



Filarmonica della Scala Riccardo Chailly

Wednesday 24 January 2018 7.30pm, Hall

Rossini La gazza ladra – overture

Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor

interval 20 minutes

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 4 in F minor

Filarmonica della Scala

Riccardo Chailly conductor

Benjamin Grosvenor piano

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Welcome

A warm welcome to this evening's concert, given by Filarmonica della Scala under its Principal Conductor Riccardo Chailly.

The orchestra was the brainchild of Claudio Abbado, who wanted to give the musicians of the Teatro alla Scala greater opportunities to perform orchestral repertoire alongside their operatic duties. It's fitting that we should begin with an overture from a work premiered at La Scala itself 201 years ago: Rossini's irrepressible *La gazza ladra*.

The prodigiously gifted 25-year-old pianist Benjamin Grosvenor then joins the orchestra for one of the most popular works in the

entire repertoire. Grieg was the same age as tonight's soloist when he wrote his A minor Piano Concerto, the work that truly put him on the international map.

The mood darkens for Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, a work about which the composer was uncharacteristically forthcoming, describing its opening fanfares as 'Fate, the force of destiny, which ever prevents our pursuit of happiness from reaching its goal.' Dramatic stuff indeed.

It promises to be a thrilling concert.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music, Barbican

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Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

La gazza ladra (1817) — overture

In a magnificently unreliable memoir Rossini writes that, as was his practice, he left the writing of the overture to *La gazza ladra* ('The Thieving Magpie') until the last minute. This so unnerved the management of La Scala, the opera house that had commissioned the piece, that Rossini 'was imprisoned by the director and four stagehands, who were under orders to throw my manuscript from the window, page by page, to the copyists, who were waiting below, to prepare the parts ... If the music paper wasn't ready, they were under orders to throw me from the window.'

Thankfully, there was no need for defenestration. The overture was duly completed and the premiere of *La gazza ladra* on 31 May 1817 was a resounding success, with Rossini's cheerleader Stendhal recording it as 'one of the most glittering ... triumphs I have ever witnessed'. The French writer especially praised the overture, 'before the end of the first presto, the theatre was a tempest of delight; and the public en masse was encouraging the orchestra with extempore accompaniments!'

In an utterly unexpected move, that audience had been called to attention by a pair of snare drums on either side of stage at the beginning of the overture. Two years after Waterloo, Europe might have been at peace, but the consequences of a quarter of a century of wars

are still present in Rossini's opera. It features soldiers returning from the battlefield and a heroine named Ninetta who is rescued from public execution when it is revealed that it is a magpie rather than she who is the thief.

La gazza ladra is a radical work that mixes the comic with the serious – *buffa* and *seria* – to create a hybrid, *semiseria*. And the overture, by turns military and romantic, reflects this mixture. Rossini also seems to hint at the opera itself before the curtain rises, a practice that wasn't to become standard in the opera house for at least another decade.

After its unprecedented call to arms on the snare drums, the overture continues with a brisk military march. Then the orchestra calls us to attention with the first theme, a sprightly melody for the winds with the string players gently beating their bows on their strings and which perhaps hints at the excitement of young love. Then comes a second sweet-toned theme for the oboe that is wittily echoed by the clarinet. Is this the mimicking magpie? The tempo picks up and goes hell for leather into the first crescendo. After slowing down briefly, we're off again, faster and faster and louder and louder. Can the opera really live up to the promise of its overture?

Programme note © Christopher Cook

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op 16

(1868, rev 1907)

1 Allegro molto moderato

2 Adagio –

3 Allegro moderato molto e marcato – Quasi presto – Andante maestoso

Benjamin Grosvenor piano

The popularity of Grieg's Piano Concerto has led to some distorted judgements over the years, but there is no questioning the impact of the work on the life of its composer. Grieg wrote it in the summer of 1868, when he was staying with his wife and baby daughter in the Danish town of Søllerød – a happy time for him which resulted in a rare burst of creative activity. Enormous success has attended the concerto ever since. Grieg himself gave its first performance in Copenhagen in April 1869: Liszt praised it when the composer visited him in Rome later that year, and for the rest of his life Grieg was in great demand throughout Europe as soloist or conductor in performances of the piece.

