

**Friday 22 May 2026 / 7.30pm**

## **Brahms' Violin Concerto**

### **Sándor Veress (1907-1992)**

Four Transylvanian Dances

*Lassu - Ugròs - Letjòs - Dobbantós*

Sándor Veress was born in Koloszvár in Hungary (now Cluj-Napoca in Romania), a city - with its Hungarian elite, sizeable Romanian community and German and Roma minorities - where a cosmopolitan outlook was a necessity as much as a virtue. He studied with Bartók and Kodály in Budapest, later assisting them in their research into folklore, and leaned just enough to the left to avoid proscription under Hungary's fascist inter-war régime, but not enough to make life under the postwar Communist dictatorship tolerable for him.

He emigrated to Bern, Switzerland in 1949 – where he was approached with a commission by Paul Sacher, the millionaire music-lover whose private chamber orchestra in Basel had premiered works by Bartók, Martinů and Stravinsky. Veress's imagination returned immediately to his lost homeland of Transylvania, and particularly its indigenous Hungarian minority: the Szeklers. His *Four Transylvanian Dances*, he insisted, were not folk tunes but “free re-creations of certain styles of dance music indigenous to Hungarian villages in Transylvania”. Their titles set the mood in each case: *Lassu* (slowly), *Ugròs* (leaping), *Letjòs* (sloping) and finally *Dobbantós* (stamping). But they don't necessarily go where you expect...

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### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

Romance for violin and orchestra, Op.11

One evening in Prague, around 1860, a young viola player called Adolf Čech joined a new orchestra.

*'You will play at the same desk as Dvořák' said [the conductor], and introduced me to a young man with a dishevelled head, like that of a genius, topped with an abundant thatch of thick black hair...but it was no easy matter. Now my playing did not please him, now he was dissatisfied with the next desk, and now and again he would stop playing altogether, and start humming some scrap of melody to himself.*

Čech couldn't know that this viola-playing lad from the provinces was already imagining symphonies, concertos and operas. Dvořák's own instrument was the viola, but he'd started on the violin and was handy on both instruments, writing easily for either. But he was also a perfectionist. Disappointed with his fifth string quartet (1873) he salvaged its slow movement and recreated it as a single-movement *Romance* for violin with the accompaniment of piano or small orchestra. It was performed for the first time in Prague in December 1877 for a charity concert in aid of a musicians' pension fund; the violinist was Josef Markus and the conductor was Dvořák's old friend Adolf Čech.

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### **Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)**

Summer Evening

After graduating from the Budapest Academy of Music in 1904 (and picking up a PhD in philosophy and linguistics two years later) Zoltán Kodály plunged wholeheartedly into the world of folksong-collecting. He was joined on his expeditions by his friend Bela Bartók – thus beginning what, for both composers, would be a lifelong study of folk music. Meanwhile, as a graduation piece, he composed an “idyll” for small orchestra entitled *Summer Evening* – a musical landscape painted in impressionist colours (he was fascinated by Debussy's music) but portraying an unmistakably Hungarian scene.

In 1929, he revised *Summer Evening* and rededicated to one of his greatest champions, the famous Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini, who had asked for something new to conduct on tour. In the composer's own words:

*I first wrote this piece in 1906. After two performances it was put aside. If I now succeed in rectifying its original faults, I must thank a great musician, whose example and request has prompted me to revisit it. The title means only that the work was conceived on summer evenings, gazing on newly cut corn fields and at the murmuring Adriatic waves. It may remain as reminiscence. No further explanation is required.*

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### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

#### Hungarian Dances

The Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi (1828-1898) doesn't sound like the easiest of characters to get along with. As a student, he was banished from Hungary for his revolutionary activities; he was flamboyant, lively and a stunning player, but even his best friends described him as "a boastful, temperamental, opportunistic person". Eventually he dropped dead on stage in San Francisco, but not before he'd been soloist to Queen Victoria, and had discovered, in Hamburg, a 19-year old pianist called Johannes Brahms. The two toured together in 1853 – Brahms improvising madly to stay ahead of Reményi's wild solos.

They were chalk and cheese, and soon went their separate ways – but Reményi's improvisations stayed with Brahms for the rest of his life. In 1869, his memories crystallised into ten *Hungarian Dances* for piano duet (they were orchestrated later by the Austrian-born composer Adolf Schmid). They were an immediate Europe-wide smash, and they've remained so popular that no-one, to this day, is quite sure which of them are based on Hungarian gypsy tunes, and which are Brahms's own work. Brahms never let on. The point is, that with their sultry, catchy tunes, and dizzying switches between happy and sad, *lassú* (relaxed) and *friss* (fast), they feel exactly right. *Eljen!*

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### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

#### Violin Concerto in D, Op.77

*Allegro non troppo - Adagio - Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace*

The history of Brahms' Violin Concerto is a tale of a particular person and a particular place. "I only wanted to stay there for a day" wrote Brahms to Clara Schumann, in May 1878. "But the first day was so beautiful that now I intend to stay for quite a while. "There" was the lakeside resort of Pörschach in Austrian Carinthia. "I'm continuing to bathe in the warm lake-water" he told another friend "and in the warmth of the Austrians – called *Gemütlichkeit*". It's impossible to miss that warmth in the Violin Concerto that he wrote there.

