

 *e* Orchestra of the  
Age of Enlightenment



# VIENNA 1897

## BRAHMS' LAST CONCERT

**SOUTHBANK**  
**75**  
**CENTRE**  
RESIDENT

## WELCOME TO OUR 2025/26 SEASON AT THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE.

### Celebrating 40 fantastic years of making music.

1986. It was the year of the Westland Affair, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the infamous 'Hand of God' goal at the World Cup in Mexico, the premiere of Harrison Birtwistle's opera *The Mask of Orpheus*... and in late June Wham! was at number 1 in the UK charts with *The Edge of Heaven*.

On 26 June, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment first stepped onto a stage.

The first of our two seasons marking this milestone features a kaleidoscope of old favourites and new combinations. It features some of our best-loved partnerships and celebrates our shared history. Handel and Bach, Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Brahms and Dvořák are all composers who have been at the heart of our journey.

The challenges faced by the OAE and all our colleagues are varied, but we remain absolutely focused on the mission of sharing the highest quality music with the widest audience possible. What continues to shine after 40 years is the golden thread of a story of friends united by a profound love of the art of music.

## PHILHARMONISCHE CONCERTE.

Sonntag den 7. März 1897, Mittags präcise  $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 Uhr,  
im grossen Saale der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde:

### 7<sup>tes</sup> Abonnement-Concert

veranstaltet von den  
Mitgliedern des k. k. Hof-Opernorchesters  
unter der Leitung des Herrn  
**HANS RICHTER,**  
k. u. k. Hof-Kapellmeister.

#### PROGRAMM:

- J. Brahms** . . . . . Symphonie Nr. 4, E-moll.  
1. Allegro non troppo. 3. Allegro giocoso.  
2. Andante moderato. 4. Allegro energico e passionato.
- A. Dvořák** . . . . . Concert für Violoncello.  
1. Allegro. 3. Allegro moderato.  
2. Adagio ma non troppo.  
(I. Ausführung in den Philharmonischen Concerten.)  
Vorgetragen von Herrn Prof. **Hugo Becker.**
- J. Haydn** . . . . . Symphonie „La chasse“ (Nr. 5 der Ausgabe  
von Dr. F. Wällner).  
1. Adagio — Allegro. 3. Menuetto — Allegretto.  
2. Andante. 4. La chasse.  
(I. Ausführung in den Philharmonischen Concerten.)

Streich-Instrumente: **Gabriel Lemböck's** Nachfolger **Carl Haudeck.**

Programme unentgeltlich.

Sonntag den 21. März 1897, Mittags präcise  $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 Uhr:  
**VIII. und letztes Philharmonisches Concert.**

- P. J. Tschai'kowski** . . . . . Suite Nr. 3, op. 55.  
(I. Ausführung in den Philharmonischen Concerten.)
- R. Strauss** . . . . . „Also sprach Zarathustra“, Tondichtung frei nach  
Friedrich Nietzsche.  
(I. Ausführung in den Philharmonischen Concerten.)
- L. v. Beethoven** . . . . . Symphonie Nr. 5, C-moll.

Sonntag den 4. April 1897, Mittags präcise  $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 Uhr:

### CONCERT

zu Gunsten des Vereines „Nicolai“, Krankenkassa der Mitglieder des k. k. Hof-Opernorchesters  
unter der Leitung des Herrn **Hans Richter**, k. u. k. Hof-Kapellmeister,  
und unter gefälliger Mitwirkung  
der Damen: Frau **Sofie Sedlmair**, Frä. **Edith Walker**, k. k. Hof-Opernsängerinnen;  
der Herren: **Andreas Dippel**, **Josef Ritter**, k. k. Hof-Opernsänger,  
und des Singvereines der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde.

#### PROGRAMM:

- R. Wagner** . . . . . Vorspiel zur Oper: „Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg“.
- J. S. Bach** . . . . . Concert Nr. 3, G-dur, für Streichorchester.
- L. v. Beethoven** . . . . . Symphonie Nr. 9, D-moll.

