

BEDFORD SINFONIA

Saturday 17 October 2026

Corn Exchange, Bedford, 7:30pm

Conductor: Ian Smith

Programme

Symphony No. 104 in D major ('London')

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732 – 1809)

Adagio - Allegro

Andante

Menuetto: Allegro

Finale: Allegro spiritoso

There was a time when it was customary to consider Haydn as a rather benign, cheerful forerunner of Mozart and Beethoven. Quite a few textbooks reflect the naive view that he deserves a prominent place in musical history far more for the outstanding part he played in the development of the symphony than on the merit of his individual achievements. He was by no means the inventor of the symphony, but he was the first master to raise this musical form to real grandeur. The daring originality of his genius imbued his symphonic movements with an unprecedented emotional content of poignant intensity. And last, but not least, he had a great influence on the development of the modern symphony orchestra.

The so-called *London Symphony* is the last of a series of twelve symphonies composed for London in 1795. It is Haydn's last symphony, and it was performed at a benefit concert in London on 4 May 1795. The majestic grandeur of the dark introduction, with its powerful initial phrase and subsequent dynamic contrasts, foreshadows Beethoven. The following allegro is mainly based on the noble and intimate first subject, for a charming but short second subject is confined to two brief appearances. The *Andante* in G major is a set of variations on a delicate tune of rare beauty. The variations of this theme rise to highly dramatic climaxes at times but the conflicts are resolved, and after the great suspense of a wonderful modulation into one of the remotest keys the movement, concludes in an atmosphere of quiet serenity

The vigorous, almost rustic *Menuetto* contains a graceful trio of Ländler character that possess all the Viennese charm of this precursor of the waltz. At the beginning of the *Finale*, a long pedal introduces, as from a far distance, the principal theme, which is accompanied the second time by its counter theme. Haydn's inexhaustible imagination develops this one subject into a finale of superb greatness, and it also contains some exquisite poetic passages before coming to a close in a mood of unperturbed happiness.

Programme notes: Anonymous

Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op.21

Ludwig Van Beethoven
(1770 -1827)

Adagio molto; Allegro con brio
Andante cantabile con moto
Menuetto: Allegro molto e vivace
Adagio; Allegro molto e vivace

At the age of fifteen Beethoven had contemplated writing a symphony, even to the extent of making sketches, but these were to be used instead for one of the piano quartets of 1785. It was not until nearly ten years later that his thoughts once more turned in a symphonic direction, and extensive sketches were again made. But what he had planned as the opening Allegro became the main theme of the finale when the First Symphony was eventually completed in 1800. The work was dedicated to Baron van Swieten, prefect of the Imperial Library, Vienna, who fostered a tremendous amount of music to be written, including Haydn's *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, and six symphonies by CPE Bach, whom Beethoven worshipped. The first performance took place in Vienna's Burgtheater on 2 April as part of a typically mammoth programme consisting of a piano concerto (probably the C major), his Op.20 Septet, a Mozart symphony, arias from Haydn's *The Creation* and, for good measure, an improvisation. In what can only be described as an understatement, the press referred to the concert as 'truly the most interesting in a long time', though there were complaints about the quality of playing of the orchestra.

Beethoven's C major Symphony was the first of a series destined to have an indelible influence on western music, but he was feeling his way with this first essay in the genre. He was content to survey new ground, using patterns already set by Haydn and Mozart, before blazing a new trail. Nevertheless, this was Beethoven, and there were bound to be surprises, no less than in the opening bars where the symphony's key of C major was approached by way of F and G major, finally to be consolidated with alternating full chords for wind, timpani and strings. Use of the wind players is prominent, especially in the gentle second subject. Full scoring for double wind is again found in the lightweight slow movement with its easy-going contrapuntal characteristics.

The third movement is a speeded up Menuetto, almost a scherzo, which is evident when Beethoven's metronome markings are followed. It uses the scales and triads from the first movement as motivic material. There are also lively modulations contrasting with the decorum of the trio section. The finale opens with an introduction consisting only of scale fragments played slowly by the first violins alone (an unusual effect) beginning on G and gradually adding more notes. After finally reaching an F, outlining a dominant-seventh chord, the real start of the finale *Allegro molto e vivace* begins in C major, and goes out with full force as it is parodied in the coda.

Programme notes: John Dalton

Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 36

Ludwig van Beethoven

Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

Larghetto

Scherzo (allegro) – Trio

Allegro molto

Beethoven's Second Symphony was written in the summer of 1802, while the composer was staying at the village of Heiligenstadt in the beautiful countryside outside Vienna. It was towards the end of the holiday that Beethoven wrote one of the most poignant documents ever written by an artist. It has become known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, speaking of suicide, his permanent infirmity, his misjudgement by society, and of utter despair. Although a period of great inner turmoil, this symphony seems to give little hint of this, being full of joy.

The work received its first performance on 5 April 1803, in a mammoth concert organised by the composer at the Theater an der Wien. It consisted entirely of his own works, including the *First Symphony*, the long-awaited *Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor*, in which he was the soloist, and the first performance of the new oratorio *Christus am Oelberge (Christ on the Mount of Olives)*, specially written for the occasion. Starting at 8:00am the rehearsal was a shambles, and by 2:30pm everyone concerned was weary and angry. The day was saved by the dedicatee of the *Second Symphony*, Beethoven's first benefactor in Vienna, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, who brought food and wine, and then persuaded everyone to try again.

The first movement opens with imposing unisons in the whole orchestra followed by a stately melody in the woodwind. It runs without a break into the *Allegro con brio* section, which is in classical sonata form. The first theme moves with increasing urgency towards the key of A major and the appearance of the second subject which, like the first, is built around a triad. This second theme is of a more ceremonious nature and the movement follows the usual pattern of development and recapitulation with both subjects in the tonic, followed by a coda based on fragments of the first.

The slow movement is in complete contrast, the prevailing mood being one of serenity and calm. This, too, is in sonata form, but the themes are much more lyrical and sustained. There is often a dialogue between strings and winds with a theme passing from one group of instruments to another. The *Scherzo* is characterised by sharp dynamic contrasts, accentuated by the colourful use of the orchestra. The theme is fragmented and tossed from instrument to instrument. The *Trio* opens with just oboes and bassoons, providing a sharp contrast to the full scoring of the *Scherzo*.

The *Finale* begins with an extraordinary angular theme almost like a burst of laughter, as if the prevailing joy of the symphony had overflowed into sheer fun. The explosive theme punctuates the entire movement, which continues with a more lyrical melody with long sustained notes for woodwind and brass. There follows a short, thinly scored section for violins and bassoon, but this is soon interrupted again by the opening 'laughter', which provides a basis for the coda and the conclusion of the symphony.

Programme notes: Finchley Chamber Orchestra, John Dalton

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