

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Elgar's Cello Concerto with Alisa Weilerstein, and Tchaikovsky's Fifth

Thursday, February 18, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Antonio Pappano, conductor · Alisa Weilerstein, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ELGAR 1857–1934 <i>Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85</i>	30'
2	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64</i>	48'
TOTAL MUSIC		78'

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Cello Concerto was Elgar's last major work, and the London Symphony Orchestra gave its first performance. Its opening idea came to him in March 1918. He had been in hospital in

London for an operation to remove an infected tonsil, and on his return home he wrote down a long, swaying melody without yet knowing what it was for. Soon afterwards he and his wife Alice withdrew to Brinkwells, a secluded cottage in the Sussex woods, where in the following months he composed three chamber works: a violin sonata, a string quartet and a piano quintet. In 1919 he turned back to the tune and built a concerto around it, finishing the score that August. He described it as ‘a real large work & I think good & alive’.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There are four movements, not the usual three, all of them concise, and the first two are joined.

The cello begins alone with a grand, declamatory flourish of full chords. This recitative is the concerto’s signature and will return twice. It dies away, and the violas, unaccompanied, quietly introduce the melody Elgar wrote down in 1918. The cello takes it over and the orchestra slowly gathers behind it, but the movement ends as bare as it began.

A plucked version of the opening recitative leads to the second movement. After several hesitant false starts the cello sets off in rapid repeated notes, a quicksilver scherzo that is over in a few minutes and gives the soloist no rest.

The Adagio is the heart of the work and its simplest music: a single unbroken song for the cello over a reduced orchestra of strings, clarinets, bassoons and horns. It is brief, and it ends on an unresolved harmony, as if the thought were unfinished.

The finale starts with another recitative and then strides out in a robust, march-like main theme, the nearest the concerto comes to the confident Elgar of earlier years. That confidence does not last. Towards the end the pace slackens, the harmony grows more painful, and the cello recalls a phrase from the Adagio. Then the opening recitative of the whole concerto returns in full, and a brusque few bars from the orchestra bring the end.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

48 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Tchaikovsky wrote his Fifth Symphony in the summer of 1888, ten years after the Fourth, at a time when he had come to fear that his powers were failing. ‘I want so much to show not only to others, but to myself, that I still haven’t expired,’ he told his patron Nadezhda von Meck that June. A few weeks later he had

the work sketched, and before the end of August the score was finished. As it neared completion he allowed himself a cautious verdict: ‘thank God, it is no worse than my previous ones.’

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. Two clarinets in their lowest register, over quiet strings, give out the motto theme, a grave melody with the rhythm of a slow march. Fix it in your ear. The Allegro grows from a lilting, slightly uneasy tune for clarinet and bassoon and rises to several great climaxes, then sinks back into the depths of the orchestra where it began.

Second movement. After a few bars of dark string chords a solo horn plays one of the best-known melodies Tchaikovsky wrote, long-breathed and yearning. The oboe joins it with a second idea, and the music swells into an impassioned love song. Twice the motto theme breaks in at full force on the brass, and after the second interruption the movement ends in exhausted quiet.

Third movement. In place of a scherzo comes a graceful waltz, a reminder that this is the composer of the great ballets. Its middle section is a scurrying, feather-light pas-

sage for the strings. Just before the close the motto slips in softly on clarinets and bassoons, like a shadow crossing the ballroom.

Finale. The motto opens the movement, now in the major and broad and solemn in the strings. A stormy Allegro follows and drives to a tremendous halt on a held chord, a pause so emphatic that audiences sometimes start to clap. Then the motto returns as a grand march for the whole orchestra, and in the last bars the trumpets and horns bring back the main theme of the first movement, also turned to the major.

Tonight's artists

Alisa Weilerstein *cello*

The Elgar concerto has followed Alisa Weilerstein through her career. She recorded it with Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin, and this season she plays it on both sides of the Atlantic. Here she performs it with the orchestra that gave its premiere in 1919, and Sir Antonio Pappano and the LSO then take the concerto on their tour of the United States, where the same pairing with Tchaikovsky's Fifth, preceded by Elizabeth Maconchy's Nocturne, is heard in Palm Desert on 26 and 27 February.

Alisa Weilerstein, born in Rochester, New York, in 1982, is an American cellist. She grew up in a family of musicians: her father, Donald Weilerstein, is a violinist, her mother, Vivian Hornik Weilerstein, a pianist, and her brother Joshua a conductor. She took up the cello at four and at thirteen made her professional debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations. She studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and, unusually for a touring soloist, also took a degree in history at Columbia University, graduating in 2004. In 2011 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. Her recordings include the Elgar and Elliott Carter concertos with Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin and Bach's six solo suites. She is a committed advocate of new music and has given the first performances of concertos written for her by Pascal Dusapin, Matthias Pintscher, Joan Tower and others.

Her solo project Fragments interleaves the movements of the Bach suites with newly commissioned pieces. She is married to the conductor Rafael Payare.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-02-18-pappano>

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