On 7 March 1897, Johannes Brahms attended a performance by the Vienna Philharmonic under the direction of Hans Richter. It was the last known time that he heard his own music in public. The programme included his own Symphony No. 4 alongside Antonin Dvořák's Cello Concerto, premiered the year before in London, and Haydn's 'La Chasse' Symphony.

“Everyone in town had heard the rumour, but for most of the audience it was the first confirmation. Brahms was dying, they could see it all over him. He had risen to acknowledge the applause after each movement of this his last symphony... On this night it was not for this symphony they shouted. They cried out for all the music and for the man, for Brahms who was dying, and with him an age.” (Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*)

Brahms died on 3 April 1897 at the age of 63.

# Programme

**JOHANNES BRAHMS**  
(1833 – 1897)

## Symphony No. 4

- I. *Allegro non troppo*
- II. *Andante moderato*
- III. *Allegro giocoso – Poco meno presto*
- IV. *Allegro energico e passionato – Più Allegro*

– Interval (20 minutes) –

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**  
(1841 – 1904)

## Cello Concerto in B Minor

- I. *Allegro – Grandioso – Un poco sostenuto – Tempo I – Quasi improvvisando – Tempo I – Grandioso – Molto sostenuto – Animato – Tempo I – Più mosso – Tempo I*
- II. *Adagio, ma non troppo – Un poco più animato – Tempo I – Un poco più animato – Tempo I*
- III. *Finale. Allegro moderato – Poco meno mosso – Tempo I – Moderato – Tempo I – Meno mosso – Andante – Andante maestoso – Allegro vivo*

**JOSEPH HAYDN**  
(1732 – 1809)

## Symphony No. 73

- I. *Adagio – Allegro*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio*
- IV. *La Chasse. Presto*

## ORCHESTRA OF THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Matthew Truscott leader, Steven Isserlis cello, Maxim Emelyanychev conductor

The OAE's 40th anniversary seasons in 2025 / 26 and 2026 / 27  
are made possible with the support of The Forty Circle.

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Free pre-concert talk with Steven Isserlis and Maxim Emelyanychev at 6.00pm  
in Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer.

# Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

## Violins I

Matthew Truscott\*  
 Dominika Fehér  
 Rodolfo Richter  
 Kyra Humphreys  
 Judith Templeman  
 Leonie Curtin  
 May Kunstovny  
 Anna Curzon  
 Huw Daniel\*  
 Claire Sterling  
 Rebecca Bell

## Violins II

Margaret Faultless\*  
 Kinga Ujszászi  
 Rachel Isserlis  
 Rebecca Livermore  
 Nia Lewis  
 Iona Davies  
 Jayne Spencer  
 Sophie Simpson  
 George Clifford  
 Christiane Eidsten Dahl

## Violas

Max Mandel\*  
 Anne Sophie van Riel  
 John Crockatt\*  
 Martin Kelly  
 Annette Isserlis  
 Kate Heller  
 Clara Biss  
 Mark Braithwaite

## Cellos

Luise Buchberger\*  
 Andrew Skidmore  
 Catherine Rimer  
 Ruth Alford  
 Helen Verney  
 Richard Tunnicliffe

