



# London Philharmonic Orchestra

**TIPPETT**  
**PIANO CONCERTO**  
**SYMPHONY NO. 2**

**EDWARD GARDNER** conductor

**STEVEN OSBORNE** piano

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

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# MICHAEL TIPPETT

## PIANO CONCERTO

- 01 Allegro non troppo
- 02 Molto lento e tranquillo
- 03 Vivace

It was whilst hearing the legendary German pianist Walter Gieseking rehearse Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto – the most lyrical and least combative of all Beethoven's concertos – that Michael Tippett began to realise that 'a contemporary concerto might be written, in which the piano is used once again for its poetic capabilities.' Following the examples of Stravinsky and Prokofiev, many 20th-century composers had turned to exploiting the piano primarily as a percussion instrument. In addition, at the time Tippett wrote his Piano Concerto (1953–55) there was a widespread view that truly 'contemporary' music should reflect the anxieties and austerity of its times. Tippett, however, felt the need to do something quite different: as in his opera *The Midsummer Marriage*, which he was working on at the same time, he felt an overwhelming urge to affirm, to express joy and wonder at the elemental beauty and mystery of life – to offer an alternative, dream-world in which hope and the courage to endure might be rediscovered.

Despite this, the Piano Concerto did not fare very well at its premiere, and for decades afterwards it was judged problematic, not least because its piano writing is ferociously difficult – so much so, in fact, that the pianist Julius Katchen declared it unplayable, and walked out of rehearsal not long before the premiere in 1956. But there are plenty of challenging piano concertos in the repertoire that have at one time been pronounced 'unplayable'. What makes this Concerto still more difficult for the soloist is that this is emphatically not a virtuoso display-piece, in which technical fireworks are foregrounded and an element of struggle can add to the excitement. Instead, Tippett mostly demands that the pianist conceal the strain and effort involved in the interests of melodic fluency and ardour, contemplative tenderness and magic. And in contrast to many famous piano concertos, the soloist is rarely in any kind of conflict or contention with the orchestra. The relationship is much more intimate, at times almost symbiotic. Uniquely, Tippett introduces a kind of musical 'go-between' in the form of another keyboard instrument, the celeste. In *The Midsummer Marriage*

the celeste is associated with spells, incantations and moments of supernatural intervention, and here it speaks in very similar tones, as the piano's 'familiar' or spiritual alter-ego.

The Piano Concerto reflects the proportions of Beethoven's Fourth: a longish first movement is followed by a shorter slow movement and exuberant finale in rondo (circular) form. But the opening is utterly original – a display of Tippett's long-breathed lyricism at its most liquid and ecstatic, building to an ardent climax. Other kinds of music appear – capricious, ghostly, tense and muscular – until, after a visionary hushed passage for celeste and timpani, overlaid with multiple piano trills, the opening crescendo returns, this time with eerie muted horn-calls. Solo cadenzas are often moments of extrovert brilliance, but Tippett's cadenza is the most inward, poetic moment in the whole movement, after which the music ebbs to a quiet, slightly questioning conclusion.

For quite a while, the slow movement seems to be moving on two levels at the same time: slow imitative writing on horns, then woodwind, evolves steadily as a calm background to an almost manic, florid outpouring for the piano. Eventually, this builds to a climax, at which upward-surgling string figures are gradually soothed by the soloist – an unmistakable homage to the slow

movement of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto, yet recreated in breathtakingly original terms. A vigorous dancing main theme for orchestra alone begins the finale (a welcome rest for the pianist after the demands of the previous movement), alternating with a bravura theme for piano, a gorgeous long melody for cellos and horns, with cascading solo figures, and a kind of bluesy meditation for piano and celeste. Finally, piano and orchestra are united in a return of the main theme, building to a jubilant, firmly major-key ending.

# MICHAEL TIPPETT

## SYMPHONY NO. 2

- 04 Allegro vigoroso
- 05 Adagio molto e tranquillo
- 06 Presto veloce
- 07 Allegro moderato

Not long after he'd finished his Piano Concerto, in 1955, Michael Tippett was sitting in a studio at Radio Lugano, Switzerland, taking in the view of the sunlit Alpine lake. A recording of music by Vivaldi was playing; suddenly some pounding low cello and bass Cs took him to another imaginative plane, and Tippett realised that a new work had been conceived. Before long, he had a clear formal conception in his head: a compact, dynamic symphony with an energetic *Allegro*, a contemplative, song-led slow movement, an arch-form scherzo based on complex, constantly shifting rhythmic patterns, and a 'fantasia' finale leading to a transformed version of the Symphony's opening idea.

It took Tippett two years to bring his dream to fruition, but by the end, what he called the 'archetypal' Baroque dance energy of Vivaldi's pounding bass remained a key ingredient. The bright clarity of much of the orchestral sound – so different from the foggy grey-brownness of much contemporary English orchestral music – also recalls that beautiful view out over the lake, as might the liquid textures of the *Adagio molto* second movement. Given the date, before the rise of the period instrument

movement, it's possible that the Vivaldi Tippett heard employed a piano, rather than a harpsichord, as continuo, which could then have served as a prompt for the flavoursome piano writing in the Second Symphony. But Tippett's use of the piano, sometimes working with, sometimes in contrast to the harp is entirely original, and it provides one of the most magical and engaging features of this Symphony's unique sound world. Vivaldi, it turned out, had provided him with a very potent musical seed.

