

Sheku's Finnis Concerto and Bruckner's Ninth

Sunday, October 25, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Sheku Kanneh-Mason, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	FINNIS b. 1984 <i>Cello Concerto</i>	25'
2	BRUCKNER 1824–1896 <i>Symphony No. 9 in D minor, WAB 109 (ed. Cohrs)</i>	60'
TOTAL MUSIC		85'

Edmund Finnis

b. 1984

Cello Concerto

THE COMPOSER

Edmund Finnis (born 1984) is one of the most admired British composers of his generation, known for music of luminous, finely wrought beauty; critics often reach for words like ‘shimmering’ to describe its textures and harmonies. He studied composition at the Guildhall School with Julian Anderson and held a Leonard Bernstein Fellowship at Tanglewood, and since 2015 he has been a professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music. His orchestral, chamber and vocal works have been taken up by ensembles such as the London Sinfonietta, Manchester Collective and the London Contemporary Orchestra, where he was composer-in-association from 2013 to 2016. His music combines clarity, subtlety of colour and an immediate sensuous appeal.

ABOUT THE WORK

This Cello Concerto is a new work written for Sheku Kanneh-Mason and jointly commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Dresden Philharmonic and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Kanneh-Mason gave the world premiere with the LA Phil at Walt Disney Concert Hall on 21 November 2025. Tonight the LSO plays its share of that commission: a chance to hear a significant new concerto by a living British composer, played by the cellist it was written for.

25 minutes

Finnis has called it “the most lyrical, intense and emotionally direct music that I have written so far”, and it is tailored to Kanneh-Mason’s particular gifts: his singing tone, his lyrical warmth, his unforced directness. Finnis’s music is celebrated for its shimmering textures and its clarity, so expect the solo cello less as a combatant battling the orchestra than as a singing voice that emerges from glowing instrumental colour and dissolves back into it. At around twenty-five minutes, it moves from introspective beauty to passages of powerful, sustained energy. Here it is framed by the vast Romantic spirituality of Bruckner.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

As a very new work, come to it with fresh ears and no expectations of famous tunes. With Finnis, the rewards lie in colour, texture and line. Listen for the way the solo cello sings long, expressive melodies (Finnis writes beautifully for the voice-like quality of the instrument), and for the finely detailed orchestral textures that surround it, often delicate and luminous rather than heavy.

Listen for the relationship between soloist and orchestra: how the cello emerges from the ensemble, is echoed and coloured by it, and how Finnis builds atmosphere and momentum through shifting harmony and instrumental light rather than through conventional display. Above all, listen to Sheku Kanneh-Mason’s tone, warm, lyrical and deeply communicative, in music written to show it off. It is a rare opportunity to hear a new concerto near the very start of its life, in the hands of the cellist it was written for.

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, WAB 109 (ed. Cohrs)

THE COMPOSER

Anton Bruckner was among the most unlikely of great composers. Born in 1824 in the small Austrian village of Ansfelden, the son of a schoolteacher, he seemed destined for provincial obscurity. After his father’s death, the thirteen-year-old Bruckner became a choirboy at the monastery of St. Florian, where he would eventually serve as organist. He trained as a schoolteacher, since the family was too poor for a musical career, and for years divided his time between teaching and organ playing in small towns.

60 minutes

Bruckner was a late bloomer. He did not begin serious composition studies until his thirties, spending some six years studying harmony and counterpoint with the Viennese theorist Simon Sechter, much of it by correspondence. He completed the course in 1861, at thirty-seven, with such mastery that one examiner, Johann Herbeck, remarked: "If I knew one tenth of what he knows, I'd be happy." Soon afterwards his next teacher, Otto Kitzler, introduced him to the music of Wagner, which Bruckner studied intensively from 1863 onwards.

In 1868 Bruckner moved to Vienna, where he would spend the rest of his life teaching at the Conservatory and, later, the University. But Vienna was hostile territory. The city's musical life was dominated by the critic Eduard Hanslick, a champion of Brahms who despised Wagner, and Bruckner, by aligning himself with Wagner, made a powerful enemy. His symphonies were mocked, rejected by orchestras, or subjected to humiliating premieres. The Vienna Philharmonic rehearsed his Third Symphony in 1874 and declined to perform it; when it was finally premiered in 1877, with Bruckner himself conducting, most of the audience walked out.

Recognition came late. Bruckner was sixty when his Seventh Symphony, premiered in Leipzig in 1884, brought him the first genuine triumph of his career. He died in 1896, aged seventy-two, leaving his Ninth Symphony unfinished. He was buried, as he had wished, beneath the organ at St. Florian.