## Double basses

Cecelia Bruggemeyer  
 Carina Cosgrave  
 John-Henry Baker  
 Kate Brooke

## Flutes

Lisa Beznosiuk\*  
 Rosie Bowker

## Piccolo

Rosie Bowker

## Oboes

Daniel Bates\*  
 Leo Duarte

## Clarinets

Katherine Spencer\*  
 Sarah Thurlow

## Bassoons

Jane Gower\*  
 Philip Turbett

## Contrabassoon

Chris Rawley

## Horns

Alec Frank-Gemill  
 Martin Lawrence  
 Ursula Paludan Monberg  
 David Bentley

## Trumpets

Paul Sharp  
 Simon Munday

## Trombones

Helena Kieser  
 Ian Sankey  
 Andrew Lester

## Tuba

Martin Jarvis

## Timpani

Adrian Bending\*

## Percussion

Rachel Gledhill

\*OAE Principal Players

# Dvořák's glorious cello concerto – a personal memoir

Steven Isserlis

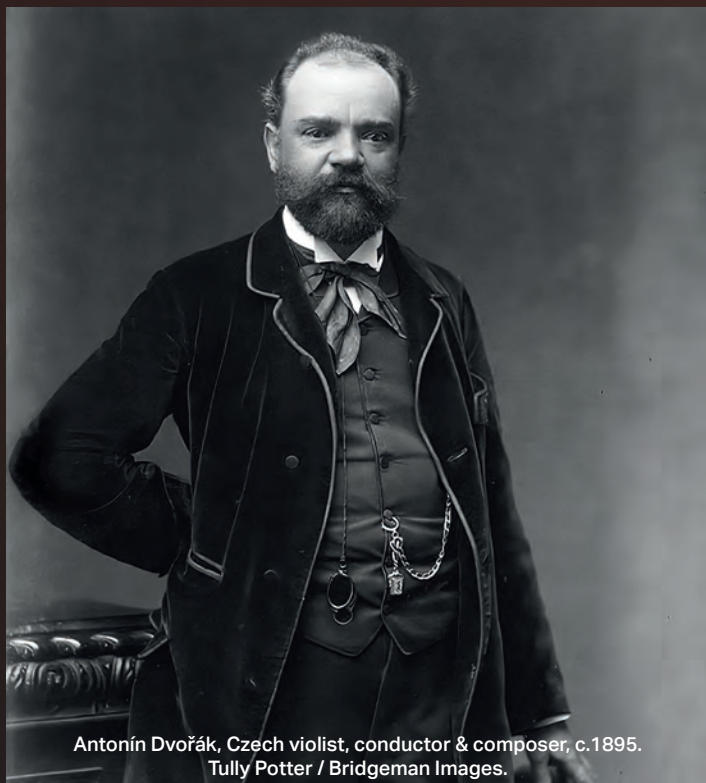
The Dvořák concerto was the first piece of 'classical' music with which I ever fell in love. I must have been, I think, about ten years old, and I became obsessed with it in a way that had only previously happened to me with Beatles songs. I listened to the concerto – at least, to the first movement of it, since I was too lazy to turn the record over – every day. At first, it was always Rostropovich's recording, with Sir Adrian Boult conducting. (Many years later – of course – I told 'Slava' Rostropovich about this. 'Which one you listen?' he demanded. 'The one with Boult.' He pouted. 'Talich

and Ozawa better.')

In subsequent years, I branched out into other recordings, eventually coming across the classic Casals / Szell version, which became, and remains, my favourite.

I was soon begging my teacher, Jane Cowan, to let me begin learning it myself. Finally, when I was twelve, she gave in and let me make a start – what a thrill! Just to play that cello entry, with its electrifying rhythm and rich chords... I felt like a star. After the lesson, my father arrived to pick me up, and, proud as anything, I played it to him. His hands flew to his ears. 'Agh – hideously out of tune!' Humph. (To be fair, that is a most uncharacteristic story about my father, who was generally wonderfully supportive – occasionally to the point of embarrassment... And it probably WAS hideously out of tune.) Anyway, determined to prove him wrong, I worked hard at the concerto; and in 1973, at the age of 14, I got to play it in concert, at my teacher's summer festival in Austria. How it sounded, I have no idea. (Not much has changed – I really don't know how it sounds when I play it today!) But for me it was an experience beyond compare.