The Second Symphony begins with those pounding low Cs, reinforced by deep bell-like tones from the piano. Above this, horns, then joyously dancing violins, expand the C harmony in fifths, building a kind of super-bright enhanced major chord, from which so many of the Symphony's melodic and harmonic ideas grow. A teasingly syncopated flute melody, accompanied by densely rippling woodwind with trumpet and celeste, provides delicious contrast, but the opening music soon returns, powering the movement into new imaginative regions, and it is driving, dancing energy that ultimately holds sway.

An angular but quietly mesmerising trumpet theme opens the *Adagio molto*, singing through delicately falling cluster chords high up on piano and harp. Divided cellos then aspire heavenward, the cluster chords enhanced by woodwind, building to an ecstatic trumpet-topped climax. A gorgeous central section follows, with string harmonies reminiscent of the 1950s jazz titan Miles Davis (a trumpeter, significantly) then, in a brilliant imaginative touch, Tippett brings back the opening section but with the textures turned upside down: a trombone takes over the trumpet theme, harp and piano now in the bass; then the cellos' aspiring melody aspires on violins, the cluster chords now rising in the bass, strengthened by low brass. The movement ends with a brief but telling lullaby for four hushed horns.

Rhythm was always one of Tippett's greatest strengths, and in the scherzo, constantly changing fast patterns of two and three notes suggest almost fantastically nimble footwork. The movement builds to a thrillingly emphatic climax, then it gradually unwinds, with intricately intertwined harp and piano (in two different keys) to the fore. Stravinsky's relatively recent *Symphony in Three Movements* (1945), which combines piano and harp in its finale, may have been an influence; but Tippett takes the combination to new levels, creating textures with the fluid transparency of a Downland chalk stream – Tippett had lived amongst the Sussex North Downs since 1928.

The form of the finale is unconventional but logical. A highly-charged expectant introduction leads to a set of variations built up above a jerky, muscular repeated bass theme. Ghosts of the Symphony's seminal fifths sounds through eerily fluttering strings and pattering side-drum, then an impassioned long melody starts high up on violins to a background of warbling woodwind and piano. The melody descends gradually until it falls right back to the Symphony's original pounding low Cs. Above this, the orchestra repeatedly builds up the bright 'enhanced major' chord in what Tippett called 'five gestures of farewell'. The final chord is directed to 'let vibrate in the air'.

Programme notes © Stephen Johnson

## EDWARD GARDNER CONDUCTOR



© Benjamin Ealovega

Edward Gardner has been Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since 2021. In 2024 he also became Music Director of the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, having been Artistic Advisor since 2022.

This is Edward Gardner's third release on the LPO Label: his recording of Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*, captured live at his first concert as Principal Conductor in 2021, won a 2023 Gramophone Award for Best Opera Recording. This was followed by Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, recorded in concert in February 2023.

In demand as a guest conductor, Edward has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, New York

Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Vienna Symphony. He also continues his longstanding collaboration with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010–16.

Music Director of English National Opera from 2006–15, Edward has an ongoing relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, where he has conducted *The Damnation of Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. He made his debut at London's Royal Opera House in 2019 in *Káťa Kabanová*, and returned for *Werther* the following season. Elsewhere, he has conducted at the Bavarian State Opera, La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Opéra National de Paris and Teatro di San Carlo.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. His many accolades include Royal Philharmonic Society Award Conductor of the Year (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and an OBE for services to music in The Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

# STEVEN OSBORNE

## PIANO



© Benjamin Ealovega

Steven Osborne's musical insight and integrity underpin idiomatic interpretations of diverse repertoire that have won him fans around the world. The extent of his range is demonstrated by his 33 recordings for Hyperion, which have earned numerous awards including two Gramophone Awards, and he was awarded an OBE for his services to music in The Queen's New Year Honours in 2022.

A thoughtful and curious musician, Steven Osborne has been invited to curate festivals including at Antwerp's DeSingel, and has been Artist-in-Residence with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra and at Wigmore Hall. *The Observer*

described him as 'a player in absolute service to the composer', and his close reading of composers' scores has led him to create his own edition of Rachmaninoff. He has a lifelong interest in jazz and often improvises in concerts, bringing this spontaneity and freedom to all his interpretations.

Steven Osborne was born in Scotland and studied at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and the Royal Northern College of Music. He is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Patron of the Lammermuir Festival, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2014.

*Steven Osborne appears courtesy of Hyperion Records (part of Universal Music Group).*



# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for 60 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including those with LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti, Tennstedt and Masur, to Jurowski and Gardner.

[lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)



**MICHAEL TIPPETT (1905–98)**

- 32:55**      **Piano Concerto**  
**01**    16:17      Allegro non troppo  
**02**    08:47      Molto lento e tranquillo  
**03**    07:51      Vivace

- 33:47**      **Symphony No. 2**  
**04**    09:16      Allegro vigoroso  
**05**    10:20      Adagio molto e tranquillo  
**06**    05:48      Presto veloce  
**07**    08:23      Allegro moderato

**EDWARD GARDNER** conductor  
**STEVEN OSBORNE** piano  
**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**  
**Pieter Schoeman** leader (Piano Concerto)  
**Alice Ivy-Pemberton** leader (Symphony No. 2)

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