

István Kurcsák



# Budapest Festival Orchestra/ Iván Fischer/ Sir András Schiff

Friday 29 November 2019 7.30pm, Hall

**Dvořák** Legend, Op 59 No 1  
Chorus, Op 29 No 3, Nepovím  
Slavonic Dance, Op 46 No 2

**Beethoven** Piano Concerto No 4 in G major

**interval** 20 minutes

**Dvořák** Symphony No 7

**Sir András Schiff** piano  
**Budapest Festival Orchestra**  
**Iván Fischer** conductor

**Part of Beethoven 250**  
**Part of Barbican Presents 2019–20**

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Programme produced by Harriet Smith;  
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# Welcome

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Welcome to tonight's concert, part of our year-long Beethoven 250 celebrations.

Joining the Budapest Festival Orchestra and its founder-conductor Iván Fischer for Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto is Sir András Schiff. This is a concerto that breaks with received wisdom from its very opening – with the solo piano setting things in motion, rather than the conventional orchestral introduction. From then on, it ranges wide in mood – by turns noble and anguished, and with a finale full of effervescence.

Dvořák composed his Seventh Symphony in response to the London

Philharmonic Society making him an honorary member. It's striking for its tautness of musical thinking, though Dvořák's genius for memorable melodies is much in evidence too.

Iván Fischer and the BFO begin with a sequence of shorter Dvořák pieces, which, in their folk-inspired idiom, celebrate the composer's love for the music of his homeland.

Tonight's musicians return tomorrow for Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto and Dvořák's Symphony No 8. They complete the concerto cycle with two further concerts on 23 and 24 May 2020.

I hope you enjoy the concert.

Huw Humphreys  
Head of Music

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# Beethoven 250 at the Barbican

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This season the Barbican, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Academy of Ancient Music celebrate 250 years since the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven. But what is his relevance today?

Beethoven is the ultimate creative genius. He epitomises the popular, romanticised image of the great composer. Beethoven suffered. He was taciturn, isolated and lacking in social graces. He endured the worst affliction imaginable for a musician: deafness. In spite of all this (many, including Wagner, would argue because of all this), he managed to compose some of the most breathtaking, transcendental, sublime music of the Western canon. At first, Beethoven's deafness was understood as a barrier to his compositional prowess: the reason for the bizarre, jarring sounds of the late string quartets. Later, it was seen as the key to his greatness, enabling him to access profound, inward truths.

Living through turbulent revolutionary times, Beethoven was an advocate for political reform. He saw a power-shift away from the aristocracy. His political beliefs were more

ambivalent and changeable than his mythology allows, but his music has come to represent resistance against tyranny and oppression, and the defence of individual freedom, equality and radical social change. It is a powerful symbol of hope, revisited in times of political struggle, a celebration of freedom and brotherhood.

The popular image can be problematic. Beethoven's vocal and choral music, or simply the works that do not contain journeys from struggle to redemption, are rarely performed because they do not comply with our perception of the heroic, suffering artist. In contrast, the Barbican's innovative, inclusive and, occasionally, irreverent programme will question the myths. The Beethoven we hear will be at times refreshingly unfamiliar.

Beethoven's music endures. Its universal themes mean that it remains relevant to almost any time and place. It has been heard in prisons, concentration camps, at the fall of the Berlin Wall, in films, and in venues across the globe; 250 years after his birth, Beethoven belongs to everyone. And that is something to celebrate.

Dr Joanne Cormac  
University of Nottingham

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# Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

## Legend, Op 59 No 1 (1881)

## Chorus, Op 29 No 3, Nepovím (1876)

## Slavonic Dance, Op 46 No 2 (1878)

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Unlike many educated Czechs of his time – the eminent nationalist Smetana for example – Dvořák was actually brought up speaking Czech in addition to the then politically dominant German language. Also untypically he knew his ‘native’ folk music more or less from birth. As the son of a village butcher he heard it sung and played probably before he learned to read and write. It was in his blood, as can be felt in so much of the music he composed, both vocal and instrumental.

The *Legends*, Op 59, are a set of 10 pieces, originally for piano duet, composed early in 1881, not long after Dvořák had completed his Sixth Symphony. Encouraged by the symphony’s success, he sent the *Legends* to the notoriously exacting critic Eduard Hanslick, who responded enthusiastically and, no doubt further encouraged, Dvořák immediately set about arranging them for orchestra. If he had any particular ‘legends’ in mind, he never confessed, but their touching, direct simplicity speaks for itself, not least in the intimate clarinet melody heard not long after the opening of Op 59 No 1.