Something of that excitement remains with me every time I play the concerto. To listen to that wonderful first tutti, and then to enter with that heroic declamation; to pass from that to the tender intimacy of the second subject; to feel the painful nostalgia of the slow movement, and then the joy, turning in the coda to aching farewell, of the finale: it is a unique emotional journey. This is Dvořák at the peak of his powers, music filled with all his characteristic qualities: the glorious melodies,



Antonín Dvořák, Czech violist, conductor & composer, c.1895.  
Tully Potter / Bridgeman Images.

the incredible rhythmic vitality, the unbreakable connection to the folk music of his homeland. But there is another, equally important, aspect of the genius of this work that has perhaps been somewhat overlooked: Dvořák's astounding mastery of form and development. To take one example: the concerto begins with the simplest possible motif, sounded initially by the clarinet. In itself the motif could seem almost plain – as could so many of Beethoven's motifs. But what Dvořák does with this little figure! It reappears in seemingly innumerable guises throughout the first movement, each time sounding effortlessly natural; furthermore, its DNA is felt through the other movements. There's not the slightest hint of academicism about it, however – the music never for a moment loses its natural, organic clarity, its clear-eyed, direct power of communication. Well, that's Dvořák...

As I implied earlier: when I was ten years old or so, I would have said that this concerto was my favourite piece of music. I wouldn't say that today; but I would say that I love it more deeply, and just as passionately, as I did then. In the more than fifty years (groan) since I first performed it, the magic of the piece has never faded – and I trust that it never will. It is a true masterpiece, and as such feels different, says fresh things to me, every time I perform it. And of course it will feel, I know, quite new when I come to play it with the OAE, one of my favourite orchestras, and with Maxim, one of my favourite conductors. The only aspect of tonight's performance that gives me pause is the fact that both my sisters will be playing in the orchestra – which means that I'll be twice as nervous as I would have been anyway (and that would have been quite nervous enough!). But it'll be worth it – for this concerto...



# Catastrophe is coming

Jan Swafford

The two symphonies in this concert, for all their contrasts of style and scope, share a common and not all that extended tradition: Beethoven picked up the symphony where Haydn and Mozart left it, and Brahms picked up the symphony where Beethoven left it. Haydn, meanwhile, didn't really pick it up from anybody. He originated.

By the end of his career Haydn was called "the father of the symphony," likewise "father of the string quartet." This is not to say that he invented either genre. Rather he took them up as relatively minor pieces and left them, respectively, the king of instrumental works and the king of chamber music. The sort of depth and scope that Beethoven, Brahms, and our time associate with the symphony, is what Haydn created in his last dozen, written for large halls and big audiences during his English sojourn.

In its variety and impact, Symphony No. 73 in D Major, from 1781, known as *La Chasse*, "The Hunt," for its last movement, is moving in the direction of Haydn's final group. Still, it and its contemporaries were written for a small orchestra playing in the music room of a mansion or a palace: flute, oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets (in the outer movements), and strings.

*La Chasse* unfolds in Haydn's more cheery mood: vigorous, ebullient, unclouded. It begins with a slow introduction to the first movement, starting with pulsing winds falling to silence. After some pensive moments we're off into a sprightly and summery Allegro full of echoes of the introduction, such as pulsing eighth notes and sudden silences. The second movement is based on a song Haydn wrote the same year, lyrical and chirpy with more pulsing eighths—Haydn is paying attention to motifs uniting the whole piece.

There follows a wry and ironic minuet, faster than the usual dance-derived movement, reminding us that in some of his quartets Haydn speeded up the minuet and invented the scherzo. So far in the symphony he has kept up a good-humored atmosphere in various modes of delight. In the finale, which he adapted from one of his opera overtures, matters spill over into a dashing romp in what the time would instantly hear as a "hunting" vein, complete with lusty horns and pounding timpani. We seem to be hunting on horseback, and having a splendid time of it. In the end, after a final shout from the horns, we're given a gentle finish.



