

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

On Tour in Ann Arbor: Maconchy, Elgar's Cello Concerto and Ein Heldenleben

Thursday, March 4, 2027 · 19:30 · Hill Auditorium

Antonio Pappano, conductor · Alisa Weilerstein, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MACONCHY 1907–1994 <i>Nocturne for Orchestra</i>	7'
2	ELGAR 1857–1934 <i>Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85</i>	30'
3	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		82'

Elizabeth Maconchy

1907–1994

Nocturne for Orchestra

7 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Elizabeth Maconchy is best known for her thirteen string quartets, and her orchestral music is heard far less often. The *Nocturne* is a short piece for full orchestra, about seven minutes long, dating from 1950 and 1951. It comes from the busy years after the war, when she was much in demand among British orchestras and ensembles, and beyond its date very little about its origins has been recorded: programme notes written for recent performances say frankly that hardly any documentation survives.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece opens high and still. The upper strings hold a thin, glinting sonority and shift slowly between two chords, and against that background the woodwind play angular, searching lines that overlap one another.

The lower strings are more restless and push the music forward. Listen for the harp, which ushers in a more dream-like passage coloured by tuned percussion, and for the trumpets, whose brief fanfares give way to long melodic lines.

The climax comes in the middle, led by the trombones, in a great swell of warm orchestral sound. It clears quickly. A solo violin is left exposed, and from there the texture thins until the instruments fade into silence one by one.

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.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40

45 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Ein Heldenleben ('A Hero's Life') is the largest of the tone poems Richard Strauss wrote in the 1890s, and he was 34 when he finished it. In July 1898 he wrote from a Bavarian mountain resort that, since Beethoven's 'Eroica' was so unpopular with conductors and so rarely played, he was filling the gap with a long tone poem on a similar subject: 'It is entitled A Hero's Life, and while it has no funeral march, it does have lots of horns, horns being quite the thing to express heroism.' The joke tells you a good deal about the tone of what followed. He completed the score at the end of December and conducted the first performance himself in Frankfurt on 3 March 1899. The dedication went to the young Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The six sections run into one another, but each has a clear character.

The Hero. The piece opens with its main theme, a long, striding melody for horns and cellos that climbs through nearly three octaves in E flat major, the key of the ‘Eroica’. Other ideas pile up around it until the whole orchestra stops on an expectant, unresolved chord, followed by silence.

The Hero’s Adversaries. Into the silence come the critics: thin, chattering woodwind, each instrument carping in its own register, with two tubas grumbling in the parallel fifths that students of harmony are taught to avoid. The hero’s theme sinks into the minor before he shakes them off.

The Hero’s Companion. A solo violin, played by the orchestra’s leader, enters with a long sequence of cadenzas, by turns flirtatious, tender, sulky and scolding. The hero answers in the low strings and horns. Eventually the two come together in a broad love scene, the most richly scored music in the work, with the critics briefly audible in the distance.

The Hero's Deeds of War. Trumpets sound from offstage and the battle begins. Percussion drives the music on, and the hero's theme fights its way through against the adversaries' music, with the companion's at his side. It ends with the opening theme returning in triumph.

The Hero's Works of Peace. Here Strauss quotes himself. Fragments of *Don Juan*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Don Quixote* and *Till Eulenspiegel*, among others, drift past, woven together so smoothly that they can be hard to pick out one by one.

The Hero's Retreat from the World and Fulfilment. After a last outburst of anger the music settles. The hero's rising theme is reshaped into a slow, falling melody for the strings, the most touching passage in the score, and the work closes quietly in E flat major, a long way from the swagger with which it began.

Tonight's artists

Alisa Weilerstein *cello*

This is the second of the LSO's two evenings at Hill Auditorium, the centre of an Ann Arbor residency built around music and health, with players also working on hospital wards and in the community. Alisa Weilerstein has been playing the Elgar concerto with Sir Antonio Pappano and the orchestra since the Barbican performance in February; here Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* replaces Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony as the second half, so a concerto of withdrawal and regret is answered by a work that begins in swagger and ends, in its own way, by retreating from the world too. The same programme is repeated as a matinee at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach on 7 March.

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-2027-03-04-pappano>

Version 1, 7 October 2026