

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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

b. 1979

Thin Ice (Violin Concerto No. 2)

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Thin Ice is Ondřej Adámek's second violin concerto, and this performance is the first in Britain. It was written for Christian Tetzlaff, who gave the premiere in Paris on 8 February 2026

with the Orchestre National de France under Cristian Măcelaru, as part of Radio France's Festival Présences. Within weeks he had played it again in Winterthur, with the composer conducting, and in Adámek's native Prague. The London Symphony Orchestra is one of four commissioning partners, with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Musikkollegium Winterthur and the Orchestre National de France.

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

1809–1847

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

64 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In June 1840 Leipzig celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of the invention of printing with movable type. For a city that lived by the book trade this was a great civic occasion, and Mendelssohn, conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra and Leipzig’s leading musician, was asked for music. He wrote two pieces. The first was a Festgesang for men’s voices and brass, sung in the open air when the festival opened; one of its tunes was fitted after his death to the words of ‘Hark! The Herald Angels Sing’. The second was the Lobgesang, or Hymn of Praise, first performed on 25 June 1840 in the Thomaskirche, the church where Bach had been cantor.

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.

Tonight's artists

Christian Tetzlaff *violin*

Thin Ice was written for Christian Tetzlaff, who gave its first performance in Paris in February 2026 and then took it to Winterthur and Prague, the homes of two of the other commissioning orchestras. He now brings it to the fourth, for the concerto's first performance in Britain. Few violinists have played as many new concertos, and his way of treating beauty of tone as something to be earned suits a piece about energy under pressure.

Christian Tetzlaff, born in Hamburg in 1966, is a German violinist known for searching, unsentimental interpretations and for a repertoire that runs from Bach's solo sonatas and partitas to the music of his own time. He studied with Uwe-Martin Haiberg in Lübeck and with Walter Levin in Cincinnati, and came to wide attention in 1988 with performances of Schoenberg's Violin Concerto in Munich and Cleveland. Since then he has appeared with most of the world's leading orchestras, and he has championed contemporary concertos by composers such as György Ligeti, Jörg Widmann and Thomas Adès. Chamber music has always been central to his work: in 1994 he founded the Tetzlaff Quartet with his sister, the cellist Tanja Tetzlaff, and for many years he played and recorded with the pianist Lars Vogt. Unusually for a soloist of his standing, he plays a modern instrument, made by the German violin maker Stefan-Peter Greiner.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

More than half of the Lobgesang belongs to the choir, from the first cry of ‘Alles, was Odem hat’ to the closing fugue, and its plainest moment, the unaccompanied verse of ‘Nun danket alle Gott’, is the chorus’s alone. The London Symphony Chorus sings it with the orchestra it was founded to partner. The LSO’s listing does not yet name the two sopranos and the tenor who take the solo parts.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-02-07-altinoglu>

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