Hunting, c. 1780 (oil on canvas). Artist Francois de la Traversie (18th century).  
© Iberfoto / Bridgeman Images

When Brahms was finishing a big piece he would generally notify friends that something was forthcoming. In that process he was apt to be most flippant concerning the works he most cared about. In August 1885, from the mountainous resort of Mürzzuschlag, Brahms sent his old friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg the first movement of a symphony: "Would you... tell me what you think of it?... Cherries never get ripe for eating in these parts, so don't



View from Austria, Müzzuschlag, V. A. Heck Publishing House, 1885. ÖNB-Bildarchiv / picturedesk.com / Bridgeman Images

be afraid to say if you don't like the taste. I'm not at all eager to write a bad No. 4." Back in Vienna, when a friend asked if he'd done something big over the summer – a concerto? a quartet? Brahms replied, "God forbid! Nothing so grand as that! Once again I've just thrown together a bunch of polkas and waltzes." He was again talking about the Fourth Symphony.

Like any composer, Brahms worried about the reception of a new work. He was more anxious than usual about the Fourth. His previous two symphonies had scored immediate successes. Meanwhile Brahms perhaps suspected he did not have a Fifth in him. In its tone and import, the Fourth was the darkest and most densely crafted symphonic work he had put before the public. His relief was manifest when its early performances, starting in Meiningen on October 25, 1885, found tremendous acclaim.

The symphony's inception went back several years. In 1880 Brahms played friends a bass line from a Bach cantata, on which Bach had built a chaconne, a dance-derived work consisting of variations over a repeated bass pattern. Brahms queried, "What would you think of a symphonic movement written on this theme someday?" Thus the finale of the Fourth. For that movement he was clearly thinking of another model as well, Bach's searing Chaconne in D minor for solo violin, of which Brahms once wrote: "If I had written this piece... the emotions excited would have driven me mad."

All these are clues to how Brahms conceived the Fourth Symphony, a work of whose expressive import he never spoke directly. Instead, he said: the cherries never get ripe in these mountains; writing a piece like Bach's chaconne would drive me mad.

**SYMPHONIE N° 4**

I

Johannes Brahms, Op. 98  
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo

Wiener Philharmonischer Verlag N° 133

Opening page of score for Symphony No 4 in E Minor, Opus 98, 1885.  
Wiener Philharmonischer Verlag AG. Lebrecht Music Arts /  
Bridgeman Images

How do his hints play out in the Fourth Symphony in E Minor? Three of its movements are in minor, or a haunting, minor-tinted major. Meanwhile as he often did, Brahms concealed some truth behind the irony when he called the symphony “a bunch of polkas and waltzes.” Most of the music reflects, however distantly, the rhythms and gestures of dance. Three of the dances, however, are hardly blithe ones.

The symphony begins with a lilting theme, its melodic profile a falling then rising chain of thirds that will permeate the melodic material of the symphony. Soon the music verges into elaborate contrapuntal variations, which will also characterize the piece. The overall tone of the first movement might be called somber nobility, with subtle shades of emotion washing through the texture.

The second movement, with its incantatory leading melody, has a tone primeval and ceremonial, like a procession for a fallen hero. In their mournful beauty, the orchestral colors are unique in Brahms, perhaps revealing his study of Wagner. Then comes an almost shocking contrast, a leaping, pounding, two-beat C-major Allegro giocoso that has been called “bacchanalian,” “tiger-like.” This is the “polka” Brahms joked about.

All that is to set up the last movement: mostly minor, at times searingly intense. It is the chaconne about which Brahms had once speculated for a finale: an introduction and thirty variations over the Bach bassline (which Brahms adapted, adding a chromatic note). In its treatment of a ruthlessly disciplined form, the finale is a triumphant tour de force. But Brahms used the steadily repeating theme of the old dance called chaconne to create – as in its model, the Bach D minor – a sense of relentless, mounting, inescapable tragedy. At the end, when tradition says the darkness of minor should be eased by a hopeful turn to major, Brahms finishes with a blazing minor chord, the timpani pounding out the Brahmsian fate-motif.