ABOUT THE WORK

Bruckner's Ninth Symphony is his last word, and one of the most profound farewells in all of music. He began it in 1887 and was still working on it when he died in 1896, leaving it unfinished: the first three movements are complete, but the finale survives only in extensive sketches. Bruckner, a deeply devout Catholic, dedicated the symphony 'to the dear God' (dem lieben Gott). The three completed movements form a coherent and overwhelming whole, so the work is almost always performed, as tonight, in three movements. Tonight's performance uses the scholarly Urtext edition by Benjamin-Gunnar Cohrs.

The symphony returns to the D minor of Beethoven's Ninth, and shares its sense of confronting the ultimate. It is vast, granitic and visionary, built from Bruckner's characteristic great blocks of sound, long-breathed paragraphs and shattering brass climaxes, but pushed here to new extremes of harmonic daring and emotional depth. Bruckner called the slow movement his 'Farewell to Life'. It is an Adagio of unprecedented harmonic adventurousness and spiritual intensity, ending in serene acceptance: a fitting, if unintended, close to the symphony and to Bruckner's life. Its early history is notable too. The first performance, in Vienna in 1903, used a heavily 'improved' version by the conductor Ferdinand Löwe, and Bruckner's actual score was not heard until 1932.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement (Feierlich, misterioso: ‘solemn, mysterious’) grows, as so often in Bruckner, from a hushed string tremor, with horn calls emerging out of the mist. Listen for how it builds through vast paragraphs to a tremendous, dissonant climax and a hammering D minor unison of overwhelming power.

The Scherzo is one of Bruckner’s most extraordinary. It is not a genial dance but something demonic and obsessive: stamping, dissonant chords and a relentless, almost mechanical drive, framing a strangely fleet, ghostly trio. It is among the most modern-sounding music Bruckner ever wrote.

The Adagio is the heart of the work and Bruckner’s farewell. Listen for the great leaping theme that opens it (a yearning rise in the violins), for the noble, chorale-like passages on the Wagner tubas, and for the shattering, grinding dissonance at its climax, perhaps the most anguished moment in all Bruckner. Then the music subsides into a long, glowing, peaceful coda, quoting earlier works and dying away into acceptance. With no triumphant finale to follow, this quiet, transcendent close becomes the final word of the symphony and of the composer.

Tonight's artists

Sheku Kanneh-Mason *cello*

Edmund Finnis's Cello Concerto was written for Sheku Kanneh-Mason, who gave its world premiere in Los Angeles in November 2025, and tonight he plays it as part of the international co-commission that brought it into being. There is no better advocate for a new concerto than the artist it was tailored to. Finnis has written for Kanneh-Mason's celebrated warmth, lyricism and communicative directness, and hearing him play it is the ideal way to encounter this new work.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason, born in 1999, is one of the most celebrated cellists of his generation and among the best-known classical musicians in Britain. Raised in Nottingham, the third of seven extraordinarily musical siblings, he shot to national fame in 2016 when he won the BBC Young Musician competition (the first Black musician to do so) and to worldwide attention in 2018 when he performed at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, watched by an audience of millions. An exclusive Decca Classics artist, he made history in 2020 when his album Elgar made him the first cellist to reach the Top 10 of the UK album chart. Admired for the warmth, lyricism and unaffected sincerity of his playing, and a passionate advocate for music education and access, he has become a genuine ambassador for classical music, appearing with major orchestras around the world.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Bruckner Remembered**

Stephen Johnson, Faber & Faber 2001

Recollections of Bruckner by people who knew him, gathered and introduced by Stephen Johnson, a vivid picture of the man who left the Ninth unfinished.

ACCESSIBLE **The Essence of Bruckner**

Robert Simpson, Gollancz 1992

A composer's guide to the Bruckner symphonies, written for listeners and with a chapter on the Ninth.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner**

John Williamson (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2004

Essays by Bruckner specialists on his life, music and the editions of his symphonies, useful for the unfinished Ninth heard in the Cohrs edition.

SOURCES

1. Edmund Finnis and Bruckner, 25 Oct 26, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/whats-on/edmund-finnis-and-bruckner-25-oct-26/>
2. Works, Edmund Finnis. <https://edmundfinnis.com/works/>
3. Biography, Edmund Finnis. <https://edmundfinnis.com/biography/>
4. Edmund Finnis, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Finnis
5. Symphony No. 9 (Bruckner), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_\(Bruckner\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_(Bruckner))
6. Bruckner's Ninth Symphony: An Unfinished Farewell, The Listeners' Club. <https://thelistenersclub.com/2018/01/29/bruckners-ninth-symphony-an-unfinished-farewell/>
7. Bruckner Remembered, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780571170951>
8. The Essence of Bruckner, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780575052215>
9. The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521008785>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-10-25-pappano>

Version 3, 30 September 2026