The same could easily be said of the Four Choruses, Op 29, published two years earlier. (Dvořák’s opus numbers are particularly confusing.) No 3, ‘Nepovím’ (‘Don’t say it’) sets a folk poem from Moravia, the region neighbouring Dvořák’s native Bohemia. The way Dvořák transforms folk-like melodic material into a concise yet touching ‘art song’ is itself a masterly achievement, which few in his time could have equalled.

Dvořák’s first set of *Slavonic Dances*, Op 46, composed in 1878, were his breakthrough piece. Encouraged by his new friend and champion Brahms, and by his newfound publisher Simrock, he composed a sequence of eight *Slavonic Dances*, hoping they might prove as successful as Brahms’s own famous *Hungarian Dances*. They did, and Dvořák’s international career was effectively launched. No 2 is cast in the form of a *dumka*, a folk form which strikingly alternates melancholic lyricism and lively dance rhythms. The melodies are Dvořák’s own, but the spirit of place is unmistakable.

# Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

## Piano Concerto No 4 in G major, Op 58 (1805–6)

- 1 **Allegro moderato**  
2 **Andante con moto** –  
3 **Rondo: Vivace**

**Sir Andrés Schiff** piano

So often Beethoven seems to strain for the impossible. In his music it can be thrilling, but in everyday life he could be his own worst enemy. The story of the first public performance of the Fourth Piano Concerto in Vienna in 1808 is a woeful cautionary tale. The composer may have thought it was a good idea to stage a concert including not just the Fourth Piano Concerto but also the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, large chunks of the Mass in C, a full-scale *Fantasy* for piano, chorus and orchestra, the concert aria *Ah! perfido* and a substantial solo piano improvisation of his own. Unfortunately few others did – especially in an unheated theatre on a freezing December day. For the musician and writer J F Reichardt it was proof that ‘one can easily have too much of a good thing, still more of a powerful one’. According to Reichardt, the unfortunate soprano in *Ah! perfido* ‘rather shivered than sang’, while the chorus broke down completely in the *Fantasy* – at which Beethoven decided that the best thing to do was to demand that they begin it all over again.

It is hard to imagine a more desperately inappropriate debut for the Fourth Piano

Concerto. This is one of the gentlest and most intimate of all Beethoven’s large-scale works. Here, as in the Fifth Concerto, he breaks with Classical convention by having the piano come in right at the start. But where in No 5 the pianist immediately seizes the audience’s attention with heroic cascades of broken chords and runs, here in the Fourth Concerto the pianist steals in unaccompanied, musing quietly on the first theme before coming to a half close – almost as though he were beginning a solo improvisation. This, and the orchestra’s response, *pianissimo* and with a completely unexpected harmony, form one of the most magical beginnings in the concerto repertoire. The leading da–da–da–DA rhythmic pattern of the first theme is the same as that of the famous ‘Fate’ motif that opens the roughly contemporary Fifth Symphony; yet it is hard to imagine two movements less like each other than the driven, tragic *Allegro con brio* of the symphony and the serene *Allegro moderato* that opens this concerto. Beethoven does allow himself some exciting technical display in the solo cadenza that forms the climax of this movement, but in general it is melodic

reflection, not scintillating virtuosity, that dominates here.

It says a lot about the Fourth Concerto that it managed to charm some of its first audience even at that catastrophic 1808 concert. Reichardt recalled the slow second movement as ‘a masterpiece of beautiful sustained melody’, in which Beethoven ‘truly sang on his instrument with deep melancholy feeling’. Some years later Liszt memorably compared this movement to the Classical legend of the divine musician Orpheus taming the Furies in Hades. Actually it isn’t quite ‘sustained’ melody. The *Andante con moto* unfolds as a dialogue between unison strings (initially aggressive, but eventually calmer) and

the ‘singing’ piano. In the end, poignantly, it is song that wins.

The *Andante* moves without a break into a wonderful high-spirited Rondo (as the title suggests, a circular form, in which the main theme recurs throughout the movement). Again, unusually for a Classical concerto, the soloist keeps up his fireworks right through the final orchestral *tutti*. Thus a concerto that begins with unprecedented modesty ends with an unashamed but thoroughly merited appeal for thunderous applause.