After Brahms died, conductor Felix Weingartner put forth an interpretation: “I cannot get away from the impression of an inexorable fate implacably driving some great creation, whether of an individual or a whole race, toward its downfall... [The finale is] a veritable orgy of destruction, a terrible counterpart to the paroxysm of joy at the end of Beethoven’s last symphony.” In 1883, when the Fourth was just ahead of him, Brahms wrote his publisher: “In [Austria], where everything... tumbles downhill, you can’t expect music to fare better. Really it’s a pity and a crying shame, not only for music but for the whole beautiful land and the beautiful marvelous people. I still think catastrophe is coming.”

What catastrophe was Brahms talking about – for Vienna, for Austria, for music? We can trace that mounting concern – despair is not too strong a word – in works from the late 1860s on. It is there in the sorrowful beginning of the Alto Rhapsody: “Who can heal the pains/Of one... who sucked hatred of mankind / From the abundance of love?” Two years later came the choral *Schicksalslied*, with its shattering middle section:

“Suffering mankind/ Wastes away, falls blindly...down into endless uncertainty.” In choosing those texts was Brahms talking about himself, childless and lonely and aging? To a degree, certainly. But the true catastrophe he saw coming was not his own but that of his culture.

In 1895 Vienna elected a new mayor, Karl Lueger, who established antisemitism as the formula for political success in Vienna. His election marked the end of power of the wealthy liberals who had largely built and run modern Vienna – and who were its most passionate music lovers. The most dynamic faction within that class were well-to-do, assimilated Jews. Those Jews above all were the targets of the ascendant Austro-German right wing. The night Lueger was elected, Brahms barked to friends: “Didn’t I tell you years ago that it was going to happen? You laughed at me then... Now it’s here... Antisemitism is madness!”

What had come was the beginning of the catastrophe Brahms had foretold. He did not just mean antisemitism. He meant the whole reactionary agenda that came with it: the exalting of the “world-transforming” antisemite Wagner and his disciple Bruckner; the doctrine of racial purity and blood-instinct; the suppression of the liberal, music-loving middle class, Jewish and otherwise. In his last years Brahms saw his class and his culture being destroyed, and he feared that music – his own music, and the great tradition he loved – could be consumed along with it. In 1896, in the *Four Serious Songs* that were his last testament, he took the first notes of the Fourth Symphony, the chain of thirds B-G-E-C, and set to them the words: “O death! O death!”

None of this is to say that Brahms was the only person in Vienna who saw something malevolent taking shape, and no one could have foreseen the final, incredible shape of the catastrophe that set the world aflame. Nor is this to say that the Fourth Symphony is a literal prophecy. But it is a foreshadowing.

Tradition has tended to say that Brahms’s work is pure music, free of autobiography and sociopolitical overtones. True, in contrast to Wagner, he did not believe that it was the task of art to redeem society. Rather he believed that art was a communication from the heart of the creator to the heart of each listener. But even if he only hinted about it to intimates, his music was rooted deeply in his life, his sorrows, his fears. In his last years Brahms feared for his music, for all music, for his civilization. So in his last symphony he sang of that despair in music of the highest beauty and craft, and he composed his elegy in the forms of solemn and mournful dances.

**Jan Swafford is an American author and composer of classical music.**



Portrait of the German composer Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897), circa 1885 © Aunaies / Bridgeman Images

# Biographies



## MAXIM EMELYANYCHEV Conductor

Maxim Emelyanychev has been Principal Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra since 2019, a partnership now extended until 2031. He is also Chief Conductor of period-instrument orchestra Il Pomo d'Oro and from the 2025 / 26 season he becomes Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Emelyanychev inspires a spirit of adventure among his collaborators, creating music that is alive with shared energy and imagination. Known for his infectious enthusiasm, Maxim draws out the individuality of each musician while forging a compelling collective sound.

With the SCO, Maxim has appeared at the BBC Proms, toured across Europe, and recorded Schubert and Mendelssohn symphonies for Linn Records. At the Edinburgh International Festival, he

has led acclaimed concert performances of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Così fan tutte* in recent years.

Internationally, he has conducted leading orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin, WDR Köln, London Philharmonic, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and hr-Hessischer Rundfunk.

