dso
DULWICH
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Emilie Mayer
Overture No. 2

Beethoven
Piano Concerto No. 4
Soloist: Sofia Sacco

Vaughan Williams
Symphony No. 5

Conductor: Chris Stark
Leader: Paula Tysall

Saturday 27 June 2026 7:30pm

All Saints West Dulwich
London SE21 8JY

SOFIA SACCO

Italian pianist Sofia Sacco has played extensively throughout Europe, Asia and South America. She appeared as soloist in more than 100 recitals in Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, China, and Mexico with latest appearances at prestigious venues including Wigmore Hall, Teatro la Fenice in Venice, Gohliser Schlösschen in Leipzig, Jilin Recital Hall (China), Auditorium Blas Balindo (Mexico City). She appeared with the Changchun Orchestra, the Pollini Symphony Orchestra, the Audentia Ensemble, Orchestra delle Tre Venezie and the Timía Chamber Orchestra. She played live at BBC Radio 3, and her recording was featured on Rai Radio 3. Sofia is the recipient of the *Francis Simms Prize* and first prize winner of the *Bach International Music Competition* and *A. Baldi International Piano Competition*.

Sofia studied piano in Padua with A. Silva and M. Ferrati, and got her Master of Arts and Professional Diploma at the Royal Academy of Music as a scholarship student with R. Hayroudinoff. Sofia was appointed Hodgson Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music for two consecutive years, and was awarded the Aud Jebsen Fellowship for 2024/2026.

She is generously supported by City Music Foundation and was recently nominated CMF Artist 2024-2026. She released her first CD featuring *Preludes and fugues Op. 87* by Shostakovich with Orchid Classics in 2025 which was praised for its "clarity and eloquence" *(International Piano)*. Shostakovich's music is a profound passion and influence for her, and she is committed to play and record all his works for piano – as an Artist in Residence for the *Società del Quartetto di Bergamo* she will perform his opera omnia in the coming years.

Inquisitive and widely curious, she also graduated in Physics at the University of Padua.

Alongside her performing career, Sofia is an enthusiastic teacher, and she currently holds a teaching position at Trinity Music School and Queen's College in London as well as teaching at the Royal Academy of Music as part of her fellowship.

OVERTURE NO.2

EMILIE MAYER (1812-1883)

If you wanted an example of how women composers have been expunged from the musical canon over the last 200 years, you couldn't do much better than to consider Emilie Mayer. Looking through a selection of core music text books and encyclopaedias, I could find no mention of her – though admittedly the most recently published edition of these was 2008. Even so, it is little short of extraordinary that a woman considered one of the most accomplished and prolific musical figures of the 19th Century – known as the 'female Beethoven' no less – has faded from collective consciousness to the point when we might ask 'Emilie who?'

Emilie Mayer

Born in 1812 in Friedland, Mecklenburg, she studied composition with Carl Loewe, and later in Berlin establishing herself as a professional composer. That she did so at a time when a career in music was unusual for women is perhaps testament to the force of her creative energies, composing eight symphonies, many chamber works, piano sonatas, and numerous overtures including the one we are playing this evening.

Her force of personality is evident in the orchestral voice of this work. Wilful perhaps, or capricious with changes of mood and light – certainly full of drama. And she rings the changes, demonstrating her compositional skill and virtuosity leading us through a series of episodes that illustrate a classical style emerging into a more romantic voice. The overture in D major has a theatrical, operatic feel, offering tantalising glimpse into her musical imagination. The opening, broad and stately, and marked 'Maestoso', gives way to a reflective andantino before launching into an energetic allegro, the momentum of which carries us through to the end. Listen for how she intersperses delicate voicing in the woodwind and strings, taking us with lyrical solos through sunlit glades punctuated by military bombast, building to an energetic and exuberant climax.

Annabelle Simmons Juritz

PIANO CONCERTO No.4

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

i) Allegro moderato ii) Andante con moto iii) Rondo (Vivace)

The history of a piece considered as one of the greatest piano concertos ever written begins with freezing ignominy. On December 22, 1808 at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, the heating system was broken. Beethoven, increasingly deaf and performing as both conductor and soloist, had led his audience almost halfway through a four hour marathon of new music. That audience, who had already listened to the 'Pastoral' Symphony amongst other offerings, numb from cold and the effort of listening to unfamiliar new music, was literally disappearing out of the doors. The introspective fourth piano concerto was no antidote. Despite early approval from critics, it shuffled out into its own dark night, and into a chill that lasted nearly three decades. It took Felix Mendelssohn finding the manuscript to herald a Europe-wide revival that began with a 1836 performance in Leipzig.

