Friday 30 October / 7.30pm
Sinfonia of London: Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto

Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)
Concerto for String Orchestra

Allegro – Andante – Vivo

Born in Łódź, Grazyna Bacewicz shaped her own musical destiny – as violinist, composer and latterly teacher – with unquenchable individuality. And throughout her years as leader of the Polish Radio Orchestra and later as Professor at the Łódź Conservatoire she composed with unflagging energy, even when the Nazi occupation forced her to give concerts in secret. These were turbulent years in Poland, but for Bacewicz music provided a space of absolute creative and spiritual freedom..

Bacewicz's Concerto for String Orchestra (1948) is superbly constructed, but brilliantly coloured. The sound of a string orchestra is sometimes compared to black-and-white film, but as a virtuoso violinist Bacewicz knew exactly how vivid that could be. The instruments are glittering or gloomy; they pluck, strum, bristle or simply sing above an energetic background rhythm. The bustling first *Allegro* begins like a streamlined Bach concerto, and the energy never lets up. In the *Andante*, it's as if a wintry mist has descended over the music: the instruments wear mutes, and shiver *sul ponticello* (playing near the bridge of the instrument, for an icy, metallic sound). But Bacewicz quietly reveals a path into the open, and opens the final *Vivo* with renewed energy. It's bracing, but it's playful too.

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)
Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

Moderato – Adagio sostenuto – Allegro scherzando

Sergei Rachmaninov's career as the rising star of the Moscow Conservatoire came to an abrupt end on the night of 27 March 1897, when the premiere of his First Symphony was a humiliating disaster. Rachmaninov's confidence was so damaged that he found himself unable to compose. "I felt like a man who had suffered a stroke", he recalled. In desperation, he agreed to undergo treatment with Dr Nikolai Dahl, a pioneering hypnotherapist.

It worked. Under Dahl's guidance, Rachmaninov began his first new work in three years – a concerto for his own instrument, the piano. "You will work freely and easily" Dahl repeated to Rachmaninov "The concerto will be of excellent quality". Rachmaninov premiered the finished concerto in Moscow on 9 November 1901, and Dahl was proved right. From the hypnotic opening chain of piano chords, the first movement rises in a great arch to a martial, trumpet-topped climax and down again.

The second movement transforms Russian Orthodox chants (clarinet) into a dreamy romantic *nocturne* – with a dazzling firework display at its centre. And the *finale* speeds breathlessly through the night with three pauses for an yearning, unforgettable tune. There's little in music to match the thrill of its final, triumphant return, as the glittering piano crowns a great orchestral surge and then races for the finish.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)
Scheherazade, Op. 35

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship – The Tale of the Kalendar Prince – The Young Prince and the Young Princess – Festival in Bagdad; The Sea; Shipwreck

When, in the summer of 1888, Rimsky-Korsakov chose the *Arabian Nights* as the subject of a new "Symphonic Suite", though he was careful to point out that the music didn't follow the stories precisely: "All I desired was that the hearer, if they like the piece, should carry away the impression of an Oriental narrative, filled with fairy-tale wonders". So the trombones and basses represent the cruel Sultan Shahryar: sworn to behead a new wife each morning. And the solo violin is his latest victim,: the brave and beautiful young

Scheherazade. She cheats death by telling him a new tale each night, finishing each time on a cliffhanger – so he has to keep her alive to find out what happens next.

Scheherazade launches straight into one of the seven voyages of Sinbad: a rolling orchestral seascape. In *The Tale of the Kalendar Prince* flamboyant woodwind solos swirl over strumming strings. The third movement is pillow-talk of the sweetest and loveliest kind. So the finale comes as a jolt. Shahryar loses his temper, Scheherazade pleads; and then spins a tale of a frenetic chase before – with a sudden change of scene – she whips up a storm and dashes the orchestra to smithereens. In Rimsky's final scene we hear the couple reconciled, as warm woodwind chords let our storyteller sleep peacefully at last.

John Wilson

John Wilson is in demand at the highest level across the globe, having conducted many of the world's finest orchestras over the past 30 years. In 2018 he relaunched Sinfonia of London: described as 'one of the finest orchestras on the planet' (*The Guardian*), Wilson and the Sinfonia's much-anticipated BBC Proms debut in 2021 was praised as 'revelatory music-making' (*The Times*). They are now highly sought after across the UK, regularly returning to the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh Festival and London's Barbican Centre among other festivals.