Both the Het Concertgebouw and Philharmonie Essen present Maxim as Artist in Residence over the season 2025 / 26.

His opera credits include Handel's *Rinaldo* at Glyndebourne, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at Covent Garden, and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Zürich.

A frequent collaborator with Joyce DiDonato, he has partnered with her as pianist in Schubert's *Winterreise* in concerts at the Staatsoper Berlin, Wigmore Hall in London, Dortmund Konzerthaus and DeSingel Antwerp.

Emelyanychev boasts an extensive discography and is in the process of recording Mozart's complete symphonies together with Il Pomo d'Oro.

His awards include the Critics' Circle Young Talent Award, International Opera Award (Newcomer), ICMA Prize for his Mozart Sonatas and the prestigious Herbert von Karajan Award 2025.

Born in 1988 in Nizhny Novgorod, Emelyanychev made his conducting debut at 12 and studied under Gennady Rozhdestvensky at the Moscow Tchaikowsky Conservatoire.



## STEVEN ISSERLIS Cello

British cellist Steven Isserlis CBE enjoys an international career as a soloist, chamber musician, author, educator, and broadcaster. Equally at home in music from baroque to the present day, he performs with the world's greatest orchestras, including period ensembles, and has given many world premieres, including Sir John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil*, Thomas Adès's *Lieux retrouvés*, four works for solo cello by György Kurtág, and pieces by Heinz Holliger, Jörg Widmann, Olli Mustonen, Mikhail Pletnev and many others.

His vast award-winning discography includes most of the cello repertoire, including the JS Bach suites (Gramophone Instrumental Album of the Year), Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano, and the Brahms double concerto with Joshua Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He has received two Grammy nominations,

for his recordings of Haydn's cello concertos, and Martinů's cello sonatas with Olli Mustonen. Premiere recordings include late works by Sir John Tavener (BBC Music magazine Premiere Award). His latest recordings, Mendelssohn Piano Trios with Joshua Bell and Jeremy Denk, and Boccherini Cello Concertos, Sonatas & Quintets, were released in 2024.

As an author, his latest book is a critically acclaimed companion to the Bach cello suites, while his two books for children about music are among the genre's most popular ever written and have been translated into many languages. He has also authored a commentary on Schumann's famous *Advice for Young Musicians*. As a broadcaster, he has written and presented two in-depth documentaries for BBC Radio, on Robert Schumann and Harpo Marx.

An insightful musical explorer and curator, he has programmed imaginative series for London's Wigmore Hall, New York's 92nd St Y, and the Salzburg Festival. Unusually, he also directs orchestras from the cello, including Luzerner Sinfonieorchester in 2019 with Radu Lupu in his final public performance.

He was awarded a CBE by Queen Elizabeth II in 1998, in recognition of his services to music. International recognition includes the Piatigorsky Prize (USA) and the Glashütte Original Music Festival Award (Germany). Since 1997, he has been Artistic Director of the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove, Cornwall.

He plays the 1726 'Marquis de Corberon' Stradivarius, on loan from the Royal Academy of Music.

# We are going to start our own orchestra

## Jan Schlapp, a founding player, recalls the OAE's beginning

I find it difficult to untangle the many strands of myth and memory that surround the beginning of the OAE. My personal memory is of my late husband, cellist Timothy Mason, coming home after a day of rehearsals in 1985, fired up with enthusiasm, saying "We are going to start our own orchestra and it is going to be player-led". Busy as I was with two very young children I was initially less than enthusiastic because it seemed an almost impossible idea – where would the money come from? How would we organise it? Who would be involved?

The seed of the idea had been planted by regular conversations between the bassoonist, Felix Warnock, the violinist Marshall Marcus, and Tim, about how to break free from the status quo of London period orchestras. We had little say in any of these orchestras and we felt a bit underappreciated. But more important was the fact that we couldn't tap into what was going on the continent. The BBC were broadcasting several of the continental giants of period performance such as Harnoncourt, Kuijken, Brügggen, Leonhardt, Christie and Koopman, but we couldn't access their knowledge and experience. Their way of exploring baroque music was different from our English directors and fascinating to us, because of their intellectual seriousness and their depth of knowledge about

instruments, phrasing, repertoire and style. They had been involved in period instrument performance much longer than us and we wanted to be free to absorb it all. At that time we had no way of inviting them to come to work with us in the UK.