**interval** 20 minutes

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# Antonín Dvořák

## Symphony No 7 in D minor, Op 70 (1885)

**1 Allegro maestoso**

**2 Poco adagio**

**3 Scherzo: Vivace – Poco meno mosso**

**4 Finale: Allegro**

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Early in 1884, Dvořák heard a performance of Brahms’s new Third Symphony. It left a powerful and lasting impression. Then, in June that year, the London Philharmonic Society elected Dvořák an honorary member, asking him to compose a symphony for them. Wisely, Dvořák hesitated before setting out on this important adventure. Something new, he realised, was required of him. His previous symphony, No 6, had also been partly inspired by the experience of hearing a Brahms symphony – in that case the Second. While Dvořák’s Sixth is a confident, colourful and entirely characteristic work, its indebtedness to Brahms’s Second is pretty clear, especially in the finale. This time there must be no composing in Brahms’s shadow. Brahms was of the same mind: ‘My idea of your new symphony is quite different from this’, he told Dvořák, indicating the manuscript of the Sixth.

Dvořák had to break new ground, but at the same time he recognised a need to curb his natural tendency to expansiveness – there was never a problem coming up with fresh ideas, but sometimes his very inventiveness could run away with itself. This time concentration was required, and it paid off. None of Dvořák’s previous symphonic or chamber works is as compellingly purposeful as the Seventh Symphony. All his natural lyricism is here – the work abounds in stirring tunes – but there is nothing superfluous: everything is part of the grand design. Years later Schoenberg famously claimed that ‘folk-song symphonies’ were a contradiction in terms. Here Dvořák proves him wrong. The Scherzo third movement, for instance, is based on the rhythms and melodic characteristics of the *furiant* – a Czech folk dance; at the same time it is one of the most gripping and original symphonic scherzos since Beethoven.

The first movement begins with a hushed, expectant drumroll (plus basses and low horns), above which violas and cellos deliver a tersely eloquent theme in a rocking 6/8 – great things could grow from this seemingly modest seed. Tension builds to a massive restatement of the ‘seed’ theme on full orchestra, but this swings in a new direction, leading to a gentler, lilting melody on flute and clarinets. From the dramatic tension between these two leading ideas Dvořák builds a magnificent, increasingly tragic argument. The ending is hushed, like the opening, with fragments of the main ideas ebbing darkly away.

A hint of a folk hymn on woodwind and pizzicato strings opens the slow movement, followed by a sensuous, Brahmsian rising motif on full orchestra, leading to a long, songlike melody on flutes and oboes. Then comes a gravely eloquent idea (violins and cellos) punctuated by solemn wind chords. On paper this looks very like a theme from the slow movement of Brahms’s Third Symphony, but it sounds quite different – there’s more than a hint here of Brahms’s arch-rival Wagner. The movement’s climax, topped with trumpet and horn fanfares, has a stirring inevitability, and the return of the opening ‘folk hymn’ idea on oboe above *tremolando* strings is also beautifully judged. As with the first movement, it’s not a note too long.

The Scherzo’s *furiant*-inspired rhythmic games begin right at the start: a quick waltz-like theme in the bass (ONE–two–three ONE–two–three) while the upper strings present a slower sounding theme (ONE–two TWO–two THREE–two), tugging invigoratingly against the waltz beat. The contrast between these two kinds of rhythm is exploited in ever new ways, bringing the kind of exhilarating dance vitality for which Brahms often strove but which he rarely matched. The slightly slower central Trio section apparently offers a moment of relaxed lyricism, but ominous pulsating figures on low strings continue to remind us of the Scherzo, and it is no surprise when tension mounts again and the first theme sweeps back in.

How does one follow that? In this case the answer is, with an unusually concise and powerful finale. It begins with an urgent theme on cellos, followed by a sombre chorale faintly (but only faintly) recalling a similar idea from the finale of Brahms’s Third Symphony. From this grows a driven Allegro which picks up on and intensifies the first movement’s tragic drama. Towards the end it seems the dark minor key is going to win; but then, at the last minute, high woodwind, horns and violins twist the cellos’ opening theme into a defiant D major. Victory has been seized from the jaws of defeat, and with four emphatic full-orchestral chords this splendid symphony ends.

Programme notes © Stephen Johnson

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# About the performers

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Akos Stiller

Iván Fischer

## **Iván Fischer** conductor

Iván Fischer is the founder and Music Director of the Budapest Festival Orchestra. He is an honorary conductor of Berlin's Konzerthaus and Konzerthausorchester. In recent years he has also gained a reputation as a composer, with his works being performed in the USA, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, Germany and Austria. He has directed a number of successful opera productions and last year founded the Vicenza Opera Festival.

He has conducted the Berlin Philharmonic more than 10 times and he also spends two weeks every year with Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. He is a frequent guest of the USA's leading symphony orchestras as well. As

Music Director, he has led Kent Opera and the Opéra National de Lyon, and he was Principal Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC.

