

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Shostakovich's Eighth, and Maxim Vengerov in Beethoven's Violin Concerto

Sunday, February 21, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Antonio Pappano, conductor · Maxim Vengerov, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61</i>	42'
2	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Symphony No. 8 in C minor, Op. 65</i>	64'
TOTAL MUSIC		106'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61

42 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven composed his only violin concerto in 1806. He wrote it for Franz Clement, one of the leading violinists in Vienna, who had given him useful advice on his opera *Fidelio*. Clement played it at the Theater an der Wien on 23 December 1806, at a benefit concert for himself.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. Four soft taps on the timpani, alone, begin the concerto, and the woodwind answer with a serene hymn-like phrase. That drum rhythm is the seed of the whole movement: listen for it passing to the violins, the horns and the trumpets, sometimes as a whisper and sometimes with the full orchestra's weight. The orchestra sets out all the themes before the soloist plays a note. When the violin does enter it rises from the depths in broken octaves, as if improvising, and climbs to the top of its range. The quietest and most affecting passage comes in the middle of the movement, where the violin muses in

the minor over soft drum-taps from the horns. After the cadenza the soloist plays the second theme very simply, low on the instrument, over plucked strings.

Second movement. Muted strings state a short, grave theme, and what follows is a set of variations in which the theme mostly stays with the orchestra while the violin embroiders around it. Midway the soloist introduces a new melody of its own, one of the stillest moments in Beethoven. The movement does not end: a sudden loud gesture from the strings and a brief cadenza lead straight into the finale.

Third movement. The violin announces the rondo theme on its lowest string, a bouncing tune like a hunting call, and repeats it at once two octaves higher. The episodes between its returns include a plaintive minor-key melody shared with the bassoon. After the final cadenza Beethoven plays games with the theme, sending it through distant keys before two abrupt chords end the piece.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906–1975

Symphony No. 8 in C minor, Op. 65

64 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Shostakovich wrote his Eighth Symphony in the summer of 1943, in a little over two months. He began it in Moscow at the start of July and did most of the work at a country retreat near Ivanovo that the Union of Composers ran for its members, finishing early in September. Yevgeny Mravinsky, to whom the score is dedicated, conducted the USSR Symphony Orchestra in the first public performance in Moscow on 4 November 1943.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. The symphony opens much as the Fifth does, with a stern, jagged motto in the cellos and basses, answered higher in the strings. Two long melodies follow, both quiet and inward, the second floating in an uneven five-beat metre over a pulsing accompaniment. Over many minutes the music is slowly driven towards a brutal march and a climax of crushing force, with the drums rolling in great crescendos. What comes out of the wreckage is the most memorable passage in the work: a long, lonely solo for the cor anglais.

Second movement. A heavy-footed march, sardonic and stiff, with a perky solo for the piccolo that sounds like mockery.

Third movement. A relentless toccata. The violas start a mechanical chain of even notes that never lets up and is passed around the orchestra, punctuated by shrieks from the woodwind and thuds from below. In the middle a trumpet plays a garish, circus-like galop over a rattling side drum. It builds to a shattering climax, which collapses directly into the next movement.

Fourth movement. A passacaglia: a slow theme in the bass is repeated again and again, eleven times in all after its first statement, while above it solo wind instruments trace numbed, wandering lines. This is the still centre of the symphony, a requiem without words.

Fifth movement. The harmony brightens to C major and a solo bassoon begins an easy-going, pastoral tune. Other soloists take their turn, but the calm is not secure: the music builds to a return of the first movement's climax. Then it subsides for good. In the last pages a flute and plucked strings touch in the final chord over a long held note, and the symphony fades out.

Tonight's artists

Maxim Vengerov *violin*

Maxim Vengerov plays the Beethoven concerto in the bicentenary year of the composer's death, first at the Barbican and then on the LSO's tour of the United States with Sir Antonio Pappano. The same programme is given at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles on 28 February, the orchestra's first appearance there since 2015, and travels on to Ann Arbor in March. The pairing sets the most serene of Beethoven's concertos against the darkest of Shostakovich's wartime symphonies, so the evening moves from one extreme of the orchestral repertoire to the other.

Maxim Vengerov, born in Novosibirsk in 1974, is a Soviet-born Israeli violinist and conductor. The son of an oboist and a choir director, he began the violin at five with Galina Turchaninova and went on to study with Zakhar Bron. At ten he won the junior Wieniawski competition, and in 1990, at fifteen, the Carl Flesch Competition in London, which opened the way to an international career and a long series of recordings; these have brought him a Grammy and two Gramophone Awards among other prizes. In 1997 he became the first classical musician to be named an International Goodwill Ambassador by UNICEF. He has also built a second career as a conductor, becoming the first chief conductor of the Menuhin Festival Gstaad Orchestra in 2010. Teaching occupies much of his time: he is a professor

at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg and, since 2016, Polonsky Visiting Professor of Violin at the Royal College of Music in London.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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Version 1, 7 October 2026