

Mendelssohn's Lobgesang, and Tetzlaff in Adámek's Thin Ice

Sunday, February 7, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican
Alain Altinoglu, conductor · Christian Tetzlaff, violin · London Symphony
Chorus, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ADÁMEK b. 1979 <i>Thin Ice (Violin Concerto No. 2)</i>	20'
2	MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847 <i>Symphony No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 52 'Lobgesang'</i>	64'
TOTAL MUSIC		84'

Ondřej Adámek

20 minutes

b. 1979

Thin Ice (Violin Concerto No. 2)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Because the piece is so new, the composer's outline is the best guide, and it is worth holding on to its two characters. One is the solo violin at play: fast, restless, dancing, unable to keep still. The other is whatever interrupts it. In the finale Adámek describes 'defiant high gestures' colliding with 'a deep, stern motif', so the conflict is laid out across the full height of the orchestra, high against low.

The opening movement sets the pattern. Listen for how long the exuberance lasts before a warning note creeps in underneath it, and for the point at which enjoyment turns into something closer to frenzy.

The two middle movements are the quiet ones, and they differ in kind. The second is tense and confined, with the violin alternately pleading and pretending to submit. The third is hushed in another way, a dance kept to a whisper that is broken off again and again.

In the last movement speed and repetition take over. Adámek speaks of acceleration building 'toward a physical struggle', and the ending does not announce a winner.

Felix Mendelssohn

64 minutes

1809–1847

Symphony No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 52 'Lobgesang'

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The very first sound is the key to the work: the trombones, alone, proclaim a broad, rising theme, and the full orchestra answers. Much later this theme turns out to be the tune to which the chorus sings 'Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn' ('Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord'). It returns during the orchestral movements and again in the closing bars, so it frames the whole score.

The three orchestral movements run together. After the energetic first comes a lilting movement in a minor key, more a wistful song for the strings than a scherzo; in its middle section the winds intone a chorale-like melody while fragments of the opening motto pass through the texture. The slow movement that follows is marked 'religioso' and has the warmth of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words.

The voices enter with the motto theme, now with its words. Of the numbers that follow, the best known is the duet for the two sopranos with chorus, 'Ich harrete des Herrn' ('I waited for the Lord'), a piece of great tenderness.

The dramatic centre comes next. The tenor sings of the snares of death and then asks, three times and each time more anxiously, 'Hüter, ist die Nacht bald hin?' ('Watchman, will the night soon pass?'). The answer comes from a solo soprano, unaccompanied at first: 'Die Nacht ist vergangen' ('The night is departed'). The chorus bursts in with the same words, and the darkness is over.

After that blaze Mendelssohn does something simple. The choir sings the chorale 'Nun danket alle Gott', its first verse with no instruments at all and its second with the orchestra moving around the tune. A duet for soprano and tenor leads to the final

chorus, which gathers speed in a fugue and then, at the very end, brings back the trombones' theme and the words that began the vocal part.



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