several awards, including *BBC Music Magazine Awards* for recordings of Korngold's *Symphony in F sharp* (2020), Respighi's *Roman Trilogy* (2021), Dutilleux's *Le Loup* (2022), *Oklahoma!* (2024) and a disc of works by Vaughan Williams, Howells, Delius and Elgar which won both the *Orchestral Award* and *Recording of the Year*. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as 'Massive, audacious and vividly played' and *The Times* declared it one of the three 'truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy' of all time, after those by Toscanini and Muti.

Born in Gateshead, John Wilson studied composition and conducting at the Royal College of Music where he was made a Fellow in 2011. In March 2019 he was awarded the prestigious *ISM Distinguished Musician Award* for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed *Henry Wood Chair of Conducting* at the Royal Academy of Music.



© Ollie Ali

Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason's mission is to make music accessible to all, whether performing for children in a school hall, at an underground club, or at the world's leading concert venues.

Highlights of this season include Artist-in-Residence at the Konzerthaus Berlin; Artiste Étoile at the 2024 Lucerne Festival; tours with the Czech Philharmonic with both Jakub Hruška and Semyon Bychkov, with Camerata Salzburg and the current UK tour with Sinfonia of London and John Wilson; and concerts with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra with Paavo Järvi, WDR Symphony Cologne with Cristian Măcelaru, Orchestre National de Lyon with Leonard Slatkin, SWR Symphony Stuttgart with Christoph Eschenbach, Pittsburgh Symphony with Manfred Honeck, New World Symphony with Stéphane Denève, Philadelphia Orchestra with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra with Kazuki Yamada.

With his pianist sister, Isata, he makes his duo recital debut at New York's Carnegie Hall Stern Auditorium in a programme featuring a newly commissioned piece by Natalie Klouda. The pair also appear on tour in Bordeaux, Rome, Cincinnati, Toronto, Philadelphia, Dublin, Munich, Berlin, Antwerp, Haarlem, the Rheingau Festival, and at Wigmore Hall. He

also appears with duo partners guitarist Plinio Fernandes and jazz pianist Harry Baker.

Since his debut in 2017, he has performed every summer at the BBC Proms, including as soloist at the 2023 Last Night of the Proms. In 2024 his family-friendly Proms appearances with the Fantasia Orchestra were designed to introduce orchestral classical music to a new generation of music lovers. He also returns to Antigua, where he has family connections, as an ambassador for the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Symphony Orchestra.

He is a Decca Classics recording artist, and his most recent album featured Beethoven's Triple Concerto alongside Nicola Benedetti, Benjamin Grosvenor and the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Santtu-Matias Rouvali. His 2022 album, *Song*, showcases his innately lyrical playing in a wide and varied range of arrangements and collaborations. His 2020 Elgar album reached No 8 in the overall Official UK Album Chart, making him the first ever cellist to reach the UK Top 10.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason is a graduate of London's Royal Academy of Music where he studied with Hannah Roberts; in 2022 he was appointed as the Academy's first Menuhin Visiting Professor of Performance Mentoring. In 2024 he accepted the role as patron of UK Music Masters and remains an ambassador for both Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and Future Talent. He was honoured with an MBE in the 2020 New Year's Honours List. After winning the *BBC Young Musician* competition in 2016, his performance at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle in 2018 was watched by two billion people worldwide.

He plays a Matteo Goffriller cello from 1700 which is on indefinite loan to him.

Sinfonia of London

Sinfonia of London brings together outstanding musicians for special projects, live and recorded, throughout the year. It comprises principals and leaders from the finest UK and international orchestras, alongside noted soloists and members of distinguished chamber ensembles. It was relaunched by conductor John Wilson in 2018, reviving the legendary studio orchestra of the same name founded in 1955.

The orchestra made its live debut in 2021, at the BBC Proms. As well as subsequent annual Proms appearances, it has performed at the Aldeburgh Festival and Snape Maltings, as well as giving three concert tours of the UK, including the current one with Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Its exhilarating performances continue to achieve five-star reviews in the press, cementing a reputation for world-class excellence.

Sinfonia of London's critically acclaimed recording catalogue on Chandos Records includes repertoire by Korngold, Respighi, Ravel, Dutilleux, Strauss, Rachmaninov and Rodgers & Hammerstein, among others. These recordings have received a *Gramophone Award* (2022) and five *BBC Music Magazine Awards* in five years, including *Recording of the Year* (2024) for its second album of English Music for Strings.

Following the acclaimed releases of the full original version of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Carousel* (2024) and *Oklahoma!* (2023), Sinfonia of London will undertake a tour of Rodgers & Hammerstein's Greatest Hits in June 2025 to 10 venues around the country, with conductor John Wilson.



Sinfonia of London

violin I

Charlie Lovell-Jones
John Mills
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Ciaran McCabe
Beatrice Philips
Andrew Harvey
Julia Ungureanu
Djumash Poulsen
Samuel Staples
Charles Mutter
Jack Greed
Dan-Iulian Drutac
Greta Mutlu
Harry Kneeshaw

violin II

Michael Trainor
Jens Lynen
Katerina Nazarova
Victoria Gill
Steven Wilkie
Michael Jones
Zahra Benyounes
David Shaw
Charis Jenson
Jenny King
Mitzi Gardner
Emily Holland
Marciana Buta

viola

Edgar Francis
Ben Newton
Vikki Wardman
Lydia Northcott
Matthew Quenby
James Heron
Amy Thomas
Miguel Sobrinho
Luca Wadham
Jamie Howe

cello

Jonathan Aasgaard
Tim Lowe
Jessie Ann Richardson
William Clark-
Maxwell
Max Calver
Thomas Rann
Hugh Mackay
Mafalda Santos

double bass

Philip Nelson
Will Duerden
Kai Kim
Evangeline Tang
Marianne Schofield
James Trowbridge

flute

Charlotte Ashton
Brontë Hudnott
Luke Russell

oboe

Tom Blomfield
Alex Hilton

clarinet

Timothy Orpen
James Gilbert

bassoon

Todd Gibson-Cornish
Angharad Thomas
Rebecca Koopmans

horn

Chris Parkes
Jonathan Quaintrell-
Evans
Christopher Gough
Flora Bain
George Strivens

trumpet

James Fountain
Aaron Akugbo
Catherine Knight

trombone

Simon Johnson
Matthew Lewis
James Buckle

tuba

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timpani

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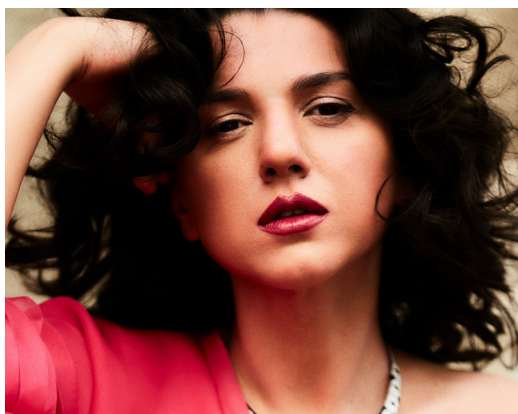
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Tue 19 Nov, Hall



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