

Bihlmaier: Bernstein, Liebermann and Dvořák's New World

Thursday, March 26, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Anja Bihlmaier, conductor · Gareth Davies, flute

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BERNSTEIN 1918–1990 <i>Symphonic Dances from West Side Story</i>	22'
2	LIEBERMANN b. 1961 <i>Flute Concerto No. 2, Op. 142 (UK premiere)</i>	20'
3	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 "From the New World"</i>	42'
TOTAL MUSIC		84'

Leonard Bernstein

1918–1990

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

22 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The suite moves through nine linked sections; listen for the journey from menace to ecstasy to grief. It opens with the **Prologue**, the snapping, finger-clicking tension of the two gangs sizing each other up. Then comes the soaring melody of **'Somewhere'**, the lovers' dream of a place of peace and one of Bernstein's most beautiful tunes. The skittering **Scherzo** leads to the famous **Mambo**: listen for the explosive Latin energy, the blazing brass and the players' shouted cries of 'Mambo!', a guaranteed showstopper.

The flirtatious **Cha-Cha** brings the tune of 'Maria' in a delicate dance; the **Meeting Scene** captures the lovers' first encounter; and the cool, sinister **'Cool' Fugue** shows Bernstein's contrapuntal mastery applied to jazz, all coiled, snapping tension. The violent **Rumble** depicts the deadly gang fight that kills both gang leaders, building to a horrifying climax. Then the **Finale** returns to 'Somewhere,' now an aching elegy, as the music fades

on a quiet, unresolved chord of grief and hope. Listen throughout for the syncopated rhythms, the brilliant percussion and the way Bernstein blends Broadway, jazz and symphonic writing into a seamless, thrilling whole.

Lowell Liebermann

20 minutes

b. 1961

Flute Concerto No. 2, Op. 142 (UK premiere)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the flute itself, in all its guises: Liebermann is a master of the instrument, and the concerto explores its full range, from long, expressive, singing melodies to quicksilver, dazzling passagework. Follow the soloist (Gareth Davies, the LSO's own principal flute) as the solo line weaves above and through the orchestra.

The first movement opens with the flute low and ominous, in the darker part of its range, and gradually draws the orchestra into more energetic music; listen for the balance between lyrical poise and rhythmic energy. The second movement is slower and dreamier, an 'aria' for the flute with answering phrases from the orchestra that lets the soloist sing at its most expressive. The finale is energetic and playful, with flute and orchestra vying with each other in brilliant exchanges. Throughout, listen for Liebermann's warm, romantic harmonic language and his idiomatic, grateful writing for the flute, and enjoy the rare treat of hearing a brand-new concerto by a living composer who genuinely loves and understands the instrument, brought to British audiences for the first time.

Antonin Dvorak

42 minutes

1841–1904

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 "From the New World"

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens with a brooding slow introduction before launching into a vigorous Allegro; listen for the striding main theme on the horns (built on a 'gapped' pentatonic scale that gives it a folk-like, 'New World' flavour) and the lyrical secondary themes, one of which strongly recalls the spiritual 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.'

The famous slow movement (Largo) opens with solemn brass chords, then gives the immortal main melody to the cor anglais (English horn), a tune of such nostalgic beauty that it was later adapted as the song 'Goin' Home' and is often mistaken for a genuine spiritual. Listen for its profound stillness and homesickness. The Scherzo is a vigorous, dancing movement: listen for the pounding rhythms and the contrasting, gentler trio sections, with rustic Bohemian charm. The Finale bursts in with a blazing, march-like main theme on horns and trumpets; listen for the way Dvořák, with masterly skill, brings back themes from all three previous movements, weaving them together and building to a tremendous, triumphant climax, before the very last chord dies away with a surprising, magical softness. Listen throughout for Dvořák's matchless melodic gift and the unmistakable mixture of American openness and Czech warmth.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

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Version 3, 30 September 2026