Benefitting from the secure warmth of a long and celebrated performance history, and midsummer temperatures, what are we better placed to appreciate than that first audience? Here are two ideas.

Firstly, the opening. Standard classical practice had dictated a lengthy orchestral introduction, announcing themes, before the soloist entered. But here, the piano starts alone: a hushed, simple five-bar phrase. Only then is the orchestra invited – but it arrives in a distant, unexpected key. This is not the traditional, cooperative partnership of a classical concerto.

Secondly, being post-Romantic as we inevitably are, we have been trained at least unconsciously if not deliberately to understand and enjoy music

that outwardly overflows but yet looks constantly inward. So the unfolding drama of proximity and distance between the solo piano and the orchestra, with its questioning, even haunting, and often uneven dialogue, is something in which we can feel safely interested, even if we are not well-versed in this particular piece. It does not turn our cultural expectations upside down, nor require of us much 'processing time' to thaw our hearts and minds.

The second movement has been called a a psychological battle, famously compared by Franz Liszt to the Greek myth of Orpheus taming the Furies at the gates of Hades. The orchestra represents the snarling, monstrous guardians of the underworld, while the piano represents Orpheus using his lyre to weep and plead for the release of his dead love, Eurydice.

Speculating fairly permissively about biographical context, around this time Beethoven was deeply in love with Josephine Deym, a young widow and former piano student. Class and family pressures are often cited as factors in ultimately keeping them apart. In letters discovered in 1957 Josephine writes, "I love you unspeakably—as one pious spirit loves another—I am not receptive to other loves." But earlier evidence suggests she resisted his demands for a passionate relationship. Under Austrian law, if the young widow of Count Deym had married a commoner like Beethoven, she would have lost her aristocratic title as well as the legal guardianship of her four children. Moreover, Beethoven's love has been described as demanding, stormy and jealous. Josephine frequently wrote that she lacked the stamina to match his intense, "heaven-storming" passions. Are we hearing the images of a very gifted, 'semi-divine' and obsessive artist, plagued by fears on an Orphean scale, deciding to 'look back' on what he wants, and on what he desires to will into existence – and to keep looking back, demanding also to be seen?

Laura Bradley

Interval - drinks are available in the church (donations to the orchestra gratefully received)

SYMPHONY NO.5 IN D MAJOR

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)

i) Preludio i) Scherzo iii) Romanza iv) Finale: Passacaglia

The expression of the ideas in Vaughan Williams' fifth symphony had a long development. He outlined his first sketches in 1936, began more serious composition work in 1938 and completed the work in early 1943. In 1936, Vaughan Williams had already long been professor of composition at the Royal College of Music, and at this period was combining teaching, examining, conducting and committee work at the College with composing at his home in Dorking. By 1943, and aged 71, he was heavily involved in the morale-boosting and volunteer work so characteristic of World War II.

The first performance took place on June 24, 1943 as part of the BBC 'Proms' series, with Vaughan Williams himself conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Prior to the outbreak of the war, promenade concerts began at 8pm, which marked the start of a long, relaxed evening of music that would often last late into the night. By contrast, wartime concerts, like the one in which the fifth symphony premiered, were scheduled to start at 7pm and finish promptly by 9pm so that everyone involved, on and off stage, could be home before blackouts and air raids. The Proms only moved to the Royal Albert Hall in 1941, after the Queen's Hall venue was destroyed in the Blitz.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

During the interwar period, many British composers considered Jean Sibelius to be the ultimate model. Vaughan Williams deeply admired how the Finnish composer built complex, massive musical structures out of small, organic fragments. He dedicates the fifth symphony to Sibelius "without permission and with the sincerest flattery" adding, "whose great example is worthy of all imitation".

One source for the symphony is Vaughan Williams' own unfinished opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* – an idea he worked on early in the century and would, in fact, return to after the war, writing the incidental music for a BBC radio play adapted by Edward Sackville-West and starring John Gielgud.

