

Total performance time: approximately 100 minutes, including an interval of 20 minutes

National Youth String Orchestra

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Damian Iorio conductor

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Simple Symphony, Op.4 (1933–4) 18'

i. Boisterous Bourrée

ii. Playful Pizzicato

iii. Sentimental Sarabande

iv. Frolicsome Finale

Performers:

Violin 1 Chloe Prins*

George Boyes

Elsa Chung

Helena Gascoyne,

Ella Hodgson-Laws

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Sonata No.8 in C minor, Op.13 'Pathétique' (1798), arr. Jeffery L. Briggs 17'

i. Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio

ii. Adagio cantabile

iii. Rondo: Allegro

Violin 2 Revekka Konstantinou*

Tori, Sze Yin Li

James Preller

Isabella Worster

Viola Jasmine Bor*

Annabel Marshall

Harry Rughoo

Xueer Wu

INTERVAL

Anna Clyne (b.1980)

Stride (2020) 11'

i. Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio

ii. Adagio cantabile

iii. Rondo: Allegro

Cello Finn Anderson-Hendra*

Sky Beardmore

Emily Elliott

Maddy Napier

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Chamber Symphony, Op.110a (1960), arr. Rudolf Barshai 25'

i. Largo

ii. Allegro molto

iii. Allegretto

iv. Largo

v. Largo

Bass Jude Chandler*

Giuliana Tritto

* principal

Written in Lowestoft at age 20, after completing his final term at the Royal College of Music, **Britten's** *Simple Symphony* was the result of spending a Christmas holiday looking through childhood compositions. Having written over 800 distinct works before the age of 18, this work for string orchestra brings together eight characterful melodies that he had penned between the ages of nine and twelve, transposing and developing them to be played by string orchestra. Most composers try to distance themselves as much as possible from their early writings, but here Britten embraces his juvenile themes, blending young ideas with his rapidly growing expertise. The work itself was written with the intention of being performed by school orchestras or training ensembles and is dedicated to his childhood viola teacher Audrey Alston, his first musical mentor.

The piece takes the form of a symphony in miniature, with four movements crammed full of humour, character and a youthful vigour. Opening with the bold yet cheeky Boisterous Bourrée, the first movement dances through Classical harmonies and structures, reflecting the origins of the symphony within the Classical period. The second movement is a showpiece played without the bow in plucked pizzicato, a nimble jig often played as fast as possible, adding a delightful variation of texture ahead of mournful and tender Sentimental Sarabande. Finishing with a flourish, the Frolicsome Finale jolts and tumbles to an emphatic close.

Arguably one of **Beethoven's** most iconic piano works, Piano Sonata No.8 'Pathétique' is one of the most frequently performed of the 32 piano sonatas. The origin of the subtitle 'Grand Sonate Pathétique' is one that has been heavily discussed. It is unclear if Beethoven himself added this (although he was rarely fond of nicknames) or whether it was the work of his publisher, albeit with Beethoven's blessing.

The key of C minor for this piece is notable, with many of Beethoven's compositions in this key sharing an underlying darkness and craggy transcendence, particularly across his early turbulent works. This piece was written when he was 27, the year it is thought he suffered the illness that eventually led to loss of his hearing. The sonata opens with gravity in an unusually extended slow introduction, unfolding an aching melody, emphasising the minor key from the outset and creating a sense of longing within the pulsing accompaniment. Even when the first movement jumps into the quicker Allegro section, the music retains the melancholy established in the opening. Material from the introduction rears its head throughout the entire movement, ending with a haunting reminder of the opening to curtail the unrelenting octave leaps in the bass and constantly shifting harmonies. The middle movement comes as an offer of respite, providing a dignified and reflective melody over a stately triplet backdrop. The final movement is a Rondo, with themes dancing and flitting between harmony and dissonance – still retaining the sense of pensiveness established at the very beginning but fighting to tear itself apart and unravel. As the music is overtaken by turmoil, Beethoven allows for a small moment of pause before a dramatic descending scale cascades us down to the final C minor chord.

Arranged for strings by the American composer Jeffery L. Briggs, this version creates a new way of hearing this well-known piano piece. The ability for string players to sustain sound, use different instrumental colours across the ensemble and employ dynamic techniques that aren't possible on the piano offers a fresh experience of a work over 200 years old.

Anna Clyne's *Stride* takes total inspiration from, and even directly quotes, Beethoven's 'Pathétique'. Using melodic, rhythmic and harmonic fragments, each of the three sections of her piece draws on the corresponding movement of the sonata, creating a twisted and heavily condensed miniature with strands of the original peeking through. The title refers to the octave leaps that stride through the left hand of the original piano part and the vitality of Beethoven's music. Anna Clyne takes Beethoven's material and filters it through her own unique and distinctive musical language to create a virtuosic piece that is wild, unique and jubilantly inventive.

Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony in C minor is not an original composition, instead a skilful adaptation of his String Quartet No.8, Op.110, by Rudolf Barshai for full string orchestra. Shostakovich was initially unsure, but he did give his seal of approval: 'Sounds better than the quartet in the original! We will give the work a new name – Chamber Symphony Opus 110a'.

The original quartet was the only substantial work Shostakovich wrote outside his native Russia. It was composed during a 1960 visit to Dresden, a city in communist East Germany that had been destroyed in 1945 by an Allied firebombing – and which killed more people than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The quartet bears the dedication 'In memory of victims of fascism and war'. Visiting Dresden reignited the composer's own memories of his experience of Stalin's terror and he poured these into this powerful and uniquely biographical work, written over a period of just three days.

The Chamber Symphony is in five moments, which are played without pause, flowing directly from one to the other. The musical material is based on a central theme built upon a representation of the composer's own name: D – E flat – C – B, which in German notation spells DSCH. This motif can be heard at the beginning with the four opening notes and it goes on to permeate the entire piece, within the sorrowful opening section, the demonic dance, ironic waltz, and the terrified stabbing chords towards the end. Shostakovich also wove in numerous quotations from his earlier works, including his symphonies and operas. In a letter to a fellow composer he wrote: 'I thought that if I died suddenly, hardly anyone would write and dedicate a work to my memory. So I decided to do something similar myself. "In memory of the composer of this quartet" should be written on the cover'. A quartet standing not only as an epitaph to the victims of war, but also a monument to his own troubled life.

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