



BEDFORDSHIRE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Bjorn Bantock

Leader: Caroline Waters

Violin soloist: Jakub Jakowicz

Saturday 28 February 2026

Great Hall, Bedford School, 7:30pm

Programme notes

Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857)

Ruslan and Ludmila – Overture

Often hailed as the ‘father of Russian classical music’, Mikhail Glinka’s influence on the musical landscape of his homeland cannot be overstated. Prior to Glinka, Russian composers tended to imitate Western models, especially those of Italy, France and Germany. Glinka was a trailblazer who insisted that Russian music could – and should – reflect its own language, tales and character. His two operas, *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*, laid the foundation for the Russian nationalist movement in music, inspiring later giants like Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Borodin and Stravinsky.

The overture to *Ruslan and Ludmila* is a tour-de-force of orchestral writing, renowned for its breakneck tempo, sparkling textures and infectious spirit. It encapsulates the very essence of the opera – heroism, magic and joy – in a single exhilarating sweep. The opera was based on a fantastical epic poem by Alexander Pushkin. The story, drawn from Russian folklore, follows the hero Ruslan on his quest to rescue his beloved Ludmila from the clutches of the evil sorcerer Chernomor. Glinka expertly weaves these ideas together, building tension and excitement through dazzling orchestration, syncopated rhythms and deft interplay between sections of the orchestra.

The work opens with a whirlwind, a frenetic, energetic rush in the strings, leading to the main theme, first heard in the violins. This is soon followed by a contrasting lyrical theme, introduced by the cellos, which brings a touch of romance and nobility. Glinka uses fragments of both themes, tossing them between sections and ramping up the tension, and the overture ends in a blaze of orchestral colour.

The overture was an immediate success at its first performance and quickly became a concert favourite. It has remained a staple of the orchestral repertoire ever since.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Concerto for violin and orchestra in D minor, Op. 47

Allegro moderato

Adagio di molto

Allegro ma non tanto

If the late 1890s had seen the consolidation of Sibelius's position as Finland's leading composer, the next decade, and more, was to see the growth of his international reputation, although a period of turbulence, drinking problems, and mounting debt, was to interfere with the creative process. During this tumultuous period, Willy Burmester, Germany's greatest violinist after Joachim, had to goad Sibelius into writing a violin concerto (between the second and third symphonies), and it was completed in the Autumn of 1903, although it was said of this concerto '*it sounds as if Sibelius just could not help writing it*'. As the violin was Sibelius' first instrument, there was every expectation that he would write an exacting concerto, and the opening of the first movement, with its immediate entry of the soloist, anticipates completely the characteristics and technical difficulties of the work. The concerto had its first performance in Berlin in 1905 with Carl Halir playing the violin and no less an authority than Richard Strauss conducting.

The long, wide-spanned melody at the start of the work establishes the soloist's dominant position. The first movement, as long in duration as the other two put together, takes in a wide variety of moods, from the cool opening to the stormy end. Themes are developed almost as soon as they are introduced so that the central section can lead to an authoritative cadenza. The movement also demonstrates stark contrasts between the highest and lowest registers of the instrument, indicative of fire and ice. Indeed, the weight of the work rests on this first movement.

The adagio second movement relieves the contrasts with a melody of sustained purity with orchestral support in the same vein. Indeed, it has one of Sibelius' loveliest melodies, and it is worth listening not only to the soloist's *cantilena* but also to the rhythmically complex double-stopping in the solo part in the central section. In the final rondo, which Tovey described as '*a polonaise for polar bears*', the soloist and orchestra urge each other on in a wild dance that only ends with the last, abrupt chord.

Programme notes: David Elliot

Jakub Jakowicz, violin

Jakub Jakowicz has performed internationally since the age of eleven. Early highlights include appearances at the invitation of Krzysztof Penderecki and his debut with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra under Pinchas Steinberg, performing Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto.

He has since appeared as a soloist with leading orchestras across Europe and beyond, collaborating with distinguished conductors such as Antoni Wit, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Marc Minkowski, Yan Pascal Tortelier, Eiji Oue and Krzysztof Penderecki.

An active chamber musician, Jakowicz has collaborated with many eminent artists and is closely associated with two major string quartets. From 2008 to 2014 he led the Lutosławski Quartet, recording the complete string quartets of Grażyna Bacewicz for Naxos. Since 2006 he has been a member of the Zehetmair Quartet, whose acclaimed recordings and international performances have earned numerous honors, including the Paul Hindemith Prize and a Diapason d'Or de l'Année.

Jakowicz is a recipient of the Orpheus Award, two Fryderyk Awards, and the Medal of the 100th Anniversary of Witold Lutosławski. He is Professor of Violin at the Chopin University of Music in Warsaw and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice.

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

Un poco sostenuto – Allegro

Andante sostenuto

Un poco allegretto e grazioso

Adagio – Più andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

Born in Hamburg in 1833, Johannes Brahms was the son of a humble double-bass player in the theatres of Hamburg. He received a thorough music training at the hands of a local teacher, and from the age of 13 earned a living by playing the piano in cafes, taverns and dance halls. During a concert tour with the Hungarian violin virtuoso Remenyi, Brahms met Joachim, who gave him letters of introduction to Liszt and Schumann. A long-lasting friendship developed with the latter, and Brahms was hailed as a genius by Schumann in an article entitled 'New Paths' published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Brahms constructed his symphonies in the classical form while retaining the nature of the romantic. The first symphony is a superb example of his devotion to the classical music architecture within which he introduces many novel thematic developments. He took nearly 15 years to develop the structure and harmonic language which satisfied his requirements for the first symphony, a work which followed classical lines at a time when the public was conditioned to programmatic symphonies. The work also shows his skill and complete understanding of orchestral technique, and the result is highly polished and refined.

Stress on the outer movements is a characteristic of Brahms' symphonies, and the first symphony proceeds from the weighty first movement through two loosely connected inner movements to a monumental finale. The symphony opens in a grand style with its harmonic signature established from the very beginning. The main theme presented harmonically at the 'allegro' is further emphasised rhythmically by the woodwinds and horns throughout the

movement with the orchestral sections continuing the dialogue. The second movement is more solemn in pace and provides extensive solos for the leader of the orchestra, principal oboe and principal horn. The third movement, an allegretto, is reminiscent of a folk tune or *ländler*. The fourth movement starts with a slow introduction coloured by the horns imitating distant alpine horns and their use of the natural harmonic series. The main theme of the movement is one of the composer's most famous, and variations on the theme are further emphasised by the addition of trombones, the first time that they are heard in the entire symphony. The development of the movement is masterful, and it concludes with the harmonic colour with which the symphony started.

Several of these notes were supplied through the Programme Note Bank of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies, and from other sources.