The BFO's frequent worldwide tours, together with a series of critically acclaimed recordings, have contributed to Iván Fischer's stellar reputation. Many of his recordings have been awarded prestigious international prizes.

Iván Fischer is a founder of the Hungarian Mahler Society and Patron of the British Kodály Academy, and is an honorary citizen of Budapest. He has received the Golden Medal Award from the President of the Republic of Hungary, and the Crystal Award from the World Economic Forum for his services in promoting international cultural relations. The government of the French Republic has appointed him Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In 2006 he was honoured with the Kossuth Prize, Hungary's most prestigious arts award. In 2011 he received a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, Hungary's Prima Primissima Prize and the Dutch Ovatie Prize. Two years later he was granted Honorary Membership of the Royal Academy of Music. In 2015, he was presented with the Abu Dhabi Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement, while in 2016 he won the Association of Music Critics of Argentina's award for Best Foreign Conductor.



Joanna Bergin



Sir András Schiff

### Sir András Schiff piano

Sir András Schiff was born in Budapest in 1953 and studied piano at the Liszt Ferenc Academy with Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados; and in London with George Malcolm. Having collaborated with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, he now focuses primarily on solo recitals, play-directing and conducting.

Since 2004 he has performed the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in over 20 cities, including Zurich, where the cycle was recorded live for ECM. Other acclaimed recordings for the label include solo recitals of Schubert, Schumann and Janáček, alongside J S Bach's *Partitas*, *Goldberg Variations* and *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

In recent years his Bach has become an annual fixture at the BBC Proms. Elsewhere, he regularly performs at the Verbier, Salzburg and Baden-Baden festivals; the Wigmore Hall, Musikverein and Philharmonie de Paris; on tour

in North America and Asia; and in Vicenza, where he curates a festival at the Teatro Olimpico.

Vicenza is also home to Cappella Andrea Barca – a chamber orchestra he founded in 1999 and which consists of international soloists, chamber musicians and friends. Together they have appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Lucerne Festival and Salzburg Mozartwoche, while forthcoming projects include a tour of Japan and a cycle of Bach's keyboard concertos in Europe.

He also enjoys a close relationship with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Budapest Festival Orchestra and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In 2018 he accepted the role of Associate Artist with the OAE, complementing his interest in performing on period keyboard instruments.

He continues to support new talent, primarily through his Building Bridges series which gives performance opportunities to promising young artists. He also teaches at the Barenboim-Said and Kronberg academies and gives frequent lectures and masterclasses. In 2017 his book *Music Comes out of Silence* – essays and conversations with Martin Meyer – was published by Bärenreiter and Henschel.

Sir András Schiff's many honours include the International Mozarteum Foundation's Golden Medal (2012), Germany's Great Cross of Merit with Star (2012), the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal (2013), a knighthood for Services to Music (2014) and a doctorate from the Royal College of Music (2018).



### Budapest Festival Orchestra

Iván Fischer founded the Budapest Festival Orchestra in 1983 together with Zoltán Kocsis. From the very beginning, the ambition of the ensemble has been to share music of the highest quality and to serve the community in the most diverse ways.

The BFO is rated among the top 10 orchestras in the world. It regularly performs at leading international concert venues, including Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center in New York, the Musikverein in Vienna and the Royal Albert Hall and Barbican Centre.

The orchestra is regularly invited to perform at the Mostly Mozart, Salzburg and Edinburgh International festivals, among others.

It has won two *Gramophone* awards and was nominated for a Grammy in 2013 for its recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 1. The following year its recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 5 won a *Diapason d'Or* and the

Italian *Toblacher Komponierhäuschen* Prize. The BFO received the Association of Music Critics of Argentina's award for Best Foreign Symphony Orchestra in 2016.

The BFO is also renowned for its innovative approach to music-making, with its autism-friendly Cocoa Concerts, Surprise Concerts, and musical marathons. The Midnight Music concerts attract young adults, while the Dancing on the Square project involves disadvantaged children in its music-making. The orchestra also promotes free Community Weeks and co-produces the Bridging Europe festival with Müpa Budapest.

The Budapest Festival Orchestra, under Iván Fischer, is also active in the opera house, presenting operas at the Mostly Mozart, Edinburgh and Abu Dhabi festivals. Their production of *The Marriage of Figaro* was ranked first on the *New York Magazine's* list of the best events in classical music in 2013. The Vicenza Opera Festival, founded by Iván Fischer, was inaugurated in the autumn of 2018.

