

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Noseda and Szeps-Znaider: Sibelius's Violin Concerto and Prokofiev from the Opera House

Thursday, May 13, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Gianandrea Noseda, conductor · Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Summer Night, Suite from 'Betrothal in a Monastery', Op. 123</i>	19'
2	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47</i>	34'
3	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Four Portraits and Dénouement from 'The Gambler', Op. 49</i>	25'
TOTAL MUSIC		78'

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Summer Night, Suite from 'Betrothal in a Monastery', Op. 123

19 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Betrothal in a Monastery is the comic opera Prokofiev began in 1940, and its source was an eighteenth-century English comedy: Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Duenna*, a farce of disguises, elopements and a miserly father outwitted by his daughter and her governess, set in Seville. Prokofiev wrote the Russian libretto himself with Mira Mendelson, later his second wife. The opera went into rehearsal, the war stopped it, and it did not reach the stage until 3 November 1946, at the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Introduction is the opera's short overture: bustling, festive, led by a trumpet tune with the wide, slightly crooked leaps that mark a melody as Prokofiev's. The Serenade is the music of the lovers Antonio and Louisa, slow and warm, with the tenor's line from the opera passing to a solo cello. The Minuet belongs to Louisa's father, Don

Jerome, and is a courtly dance that keeps tripping over its own feet, affectionate satire of a man who thinks himself dignified.

‘Dreams’, subtitled Nocturne, is the heart of the suite: the love theme of the opera’s second couple, Clara and Ferdinand, with a solo flute floating over strings divided into many parts. The closing Dance comes from the end of the opera. It starts quietly, on a rhythm that repeats and repeats, and grows to a bright, full climax.

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

34 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Sibelius wanted to be a violinist before he wanted to be a composer. He practised for years with a virtuoso career in mind, and gave the ambition up as a young man. His only concerto, written in 1903 and 1904, is for the instrument he had failed to master, and it asks the soloist for everything he could once imagine and not play.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is one of the most recognisable in the repertoire. Muted violins set up a quiet shimmer in D minor and the soloist enters over it at once, with a long, searching melody that seems to begin in the middle of a thought. There is no orchestral introduction and no waiting.

In the first movement, listen for where the cadenza falls. Normally it comes near the end, as a display before the close. Here it stands in the middle and does the work of the development section, so the soloist alone carries the argument forward. The orchestra's own themes, dark and heavy in the lower strings and brass, are as important as the violin's.

The slow movement opens with a short woodwind introduction before the violin enters low in its register with a broad, grave melody; the temperature rises to a passionate climax and falls away again. The finale is a dance over a pounding rhythm in the timpani and low strings, with the soloist leaping across the instrument in double stops, harmonics and rapid scales. The critic Donald Tovey's phrase for it, 'a polonaise for polar bears', has stuck to it, a little unfairly: it is as exhilarating as anything Sibelius wrote.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Four Portraits and Dénouement from 'The Gambler', Op. 49

25 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Gambler is the opera of Prokofiev's mid-twenties, written in 1915 and 1916 from Dostoevsky's short novel of 1866. The story is set in a German spa town the novelist calls Roulettenburg. A Russian General, deep in debt, waits for news that his rich aunt has died; the aunt arrives in person, very much alive, and loses a fortune at the tables; Alexei, a penniless tutor in the General's household, loves the General's ward Polina and stakes everything on roulette to win her. Prokofiev set Dostoevsky's prose almost as speech, fast and without arias. A production planned for the Mariinsky Theatre in Petrograd fell victim to the revolution of 1917, and the opera was not staged until the end of the 1920s, in Brussels, in a revised version sung in French.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Alexei comes first: restless, impulsive music that never sits still, the portrait of a man who thinks faster than he judges. The Grandmother (Babulenska) begins as a formidable old lady who knows her own mind, then a solo violin

leads into something more touching, as if the composer liked her too much to leave her as a caricature. The General is all bluster and empty ceremony.

Polina has the longest movement and the most ambiguous. It starts quietly and tenderly, grows stronger and more troubled, and ends subdued. The Dénouement returns to the gaming tables and what follows them. It is the most dramatic music of the five, driven and feverish, with a sharp-edged, dissonant close that offers no consolation. Heard after the moonlit Summer Night suite in the first half, it shows how far apart the two ends of Prokofiev's operatic career were.

Tonight's artists

Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider *violin*

Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider is a regular guest of the LSO and has played the Sibelius concerto throughout his career. Around it Gianandrea Nosedà, the orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor, continues the Prokofiev thread of his season: in December he conducted the suites from *The Love for Three Oranges* and *Chout*, and here he turns to two operas that are rarely staged in Britain. This is a single Barbican concert on 13 May 2027; the two Prokofiev suites are also played without the concerto in a Half Six Fix concert the evening before.

Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider, born in Copenhagen in 1975 to Polish-Jewish parents, is a Danish violinist and conductor of the front rank. He announced himself by winning the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 1997, following earlier successes at the Carl Nielsen and Sibelius competitions, and went on to a major international career as a soloist, admired for the richness, power and aristocratic breadth of his tone. In recent years he has built an equally significant career on the podium, serving as music director of the Orchestre National de Lyon and as principal guest conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, a double life as soloist and conductor that gives his music-making an unusually complete musical perspective. He plays a great Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin once owned by Fritz Kreisler.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-05-13-nosed>

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