Wilson's large and varied discography with Sinfonia of London has received near universal critical acclaim, and in the summer of 2026 they released their thirty-second album since 2019. Their recordings have earned several awards, including numerous BBC Music Magazine Awards for recordings of Korngold's Symphony in F sharp (2020), Respighi's Roman Trilogy (2021), Dutilleux's Le Loup (2022), Oklahoma! (2024) and a disc of works by Vaughan Williams, Howells, Delius and Elgar which won both the Orchestral Award and Recording of the Year. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as "Massive, audacious and vividly played" and *The Times* declared it one of the three "truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy" of all time, after those by Toscanini (1949) and Muti (1984).

Born in Gateshead, Wilson studied composition and conducting at the Royal College of Music where, in 2011, he was made a Fellow. In March 2026, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious RPS Conductor Award and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.

Benjamin Grosvenor

Acclaimed and multi-award winning British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is renowned for his 'indisputable virtuosity' and understated elegance at the keyboard and appears on the world's most prestigious stages.

His 26/27 season includes concerto performances at Chicago Symphony, London Philharmonic (both in London as part of their 2027 Beethoven celebrations and on tour in Belgium and the Netherlands), Gurzenich Orchestra, National Symphony Ireland, Osaka Philharmonic, Tokyo Metropolitan and Atlanta, San Diego and Seattle Symphony Orchestras. In the Autumn, he tours the UK with the Sinfonia of London and John Wilson. He tours with Sheku Kanneh-Mason across Europe and North America, including at Carnegie Hall where they are joined by Hilary Hahn. He is also joined once more by Hyeyoon Park, Timothy Ridout and Kian Soltani for Piano Quartets and gives solo recitals including at Wigmore Hall, Theatre des Champs Elysees and makes his debut at Louisiana, Denmark.

Previous concerto engagements have included Cleveland, Boston Symphony, NHK Symphony, Philharmonia, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Orchestre National de France. Benjamin regularly appears at the BBC Proms, most recently with Ravel G major (2025) and Busoni (2024), and has also performed a solo recital and at the First and Last Nights.

Benjamin's recent conductor collaborations include Marin Alsop, Elim Chan, Edward Gardner, Manfred Honeck, Paavo Jarvi, Nathalie Stutzmann, Krzysztof Urbanski and Kazuki Yamada.

A celebrated recitalist, recent engagements have included Berliner Konzerthaus, Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Lucerne and at Klavierfest Ruhr, Mantaa and La Roque d'Anthéron Festivals. He was a featured artist at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris and in 2024 premiered Hommage à Liszt by Brett Dean – which was commissioned for him – in Lucerne, Chicago and London.

Benjamin's impressive discography on Decca Classics stretches back to 2011, with his most recent release of solo repertoire by Chopin described by International Piano Magazine Critic's Choice as 'an altogether revelatory experience'.

Benjamin Grosvenor is performing on a Steinway concert piano.

Sinfonia of London

Sinfonia of London is an award-winning orchestra, led by its Artistic Director, conductor John Wilson.

Often described as a 'super-orchestra' (*ArtsDesk*), it brings together outstanding musicians from the UK and abroad, creating exceptional musical experiences for audiences either through live events or via an ever-growing catalogue of recordings.

Launched in 2018, Sinfonia of London revived the legendary studio orchestra of the same name, founded in 1955. It made its live debut in 2021 at the BBC Proms and has appeared there on an annual basis since. It has subsequently appeared throughout the UK, including at London's Barbican Centre and at the Aldeburgh Festival. In 2024 it was named as an Artistic Partner of The Glasshouse, Gateshead and made its international debut this November at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, frequently cited as one of the world's greatest concert halls.

The orchestra has quickly built a celebrated range of over 30 recordings on the Chandos label, covering a wide range of music from the likes of Korngold, Respighi, Ravel, Strauss, Rachmaninoff, Britten,Walton, Bliss, and Rodgers & Hammerstein, with the orchestra's most recent releases being Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* and Walton's Cello Concerto and Symphony No. 1.

Alongside outstanding reviews ('leaves music critics ready to die for joy', in the words of *iNews*), the orchestra has received five BBC Music Magazine Awards in five years, and, in 2022, a Gramophone Award

The orchestra is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, BBC Four, iPlayer and Marquee TV.

Find out more about the orchestra and forthcoming concerts and recordings at sinfoniaoflondon.com