Gradually, in discussion with all interested parties, the idea of a player-led orchestra took shape. Sponsorship was found. Everyone would be paid the same, there would be at least three leaders, and there would be an artistic committee elected by the players who would lead on concerts and repertoire. And out of this "organised chaos" as Marshall put it, came our first London concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in June 1986 with Sigiswald Kuijken directing a programme moving from Rameau to Haydn. This marked the beginning of OAE's journey. Forty years on, that journey continues today, still with the same ethos and the shared excitement of discovery.

Read Jan's full article about how the OAE was founded on our blog at [oae.co.uk/start](http://oae.co.uk/start)



Pre-concert at the Sheldonian Theatre. Credit Susan Benn

# A seat with a view

**Martin Kelly (viola)**



I wasn't quite a founder of the OAE - I came in two or three concerts in, around 1986 or 1987, and the first really memorable thing I did was Mozart's *Idomeneo* conducted by Simon Rattle. I'd played with nearly all of the period instrument ensembles at that time, but then Simon came in, and it was a whirlwind. He was incredibly young, incredibly dramatic, incredibly well-prepared, and we had a fabulous cast of singers. It was real edge of your seat stuff!

That felt like such a positive event, because back then most of the period instrument groups worked with the same conductors most of the time. The OAE was different. I'll always remember when Frans Brüggen came to conduct Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony. When a performance is very special, people talk about it being a huge arc, a journey; and that's how it felt with him. My partner was sitting next to Alfred Brendel in the audience, and at the end he overheard Brendel saying "that was quite something!"

The period instrument scene has evolved hugely since I started. In the OAE, we kept pushing boundaries, playing later and later repertoire. I don't feel that is quite so important now, though I notice that next year they will be playing *The Rite of Spring*! But things are more open now, I think. We did an amazing project last year called *Breaking Bach*, with breakdancers. I was slightly sceptical as to how it would work, but I just absolutely loved it. It brought in an audience that wasn't necessarily interested in going to classical music, but in no way was the music dumbed-down. It was quite special.

I was planning to retire at the end of June but Philippa our fixer phoned me last night and asked if I was available for the Prom in August, and I said yes - as long as I'm not pushing anyone else out, I'll do it! After that, I feel now is the time to go off doing hiking and foreign explorations, while I've got the energy and health. I still want to play, and I'm a trustee of the Benevolent Fund, so I'll continue to be involved with the Orchestra. But I also feel it's important for the next generation to put their stamp on things - to encourage them to develop what they want to say. My generation has been so lucky!

**Martin was talking to Richard Bratby**

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The Secret Garden Cafe Concert: Sound and Sentiment at Acland Burghley School, May 2026.  
Credit: Zen Grisdale



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➔ Scan the QR code to watch behind the scenes of The Secret Garden Cafe Concerts

# OAE Experience Scheme 2026 / 27



Teatime Tots at Acland Burghley School. January 2026.  
Credit: Dreamchasing Young Producers Harvey O and Jess S



Teatime Baroque: Celebration and Lamentation at Acland Burghley School,  
April 2026. Credit: Cathy Boyes



Thirty-one instrumentalists from across Europe are embarking on a two-year placement with the orchestra as part of the 2026 / 27 Ann & Peter Law OAE Experience Scheme. Giving gifted early career period instrument musicians the opportunity to work and perform together during five academy courses, with coaching from Orchestra members, and access to rehearsals, the programme offers an intensive introduction to life inside



the OAE. The cohort has already met in London for a classical course with Margaret Faultless and a baroque course led by Leo Duarte, with more projects and courses still to come this year.

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