In fact, he was never really able to escape from the shadow of the work that first made his name and there were times when he even felt that constant involvement in performances of it was obstructing his more mature creativity. Nor was he ever truly satisfied with the details of its orchestration, with which he continued to tinker for years. The most startling example of his lack of confidence in his own initial inspiration was the reassignment – at Liszt's suggestion – of the first movement's tender second theme to a solo trumpet. Although Grieg later thought better of this quirky piece of scoring and returned the theme to the cellos, it was incorporated, along with various other of Liszt's suggestions, into the first published score, issued in Leipzig in 1872. The version we know today actually dates from as late as 1907, when Grieg and Percy Grainger together produced a revised edition.

If the Piano Concerto was Grieg's first notable success, it also marked the end of a chapter in his creative development. Hitherto he had followed the central European tradition of large-scale sonata-form composition (having produced in the previous eight years a piano sonata, two violin sonatas and a symphony), but his success with these forms had been limited and it seems that it was at the time of the Piano Concerto that he decided that such music was not for him; thereafter he largely favoured more intimate forms. This is ironic, because this concerto is arguably his most satisfying attempt at large-scale composition, combining a sound, no-nonsense approach to the formal problems of the Romantic concerto with keen melodic invention and a fitting sense of the heroic. His own attractive musical personality is also much in evidence, and the folk elements which were later to become such an important part of his style are unmistakable.

It has often been observed that the work owes much in formal outline to Schumann's concerto in the same key, written during the 1840s. This is particularly clear when the two opening movements are compared: both start with a dramatic descent from the top register of the piano to the middle; both present their first theme in the woodwind, to be copied by the soloist; their central development sections have a similar outline (wind interplay accompanied by arpeggios from the piano, which then emerges to hold centre stage); and both movements end with a passage in a faster tempo. But to say that the

Norwegian composer consciously modelled his concerto on Schumann's seems fanciful: it seems more likely that Grieg, who had come to admire Schumann's work during his student days in Leipzig, absorbed the older composer's example as an unwitting consequence of close familiarity.

If the first movement owes an unconscious debt to Schumann, the other two are more clearly products of Grieg's own invention. The second is a haunting Adagio in D flat major whose song-like opening theme is at first stubbornly ignored by the piano, which prefers to follow its own dreamy course. The orchestra continues to nudge it gently in the direction of the first theme, however, until in the end the piano relents and takes it up in a sonorous and assertive restatement. The mood subsides as

the movement draws to its close, but a brief woodwind fanfare and a flourish from the piano plunge us straight into the finale.

This opens with a perky theme based on the characteristic dance-rhythm of the Norwegian halling but, after a brief, chordal second theme has come and gone, the mood changes dramatically for an extended interlude featuring a wistful new theme. This is then lovingly developed by the soloist and, although the return of the opening material eventually sweeps it aside, it is this theme that has the last word as it triumphantly brings the movement – and Grieg's large-scale orchestral ambitions – to an end.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

interval 20 minutes

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–93)

Symphony No 4 in F minor, Op 36 (1877–8)

1 Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima

2 Andantino in modo di canzona

3 Scherzo (Pizzicato ostinato): Allegro

4 Finale: Allegro con fuoco

By early 1877, when Tchaikovsky began sketching his Fourth Symphony, he was at the height of his powers. He was about to embark on his first great opera, *Eugene Onegin*, following on from his first balletic masterpiece, *Swan Lake*, and his grandiose First Piano Concerto of two years earlier. It was during the composition of the Fourth Symphony that he started to benefit from the regular allowance sent to him by the wealthy, eccentric widow Nadezhda von Meck.

On the other side of the balance he had declared his intention to marry and was about to act on it, with disastrous consequences not unconnected to his homosexuality. His motives, and the nature of the ensuing events, have been much mythologised. Recent scholarship reveals the situation to have been rather more mundane than was once

believed (there is no firm evidence, for instance, that Tchaikovsky attempted suicide at this time). Nevertheless, it is true that the composer himself considered the Fourth Symphony to be on some level a reflection of his emotional strife.

Tchaikovsky's benefactress has to be thanked for more than just her material support. Following the first performance of the Fourth Symphony in February 1878, she asked her protégé whether the work had any kind of programme. This innocent query elicited one of the most famous letters ever penned by a composer – one that hardly any commentator has been able to resist quoting, yet one that at the same time has to be treated with care. In his letter Tchaikovsky referred to the symphony's bloodcurdling opening fanfares as 'the kernel of the whole symphony':

This is Fate, the force of destiny, which ever prevents our pursuit of happiness from reaching its goal ... It is invincible, inescapable. One can only resign oneself and lament fruitlessly.