# Budapest Festival Orchestra

## **Conductor/ Music Director**

Iván Fischer

## **Assistant Conductor**

Paul Marsovszky

## **Violin 1**

Yoonshin Song *leader*

Violetta Eckhardt

Ágnes Bíró

Mária Gál-Tamási

Radu Hrib

Erika Illési

István Kádár

Péter Kostyál

Eszter Lesták Bedő

Gyöngyvér Oláh

Gábor Sipos

János Pilz

Csaba Czenke

Emese Gulyás

## **Violin 2**

Tímea Iván

Györgyi Czirik

Tibor Gátay

Krisztina Haják

Zsófia Lezsák

Levente Szabó

Zsolt Szefcsik

Antónia Bodó

Noémi Molnár

Anikó Mózes

Zsuzsanna Szlávik

Emma Gibout

## **Viola**

Csaba Gálfi

Ágnes Csoma

Cecília Bodolai

Zoltán Fekete

Barna Juhász

Nikoletta Reinhardt

Nao Yamamoto

László Bolyki

György Fazekas

István Polónyi

## **Cello**

Péter Szabó

Lajos Dvorák

Éva Eckhardt

György Kertész

Gabriella Liptai

Kousay Mahdi

Rita Sovány

Orsolya Mód

## **Double Bass**

Zsolt Fejérvári

Attila Martos

Károly Kaszás

Géza Lajhó

László Lévai

Csaba Sipos

## **Flute**

Anna Garzuly-

Wahlgren

Anett Jófeldi

## **Oboe**

Kyeong Ham

Marie-Noëlle Perreau

## **Clarinet**

Ákos Ács

Roland Csalló

## **Bassoon**

Andrea Bressan

Dániel Tallián

## **Horn**

Zoltán Szóke

András Szabó

Dávid Bereczky

Zsombor Nagy

## **Trumpet**

Gergely Csikota

Tamás Póti

## **Trombone**

Balázs Szakszon

Attila Sztán

Csaba Wagner

## **Timpani**

Roland Dénes

## **Percussion**

László Herboly

István Kurcsák

Boris Boudinov

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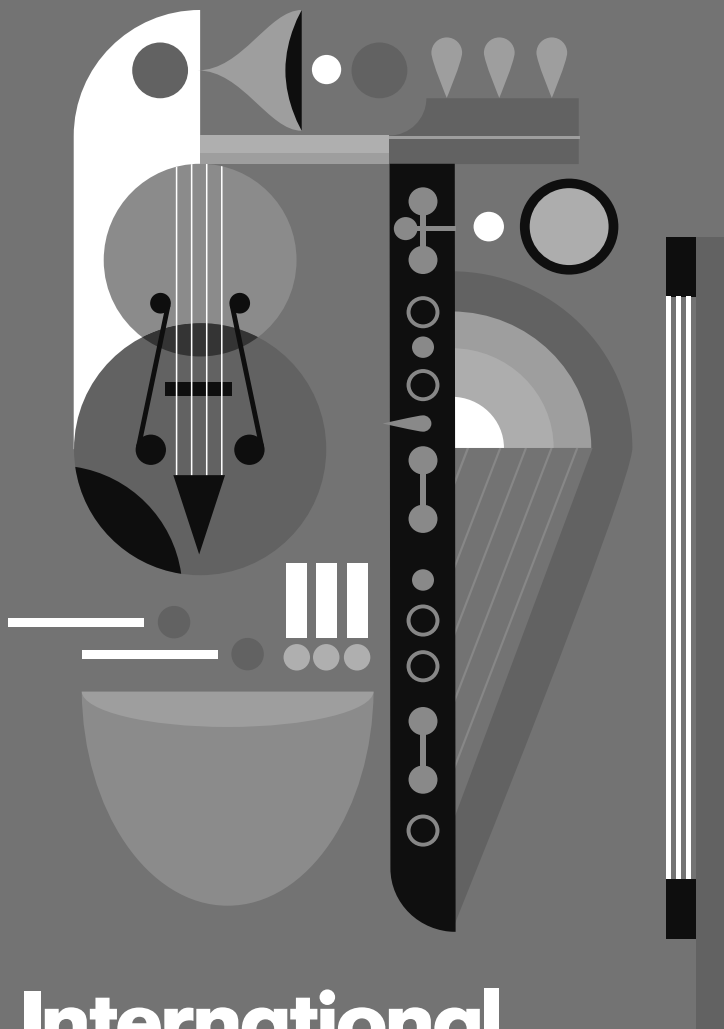
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