

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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

ABOUT THE WORK

The Symphonic Dances from West Side Story are Leonard Bernstein's own concert distillation of the music from his greatest theatrical triumph, the 1957 Broadway musical that retold Romeo and Juliet as a tale of rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, on the streets of New York's Upper West Side. The show was a landmark, fusing Broadway, jazz, Latin-American dance and symphonic sophistication into something wholly new. In 1960 Bernstein (with the help of his colleagues Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal, who assisted with the orchestration) drew nine of its dance and dramatic numbers into a continuous twenty-odd-minute orchestral suite, which was premiered by the New York Philharmonic under Lukas Foss in February 1961.

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

b. 1961

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

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

This concert brings the UK premiere of Lowell Liebermann's Second Flute Concerto, a recent addition to the repertoire of one of today's most flute-friendly composers. Liebermann's

earlier flute works, the Sonata of 1987 and the First Flute Concerto, have become beloved cornerstones of the instrument's modern repertoire, so a second concerto from him was eagerly awaited by flautists everywhere. The work was first performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2023 and is dedicated to the Icelandic flautist Stefán Ragnar Höskuldsson, whose admiration for the Sonata first brought him to the composer; this LSO performance, with the orchestra's own principal flute Gareth Davies, gives it its first British outing.

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

1841–1904

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

42 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, 'From the New World,' is one of the most popular and beloved symphonies ever written, and a fascinating meeting of the Old World and the New. In 1892 Dvořák, already famous across Europe, was lured to New York to become director of the National Conservatory of Music of America, with a mission to help Americans find their own national musical voice. He believed that voice could be built on the music of Black Americans and Native Americans, and during his American years he immersed himself in spirituals (a Black student at the Conservatory, Harry T. Burleigh, sang them to him) and in the idea of Native American melody. The 'New World' Symphony, written in 1893, is the great fruit of that engagement: not a collection of borrowed tunes, but original music written in a spirit Dvořák absorbed from these

American sources and fused with his own deeply Czech sensibility, so that homesickness for Bohemia and the wide horizons of America mingle throughout.

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, ma-

gical softness. Listen throughout for Dvořák's matchless melodic gift and the unmistakable mixture of American openness and Czech warmth.

Tonight's artists

Gareth Davies *flute*

The UK premiere of Liebermann's Second Flute Concerto is given by the LSO's own Principal Flute, Gareth Davies, a player stepping out from the section he has led since 2000 to take the solo spotlight. Liebermann's richly lyrical, virtuosic writing for the flute is ideally suited to an artist of Davies's experience and musicianship, and there is a special pleasure in hearing a beloved orchestral principal introduce a major new concerto to British audiences with his own colleagues.

Gareth Davies has been Principal Flute of the London Symphony Orchestra since 2000, one of the most prominent orchestral flautists in Britain. He has also served as Chair of the orchestra and is a professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Beyond his playing he is a noted broadcaster and writer: he has written and presented programmes for Classic FM and BBC Radio 3, and his book *The Show Must Go On* was named a book of the year by the Financial Times. He brings to Liebermann's concerto the artistry and authority of one of the LSO's longest-serving and best-loved principals, performing as soloist with his own orchestra.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-03-26-bihlmaier>

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