The symphony has one of the smallest orchestrations of his symphonies, demanding intimate, chamber-like playing to achieve its transparent glow, in stark contrast to the massive forces demanded by *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

But much is shared. One of the most direct transfers is the horn opening of the Romanza which, in the opera, is where the Pilgrim stumbles in, kneels at the Cross, and is relieved of his heavy burden by three 'shining' beings.

We can perhaps find in tonight's music an echoing recognition of the pressing realities of the fragility of individual and collective life, of uncertainty, and finitude. Yet there is also a mode that offers not quite a celebration of these same constraints but rather an appreciation for what they throw into relief: the beauty of what we (still) have, and the gift of the present moment. Perhaps too, there sounds a yearning for a time when all might forever have that which they now newly value, but without the horrors, inconveniences and everything in between that leads to such insight. The symphonic expression might be compared to that of a soul longing for a final, perfect destination.

The wartime context of the symphony may offer a way into understanding how the ideas in *The Pilgrim's Progress* evolved from a narrative intent to relate a 'chronology' of a Christian soul, with clear rising action and orthodox resolution into a different suite of answers or responses to a different set of spiritual and existential questions and priorities; we might even say, needs.

Laura Bradley

Chris Stark is based in South East London. He began as a cellist, turning to conducting whilst a choral scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge.

As a co-founder of the RPS Award Winning Multi-Story Orchestra, he has conducted all the Orchestra's car park performances since their inception with The Rite of Spring in 2011, including celebrated performances at the BBC Proms.

Away from Multi-Story, he works mostly in opera, for organisations that include Glyndebourne, Oper Köln, Garsington, English Touring Opera and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Committed to community music, he is principal conductor of the Ernest Read and Blackheath Halls Symphony Orchestras. He has recorded for NMC and broadcast with both Multi-Story and the Aurora Orchestra.

Paula Tysall studied violin at the Centre for Young Musicians, the Royal College of Music and the National Centre for Orchestral Studies.

As a member of the New London Orchestra she has recorded for Hyperion Records, made broadcasts for the BBC and Classic FM, appeared at the Proms and in Matthew Bourne's award winning Swan Lake. She has played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia and English National Ballet, and also has performed in many operas, shows, and chamber music concerts.

She leads the Blackheath Halls Orchestra and recently took over shared running of the Minehead Orchestral Festival and is delighted that Chris Stark has become their new Musical Director.

Paula teaches at Westminster School and has just a few private pupils.

Violin 1
Paula Tysall
Helen Bartholomew
Chris Burns
Charlotte Chaplin
Tessa Crilly
Ruth Holton
Nancy Simpson
Ted Thornhill
Kate Vineall

Violin 2
Jane Howard
Gillian French
Andrew Fryer
Virginia Kennedy
Victoria Kershaw
Andrew McGregor
Christopher Shone
Jessica Smith

Viola
David Lawes
Liz Cleary
Jennifer Green
Will Lawrence
Nicola Prior
Sophia Swanepoel
Alan Taylor
Sally Winter

Cello
Nicky Jackson
Russell Ashley-Smith
Sarah Bort
Karen Bowman
Laura Bradley
Fiona Clarey
Emma Geoghegan
Katherine Goodman
Nikolay Gromov
Catherine Johnson
Annabelle Juritz
Celia Kent

Double Bass
Sylvain Letall
Zeynep Smith
Sam Wise

Flute
Sam Purser (+piccolo)
Rosie Sprackling

Oboe
Ian Finn (+cor anglais)
Louise Simon

Clarinet
Claire Richards
Alison Rosser

Bassoon
Jeremy Crump
Hilary Dodd

Horn
Mary Cowlet
Wilf Redmond

Trumpet
Susan Emmons
David McCleery

Trombone
Charles Mackworth-Young
Frances Barrett
David Syer

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DULWICH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

'Hymn to the Earth'

With Dulwich Choral Society

Saturday 21 November

7pm

All Saints, West Dulwich

Ravel L'Aurore
Sibelius En Saga
Vaughan Williams Towards the Unknown Region
Holst Battle Hymn (from Rig Veda)
Lili Boulanger Vieille Prière Bouddhique
Sibelius Maan Virsi (Hymn to the Earth)
Faure La Naissance de Vénus

Please switch off mobile phones and electronic devices. Photography and the use of recording equipment is not permitted during the performance