And he duly wrote out the theme of 'fruitless lament', which is the quiet, breathless idea on violins and cellos, soon passed to the woodwind. This agitated music ebbs and flows but achieves nothing. How is Tchaikovsky to move on? The answer, for the time being, is by going into denial. Almost as though there has never been a problem, the clarinet and bassoon hit on a friendlier version of the lamenting theme, the tempo slows and suddenly a new theme is upon us: a lilting, balletic idea on solo clarinet, echoed by the flutes. Or, as Tchaikovsky more poetically put it, 'Would it not be better to turn from Reality and immerse oneself in Dreams?' The lamenting theme now returns with a smile on its face. But the solution is premature and at the peak of exaltation the opening fanfare bursts in, on snarling trumpets and horns. 'This was only a dream, and Fate awakes us.' Laments and the ghostly summons of Fate alternate to increasingly dramatic effect in the development section and the recapitulation again plays out the drama of Dreams and Reality. An inspired, multi-sectioned coda drives home the message that 'all life is the ceaseless alternation of bitter reality with evanescent visions and dreams of happiness'.

This first movement is almost as long as the other three put together and it casts a profound shadow. Tchaikovsky's letter sets the scene for the slow movement, referring to 'that melancholy feeling that arises in the evening as you sit alone, worn out from your labours'. As in the first movement, there are contrasting themes that Tchaikovsky describes as memories of 'blissful moments when our young blood seethed and life was good'. Note the past tense. Happiness in this symphony is never in the here and now. Finally the opening song-like theme returns, with some extra decorative figures in the woodwind, very reminiscent of the first movement's 'Dream' theme.

There are three main ideas in the Scherzo, all of them sharply characterised. The first is a dancing pizzicato string theme; the second is a folksy tune on the oboe, over a drone bass in the bassoon, for which Tchaikovsky suggested the image of

a drunken peasant; the third evokes a distant military parade. These three themes are shuffled around, superimposed and spliced together. For Tchaikovsky they were 'fugitive images that pass through one's mind when one has had a little wine to drink and is feeling the first effects of intoxication'.

Then comes a rude awakening, with the rushing unison theme of the Finale. Here Tchaikovsky's description tells only one side of the story:

If you can find no impulse for joy within yourself, look at others. Go out among the people. See how well they know how to rejoice and give themselves up utterly to glad feelings. It is a picture of a popular holiday festivity.

The Finale's second theme – first heard on the woodwind, punctuated by rushing scales on violins and violas – bears this description out, since it is a folk song, famous to all Russians: *In the field a little birch tree stood*. But there are other resonances in Tchaikovsky's words, not least in the phrase 'Go out among the people'. That echoes the celebrated injunction of Alexander Herzen, the spiritual founder of the Russian revolutionary movement. 'Go to the People,' he declared; which is exactly what the so-called Populists did in 1874 and 1875, just three years before Tchaikovsky composed his symphony. What the Populists encountered when they 'went to the People', however, was widespread indifference, if not downright hostility. As one Russian commentator later put it: 'Socialism bounced off people like peas from a wall.'

Tchaikovsky was a staunch Tsarist and at one with his patroness in despising Communism. Though his views on the Populist movement as such are not recorded, it is entirely possible that his use of the phrase 'Go out among the people' was ironic – that he was aware that going to the people might not be as fulfilling as it promised to be. This would account for his Finale's increasingly panicky attempts at affirmation, eventually halted by the dire summons of the first movement's 'Fate' theme. After that, it is very much up to the conductor whether to interpret the coda as straightforwardly triumphant or to push it over the edge into hysteria.

Programme note © David Fanning

About the performers

Silvia Lelli/Filarmonica della Scala



Riccardo Chailly

Riccardo Chailly conductor

Riccardo Chailly is Music Director of Teatro alla Scala and Principal Conductor of Filarmonica della Scala. He was previously Kapellmeister of the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, the oldest orchestra in Europe, and for 16 years was Principal Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam.

He is also Music Director of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, a position held in the past by Claudio Abbado.

He regularly conducts the world's leading orchestras, including the Berlin, New York and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as well as

appearing at festivals such as the BBC Proms and Salzburg.

In the opera house, he has conducted productions at the Teatro alla Scala, Vienna State Opera, New York Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Bavarian State Opera and Zurich Opera House.