But the concerto is also a homage to Brahms's long friendship with the Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim. From the very beginning of the concerto - its warm, swinging opening melody introducing a string of successively lovelier themes, none a million miles from a waltz – the music unfolds at an very deliberate pace. Brahms feared his *Adagio* might sound too modest but its measured opening oboe melody could scarcely make a better foil. And for a *Finale*, the solo violin launches a brilliant gypsy-*rondo*. Brahms is serious, but never self-important. When Joachim premiered the concerto in Leipzig, on New Year's Day 1879, Brahms was nearly late. He took the podium in the nick of time – suspenders unbuttoned, shirt untucked, and wearing a pair of grey everyday trousers.

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### **Maria Włoszczowska** violin

Polish violinist Maria Włoszczowska is recognised for her versatile musicianship, performing as a soloist, director and chamber musician, in addition to her roles as Artistic Partner of the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Director and Leader of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Recent career highlights include Maria's solo debut at the BBC Proms with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and conductor Dinis Sousa, directing the Chamber Orchestra of Europe at Mozartwoche Salzburg and in Kronberg, directing the Orquesta Sinfónica de Tenerife, performing Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Mozart's Violin Concerto No.5 with Orquestra XXI, and concertos by Vivaldi, Bach and Telemann with Neues Bachisches Collegium Musicum under the baton of Reinhard

Goebel at Leipzig's Gewandhaus. In the 2024/25 season, Maria performed as soloist and director with, among others, the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and Amsterdam Sinfonietta, as well as returning to the Chamber Orchestra of Europe for several projects as their newly appointed Director and Leader.

Maria appears frequently at Wigmore Hall and at international festivals such as Musikdorf Ernen, Lockenhaus Festival, Lammermuir Festival and IMS Prussia Cove as well as in residency at Yellow Barn, Vermont. Distinguished artists such as Jeremy Denk, Alasdair Beatson and Dinis Sousa regularly join Maria in recital and recent highlights include her New York recital debut presenting all six Bach Sonatas for violin and keyboard and performing Ives' complete cycle of Violin Sonatas at Wigmore Hall and Lammermuir Festival alongside Jeremy Denk.

A recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Emily Anderson Prize, Maria based herself in the UK after completing her studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Hungarian violinist and conductor András Keller. In 2018 she won both First Prize and Audience Prize at the XXI Leipzig International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition. Maria plays on a violin by Francesco Stradivari.

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## **Royal Northern Sinfonia**

### **Internationally renowned, calling Gateshead home.**

37 musicians at the top of their game. Electrifying music, old and new. All the talent, determination, and creativity of the North East on a worldwide stage. From their home at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Royal Northern Sinfonia share the joy and wonder of orchestral music with thousands of people across the North of England - and beyond - every year.

From symphonies to string quartets, film soundtracks to choral masses, and original performances with awesome artists from Sheku Kanneh-Mason to Self Esteem, the orchestra's members have got one of the most varied jobs there is. They're always looking for fresh new sounds from up-and-coming composers, inviting local communities to share a stage, and doing everything they can to inspire and prepare the musicians of tomorrow to one day take their place.

They're also working hard to smash the barriers that can stop brilliant people getting into classical music. They've teamed up with national partners to support women conductors to develop their careers, to help global majority musicians get vital experience in the orchestra world, and to celebrate disabled and non-disabled musicians breaking new ground together in inclusive ensemble RNS Moves. And they bring new musical opportunities to the region, headlining the first-ever BBC Proms weekend outside London.

Because they whole-heartedly believe orchestral music is for anyone - big cities and rural villages, tiny babies and life-long listeners, die-hard fans and curious minds - they travel far and wide to make sure there's top-notch classical music on offer for anyone ready to say "I'll give that a go". You'll find them in churches, castles, and community venues across the North, as well as leading the charge in Carlisle, Kendal, Middlesbrough, and Sunderland.

With 65 years of success to build on, they've signed a dynamic artistic leadership – Music Director Dinis Sousa, Artistic Partner Maria Włoszczowska, Principal Guest Conductor Nil Venditti and Associate Conductor Ellie Slorach – to lead the way into a bold, bright future.

Wherever the orchestra play and whoever they share a stage with, every performance is a chance to see, hear and feel the music.