He was awarded the title of Grande Ufficiale della Repubblica Italia in 1994 and was appointed Cavaliere di Gran Croce of the Republic of Italy in 1998. In 1996 he was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London. The French minister of culture bestowed on him the title of Officier de l'Ordre des arts et des lettres in 2011.

Riccardo Chailly records exclusively for Decca. His discography of more than 150 CDs has won many prizes, including two ECHO Klassik awards, Diapasons d'Or, an Edison Prize and, recently, *Gramophone* magazine's Recording of the Year for his set of Brahms symphonies. With Filarmonica della Scala he has released *Viva Verdi* (2013) to mark the 200th anniversary of Verdi's birth and, this month, a disc of overtures, preludes and intermezzi from operas first performed at La Scala. This season sees the release of discs dedicated to Cherubini and Nino Rota.



Benjamin Grosvenor

Benjamin Grosvenor piano

British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is internationally recognised for his electrifying performances and perceptive interpretations. His virtuosic command over the most strenuous technical complexities underpins the remarkable depth and understanding of his musicianship.

He first came to prominence as the winner of the keyboard final of the 2004 BBC Young Musician Competition at the age of 11. Since then, he has performed with leading orchestras across the world, including the Boston and London Symphony orchestras, Cleveland Orchestra, Filarmonica della Scala and Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne. He was a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist from 2010 to 2012. He has performed at the BBC Proms on a number

of occasions, including at the First Night in 2011 and, in 2015, at the Last Night, playing Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No 2 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop.

In 2011, he signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever to sign to the label and the first British pianist to do so in almost 60 years. Other career highlights to date include Gramophone's Young Artist of the Year and Instrumental Award, a Classic BRIT Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, a Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award and a Fellowship from the Royal Academy of Music. In 2016 he was announced as the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic. As part of this he returns to New York in April, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3 under Esa-Pekka Salonen, as well as chamber music with members of the orchestra at the Tisch Center for the Arts at 92nd Street Y.

Recent and current recital highlights include concerts at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Amsterdam Muziekgebouw, New York's Carnegie Hall, Berlin's Konzerthaus, Barbican and Southbank centres and Tokyo's Musashino Civic Cultural Hall. This season he also appears at the Lucerne, Gilmore and Roque d'Anthéron festivals and undertakes his first tour of South America.



Filarmonica della Scala with Riccardo Chailly

Filarmonica della Scala

Filarmonica della Scala was first set up by Claudio Abbado and the musicians of La Scala Opera House in 1982 with the aim of developing a symphonic repertoire. Carlo Maria Giulini conducted the orchestra in more than 90 concerts. Riccardo Muti was its Principal Conductor from 1987 to 2005, making a decisive contribution to the orchestra's artistic development. Riccardo Chailly was named Principal Conductor in 2015.

Filarmonica della Scala has collaborated with some of the world's leading conductors, including Georges Prêtre, Lorin Maazel, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Zubin Mehta and Leonard Bernstein, among many others. Daniel Barenboim and Valery Gergiev are honorary members. The orchestra has a close relationship with Myung-Whun Chung, Daniel Harding and Daniele Gatti.

Since 2013 the Filarmonica has hosted the 'Concerto per Milano' in the Piazza del Duomo, an acclaimed event which has attracted audiences of more than 40,000 people each year. Another highlight is its educational initiative 'Sound, Music!', aimed specifically at primary school children.

The orchestra also has a long tradition in supporting Milan's main scientific institutions and voluntary bodies, through special concerts for

their benefit and open rehearsals that are part of the 'Prove Aperte' series.

Contemporary music is also an important strand of Filarmonica's activities, and each season the orchestra commissions a work from a leading composer.

More than 600 of its concerts over the past 36 years have been given on tour. Important milestones have included the orchestra's debuts in the US (with Riccardo Chailly) and China (with Myung-Whun Chung). This season's tour, of which tonight's concert is a part, also features appearances in Lucerne, Berlin, Freiburg, Vienna, Budapest, Paris and Luxembourg (all under Chailly), as well as Istanbul (under Daniel Harding).

Filarmonica della Scala has made numerous recordings for a wide range of labels, including Viva Verdi for Decca under Riccardo Chailly and, for Sony, the project '900 Italiano' that to date includes three DVDs directed by Georges Prêtre, Fabio Luisi and Gianandrea Noseda. A new CD for Decca (overtures, preludes and intermezzi from operas first performed at La Scala) with Chailly has just been released; two others will appear later this season.



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Daniele Morandini*
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